

Why Homeschoolers Love To Read

I saw the headline in Monday's *Harvard Gazette*: "Life Stories Keep Harvard Bibliophile Fixed to the Page." My first thought was, 'I bet he was homeschooled.'

He was.

The article describes the experience of Harvard University junior, Luke Kelly, who grew up in Mississippi and was homeschooled for most of his childhood. Much of his time was spent reading and he developed a passion for books and literature.

Why did I suspect that a bibliophile college student was homeschooled before even reading the article? Because most homeschoolers love to read—I mean, really LOVE to read. Many of them develop this affinity because they have the time, space, and freedom to read when they want, what they want, how they want.

Released from standard schooling constraints that dictate reading materials and create arbitrary reading levels, homeschoolers learn quickly that books are vital tools for knowledge and discovery. They are not the props of arduous assignments. They are vibrant narratives that entertain and edify.

With homeschooling, reading is not a separate subject to be covered at certain times in certain ways; rather it is an integral and seamless part of overall learning. Trips to the library are not reserved for 40-minute blocks once a week with a librarian-led lesson. Homeschoolers often spend hours at the library, scouting the shelves in search of a good story, seeking librarian advice when needed, exploring the vastness of its real and digital resources.

And boy do they read! My older daughter has read more books in the past six months than I read in my entire K-12 public schooling stint.

Homeschoolers are also able to learn to read at their own pace, on their own timetable, following their own interests. With mass schooling, reading is regimented. Children learn to read in a specific way, following a specific curriculum, at a specific time. Increasingly, that time is being pushed to remarkably young ages. Kindergarteners are now expected to do the serious seat-work previously reserved for older children. Even preschoolers are being pressured.

Erika Christakis, author of *The Importance of Being Little*, writes about the dramatic changes in early childhood education. She explains that much of this change originates from more standardized, Common Core-based curriculum and high-stakes testing requirements. Christakis writes:

“Because so few adults can remember the pertinent details of their own preschool or kindergarten years, it can be hard to appreciate just how much the early-education landscape has been transformed over the past two decades...A child who’s supposed to read by the end of kindergarten had better be getting ready in preschool. As a result, expectations that may arguably have been reasonable for 5- and 6-year-olds, such as being able to sit at a desk and complete a task using pencil and paper, are now directed at even younger children, who lack the motor skills and attention span to be successful. Preschool classrooms have become increasingly fraught spaces, with teachers cajoling their charges to finish their ‘work’ before they can go play.”Teachers are beginning to internalize these standards, rather than question them. As assistant professor of education, Daphna Bassok, and her colleagues at the University of Virginia discovered: In 1998, 31% of teachers believed that children should learn to read while in kindergarten. In 2010, that number was 80%.

Many kids who are not developmentally ready to read on this increasingly pressurized, standardized school timeline are then slapped with a learning disability label and given an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to get them caught up to the herd. This can often lead to deep resentment, not only of reading but of learning in general.

Homeschoolers avoid the standardization and regimentation of forced schooling, and their learning is often much richer and more meaningful as a result. It’s also more joyful.

So I wasn’t surprised that a college bibliophile was homeschooled. I would have been surprised if he wasn’t.

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