

Don't Forget the Fun!

Karen Lange

Do you ever feel like all you do is cover the basics? Jumping from math to English, to history and science, then off to the kids' activities or church and all those other good things you do. Before you know it, the week is over and you didn't do nearly all you'd planned. I know the feeling; I found myself there often. While covering the basics is important, it is nice to add those extras sometimes. Art, music, life skills, science experiments, field trips, etc., can provide just as much in the way of educational benefits and good family memories.

These extras can add a little fun while still having value. I think they are important and have their place in any type of curriculum, not to mention life. Living is learning, and with a little thought and creativity, you can break free of just the basics and add a spark and more fun to regular studies.

One way to add these extras in is to co-op with one or two other families. Keep it simple to minimize stress for the parents. Pick a craft project, bake some goodies, or do a couple of science experiments together. Visit a museum and then picnic in the park. You might want to choose a day every few months and figure it into your 'official' school calendar.

Another way to supplement is to think in unit study terms, combining subjects. What are you studying in history? Have the kids look up period artists. Do a brief study of one or two of them; read a short biography, examine their style, technique, and so on. Have the kids interpret and re-create the artist's work using different mediums. Try watercolors, pastels, or crayon and colored pencils. Make a mosaic using construction paper (or whatever!) of Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, for example. Do your kids like to draw cartoons? Have them draw a historical event with funny captions. Ask the kids for suggestions too; their ideas might surprise you.

How about combining art and science? Have the kids observe and draw the stages of plant growth. There will be shapes, colors, shading, and other 'art' type things involved. Perhaps making a mural of Ben Franklin's work with electricity might be fun. How about illustrating facts about Robert Fulton's work? Did you know that Fulton not only studied science and engineering but also art? My kids, when younger, loved this Fulton piece of trivia: as a young boy, he would trim fur from his cat's tail to make paintbrushes. Watch for and explore tidbits like these. They can add another interesting dimension to your studies.

Consider combining science and home economics. Cooking is science! Do a brief overview of how yeast works while making bread or sticky buns. Find out how and why the cheese on pizza melts. What happens to ice cubes when we take them out of the freezer and put them into a hot beverage? Where does the wiggle in Jell-O come from? If nothing else, observation and discussions make the kids think. They'll also pick up practical kitchen skills in the process.

Another extra, although maybe not as popular with the kids, take time to teach cleaning skills. Teach them the proper way to dust, vacuum, clean the bathroom, etc. Hide a few coins in hard to find, but important places needing dusting for the kids to discover as they dust. Many hands make light work, you know--why not set a timer and see how fast the dinner dishes can be cleaned up? This can help teach the kids to work quickly, carefully, and efficiently. This is one extra I am exceedingly thankful I took the time for. My three kids, ages 22-26, know how to clean house. Now that the older two have moved out, I do miss having help around the house! But the overall benefit is that they know how to do it now in their own homes.

Don't allow adding the extras to stress you out. Just keep your eyes open for potential add-ins. There are many ways to make the most of your days and make learning more fun and rewarding. Pray about it, set flexible goals, and enjoy time with your kids. You won't regret it; they'll be grown before you know it!

Biographical Information

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