

Unit Studies 101

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Introduction

Learning should be an exciting adventure – SHOULD BE but that's not always the case, is it? I can honestly say that learning was not exciting to me UNTIL we began homeschooling with unit studies. When we made this switch, a breath of fresh air moved through our lives, and nothing has been the same since that time. With the change came the realization that education was more than books or homework or hours spent in sheer boredom. When first researching the theory and application of unit studies, I came across a quotation that has since become popular in homeschool circles:

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
William Butler Yeats

This one thought was a home run – as fast as we can pour facts into our children's minds, they seem to disappear just as quickly. Unit studies can change this – the retention, the adventure, the challenge of living life to each one's personal capacities, and much more.

After many years of writing and speaking about unit studies, I am finally able to write this book, Unit Studies 101. If you are like me, you know just how many demands there are on a parent's time, and keeping priorities in the right order is vital.

Over the years, I have gained quite a bit of experience with developing unit studies on a wide variety of topics – 18+ years of writing and using unit studies on countless topics with our own children as well as many others that have provided feedback along the way. This book is written in an attempt to pass along this knowledge to the many parents and teachers that need insight into developing and using unit studies – the missing link, so to speak. Having written many different unit study books, I realize that I will never be able to write unit studies on the vast number of topics that will be of interest to so many children. As a result, this book has been written as a bridge to help you go from using prepared unit studies to developing your own studies that fit your children's interests.

In this book, I have shared all kinds of information that should help you along your own educational adventures. You will read about the concept of unit studies, how to choose a topic, how to research and build a unit study, and how to use a unit study. With a degree in engineering, I tend to try and develop systems of doing things – this book contains my system of building and using unit studies. It has been quite a long and arduous endeavor to capture my way of doing this for you in written words. Please be patient as you begin this journey and know that my first unit studies were a far cry from the ones that I write today. We all have to

begin somewhere, and hopefully this book will get you started quickly and effectively.

I write and speak and share with one goal in mind, and that is to help others enjoy the learning process with their children as they help their children discover the world as well as themselves. You see, God has gifted each and every child in a very unique and amazing way. It is up to us, the parents and teachers, to help these children discover their unique gifts and talents, and find joy in the journey. I compare this journey to opening a gift, removing one layer of wrapping at a time until you reach the very special gift – a happy and precious individual, blessed by God. Enjoy these times, for they are very special to each and every one of us!

Blessings,
Amanda

*“God wants us to be victors, not victims;
to grow, not grovel; to soar, not sink;
to overcome, not to be overwhelmed.”
William A. Ward*



Chapter Two

What is Your Goal?

“If you’re not sure where you are going, you’re liable to end up someplace else.”
Robert F. Mager

“If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable.”
Seneca

Goals, goals, goals. We hear over and over again how important goals are to our success in life. While it is an important concept to most of us as it applies to our lives, it should also be very important to us as we educate our children. We need to set some educational goals as we proceed with their education. Like any goal, we need to remember that they will have to be somewhat flexible and allow for adjustment as the child changes and grows to adulthood.

Also, like other goals, educational goals can be short-term and long-term. For example, short-term goals might include learning to read during the upcoming school year. Long-term goals might include gaining an understanding of the child’s gifts and talents in the years to come. Education is made up of many components, and these components fit together like puzzle pieces. A child needs a spiritual education as well as an academic education.



When we began our homeschooling journey, I read so much at once, trying to absorb and understand as much as I could possibly get in as short an amount of time as possible. I’m sure that many of you know exactly what I mean. I was not a “degreed” teacher, but I knew that homeschooling was something that I was supposed to do for our

children, and for our family. I kept reading about the importance of setting educational goals, and so I began to put together a set of goals for each child – fitting the goals to help with each child’s weak spots or growing interests. Over the years, these notes in a spiral notebook have helped keep us on track, and have been adjusted along the way when necessary.

Homeschooling is not an easy choice, and it is not for everyone. It is a decision, a commitment, and a life-changing challenge. It was pretty unnerving to make this choice, and when I came across the poet Robert Frost’s words, it was as if I had my answer and the journey began.

“I am not a teacher, but an awakener.” Robert Frost