

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

**Courtney Ostaff:** For the fourth part of the curriculum rating game.

**Jenn:** We are;

**Courtney:** 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. 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.

Next on the list, Simply Charlotte Mason and her *Pet Shop Math*. Didn't she have baseball card math over there, too, or something like that? There's some sports version of it.

I used that in 5th Grade for all my 5th Graders to solidify arithmetic. It's like you're owning a little store, and there's these little cards, and you put them in an envelope, and you pull them out, and it's like, today, someone comes into your shop, and they buy four hamsters and the two cages and all this stuff that you would need, and then you have to add it all up and make change. We loved it.

**Courtney:** I'm pretty sure I bought their handwriting curriculum. I bought online curriculum from them at one point. Maybe it was a copy work curriculum. Really very, very pleased with the products that I have purchased from them.

**Jenn:** *Schiller math*, I know nothing of.

**AJ:** Me neither.

**Courtney:** I looked at it, didn't buy it. Pass

**Jenn:** *Sonlight*, same thing as *BookShark*. We've talked about that. Go back and listen to that episode for that review.

*Singapore Math*. For one of my kids, it worked great, and they loved it. It was really hot, I think, in the early days when it first came out, because it was like, "This is a new way that no one else has ever taught us math," and now, I think it's more mainstream.

**AJ:** A lot of the people complain about and the Common Core math actually is stuff that Singapore did.

**Courtney:** Badly. No, not that Singapore did it badly. The Common-

**AJ:** I did use it with Ruby early on the lowest levels of it, and she did fine with it. I think that I would have needed a whole lot more information about their approach than was readily available at that time.

**Courtney:** 4 out of 5. Good conceptual, especially if you use the *Home Instructor's Guide* to teach it. They tell you how to use the manipulatives that you really should be using. They don't sell you the manipulatives, however. There, I think is insufficient practice for students who need extra reinforcement. I know they sell those Intensive Practice books, not a super fan.

Do, however, really like their *Challenging Word Problems*. Good stuff over there. However, what I have found is that for students with any math disability, that lack of retrieval practice, lack of interleaved, interval, spaced retrieval practice means they can slide by, and then you end up with a kid who doesn't actually know math as well as it looks like they know it. In that sense, it's not great.

However, if you have an average kid or average to fairly bright kid, and they don't have any issues with math, and you're willing to invest the considerable amount of money, we're looking at like \$140 a year, in locating both the *Textbook* and the *Workbook* and the *Teacher* book and the *Home Instructor Guide* and the *Challenging Word Problems*, so that's, what, six books right there per year minimum. Then it is a really solid math program. I don't think it is like earth-shaking or groundbreaking or whatever, but it's good stuff.

**Jenn:** That's actually twice that many books because you would have like 4A and all those books for that and then 4B and all those books for that.

**AJ:** It's true. It's a lot of books. The other thing that I think gets lost when Americans teach Singapore math is the fact that kids in Singapore often have after-school tutors that do all of that drill with them. Those extra word problems and all those kinds of things, a lot of that stuff is being done in after-school tutoring sessions.

I have a friend who grew up in Singapore, and he said that basically, if your family could even remotely afford a tutor, you had a tutor, and there was a huge competition for the best tutors, a factor that we don't take into consideration when we look at the math scores coming out of some of these countries, for example.

**Jenn:** *Story of the World*, I used all four volumes with my kids. They liked them to various degrees. I loved the *Activity Book* because I am obsessed with getting literature to go with books. I would definitely say that the *Activity Book* taught me how to find literature to match our studies. I owe it a great gratitude.

**AJ:** Again, if you haven't mummified a chicken, have you actually homeschooled?

**Jenn:** It's true.

**AJ:** These are important. I have to admit something here, which I'm almost embarrassed to admit, but as an adult reader, I really enjoyed Volume 1. I know that people are concerned about is it really secular, et cetera, we don't have to go there.

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Honestly, Volumes 2 through 4, I barely made it through. I found them really tedious to read. I'm a medievalist, by training, and I couldn't make it through Volume 2. That's a little bit disturbing to me.

Maybe my attitude colored my kid's impression, but she really didn't care for them either, and she was a really avid reader. I do know families who really swear by the audiobooks. Those seem to be, in some ways, even more, popular than the actual print texts. That's a thing to think about if you have kids who really enjoy listening to things being read aloud to them, that that might be a way to get some of that information in if reading with the eyes is not as exciting

**Jenn:** *Spelling Power*, an older book, a really thick book, but all the spelling you would need from when kids can read through 12th Grade in one book. It's pretty cool for families, but it gives no real spelling instruction. I don't know actually if I would still use it now, but when I had a lot of kids, I liked that better than a whole bunch of spelling books that I had to grade.

**Courtney:** That's a good point.

**Jenn:** That's why it worked for me. If you have a lot of kids, and they're natural spellers, then you're pretty good.

**Courtney:** I own it. I've never used it.

**Jenn:** I guess, Courtney, you're going to abstain because if I say, "Susan Wise Bauer," you're going to say, "She's my boss."

**AJ:** Exactly. [crosstalk]

[chuckles]

**Jenn:** I'm going to say, "Fan girl."

**AJ:** I'm also a fan person. I would say, the thing that I probably recommend to people most from her is her approach to writing. I tell everybody who will listen that they should go and buy the cheap MP3 of her seminar on K-12 for writing instruction from [welltrainedmind.com](http://welltrainedmind.com) and listen to it to get big picture of what high-quality systematic writing instruction looks like over the entire course of a kid's primary and secondary schooling. It's that good. It is just fantastic. She understands the idea of cognitive load really, really well when it comes to what goes into writing.

**Courtney:** I also recommend that MP3. Totally worth, what is it, \$4?

**Jenn:** The next thing on the list is *Spelling Workout*, which I would mark down as a decent book.

**Courtney:** I really like it because it does include some phonics in its systematic design. It includes the phonics rules. It is age-appropriate. You get to practice handwriting. The other thing that I think people forget about homeschooling is that all these time fillers you have in a classroom like crossword puzzles or word searches

or that kind of thing, our students don't actually ever generally do that or alphabetize things.

I find it useful that my kids are, "Oh, yes, I know how a word search works." How many have kids know how to do a crossword puzzle? "I know how to alphabetize something." Just for that alone, I like it.

**Jenn:** *Spelling You See* is pretty new. It's from the Math-U-See folks. The only reason I have seen it is because I think it's *BookShark* and *Sonlight*. That's what they switched to. When I ordered some stuff, it came with it. I've looked at it. It's a workbook. They're on levels. Every day, you're copying more and more of the same passage, until the last day, you're copying some ginormous amount. You're also learning to spell some of the words that are in that copy work.

Time for *The Bookish Society*.

**Courtney:** I do love it. You know me. I am super busy, and I want to not have to worry about things. I have not worried about my children doing literature in terms of exposure to new material at all this year. I signed Elena and Gwen up. Elena has gotten a picture book a week basically all school year. Now I have this enormous stack of beautiful, high-quality picture books.

Elena has had a chance to work with another adult outside of the home in terms of analyzing those picture books for the story and for greater meaning and doing art analysis and doing it in the company of her peers, which I really appreciate. Gwen has made some great new friends through it. She's read a different book every month, which is nice because I assign her a lot of reading. It's not terribly stressful, and I don't have to remember to find the books. They just show up at my door, which is probably one of my favorite parts. 5 out of 5, Jenn.

**AJ:** While I do not have a child of the appropriate age for *The Bookish Society*, I can say, as a parent, just hanging out on the Facebook group, it's neat to be around other bookish people. We trade book recommendations for adults as well, which is really nice. I feel it's like a peer group that I would not otherwise have access to. I really appreciate that. I also really appreciate that Jenn's super on top of the whole social media thing. I'm learning about all kinds of books that are coming out for middle grade and for young adult.

**Jenn:** *The Good and the Beautiful*. I don't know that.

**Courtney:** The curriculum is definitely Christian in nature. I don't like all-in-one curriculums. I tend to prefer a secular curriculum. I looked at it briefly and didn't...this is not my bag.

**AJ:** It does get mentioned quite a bit on the Facebook group. I know nothing about it beyond what I've seen there.

**Jenn:** ULAT

**AJ:** Oh, it's a foreign language program. It's supposed to be a natural language acquisition sequence. I haven't looked at it closely enough to really be able to give

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an informed opinion about it. In general, when somebody talks about natural language acquisition, they're talking about a lot of listening and a lot of speaking. For very young kids, that often is a very effective way to teach a foreign language as well.

**Jenn:** *The Well-Trained Mind*, the book that started it all.

[laughter]

**AJ:** This is still the best guide to academic homeschooling on the market.

**Jenn:** Susan really gave it all away when you think about it. I mean, to put all that knowledge into one book.

**AJ:** It's fantastic. The fact that it has been regularly updated so that you don't have the problem of 75% of the books that she recommends are out of print, that they really have kept up with it. That is one of the advantages of working with a well-established professional academic publisher like Norton. I think it's a must-read. Absolutely.

**Jenn:** *Usborne* books. They have a lot of good books. I would use them to supplement my curriculum, I have, especially the younger retellings of classic books. We have a ton of those on our shelf still. I give them 5 out of 5.

**Courtney:** It's a multi-level marketing thing.

**Jenn:** I always get mine from Book Depository, so I skip that whole thing.

**Courtney:** There's very little I've ever found there that I haven't found in a better book elsewhere. 3 out of 5 maximum. The books are pretty.

**Jenn:** Yes, they are pretty. A lot of times they have golden sparkles. They have a lot of unicorn books. I can tell you that.

**AJ:** Yes, they do.

[laughter]

**AJ:** They have for a long time. My kid went through an enormous unicorn phase, and I cannot tell you.

**Jenn:** *Vocabulary from Classical Roots*, anyone?

**AJ:** This would be more what we would recommend if you're going to do a root based program.

**Jenn:** *Wheelock's*?

**AJ:** *Wheelock's* is a college text. There is no reason that I can imagine for a homeschooler to need to use *Wheelock's* unless their child is enrolled in a college-level Latin course through a community college. There was a trend, maybe 20 years

ago, of people trying to teach their first graders Latin with *Wheelock's*. Just don't do it. Again, it's not a textbook that I love, but it is or has been traditionally Latin 101 book. It's the one that I learned Latin with in graduate school. I don't love *Wheelock's*, but there it is.

**Jenn:** *Wordly Wise*, I just like *Sadlier* better, but *Wordly Wise* is perfectly appropriate if you want a workbook vocabulary program.

*WinterPromise*, another lit-based curriculum. A lot harder to secularize, but they do have some good phonics stuff for the younger years that I like. They have a really cool horse program if you've got a horse-crazy kid. They have a dinosaur program, but I don't recommend it because it doesn't believe in evolution. That made the whole dinosaur thing pretty tricky for our family. That's all I've got on that.

I give them 2 out of 5 stars.

*Writing With Ease and Writing With Skill*. We do those together.

**AJ:** Sure. I think we've already-

**Jenn:** I think we talked about those.

**AJ:** We touched on the excellence of Susan Wise Bauer's writing instruction. I think she's downloaded her brain into these books and made them usable again, for people who are not necessarily confident as teachers of writing. I think that is a tremendous value. Particularly for cost. Good stuff.

**Jenn:** That's it. We've reached the end of the alphabet.

**Courtney:** [unintelligible 00:14:01]. Amazing.

**AJ:** No Zaner-Bloser? [laughs]

**Jenn:** I think it is not really a curriculum, is it? I don't know. There's a lot of handwriting. You can buy it.

**AJ:** You can buy Zaner-Bloser workbooks and things.

**Courtney:** They sell paper, too, a handwriting paper, which is also helpful.

**Jenn:** Oh, that's right.

**Courtney:** A lot of people don't realize they can buy that.

**AJ:** I know that that was something that *The Well-Trained Mind* the early additions recommended. I remember that they would even say like, "You need two packets of this with paper for your first grader. I loved that. Just made my OCD heart sing. The Zaner-Bloser, today, I would probably go with something like *New American Cursive* in place of Zaner-Bloser, but there are lots of materials out there for it. They do sell the paper.

I don't even know how many schools are still even teaching cursive, for example. I know that it is a mainstay or was at least a mainstay of public school cursive. Once Palmer fell out of fashion, I think Zaner-Bloser took over, in a way.

**Courtney:** 5 out of 5 for handwriting instruction. I have a ream of Zaner-Bloser paper on my desk right now.

**AJ:** There you go.

**Jenn:** Oh, you bought a ream. I love that. I do love school supplies. I, too, was very happy when I was instructed by Susan to buy, or there was all of that stuff for a particular paper or pen or whatever. I was all like, "Great, go into Target.

**Courtney:** It's like [crosstalk]

**AJ:** There's Ticonderoga pencils.

**Courtney:** They're worth \$12 for 500 sheets of a kindergarten size paper. Why would I not buy it?

**Jenn:** Agreed. Why wouldn't you?

Now it is truly A to Z.

The Bookish Society is open for registration. Our Round Table lit circles begin in July, and our Women's Studies for Junior High and our Exploring the World Through Story both begin in August. If you or your kids like hearing from authors, give my podcast a try. It's called the *Bookish Society Secrets*. I interview middle-grade authors of brand-new books that I know kids will love.

**AJ:** Speaking of *Exploring the World through Story*, that is the new world literature folktale and geography curriculum.

**Courtney:** I wrote a book last summer on how to teach an online class. Start with the definition of what is an online class all the way through assignments and setting it up and setting a class culture, working with parents, sample assignments, assessments. A to Z of how to teach an online class. That is available from John Catt Publications.

**Jenn:** I said at the beginning we were going to keep score, and I did, so look at me. I will start with AJ with a score of 52, which is admirable. Next up, I have a score of 74, and Courtney crushed us with her score of 90 curriculums.

**AJ:** Bravo.

**Courtney:** I do have an entire room of my house devoted to curriculum.

**AJ:** I am a minimalist, so there we are. [laughs]

**Jenn:** I am a minimalist with too many kids. That's why I got in the middle there because I had to buy more things.

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**AJ:** You have an excuse.

**Jenn:** I have an excuse.

**Courtney:** Thank you for listening to our mini-series on our quick and dirty curriculum reviews. We hope you found it useful as we went down the list from A to Z. Thanks for listening, and give us a review wherever you listen to podcasts.

**[00:17:22] [END OF AUDIO]**