

THE 10 BEST
THINGS YOU'RE
NOT DOING
FOR YOUR

Homeschool



If we're really being honest with each other, as much as we may love it, the Internet can be a time suck.

We turn to the online world with a desire to make our homeschool better, but often the best gets lost amidst all of the good, not-so-good, or just plain distracting ideas.

Shiny crafts and printables abound on Pinterest. Forums are filled with opposing curriculum recommendations. Blogs (including my own) feature an abundance of ideas. And it's mostly good stuff.

But sometimes what we really need in our quest for the better homeschool are actions — things we can do today that will improve the quality of education we are giving our children because they are not just good things, but the best things. And these are those best things.

Doing just one of the ten actions in this book will raise the standard of education in your home. Do more for an even bigger effect. They are easy to implement and you might find that you enjoy them so much more than other things that have been filling your day.

— Pam Barnhill



ACTION #1: READ ALOUD MORE TO YOUR KIDS

Simple Steps

- Peruse [a good book list](#) and choose a book age-appropriate to read aloud. If you have a wide range of ages shoot for the middle of the pack. Good family-friendly read alouds for starting include *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, fairy tales, *The Penderwicks*, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.
- Resign yourself to the fact that read aloud time does not have to be quiet and serene to be effective. Set up some simple rules like 'you are free to play with any quiet toy as long as you are listening' and 'keep your hands to yourself.'
- Just get started. Commit to five minutes a day to begin and build the habit from there. Download the free [Quickstart Guide to Great Conversations with Your Kids About Books](#) for the support and tools you need to begin simple conversations with your kids about what you are reading.

How this can change your homeschool

According to Andrew Pudewa from the [Institute for Excellence in Writing](#), reading out loud to your kids builds a “database of reliably correct and sophisticated language patterns” which is essential to their future as communicators. Since written and verbal communication are vital to any profession, this is likely the most important act you will do in your homeschool. Not to mention the fact that reading good books imparts a wealth of knowledge to our kids.

Pudewa insists that we should start reading aloud to kids while they are young, but it is perhaps even more important to read to them after they get older too. He suggests reading to your kids for hours each day, so whatever you are doing likely isn't enough.

Sarah Mackenzie, host of the [Read Aloud Revival Podcast](#), declares that better relationships is the greatest benefit of extended read aloud sessions. Kids will better remember books you have read to them and talked about with them. According to Mackenzie, the simple act of reading together will strengthen the relationships in your family.

Additional Resources

[Nurturing Competent Communicators](#)

[The Reading Promise: My Father and the Books We Shared](#)



ACTION #2: CHOOSE MORE CLASSIC BOOKS

Simple Steps

- For help choosing age-appropriate classics [consult this list](#).
- Peruse your personal homeschool book list and replace every third book with a work of classic literature instead.

How can this change your homeschool

According to [Jason Caros, headmaster of Founder's Academy](#), classics are “written in noble language, and teach readers important lessons about human nature (life lessons pertaining to virtue and vice).”

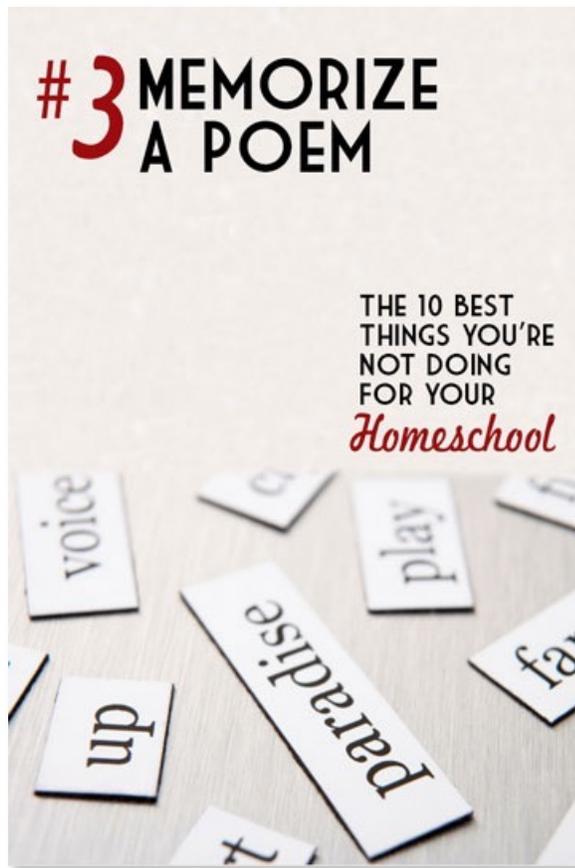
Historical fiction may include historical facts packaged in an enjoyable package, modern stories may be fun and engaging, and non-fiction may be necessary at times, but all are milk compared to the cream of classic literature.

To fully shape the moral imagination of our children, we need to feed them a diet of cream and consume less watered-down milk.

Additional resources

[The Importance of Classic Literature](#)

[Teaching Classical Literature Classically](#)



ACTION #3: MEMORIZE A POEM

Simple Steps

- Choose a short enjoyable poem for memorization like a selection by [Robert Louis Stevenson](#), [Hilaire Belloc](#), or [Christina Rossetti](#).
- Read the poem aloud daily with your kids until they have it memorized — I bet they do it quicker than you do!
- Lather, rinse, and repeat with another poem.

How this can change your homeschool

Let's return to Andrew Pudewa from his book *Linguistic Development through Poetry Memorization*:

A child's instinctive desire to memorize is intrinsic to language acquisition, yet for the most part we ignore it, or allow it to happen so haphazardly that we miss out on one of the greatest opportunities to build sophisticated language patterns. Poetry

has long served a critical role in the transmission of culture, as it tends to convey the “rhyme and reason” of life in a concentrated and memorable form. But if we don’t provide the content and opportunity for organized memorization, kids will let popular culture be their teacher. In other words, if we don’t provide them with Belloc, Stevenson, and Rossetti, they’ll memorize McDonald’s commercials and Snoop Doggy Dog rap lines. Memorization is not only natural for young children, it is culturally powerful and educationally essential.

So if we want our children filled with the worthy, then we have to fill their heads (and hearts) with content of our own choosing.

Poetry is not the only content worthy for memorization, but it is often the easiest, so a good place to start. Scripture, selections from Shakespeare, great speeches, and helpful tools (like math facts or Latin chants) are easily added to your repertoire once the memory habit is established.

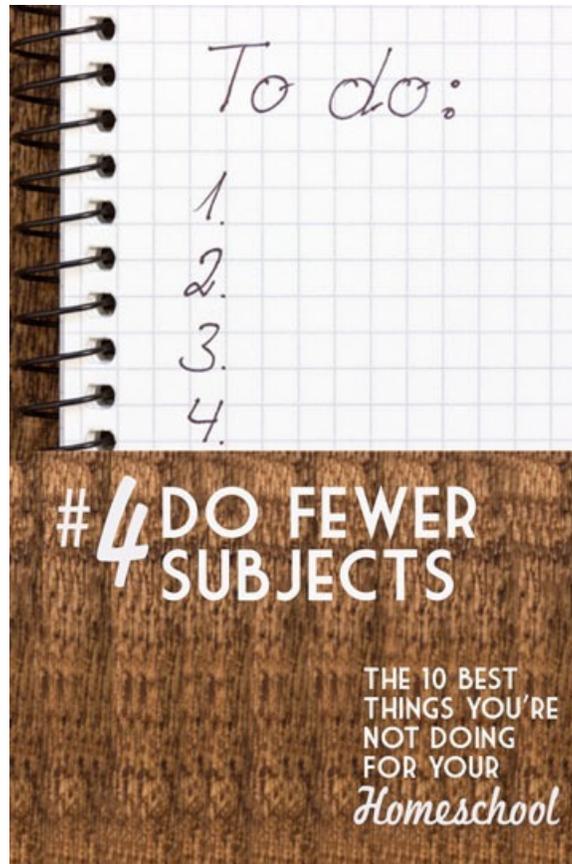
Additional Resources

[Memorization and the Soul: Why, What, and How](#)

[Furnishing the Soul: A Conversation on Recitation with Andrew Pudewa](#)

[The Ultimate Guide to Memory Work](#)

[Help Your Kids Memorize Anything](#)



ACTION #4: DO FEWER SUBJECTS

Simple Steps

- List out every subject that you do in your homeschool each day.
- Turn a critical eye towards this list and put a star beside those subjects you would consider truly necessary for your student's success.
- Carefully consider eliminating most of the subjects without a star beside them.
- Research [alternate schedule ideas](#).

How this can change your homeschool

If you are frantically rushing around trying to get 20 subjects done in a day there is a very good chance that nothing will be done well. By paring down the schedule to a few things on which to focus, you can make sure those skills are being done well.

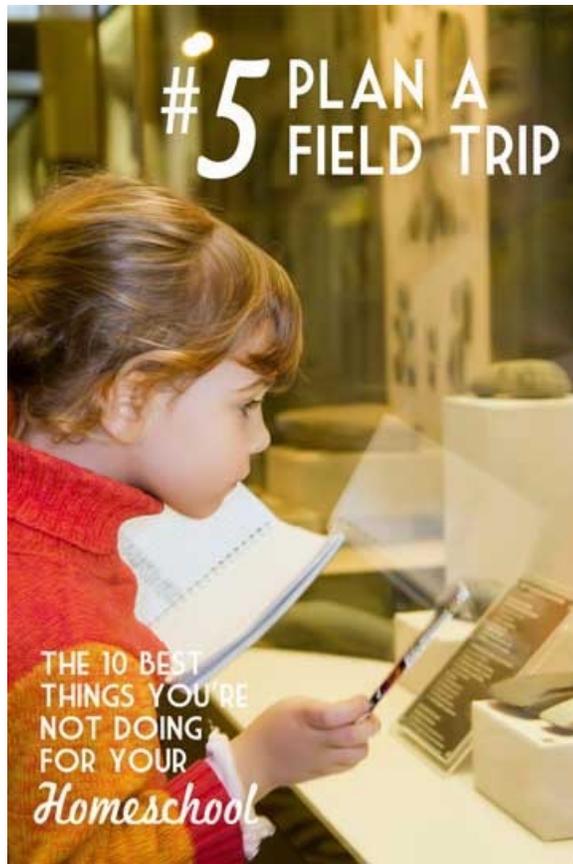
For elementary students they need mastery of the skill subjects of language arts and math, plus a rich diet of classics read aloud (see above), tons of outdoor play, and interesting field trips (see below).

Moving into the middle and high school years, add more subjects but use creative scheduling techniques like [block scheduling](#) or [loop scheduling](#). This will limit the number of subjects studied in any one day, yet the student will still accomplish all the necessary subjects.

Additional Resources

[Simplify the Curriculum](#)

[Multum non Multa](#)



ACTION #5: PLAN A FIELD TRIP

Simple Steps

- Peruse local websites, the chamber of commerce or homeschooling resources and pick a place to visit.
- Either alone or with a group, visit a museum, performance, science or nature attraction, local business — anywhere to learn.
- Once there explore, read, discuss, enjoy.
- Repeat often.

How this can change your homeschool

Sometimes we get so caught up in getting things done that we forget one of our greatest gifts as homeschoolers is to get out and learn in the real world.

We spend our time reading about the natural world instead of being in the natural world. We look at pictures of things in books instead of seeing them in person. We listen to recordings of music instead of watching a live performance.

Homeschooling gives us the freedom to take advantage of so many more opportunities than our schooled counterparts. While informal, the education we receive while attending the theater, a national park, or the art museum is just as valid as the formal education we receive while sitting at a desk — and often more effective.

Our lives should be as rich with these opportunities as our budget and schedule will allow.

Additional Resources

[The Ultimate Guide to Field Trips for Homeschoolers](#)

[Your State Tourism Board](#)

[Official Museum Directory](#)



ACTION #6: BECOME A LIFE-LONG LEARNER YOURSELF

Simple Steps

- Start a book club of other homeschool moms to read classics or study homeschooling books like Charlotte Mason's works.
- Take a class either at a local venue or online. Learn a new skill or creative endeavor.
- Develop yourself professionally as a homeschool teacher by attending a local conference, a state or national convention, or through audio lectures and online resources.

How this can change your homeschool

Mom as student is valuable to your homeschool in a number of ways. First, you will be modeling an example and love of learning to your student. Janice Campbell, homeschool mom of four graduates, says:

Beyond this, you will be the first and most influential learning model your student will see. If you approach new projects and concepts with curiosity, humility, and a positive attitude, your children are likely to respond similarly. It is important that they see you actively pursue topics that interest you, because there are no greater catalysts for learning than curiosity, interest, and wonder.

In addition to modeling learning, the act of learning ourselves reminds us of the difficulties of being a student. As I struggle to learn to knit I have a greater empathy for my kindergartener struggling with letter formation. I am reminded of how difficult learning a new skill is and how often I need to practice with patience to master it.

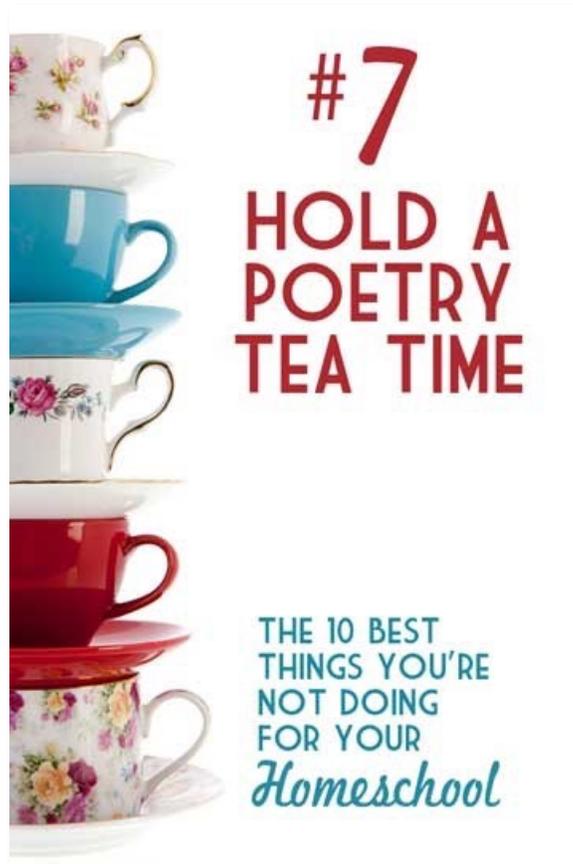
Additional Resources

[A Collection of Great Audio Lectures and Podcasts for Homeschoolers](#)

[Craftsy](#)

[Book Discussion 101](#)

[Start Here: A Journey Through Charlotte Mason's 20 Principles](#)



ACTION #7: HOLD A POETRY TEA TIME

Simple Steps

- Put water on to boil while you have the children set the table with linens, gather teacups and plates, and devise a centerpiece (candle, simple nature display, flowers from the yard).
- Pour everyone's favorite hot drink (Sometimes we do tea. Sometimes we do hot chocolate.) and set out a simple snack. It can be store-bought or homemade.
- Grab a collection of poetry books, your current read aloud selection, or some treasured picture books.
- Eat, drink, and be merry as you share, read, and discuss.

How this can change your homeschool

Julie Bogart from Bravewriter says:

Poetry Tea Times offer you and your children a break from the fast-paced demands of homeschooling, parenting, and household running... When you pair poetry with tea, your children create a connection between contemplation and rest, while also creating memories of serenity and joy.

Ritual is extremely important in the formation of family culture and the ability to set aside time from the busy whirl. Time set apart is special, cherished, treasured, and remembered. Does it have to involve tea? Or poetry? Neither are necessary, though both are nice.

Some homeschool family tea rituals might revolve around religious practices, others might have a standing read-aloud time after dinner in the evening. The important thing is to choose the ritual, make it a moment set-apart either by the food you eat, the decor, the action, or a combination of any of those, and to be consistent with its practice.

Additional Resources

[Poetry Tea Time](#)

[Easy Tips for Poetry Tea Parties](#)

[Ten Books of Poems for Kids](#)



ACTION #8: BE CONSISTENT

Simple Steps

- Change your mindset to one that allows you to see homeschooling as your part-time job.
- Get up every morning and act just like you would if you were going to work! If you consider not homeschooling that day for some reason, pretend you have to call a boss and explain.

How this can change your homeschool

This one is huge. I speak from experience. Wake up everyday and *just do the school*. Hit or miss homeschool never helps anyone. Not your kids and certainly not you.

The more the kids get into a routine of waking every single day, sitting and doing school, the easier it will be on everyone, regardless of your method of education.

Whatever you choose to do for school, do it routinely. The kids will come to know what is expected of them, they will argue and fight with you less, and it will get easier as you go along. End of story.

Additional Resources

[Stay Motivated and Consistent in Homeschooling](#)

[Daily Faithfulness](#)

[Be Careful About Letting Life Derail the Home Education Train](#)



ACTION #9: PLAN A MORNING TIME

Simple Steps

- Make a list of subjects or activities which you feel are important, but often get the short shrift in your schedule and set aside for more scholarly pursuits. These could include reading aloud, memorization, picture study, composer study or music appreciation, prayer, Bible study, etc. **The key to morning time is that these are all subjects that the entire family can do together as a group.**
- Use the post [Six Steps to Plan a Circle Time](#) to draft a first plan. Jot this down in a notebook with a pencil.
- Live your plan for a while. You will likely change a few things, drop a subject, add a reading, switch things around. Eventually a habit will develop that will become routine.

How this can change your homeschool

From Cindy Rollins:

That is what MT (Morning Time) is. It is the daily collection of little grains of time that add up to a lifetime of learning. It is the daily sowing of the seeds of learning for the long haul... Over the years, MT has kept the same structure but it can also be fluid as to categories. I think it is a great place to put all those categories which fall outside the usual school routine: composer study, artists, Plutarch and Shakespeare, even nature notebooks are each perfect for MT because these are the important things that often get squeezed out of the traditional school day. We may even find when we scoot over just a couple minutes a day to make room for these easily neglected areas the connections the mind begins to make start circuits for our children which far surpass the mundane teaching of subjects.

I have read the complaint from a mom in an online forum that she did not need to name these practices and put them in a basket — she had been doing all of these things for years. I say good for her, but the act of naming something (basket optional) is at the very heart of its existence. The first thing Adam did in the garden was name the animals. This naming is important stuff. By giving a name to a set of practices we do (a liturgy, if you want) we elevate it, make it more that what it was before.

The practices of morning time — prayer, reading aloud of worthy literature, memorization, singing, the arts, discussion — are the very heart of human learning, and the most important things you will do all day. Call it what you will, but name it, own it, and let your homeschool be transformed.

Additional Resources

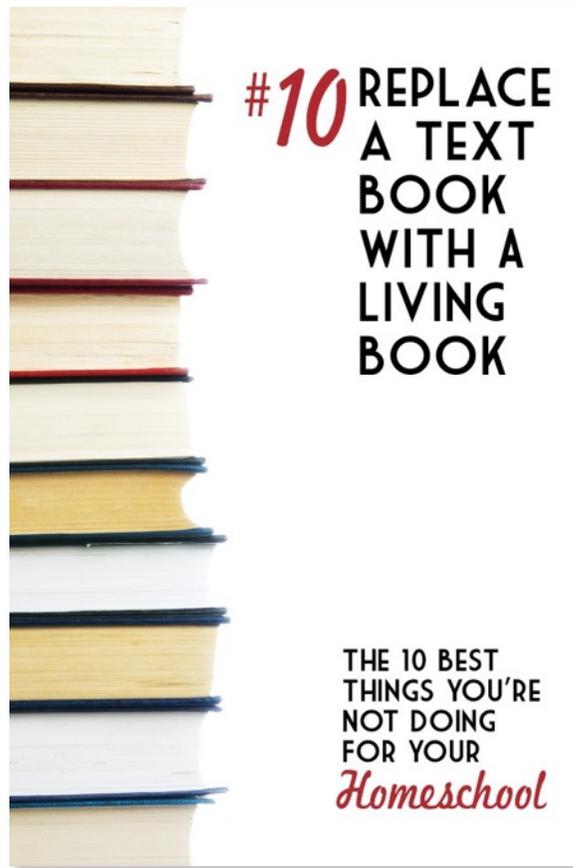
[Your Morning Basket Guide](#)

[Your Morning Basket Podcast](#)

[The Long Haul: On Morning Time](#)

[On Morning Time](#)

[Cindy Rollins' 31 Day Series on Morning Time](#)



ACTION #10: REPLACE A TEXTBOOK WITH A LIVING BOOK

Simple Steps

- Choose one text that is sucking the life from your studies, one that everyone dreads, that has become dry and boring.
- Research alternatives by chatting with friends, perusing online forums, or searching book lists. Strive to [find a living book](#) (fabulous definition and websites with lists at that link).
- Put the text aside and instead use the living book to complete your studies.

How this can change your homeschool

First, what is a living book? In order to define the difference it might make, we must first explore what makes it different from a text book. From [Simply Charlotte Mason](#):

Living books are usually written by one person who has a passion for the subject and writes in conversational or narrative style. The books pull you into the subject and involve your emotions, so it's easy to remember the events and facts. Living books make the subject "come alive." They can be contrasted to dry writing, like what is found in most encyclopedias or textbooks, which basically lists informational facts in summary form.

[Brandy Vencel](#) calls living books the "medium of ideas" as opposed to fact. Since we want to fill our children's heads with big ideas instead of small facts, living books are a valuable way to learn.

Living books will interest our students, make them think about the topic at hand, and prompt discussion because they do not come with comprehension questions at the end of the chapter.

Living books are what I reach for as an adult when I am interested in a topic and want to learn more. I would never choose a text and submit myself to the boredom. Why would I do the same to my kids on a regular basis?

Additional Resources

[31 Days of Charlotte Mason: What is a Living Book?](#)

[The Ultimate List of Living Books Curriculum](#)

[MacBeth's High School Science](#)

Remember, you do not have to do everything on this list. Start small, and well, by choosing the one thing that interests you most and then do it! Once it is established as habit, try another thing from the list. Your homeschool will be better for the small, consistent steps you take.