

**How to Create
Your Own
Unit Study**

Valerie Bendt

Copyright, 1990, 1994, 2004

Contents

FOREWORD	23
INTRODUCTION	24
OUTLINE	25
DEFINING OUR GOAL	29
EVALUATING CURRICULUMS	31
UNIT STUDY APPROACH	34
SOME EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES	34
PHONICS AND MATH	37
SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES	40
GETTING STARTED	43
USING THE LIBRARY	47
USING GAMES AND TEACHING AIDS	51
USING DICTATION AND COPYING	52
THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING	54
PROJECTS: FRIEND OR FOE?	55
CHOOSING YOUR UNITS OF STUDY	55
READING GOOD LITERATURE	56
FINE ARTS	59
NATURE STUDIES	60
USING THE BIBLE	61
RECORD-KEEPING	62
REFLECTING ON UNIT STUDIES	69
SAMPLE UNITS	72
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE REFERENCE	87
SECTION OF THE CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY	
A GENERAL GUIDE TO THE REFERENCE	89
SECTION OF THE CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY	
DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM	104
DEAR READER	106
FOOTNOTES	107
WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT	108
<i>HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN UNIT STUDY</i>	
A WORD ABOUT TIMELINES	109

If you are interested in this book, you have probably already spent time analyzing what is truly valuable in education. You have asked yourself, “What is really important, and how can I give my child the best?” After all, is it not for their good that we have taken on this responsibility?

The key to finding direction in all of life is knowing our God-given responsibilities. In regard to children, we are told to “train up a child in the way he should go.” Truth, therefore, becomes the major emphasis, with academics taking on a lesser role.

If we are going to successfully bake a loaf of bread, we need the right proportion of ingredients: flour being the major foundation, with other necessary ingredients in smaller portions. Likewise, without giving our children a foundation of truth on which to build other learning, their education is not a success no matter how high the test scores.

Our society is trying to function with the belief that education in academics is the solution for all ills. Teaching academics only for success is like trying to make bread using only yeast. It can not be done.

Why is it we can readily recognize proportion and order in other areas of life, but somehow we have been deceived in the area of education?

One of the most difficult tasks in homeschooling is breaking away from the idea that we must teach just like the schools. This belief puts great pressure and guilt on us when we search for a more sensible approach to teaching.

In this book, Valerie has developed a framework for us to break away from school and get involved in life-training using academics to assist us in building that foundation of truth.

Kathleen Ann Albert

1990

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NASV)

Introduction

This book was written to encourage you to create studies to strengthen your family. You are your family's best curriculum specialist. You can devise studies superior to any curriculum on the market.

I urge you to put away the tedious texts and delve into real, living books. Sharing good books with your family is rewarding. Involve your children in real-life experiences, providing them with a multitude of pertinent educational encounters. Train them to become self-taught individuals, ensuring a life-long love for acquiring knowledge.

In the margins I have included quotes from the Bible, key educators, and various classics. Each quote is pertinent to the section in which it is contained. It is my hope that these will spark your interest and cause you to read further. Excerpts from selected classics have been included, as reading good literature is a significant part of our studies.

The wide margins allow you to make notes beside significant passages. An outline is provided to afford you quick reference to desired information.

My children's names and ages at the time of publication (1990) are as follows: Michelle, 11 years old; Melissa, 9 years old; Robert, 7 years old; Raymond, 5 years old; and Mandy, 1 year old.

I. Defining Our Goal

- A. Definition of education taken from the *American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster, 1828*, contrasted with more current definitions
- B. The purpose of education
- C. Thoughts pertaining to education, by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

II. Evaluating Curriculums

- A. Most curriculums foster a multiple choice mentality
- B. Texts offer bits and pieces of predigested material
- C. Children are not encouraged to think or reason due to the influence of inferior curriculums
- D. Textbook and workbook approaches stifle creativity

III. Unit Study Approach

- A. Major subjects integrated into a particular topic, theme, or historical time period
- B. Studies can be approached biblically
- C. Lesson plans simplified as all ages study one topic
- D. Family unity strengthened
- E. Skills strengthened as each child works at his own level

IV. Some Educational Philosophies

- A. Charlotte Mason: 1842-1923
 - 1. Wrote, among other books, *Home Education*
 - 2. Chose living books covering a vast range of topics rather than textbooks
 - 3. Use time saved in not drilling facts to read good books
 - 4. Use narration — simply having children retell what has been read
- B. Ruth Beechick
 - 1. A present-day educator
 - 2. Uses real books rather than textbooks
 - 3. Uses dictation and copying to strengthen skills
 - 4. Wrote several excellent books including, *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*, and her “little books” on Reading, Arithmetic, and Language.

V. Phonics and Math

- A. *Reading Made Easy*
 - 1. No need for workbooks
 - 2. No need for phonetic readers; use the library or have the children dictate their own stories and use them for readers
- B. *Math*
 - 1. It is not always convenient to integrate math into your unit study
 - 2. Use lots of hands-on manipulatives with the younger children
 - 3. Use a good math text, like *Saxon*, for grades 4 and up

VI. Schedules and Routines

- A. Maintain a schedule while remaining flexible
- B. Children perform best when they have a set routine
- C. Tone for the day is set as Dad spends time with the children be-

fore work

- D. Using the same unit for each child simplifies matters, but use a method that works best for your family
- E. Break teaching time into manageable segments, giving each child some individualized attention
- F. Devise a schedule for yearly studies, i.e., a two-weeks-off, ten-weeks-on plan

VII. Getting Started

- A. Use various books to help you determine what needs to be studied at each level – *Teaching Children* by Diane Lopez and *The Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manuals* by Cathy Duffy
- B. Unit study method is effective for teaching high school students as well
 - 1. Teaches them how to research information on their own
 - 2. Older children can lead the rest of the family in a unit study
- C. How to determine what topics your high school student should cover
 - 1. School textbooks
 - 2. Scope and sequence charts
 - 3. *Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual* for Junior and Senior High by Cathy Duffy
- D. Read biographies to your children
- E. Develop a timeline, making figures to represent people you study
- F. Unit studies can be used to enhance regular textbook studies
- G. If using a published unit study, tailor it to your family's needs and desires

VIII. Using the Library

- A. Biographies
- B. Reference books
 - 1. *Index to Collective Biographies for Young Readers*
 - 2. *People in Books*
- C. Subject card catalogue
- D. Library materials checklist
- E. How to categorize and use the books you have chosen

IX. Using Games and Teaching Aids

- A. Games are non-consumable
- B. Games are beneficial for reviewing previously covered material
- C. Aristoplay games
- D. Create your own games to accompany a specific unit study

X. Using Dictation and Copying

- A. Strengthens spelling, punctuation, and grammar skills
- B. Uses good composition models
- C. Allows children to learn about a topic of study while strengthening basic skills; time is not wasted on irrelevant workbook material

XI. The Importance of Writing

- A. Makes a lasting, good impression
- B. Can be used to effectively convey the message of our Lord

- C. Children's writing is influenced by the material that they hear and read

XII. Projects: Friend or Foe

- A. Published unit study curriculums place a heavy emphasis on projects
- B. Use projects to your advantage; do not allow them to dictate your schedule
- C. Ease up on academics while engaged in a project to reduce tension

XIII. Choosing Your Units of Study

- A. Organize units to encompass a wide variety of subject matter during the year
- B. Units may be studied together as a family, or capable children may conduct their own unit studies

XIV. Reading Good Literature

- A. Read books of a high literary value on a daily basis
- B. Use literature to stretch vocabulary and increase knowledge
- C. Provides a springboard for various writing activities
- D. Have children narrate what you have read to them
- E. Reading to your children strengthens their listening comprehension skills

XV. Fine Arts

- A. Often overlooked in favor of more academic endeavors
- B. Use music, art, and poetry to enhance your units
- C. Have children draw, paint, perform musically, and write poetry

XVI. Nature Studies

- A. Children need to be acquainted with nature
- B. Nature walks
- C. Sketch samples collected from nature
- D. Use nature guides to identify specimens

XVII. Using the Bible

- A. Many published unit study curriculums integrate Scripture into the study
- B. Use a concordance and a topical Bible to locate passages relating to studies
- C. Bible verses make excellent typing exercises

XVIII. Record-Keeping

- A. Daily Log
 1. Enter material covered as you progress through your day
 2. Make a basic outline, leaving room for flexibility
 3. Use a spiral notebook or other record-keeping book
 4. Write the dates in your log book and list the unit studies; keep this for future reference
 5. Record life skills as well as academics
- B. Have children keep their own log or journal
 1. Record-keeping teaches children responsibility
 2. Record-keeping also teaches children to organize their thoughts

XIX. Reflecting on Unit Studies

- A. I am learning with my children
- B. All children are special and deserve a tailored curriculum
- C. Do not try to re-establish school in the home
- D. Begin with a short, simple unit and progress from there

XX. Sample Units

- A. World Geography
- B. Children's Authors
- C. Storytelling
- D. Medieval
- E. House Cleaning
- F. Cooking
- G. Greek and Roman Studies

XXI. An Introduction to the Reference Section of the Children's Department of the Public Library

- A. Reference books to aid your search for pertinent materials
- B. The availability of reference materials depends on the size of your library

XXII. A General Guide to the Reference Section of the Children's Department of the Public Library

- A. Dictionaries
- B. Classics
- C. Award books
- D. Guides for locating easy readers
- E. Guides for books for reluctant readers
- F. Subject indexes inclusive of summaries of children's books
- G. Poetry anthologies with subject indexes for locating poems relating to your study
- H. Subject indexes to fairy tales
- I. Subject indexes to children's plays
- J. Mathematics library guides
- K. Guides to history in children's books
- L. Musical story hour guides
- M. Flannel board storytelling guides
- N. Commentaries on famous authors and their works
- O. Guides to Spanish books
- P. Guides to picture books

XXIII. Dewey Decimal Classification System

XXIV. Dear Reader

XXV. Footnotes

XXVI. What others have said about *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*

XXVII. A Word about Timelines

The following definitions were taken from the *American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster, 1828*.

EDUCATION: n. The bringing up, as of a child; instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations. *To give children a good education in manners, arts and science, is important; to give them religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties. ¹

EDUCATE: vt. To bring up, as a child; to instruct; to inform and enlighten the understanding; to instill into the mind principles of arts, science, morals, religion and behavior. *To educate children well is one of the most important duties of parents and guardians. ²

The following is a definition taken from the *Webster's Encyclopedia of Dictionaries* – 1978:

EDUCATE: vt. To cultivate and discipline the mind and other faculties by teaching; send to school. ³

and *Webster's New World Dictionary* – 1988:

EDUCATE: vt. To train or develop the knowledge, skill, mind, or character of, esp. by formal schooling or study; teach; instruct. ⁴

There is a tremendous difference between the definition or concept of education in the 1828 Webster's Dictionary and the definitions we have today. In 1828, education was clearly the responsibility of the parents, and now that responsibility has been given over to the schools. Once parents allowed the schools to take control of the education of their children, it was not long before the schools demanded that they have total control. Parents were no longer qualified to oversee their children's education.

You will also notice another sharp contrast between the 1828 definition and the modern definitions of education. In the 1828 version, academics were secondary. A religious education and the child's behavior were deemed most important. Today, the Bible is not even allowed in the public schools. Can character be taught without a basis for truth?

When teaching our children at home, we must ask ourselves, "Are we going to reconstruct school at home, or are we going to provide our children with a real education?" In her book, *For the Children's Sake*, Susan Schaeffer Macaulay states:

Education extends to all life. The truly educated person has only had many doors of interest opened. He knows that life

Defining Our Goal

It is significant that there is no reference in the Scriptures to the school as a separate institution established by God. In spite of the great importance of the teaching ministry, God has not seen fit to ordain schools as such. Even the implications of the cultural mandate and the Noahic covenant, with the establishment of the institution of human government, do not suggest a parallel establishment of schools as instruments of such human governments. As far as the Bible is concerned, the function of transmitting truth and educating the young belongs to the home and church.
— Henry Morris
Christian Education for the Real World, Master Books

How to Create Your Own Unit Study

The goal of education is a life, not a living; its best location is a home where life goes on, not in a classroom; its curriculum is the Word of God as it illuminates every part of life; its faculty consists of fathers and mothers; and its methods of instruction are one-to-one tutoring and including the child in the daily companionship of serving God.
— Gregg Harris
“The Biblical Basis for Home Education,” The Teaching Home, Aug./Sept. 1990

It seems to me that we live in an age of pedagogy, that we of the teaching profession are inclined to take too much upon ourselves, and that parents are ready to yield the responsibility of direction, as well as of actual instruction, more than is wholesome for the children.
— Charlotte Mason,
Home Education,
Charlotte Mason Research and Supply Co.

will not be long enough to follow everything through fully.⁵

It is our job as parents to introduce our children to a wide variety of interesting topics. We must teach them how to learn so they may further explore areas to which they are drawn.

The child is not made for education, but education is to serve the child, serve his personality, his life, his needs.

— Susan Schaeffer Macaulay⁶

As we teach our children, we should ask ourselves, “Is what I am teaching really serving my children’s needs? Am I filling their minds with tedious, nebulous facts, or am I feeding their minds with the good, the wonderful, the excellent?” Enjoy learning and exploring with your children. Learning lasts a lifetime. Scripture gives us that ultimate ruler by which to measure all things.

Finally brethren, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

Philippians 4:8 (NASV)⁷

Much of the curriculum written for children today fosters the multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank mentality. The children are not introduced to something as a whole but in bits and pieces of predigested material which they are to regurgitate at the appropriate time. In trying to complete their work, they are looking for the right answers rather than being given the opportunity to grasp a whole concept or idea. Curriculum-driven textbooks and workbooks most often stifle learning and creativity. The use of real or living books allows the children to interact with some very creative and interesting people. These are real authors, not curriculum specialists. Real authors write because they feel they have something valuable to share. Of course, we must still cautiously apply our measuring stick found in Philippians 4:8. There may be parts of books we do not agree with, but we can filter these out or use them to show our children that other people think or act differently than we do. The key here is not to dwell on evil. Our children should know that evil exists, but let us not give them any how-to lessons.

Good books stimulate discussion. If your children can enter into a discussion with you about a book you have read aloud together, then you know they comprehend. This also helps them to retain a good deal of the material covered. Do not feel you have to process the ideas covered and break them down for the children. Let them try to understand for themselves. This is especially true when reading classics or other great literary works, as it will help to stretch their minds. Do not worry about them comprehending every bit of it, but let them take in what is appropriate for them at the time.

I find this a helpful thing to consider as I am teaching four of my five children together. The younger ones pick up certain things while the older ones pick up more. I try to get them to grasp a whole picture of what is being studied as opposed to isolated facts here and there. These isolated facts have no meaning if there is not a larger framework upon which to build. Sometimes I do find it best in certain areas of study, however, to choose simple books that explain things without throwing in a lot of difficult facts. This is true in the area of science.

We studied the human body, and I wanted my children to get a feel for the way the body systems work together as a whole before I bombarded them with facts about cells, neurons, and protoplasm. They needed to be able to grasp the whole and be acquainted with it before breaking it down into minute parts.

You will find that in technical areas such as science, the simpler books provide the child with an adequate overview of the particular subject being tackled. Few school children are able to recall all the tedious facts drilled into them by their teachers. They get so wrapped up in memorizing these difficult facts that when all is said and done, they do

Evaluating Curriculums

True Christian education, as set forth in the Bible, embraces all truth, whether "secular" or "spiritual." It is not narrow and restricted education, as some might assume, but extremely comprehensive — in fact universal — in its scope. Nothing is to be excluded except false knowledge and harmful philosophy, but, unfortunately, these constitute a large component of modern educational curricula. They must be removed from a Christian curriculum, but there is far more than enough genuine and valuable truth to incorporate in their stead.

— Henry Morris
Christian Education
for the Real World,
Master Books

*How to Create Your Own
Unit Study*

Balboa set off to climb the hill, with Leoncico as his only companion. The journey took him two hours, for he was desperately tired. As he drew near the rocky summit, he realized that he might be approaching the greatest moment of his life. If nothing was visible except more mountains, then his first attempt to find the Southern Sea would have failed. The men were too exhausted to travel much farther without rest and proper food. But if the sea was visible, then he Vasco Nunez de Balboa would be the man who had found it. He would be the first European to see the new ocean.

Balboa reached the summit. Eagerly he gazed westward. Far away in the distance lay the Pacific Ocean! Sunshine was sparkling on an expanse of blue water that matched the brightness of the morning sky.

Balboa raised his arm to salute the splendid sight. Now, whatever happened, his name would be remembered in centuries to come. He fell on his knees and began to pray. Far away at the bottom of the hill, seventy Spaniards looked at one another and grinned.

— Balboa, *Finder of the Pacific* by Ronald Syme, William Morrow and Co.

not even have a clear overview of what was being studied. Keeping with the simpler books in such cases provides the children with enough knowledge to have an understanding of the subject without being overwhelmed and, therefore, totally confused.

We tackled a unit on world geography, but I did not have the children learn all the countries of the world until they were able to have an understanding of what we mean by “world,” “country,” and so on. We began with simple library books and branched out from there.

Children can often be introduced to such concepts through literature. Read a story that takes place in a different country, and they begin to get a feel for that country. They realize that it is both similar to and different from their own. Such books can be read on a level above that of your children’s reading or comprehension level; this will serve the purpose of stretching their minds while not confusing them with tedious facts to be memorized. They will be introduced to new vocabulary, which they will comprehend as the story unfolds. Children can understand many difficult words when used in the context of a story. This is not to be confused with reading them a book with a lot of technical information on which they have no basis to hang this knowledge. There is a big difference between pleasurable reading and technical reading. Technical reading has its proper place after sufficient ground work has been laid.

Biographies are an excellent introduction to different people, ideas, places, and times. While studying our unit on world geography, we read biographies about explorers and missionaries and studied the geographical terms we encountered. Geography came alive through these books.

Let us not recreate the school in the home when we can utilize a superior method of instruction. We do not need to rely on textbooks and workbooks designed to accommodate 30 or 40 children in a classroom. We can use real books, living books that spark our children’s interests. You can study history, science, art, music, literature or a host of other subjects by reading biographies about real people in real places in real space and time. Children prefer this to dry textbooks.

We read twenty biographies in one year. A textbook would possibly have donated one or two paragraphs about each of the people we studied. We read entire biographies about these people and in turn received a taste of the cultural, economical, political, and geographical climates in which they lived. We were able to experience them as real people, not merely as paragraphs in a textbook. While studying particular units, we were able to see how the lives of certain people overlapped. We made figures of each of the people and placed them on our timeline. We chose a specific item to go with each person to enable us to better remember them.

Quoting from Charlotte Mason’s book entitled *Home Education*:

The children should have the joy of living in far lands, in other persons, in other times – a delightful double existence; and this joy they will find, for the most part, in their story-books. Their lessons, too, history and geography, should cultivate their conceptive powers. If the child does not live in the times of his history lesson, be not at home in the climes his geography book describes, why, these lessons will fail of their purpose.⁸

You must be wondering, how do I know which books are best, and where do I find them? How do I know I am teaching all that I should and that there will not be any gaps in my child's education?

Well, this life does not afford us enough time to fill in all the possible gaps. The only gap to be concerned with is a void in your child's life that can only be filled by the Holy Spirit. Remember, academics are not everything.

Expose your children to the best in music, art, history, science, and literature. This can be done through the use of living books, real artwork, games, tapes, and so on. Put away the tedious workbooks that inhibit your child from experiencing real life. Through literature we form intimate relationships with people, historical events, and places. As Susan Schaeffer Macaulay states in her book, *For the Children's Sake*, "In literature, perhaps more than through any other art form, we are able to get into the other man's shoes."⁹

These relationships are formed as you share books with your children. A good deal of your school time should be spent reading together. To have time to accomplish this, you must eliminate the unnecessary busy work. It is difficult because we equate learning with filling in countless workbook pages or answering questions at the end of tedious textbook chapters. In order to partake of the excellent, we must throw out what the curriculum specialists have deemed as good.

Suppose I had a room full of parents and I divided it down the middle. Then I informed those on my right that they must complete five workbook pages dealing with reading comprehension, involving isolated paragraphs and answering teacher contrived questions. Meanwhile, those on my left would listen to me read several chapters from an excellent book about an interesting person, whom we would afterwards discuss. Before we engaging in these activities, I would allow anyone to change sides of the room. How many do you think would choose the workbook side? The discussion side? Which side do you think your children would choose? More importantly, which situation is more conducive to learning? Which lesson would be more cost efficient; the one involving a consumable workbook or the one involving a library book or a book of your own which can be used again and again? Let us not have the children equate

In my experience, God's direction is much more evident when we design our own unit studies than when we use formal curriculum. As we choose topics and activities we are more open to God's leading than when we work with curriculum that has already been designed by someone else.

— *Cathy Duffy* Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual, Elementary Grades, 1990 edition, Grove Publishing

The unit method of organizing the day's activities around a single topic is considered to be one of the most effective methods of teaching. It is practical for your child for finding any information he may ever need. It is particularly useful when you are teaching several children of varied ages. Even pre-school youngsters can be included in the informal part of such a method.

— Raymond and Dorothy Moore
Home Style Teaching,
Word Publishing

Unit Study Approach

Some Educational Philosophies

Unit Studies Made Easy

education with being bored!

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's book, *For the Children's Sake*, has two companion volumes, which I find to be a tremendous aid in formulating my own curriculum: *Teaching Children: A Curriculum Guide to What Children Need to Know at Each Level Through Sixth Grade*; and *Books Children Love: A Guide to the Best Children's Literature*. These books are categorized by subject and grade level, which makes them very easy to use. Two additional guides that I highly recommend are Cathy Duffy's *The Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual* for the elementary grades and *The Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual* for junior and senior high school. Be flexible when using any book as a guide. Remember, your children are unique and you understand them better than anyone. Follow your instincts.

Next, we will define the term *unit study* and see why it is a more simple and effective way to teach. Along with the unit study approach, I combine the educational practices of both Charlotte Mason and Ruth Beechick.

Basic school subjects are studied in light of a particular topic, theme, or historical time period instead of studying eight or more isolated subjects.

Children are able to grasp the wholeness of truth as they see how these subjects relate to one another. Studies are approached from a biblical philosophy of education. Lesson planning is simplified because all ages study a topic together. Families are strengthened through this unity. Field trips, projects, and games all center on a particular unit.

Basic skills are taught in an informal manner while engaged in the study of a particular unit. Previously learned skills are strengthened as the children work at their own levels.

Let me introduce Charlotte Mason. She lived from 1842 to 1923 and was a teacher, author, and lecturer in England. Her own writings have recently been reprinted; her book, *Home Education*, has a wealth of knowledge for us as parents. She believed in respecting children as whole persons. She believed children should be involved in real-life situations, learn self-discipline, and be given ample time for free play.

Studies were limited to the morning hours with the afternoons free for creativity and play. The evening hours were to be spent enjoying a good book with the family. She chose to use living books covering a wide

range of topics instead of textbooks. She utilized the time saved in drilling facts in a textbook to read good books. Charlotte Mason did not believe in pressuring a child into a specific grade level. She stated that this would diminish his assurance of his self-worth. She allowed the child to progress at his own rate while exposing him to the best. I quote Miss Mason:

This horse-in-a-mill round of geography and French, history and sums, was no more than playing at education; for who remembers the scraps of knowledge he labored over as a child? And would not the application of a few hours in later life effect more than a year's drudgery at any one subject in childhood? ¹⁰

She believed in giving the child a liberal education, introducing him to good books and protecting him from "twaddle." Twaddle was her own word for the worthless, inferior material published for children. She saw that it underrated the child's intelligence. Miss Mason had her students narrate books that had been read aloud. Later, as they matured, this narration would develop into a written composition. This is reading comprehension fully exercised.

A child who learns early on to narrate orally will be less apt when he is older to encounter the typical problems often associated with written compositions. Narration is simply a retelling of what has been read. You know a child comprehends the material and his retention of that material will be greater when he can express himself through oral narration.

Ruth Beechick, a truly great author and educator of our present day, has also seen the value in using real books rather than textbooks. In her three "little books," she instructs parents how to use a natural method in teaching preschool through third grade. One book deals with arithmetic, one with language, and one with reading. She dispenses with complicated teaching methods in favor of simpler and more practical methods. She has also written a number of other books including an excellent volume entitled, *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*. In this book she gives helpful instruction on how to teach using real books instead of texts or workbooks.

Quoting from her book, *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*:

Some educators question whether textbooks, even at their best, could ever do the job. "The very nature of textbooks is to present information that is predigested, pre-thought, pre-analyzed, and pre-synthesized," says a school learning specialist. A steady diet of such books deprives children of the joy of original thought. It turns them off to learning. ¹¹

Ruth Beechick explains that although textbook series publishers

In saying that EDUCATION IS A LIFE, the need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum.

— Charlotte Mason, *Home Education, Charlotte Mason Research and Supply*

To the memory of my mother: wise in counsel, tender in judgment and in all charity, strong in Christian faith and purpose, I dedicate, with reverence, this simple book.

— Author's dedication to *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* by Margaret Sidney, Grosset and Dunlap, Inc.

How to Create Your Own Unit Study

The philosophy of the publisher dictates the methods presented in their material, just as it should be in our homes that our philosophy of education dictates our method of teaching.

The point is if we have a certain philosophical approach to education, we should try to be fairly consistent in choosing materials so that our curriculum is not doing battle with our educational philosophy. Sometimes we are not aware of philosophical conflict, but we know that our curriculum is not working for us.

— *Cathy Duffy* Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual, Elementary Grades, 1990 edition, Grove Publishing

boast about strengthening concepts, basic skills, and generalizations from one grade to the next, these things are not accomplished. The texts are a compilation of separate, disjointed topics.

She stresses the use of dictation as a significantly successful means of teaching. Copying selected passages is useful to younger children and can also be useful to children who find dictation too difficult. Lessons using copying or dictation integrate writing, grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and comprehension skills for a well-balanced educational program.

Dictate a paragraph to your child, observe what he has trouble with and work on that. A grammar/composition handbook will prove to be a beneficial resource. *Writer's Express* is a good book to start with for the lower grades. For the middle grades and high school, I recommend *Write Source 2000* and *Writer's Inc.* All three handbooks are published by The Write Source. This company produces grammar/composition handbooks for each grade level, but as much of the material overlaps, you can use the titles I have recommended and adapt them to your children's levels. (I prefer to use only the student handbooks — not the teacher's guides or student workbooks.)

Common Sense Press publishes a series entitled, *Learning Language Arts through Literature*, which implements the copying and dictation learning approach set forth by Ruth Beechick. Each book in the series gives step-by-step instructions on how to get the full benefit of this method. The selections to be dictated or copied are chosen for you. This series will be helpful for those of you new to the dictation method of instruction.

As I use the unit study approach, I incorporate the dictation and copying methods whether we are conducting a literature unit, science unit, or other type of unit. Because all of our studies center on a particular topic, theme, or time period, the dictating and copying methods are a very easy way to integrate language arts into any study area. Charlotte Mason's narration method of study is also easily incorporated into a unit study.

There are many other experts in the homeschooling arena advocating a more practical approach to learning as opposed to a textbook-workbook oriented approach. I have read a number of the books by these people, but space does not permit me to comment on all of them. Raymond and Dorothy Moore have written numerous books expelling the myth that seeks to legitimize the effectiveness of the workbook approach. As a result of increased awareness, several publishers have produced materials based on the unit study method, some of which I have used or examined. Although superior to the basic workbook-oriented curriculums, I still felt in bondage when using them.

My family's particular needs and desires drive me to develop our

own unit studies. It does take time and dedication, but so does trying to keep up with several children working at different levels, on different subjects, in different books. We are learning as a family. Our goals and priorities are based on our needs; they are not based on someone else's lesson plans — someone who is not familiar with my family.

Next, we will discuss how you can successfully create your own unit studies. Do not let the self-proclaimed experts intimidate you. What was accepted as educationally sound a few years ago is now regarded as incorrect. Why? Because the experts are realizing that their inferior teaching methods and materials do not work. The curriculum specialists plod away trying to come up with new and better methods and materials, and the textbook publishers happily print and sell new editions of texts and workbooks each year. Have you ever gone to a public school book depository and wondered why they were getting rid of so many books? If the public school does not want them, I certainly do not! Let us be cautious of some Christian textbook publishers who mimic the secular, but throw in a Bible verse here and there as a peace offering. This is an insult to true Christianity.

Quoting from Ruth Beechick's book, *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*:

For some children and for some time, certain books will happen to be just right. But if you find yourself struggling to mold your child to a book, try reversing priorities. It is the child you are teaching, not the book. Bend the book or find another; make the studies fit the child!¹²

(Note: Once I became familiar with putting together a unit study, I included my children in the research process.)

The first period — from colonial times to the 1840s — saw the dominance of the Calvinist ethic: God's omnipotent sovereignty was the central reality of man's existence. In the Calvinist scheme, the purpose of man's life was to glorify God, and the attainment of Biblical literacy was considered the overriding spiritual and moral function of education. Latin, Greek and Hebrew were studied because they were original languages of the Bible and of theological literature. Thus, this period in American education is characterized by a very high standard of literacy.
— Samuel Blumenfeld, "Who Killed Excellence?" *Imprimis* 1985