

LEARNING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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Some of my fondest childhood memories are being gathered around my grandparents table with a feast set before us. Every Sunday after church, aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighbors would stop by for a visit. My grandmother would whip something up on the stove, and there always seemed to be plenty of food to go around. If I close my eyes, I can still see my grandmother in the kitchen, my grandfather at the table tapping his foot, humming a song, and the children running around the house. Being surrounded by friends and loved ones made even the simplest meals like beans and cornbread taste delightful. Now that I have children of my own, I want to keep those traditions going so they can have the same kind of memories. These memories are such a part of me that I thought, if I can still vividly experience sights, sounds and smells from decades past perhaps they'll remember our educational journey at home just as well.



LEARNING IN THE KITCHEN

After having my fourth baby, I had to come up with some new ways to incorporate learning into our everyday lives. My oldest who is 6 loves being in the kitchen, so I started using the space as a learning opportunity. One of the first things I did was pick up a recipe box so my daughter could do her copy work by writing down her favorite recipes. I try to let my children bake at least one day a week which gets messy, but they love it. We pull out our measuring cups and spoons and talk about fractions and all the different ways we can measure one cup of flour or a teaspoon of salt. We talk about what kind of things happen when you add certain ingredients like what makes bread rise or what happens when you mix vinegar and baking soda. These lessons in Math and Science are happening organically, and they don't even realize that "school" is taking place.







INSPIRATION FROM BOOKS

If you were to ask any veteran homeschooler, “What’s one of the most important things they did with their children?” reading books would certainly be at the top of their list. Even though we read books throughout the day, and at bedtime I always try to read first thing in the morning. When I make reading a priority, I can feel better about letting other subjects go if the day gets complicated. During the warmer months, my children like to eat breakfast on the porch. I usually take this time to read our picture books from the library. We often let our books lead our days and we set off on adventures inspired by our stories. We have also made the habit to gather around the table for tea and poetry once a week. Sometimes we whip up a loaf of banana bread while other times we use our box of tea cookies we keep on hand. We have really come to enjoy this part of our week and I simply adore that poetry has become a part of our children’s lives. It opens up a world of beauty and strengthens their descriptive vocabulary. They settle in for their delicate little treats and cups of tea, even our 2 year old slows down to soak up the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, while he sips from his special cup.

"Dear old world
You are very lovely
And I am glad to be
alive in you"
Anne



I love good literature. You can learn so much from just one book. One of our favorite things to do is to make a recipe inspired by what we are reading. We have made butter and maple syrup candy after reading *The Little House* books. We made crepes when learning about Paris and while reading *Madeline*. Our friend, Winnie the Pooh, inspired us to make homemade biscuits topped with honey. We have a Winnie the Pooh cookbook that we love. It's filled with all sorts of delicious honey recipes. Making books come to life with food is just one more opportunity for learning. Even if a book doesn't specifically talk about food, you can use the time period or where the story takes place to get cooking in the kitchen.





THE WORLD AT YOUR TABLE

Our family dreams about traveling the world one day. Sometimes my oldest talks about eating macarons in Paris, which sounds amazing, but for now we bring Paris to our table. I've always viewed food as one of the best gateways to learn about other cultures. After reading the book *A Cricket in Times Square*, we made a traditional Chinese meal. This led us to want to learn more about the Chinese culture, the foods they eat, and how you say Cricket in Chinese (Xīshuài 蟋蟀). We colored a Chinese flag with chalk pastels, ate with chopsticks, and finished our meal with Fortune cookies. Food is connected to memory which makes me believe that involving food while learning will create a lasting foundation in their minds.

GATHER AROUND THE TABLE

Dinner time is an instance that we can all slow down and be together. It's something that our family values and is a part of our everyday lives. Even though we have moments of picky eaters and spilled drinks, it is still a time of joy and shared conversations. A huge part of our homeschooling is narration, and the dinner table is a perfect time to practice the art of storytelling. My husband tells us about his day, and the children share what kind of discoveries they have made during their day. Meals can be a joint effort to bring everyone together to help make the foods that nourish our bodies. The kids pitch in and help prepare the vegetables while my husband teaches them about the different kinds of herbs he's using. Everyone participates in smelling and tasting the herbs while learning what foods they best pair with. The older children help set the table, and sometimes we light candles to make the ordinary feel special.





My husband is a musician so music is a huge part of our lives. We use dinner time to play some of our favorite composers, like Johan Sebastian Bach. Our easy go to meal of spaghetti can be made into a romantic dinner by incorporating candles and playing Italian opera, and adding a bit of fresh cut basil helps give the sauce in a jar a little extra home cooked comfort feel, too. Some days we pretend like we're at a French café eating baguettes and soup with the sound of French music filling the house. Daddy speaks in a funny French accent and tells us about his time spent abroad. We savor these times together as a family.

Food and memories go hand in hand, every time the stove fires up I like to think that one day my kids will close their eyes and see me in the kitchen, their daddy singing a song and the kids running around the house.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kerina Clay is a mother of four, two girls and two boys. She resides in WV with her husband Peter. She is a Christian who loves exploring God's creations, eating healthy, learning, books, and playing with her children. Kerina's homeschool is inspired by Charlotte Mason philosophies and the ever expanding curiosities of her little ones.

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