

Jenn: Welcome to the *Good Enough Homeschool* Podcast. We are-

Courtney: Courtney Ostaff.

AJ: AJ Campbell.

Jenn: Jenn Naughton. Today, we'll be playing around, which is unlike us, but that's what happens when AJ and Courtney put me in charge. Between the three of us, we've tried a lot of curriculum, and I thought let's see just how much we've cycled through over the years. I'll keep score. We're going to give you some short Yelp reviews of all the different curriculum that we could think of over the past 20 years.

We will get one point for everything purchased and 3 points if it has been bought, sold, and bought again a second time, and a bonus point will be awarded for any Yelp type one-sentence review. Our first curriculum is *100 Easy Lessons to Teach Your Child to Read*. Who gets a point?

AJ: Ding, ding, ding, I do.

Jenn: Me too. Courtney?

Courtney: 4 out of 5 stars only because at about lesson 78 it stops explicitly teaching phonetic rules.

Jenn: Fair. All right, next up, All About Reading or we could just say All About Learning Press. All About Reading and All About Spelling combined, let's talk about both. My Yelp review, lots of pieces that you may not need anyway to lose. I'm going to give it 3 of 5.

Courtney: I'll go 3 to 5, too, simply because I can't handle that many moving parts, but very good if you have a child whom you suspect might be mildly dyslexic.

Jenn: Analytical Grammar, any winners?

AJ: Yes, I've used that as a supplement actually for tutoring students. I would say probably 4 out of 5, maybe even 4.5 out of 5.

Jenn: *History of the US*. I don't know why I specified third edition, but I did. Yes, I really like Joy Hakim. I like her tone. I'm going to give her 4 of 5 stars.

AJ: I would say, now, I don't which edition I've looked at, we had this at the classical school as a mainstay for our American history. I would say 3.5 out of 5. The first volume where she deals with Native Americans, no, but, otherwise, yes, I think it's well done. I think she does a good job with dealing with immigration. That was one of the units that we used it for our Core Knowledge. I thought it worked well.

Courtney: 4 out of 5 because I really like the sidebars and inclusion of primary sources. I would go with AJ on just go ahead and skip that first one, but I also really like that if you're not using with Core Knowledge, there are teachers' guides and workbooks you can buy to go with, very helpful.

Jenn: Fair. Did I write American History Seton Press?

AJ: I think you did.

Jenn: Yes, I did, and I don't know why. Here's the thing with that, anything from Seton is biased towards Catholics. If you read any of the American history from Seton, it's [inaudible 00:03:00] going to tell you about famous Catholics in American history and no one else. Take from that what you will. I'm, 0 stars, would not recommend.

AJ: Yes, I haven't used Seton American History, but I taught kids both in the classical school and in a cottage school who had gone through Seton's program and their view of history generally and American history particularly, was interesting, let's just put it that way.

Jenn: All right. AmblesideOnline. I think it's free so no, I didn't buy it.

AJ: It is.

Jenn: I dabbled in it because I really, really like old books. It was fun for a while, but then my kids rebelled. They were a little too old. It's more like I liked it, and they didn't like it.

AJ: I think they have great poetry resources. If you want free or very low-cost poetry anthologies, that's great. They've got a lot of good stuff for picture study. My issue with AmblesideOnline is that they fall into the Charlotte Mason category that I think of as educational historical reenactment. Basically, they're trying to do something as close as possible to what Charlotte Mason did herself, but the problem is that Charlotte Mason has been dead since 1923. A lot has happened in the world since then, and there are books that you might want to read that have been published later.

They tend to rely on a lot of older books, which can be very appealing but are not necessarily-- It's like the Seton thing. You get a very oddly biased view of the world if you only read books that were published before 1923. It's a little odd, but it's not all they do. That was certainly the tendency.

Jenn: A lot of it.

AJ: Yes, they also have a strong bias toward evangelical and even, I would say, almost fundamentalist Christian views, which were not Ms. Mason's own views. She was a Broad Church Anglican. You get an anti-evolution bias in there, which was not something that Ms. Mason herself had. That's my issue with Ambleside, but they do have some really wonderful free resources.

Jenn: All right, Courtney, do you have any thoughts on that?

Courtney: I'd give it a 2 or 3 stars out of 5 simply because when you are scraping pennies and you want to do a richer classical education then you can get, and you don't have a good library handy, and you need it all laid out for you, it's there.

Jenn: That's true. Most of the books are available online for free too. That's a good point. All right. Next up is Art of Problem Solving. That's one that we tried and discarded because my kids aren't talented in math.

Courtney: I'd give it a 4 out of 5 only for students with good working memory and strong foundational skills.

Jenn: That's specific. That's good. I'm not reading the next one on the list because I don't know what that is. How about ARTistic Pursuits? Has anyone tried that?

Courtney: I have 3 or 4 books of it that I have never managed to successfully implement because I can't get it on a regular schedule. I even went and bought the very expensive kit with everything in it, and I still couldn't get it going on. I like the idea. I think it's fantastic. I just can't make it work. I'll give that a 3 out of 5.

AJ: I would ditto that. Same thing here. My kid managed to become an artist even without this despite the fact that I bought it and wanted to use it, but, yes, I'm just not that parent. I'm not.

Jenn: Next up, Blossom and Root. I have not bought it, although I've seen it. I know, Courtney, you would have opinions.

Courtney: I saw their presentation at a convention, and I liked what I saw. It was for the very early years at that point. It didn't tempt me enough to buy it.

Jenn: AJ? Nothing?

AJ: No experience.

Jenn: Courtney, you're winning.

[laughter]

You're slaying us. All right, Beast Academy, which is from Art of Problem Solving but is different. Here's my Yelp review. I'm going to go 3 of 5 stars because everyone wants their kids to like it, thinks their kids will, but you have to have an advanced math learner for it to work. Just because your kid likes to read graphic novels is not enough. I'm just giving it 3 stars because I feel like it's bait and switch.

Courtney: I'll give it 3 out of 5 simply because kids either love it, and they just devour it and gobble it up or they hate it. Again, the same caveats apply that you need to have strong foundational skills. You need to have a good working memory, and you need to have an extremely high frustration tolerance and willing to accept less than perfection in answers. That's a suite of skills that not every kid has.

Jenn: I think their idea is that a lot of the problems are supposed to be too hard, so there can be a lot of frustration with that.

Courtney: I think people have forgotten that AoPS and Beast Academy were written by math competitors. It's like having an Olympian write you a workout regimen.

[chuckles] It may work for future Olympians, but the rest of us mere mortals maybe not so much.

Jenn: Exactly. All right, Barefoot Meandering also known as Barefoot Ragamuffin Curriculum, AJ?

AJ: Yes, I added this in. They have lessons through literature series for reading and grammar, and so on. I should admit that I know the author, so I'm not entirely unbiased here. She is an experienced homeschooling parent with a bunch of kids. Knew her many years ago. This is a very solid Charlotte Mason-style curriculum. It's written to the student.

I just think it deserves to get more airtime because she's put a lot of work into it. I think she's done a really nice job. It's beautifully designed. She's a designer and really fantastic with that. Visually appealing and very accessible, I think. It's mostly secular and you can get religious supplements if you want them.

Jenn: All right, Beautiful Mundo?

AJ: I really loved the idea of this curriculum. I think it is nicely designed, and there's a lot of information that you get with it. I think the problem is that it requires the parent or teacher really to be conversationally fluent in Spanish. If you're not that, you're going to struggle with this. Some of the books, the picture books are way too hard for beginners who are not native speakers or who are not heritage speakers, are not hearing Spanish in their environment.

It also doesn't really circle back to review vocabulary or grammar structures or anything like that. I would give it maybe 2.5 to 3 out of 5 for that reason. It just ... structurally it's not there as a language learning program. If you just want light exposure, fine but I'm not entirely sure what your kid's going to retain.

Courtney: I'm going to go with AJ on that one because my husband was asking me about it at dinner the other night and I told him, I said, "This would be great if I were a fluent Spanish speaker and I want to run my household in Spanish immersion language style." I'm not. I have four semesters of college Spanish and it's rusty and it's just not up to this task. It's beautiful but I ended up making flashcards for retention. It doesn't have all the pieces I need as a non-native speaker.

Jenn: That's fair. I wanted to like it even though I don't have anyone to use it. It looked so fun.

Courtney: The books are gorgeous. I love the book selection. Just functionally not where I need to be.

Jenn: All right. Next up we have Before Five in a Row and after that is Before Five in a Row. I'm just going to add in regular Five in a Row. All the Five in Rows together. This applies to all of them. They're great for enrichment but they shouldn't be your whole day. You're never going to convince me that that's all you have to do.

AJ: I'm going to go with that. I love Five in a Row. I think it's lovely. If I had a child of that age I would be doing with them as one nice moment in my day. It's definitely not

File name: Episode 19 - Curriculum Rating Game.mp3

a full curriculum. It's sweet and a really nice way to cuddle with your kid on the couch.

Courtney: I don't like it. It's insufficiently scheduled. It doesn't have goals and outcomes readily available for me. My kid gets seriously bored hearing a book three or four or five times in a row.

Jenn: So I learned.

Courtney: Painfully.

Jenn: Painfully. As painfully obvious. That is true. I give you an extra point because I know that that is true. All right. The next one is *Building Foundations of Scientific Understanding*. Yes, I bought it, no I never used it. It was too hard. 2 of 5 stars only because I could never implement it.

AJ: Same here. I have actually bought and sold it, I can't tell you how many times. Probably three.

Courtney: Oh, you get extra points?

AJ: Probably three times. I've had PDF, like the Kindle versions. I bought it even just for my own readings to try so I would try to understand it. I do not know how anybody manages to use this program, I really don't. It's so complicated. I don't know how any busy-- any homeschooler who has a child of that age would ever have time to make this work.

Courtney: I love it.

AJ: Of course you do. You teach science.

Courtney: We are sciency people. My grandfather was a rocket scientist. My parents met in forestry school, West Virginia University. This is the language of our people but it's not for everybody. I wouldn't recommend it to any newbie or even fair to middling experienced levels of homeschoolers. You got to have some experience homeschooling and a real intuitive, comfortable understanding with science. It's almost like it's the Beast Academy for science, only it's not nicely laid out for you. In that sense it's ugly. 2 out of 5. I love it. Not for everybody.

Jenn: That's fair. BookShark. Alright, here's the thing.

AJ: Don't we have a whole episode on this already?

Jenn: Yes, we do have a whole episode on this already. Everyone should go back and listen to that. Short answer, it shouldn't be your whole day. I'm going to just stick with that. Bought, sold, bought, sold, bought, sold, so many times. Anyone else?

Courtney: I passed the first time around because of that whole thread on the Well-Trained Mind forum.

Jenn: Yes that's fair. You have to bat me over the head. I have to see all that stuff for myself. I don't just believe random threads that would save me money. Are you crazy? Botany in Eight lessons. I remember that and I probably bought it. I think I used it but I don't remember it so I guess I'm going to have to give it 3 of 5 stars because it was unremarkable but that means I didn't hate it.

Courtney: I just bought it and I'm planning it for the summer. It's on--

Jenn: It's okay, right?

Courtney: Yes, except it's pretty heavy duty and it doesn't come with a daily schedule. You know how I feel about things that don't have daily schedules. It's going to require a considerable amount of prep work for me to get it all in gear. It looks, the material, the information, the science part of it is a 5 out of 5. I'll give it a 3 out of 5 for prep but a 2 out of 5 for making me find materials. Average about 3.5 out of 5.

AJ: I'm going to throw another one in here. It's a book that I, again, I've bought and sold several times just because of moves and whatever. It's called *Botany in a Day* by a fellow named Thomas Elpel. He actually has a video introduction to it on YouTube that you can look up. It's actually great. I think it's more suitable for high school students although he used to sell a card game that you could actually use with elementary kids that went along with it to help you learn about different groups of plants and how to identify them in the wild and I think that's fun. If you like nature study, that one. I would give that at least I'd say a 3.5 out of 5.

Jenn: I wrote it down so we can add it to the show notes.

AJ: Okay.

Jenn: *Building Thinking Skills* from Critical Thinking Company. I have used a lot of things from The Critical Thinking Company. *Building Thinking Skills* a little bit. It's actually not my favorite product from them but I do think it's really good if you have to train your kid to take a standardized test and you care about how they do. I think it's a good product for that.

Courtney: I'll give it 4 out of 5 because I like the way it's set up. It's easy to use, the directions are clear. I can assign it to a kid and they can do it.

Jenn: Brave Writer. I think it's a little bit of information for a lot of money. Very quietly 2 or 5 stars.

Courtney: I wouldn't pay for it, let's put it like that.

Jenn: All right.

AJ: I have looked a number of times at it and I have never found anything that would be useful to me as a tutor or a teacher.

Jenn: Build Your Library, shout out to Emily. 5 out of 5 stars for her taste in books which coincides with my own. The scheduling doesn't really-- I don't know, it works

File name: Episode 19 - Curriculum Rating Game.mp3

for me okay but I end up tweaking it. It is secular and if you want a literature-based curriculum then I think it's really good for that. That's what it is.

Courtney: I'll give it a 4 out of 5. I love the books. I am fine with the schedule. I appreciate the schedule. I think it is weak in formal grammar, formal writing instruction, and formal science. I know that you have to add that in

AJ: I think that's part and parcel of Charlotte Mason, honestly, particularly in the younger grades. That is overall curricula that draw on Charlotte Mason. That is overall an issue, I would say.

Courtney: Emily, we love your work.

AJ: The book lists are top-notch.

Jenn: It's a bargain. I can tell you. Not only does she have to read all those books but then she has to break them all down to schedule them and then pull in vocabulary and stuff out. That's a lot of work and it doesn't cost very much money for a whole year for that whole schedule.

Courtney: Worth every penny.

Jenn: Alright, we're at Calvert, RIP, sob, loved it. I know it was schooling a box but back in the early days of the-- days of yore 2000, 2001, 2003, it was perfect for me starting out.

Courtney: Confused listeners may know that Calvert got sold and what they're selling now is not what they used to sell, not in any way shape or form, just FYI.

Jenn: The Canon Press. I'm just going to say it but I don't know.

AJ: I actually think I'm the person who added this in. There are three companies, Canon Press, Logos, and Veritas which are sort of intertwined because they have a lot of authors in common. They use each other's materials and so on. These are all neoclassical programs with a strongly reformed theological perspectives. They are very conservative Christian perspective that's very much baked into their programs. They're known mostly for things like their logic, Latin, like the *Matin Latin*, that sort of thing. I just put them in here because they are old-school neoclassical. They are the religious counterpart to the Well-Trained Mind, if you will. Same basic philosophy, Dorothy Sayers's three stages. grammar stage, logic stage, et cetera.

They are out there and they do put out-- Veritas in particular puts out a program that I used with Ruby called the Phonics Museum. The old version of it was absolutely lovely, wicked expensive but really beautiful. Big, huge flashcards, lots of classical arts, great primers. Just all wonderful. It's recently been redone and it's got this very cartoony style now and they even have an app which just shocks me. Just something to be aware of. Their products are high quality if you are of their theological persuasion.

Courtney: Are these the people that put out those omnibus books?

AJ: Yes.

Courtney: Hard pass for me. Hard pass.

Courtney: All right, Classical Academic Press. I have bought some stuff. What have we used? We use their logic. It was okay.

AJ: We used *Latin for Children* in the classical school, so I think their stuff, it is high quality. I don't tend to like the art, that's for sure. I have also used their logic programs and think they're very well done. Also, the rhetoric program, very, very well done. Fairly easy to secularize.

Courtney: 4 out of 5. I really like it. The layout is clean. It's easy to use. It comes with a daily schedule. I did not like the *Latin for Children*. I bought it, and I stashed it after about three months because it did not work for Gwen. I think it would not work for any children who had trouble taking in information, primarily auditorily, because there's a lot of chanting and that does not go over well at our house, but the writing and rhetoric program really like it for that bridge between learning to write sentences and learning to write essays. Very strong there.

I have not used the upper levels of Writing & Rhetoric, but I've heard through the grapevine that they're very well done. I'm looking forward to using them myself.

Jenn: Give it 3 of 5 stars.

AJ: I would say for me, the *Latin for Children*, 2.5 The logic ones, I would say more like 3.5.

Jenn: All right, Classical Conversations. It's a hard pass for me.

Courtney: Hard pass for me.

AJ: Same here.

Jenn: Community college. I'm a big fan.

AJ: Me too.

Jenn: Not only does it save you money, but community college professors are overall some of the best teachers I've ever met. They're used to teaching people from all walks of life. They don't expect anything really of the kids coming in or the young adults coming in. Five stars.

AJ: Yes, same here.

Courtney: I will also give it 5 out of 5 because I used to teach community college.

Jenn: Core Knowledge. AJ, I know you like it.

AJ: Yes, I do. This was what we used in the classical school for grades pre-K-6. It is a very strong, content-rich program. You have to recognize that it is designed for a

File name: Episode 19 - Curriculum Rating Game.mp3

classroom setting, but I think in terms of the content and in terms of their overall structure and what they're trying to achieve, it's fantastic, so I would give it 5 out of 5.

Courtney: I would give it a 4 out of 5 only because you do have to print a whole whole lot and as you said, it's designed for the classroom. However, those free downloads have scripted instruction in them and they reinforce content from science to read-alouds to history and back. It all swirls together in this interlocking spiral that is just beautiful. Yes, the scheduling is a problem. I was ready to pull my hair out last night, but 4 out of 5 for really good content reinforcement.

Jenn: Charlotte Mason. I think you're up again AJ.

AJ: Her ideas are kind of a mixed bag. I think some of them have held up really, really well. Others not so much because, yes, we've done a lot of research and things in the last 100 years. Using good literature is wonderful. The ideas that she promoted, some of them were great. If you like books, you like reading aloud, you like a literature-based program, look into her ideas.

Courtney: Not a super huge fan. 3 out of 5, simply because science is so important and math is so important. I think we can expect more of our younger students, especially in terms of writing instruction.

Jenn: I'm going to give her 3 out of 5 because books and nature study. Ecce Romani. Romani, I don't know how you say it.

AJ: Yes, Ecce Romani. This is one of the top Latin programs used in schools. I have used it with a tutoring student, somewhat similar to Cambridge. It's fine.

Courtney: I used it with Gwen and I did not know any Latin. I had a doubt but it worked really well for her because it was strongly visual and it was a whole to part, and she needed that. With those two caveats in mind, I would give it at least a 3 or 4 out of 5.

Jenn: Evan-Moor. I know, Courtney, you recommend Evan-Moor all the time.

Courtney: I do because it's so open and go, and it hits those national standards. Is it brilliantly groundbreaking instruction? No. Will it get her done and keep your kid on level? Yes. Many years when life was hard at my house, I bought a stack of Evan-Moor workbooks, and that was what we did. I also particularly like their daily geography because I think geography is an underrated subject and it's just enough to make sure that your kid is not totally ignorant of maps and where things are in the world, which is super helpful.

AJ: I would second that on the geography.

Jenn: I'm going to give zero stars to Easy Peasy All-in-One Homeschool and tell you to just buy the Evan-Moor workbooks. I'm assuming that you guys are also a hard pass on that.

Courtney: I never recommend it.

Jenn: *English from the Roots Up*, which you never hear from anymore. I liked it for what it was. I used it before we started Latin. I thought it gave my kids a good base. It was easy to do and it was Latin and Greek roots. It really got them interested in what English is made up of and it made them want to learn Latin once they realized how much they already knew. Elemental Science.

Courtney: Bought and sold and bought and sold and bought and sold.

Jenn: How many points do you want? At least 3.

Courtney: The devil is in the details and the details do not work for me. Thanks for listening to the *Good Enough Homeschool* podcast. This is the end of the first part of the series. Swing back next week where we will have the rest of the story.

[00:26:10] [END OF AUDIO]