

Jenn Naughton: Welcome to the *Good Enough Homeschool* podcast.

Courtney: For the second part of the curriculum reading game.

Jenn: We are;

Courtney Ostaff: Courtney Ostaff.

AJ Campbell: AJ Campbell.

Jenn: And 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 three 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.

Explode the code. I like it, I think it goes well with phonics pathways, which I also love. There's half level books, which are awesome because let's say, you finished book three and you're like, I don't know, "They're pretty wibbly wobbly. I don't know if they really have it."

You could do all of book three and a half before you go to book four. I gave it five of five stars.

Exploring Nature with Children, bought it, sort of used it. It's like, not my thing.

AJ: Same.

Courtney: I bought it and I bought the journal and I recommend it all the time. I really, only fluffily use it in like kindergarten with Elena because it's not scheduled enough for me. You're the kind of person who sends your kids outdoors to play every afternoon. Don't come back for three hours, that kind of thing. Then this is right up your alley.

Jenn: Memoria Press Latin.

AJ: Memorial Press does a lot of things really, really well. They're very good at making their things usable for busy parents, who don't necessarily have a background in the subject matter. If that's what you're looking for it's great. Pedagogically though, I have a real issue with using the grammar translation method to teach Latin. The end result is you have kids memorizing a bunch of stuff that they don't actually know how to use in practice. Their stuff is so, so, so dry. I gave them two out of five stars for usability.

Courtney: We used it for a year and I liked it well enough, it was usable for someone who had no Latin. The workbook style was really useful for kids who did

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not do well with auditory instruction. For that reason alone, I'll give it a three out of five.

Jenn: Galore Park.

Courtney: It's still there. I just bought a Galore Park geography and a Galore Park religious education for Gwen.

Jenn: I really, really like them. Their history is hard to use because they're teaching British history, which is fair, since they're in Britain and all. I really like their language arts. We used their Latin. We used their science one year. I'm a fan. There's not as much available as there used to be because I think the guy who owned it sold it and now they have a lot more test prep.

Courtney: They did. They sold it to Hodder Education, which is the main curriculum provider, what there is of curriculum for the UK education, as far as I can tell. They do, do a lot of test prep. What I like about it is that they have put it in the Kindle format and now you can buy the stuff inexpensively on Kindle. The student book is \$8 on Kindle for the key stage three, I think, the 11 to 14 year-olds.

AJ: I never used any of their stuff, but heard very good things about them from people whose opinions I trust.

Jenn: Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting, big fan. My favorite handwriting.

AJ: Yes. I love Italic handwriting. I think it's lovely. I did want to put in a plug here for a cheaper version. If you want the quick and dirty approach to Italics Penny Gardner's book, *Italics: Beautiful Handwriting for Children*, you can go to Penny Gardner that's, G-A-R-D-N-E-R.com. I think you can still buy this. Penny Gardener is and was a Charlotte Mason educator. She used to go around the country and give seminars about Charlotte Mason education.

She was one of the first people that I heard speak when my kid was still a toddler. She's absolutely fantastic. I think you can now actually buy her seminar as a video, but I love the fact that she provided very inexpensive materials.

Courtney: Four out of five. I own half a dozen writing curricula. It's a huge struggle at my house and after a year of using Getty-Dubay's level A, Elena has perfectly legible handwriting and strong letter formation. Absolutely, great for that. The reason I dock the star is because I do not like the way the instructor manual is set up. I find it too confusing.

Jenn: Getting Started with Latin and French, Spanish or German.

AJ: The pro to all of these books is that they are easy to use, they are cheap, and they're great as an introduction to the language. You have free audio for most of those, which I think is fantastic. The con is, once again, these are grammar translation methods. It's fine as an introduction, is just to get your feet wet and decide if it's something that you want to continue with. It is not the approach that I would typically use though, for somebody who wanted to gain fluency. That's not the point of the books, they are getting started with. They are not becoming fluent in.

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Courtney: Two out of five. It's pitched as being a full-on language curriculum, it's not, it's too easy.

Jenn: Guest Hollow.

Courtney: We like it. If you took BYL and applied it to science and added in some experiments, I think that you would get the Guest Hollow kind of thing. I don't think Guest Hollow was fully secular. It's secular enough for me. The books are fantastic. The hands-on experiments are easily doable, it comes with a daily schedule, it has a workbook, it has quizzes, it has video links in it. It's not perfect. I'm going to give it a four out of five, but it is pretty darn close for a lit based science program.

Jenn: I really like their new geography program. They wrote an online textbook to go with it. It's very hard to find a good geography program for high school. It's working for us. I like that it's all scheduled. I can click the links on the schedule to buy the books, makes it a lot faster. Don't really have to hunt them down. They do a pretty good job with switching things out, if they go out and print. I like it. I'd give it five out of five stars.

The next one is Grammar School Latin, which is Memoria Press. It's just their secular name for it. All they did was take out words like pray.

AJ: I see.

Jenn: Grammar for the Well-Trained Mind. Of course, I'm a five of five stars. I like it. I really like that those books cover the same concepts, but they have different examples. You can keep rotating all the way through grammar for a few years in a row. There's like the red book and the blue book and the green book, but it doesn't-- or maybe purple book, I didn't know. It doesn't matter, you can start with any color book and then just do a different color book the next year.

Courtney: I'm going to give it a four out of five because it's brutally difficult. I see grown adults, homeschooling parents, arguing about answers on Facebook. It is really hard, but it's laid out beautifully, it's scheduled beautifully. Not that it's not doable, but this is not for the faint of heart. This is not something that you can be like, "Oh, wander over here kid and do it by yourself. I'll check your work in five minutes." This is not that kind of grammar program.

AJ: No.

Courtney: This is grammar for serious grammar people. We did it half speed one year, two years and that worked out fine as well, because it was so difficult. I give it a four out of five.

AJ: I have never actually used it. Hake is basically Saxon, but for grammar, anyway. [crosstalk]

Courtney: Five out of five. I love me some Hake.

Jenn: Me too.

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AJ: Hake is marvelous.

Jenn: Hake is accessible for every kid.

First Language Lessons. Yes, five of five stars.

AJ: Yes, same here. Same good stuff.

Courtney: I know people are like, "Oh no, they spent 30 lessons on a noun." I'm like, "Hello, how many five-year-olds have you talked to recently?"

AJ: They don't mind and as that person who will get them in sixth or seventh or eighth grade, can I tell you that most of the students that I have dealt with, homeschooled or public schooled, they might be able to tell you what a noun is. They can rattle off the definition. Can they find one in a sentence? No. This is so important. If you want your kids to go on and be able to talk about writing intelligently, to learn a foreign language, they need this information.

Courtney: This is done in developmentally appropriate fashion.

AJ: Exactly.

Jenn: Oh, I totally agree. Hey, Andrew! Teach Me: Some Greek. The name of the book, not AJ in this case.

AJ: Exactly. I could still sing the Greek alphabet song that goes with that curriculum. I used this with my daughter to teach her the alphabet and she was really little. It was one of those labor of love, some homeschooling parent put it together back in the dark ages. I guess it's still available. Probably not the best thing to try to teach your kid Greek, but it is sweet.

Courtney: Looked at it. Didn't buy it. Not really into learning Greek.

Jenn: Henle Latin, AJ.

AJ: Augh. Conquer the barbarians and then convert them.

Jenn: It's Henle who says like that. [crosstalk]

AJ: It's awesome. Henle Latin, if you're trying to give your kid basically a pre-Vatican to parochial school education, it's a fine program.

Jenn: Pandia Press, History Odyssey. I have downloaded the two week samples. I never bought it. I don't know why. I just don't like it. Two stars for me.

Courtney: Two and a half to three stars for me. I bought the level two ancient history. I was very disappointed in their choice of spine. When I pointed out to them, they said that they would make it optional. The last time I checked, which has been a while, they hadn't revised it to use another spine. They also do their ancient history by location instead of chronologically, which I didn't like. They say that they do

literature. I did not like the literature choices, I did not like the way they handled the literature.

I didn't think it was rigorous enough, but I do like their science, at least in terms of the Astronomy 2 I bought and I like to have them up on the shelf. Two and a half, three stars for that.

AJ: No opinion, haven't used them.

Jenn: Human Odyssey, which is similar, and I get them confused, but this is K-12. I hunted down and found all their textbooks used. Anyway, I really like them. I even bought the high school, American History and World History. We use them sporadically with other stuff that we're using. I'm a five of five for that.

Courtney: I will go a four and a half out of five, simply because it's a teensy bit Eurocentric, but the writing to the upper middle school, like grade six, seven, eight, there is spot on. It is chronological world history extremely useful as a spine for those years. Very good. Very well done.

AJ: I would echo that. There's a real gap, I think, between the elementary school and high school world history, and this fills it almost perfectly. I think it's fantastic.

Jenn: History Quest by Pandia Press.

Courtney: If this is what I remember it is, it's their replacement for Story of the World for their elementary level.

AJ: Yes. That's my understanding too, that it's just the substitute for that. I looked at samples online. They're fine. I don't have a strong feeling one way or the other on those.

Jenn: Handwriting Without Tears, which is now the larger company Learning Without Tears. It's not a great looking cursive, but for printing, it worked great for my kids. I know that the various occupational therapists that we've used have always recommended it, and were very pleased when I had showed them we were already using it. Then very pleased/also sad because, "Oh, you're already using my secret weapon. Now, how do I fix your kid?"

AJ: I feel the same way, but it's really not a very pretty script. Again, it's great for kids who need that extra help, might otherwise be going to an OT or are going to an OT. I would say probably four out of five because it's for a special group of people.

Courtney: I was not impressed. We used it. I didn't think it had enough practice. I thought the letters were uncomfortably large for my child. We used it for two or three books, but then again we had handwriting issues in general, so, take of that what you will.

Jenn: iCivics.

Courtney: Five out of five, that is fantastic. It is highly under recommended. If I remember correctly, it is the retirement project of a Supreme Court Justice Sandra

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Day O'Connor. The whole goal is to provide civics lessons to the United States. They're all free, you can register online as a teacher, very easy to do, 100% free.

They have some online stuff, more so now, but they have enough lessons at the middle school level that you can do a solid year of extremely high quality civics lessons, and even more at the high school level. Really good stuff. It's all downloadable, almost all downloadable as PDFs mostly. There are a few PowerPoints and a couple of games, but you can download that, print it off, bind it and make yourself a high quality civics work text.

AJ: Awesome.

Jenn: That is awesome. I guess I should look into that. IEW, Institute for Excellence in Writing, the only thing I came away from that entire program was my whole family can recite the poem Ooey Gooy.

Courtney: "Ooey Gooy was a worm..." Elena loves reciting poetry. She made it through the first entire book of their poetry memorization program this year. We did skip a couple of poems because I had problems with the content, not with the poem themselves, but I could not get into the writing instruction. It seemed really complicated to me, so, three out of five.

AJ: Yes. I will admit to heartily disliking this writing program. I worked with some kids in the cottage school and in an early iteration of the classical school who had used this extensively, I think largely because the parents were extremely busy. There was very a very large family. They would just put their kids in front of the video and have them learn directly from that, which is I understand not the way it was supposed to be done. Ideally the parent or the teacher is supposed to look at the video and then use that as a model for teaching.

What I found was that they were very stilted, formulaic writers. There was no flexibility and no real feel for language, which was surprising given what you would expect from a program like that. I think the main issue that I have is that the creator of it was a Suzuki violin teacher, and writing is not music. It is not Suzuki violin. Trying to apply some of those ideas of repetition and learning by ear and all of that thing to writing, just does not make sense. It really doesn't work. Expensive, it's very complicated. It's just not something that I can get behind.

Jenn: : Same, all that, I Speak Latin, by Quidnam Press. I can tell you that it was really the funnest Latin, funnest, probably not being a great word that we've ever had in our house and Declan still talks about it. Five out of five stars, would recommend.

Courtney: I am using the heck out of that living memory book that you put together, AJ. This is the second or third time this semester I have gone back to it for memory work for Elena's, especially turning it into copy work, super helpful.

Jenn: Jump Math, everyone asks me about that and every time I'm like, I have no idea.

Courtney: I have used it, four out of five, simply because it's generally meant to be used in a classroom but, they, like RightStart, have some really excellent

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explanations of how math works, conceptually, that are excellent for students who might have a learning disability in math, or who have gaps in their math knowledge. Good amount of practice.

My only caveat is that it's hinky to work through their website, to get the free stuff for homeschoolers. If I recall correctly, it's Canadian. The way that they annotate their numbers is slightly different, but really good high quality stuff there.

Jenn: Killgallon and all the many, many books.

Courtney: Five out of five, even though it doesn't come with the schedule, we can make it work. It was a lot of fun. Good for kids who like to play with language. I let Gwen just write in the book or mark up the book. I didn't think the books were that expensive. It's easy to do. I have not found anything else I like as well for teaching students how to write varied sentences.

Jenn: What book do you tell people to use first because that's the question I get.

Courtney: You do sentence, grammar, and then paragraph.

Jenn: That's it.

Courtney: Now, they recently revised it to have an all-in-one per level. I have not looked at those. I'm perfectly fine with the older style.

AJ: I would also give it five out of five for exactly the reasons that that Courtney mentioned. I think what I like about it the most is their emphasis on sentence level composition, the sentence and the paragraph. There has been this incredible pressure on younger and younger kids to write extensively rather than to write well. You get these, "My kindergarteners supposed to write a paragraph on whatever."

Courtney: That's not even exaggeration.

AJ: That is freaking ridiculous. It just is. What I love about Killgallon is that they do focus on the sentence level at each level of schooling.

Jenn: Quick question about that. If kids haven't done any writing instruction, do you go backwards in the level or do you still give them the middle school book if they're middle school age?

Courtney: I wouldn't necessarily start there, if they haven't had any writing instruction, I might start with an upper level of Writing With Ease, to make sure that their kids know about the capital letters and periods and things like that.

AJ: That's what I would recommend, if they don't know what's in First Language Lessons, you don't want to dump them into Killgallon, I would say.

Jenn: Kumon. I, too, love their preschool workbooks.

AJ: I love those things, but I also have some friends whose kids benefited from their in-person tutoring programs. I have mixed feelings about their methods, but the kids who needed them seem to come up to grade level and it seemed to work.

Courtney: I will give it a five out of five, if you make wise choices in the workbooks that you select. I will even go further and say that I can use it with the K through two, because most K through two curricula pay insufficient attention to telling time, and dealing with measurement and working with money. It's just like, two weeks in February, and then we move on. A lot of kids get left behind it on the how to read a clock. They don't know how to make change properly. That kind of thing is super, super helpful for that really good stuff there.

Jenn: I really want to talk about Life of Fred. People still love it, which is so odd. I still own it. In fact, if you are in the Good Enough Homeschool group, you could buy it from me for a bargain price, [laughs] because it has been taking up valuable shelf space for far too long.

AJ: Fred is quirky. Fred is funny. Fred made a very good-- he saved my bacon at a certain point because I had a kid who was getting very resistant to the math that we were doing, and really needed a change of pace. Fred was a great change of pace, but at a certain point, you start including other subjects with math and they're mathy related subjects, but it's a little bit peculiar. At a certain point he takes a sharp turn right into capital L libertarianism, which was really not what I wanted my kid to have. At that point, we dropped Fred.

Courtney: Two out of five as a math teacher simply because I think it has insufficient practice. If you have a kid who is sharp and will pick that up, and he doesn't need much practice, more power to you, but for the rest of us mere mortals over here, we need problem sets of like 20 or 30 and this ain't got it.

Jenn: We liked it when it was first coming out because it was weird and quirky and my kids, they just love stories. I started with the A book and we would read a little bit at night, and we would all just laugh so hard but it wasn't what we used for math.

AJ: The storylines are a little bit strange and sometimes mildly disturbing, a bridge to-- [crosstalk]

Courtney: When it's too weird for us.

AJ: It was a bridge too far, I would say. I have to agree with Courtney. We used it as a supplement basically, as the treat at the end of the week. Like if you make it through all of the problem sets in Saxon or Rod and Staff or whatever it was we were using at that point. Here, you get to read a Life of Fred thing. I would not ever use it as the main math text for really any child.

Jenn: Lingua Latina?

AJ: This is the GOAT. Greatest of all time. I'm sorry. I'm a huge fan of Orberg's work. This is Lingua Latina per se illustrata. There are two volumes. The first one is Familiar Romana. It is essentially a novel written entirely in Latin about a Roman family. It's deceptively simple but it is a wonderful text. It's my favorite thing. The File name: Episode 20 - Curriculum Rating Game Part 2.mp3

important thing to know though is, it is not something that you can teach if you don't know Latin yourself.

What you can do, however, is take yourself through the book using the college companion, which is basically a handbook that was created many years later by a college professor that takes you through explanations of the grammar, gives you translations and all sorts of other things that are not in the text itself. You can teach yourself Latin with it. When people ask me, how should I teach Latin to my high schooler? This is what I tell them. Use Lingua Latina, find somebody who can teach it. It is fantastic. 10 out of five.

Jenn: The Book of Lively Latin. Oh, Holy cow. I think that killed one of my printers.

AJ: Yes, that's the issue with that book.

Jenn: That's true.

AJ: It's a lot and it's a lot for that age of grade three through six.

Jenn: Courtney, sing the praises of Living Memory.

Courtney: I bought this over--. It must have been Christmas break. I looked at that and I thought, "This is very strange," [laughs] because it's a book of lists but then I got into it. When people start talking about memorization, they typically start about poetry or speeches and such like. It's valid that those are worthwhile to memorize. Absolutely. There is a whole other world of sets of foundational information that is important across the content areas. This morning, I spent about three hours going through turning those lists into copy work complete with images for Elena to use as her copy work book for second grade.

It is absolutely fantastic. She's going to write three times things like "Mount Everest is the tallest mountain," or "the Mariana trench is the lowest place on earth." Those kinds of things, super helpful.

Jenny: I actually have the first edition also in print and I refer to it all the time.

AJ: It's not everything you need to know but if your kid knows these things, then they have those hooks that they can hang the rest of their knowledge on.

Jenn: Logic of English. I'm already past that.

Courtney: Three and a half to four stars. It's really good phonics, good for kids that need a lot of tactile work. I personally cannot handle all of the flashcards and whatnot that are included. I found the scheduling to be complicated and I really couldn't hack it. I bought a copy. I have a copy and I do not use it.

AJ: I have not used it. I have read the author's book which is, what? Uncovering the Logic of English, something like that. I'll have to look up the title. I found it very helpful. I've also watched a bunch of her videos, training videos and things that she made available for free during the pandemic, which was very nice. I did find them very, very helpful. They were essentially training videos for classroom teachers. I

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came away quite impressed. Again, I think it's one of those things that for my style of teaching, particularly, as a homeschooler would have had too many moving parts.

Jenn: Lost Tools of Writing. Oh, I bought and sold it and bought and sold it.

Courtney: I currently own two copies myself and still have not managed to implement.

AJ: I can't figure it out. I don't know, I just don't like it. Every time I start reading it, I get super bored.

Jenn: I read it out and I liked it but it takes a lot of my mental energy. I want someone to tell me what to do. I don't want to have to sit there and recreate from scratch every time.

AJ: I have thoughts and feelings about Circe generally, not something that I would probably pick up.

Jenn: Wait, there's more, come back next week and we will keep ongoing. Thanks for listening and if you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a review wherever you get your podcasts. Then join us next time when we give you some more real talk about homeschooling.

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