

Choose a Great History Curriculum for Your Family

Hi, this is Terri from Knowledge Quest. Today, we'll be talking about choosing a great history program for your family. Hopefully as a result of this discussion, you will be able to pick a program that will be a great fit for your family at this stage in your children's education. So, if you would like to take a moment and grab a cup of hot tea or coffee and get comfortable, go ahead and do that and we'll get started.

First, let me tell you a little bit about Knowledge Quest. We sell historical outline maps and timelines and other supplemental history products because we believe that history makes sense using maps and timelines.

Funny thing is... my most frequently asked question is which history curriculum I recommend to go with our products. My short and sweet answer is anything chronological in nature that incorporates lots of great living books.

You see, history is my favorite subject. But that hasn't always been the case. I remember sleepy afternoon classes with a teacher that emphasized facts and figures, dates and names. Frankly, I still have not memorized the terms of office for our U.S. presidents. And I am sure that I ever will. I do, however, know their order (or used to, at least) and their approximate time period in office, but come on... history does not have to be so dull!

We have been homeschooling for 8 years now and I have taught history using a Well-Trained-Mind approach. This is a book written on classical education by Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer. We tackle history chronologically, read tons of great books, record significant events on a timeline, label historical blackline maps, outline key events and assemble everything into notebooks.

Sometimes, we even make lapbooks or do a project or two. We do not "need" a history curriculum. But let's be realistic... it is easier to stay on track and move forward when I do not have to come up with everything on my own.

And this is where a good history program or plan comes into play. I have used 3 curricula primarily over the years, but have a pretty good handle on about 5 and I will share my thoughts and opinions on each.

THE STORY OF THE WORLD

First, I would like to talk about the Story of the World series written by Susan Wise Bauer. For two reasons primarily – 1. because it is an excellent stand alone program for younger students and, 2. because so many other curriculum writers incorporate it into their program or plan, or even base their program around it as a “spine”.

Let me define the world “spine”. Spine just basically means a book or series of books that all of the other reading selections and activities are based from. So, if I say that the Story of the World is the spine of a program, it is the core reading text which dictates what will be studied and when.

The Story of the World is a four-part series. It is a chronological narrative of history in story format beginning in ancient times and concluding at the end of the 20th century. Susan Wise Bauer writes in a very engaging manner and leaves the reader wanting more, which is just what we want when we are teaching history, is it not? The narratives are geared toward elementary students, but can be enjoyed by older ones as well.

These books are incorporated into four of the history programs that I am going to discuss today. So that says something about the quality, or at least popularity, of the books right there. If so many curriculum writers are assigning them as central reading in their programs, they are obviously well-liked and approved of by many.

The narrative books are a stand-alone product. However, the publisher – Peace Hill Press – has provided activity guides which turn the series into a complete history curriculum. Included in the activity guides are suggested reading lists, discussion questions, hands-on activities, map work, coloring pages and more. If your children are in 1-4 grades, you would not need anything else.

There is one complaint I have often heard about Story of the World and that is that it does not seem to come from a Christian world view. Well, I am acquainted with the author and I can tell you that she is most definitely a Christian. She is married to a pastor and their family is very devoted and committed to the Lord. Her faith aside, she has tried to write from a neutral stand point, leaving out theological commentary. She believes that religion and religious matters should be taught to children by their parents and their church leaders. Basically, she has left the parents room to teach history through their own theological grid, rather than hers.

What does this mean for you? Basically, you would just need to add in your own teaching of your religion as you go. For example, teach your students your beliefs on the origin of the world before diving into the books. Teach your children how God orchestrated events – they did not happen by chance – as you progress through the series. Read your Bible as you study ancient history and record events on a timeline so you can see how world history events lined up.

BIBLIOPLAN FOR FAMILIES

This brings me to my next selection for you to consider – Biblioplan for Families. If you are looking for a history curriculum guide that combines Scripture with the study of ancient civilizations, or one that teaches about Church history and the lives of great Christians while studying Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation history, then Biblioplan may be just the ticket for you. This plan maps out your reading selection, while integrating quality historical literature with Biblical and secular history in a format that is easy to follow and requires minimal parent preparation. In fact, this program does your Sunday evening planning for you.

Biblioplan for Families came into being because the authors, Susan Finck-Lockhart and Kristin Walker, liked the concept of the Well-Trained Mind, but wanted to make it practical and easy for families to use. This plan breaks your history studies into 3 days a week and tells you which books and how many pages of each should be read on each day. Biblioplan includes reading selections from the Bible, Story of the World (as well as other history spines), age-appropriate readers and family read-alouds. It includes map activities, significant timeline dates and writing exercises.

Like Story of the World, Biblioplan for Families divides the whole of recorded history into 4 time-periods, meant to be studied over the course of 4 years. The 4 plans are geared towards 1-8 graders, plus they have published a high school supplement so that the older students may use it as well. Each plan retails for \$24.95, which is a very economical price for a history program. Using your local library heavily, you would only have to buy a few core books necessary to use the course.

TAPESTRY OF GRACE

The next history program that I would like to recommend to you is Tapestry of Grace. In some aspects, this is similar to Biblioplan, but is oh-so-much-more! Tapestry of Grace is certainly much more than a reading plan. This curriculum includes teacher notes, background information, discussion questions, student activity pages, hands-on projects, map work and geography assignments, significant timeline dates and more. There is an optional writing component that corresponds to the history studies as well.

Like the others discussed so far, this curriculum is also broken down into 4 time periods – Ancient, Medieval, 19th and 20th Centuries. Each time period is meant to be studied over the course of one year's time. Each plan has a teacher's manual and student activity pages that are divided into age group. There are lessons directed specifically to lower and upper grammar stage students (K-5), dialectic (6-8) and rhetoric (9-12). Let me explain these classical education terms here briefly – they are not as scary as they sound.

The grammar stage of a child's education is when his or her brain is most receptive to and capable of memorizing and regurgitating facts. If there was ever a time for rote learning, this is it. A grammar stage student's brain can easily absorb and memorize such things as the order of U.S. presidents, or the kings and queens of England, multiplication tables and the list of prepositions, to name a few. This does not mean that this is all we do with our grammar stage students, but if we are aware of this window of incredible absorption of facts, we can use this knowledge covertly to our advantage.

The dialectic, or logic, stage begins around the age of 10 or 11, about 5th or 6th grade. This is when the student begins to take all of those facts that he had learned during the grammar stage and begin to assimilate them and make logical connections between them. The brain begins to work in such a way that he can see and understand the relationships between processes and events. A timeline becomes a critical tool at this stage because the logic stage student can grasp the cause and effect of historical events in a way that he could not before.

The rhetoric stage comes next at approximately the time your teenager is entering high school. She has learned her facts and figures, studied the relationships between them, and now she is ready to argue her point of view. This is a time of analysis, critique and argument. Teenagers are now ready to express themselves, so let them do it in a constructive and supervised way. Let them express their opinion on what the great philosophers had to say, or the 19th century theologians, or the 20th century politicians. Press them to agree or disagree and have them tell you why. Papers should not be merely reporting facts any longer. They need to be saturated with their opinions supported by research and logical conclusions.

Tapestry of Grace teaches differently to these three stages and yet they all study the same time period in history, just at different levels and with different requirements. The umbrella of progressing through history chronologically and at the same pace covers all of your children with suitable lesson plans for each.

This is the strength of Tapestry of Grace – all of your children, no matter their ages or levels, can be studying history together. This program is especially well suited for larger families and co-op groups. This is not to say that you cannot use it with smaller families, you certainly can, but it seems to be more enjoyable in groups. Tapestry of Grace is more expensive than the others being mentioned here today at \$150 per year plan, but definitely worth the price tag when you consider all that you get.

TRUTHQUEST HISTORY

There are still two more curricula that I would like to share with you. The next one is Truth Quest History by Michelle Miller. She has written a 10 volume history

curriculum covering Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation and Exploration, The Age of Revolution, Parts I, II, and III and American History for Young Students, Parts I, II, and III.

The first seven that I listed are geared for students in 5-12 grade and the American History series is written for younger students in grades 1-5.

Unlike Biblioplan for Families and Tapestry of Grace, this curriculum does not map out your days or your weeks. It does not tell you what books to read (although it does give you some wonderful suggestions). So what does Truth Quest History Guides offer you? Truth Quest is a beautifully written commentary that takes you chronologically through the story of world history from a Christian point of view. This is a hands-off, no guilt, you-can-do-it history program that would best suit the teacher that does not require hand-holding. It is a laid back approach to history that fosters fascinating discussion, self-learning and a desire to dig deeper into the topic. Using the books already on your shelf or available from your library, this would be an inexpensive option for you. Each program costs between \$24 and \$34.

SONLIGHT CURRICULUM

Finally, I would like to tell you about Sonlight Curriculum. This is the only program I am recommending that is not completely chronological in its approach. It does tackle history chronologically in some core packages, but at lightning speed and then it goes back to studying history "out of order". Sonlight is a literature-rich program that covers way more than history – although history is its cornerstone subject. The beauty of Sonlight is that you can purchase an entire core package and you get everything that you will need to teach the program for the year. There is no need for last minute dashes to the library for required books or to the hardware store for some little item necessary for the science project – everything down to the paper clip is included.

This curriculum was written originally for overseas missionaries and military families who do not have access to all that we do here in the States. But the concept of having it all put together for you with nothing else to buy appeals to many of us here in the U.S. also, even though we have stores and libraries on every corner.

The books that Sonlight carries and incorporates into their program are delightful. Whether we buy a core package or not, we always buy readers and read-alouds from Sonlight every year. Sonlight covers all grade levels from kindergarten to high school with age appropriate reading and writing exercises.

The teacher's manuals are jam-packed. I always tell people not to feel guilty if they do not cover all that is listed there. It really is a lot.

This curriculum is the opposite of Truth Quest History. If you would like a program that holds your hand and tells you what to do every single day, consider Sonlight Curriculum.

I hope that this has been a helpful discussion for you. These 5 programs are the best out there in my opinion. There are two others worthy of mention, but I am not familiar enough with them to give them my whole-hearted stamp of approval. They are Mystery of History and Veritas History.

I have included links to all of the programs that I have highlighted for you today. They are located at www.knowledgequestmaps.com/history.htm.

Again, we discussed these five programs or plans:

The Story of the World
Biblioplan for Families
Tapestry of Grace
TruthQuest History
Sonlight Curriculum

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this series which is titled "History Makes Sense Using Maps and Timelines". Round out your history program with the use of historical outline maps and timelines. Most history program recommend them, but not all will tell you why or what to do with them. I will! Stay tuned.

God bless you on your educational journey. I wish you the best!

ADDENDUM for Mystery of History

I have had several people write to me this past week asking me what my opinion is of Mystery of History. First of all, let me just say that I hadn't received my review copy of Mystery of History in time for my audio history recommendations. And second... well, here was my reply to those that asked:

Thank you for writing. I just received my review copy of Mystery of History, two days after I put together the audio for the website. As I took some time to peruse the first volume, I was struck by something unusual. Its strength is also its weakness! It is an all-in-one-volume, you-don't-need-anything-else kind of book. This makes it simple, sleek, easy to use and comprehensive. It also leaves you as the teacher without the need to incorporate living books into your history studies. I think that it would be all too easy to just do the work in the manual and leave out the reading of historical literature, biographies and plain old fascinating historical fiction. This removes a critical aspect of history study, in my own opinion.

I think that as long as you realize that this has been left out and make some adjustments to the program by reading aloud or assigning some historical texts, biographies and literature alongside the volumes, you will have a great program to follow and use. This will also allow you to get different "takes" on the same historical events. Again, I believe this is essential when studying history because we cannot trust one person to interpret all of history for us. The author has an extremely good understanding of historical events and the sovereignty of God, but we must be careful when we only listen to one, unless of course, it is the One. I hope that this makes sense.

I realize that Mystery of History is a favorite of many, but I just ask that you use caution when following this type of a course of study written from one author's perspective without the addition of living books. Living books written by other authors that are passionate about their subject matter provide a second look at the same material giving our students more to think about and grapple with. This is especially important when they reach the logic and rhetoric stages of learning. Still, filter everything that you read through the grid of scripture, but enjoy the voices of many historians when you study this subject we call history.

I hope that this addendum has been helpful to you. If you have any other questions or comments, feel free to write to me. [Contact Us.](#)

Take care and God bless,

Terri Johnson