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Tailor-Made Education



Homeschooling is great because you can tailor your child's education to his/her interests and needs!

But what does that even *mean*?

I might give the impression that Darren and I craft every single lesson to each of our children's interests and needs: *"I noticed Sparkler's attention wandering during math last week, so I'm writing out each problem by hand in purple ink, because that's her favorite color right now. And we're skipping division because that stresses her out."*



Obviously not. For one thing, we don't have time to customize every lesson to each child's preferences. For another, if we built our schooling around our children's primary interests, math wouldn't exist and everything could be accomplished via YouTube videos. Finally, we have a whole shelf of schoolbooks that we need to reuse to get our money's worth out of them.

So when I say "tailored education," I'm talking about the way we approach the learning process with each child. We take into account several factors:

- **Figuring out how a child learns best.** Last year, Bookgirl worked through a biology course almost entirely on her own. She's a visual learner, a fast reader, and preferred to do the work on her own time. We want to do the same course with Gamerboy, but he's much more of an auditory learner and has trouble focusing like Bookgirl can. So although we're using the same curriculum, our approach will be streamlined and more interactive this year.
- **Understanding what captures a child's interest.** If you listen to Sparkler talk, you come away with the impression that she loves fantasy and fiction. But I noticed that the books she rereads over and over are nonfiction books. Two of her favorites are *Make the Bread, Buy the Butter* by Jennifer Reese, a discussion of which foods are worth making, and which you should just go ahead and buy; and *What If* by Randall Munroe, which I talk about in my [last post](#). This year, we'll supplement her literature textbooks with some nonfiction.
- **Anticipating a child's weaknesses.** Both Bookgirl and Ranger (oldest and youngest) keep quiet and try to handle their problems on their own. We learned of this tendency after a few disasters, so now we try to intervene at an early stage. When Bookgirl took a composition class at the local community college, we made a deal with her: we'd pay for half of her new laptop, and the way she "paid us back" was to let us know when she was struggling and needed help in her class. I was able to help her a couple of times when she was floundering, and she ended up acing the class.
- **Incorporating what interests a child.** This aspect of homeschooling is really fun, especially for elementary-aged students. Handwriting is a little less burdensome when they get to write about their favorite video game characters. Math problems make a lot more sense when the problem involves dividing candy among friends. And it strengthens your connection with your child as you explore what they like.
- **Do fun stuff.** Sometimes school gets to be a grind. Darren, who plans our daily lessons, often assigns projects based on what the kids enjoy. Designing a D&D session, for instance, involves storytelling, math, and leadership skills — but for our boys, it's just fun.

Bookgirl is always up for reading new fantasy books and writing a couple of paragraphs comparing and contrasting heroines or settings. Sparkler loves being given a prompt (“Someone gets a surprise package”) and digitally animating it. We can’t make every bit of school “fun,” but we can give them some projects to look forward to.

The Jones Homeschool covers all the core subjects. Nobody gets to opt out of phonics or fifth grade math. But within that structure, Darren and I put a lot of time and energy into understanding how each child learns best. That space to “tailor” our children’s education is what homeschooling is all about.

— Sara

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Sara Roberts Jones grew up in Mississippi and married a Canadian; they compromised and live in Virginia. In among homeschooling their four children, Sara writes, visits friends, takes long drives, and finds stuff to laugh at. [View all posts by Sara Jones](#)

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