

A Fair Idea

Karen Lange

Looking for something to add a little excitement to your homeschool? Need some ideas? Why not have a homeschool fair? This can be a fun activity for the whole family. It doesn't have to take a lot of time or energy, and this type of activity looks great in the portfolio.

An art fair can be a showcase for students' work. Craft projects, artwork, even poetry, and stories can be nicely displayed for attendees to see. Our county homeschool group hosted a yearly art fair in January. It gave us an excuse to socialize and a project goal to aim for during the winter.

One parent would coordinate the event, delegating other responsibilities such as refreshments, registration, and certificates. When we started, our kids were all young, so we didn't want it to be a competition with judges or any pressure for the kids. We printed certificates of participation with the students' name, event date, location, etc. Sometimes we'd pick up generic ribbons from the party store--the kind without any "place" on them, and hand them out too. The kids felt like they'd accomplished something and had a nice memento for a scrapbook or memory box.

We had two places we regularly used to meet for these things: one was a church fellowship hall, the other a Christian school gym. Their fees were minimal or a small donation, as long as we took care of cleanup. These facilities were nice; all the amenities were included--restroom, kitchen, tables and chairs, etc.

Each child was allotted a space on a table to arrange his work. We placed a nametag at each place with the student's name and age. Each child was required to stay with his work for a certain period of time to answer questions (and receive compliments!). Sometimes we would have a short ceremony, handing out certificates, and other times we'd place them with the child's work on the table.

Registration included taking family names, number of participants per family, and the type of art that students would bring. Sometimes we'd collect a fee, such as \$1 per student, to cover the facility, paper plates, etc. This was not always necessary as our group collected small yearly dues for a newsletter and other expenses. It depended on what our other expenses were for the year.

Our fairs were scheduled after dinner and refreshments were simple. Each family was required to bring a snack and drink to share. We requested easy snacks, such as cookies or pretzels, to keep supplies and clean-up minimal.

We allowed preschoolers to participate too, since this was something that they could easily do. Parents or a responsible older sibling were required to stay with the preschooler. Some students displayed drawings, paintings, craft projects, art notebooks, scrapbooks, illustrated stories; anything “artsy” was allowed.

While fun and socialization were part of our plan, we had another motive in mind for these events. Requiring students to stay with their work gave them an opportunity to speak to attendees of all ages. We saw some of our shy students blossom with the opportunity to comfortably speak about their work to others. We moms were sneaky; we seized the opportunity for the kids to practice their people and public speaking skills. This provided an avenue to do so in a controlled and friendly environment.

In the spring, we also had a science fair and followed the same guidelines. Again, we refrained from having judges and competition. Our group wasn’t huge, and there was a range of ages and abilities, although mostly elementary level, which we thought would be hard to pigeonhole into judged categories. We wanted the kids to have fun with science, minus big pressure, while they were young. There was plenty of time for real life pressure experiences as they got older. We’d often invite a neighboring county’s group to participate in our fairs, and it was a nice cooperative time together. Friends and relatives could come and see students’ work, and see that the kids were growing, learning, and interacting like regular people.

Another winter activity we held occasionally was a talent show. This of course, took a little more planning on participants’ part, but everyone enjoyed it. We followed the same guidelines with certificates, location, and snacks, and allowed a certain amount of time for each talent act. We had songs, musical instruments, skits, and even a mini Civil War reenactment with costumes. The sneaky moms were at work again; this gave the kids a chance to stand up in front of others.

Even if you don’t have a local homeschool group, see if you can round up a few families and meet in someone’s home. Or, have your own family fair and invite friends and relatives. Use your imagination to customize a great fair to complement your homeschool experience.

Biographical Information

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Karen Lange was privileged to be the emcee at many homeschool talent shows. Her favorite act was “Who’s on First?” performed by her sons. She does admit, however, to being biased in her selection. She and her husband homeschooled their three children grades K-12. She is a freelance writer and the creator of the Homeschool Online Writing

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