

## THE FORSTER FAMILY “FAVORITE CURRICULUM” LIST

### READING:

- We only used **Alphaphonics**, by Samuel Blumenfeld. We loved it, it was one simple book, and all six of our children learned to read from it! (Two learned by just listening to the others working through it!)
- **Bob Books** were a fun extra that the kids really liked. Several sets of 8-12 small, simple, paperback books, these use simple letter sounds to form words that combine into short stories that very early readers can start to read. Very motivating. In the first book, the child can read a WHOLE book by just learning to blend 4 letter sounds! One of our daughters bought these to put in her hope chest, she liked them so much!

### MATH:

- **Developmental Math** – These aren't fancy, but they worked, are relatively inexpensive, and self-teaching, and incorporate plenty of review. We went from them into Saxon Math 87.
- We used **Calculadder** for memorizing multiplication facts and for developing speed.
- We also played a lot of games that employed math skills.
- **Key to Measurement** –helped make some sense out of the metric system and **Key to Geometry** was good for basic geometry concepts when kids were in upper elementary. We used it for four kids with a 6-year age span all at the same time.
- **The Mathematics for Everyday Living series**, published by Meridian Creative Group, was an excellent resource for teaching the practical everyday side of math. Unfortunately, they seem to be out-of-print now. They had books with exercises dealing with budgeting, saving, buying, inflation and depreciation, borrowing, investment, insurance, and taxes. They were really practical!
- We used **Saxon** for the junior-high and high school level math. along with **DIVE into Math** CD's, Benjamin worked through Advanced Mathematics on his own (since I would have been absolutely no help to him) with the DIVE CDs. DIVE was a life-saver for the advanced math levels!
- **Teaching Textbooks** – We switched to these with the girls, which took the pressure off of me for explaining things. These come with CD's of a teacher working through each new lesson before the student does the problems, and the best part – a CD of the teacher working through every problem so students can go to him for help on their errors! The story problems are also very entertaining!
- **Business ventures:** These gave everyone lots of experience with money, accounting, profits, losses, bookkeeping, billing, purchasing, sales, phone calling, social skills, etc. They've also learned a lot about science, art, sewing, and about taking responsibility and the results of diligence and negligence. And as a side benefit, some actually made money!

*Some of the business ventures our children tackled were:*

- *Indian corn and pumpkins*
- *Breeding and selling rabbits for show and pets*
- *Chickens for meat*
- *Eggs*
- *Pigs*
- *Goats/Milk – for milk and meat*
- *Sheep – for meat*
- *Cards with photographs*
- *Civil War clothes for reenactors*
- *Flowers: plant, pick, & sell for Farmer’s Market and to sell at retirement homes*
- *Teaching music lessons*
- *Farmer’s Market:*
  - Berries*
  - Bouquets*
  - Vegetables*
- *Our children also learned a lot about math by working with a clear budget with specified percentages of earnings going into different categories. They also learned a lot about percentages and counting out money by acting as “Paymaster” for the household each month when they we paid for the work they did for our business. (We explain some of this in our “Stewardship Street.”)*

#### **HANDWRITING:**

- *Italic Handwriting Series, **Barbara Getty and Inga Dubay***
- *No one was done with handwriting until they had copied the books of Proverbs, James, and all of Psalm 119.*
- *Some of the kids were also interested in learning the beautiful old Spencerian style of writing, and they went through a reprint of the old “Spencerian Penmanship” copy-books. (We bought another more expensive notebook on Spencerian handwriting, but I think these older books were better.)*

#### **COMPOSITION AND CREATIVE WRITING:**

- *Lots of reading of well-written books is the best way I know to develop good writers! We have lots of shelves of books (just ask anyone that has helped us move!).*
- *I really liked **Comprehensive Composition** (Design-a-Study) by Kathryn Stout. It is concise, but covers a lot of territory! We worked our way through all the different types of writing that Mrs. Stout outlines.*
- *We used **copy work** as an effective means of paying close attention to good writing of proven authors (further explained in the grammar section).*

- **Excellence in Writing** also offered structure that I longed for in teaching writing. I like the fact that the kids (the guys, in particular) didn't have to think up subject matter to write about. They could just focus on mechanics and style in writing. I think this is a good program, but we used it for a couple years and then moved on to use other materials that encourage a more direct writing style with less "flowery-ness."
- **Style: 10 Lessons in Clarity and Grace**, by Joseph Williams is a great book on developing a concise and understandable style of writing.
- **The Lively Art of Writing** is my favorite for essay and research paper writing. It is concise, follows its own advice, and offers great practical writing assignments and vocabulary exercises.
- Our girls really enjoy writing, and we have found some good books by proven authors that we have read and benefited from:

Gary Provost's **100 Ways to Improve Your Writing** has small daily bites of writing advice that we have read aloud together each day.

**Writing Magic** by Gail Carson Levine has been a great book with lots of very practical advice and some very good and helpful writing assignments. We have really enjoyed this book.

Robert Peck (author of "The Day No Pigs Would Die") has several books with clear and practical writing advice, but you need to watch out for some earthy and sometimes off-color humor in some of his stuff.

We have another book we're getting ready to use on plot-development for fiction. It is entitled **Plot and Structure: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting a Plot that Grips Readers from Start to Finish**, by James Scott Bell. It also many practical assignments.

- **Letter writing and journaling** have also been practical opportunities to develop writing skills.

#### VOCABULARY:

- We used **English from the Roots Up** and **Vocabulary from Classical Roots** just to boost vocabulary, and we also used Educators Publishing Service's **Analogies** series for word usage and in preparation for SAT tests.
- Again, reading good books is the best method for expanding vocabulary!

#### GRAMMAR:

- **Copy work:** I copied out passages from the Bible and from other books in a font the same size as the kids' handwriting. I put lines directly below each line of text, and had them copy the passage with correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc.

Eventually I put the entire passage in smaller type at the top of the page, and had them copy it on lines at the bottom of the page.

Then we moved to dictation and I read the passage a phrase at a time and had them write and punctuate.

- I don't remember too much about **Winston Grammar**, but we used it early on. We also used **Daily Grams** some for review of concepts, but I wouldn't consider it a complete grammar program.
- I found **Shurley Grammar** offered the most structure for covering most grammatical concepts, and then followed that with Nancy Wilson's **Mother Tongue** which works with sentence diagramming. I think the diagramming really helped bring a truer understanding of concepts.
- When I tried to write my own sentences for the kids to diagram, I found that there were still many sentence structures that Shurley Grammar had not covered, and we worked with some other material I found online to supplement.
- **Jensen's Punctuation** has been a very good book for helping everyone with the rules of punctuation, especially in the use of commas!
- I would like to go back now and look at the old **Harvey Grammar** books and see how they teach grammar. I would emphasize sentence diagramming more at an earlier age if I was starting over again.

## HISTORY:

- We pretty much designed our **own curriculum**. I find history textbooks boring because they skim over the surface, and leave out all the fascinating stories that actually make history so interesting. I used a **general book** about a particular period of history as an organizational tool for outlining a unit of study, and then we read a lot of other more detailed books about the era. For general books, we especially enjoyed **The Story of Liberty** and **Sweet Land of Liberty**, by Charles Coffin, **The Story of the Confederate States**, by Joseph Derry, and the **History of US** series.
- We listened to lots of **Little Bear Wheeler** tapes, read LOTS of **historical fiction**, and lots of **biographies**, and then gave everybody enough time to play, which always resulted in hours of reenacting of what we were reading about. The boys did their own research beyond our "official" school time, learning about weapons, clothing, buildings, etc., and then they made their own weapons, costumes, forts, etc.
- We had World War 2 parties and Civil War parties and Civil War balls and campouts. Planning Reformation Day parties for our church has always spurred a lot of research about different heroes of the Reformation.
- Our detailed approach has led to some holes in our overall knowledge of the flow of history, so I have had the kids read Jackson Spielvogel's **Western Civilization**, and they have also listened to R. J Rushdoony's **Christian Survey of World History** and and Steve Wilkins' **The First 350 Years**.

- *I never had to make anyone study history. They have always loved it and have always done a lot of history-related reading on their own. One goal in teaching history has been to **help the kids love history**. Another has been to help them learn to **research effectively**. With those two accomplishments, they'll be ready to study history for the rest of their lives.*

## FOREIGN LANGUAGE:

*This was a tough one for us. I didn't hear of **Rosetta Stone** until we wrestled with several other programs. I tried Latin for awhile, because other people were teaching Latin, but I couldn't stay enough ahead of the kids to be helpful to them when questions came up.*

*I finally realized we should study Spanish since I had several years of Spanish study to fall back on myself, and because we live in an area with many Spanish-speaking people. Then I floundered around with programs that worked best with us all working together. Spanish was always the subject that got tossed aside if we ran out of time. Finally **Rosetta Stone** came to the rescue. I really like it, and it has allowed the girls to work independently without me.*

## SPELLING:

- *We almost exclusively used **Natural Speller**, another book in the Design-a-Study series by Kathryn Stout. It contains 8 levels of spelling lists organized by common sound patterns and spelling rules. I broke the lists up into weekly lists and had the children do several activities with the words each week. I chose from the following list:*
  - *Copy the list*
  - *Alphabetize the list*
  - *Identify part of speech*
  - *Write the words into sentences (this sometimes uncovered some misunderstandings of word meanings!)*
  - *Define the word*
  - *Give an antonym for each word*
  - *List synonyms for each word*
  - *Break each word into syllables*
  - *Write a story using all the words*
  - *Change verbs to nouns by adding "er"*
  - *Write the plural for of all nouns*
- *For the one creative speller of the family we also used **Dr. Aardsma's Spelling Drill** on the computer, but I think she improved the most by just reading and writing a lot (and using Spell-Check on the computer ☺)*

- **Word games** (Boggle, Scrabble, Quiddler, etc.) have also been a great way to develop spelling skills!

#### **GEOGRAPHY:**

- We worked through Runkle's **Welcome to the Wonderful World of Geography**, and have also used **Trail Guide to Bible Geography** and **Trail Guide to World Geography**, by Geography Matters
- The older kids went through ABeka's **World Geography Map Studies**.
- We also made **notebooks** on the United States, with maps of each state, basic information, and essays about topics related to each state, and we improved our knowledge of the U.S. map with two games that everyone enjoyed: **Mad Dash** and **The Scrambled States of America**
- Our boys learned their world geography by playing **Risk** and **Axis and Allies** with their buddies.

#### **SCIENCE:**

I am **not** a scientific sort of person, although I am quite interested in the wonders of God's creation, and I was frustrated for many years while I searched for the perfect systematic science course.

When the kids were young we spent lots of time poring through **Usborne** books on animals and weather and rocks and electricity, etc. We collected all sorts of bugs and butterflies and shells and studied **Audubon field guides** galore. We studied astronomy and laid in the grass finding the constellations on cold, clear nights.

Eventually we went through **Introduction to Biology**, by John Holzman, and then finally discovered the **Apologia** science textbooks by Jay Wile. Now, in spite of my scientific disablement, I have a son finishing his second year in engineering. He took the Apologia series, devoured them, and walked into college engineering without a hitch.

#### **GOVERNMENT:**

- We went through **Land of Fair Play**, by Geoffrey Parsons, published by Christian Liberty Press and then some went completed Alpha Omega's Life Pacs on **Civics** and **Government**.
- Gary DeMar's three volumes of **God and Government** was an excellent study, digging into Scripture for God's description of biblical government and the Christian's duty as a citizen.

## LOGIC:

We used **Beginning Thinking Skills: Verbal and Figural** when everyone was little. The boys went through Memoria Press's **Traditional Logic**, by Martin Cothran. It offers a challenging in-depth study of classical syllogism, which kept me on my toes trying to keep up with them.

I later used **Fallacy Detective** and **Thinking Toolbox**, by Nathaniel and Hans Blue-dorn, with our girls who are all younger than the boys, and we followed these up with **The Art of Argument**, by Classical Academic Press, which is a thorough and very practical study of informal logic, aimed at identifying flawed arguments that appear in conversation and in the media.

## HOME ECONOMICS:

The best curriculum for this has been training and responsibility in the everyday household duties!

One of the most inspiring books I have read with the girls (because many years ago it so profoundly changed my own life) is Edith Schaeffer's **Hidden Art of Homemaking**. I believe every Christian homemaker and young lady should read this book! It opens our eyes to the beauty, art, and great privilege and potential of homemaking.

In addition, we have read many of **Don Aslett's books** (i.e. **Is There Life After Housework** and **Do I Dust or Vacuum First?**)

We also read through all of **America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook** (which includes excellent basic cooking information) and worked through portions of the lessons in **Christian Light's** home economics course.

The girls have also learned that Mama's way isn't the only way by helping in the households of other godly women. This has been a mutually beneficial arrangement as they help new and seasoned mothers, and as they learn from them and develop friendships with them.

## LITERATURE:

The main formal literature **study** we have done, besides everyone's own individual reading of classics, has focused around Shakespeare. We have studied quite a few plays with the help of Peter Leithart's **Brightest Heaven of Invention**, and Ralph Smith's **Shakespeare the Christian, Vol. 1**, a series of ten lectures with study guides. Both these resources have been excellent for studying the biblical themes of Shakespeare's play.

We read the plays with the help of **Cliff Complete** editions of each play, which include the complete text accompanied by vocabulary helps, commentary on each scene, and

suggested activities and review tests. We also listened to them on tape, and watched film versions of each play.

The girls and I also have enjoyed reading and listening to audiobooks of Jane Austin's novels, with the excellent study materials supplied by Peter Leithart in **Miniatures and Morals**.

## **BIBLE:**

The Bible serves as the foundation and interpreter of all of our lives, so it has permeated all of our study. In addition to seeking out materials that faithfully look to Scripture as the authority for all learning and living, we have also included specific study of the Bible in our homeschooling curriculum.

Most of what we have used to aid in this study can be seen in the materials that we sell at Doorposts. We have studied about how to study the Bible and applied our learning in the study of several books of the Bible. Besides our own **Beauty and the Pig** we used several books from the **Discover 4 Yourself Inductive Bible Studies for Kids** series by Kay Arthur. These upper elementary level studies include **John, James, Jonah, How To Study the Bible**, and more.

We have studied the Proverbs in detail (see our **Hidden Treasures**), and we have worked through many of the projects and resources listed in **Plants Grown Up** and **Polished Cornerstones**.

The girls are now working through **For This Is Right**, copying and answering each question, and copying one verse for each question.

We also went through G.I. Williamson's **Westminster Shorter Catechism Study** for a systematic study of basic Christian doctrine and theology.