

# EXCELSIOR NEWSLETTER

Excelsior Classical Covenantal Community

March 2008

[www.excelsiorclassical.org](http://www.excelsiorclassical.org)

## “Ten Things to Do with Your Child Before Age Ten” by Harvey and Lauren Bluedorn

### Introductory Remarks

**The goal of Classical Education** is to give students the tools with which to learn on their own — to liberate them from the drudgery of task-performance and to make them independent scholars.

*There is more than one legitimate way to approach classical education. In this booklet, we explain how we, as a homeschooling family, have put the principles of the Trivium into practice. Other classical educators may apply the trivium differently, emphasizing different methods and principles. Most of the things we recommend come from our own experiences. This does not mean that we followed every one of our recommendations all the years we have taught our children. It has taken us many years to fully develop our philosophy of education. We made the most mistakes with our first children — they were our guinea pigs. Some of*

*“What goes into a child’s head as a little one will come out later as he writes.”*

*the things we recommend are what we would do if we could begin again. In this booklet you read the culmination of a long journey.*

### **I. Building a Firm Foundation**

The Early Grammar Stage

Ten Things to Do With Your Child Before Age Ten

Before age ten, the child is in an early Grammar Stage where he is mostly dependent upon his concrete sensory experiences for learning. To put it in computer lingo, he is still “booting up.”

### Moms’ Night In / Prayer

Monday, March 17th, 7:00 p.m.  
at the Moellers’ House

### Older Student Research Paper Night

Friday, March 21st, 6:00 p.m.

This will be the perfect opportunity to work on your research paper. Come prepared with all of your questions and materials!

### Returning Family Applications

Deadline for turning in applications for next year is March 15th. Please return completed applications to Nita Fradenburg.



Around age ten, the child enters a more intense phase of the Grammar Stage where his brain becomes physically able to make more complex connections, which, among other things, makes the child more able to handle abstract concepts and helps the child with self-management and self-control.

The following is a general list of ten things we believe are important to teach your children before age ten. After this we will outline a suggested daily schedule.

### Ten things to do with Children before age 10

1. **Reading & Writing** - Intensive Phonics; Copywork; start English Language Notebook
2. **Oral Narration** Daily
3. **Memorization** Bible; poetry; passages of literature; Greek and/or Hebrew alphabet
4. **Hearing & Listening** Read aloud 2 hours per day from a variety of fiction and nonfiction; start History Notebook; timeline
5. **Family Worship** Family Bible study morning and evening using grammar level questions
6. **Arts & Crafts** Provide the time, space, and materials; develop creativity
7. **Field Trips & Library** Start learning elementary library research; investigate the world
8. **Work & Service** Schedule for chores; visit nursing home, etc.
9. **Discipline** First-time obedience
10. **Play & Exploration** Develop the imagination

#### 1. Reading and Writing

##### Phonics

Homeschooling families have many good intensive phonics programs from which to choose. You should locate an intensive phonics curriculum which best fits the needs of your family. Among those criteria you should consider for choosing a phonics curriculum are these:

**Expense.** The teaching of reading does not need to be costly. Because many of us parents were not taught phonics, we need a full curriculum to teach ourselves first! Once we have learned the system, then we can easily teach our children by using a small chalkboard and a few easy readers.

**Method.** Despite what some persons want us to believe, English is a phonetic language. The problem with English is that it has the largest vocabulary, manifold larger than any other language which has ever existed. As a consequence,

English has incorporated spellings from many different languages. Therefore, the way a particular word spells its sound may also display some of its history. This is the great cultural treasure of the English language — a treasure which is rapidly being lost as our vocabularies swiftly shrink under “look-say” or sight reading — a method of teaching reading which was invented for the deaf! You cannot build a large vocabulary upon the foundation of sight reading.

##### Copywork

When your child becomes fairly proficient at printing his letters and he is on the road to learning how to read, you can begin him on copywork. Copywork is an age-old practice dating back to ancient times, and is, along with oral narration, the first step in teaching a child how to write. First Peter 2:21, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving behind for us a copyhead [ὀπογραμμὸν: hupogrammon], in order that ye should trace over his tracks.” Copywork is a good way to practice handwriting skills, re-enforce phonics instruction, introduce grammar and proper sentence structure, and lay a foundation for creative writing at a later age. In copywork, the child copies on his own paper, word for word, from a sentence or paragraph which someone else has written. Whose sentences and paragraphs should your child copy? Use the finest literature. Begin with the Bible. For more advice on selections, consider Philippians 4:8. Your child should spend some time each day doing copywork. In her book, *Language Arts . . . The Easy Way*, Cindy Rushton outlines how to incorporate copywork into your curriculum. Copywork could be kept in his English Language Notebook, or it may deserve its own separate notebook. Your child may copy from the Bible one day, copy poetry or literature the next day, copy famous speeches or sayings of important men another day. He may keep all of his copywork in one notebook, or he may keep different notebooks for different kinds of literature.

#### 2. Oral Narration

In Britain, at the close of the nineteenth century, Charlotte Mason developed the concept of narration as a method of teaching. In her book, *For the Children's Sake*, Susan Schaeffer Macaulay has reintroduced narration to homeschooling families. In oral narration, the parent reads to the child, or the child reads to himself, then the child “tells back” to the parent, in his own words, what was just read. It is best to begin narration at an early age, when the child is four or five years old, to practice it on a daily basis, and to continue the practice through high school.

Narration is an exercise which builds mental stamina. According to Karen Andreola, “. . . narration takes the place

of questionnaires and multiple choice tests, it enables the child to bring all the faculties of mind into play. The child learns to call on the vocabulary and descriptive power of good writers as he tells his own version of the story.”

Narration is very difficult to do. Could you, without notes, narrate the sermon which you heard last Sunday? Most of us — including the pastor who preached the sermon — would have trouble remembering even the text of the sermon. Our adult minds have not been trained to listen to something, remember it, and then retell it. We were never trained in the skill of narration.

It is best to begin small. Read to your child one short paragraph from a simple story, then ask him to retell the story in his own words. In the beginning you may need to prompt your child with questions about the passage. As the child becomes more practiced in the skill of narration, he will be able to narrate longer and more detailed passages.

Narration can serve three functions. First, you can periodically test how well a child is comprehending the material which he reads or hears.

The more a child has to say in his narration, the more thoroughly he has understood the material. If he does not remember much about the material, then he probably did not listen well or read carefully.

### 3. Memorization

Memorization should be begun when your child is young — even as young as two or three — and continued throughout life. (It is good for us old folks, also). Time should be spent everyday reciting memory work. Encourage your child to memorize such things as the Greek and Hebrew Alphabets, passages from the Bible, poetry, catechisms, excerpts from literature. Your child could memorize passages of the Bible in Greek or Latin, and the same passages in English, in order to give them a feel for those languages. Memorizing passages of literature will prepare your child for the study of formal grammar at age ten. He gets a feel for the way sentences are put together and he builds his vocabulary. Memorizing also prepares your child to be a good writer. What goes into a child’s head as a little one will come out later as he writes.

### 4. Hearing and Listening

By reading aloud to your child, he learns the sound of words, he increases his vocabulary, he enlarges his conceptions of the world, and he develops his imagination. We suggest that you read to your child at least two hours a day. Read from a wide variety of good literature, biographies, and historical fiction. Include books on science, geography, art, music, and history.

**Three do nots:** Do not be afraid to read to young children books with long chapters. A five year old is capable of attending to and understanding much of such books as *Treasure Island* or *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Do not waste your time reading “fast-food” type books (e.g. *Babysitter Club* books or Nancy Drew mysteries). Do not require your children to sit beside you on the couch perfectly still while you read. As long as they stayed in the room and were not distracting or interrupting, we allowed our children to play quietly with their toys or to work on cross-stitching or to draw or some similar quiet project, while we read aloud. Many children listen much better when they are doing something with their hands — indeed, it seems some little boys cannot sit still long enough to listen unless they are holding something. Some parents combine narration with read aloud times.

### 5. Family Worship

Contrary to the old saying, “the family which prays together, stays together,” studies have shown that the family

## Upcoming Events

### National Latin Exam

This year’s exam will take place on Friday, **March 7th at 8:00 a.m.** (promptly) during Excelsior. The cost of the exam is \$6.00 per student. Please pay before or on the day of the exam. Checks need to be made out to Excelsior.

**DON’T BE LATE!**

### Family Movie Night

We would like to get together sometime in March to watch a movie that correlates with what we have been studying (i.e. *Ben Hur*).  
Date, time, and movie TBA.

“It is only the family which prays and studies the Bible together regularly as a family at home which stays together.”

which only prays together — that is, worships together only at church — does not usually stay together. It is only the family which prays and studies the Bible together regularly as a family at home which stays together. The father should lead the family in prayer and Bible studies, morning and evening if possible. This will strengthen the father’s role as the accountable head and moral guide of the family. The mother teaches her children the proper role of submission to their parents by her example of submission to their father. Mothers are not to be the spiritual leaders of the family. With regular family worship, the mind is developed along spiritual and moral lines in a way which cannot be accomplished by Bible workbooks, private devotions, or regular church attendance.

A method of Bible study which we suggest is Biblical and profitable is to have someone read a passage of Scripture, then have everyone in the family, perhaps in turn, ask the father a question about the passage. Before age ten, you may expect a child to ask mostly Grammar Stage questions of fact. By age thirteen he will ask more Logic Stage questions of theory, and by age sixteen he will ask more Rhetoric Stage questions of practice. If you accomplish all the academics, but leave out family worship, you will raise well educated practical agnostics. Family training in God’s word should be your top priority — far above academics.

Do not let your child ignore God. God is the ultimate reason for why he is alive. When God speaks, He must always have the child’s attention. So do not indulge in frivolous Bible story books which degrade God’s word to entertaining comics or to nice little tales on the level of myths and fables. The standard must not be entertainment value, but faithfulness to God’s word.

## 6. Arts and Crafts

Young children learn more through their senses. They need more hands on manipulatives before age ten. Give

them plenty of time to experiment with art and crafts and thereby develop their elementary creativity.

In the main room of your house, or wherever it is you read to the children and spend the most time, keep a low shelf stocked with good quality colored pencils, crayons, or markers, paints, paper, scissors, glue, clay, wallpaper sample books, fabric sample books, matting board scraps, sewing, knitting, and crocheting supplies. Next to this shelf you may have a small table with chairs where the children can easily work on their projects while you read to them. Younger children can do crafts while the older ones are being helped with math or science. Art and craft projects can be sent to relatives, made into gifts, given to residents at the nursing home, entered into contests, taken to the county fair, or simply displayed in the home. In our home, we have framed many of the children’s works, and the walls are covered with the results.

## 7. Field Trips

Take field trips frequently. Take time to attend concerts and plays, museums and exhibits. Visit workplaces. Give your child experiences from which to build his understanding of the world — experiences he will draw upon and perhaps revisit when he is older.

Do not let your child explore the world only from a cathode ray tube. Children need real experiences to relate to. Seeing a jet take off on television is not the same as seeing a jet take off in front of you. Hearing an orchestra on television or radio is not the same as hearing an orchestra in person. Watching a computer simulation of a scientific experiment, or watching a video of it, is not the same as doing it in front of your very own eyes. Yes, you can learn some things by the tube. But it is not the same. There are also some things which you are not learning.

## 8. Work and Service

Develop in your child a love for work and service. From the time a child is able to walk and talk he should be given regular chores to perform. We do not mean simply feeding the dog and making his bed. A five year old is quite capable of putting the dishes away and folding the laundry. A ten year old can prepare simple meals from start to finish. Children of all ages can clean and straighten the house. The mother should not be picking up things from off of the floor. Your goal should be that by the time a child is in his teens, he is able to take over the work of the household, from cooking to cleaning to caring for his younger brothers and sisters. This not only teaches them to appreciate work while

removing some of the burden from the parents, but it is good training for when they have their own households.

Do not do for your child what he can do for himself. We need to reject all of this popular “self-esteem” stuff. The world’s problems can be summarized in one simple expression: too much self-esteem. Too many people think they are too good for what they get in life. They think they deserve better. And among the things which foster such notions is parents fawning over their little children. For the first year of his life, you pretty much need to do everything for him. But after that, the situation should begin to change rapidly. He can learn to do many things for himself in the next couple of years. He can clean up his own messes.

### 9. Discipline

We have found in our own experience that if the area of discipline is neglected, then we may as well forget about academics altogether. Children will never learn self-discipline if parents do not train them in it. The child who does not develop self-discipline will fail in many things — including the academics you are preparing him for.

Ask yourself these questions: Am I satisfied with the obedience of my children? Do I enjoy being around my children? Do my children honor and respect me? If your answer is “no” to any of these questions, then you should re-evaluate your priorities. If you do not have first time obedience from children of all ages, your homeschool journey will be beset with all number of difficulties. Regarding first time obedience, we highly recommend a book originally published in 1833: *The Mother At Home*, by John S. C. Abbott.

Do not allow your child to ignore you. You are the immediate reason for why he is alive. When you tell him something, make sure he hears you. When you read to him, do not let his attention wander too far. Of course, be sensitive. There are going to be times when he has something he needs to think about, and you may need to leave him do so. But do not let him shut you out. You must always have his attention when you speak. You must always have something for him to hear. No, we do not live up to that standard. But that should be the standard by which we measure.

Do not let your child rule you. Let him rule himself. A man must rule himself before he can rule others. (Think of

all of the offices which have become inverted and perverted because of men who could not first rule themselves.) Nobody learns to rule himself by obeying his own desires. He can only learn to rule himself by obeying another’s desires. There must be something larger than himself to serve. (That is why the concept of God is inescapable. If you do not follow the true God, then you have to invent a substitute god to serve a similar function.) If you can teach your child to know himself and rule himself, then he will be able to rule that part of the world which you give to him, and eventually that part of the world of which God places him in stewardship.

**“Do not do for your child what he can do for himself. We need to reject all of this popular “self-esteem” stuff. The world’s problems can be summarized in one simple expression: too much self-esteem.”**

### 10. Play and Exploration

Give the child plenty of time to explore and play. Do not buy “toystore” toys — they are expensive and are usually forgotten after the newness wears off. Invest in real things. Garage sales and auctions are an unending source for things like sewing machines, small tools for working in the garden, hammers, nails, and things for building, some wooden blocks, and dress-up clothes. Buy tools for exploring (a good microscope, telescope, binoculars, dissecting equipment, basic chemistry equipment, etc.), not toys for adoring. Teach your children how to use them responsibly (safe, neat, and orderly — clean up when you are done), and make them readily available for when they want to use them.

Do not let your child waste away. You will have to discover the happy medium between giving your child enough time of his own and giving your child too much time of his own. If he has too little time, he will not develop his own thoughts. If he has too much time, he will pursue mischief, or at least no profitable ends. Give him something to think on when he has nothing to do. Memorization fills the mind with things to teethe his mind on and ponder.

Note: This article has been abridged to fit our newsletter. The complete article is available at: [http://www.triviumpursuit.com/articles/ten\\_to\\_do\\_before\\_ten.php](http://www.triviumpursuit.com/articles/ten_to_do_before_ten.php)

# Preparing for March...

## March Headmasters

**March 7th** - Don Dye

**March 14th** - *Spring Break*

**March 20th** - Charlie Hardin

**March 28th** - Kevin Smith

## March Clean-Up

**March 7th** - Dye family

**March 14th** - *Spring Break*

**March 20th** - Hardin family

**March 28th** - Smith family

## Calendar Reminder!!!

Our Spring Break is the week of  
March 10th - 14th.  
We will meet on Thursday, March 20th  
rather than on Good Friday (the 21st).

## ACCS Conference June 26–28

*Recovering Truth, Goodness and Beauty* is the theme for the summer conference in Austin, TX. There will be five great plenary talks including two by Ken Myers of Mars Hill Audio and a variety of workshops with several new speakers and topics. More information and registration details will be available March 1st from [accsedu.org](http://accsedu.org).

This is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about classical education, so mark this on your calendar!

## Lunch:

**March 7th - Chick-fil-a**

**March 14th - *Spring Break***

**March 20th - Wendy's**

**March 28th - Pizza Dr.**

Please leave your completed order form and money in the box labeled "LUNCH" in the foyer of Bldg A. a week before the lunch you're ordering.

