I growl when my husband calls me fickle, but when he’s not looking, I (sometimes) admit it. I say that only God’s direction for our homeschool will do, but I can be hoping for human “permission” when His guidance—and even what I see in front of my face—don’t “make sense.” Any time His way doesn’t seem sensible, my mind has been misshapen by secular ideas.

Why else did I waste time ignoring everyone’s favorite learning materials: cliffhanger, breathtaking, unforgettable, inspiring stories! But, no, I started with dry-as-dust tomes … even when my kids couldn’t remember them two weeks later and weren’t motivated to learn more. Sure, I talked about “lifelong learning” but was inoculating against it by using dead recitations of isolated factoids. Meanwhile, my sons begged for great biographies, historical tales, and (vicariously thrilling) exploration epics that brought events, principles, and decisions to life. I had my foot down, though, until I realized that the books they craved weren’t candy but meat! Ah, “permission granted!” Well, the Lord didn’t make the Bible into an impersonal schoolbook with quizzes; instead, it effectively trumpets the most crucial truths through the story-lives of those following (or not) the Way! If such narrative teaching is good enough for the Book that shapes eternal destinies and instructs nations, why couldn’t I use narrative to teach everything else?
Thus began our good-book-collecting journey. I now have 25,000. No, that was not a typo. There are many wonderful treasures out there, and they deserve to be within reach of our community’s kids! Our collection, the Children’s Preservation Library, now serves area families, and wonderful volunteers keep it humming. Happily, when I started searching for the gems, the discards coming out of public libraries (my main purchase source, directly or from homeschool families selling their local discards) were awesome. They enlivened almost every famous astronomer, mathematician, explorer, painter, inventor, spy, shipbuilder, king, and queen; they allow kids to walk through the impactful decisions of historical actions (proving the benefits of God’s principles) by plunking fictional kids into the center of real events. It has been a profound joy to see young readers cheer as these books bring their interests to life!

Of course, that is why they call them living books—because the learning always comes through living characters (be it a bird in a science book, an Indian girl in a study of tribal life, or a 14-year-old boy who is servant to Brutus at the real Battle of Philippi). Never, in a living book, will you see factoids separated out of a story line and splattered around the perimeter of a two-page spread that features, not story, but a big photograph in the middle . . . the assumption being that modern kids won’t read blurbs more than two sentences long and will really only look at pictures. Hey, if there is no story line, then pictures are a relief. But story penetrates deep into the heart and paints inner pictures. Dissected factoids are mere crumbs for the mere brain, and truth is bigger than that!

Such living books cover fabulously diverse and worthy subjects; they connect with your child’s God-given interests to draw them in. Want some examples? I’ll select faves from the varied reading lists SchoolhouseTeachers.com had me assemble. These are accessible on their website, so you can explore these fascinating fields using delicious living books . . .

**Museums**

- **You Can’t Take a Balloon into the National Gallery** by Jacqueline Preiss Weitzman (K–Gr. 4)
  Children follow balloon blowing past Washington’s famous sites and into National Gallery of Art.
- **Joke’s On George** by Michael O. Tunnell (Gr. 1–4)
  Famous painter, Charles Willson Peale, tricks George Washington at his unusual museum.
- **Rocks in His Head** by Carol Otis Hurst (Gr. 1–5)
  Boy’s passion for studying rocks pays dividends at museum during Great Depression.
- **Carl Ethan Akeley** by James Clark (Gr. 5–12)
  This naturalist and taxidermist created the now-common diorama method to preserve and display animals in museums. How does this relate to “shotcrete” and Akeley’s innovative building repairs? Find out!

**Photography**

- **Pioneer Bear** by Joan Sandin (Gr. 1–3)
  Fact-based picture-book shows itinerant 1800s photographer trying to take picture of bear!
- **Snowflake Bentley** by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (Gr. 1–4)
  Fascinating! Bentley explored the uniqueness of snowflakes and worked to photograph them—before they melted!
- **Click! A Story about George Eastman** by Barbara Mitchell (Creative Minds, Gr. 2–7)
  George Eastman was an important camera inventor: think Eastman-Kodak Corporation!
- **Natural Wonders** by Vicki Cobb (Gr. 3–12)
  Photographing science phenomena
- **Matthew Brady: Civil War Photographer** by Elizabeth Van Steenwyk (First Book, Gr. 5–10)
  Brady realized that photography could record major historical events!

**Art**

- **Math-terpieces** by Greg Tang (Gr. K–4)
  Addition is more fun when totaling items in famous artwork!
- **Sky Tree** by Thomas Locker (Gr. 2–6)
  Lovely paintings follow a particular tree through the seasons.
- **Giotto Tended the Sheep** by Sybil Deucher (Gr. 2–8)
  Ah, if only all children’s biographies were like this: tender, warm, sweet, and yet filled with meaningful learning (about a medieval painter, here).
- **Michelangelo** by Ernest Lloyd Raboff (Art for Children, Gr. 3–9)
  It is hard to top Raboff’s series!
- **Benjamin West and His Cat Grimaklin** by Marguerite Henry (Gr. 4–10)
  You knew I had to mention this super-charming, true story of the gifted boy

---

1/4 Square Ad

To Be Determined
who learned to make paintbrushes from a neighboring Indian and whose loving Quaker parents struggled to reconcile his God-given gift with their doctrine on images. Worthy and inspiring!

- **Second Mrs. Giaconda** by E. L. Konigsburg (Gr. 4–12)

### Foreign Language

- **Sequoyah: Cherokee Who Captured Words** by L. Patterson (Garrard’s American Indians, Gr. 1–5)
  Warm and inspiring!
- **Cock-a-Doodle-Doo!** by Marc Robinson (Gr. 2–6)
  Onomatopoeia (like rooster sounds) in other languages. Fun!
- **A World of Knowing** by Andy Russell Bowen (Gr. 3–10)
  Story of Thomas Gallaudet, who sought better living conditions and communication for the deaf.
- **Words from the Exodus** by Issac Asimov (Gr. 7–12)
  Asimov’s humanistic worldview should be filtered, but his insights on English’s roots in Bible passages are fascinating.
- **Navajo Code Talkers** by Nathan Aaseng (Gr. 8–12)
  Navajo language is so complex that native speakers used it as unbreakable code during World War II!

### Frugality

- **The Whistle** by Benjamin Franklin (All ages)
  Franklin told this zingy parable to warn against wasting money.
- **Bored—Nothing to Do!** by Peter Spier (Gr. K–3)
  Think you haven’t enough toys? Boys dream up fun from leftovers in a barn. Funny!
- **Edward and the Pirates** by David McPhail (Gr. 1–4)
  Kids discover that reading helps them imagine expeditions!
- **Richard Wright and the Library Card** by William Miller (Gr. 1–4)
  African-American man teaches himself to read with virtually nothing.
- **George Washington's Breakfast** by Jean Fritz (Gr. 1–6)
  Young boy who wonders about Washington’s breakfast gets benefits from no-cost inquiry!
- **The Bee Tree** by Patricia Polacco (Gr. 2–6)
  Grandpa teaches that extra riches (literary honey) can be found in books if one seeks.
- **Watchwords of Liberty** by Robert Lawson (Gr. 3–12)
  This “cost-effective” collection gives many famous American quotes in one inspiring book.

Such books may not be on your public library’s shelves, for they usually offer only the books of the moment, but prod their database. Use a curriculum that points to great reads so they are the main event. Cover your theme through art, science, biography, and more. You’ll find gems through interlibrary loan and online sources. Probe used bookstores and private/parochial/collegiate education department libraries. Look for books that respect the reader as a spiritual being (not just a biochemical brain), with creamy paper, generous spacing, quality narrative, worthy content, and living characters. Grandma could purchase some as gifts. Maybe there is a private living-books library in your area (see our website). Enjoy the treasure hunt!

Michelle has always loved books! From teaching herself to read at a very young age to making her baby sister patronize her pretend childhood library, she today has a collection of 25,000 vintage living books: Children’s Preservation Library (www.ChildrensPreservationLibrary.com). Naturally, her award-winning TruthQuest History (www.TruthQuestHistory.com) curriculum harnesses the incredible potency of these great books, along with pithy and supporting spiritual commentary.

Michelle Miller