

Thought exercise: Imagine visiting a foreign city whose language you don't speak. You have 2 days to see all the amazing historical sites on your bucket list. However, there are no signs in English and very few tourists. Almost no one who speaks English and those who do all have very different and strong opinions on what you should see and do. You have several options if you want to maximize your time there. Keep in mind, you have already spent a lot of money on airfare and hotel and you have tired, cranky children with you.

You can:

1. Hire an in-person guide
2. Get a lot of maps
3. Get a thorough guide book
4. Do tons of research and learn the language

You have already invested a lot of blood, sweat, and tears into your kiddos. You have possibly pulled them out of conventional school and are trying to navigate the homeschooling landscape. Unlike 30 years ago, there are many options now for how to homeschool. Think through how you will do this with integrity.

Initial Questions to consider:

- 1) Where are we headed/what are our priorities?
 - a) What are my 1-year goals?
 - b) 5-year goals?
 - c) High school and beyond
- 2) How do my kids learn/remember best?
 - a) Screen vs book/paper
 - b) Bells and whistles vs no frills
- 3) What is our family's education style/philosophy?
 - a) Classical
 - b) Eclectic
 - c) Unschooling
 - d) Experience-based
 - e) Project-based
 - f) A mix-and-match
- 4) Which subjects/skill sets does my child need to learn and when? (scope and sequence)
 - a) Don't blindly follow grade level! Teach to the child you have, not the mythical "average" child.
- 5) What is my skill set?
 - a) What subject/s do I know enough about teaching to understand when I have provided a thorough and appropriate education for my child?
 - b) "I know enough 3rd grade math to understand what my child should know by the end of the school year and what is the appropriate route to take to get there. I am able to evaluate my child's work."
- 6) What are my deficiencies?
 - a) What subjects do I not know enough about teaching to understand when I have provided a thorough and appropriate education for my child?

- b) "I might be a pretty decent writer, but I do not know enough about teaching 4th grade writing to know what skills need to be in place and how to best achieve those goals by the end of the school year. I also do not have a good framework to evaluate my child's work."
- 7) Can I educate myself on my deficiencies?
- a) What resources (books, online tutorials, etc) are available?
 - b) Do I have the time, etc. to do this?
 - c) Which deficiencies will provide me the biggest bang for my buck if I overcome them?
 - 1. I can use those skills in the future for both myself and other children
 - 2. I can achieve a lot of understanding with relative ease (e.g. It is far better for me to learn how to teach writing across different grade levels than it is for me to learn Latin and then learn how to teach it).

Questions to consider when evaluating curricula (the materials used to teach a given subject):

- 8) Different types of "formal" instruction
- a) Outsourcing (class)
 - 1. Class taught by an instructor who isn't you whom your child can contact for help
 - 2. Online or in person
 - b) Do-at-home curriculum (e.g Singapore math grade 4)
 - 1. Online
 - 2. book
 - c) DIY
 - 1. Documentaries, field trips, books, free printables, websites, etc
 - 2. This option is not as challenging if scope and sequence are not as important
- 9) Cost
- a) Things that are free can end up being very costly in other ways
 - 1. Time, sanity, other commitments
 - b) Understand what you are paying for!!!
 - c) Understand that when you outsource a class/subject, you are not learning for yourself what is educationally appropriate (question 4). Obviously, this can be totally fine, but this is an oft-overlooked negative.
 - d) Am I paying for stuff I don't need (coloring worksheets, dancing monkeys, etc)
 - e) Is there a middle-of-the-road solution?
- 10) Time required of parent/teacher
- a) How easy is it to implement?
 - 1. Will I have to print off free sheets from multiple locations?
 - 2. Will I lose track of what we have accomplished and what we have left to do?
 - 3. How organized do I need to be?
 - b) How easy is it to evaluate?
 - 1. Will I know where the "holes" are?
 - 2. How easy is it to see the big picture of where we are heading?
 - 3. When will I know we are "finished"?
 - 4. Do I know how to evaluate the work accomplished?
 - 5. Do I know what is developmentally appropriate?
 - c) How much available time do I have? What are our life limitations?

1. Am I educating or parenting other children?
2. Do I also have paid employment that takes time?
3. Am I busy in other ways (volunteering, chauffeuring, personal education, etc)

11) Quality/Comprehensiveness

- a) Is the scope and sequence appropriate, thorough, and developmentally appropriate for my child?
- b) If the curriculum is more of a spine, am I able to supplement well?
- c) How high does the quality need to be?
 1. E.g. – my family goes on a ton of field trips all over so I don't need a thorough 3rd grade history curriculum because we have that more than covered
 2. 2nd grade science can be a lot less thorough and filled with rabbit trails than 8th grade science can.
 3. If your 2nd grade math curriculum is not thorough enough, this will very negatively impact you in the future.

“I want a curriculum that is free, easy to implement, and comprehensive.”

12) I call this “the unicorn of curricula” because it is almost mythical and rarely found

- a) Please understand that this option requires either printing out a lot of materials (not free) and staying organized, and/or using a computer/internet. If this runs counter to how your family operates, you will have problems.
- b) If you are not an organized person, you are almost doomed to failure.

13) There are some great resources out there that do a lot for free without making you crazy

- a) Khan Academy
 1. No frills, great for review, identifying holes, and providing a spine
- b) Big History Project (for older kids)
- c) LIBRARY

14) When scope and sequence are not as big of an issue, free is MUCH easier to find and implement

- a) You can put together a unit on a social studies or science topic for K-8 using only the library, free documentaries, and/or websites with loads of free printables.

15) Free is also quite easy to find if you need tutorials for additional instruction

16) Free is easy to find if scope and sequence are important AND you have a solid understanding of what you are looking for. In my experience, the ease of implementation might be a limiting factor (e.g KISS Grammar).

How to Run into Trouble While Riding the Free Unicorn: Cobbling together a curriculum for ELA or math using only supplemental materials

1. Having no spine such as EngageNY or Khan to serve as a guide
2. Not understanding which materials are supplemental and which are spine
3. It is hard to say on track with no master guide. Either every day is a rabbit trail or lots of work can happen with no real purpose/direction (busywork).

4. Think of hiking in the woods with no trails and no map. Or with a bunch of trails and no map. It is one thing if you are an expert with a compass and wilderness survival skills, but if you are not, you need some kind of guide.