

A Letter Of Testimony

I wanted to share with you the email that made me know that SOW was the choice for my family over Weaver, HOW, ect... really anything else on the market...It helped me and might help others out there like me. Who want a Bible base curriculum not just one that taught the Bible...But your cost is so much less than theirs. And another plus is you can use any reference books you already have.

Sher,

Dear Sher,

I wrote this summary about 9 months ago to a lady I knew who was considering SOW - she wanted to more about how it worked on a day to day level - and it's been since sent out about a dozen times to people who come to the SOW message groups wanting information. SOW is hard to picture until you actually have the books in your hand, so this summary might not answer every question, but it might give you a general idea of how it works. The beauty of SOW is that you can adjust it to suit your family (as you will see we have).

Warning - this is really long!

I hope this gives an overall idea of How To SOW. I'm no expert, just someone who had the same questions and after almost two years of SOWing finally has a few answers!

The first thing you should know, is that this is THE most Godly curriculum I've ever seen (and I sell used curriculum, so I see a lot of it).

How to explain it without taking up your whole day? *It's more of a tool than a curriculum* - I mean, you could go out and buy every book she recommends and do it exactly

as it's laid out in the manuals, but you don't have to. She gives you the way she did it - but it's open-ended, so that if you don't happen to have the same Bob Jones science text that she has, then you can very easily substitute your own text/resource/library book (or skip that part altogether).

The framework of the program is the Scope and Sequence. These are one page charts that give you an entire years' listing of topics, by week. So for Week 1 it gives the Scripture chapters you will read, the Memory verses for that week, the Science topic for the week, the Bible Character etc (you can see samples of the Scope & sequence at their website) It's so handy to have it all at a glance like that. And if your children are like my son - I only have the one :(- they have a copy of this in their book as well, so they know exactly what they'll be doing each week too.

So you *Read the Scripture chapters* and *then you start using the tools* she's provided.

First is Language Arts

"Outlining" the important ideas and events in the chapter you've read. She provides sheets for the younger children to do their simple outline on, and a page of directions for the more complicated (older level) outline. This gets the children doing the basics of an inductive Bible study - without bogging them down in a lot of jargon.

"Penmanship & Memory Verse". The child writes out the Scripture verse as Handwriting practice, at whatever level he/she is at, whether manuscript or cursive/italic, calligraphy etc. As they are writing they are starting to learn the verse. A few more minutes spent memorizing (we do about a verse a day) and by the end of the week the section is memorized.

"Vocabulary Study" uses words from the Scripture memory verses and the key words of the week (i.e. 'sin') The child looks up 'sin' in the concordance and writes out the Hebrew spelling, the phonetic spelling and the definition of the word, sort of similar to the Principle Approach.

"Topical Study" comes next: using the Scripture memory verses,

and a Bible dictionary, Webster's dictionary, and/or concordance the child looks up the topic, say it's 'sin', and writes a short summary of what the definition of sin is, and tries to find what this weeks' verses are saying about sin. At the lower levels this is a one sentence summary or a picture; for the higher levels it is a paragraph or two, or more. Then they try to make an application to their own life in either sentence(s) or paragraphs. i.e. God does not like it when we sin, we need to confess our sins to Him, etc. Last they write a corresponding New Testament verse that summarizes best what they have learned. This to me is the best part, it's so amazing to see how much my 10(now 11) yr old son has gotten out of this simple study.

“Character Study” is sort of the same, only focused on the character of the lesson - Adam, Cain, Abraham, Lot, Moses etc. Sometimes the character is one of the names of God and what it means. Using the character trait chart (a list of Godly and ungodly character traits and the reference verses to go with them) the child has to figure out if this character was godly or ungodly, and make application to their own lives - God didn't like it when such & such happened, so I shouldn't do that either - that sort of thing. Again, I'm always surprised by the depth that these questions pull out of our son!

“Setting” is drawing a map of the area in which the events take place, and labelling them appropriately. Usually this is a map of a geographic area, but sometimes it could be drawing the Tabernacle, or a specific city.

“Commentary” is a summary of all of the above - what happened in the Bible story (the events), what resulted, what do we learn from this, how can you apply this to your life. We found this to be the most difficult - I was brought up in Public School - we weren't taught how to think like this!

And again, for each of these things there are instructions for the younger children (usually filling in a worksheet, or drawing a picture) and more detailed instructions for the older ones (a paragraph or mini-essay or a hands-on-project).

Well that covers Language Arts!

Before you start to think this is a lot - it IS a lot - I started selecting different things each week - so we might do Read/Outline/Vocabulary & Commentary this week and next week (with the next Scripture section) we would do the a different set of 4 or 5 items. Depends on your children:).

Science, History, & Geography

“Science, History & Geography” are covered in chunks. For Year 1, Science is emphasized because you're studying Creation Science (Genesis) & Earth Science, so there's not as much History & Geography till the last few weeks of the year. Most years have it about equally divided - again in lumps (3 weeks of science topics, followed by 3 weeks of history topics, something like that). She recommends starting with Year 4 for

high schoolers simply because that way they finish the whole New Testament - but the great thing about this program is that you can do it any way that works for you -there are no rules!

“Science” She took the chapter headings from the science text she already had and came up with an outline, so this week the topic might be 'Weather', next week it might be 'Planets'. You could use the same text that she used (Bob Jones) or just use any book you have around that covers each topic. She gives several general project starters for each topic - "make a chart of plants" etc. so you can get your child doing something constructive, whether you have the same text or not. You can also improvise (if you want to) and go further with the topics or do less and just read about those topics together and not do any projects. A lot of people incorporate Charlotte Mason ideas into SOW with their younger children and just read and narrate, and skip much of the extra writing. We do more hands on projects, but my son is only 10. I know of several families with high-school-age children who use something like Apologia science because it's more structured and easier to put onto a transcript.

“History” uses basic texts as references, but you could substitute any book you prefer (She

doesn't just say "Read chapter 12 in some text book" as other curriculums do). Instead, she tells you the subject, you find a book you like at whatever level you need. So for World History we're using an A Beka text I already had as a reference, and have added historical novels, Usborne books, etc to fill it out with.

Geography is more of a Social Studies concept - basically you're researching about a particular region of the world, continents in the first year, and then more specific groups & regions after that. What is the land like, what are the people like, what customs do they participate in, are they Godly or not. The project ideas she gives can be adapted for any age - from simple crayon pictures to 500 word essays.

Creative Writing

Each week she lists ideas for creative writing exercises that go along with the topics of the week. Some of the ideas we just talked about, or read some of the suggested extra reading that she recommended, but didn't do the writing.

Electives

We haven't used many of these, they tend to be more for a family with several children, so it was a bit hard to do some of the activities. But she makes suggestions like: "have a Passover meal" and recommends a book to tell you how to do it, or perhaps a drawing lesson (ie animals when studying animals in science) So they're simple enough ideas, but also easy to substitute an Art course or crafts or some other activity if you wanted to.

Spelling

There is an extensive list of spelling and grammar skills (ie alphabetical order, prefixes, singular/plural, verb tenses) Using the Scripture references for the week you dictate to your child all or a portion of the verses and if they make mistakes those are the spelling words for the week. Also, any words that they misspell in their other writings for that week can go on the spelling list. They then look the words up in a Bible dictionary, and an English handbook and tell what part of speech it is, or re-write the word in its present/past/future tense, things like that. There's enough here to get through to gr 12 - we've only used the first few pages so far! I figure we have several more years before he needs to learn it all.

Same with "English", there is enough to last quite a while. Same format as Spelling, with more emphasis on grammar and word usage and sentence structures. Each page gives directions for finding out something like: "what is a subject of a sentence" The child looks up the topic in his English handbook and writes the definition. Then he/she goes through that week's Scripture and underlines the subjects of the verses, (this is done on the child's Penmanship page - she/he wrote the verses out earlier in the week, now s/he is using that page for his English study).

Literature

is a list of recommended reading and three very useful tools for analyzing what you've read. A 'Poetry' page gives directions for finding the rhythm of the poem as well as locating the main thought in the poem, and making application to Scripture about the poem. The 'Short Story' lesson asks the child to select some words from the story (vocabulary - I help with this) and answer questions about what happened in the story, what is the main thought etc. The 'Fiction/NonFiction Lesson' is similar- These generic lessons can be used with ANY story - it's so simple - I have shelves full of literature study guides, but these 3 pages give you exactly what you need to use with any piece of

literature in a very user-friendly manner! "Prayer Letters" (I should have started with this, it's the first thing we do each day). Teaches the child to pray, by writing simple prayers

based on the acronym PRAYS (Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield, Supplication). Each day they write a short prayer Praising God for something or Asking for something or Repenting for something etc. This is really simple for the younger ones, and can be expanded for the older ones by requiring paragraphs instead of sentences.

Conclusions:

The thing I like best about how they've laid this out is that it is not someone else's doctrine - I've used several different publishers' material (ie Rod & Staff, A Beka, Christian Light) and you always get certain doctrines/beliefs coming through. I have no objection to that, but it's refreshing to not see that on every page - You are free to interpret the Word of God for your family, according to whatever beliefs/convictions you have and there's nothing in the curriculum that will cause your child to wonder why his book says

something different from Mom & Dad.

A total change of life - we were never slaves to any curriculum, but it is so thought-provoking that it takes some getting used to. *They recommend that you really take it slow the first few months - in fact, they recommend that you do the first lesson over a period of a month* (it would usually take a week). We did this, and did the next two lessons over a period of 2-3 weeks each, because my son was not used to doing so much thinking for himself. It wasn't til about March that I really started to feel comfortable - mind you, we didn't have Internet then either, so I had no source for support unless I called someone long distance. I'm sure with the discussion boards I would have "caught on" much more quickly.

It was very difficult at first, in terms of getting my son to complete the work - it was so different from filling in the blanks and short answer questions where the answer was somewhere in front of you. I was also requiring a bit too much of him the first few months - after I relaxed a bit, things went more smoothly and now he wouldn't give it up!

I'm still awed by some of the work he did. When we put all his work into a binder at the end of the year I couldn't believe how much there was - it didn't seem like we were doing nearly as much as we used to, but in fact it was much more!

Overall we aim to spend about 2 -1/2 - 3 hours per day this year, Gr 5 - this includes Math & other things that we do. As I said, we don't do everything - there are tons of ideas that I haven't even mentioned about character training and family devotions, and money/time management. She has provided a Godly answer to just about any circumstance, from menu planning to how to teach the toddlers.

I'm really convinced this is a great tool, not only for the children, but for me, too! It has really brought the Bible into our daily lives like no other curriculum - and it is noticeable that our son has learned more about the Bible than he had learned previously using things like Rod & Staff etc. I hope I haven't overwhelmed you - I'm really interested in getting the word out about SOW - it has really changed our home.

God bless you as you make your decision!
Ontario, Canada