

The Critical Thinking Company also publishes books that help develop thinking skills within various subject areas such as math, language arts, science, and U.S. history. (Reviews of *Developing Critical Thinking through Science*, *Mathematical Reasoning through Verbal Analysis*, and *Cranium Crackers* can be found at [CathyDuffyReviews.com](http://CathyDuffyReviews.com)) You can send for The Critical Thinking Company catalog—called *Bright Minds*—or check out their Web site to determine which resources best suit your needs. (Note: this is a nonsectarian publisher, and you might find occasional, minor content problems.)

## **More Challenging Logic for Teens**

*Critical Thinking: Problem Solving, Reasoning, Logic & Arguments, Books One and Two*

by Anita Harnadek

Critical Thinking Co.

(See address on page 291)

Book One student book—\$21.99, teacher's manual—\$9.99; Book Two student book—\$24.99, teacher's manual—\$9.99

These two books, *Critical Thinking, Book One* and *Critical Thinking, Book Two*, are especially good for junior and senior high school as an introduction to critical thinking and logic.

They are lots of fun but will also challenge both students and parents. Some of the exercises are silly but effective. You can skip around to some extent, choosing lessons that are most interesting, easier, or more challenging since they range from popular fallacies through formal logic.

Use these books interactively (teacher interacting with one or more students) since they are not designed for independent work. You will need the teacher's manual for each book.

When we used these books, we occasionally had trouble with the author's politically correct point of view in the phrasing of statements and/or questions. We sometimes used those instances to try to identify her worldview (an exercise in critical thinking!), sometimes skipped them, and sometimes changed them. There isn't anything seriously objectionable on the surface, but attitudes and opinions can be subtle influencers.



### ***The Fallacy Detective***

by Nathaniel and Hans Bluedorn

Christian Logic

P.O. Box 46

Muscatine, IA 52761-0001

(309) 537-3644

[www.christianlogic.com](http://www.christianlogic.com)

\$22.00

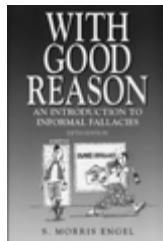
The Bluedorn family, longtime promoters of Christian classical education, encountered the same problem we did with content in most critical thinking and logic resources, so Nathaniel and Hans Bluedorn put their heads together and came up with this excellent introduction to practical logic from their conservative Christian homeschoolers' perspective. Subtitled "Thirty-Six Lessons on How to Recognize Bad Reasoning," it uses humor, historical

references, and real life situations to help teens learn to think and express themselves clearly. Comic strips from *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Dilbert*, *Peanuts*, and *Nuna and Toodles* (the Bluedorn brothers' own creation) are a nice touch that have been added to the second edition.

The style is similar in many ways to the *Critical Thinking, Books One and Two* I described above. However, the underlying perspective comes through in different ways. Verses from Proverbs are used to discuss knowledge and wisdom. One exercise statement reads, "I know everybody thinks Einstein's theory of relativity is correct, but I can't accept it. Einstein believed in evolution." Another on the same page relates this conversation: "Mrs. A: 'I'm going through a logic book with my kids. It's called *The Fallacy Detective*. I really like it.' Mrs. B.: 'Aw, the authors of that book are just a bunch of homeschoolers. What do they know about logic.' " (p. 49).

*The Fallacy Detective* will likely appeal to many families for another reason: it doesn't need to be taught. Students can read and work through it independently. However, it might be enjoyable for both parent and student for the teen to read the lesson on his or her own, summarize the main idea to a parent, then go through the exercises out loud together. Some exercises require simple identification answers, but others might prompt some great discussion. The authors' answers are in the back of the book.

Instructions for a *Fallacy Detective Game* in which players make up their own fallacies are also at the back of the book. This would make great family fun for those with two or more teens.



***With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies (sixth edition)***

by S. Morris Engel

St. Martin's Press, Inc.

175 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10010

(order through bookstores)

[www.stmartins.com](http://www.stmartins.com)

\$36.25

*With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies* is another good choice along the same lines as *The Fallacy Detective*, but it's better for older teens. It begins with "definitions," but even this potentially boring foundational information is presented with touches of humor that make it both entertaining and interesting. Each brief section is followed by a summary of key points and practice exercises. Answers to a few selected questions are at the end of each section, but parents will need to read along to be able to discuss exercise questions and figure out answers to those for which none are provided—not that difficult a task. (Parents without a background in logic will find that reading this book is time well spent!)

Among topics dealt with in the first section are arguments and nonarguments, missing components, syllogisms, truth, validity, soundness, and deductive and inductive arguments.

The next section deals with language as a medium of communication. It gets into topics such as implied and actual meanings of words, ambiguity, and vagueness. Information here will be valuable to those who want to become more skillful communicators.

The bulk of the book deals with the “fun stuff”—informal fallacies. These fallacies are divided into three general sections: fallacies of ambiguity, presumption, and relevance. Under each section we encounter the more familiar labels, such as begging the question, special pleading, ad hominem attacks, mob appeal, appeals to authority, etc. There are plenty of examples and exercises plus the occasional cartoon for illustration.

An appendix at the end titled “Writing with Clarity and Reason” explains how writing an essay is much like presenting an argument. It offers excellent ideas on structuring and presenting essays.

This book is broader in scope than *The Fallacy Detective*, but it is written for an adult, non-Christian audience. Nevertheless, it should be suitable for mature Christian teens.

## Art

Art is a very broad area, but I have focused on a narrow aspect with the following selections. Drawing skill is a form of literacy—being able to communicate with pictures in this case. So with my limited space, I have selected two resources that everyone might use for basic instruction.

### ***Mark Kistler's Draw Squad***

by Mark Kistler

Fireside Books/Simon and Schuster

(order through homeschool distributors or bookstores ISBN# 0-671-65694-5)

[www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)

\$17.00

Mark Kistler studied under former Disney artist Bruce McIntyre for twelve years. McIntyre produced his own *Drawing Textbook*, videos, telecourses, and other resources for students to learn to draw, but never quite made the connection with user-friendly children's materials. So Mark Kistler took up the crusade to bring drawing literacy to children via a national public television program and this book.

Drawing, or artistic literacy, is at the heart of *Mark Kistler's Draw Squad*. Author Mark Kistler's basic premise is that everyone can draw. They just need a few basic techniques to know how to get started. As children learn these techniques by working through each lesson, they get immediate and impressive results. Kistler presents the techniques as ten “key words”: foreshortening, shading, surface, size, contour lines, overlapping, density, shadows, attitude, and daily use.

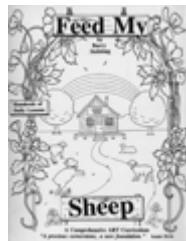
The book has thirty lessons with nine components to each lesson. Consequently, a lesson should be spread out over a few days or a week. Since “daily use” is one of Kistler's keys, he recommends some sort of daily drawing activity—and there are plenty of ideas in the book for that!

Lessons include warm-up exercises, instruction in a new skill, exercises with the new skill, examples, evaluation activities, practice and review, and extended activities.

Children actually do much of their drawing right in the book, but you will also want to have extra sketchbooks for all the drawing they will want to do. A pencil is the only other thing you need—no fancy art equipment!

Kistler's book has a jazzy format with cartoon characters popping up occasionally to make things even more interesting. Lessons are well laid out and easy to follow—a fourth or fifth grader can use the book on his or her own. Younger children will need a little help. The format is so appealing that adults will enjoy using it too. If parents don't know how to draw, they should purchase an extra book for themselves and learn right along with their children.

Mark also has some newer drawing books available: *Mark Kistler's Imagination Station* and *Drawing in 3-D with Mark Kistler*.



**Feed My Sheep**  
by Barry Stebbing  
How Great Thou ART  
P.O. Box 48  
McFarlan, NC 28102  
(800) 982-3729  
e-mail: sales@howgreatthouart.com  
[www.howgreatthouart.com](http://www.howgreatthouart.com)

\$42.95; Bundle Pack—\$59.95

This is a combined art text and workbook for teaching drawing, color theory, art appreciation, perspective, portraiture, anatomy, lettering, painting, and more to students ages ten through adult. Older students and adults without art experience should find this a valuable course. It contains more than 250 lessons plus a packet of 17 paint cards. These are 8½-by 11-inch in size and are a heavy 110 lb. stock. For many of the lessons, students need only drawing pencils, a set of colored pencils, a kneaded eraser, a ruler, an extrafine marker, sketchbook, and posterboard. Most of these items come in the Bundle Pack. Later lessons on painting use pure pigment paints and brushes. A drawing board, triangle, and T-square are also helpful in later lessons, but not essential.

Depending upon the age and ability of the student, this can be a three- to four-year curriculum using one lesson per week. One of the primary goals for the course is that students learn to draw realistic images. However, work with other media and skills, including cartooning, is also taught. You need to select lessons that are appropriate for each student. For example, you might save the painting lessons for older students.

If you want to tackle painting as soon as possible, purchase the Bundle Pack, which includes the book plus a set of pure pigment paints, brushes, Prismacolor pencils, drawing pencils, drawing pen, pencil sharpener, and eraser. Otherwise, start with just the book and purchase paints later so they will be fresh when you want to use them.

Author Barry Stebbing's Christian perspective is evident throughout the course in Bible verses, lesson explanations, art appreciation lessons, and even the choices of examples. The book is written to the student so he or she can work independently. However, younger students will probably need some assistance. Instructions are fairly thorough, so even parents with little art background should be able to help students through all of the lessons.

Art appreciation is incorporated into many of the lessons, and more-focused lessons direct students to the library to locate and copy artists' works or examples from particular periods. Students also research answers to questions posed about art history, styles, artists, etc.

Overall, this is a very comprehensive course. For parents who wish to maintain academic accountability, there are occasional quizzes on art theory and appreciation, with an answer key at the back of the book. This single volume offers a tremendous amount of art instruction at a very low cost. Since students actually work in the book, it is best to purchase one for each student. However, for parents who would rather copy the lessons for multiple children, this is allowed for in-the-home use only.

How Great Thou ART also publishes two less-expensive volumes that cover content similar to some in *Feed My Sheep*. These are called the *Lamb's Book of ART, Books I and II*. For younger children, check out *I Can Do All Things: A Beginning Book of Drawing and Painting*, and for older students, the company's flagship book titled *How Great Thou ART*.

## Online Classes

Do you want to move your family to Asia for missionary work but wonder how on earth you can manage to continue homeschooling your teen? Did you flunk math all the way through high school and now desperately need someone else to teach your child algebra? Do you have an ambitious, bright student who is begging to go to a “regular” school so she can take AP courses? Does your teen want a course on Greek philosophers with Socratic discussion and you don’t have the time, knowledge, or inclination to teach such a course yourself?

All these needs and more can be met with courses available to homeschoolers on the Internet. Homeschoolers are at the cutting edge of online learning because of their openness to new ideas and the unusual needs many families have. For example, Fritz Hinrichs ([www.gbt.org](http://www.gbt.org)) began offering classical courses online back in the 1980s. He has continually developed his courses and delivery methods as new technology and software has developed.

Homeschoolers are not the only ones taking advantage of Internet technology. Even government schools have jumped on board. A challenging dilemma has surfaced as a result. Courses offered by government schools are usually free or of minimal cost to families, while those offered by private organizations can cost hundreds of dollars. But there is a significant nonfinancial cost when a homeschooling family uses courses funded by the government—loss of parental control.

While legal definitions vary from state to state, homeschoolers who enroll in government school courses are no longer considered to be homeschoolers. They are under the authority of the school's teachers rather than that of their parents, even if they are completing their coursework at home under parental supervision. Parents no longer have the final say over course content and requirements unless they pull a child out of the school.

While parents, theoretically, have the ability to oversee what their children are reading and doing, the reality is that in most situations children will work independently, and parents won't know the actual course content. They won't be able to determine in advance if their child's teacher will support or contradict their family beliefs and values. And for those interested in forming a Christian worldview in their children, many government-school approved courses are counterproductive since they adhere to a secular materialistic worldview.

In addition, there are political ramifications of homeschoolers enrolling in government programs that are damaging to the larger homeschool community, but those are beyond the

scope of this book. The bottom line is that the “free” courses often come with a hidden price tag.

Content and viewpoint problems can also crop up in online courses offered by private organizations that hold different worldviews than that of your family. However, you are often able to ask questions about teachers and worldviews in these situations. I would urge you to carefully investigate any such program before enrolling your child. There are many good organizations offering online courses that work well with homeschoolers and are up front about their religious beliefs and goals.

In addition to beliefs and goals, there are also choices about structure in online learning. Some programs use the Internet for automated course delivery. Students log on to a course, work through it answering questions as they go, and receive a grade based on their work. Some such courses are mostly text—like reading a textbook—while others are heavily illustrated with computer graphics and animations. Some courses are largely discussion based—this is especially true of classical education courses. Some use bulletin-board posting as a part of course requirements. Some require separate written work, such as essays that are e-mailed to instructors. Some use the Internet sparingly, making assignments in traditional textbooks, relaying assignments and comments back and forth over the Internet, with an occasional student chat room discussion. Anything that might be done is probably being done by some course provider somewhere.

Also, you need to think about your child's learning style when you choose online programs. Because most young children need more active learning and interaction, online education is rarely a good idea for the elementary grades. However, it becomes much more appropriate for junior and senior high students. Even so, an older child's learning style should still influence your choice of such programs. For example, a sociable child will much prefer online discussions to courses where she primarily reads text material online with minimal interaction.

There are two terms you need to know in regard to online courses: *synchronous* and *asynchronous*. *Synchronous* courses mean there are times when students and teacher are online and interacting at the same time—synchronously. *Asynchronous* courses mean courses are either prerecorded or written material that students may access at any time. There are no chats or sessions where students and teachers interact together simultaneously—unless they happen to do instant messaging. Referring back to my last example of the sociable child, she is much more likely to succeed in synchronous courses because of the real-time interaction with others.

Below are some of the online options. The grade levels served by the courses are noted in parentheses. Reviews of just a few of these follow as examples.

- Apex Learning: [www.apexlearning.com](http://www.apexlearning.com)—nonsectarian; asynchronous (9–12)
- CLASS.com: [www.class.com](http://www.class.com)—graphically interesting courses originally developed under University of Nebraska-Lincoln's distance education program; equivalent to public high school courses; asynchronous; nonsectarian (9–12)
- Clonlara's Compuhigh: <http://compuhigh.com>—asynchronous; project-based learning; nonsectarian (9–12)
- CompassLearning Odyssey: [www.childu.com](http://www.childu.com)—secular; asynchronous; graphically interesting courses (PreK–6)

- Eagle Christian: [www.eaglechristian.org](http://www.eaglechristian.org)—Christian program using textbooks with some on-line interaction (7–12)
- Escondido Tutorial Service: [www.gbt.org](http://www.gbt.org)—synchronous discussions; classical; Christian (9–12)
- K12 (Bill Bennett's program): [www.k12.com](http://www.k12.com)—asynchronous; uses a mixture of online activity, real books, and textbooks; nonsectarian. (The big problem with this program is that it tries to enroll home educators in public school programs so they can get the curriculum free.) See review at [www.grovepublishing.com/curriculumreviews/elreviews/el\\_k12.htm](http://www.grovepublishing.com/curriculumreviews/elreviews/el_k12.htm). (K–8)
- North Dakota Division of Independent Study: [www.thedistancelearning.com/usa/of076.htm](http://www.thedistancelearning.com/usa/of076.htm)— asynchronous; students read from both texts and online lessons; nonsectarian public school program (4–12)
- NorthStar Academy: [www.northstar-academy.org](http://www.northstar-academy.org)—Christian; asynchronous; students access prerecorded lesson presentations and use traditional textbooks; satisfies U.S., Canadian, or U.K. requirements (7–12)
- Oxford Tutorial Service: [www.oxfordtutorials.com](http://www.oxfordtutorials.com)—classical; Christian; synchronous discussions (9–12)
- The Potter's School: [www.pottersschool.com](http://www.pottersschool.com)—Christian; synchronous courses (7–12)
- Schola Classical Tutorials: [www.schola-tutorials.com](http://www.schola-tutorials.com)—classical; Christian; synchronous discussions (9–12)
- Scholars' Online Academy (SOLA), Regina Coeli Academy, Agnus Dei Elementary Program: [www.islas.org](http://www.islas.org)—classical; combination of live conferencing and bulletin-board interaction; synchronous and asynchronous classes. SOLA is Protestant, and Regina Coeli and Agnus Dei are Catholic—all three are branches of the same organization, ISLAS. (4–12)
- Studium Discere Tutorials: [www.sdtutorials.com](http://www.sdtutorials.com)—classical Christian courses; interactive discussion (9–12)

### **Apex Learning Inc.**

315 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 600  
 Seattle, WA 98104  
 (800) 453-1454  
 e-mail: [inquiries@apexlearning.com](mailto:inquiries@apexlearning.com)  
[www.apexlearning.com](http://www.apexlearning.com)

Many high school students who want to take Advanced Placement (AP) courses, even within regular schools, have no access to courses in which they are interested. Even the best schools can offer only selected AP courses, if any. So Apex Learning came up with a solution a number of years ago by offering online AP-level high school courses. They have continually expanded the number of courses available, and they have added general education and foreign

language courses to their offerings. They have also partnered with other companies to link to a broader range of courses, but these are not Apex's own courses.

Among Apex's own courses at present are fourteen AP courses, eight general studies courses (in math, science, history, government, literature, and computer programming), and six non-AP foreign language courses.

Apex primarily provides services to students within traditional schools. However, they also serve homeschoolers. All courses are nonsectarian, suitable for use within government schools.

I have not examined all their courses, but those I have seen clearly demonstrate that there is no common format used by Apex courses. Nevertheless, those I have viewed all are very engaging, thorough, and professionally presented. Courses are well designed and use audio, video, animations, and other multimedia enhancements that make the content interesting.

Students take courses on a regular school schedule with other students. They work with a teacher from Apex or under another credentialed teacher—you could set up an extension class for homeschoolers with your own teacher using the Apex course for content delivery and your group meetings for discussion, collaborative activities, tests, etc. All courses are designed with multimedia tutorials providing the course content. Students access these tutorials online at a convenient time. Online quizzes and exams are scored and recorded. There are usually additional assignments that students complete and submit to their teachers. Some additional activities and discussions are dependent upon students being enrolled with a group. Nevertheless, students can and frequently do use the courses independent of a group.

Courses sometimes require additional books or resources (e.g., a Norton anthology for a literature course or a graphing calculator for math courses) that you need to purchase separately. Sometimes, optional resources are suggested.

Lab sciences are a bit challenging for homeschoolers. If students do not need actual hands-on lab work, these courses are sufficient with their virtual labs. Those who need hands-on lab are required to complete the labs under a qualified instructor in an actual lab.

Prerequisites and course outlines are available on the Web site for each course. Pretests for AP math and science courses help you determine whether or not your teen is ready for a particular course. Apex also offers separate AP exam review “courses.”

Unfortunately, Apex's courses are probably the most expensive online high school level courses available to homeschoolers.



**The Potter's School**  
8279 Raindrop Way  
Springfield, VA 22153  
(703) 690-3516  
e-mail: [director@pottersschool.org](mailto:director@pottersschool.org)

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

\$350.00 per junior high course, \$400.00 per senior high course

The Potter's School has grown from small beginnings as it has responded to the needs of homeschoolers. They have been especially aware of the unique needs of families overseas in mission fields.

They have developed individual, online courses—both core and elective—for grades 7-12. While you could probably put together a complete program with their courses, The Potter's

School does not offer a diploma. Think of them as a course or curriculum provider rather than a school.

Courses involve videoconferencing once a week for ninety-minute sessions. Potter's School describes these sessions: "The live class sessions employ audio, video, chat, an interactive whiteboard and web presentations to enhance the students' educational experience. The live sessions also provide students valuable interaction opportunities with their peers from all over the world." Potter's offers a number of "sections," or class groups, for each course, each meeting at a different time, so families can select a time that works for them. Teachers are all well-recognized specialists in their areas, and they interact with students enough to actually get to know them.

In addition, there are student discussion forums and online "study halls," individual feedback from teachers, an online yearbook to which students can contribute, a student-published e-zine, and even optional overseas trips in which both students and parents can participate during the summer.

The Potter's School has a Christian (Protestant) statement of faith, and all their courses are taught from a biblical worldview. They actually offer worldview courses.

Among their core courses are high school math courses using the excellent UCSMP math series. (These are some of the very best math textbooks, although I do not generally recommend them to homeschoilers working independently because they really do need presentation by a knowledgeable teacher.)

Potter's has a number of lab science courses using Apologia's excellent textbooks. They also offer courses in history, geography, logic, English, computer programming, Church history, Bible, French, Spanish, Latin, and Greek. Course offerings change from year to year depending upon demand.

A number of their courses are AP level, and all courses are academically rigorous. This is not an "easy way out" for students to get through high school.

Because students "meet" at set times, courses operate on a regular school year schedule. Each section is limited to no more than fifteen students, so early registration is a must if you want a particular time slot or even to be able to get into some courses.

The technology for these courses is sophisticated enough that some families might have trouble getting it to work. Potter's requires families to install and test the software they use before registration to ensure system compatibility. Their conferencing software will not work with Mac systems and might even have problems with some Windows systems (e.g., through proxy servers).

## All-in-One Programs

Let's be honest. There are times when you just need someone to put together the whole package for you. Whether or not it meets all your children's learning-style needs or it lines up completely with your philosophy might not matter as much to you as having a program that makes it easy for you to homeschool, particularly if you are just starting out. The package might come from a correspondence school or umbrella school, or it might be a homeschooling program—any of these might be labels for some type of program that gives you everything you need in one nice, neat package.

I'm including reviews here of two very popular programs, each very different in terms of curriculum used and oversight provided (or not). You will find such programs everywhere on the spectrum, from no oversight or teaching services to complete oversight with extensive teacher services. You'll also find programs that offer a wide range of resources from which you can choose, programs that offer you no choices at all apart from their prescribed curriculum, and everything in between. Some programs are Christian; some are nonsectarian. Many follow a fairly traditional approach to education, but some focus on some of the less-standard approaches, such as classical education or even unschooling.

*A to Z Home's Cool* is a Web site that features Ann Zeise's extensive descriptive listings of programs according to various categories so you can check out more options: [www.gomilpitas.com/home\\_schooling/methods/DLPs.htm](http://www.gomilpitas.com/home_schooling/methods/DLPs.htm).

### **Calvert School**

10713 Gilroy Road Suite B  
Hunt Valley, MD 21031  
(888) 487-4652  
e-mail: [inquiry@calvertservices.org](mailto:inquiry@calvertservices.org)  
[www.calvertschool.org](http://www.calvertschool.org)

Average course price is under \$600.00; average Advisory Teaching Service price is about \$280.00—prices are lower for early grades and higher for upper grades.

Calvert offers complete courses for prekindergarten through eighth grade with all materials supplied for each course, including such consumable resources as crayons and pencils. Calvert's strength has always been in their coverage of geography, history, mythology, poetry, and literature, as well as in their teacher's manuals. Art and poetry are included in most grade levels along with basic academic courses, so this is a culturally rich curriculum. Calvert has also created their own math program that adds to the overall academic excellence.

Teacher's manuals provide clear, concise instruction for both the novice and experienced teacher. Even though Calvert makes no such claim, their teacher's manuals effectively teach you how to teach. The quality of individual subject courses within Calvert's program varies from mediocre to excellent. *A Child's History of the World* and other similar books are much better than typical textbooks.

This is not a Christian school, and some of the texts contain evolutionary concepts. However, you are welcome to supplement or substitute lessons reflecting your own beliefs and philosophies for the Calvert lessons. Calvert staff seem to have made good judgments about making assignments from some of these books. For example, in the kindergarten science book there are a few pages about space aliens that have little relation to any science topic. The Calvert manual skips these pages, and so should you.

Prekindergarten and kindergarten programs are a little more challenging than some other programs. Pre-K includes many readiness activities. Reading instruction is introductory and does not use intensive phonics at this level. Kindergarten includes solid phonics instruction through beginning and ending sounds and short vowels. The program includes appropriate work pages and simple readers.

Since subject studies are integrated to some extent, mixing of grade levels is not allowed, with the exception of math. Calvert now offers an option for students to take a placement test and be given a math course at the indicated level. Although these courses are a prepackaged curriculum for each grade level, Calvert allows students to enroll in a program minus the math curriculum or with a “custom math” option. However, Calvert's new math program should please most families.

A second or third child may now enroll in a course already completed by a sibling at a reduced rate since some of the materials can be reused from the previously used course. They get replacements of consumable books, new books when necessary, and a new lesson manual to reflect any changes made.

You may enroll your child and work with him or her independently, or you may elect to include the optional Advisory Teaching Service (ATS) for grades K through 8. With the ATS, tests are sent into Calvert for review and grading by a professional teacher/advisor, who also makes comments and suggestions. At kindergarten level, parents are given progress sheets to use rather than evaluating with tests or grades. Parents submit these sheets along with samples of student work for evaluation by Calvert teachers. Only with the ATS will Calvert issue a certificate of completion for courses.

Calvert also offers enrichment courses: *Beginning French* and *Beginning Spanish* courses for grades 4–8, Levels 1 and 2; *Melody Lane* music course on video for grades K–3 (includes some theory) [\$95.00]; *Discovering Art*, an art appreciation course for grades 4–8 [\$125.00]; and classic literature courses. Enrichment courses are available to those not enrolled in Calvert.

I'd like to give a little bit more space to one type of enrichment course. Calvert's *Reference Library* courses are available at four different levels of difficulty. I would probably skip the first level for kindergarten and first grades and start with one of the others. I suspect the third and fourth levels (\$48.00 each) are the most useful because they target grades 3 to 5 and 6 to 8 respectively—grade levels where reference work is really necessary. These courses each include an appropriate dictionary and thesaurus with a lesson manual. Lessons teach children how to use the books through relatively fun activities. Children do lots of “hunting” for the answers.

Use of enrichment courses for group classes is priced differently than when purchasing for individual use. Call for details.

While you are still restricted on the amount of individualizing you can do with Calvert courses, this is a good choice for new homeschoolers, missionaries, or others who have difficulty rounding up all the necessary materials or creating their own lesson plans. Yes, it is expensive. But Calvert really does make homeschooling very easy for parents while providing an interesting program that works well for most children.



**Sonlight Curriculum**  
8042 South Grant Way  
Littleton, CO 80122-2705  
(303) 730-6292  
e-mail: [main@sonlight.com](mailto:main@sonlight.com)  
[www.sonlight.com](http://www.sonlight.com)

Sonlight is strictly a curriculum provider—not a school or oversight program. But what sets Sonlight apart from other curriculum providers is that they have designed “grade level” programs with carefully selected resources and instructor’s guides that outline lessons for each day using specific pages within the materials provided. In this, they are more similar to Calvert and other such oversight programs. However, there is no option for sending in work for grading, record keeping by Sonlight, or teaching assistance other than what’s available on the discussion bulletin boards at their Web site.

Sonlight was begun by a homeschooling family who wanted to provide the best materials at a reasonable cost that would work for families living overseas and working as missionaries. They wanted to base their programs on the educational philosophy of Dr. Ruth Beechick: structured, yet allowing for maximum real-life learning. Influenced by Charlotte Mason’s ideas, they also wanted to include real books, but at the same time not create a program that required too much time and work from busy parents. These ideas actually reflected the needs of many homeschooling families, not just those in mission fields. As a result, Sonlight grew to become one of the largest curriculum suppliers in the homeschool market.

But Sonlight is not for everyone. They actually have a page on their Web site and in their catalog titled “31 Reasons *Not* to Buy Sonlight.” You should take time to read through this before ordering a program.

Sonlight offers a complete, eclectic, literature-based program integrated around historical themes for kindergarten through high school. They have arranged their program in an unusual fashion. There are thirteen different Core Program Packages, loosely designated for grade levels. However, all of these packages might be used with a range of students over at least three grade levels. This is possible because Core Packages primarily cover history and Bible while also including many read-aloud books plus “readers” (real books rather than reading textbooks). History and Bible instruction are not especially dependent upon skill or maturity levels.

Core Packages focus on one of three broad areas of history: world history, U.S. history, or cultures. Read-aloud books are excellent choices that you would probably love to have in the family library even if you weren’t using Sonlight. Bible instruction uses Scripture and other resources, including Christian and missionary biographies. This is essentially a Protestant program, although the level 8 program presents a very even-handed study of church history and doctrinal issues comparing Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox positions.

Separate language arts, math, and science packages are then combined with your choice of a Core Package to customize the curriculum. Language arts, math, or science packages might be selected for the same grade level or various levels depending upon children’s needs. Instructor’s guides come with Core, language arts, and science packages. Language arts guides refer to some of the books that come in the corresponding level Core Packages, so if a child needs a particular level of language arts, that might dictate which Core Package you choose. Math and science function independently of the Core Package. Elective packages or resources are also available for critical thinking, foreign language, art, music, geography, Bible study, typing, creation/evolution, church history, driver’s education, worldview, and physical education.

Language arts instructor’s guides have built in all of the instruction for phonics, grammar, composition, and most other language skills. I am particularly impressed with the weekly

writing assignments built into the curriculum, since this area is lacking in so many other programs. Additional books in the packages might be for handwriting or spelling, or they might be a dictionary or thesaurus. Sonlight has created some of their own readers for the early stages of reading, but after that they use real books from other sources.

Science packages include the guide, an assortment of books, and supplies for experiments and activities. The guides for both language arts and science all include lesson plans, calendars, instructions, student activity sheets, answer keys, and much more.

For math, Sonlight offers one or more choices for each level. Answer keys or solution manuals are part of each program, but there are no instructor's guides for math.

All Core guides include week-by-week lesson plans with record-keeping calendars, and thorough instructions. In addition, they have geography and timeline activities, study guides for all history, reader and read-aloud books, answer keys, and much more.

Sonlight emphasizes only those activities that have clear educational purposes; make-work projects and crafts are nonexistent. Though parent-child interaction is required at certain times, little time is required for lesson preparation. What I hear from parents is that the hardest thing is getting time to get through all the read-aloud books.

While Sonlight Curriculum's hallmark is the use of real books—literature, historical fiction, and topical fiction—rather than texts, they still use textbooks and workbooks sometimes. For example, they use *Saxon Math*, *Miquon Math*, *Videotext Algebra*, *Singapore Math*, *Spelling Power*, *Apologia* science texts, and *Italic Handwriting*.

While Sonlight sells complete curriculum packages for each subject in every grade, they also permit you to purchase any individual items out of the complete packages or from their catalog.

On its Core Packages (history, readers, and read-alouds), Sonlight offers an eight-week trial period—use it, and if you don't like it, return your program for a full refund. Customers who purchase a Core Package can take 10 percent off the total cost of their order. Prices for the Core Packages (before discounts) range from about \$250.00 to \$540.00, while other packages and materials are less. As an example of how this all adds up, if you were to purchase the *Comprehensive 3* curriculum package (Core, math, language, and science, plus art and critical-thinking electives) as a new user, the total cost (with the 10 percent discount) would be \$810.30 based on 2003-04 prices. When you just begin with Sonlight, there are some extra costs for resources that are used over a number of years. So costs for subsequent years might be lower.

You save even more if you teach children from the same resources whenever practical, even though they might be at different grade levels for math and language arts. Much of the curriculum is nonconsumable, so you can reuse a large percentage of each level in the future.

Sonlight has proven to be an excellent option for families who want something different from traditional curriculum but lack the experience to put it together on their own. I strongly recommend reading through Sonlight's catalog, either print or online, before determining which program, levels, or resources to use. Both the catalog and Web site are loaded with helpful information, plus the online forums provide an opportunity to ask any questions you might have and get input from Sonlight users around the world.

## Computerized Curriculum

I had to create a separate category to cover *Switched-On Schoolhouse*, a computer-based curriculum. This is not the only computer-based curriculum—*Algebra Classmate* (reviewed in [chapter 8](#)) is an example of other computer-based programs. But *Switched-On Schoolhouse* is the only one developed for all subjects and grade levels in a consistent format. Thus it doesn't fit under a single subject-area heading.



### ***Switched-On Schoolhouse 2.0***

Alpha Omega  
300 North McKemy  
Chandler, AZ 85226-2618  
(800) 622-3070  
[www.aop.com](http://www.aop.com)  
\$69.95 per subject or \$299.95 for complete 5 subject set

Alpha Omega first developed their *LIFEPAC* curriculum, a self-instructional learning system using a number of worktext booklets for each subject. Alpha Omega responded to the proliferation of computers and improvements in technology by using their *LIFEPAC* curriculum as the foundation of their new computer-based curriculum, *Switched-On Schoolhouse*.

*Switched-On Schoolhouse* is available for grades 3-12 in a completely computerized form that includes full-color graphics, videos and slides, sound, and Internet excursions.

Many parents love *SOS* because it really allows students to work independently. Parents need to set up the initial program, customize lesson plans if necessary, check student progress—which can be viewed in “teacher mode” on the computer—and review writing assignments. Parents can also build supplemental lessons within the *SOS* curriculum.

Computer equipment should be fairly current for the program to run at a decent pace, for smooth viewing of video clips, and for the use of sound. Listed requirements are a CD-ROM multimedia PC system with 500 MHz or higher processor; Windows XP, 2000, ME, or 98 (2nd edition) operating system; 256 MB of memory; and 200 MB hard disk space. Web excursions are not essential to the curriculum, so an Internet connection is not absolutely necessary; however, the Web links add extra interest and additional learning opportunities.

Bible, math, language arts, science, and history/geography courses can be purchased individually or as complete grade level sets. The programs follow the same general format for each subject. A topic is introduced, then students are given pertinent vocabulary words to learn. Activities and/or games help students to quickly master the vocabulary words. Three games—*Spelling Bee*, *Alpha 14*, and *Vocabulocity*—are integrated into all the courses, but not all of them necessarily in every lesson. The latter two games include some sharp graphics, but they are still nowhere near the level of graphic artistry of the enticing games most young people are accustomed to. After they have played the games a few times, students might feel they are wasting time waiting for the program to go through its graphic routine before moving on to the next questions. Students can skip these games if they simply study the vocabulary words and definitions and find the games unnecessary.

Students read through each section of instructional material on the screen, then hit “Show problems” at the bottom of the screen to work through comprehension activities. Questions are presented in crossword puzzles, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice, sorting, and matching. Incorrect answers are immediately identified, although students are not allowed to correct them until later on. The program goes back to missed questions to give students another opportunity to get the correct answer.

These section questions in all subjects other than math allow students to scan the “text” material to figure out what the correct answer should be most of the time, but sometimes they must make inferences, read maps, or interpret data to arrive at correct answers. Math programs require students to solve problems. If students miss questions, those that were answered incorrectly are presented again. Sometimes hints are given, such as pointing out that the error was in the spelling or indicating a map to which a student might refer to find the answer. However, such hints seem few and far between.

Once students have answered all questions correctly for a set number of lessons, they take a quiz. It is possible to set the program such that students cannot scan material when taking a quiz, so this is when you will really know whether or not they’ve learned anything. (The “open book” option allows students to exit and enter the quiz as many times as they wish, presumably allowing them to check the lesson for information they don’t know.) Some written responses are required in the exercises and quizzes, and parents/teachers must score these themselves. The program alerts parents/teachers to exercises that need grading while the program is in “teacher mode.” Exercises and quizzes are scored by the computer, although parent/teacher override is permitted.

The program is very professional (much improved from the first edition of *Switched-On Schoolhouse*). It allows parents control over which lessons are to be assigned in which order, how lenient or tough to be with spelling of answers, grade format, and access to the Internet. It truly allows students to work independently—a tremendous help for parents with little time to oversee schoolwork. Parents also set up a school calendar that allows the computer to schedule each student’s rate of progress. The computer then alerts students if they get behind schedule.

Extra graphic boxes that expand to add additional information are generally very helpful. The programs move at a fairly good pace for the most part so there’s not a lot of wasted time, as in software of the “edutainment” sort. While answers are each followed by a verbal affirmation (it would be nice to be able to turn these off and just have something like a green light/red light signal), there are no “cute” graphics wasting time between answers and subsequent questions, except in the games.

The content is nondenominationally Protestant throughout all subjects. Biblical concepts appear throughout all subjects, although less so in math than others.

The Bible program offers solid content, including some Scripture memorization. Map identification is added to the typical questions and answers.

The language program covers reading skills, grammar, composition, spelling, and vocabulary. Periodic writing projects stretch skills beyond the short answers students write within the lessons themselves.

History and geography are combined, with geography and map work intermixed throughout lessons. Essays, reports, and special projects expand learning beyond the computer.

Science programs also include a few experiments, essays, observations, and other noncomputer activities.

*SOS* is a very sophisticated system, so it comes with a 180-page manual. You will need to use the manual to initially set up the system, set up the teacher(s), and set up students and courses since it's not an intuitive process. Once you've got the hang of how to do this, it is easy to add additional courses and students. There is so much customization available to users that most novices will stick with the basics until they get comfortable with the program. But once you've used it for a while, you should experiment with all the fine-tuning features, such as the ability to customize your calendar, create assignment options for students, change grade options, and even edit and create subjects. You should also take time to familiarize yourself and your student with the dictionary and calculator available through the "resource center," available at the click of a button.

*SOS* makes life easy for parents, but it's not perfect. As I have encountered in many other computerized programs, requested answers seemed highly debatable. Teacher overrides are helpful in dealing with such situations, but that requires more immediate oversight. I am continually surprised at questions curriculum authors come up with that have little value or might even be deemed incorrect by some children. For example, the science curriculum in one lesson focuses at least two questions on defining geraniums as plants that often grow in window boxes. Here in Southern California, geraniums are a common ground cover or bush and only rarely appear in window boxes since they grow too fast for such containers. And is not the focus on window boxes a distraction from more salient features of geraniums?

A problem cropped up in the math program immediately with the presentation of addition and subtraction problems with regrouping. Given three-digit numbers, students will generally work from right to left to solve each problem, yet the cursor begins on the left, and it is a bother to get it to enter numbers in the logical order.

In the language program, students are frequently working from reading selections, answering questions regarding content. Unfortunately, some of the questions are too nitpicky. For example, one question asked students how many trees were in the backyard (13) in a story about family members being friendly to birds and animals. The number of trees was irrelevant unless you really want children to memorize that sort of detail when reading.

The latest release of *SOS* (version 2.0) has a number of improvements over earlier editions; among them are better graphics, interfaces that are easier to work with, more video clips, built-in Web links (previously they had to be set up separately), and the ability to print lessons, problems, assignments, and records.

Numerous *SOS* elective courses—some for elementary grades but most for high school level—can be added to an *SOS* core curriculum or can be used on their own. Among the electives are *Spanish* and *French* courses for elementary grades or for high school, plus consumer math, state history, *The Story of the Constitution*, *Health*, and *College Planner*.

In summary, I expect that many parents will find *SOS* the tool that makes homeschooling possible for them. Nevertheless, for students this is not a creative approach to learning. It has to be very structured and controlled to be able to work within the computer format.

• • •

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## ADVICE YOU CAN TRUST FROM ONE OF THE TOP REVIEWERS OF HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM IN THE FIELD OF HOME EDUCATION TODAY

The key to successful home education, homeschool veterans will tell you, is determining your educational philosophy and marrying it to your child's learning style. With these things determined, you can then make an informed decision in choosing the right educational curriculum for your child. **THIS IS THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS.**

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- Chapters presenting the Top 100 Picks use a chart system for easy comparison in regard to learning styles to help parents make informed choices.
- Chapter reviews of Top 100 Picks provide thorough reviews with illustrations so parents can have complete information when making these crucial educational choices for their children.

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Cathy Duffy is a household name among homeschooling communities. She is best known for her comprehensive *Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual*. She has been a homeschooling mom, writer, author, curriculum consultant, and a conference speaker for over twenty years.

Cathy and her husband Mike began homeschooling their three sons, Chris, Josh, and Matt, in 1982. In preparation for home education, Cathy began researching curriculum the year before they began. Because of the needs of her children and the struggles other home educators endured trying to determine what materials to use, she continued researching and began compiling and sharing information. She has written many articles for home education magazines in addition to her *Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manuals for Elementary Grades and Junior/Senior High*.

Cathy also shares her expertise as a curriculum consultant to individuals, publishers, and distributors, and, when she can manage a break from the home education routine and her busy family, she speaks at home education events around the country.

Cathy has also been active in local and statewide homeschooling organizations and activities. She served as a board member for Christian Home Educators Association of California and as coordinator and board member of Christian Family Educators of Orange County, California. She has also helped with science and art fairs, organized park days and picnics, and organized and taught group classes.

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