

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

**AJ Campbell:** For the third part of the curriculum rating 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. A bonus point will be awarded for any Yelp type one sentence review.

**Jenn:** *Mater Amabilis*.

**AJ:** I can tell you what this is. This is a Catholic Charlotte Mason program, Ambleside online, but for Catholics. I believe it's free. There also is one that we didn't mention earlier that is a Jewish take on Charlotte Mason, which is *Ani VeAmi*.

**Jenn:** *Mapping the World with Art*, which is an Ellen McHenry program. I think I bought it but I don't think we used it, yet I have an art major.

**Courtney:** Purchased. Failed to implement.

**AJ:** No experience with.

**Jenn:** Mark Kistler's *Draw Squad*. The book itself is outdated. I know PBS has a lot of his stuff online for free.

**Courtney:** It was scheduled with something that we were doing. She did not like it. From my POV, zero out of five.

**Jenn:** Royal Fireworks Press, we have a whole episode on this.

Memoria Press *Lit Guides*. I already said I like them a lot. In general, four or five stars.

**Courtney:** Same. Four or five. I have inches and inches and inches of shelf space devoted to Memoria Press *Lit Guides*.

**Jenn:** Also you can do them orally. If you have a kid that doesn't like writing in every subject themselves you can just get the teacher's guide and do the whole thing out loud.

**AJ:** That is honestly true of a lot of Memoria Press' materials. Materials are often very, very work-booky or they look like workbooks but you can almost always do them orally and it'll work.

**Jenn:** They do have some secular versions. You have to hunt around for them. I know a lot of their copy books are Bible verses but there's one about like famous presidents.

Their enrichments sets are next. Although I wouldn't recommend necessarily buying all of the books because I think that'd be very expensive. It's a really, really put together program. Somewhat better than *Five in a Row*, I would say, as far as scheduling goes for the K through two group. Courtney, I know you liked it.

**Courtney:** I do. I particularly liked the science part of the enrichment sets. They have a literature section and then they have a science section. I don't know if you all did this or you remember those. Do you remember those *Let's Read and Find Out* science books?

**Jenn:** Yes.

**AJ:** Yes.

**Courtney:** For that level of science they have a lot of picture books, very high quality selections. They do one a week. I think if I recall correctly you can buy the books more inexpensively used. What I really like is the guide. It has it all laid out for you. It's all scheduled. It tells you what questions to ask. It tells you what answers you should have.

They also do art, like art appreciation, and they have crafts that they work in there and they have music, and it's all laid out. It's just really nice. At least as far as the science stuff goes it is 100% secular. Some of the choices in the literature section for the enrichment sets might be a little on the not secular side. They're classic literature. You might want to sub some out. I did a couple, but still highly recommend. If you are going to move abroad or you have funds from a charter school that you must absolutely use now, then it's super convenient just to buy the set, like \$350 a set.

**Jenn:** There's probably pretty good resale value though if you kept the set together and sold it with the guide.

**Courtney:** Which I did last spring and I can attest sold like hotcakes.

**Jenn:** The next one up is *Mathematical Enhancement Programme*, program spelt the British way with an E on the end, so *MEP*.

**Courtney:** It's a British program.

**Jenn:** It's a British program. I don't know much about it but I think it's online and it's free.

**Courtney:** It is online. It is free. It's extremely high quality. I think it does all of elementary school. I have a homeschooling acquaintance who used it with her oldest

child who was like a national math Olympiad winner person. You can get really good at math with that. However, I didn't want to use it because it requires a lot of printing. Just wanted books that I could just do. It is out there. It's free. It's super high quality. Five out of five.

**AJ:** I have no experience with it. I have nothing to say.

**Jenn:** How about *Minimus*? I love that little mouse. AJ?

**AJ:** *Minimus* is so cute. I think the program has expanded since the last time I looked at it and certainly when I used it. It was meant for classrooms. I don't remember if it's the lead in for Oxford or Cambridge. It was one of those programs for elementary kids, a language exploration kind of thing. It's really fun. It's a sweet little story about a family living at Hadrian's wall.

There's this little mouse named *Minimus* because *mus* is Latin for mouse and there's a big cat and there's all kinds of stuff. It's very cute, very cartoony comic book style. I would recommend it more as a supplement to another program than a main thing. Again, it requires you to know a certain amount of Latin, but not a huge amount. Maybe people who have used it more frequently would have more to say about it. I found it a very charming supplement. My daughter enjoyed it.

**Courtney:** I use it as a gentle introduction to the idea of Latin. Not that we're going to learn to read Latin or anything but like, "Oh, Latin was spoken by real people. It's a real thing. It's another language. Here are some of the history of it and here are some crafts we can do with it. Here's some vocabulary you might use. It is very low key, laid back hands-on fun." You're right. It was designed for a classroom, but I found it very usable at home as long as I didn't expect my kid to come out of it picking up a book in Latin and reading anything. They do have little *Minimus* books. It worked really well for us and the cases really range.

**AJ:** I want to say that I used it maybe in first or second grade. The other thing that happened that came out of *Minimus* for us which was interesting was that Ruby did become interested in Roman history in a way that other programs did not seem to do for her. What I ended up giving her, and this is just a side thing, were the *Roman Mysteries* by Caroline Lawrence, who is a British author.

There's a whole big series that we actually gave them to our public library in Massachusetts when we moved away because we had a whole set including a bunch that I ordered from Britain. They are wonderful fun stories. If you have access to those in your library and you have a kid who likes mysteries, likes history, they're really fun.

**Courtney:** Sadly, I think *Minnie Mouse* has gone out of print. If you think you might be interested, now is the time to get yourself a cheap copy if you can find one.

**Jenn:** All right. How about *Miquon Math*? All I can think of are those rods.

**Courtney:** That's *Cuisenaire*.

**Jenn:** Is that different?

**Courtney:** Yes.

**Jenn:** I see. Then obviously I pass.

**Courtney:** I bought the first book and you know how AJ you said you DIY your own language arts program to a certain extent?

**AJ:** Yes.

**Courtney:** This is the math program for people who want to DIY early math. It has a suggestion of an idea that you might do kind of thing. This concept that you can teach in this way. It is not actually like, "All right. We got a chapter on fractions." It's not like that at all. If you are into math, you are a math-y person and you teach math and you want to have a more fluid math experience, that's the way to go. For the rest of us, two out of five.

**Jenn:** *Math Mammoth*. I've used that a couple of times. I bought it on one of those homeschool buyers co-op sales. I like that they've got those subject books. It took us a couple of times through like telling time and all that. Those were cool because you could just reprint them. Courtney, I'm sure you've got opinions.

**Courtney:** I do. I'll give it a four out of five. It's a quality math program. They're work texts written to the students. They might have a little more practice than you need. I don't like the lack of manipulatives in the program, although that may be a bonus to some other people. If you're looking for a quality inexpensive math program that your child can work relatively independently on, would recommend.

**AJ:** If I were to go back now, if I had to redo math that is actually a program I would seriously consider.

**Jenn:** Me too. I wish they had algebra. That would have been nice.

*A Mystery of History*. I just remember that being like a Christian curriculum, I think. I don't know anything about that. *MOH* is the acronym.

**Courtney:** Pass.

**AJ:** Me too.

**Jenn:** All right. *Moving Beyond the Page*, anyone?

**Courtney:** I own it. We did not use it. I don't like the way it's laid out. I don't like the format. I don't like the visual design of it, so I never used it but friend gave me a whole set. I just don't like it.

**Jenn:** Moving on, Math-U-See, I've never used that. Never tried that one.

**Courtney:** It's a mastery math curriculum that teaches stuff out of order from what they teach in the regular public schools, you learn something real hard and they never teach it again. Very unlike your typical math program. It is said to be good for some kids with some learning disabilities. It does a whole lot of manipulatives, and it

comes with videos for people who aren't confident in teaching math. I do not typically recommend it.

**Jenn:** Orton-Gillingham?

**Courtney:** That is not a curriculum. It's an approach.

**Jenn:** I know. Okay. Yes, that's what I thought.

**AJ:** What I can say about that it's an approach to teaching, reading, and often remedial reading, so remediation for students with dyslexia or other things. I actually looked into becoming an Orton-Gillingham tutor at one point and decided that I didn't want to spend the money on the certification and that sort of thing. I do have friends who have done that are very, very successful with it and with helping kids. There are a lot of programs that you find that are designed for remediation in phonics that are Orton-Gillingham based. Orton and Gillingham were two researchers and what they came up with then spawned actual curricula. That's just something for people to be, if they hear, OG or Orton-Gillingham, that's what it refers to.

**Jenn:** How about *Oak Meadow*? I've bought, sold, bought, sold, bought, sold, gotten a few levels all the way through. I think it would be better if they provided a daily schedule instead of a weekly schedule. I also don't think that there is enough memorization. It's basically an entire curriculum that is based on exposure, in my opinion, three out of five?

**Courtney:** Three out of five. Bought and sold as well, and then bought again. Not enough meat to the curriculum. I do not like the pedagogical theory there. However, if you want to do a very mildly Waldorf style at home, it is thoroughly secular.

**AJ:** I looked at it very longingly in the early years. We actually lived not far from their office and we even visited their office at one point. I just ended up looking at things and thinking it was too light, too fluffy and I have enough issues with Waldorf philosophically that I decided, "No, I didn't think so."

**Jenn:** *OPGTR, The Ordinary Parent's Guide to Teaching Reading* from the Well-Trained Mind Press. We used that the first year it came out. I think I used it maybe with Kat. We liked it. I think I may have ended up jumping ship after a while though and going back to *Phonics Pathways* because that's just my comfort zone, but I think it, if that's the thing that works for you, I think it's great.

**Courtney:** I love it. Five out of five, no nonsense and get 'er done. Takes you all the way through fourth grade phonics and there aren't many places you can get a program that will take you through four years of phonics in one book.

**AJ:** I would agree. It's incredibly solid, really, really well thought out, scripted, all the things you want. Particularly for brand new homeschoolers who you have your little kindergartener and you're like, okay, we're going to homeschool and I need to teach you how to read. This is going to give you what you need to do that and get it done without spending tons of money, without lots of bells and whistles. Yes, it's great.

**Jenn:** This is probably going to go to you, AJ. Oxford University Press Latin.

**AJ:** Okay. Oxford Latin is, again, a mainstay classroom based Latin program, quite solid. I don't honestly have much to say about it other than that. It's what you would expect in a modern Latin classroom. Again, all of these things really do require the parents to know Latin. It's just not something that you can throw at your kid and have themselves teach, or just pick up on the fly. That's not the way these books are arranged.

**Courtney:** We own it. Gwen uses it for her Latin class. I outsource that, so pass.

**AJ:** If you were interested in a class and that use Oxford Latin, that's a very reasonable mainstream class you're looking at. I would not worry about the choice of textbook if you see Oxford Latin.

**Jenn:** *Phonics Pathways*. I think I've already mentioned it like three times. Yes. Five out of five stars from me.

**AJ:** Me too. This was actually a text that I first encountered when I was doing adult literacy tutoring in San Francisco. That's what we used and it was wonderful, really, really good, inexpensive, straightforward, good stuff.

**Jenn:** Deceptively simple.

**AJ:** Deceptively simple, but it's straightforward and quite easy to use.

**Courtney:** I give it a four out of five because it's not paced and the directions are not super obvious. It can be really confusing if you're looking at it for the first time. That said, really high quality stuff there. You can buy it for a penny used and I use it concurrently with *The Ordinary Parent's Guide to Teaching Reading*, to provide extra reinforcement because for whatever reason, both of my children hate those little easy readers, those leveled readers with the passion of a thousand fiery suns, so we did this.

**Jenn:** The *Plaid Phonics*, which you don't really hear much about this anymore from Pearson now.

**AJ:** Yes. *Plaid Phonics* was one of those things that some of the older Catholic classical programs recommended. I never used them, but I knew kids who had gone through them. I remember looking at them and thinking, yes, that would be a pretty solid thing. Just wouldn't be my first choice because now, there are other things like the *Ordinary Parents Guide* or *Phonics Pathways* or other things that you could use. If you wanted something that was specifically graded, like this is my kindergarten phonics book, this is my first grade phonics book, that's the thing that you could use.

**Courtney:** I give it a four out of five. I used it with Gwen. It's very work booky. If you have multiple children and need something where your kid can work slightly independently and they like doing workbooks, it is a really nicely done and it's inexpensive.

**Jenn:** Quidnam Press, oh, those people. Oh my Gosh, I guess we can talk about them again.

**AJ:** I don't think you need to, honestly.

**Jenn:** Five out of five stars.

**AJ:** Thank you.

**Jenn:** Welcome. Rod and Staff, I really like them. Okay. I love their math and their English.

**AJ:** Conservative Mennonites. I get it. This is not normally what I would go for, but I puffy heart love these folks. I really tell you. Their math is, this is not conceptual math, this is procedural all the way, you just need be aware of that. Their English is really, really thorough in part because it is written...there are two aspects to this, one is that a large number of their students are coming into school, not as native English speakers. They come in as German speakers, some dialect of German.

They need to get very thorough instruction in English. Those who do speak English may speak non-standard English. This really focus is very prescriptive, really focuses on "proper English". It's very, very Christian, there are Bible quotes everywhere. You just got to know that. I don't know if they still have this, but they used to have a book for younger kids that was about hygiene and manners.

There was all this health stuff and washing your hands and how to answer the phone. I don't know, it was weird, but it was actually really nicely done. You need to be aware too that Rod and Staff just does not offer literature because they don't teach it in their schools. They teach Bible and they teach reading through the Bible, so I'm not recommending their phonics or any of that.

Then they have devotional literature, but they don't read Shakespeare, for example. That is just out. English, if you're looking for a grammar program, their English program is fantastic. It's super, super thorough. The other thing about the school system is that many of the teachers are recent graduates. They finished school in 10th grade and often young ladies will go in and teach for a couple of years until they get married.

Their teacher manuals are very scripted. It's really, really easy to teach because they assume that this is basically a kid, she graduated in June and in September, she's in the classroom and she needs to have everything scripted out and they will even tell you how many minutes particular activities should take through the lesson. It's really fantastic if you need something that is a lot of handholding, a lot of scripting. The other thing that I just have to say, the early math, you get to make felt boards.

Anybody who did the Protestant Sunday school thing with felt boards, and you have fond memories of that, you get to relive that through Rod and Staff. The books are also inexpensive. They're hard back, a lot of them, there are some paperback ones. And they emphasize timed arithmetic tests, and that doesn't work for every kid. It certainly did not work for my kid. It was hugely anxiety provoking. You don't necessarily need to do that, those are extra things. Again, it is a conservative Christian company, so you have to figure out is that something that you want to support, but the books were available used a lot of places. If you want the get it done math and grammar, you could do worse.

**Jenn:** I think it gave us some cultural literacy to do because there's a lot of references to the Bible and the story problems, figuring out how long the Ark was. Right. That was fun and a lot of farming and baking questions. It was a taste of rural life that my kids didn't really have, so we liked that part.

**Courtney:** I'm using the Patterns of Nature. I think that's them, right?

**Jenn:** Yes. That's second grade science for them.

**Courtney:** I am really liking it. I was a little disconcerted at first, but, this is just the right amount of reading for Elena. We're doing partner reading, she's reading, and then I'm reading and then she's reading again and she's really enjoying coloring the flowers and identifying the weeds and things like that. We live in the country, right? I'm, "All right, let's go out and find some of these weeds." [laughs]

**Jenn:** That's great.

**AJ:** One of the things that I love about Rod and Staff is that they're super explicit in their writing. They'll point out, like, it is the same moon. You are seeing the same moon as anybody else on planet Earth. There's only one and everybody can see it. Things that little kids sometimes get really confused about. They don't realize that the phase of the moon is going to be the same everywhere on Earth at the same time.

**Courtney:** Speaking of which, we're talking about the weeds. Kids are all, "Well, what makes a weed?" It has this very clear definition that a weed is a plant that we don't want that grows in cultivated ground. They use the word cultivated. It's great vocabulary. It's very clear definition. I really like it.

**Jenn:** Rosetta Stone. Why pay for that when you can do Duolingo for free.

**AJ:** Exactly.

**Jenn:** *A River of Voices*. Courtney, didn't you buy that for review?

**Courtney:** Yes, I did. Now that you've mentioned it. I did not like it. I found it to not be very rigorous in that it didn't demand very much of the student in terms of contextualizing information or recognizing themes in history or mastering content. I understand that a lot of people really like the booklist. More power to you. And that a lot of people don't feel as strongly as I do about history and geography as a rigorous discipline. They're more into the science and math end of things. If that's you, that's fine but I was not super impressed. Two out of five.

**Jenn:** The next one on the list is *Reading Pathways* and I'm not sure if I'm getting that confused with their other book called *Pyramids*. AJ, do you remember the difference between those?

**AJ:** I do not remember the difference.

**Jenn:** Okay. I'm going to talk about *Pyramids* because I remember that one and that was simply really great for my kids with visual difficulties because you can picture a pyramid. What they would do is they would break up the sounds or the words into

short-- There'd be one letter on one line and two on the next line and three on the next line. You'd just be reading one little tiny line at a time and you'd move a bookmark down the page. It was really helpful for kids who have trouble, like if they're skipping around the page. I think that there are some pyramids lessons in *Reading Pathways*, but possibly *Reading Pathways* is the sequel to *Phonics Pathways* and it's just more of the same.

*Real Science for Kids*. Is that still around?

**Courtney:** Yes.

**Jenn:** Okay. I remember using it in the way back time and I thought it was supposed to be secular but then there was some drama that maybe it wasn't secular.

**Courtney:** It is neutral. I haven't ever found a need to use it as I never found that it was any better than any other program that was already available. Let's put it like that.

**AJ:** No experience.

**Jenn:** RightStart Math?

We've used their games. They're super fun.

**AJ:** It was one of the programs that my daughter actually did very well with. Super Montessori. The person who was my co-founder of the classical school was a big Montessori fan. She insisted that we use RightStart as the elementary math program. Then after that people transitioned into Saxon. I was skeptical and I said, "You know what? I don't have to teach it. The classroom teachers are teaching it." My daughter did really, really well with it. We did end up buying the whole thing with the balance and all that business at home. She really enjoyed it. I think the manipulatives were the big draw there. I hate having to play games to drill stuff. My kid loved it, I did not love it so much. Again, fairly pricey, lots of moving parts, literally. It seems quite effective.

**Courtney:** I really like it. Four out of five simply because it does have so many parts, but the explanations are really good. The conceptual understanding of math that your child develops will also be really good. If you do the games, your child will get enough practice. I confess to not doing the games. I add in Saxon and those Kumon workbooks to provide extra reinforcement for practice. I have been really pleased for both of my children with the RightStart math. I would not use it as my only curriculum because I think that like most elementary math curricula, they give very short shrift to things measurement and time and temperature, that kind of thing. Good stuff. Really good stuff.

**Jenn:** Sadlier Vocabulary. Everyone knows that I am 10 out of 5 stars on that.

**Courtney:** I bought it for Gwen for next year, going to try it.

**Courtney:** Let me preach the joy of Saxon.

**Jenn:** This is the house of Saxon.

**Courtney:** Yes. TLDR, it uses concepts from cognitive science to provide children with integral spaced, interleaved, retrieval practice on an 80/20 basis that complies with Rosenshine's *Principles of Instruction*. It is really good for children who have a learning disability in math. It is not fun. It is not entertaining. It does not have remarkable instruction. It takes time, at least an hour a day minimum, and you cannot just abandon your children to it. It is text heavy. If your child has dyslexia, you need to either explain it to them auditorily or do something else. Because it has so many problems, for children with dysgraphia, you might want to actually let them write in the book. However, you will end up with a child who knows their stuff, who can do math. They might not be a mathematician at the end, but you can definitely get an engineer out of that program.

**AJ:** If you haven't used Saxon, have you really homeschooled? That's all I have to say. It's a workhorse. It's this there's a reason that generations of homeschoolers have leaned on Saxon. They used to have their homeschool edition. I don't even know if those are available anymore, but it's a really, really solid program. It's what we ended up using in the classical school after kids finished with RightStart and my kid hated it. She hated it.

There's so many problems. Oh, she knows her stuff. It's really, really thorough. I think as Courtney said, it can be very, very good for kids who are not strong in math. In a classroom setting, that was super important because we had kids all all over the map in terms of their math background and their math abilities. Saxon did the job beautifully.

**Jenn:** We use Saxon. We used it on and off for different kids. It's what I use with Declan now and we also use Nicole the Math Lady with it, and sometimes I watch her and then I use that to teach him if I need a math teacher's vocabulary. I highly recommend her website too.

**Courtney:** Wait, there's more! Come back next week and we will keep on going. Thanks for listening. If you enjoyed this episode please leave us a review wherever you get your podcasts. Join us next time, when we give you some more real talk about homeschooling.

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