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Homeschooling On A Shoestring

Tags: budget curriculum HSLDA lanuage math science social studies

In homeschooling vernacular, expensive is a relative term. While the average cost is about $500 a year per child, this goes down a bit in families with more children, since resources can be shared, membership costs are not multiplied, etc. If your children have been in private school for $4,000–10,000 a year per child, you're probably planning a vacation with your homeschooling savings and are only reading this article to kill some time! But if they've been in a conventional school setting or are just beginning school, it's prudent of you to count the cost, to be prepared. You'll want to invest in your core curriculum materials first, then add other items as your budget allows

It is possible to homeschool with just a Bible and a library card, but most of us will add a bit. I was able to homeschool seven children at a time for less than $100 in a year, once I had accumulated a few non-consumable resources. Here are a few ideas to homeschool on a shoestring budget:

Save on textbooks and other curricular materials

- Borrow or rent books—check with your local support group.
- Purchase used books.
- Public school give-aways. (Use with extreme caution because of worldview content and the need for teacher texts that you usually won't get—but I've seen atlases, encylopedias, typing practice books, maps, and more.)
- Library sales.
- Educational "wish lists" to family members for gift-giving times
- Use your state's standards of learning listing and check out appropriate library books.
- Use *World Book's* standards of learning with library books.
- Use a major textbook publisher's scope and sequence with library books.
- Use *What Your Child Needs to Know When* or *The Checklist* (or *Teaching Children* by Diane Lopez) as a guide to what to teach, then use library books or living books.
- Utilize an all-in-one program such as *What Your 3rd Grader Needs to Know* or comprehensive workbooks (not an ideal long-term solution, but helpful in a financial pinch).
- Laminate your books and answer keys with clear Contact™ paper for durability.

Use multi-level curriculum

Use grade-specific materials for each child for skills subjects such as math and language arts, then use multi-level materials for content-area subjects such as science, social studies, character/Bible, art, health, etc, working with all of your children together, to economize on time *and* money! Here are a few suggestions:

- Konos curriculum
- Diana Waring's history guides
- *Bible Study Guide for All Ages*
- Greenleaf Press
- Five in a Row
- Student of the Word
- Janice Van Cleave's science books

- Beautiful Feet guides
- Daily Bread
- Valerie Bendt's *Unit Studies Made Easy*
- *Heart of Wisdom*
- Tapestry of Grace
- Science in the Creation Week
- Considering God's Creation
- And many others

Re-use your material for a later student

Invest in reusable, non-consumable texts rather than workbooks. This works especially well for:

- Math textbooks
- Language arts texts
- Most unit study guides
- Games
- Living books (including both fictional and non-fiction literature)

Don't make it complicated

Math + language arts + well-rounded reading/hands-on discovery in other subject areas = a common sense basic curriculum for little money. For example:

- K-3rd—Ruth Beechick's *The Three R's of Learning* ($12 for math, reading, and language) + *Five in a Row* ($25 for literature-based unit studies) + Bible + library card = $37 and all items are non-consumable (re-sellable)
- 4th-8th—*Learning Language Arts through Literature* ($27; activity book optional) + Saxon math ($70) + Bible + library = $97 (all non-consumable)

These totals would be even lower if the materials were purchased used; books could be re-sold to recoup some of the funds at the end of the year.

Save on school supplies and furniture

- Stock up on inexpensive spiral notebooks in August—they won't be that inexpensive again all year, and they are good for school work, phone messages, and more. The wide-ruled ones give more space for lettering and numbers for younger students, while the college-ruled variety are more popular for middle schoolers.
- Paper—again, lowest pricing of the year
- Home computer—doesn't need to have bells and whistles; check classified ads in print and online. Some stores offer educator discounts on hardware as well as software.
- Art-quality colored pencils—Not the cheap, waxy ones. These are worth a little more, since they are easily sharpened, store well, offer good paper coverage and true colors (and don't melt in the car!).

Budget-minded lesson planning

- Inexpensive spiral notebook
- Print planning pages from the Internet (if in the public domain)
- Computer
- White board
- Journal
- A planbook with spaces large enough for several children

Frugal field trips

Field trips can help excite a child about an upcoming topic, or give closure to a topic already covered. Many facilities offer group rates; invite another family to join you to meet the minimum and provide “socialization” at the same time! Other venues offer student discounts or family discounts (one family of 12 got a group discount and the cashier gave the husband the bus driver freebie!). Theme parks, state fairs, historic sites, and other public attractions often promote discount days for homeschoolers.

Join your state and local groups

Consider joining your state organization and local support group, where you will often find timely information on discounts, contests, workshops, book and clothing swaps, sports programs, field trips, and more—what a bargain for a small fee each year. The membership itself will often qualify you for an educator’s discount, and membership in some state organizations yields a nice discount on your HSLDA membership!

Suggestions by subject areas

For a more comprehensive overview of the expenses involved in home education
read the article, “What Does It Cost to Homeschool

Math tools on a tight budget

- Manipulatives—beans, popsicle sticks (rubber-banded by tens for place value, with ten-stacks tied with ribbons to denote hundreds), homemade flash cards
- Math games—*True Math, Monopoly, Set, 24, Number Jumbler*
- Anything with money or points
- Family Math
- Measuring cups, scales, tape measures
- Food (evenly cutting a pizza = fractions, fairly distributing M&M’s = division)
- Cooking
- Calculator skills
- Calendars
- Car gauges
- Clocks and watches

Language arts aids

- Language games such as *Scrabble, Guggenheim, Taboo, The Play’s the Thing, Scattergories*, etc.
- Dictionary and thesaurus
- Tape recorder/video camera
- Computer
- Puppet theater in a doorway (a sheet tossed over a tension rod, with Dollar Store hand puppets)

- Newspaper (a day old from the neighbors is probably timely enough)
- Penpals—especially relatives
- Toastmasters club
- Book signings at a local bookstore
- Spiral notebook with magazines, scissors, and gluesticks (Cut out things that make a B sound and glue onto the B page; Cut out M words and glue onto the M page….)
- Collections—build organization and classification skills; can help with alphabetizing

Science on a dime

- Backyard botany
- Raising animals (for fun and profit!)
- Nature journals
- Animal habitat studies
- Weather observation
- Geology of your yard
- Broken appliances to be disassembled to figure out how things work
- Batteries, flashights
- Kitchen chemistry (melting/freezing/boiling points; solutions; etc.)
- Food chemistry! (crystallization in fudge; yeast multiplication, gluten and carbon dioxide development in bread; caramelization)
- Cars, bicycles, lawn mowers-machines/maintenance
- Scout handbooks
- Camping (rustic)
- Extension service, Master Gardener program, etc.
- Local clubs, including robotics and other interests
- Science and nature museums, observatories, botanical gardens, zoos, farms

Social Studies on a Shoestring

- Large map on the table, protected by a clear plastic layer (available by the yard at fabric departments; generally under $3)
- Fill-in blank maps of countries, continents, states, etc.
- Ethnic restaurants
- Genealogy research
- Look up the day they were born (library research, also falls under Language Arts!)
- Government publications
- Local museums, historical societies
- History re-enactments
- Historic landmarks
- Travel
- Geography of various regions you have visited (or would like to visit!)—foods, people,
- topography, history, government, etc.
- Town and state government buildings and meetings
- Homemade timeline

HSLDA

This resource is provided by the Home School

Legal Defense Association's *Early Years* website as a service to the homeschooling community.

To subscribe join HSLDA or visit its website, please click here.

Author: Vicki Bentley

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