



ARTICLES BY BETTY WARD CAIN

Answering a Mother's Questions

These are excerpts from a conversation I had with a mother who was home schooling her child. I gave her some practical ideas and thought you might benefit from some of my answers:

SUSAN: I am homeschooling my daughter...of course, she's only three and a half, but I started doing preschool with her over a year ago and she's on to kinder. work right now. I'm going to have to take a break with her and study music, or something...I'm running out of things I think she's ready for! :)

But I love it, and will continue to do it. I know a few people doing the virtual school, but I plan on doing traditional home schooling.

What subjects and grades did you teach?

By the way, I loved school...really...and I love talking to teachers!

BETTY: I taught kindergarten for almost 30 years. (My first year was in 2nd grade and then I switched to kindergarten.) I loved this age. They are so eager to learn and there is so much to help them with at this age. People who didn't understand kindergarten thought we just played all day. There was a lot of learning going on and we had to do it orally because they could not read. We had to invent ways to teach them and make it fun. This was the first experience with school for

most kids and we wanted them to enjoy it, so yes, we did play a lot, but it was constructive play. Our games were educational, our math lessons looked like play, our science lessons were done outside, etc. Most people did not understand it was important what we were doing. I loved every minute of it.

SUSAN: You know, kindergarten has changed such a lot from when I went (which, relatively, wasn't that long ago) in 1985. I went for half a day, we had two recesses, a snack time, a nap time, a time to play house, paint, build with blocks, etc...at the public kindergarten here, now, they go all day long and have no nap time, and they really drill them.

I just don't think all that's necessary. I do "school" with my daughter (three and a half years old) one hour a day, four days a week max, and she can already write and read many things independently and has great critical thinking skills. I love doing her school with her...she's already tackled most of what they're teaching in kindergarten, and I haven't really had to push her at all because she enjoys doing it.

Although she knows her numbers up through 20, I haven't really thought much about starting addition and subtraction. Do you have any suggestions? Is it best to use manipulatives, like maybe a bunch of blocks or pennies, or is there some other way? And I certainly don't remember...do they learn to tell time in K?

BETTY: It sounds as if your daughter is ahead of the game. Things have changed since I taught kindergarten. The year following my retirement, kindergarten went to all day. That is just too much for young children in my opinion. We did addition and subtraction in kindergarten. Begin with manipulatives. Use some objects that are two different colors at first such as: I have 2 red cars and I have 4 blue cars, if I push them together how many do I have. Do this with different objects several times. Then you can go to same colored objects, then pictures of objects and eventually numbers. I always liked to teach a skill gradually to be sure the students knew the skill completely. We taught telling time in kindergarten, but it was only to tell time by

the hour. I hope this is what you needed to know. I loved teaching this aged child. They are so eager to learn at this age. I tried to make learning fun. My parents didn't understand when they asked their child what they did today and they said, "we played" until I explained it all to them. We made games and the students would play the games, I would check their answers by seeing how they had played the game. They thought it was just playing, but they were learning.

SUSAN: That's a great idea to use different colored things for the manipulatives...I can't afford actually "tools" that they sell, so I'm always looking for ideas. I suppose legos would work! :) Any suggestions you have are more than welcome...I'm always looking for ideas and ways I can do things without spending money.

BETTY: When I began teaching kindergarten they did not budget supplies for us. We had to gather up whatever we could and use it. I purchased a book that I wish I could remember the name, but I took their concept and made my own games. The idea was to make up some games using manipulatives for the child to count, add, subtract, etc. One was cards with a large slice of watermelon which you could easily duplicate yourself. Then they had taken watermelon seeds and spray painted half of them white and half black. You could then give the student number cards to count out the objects; or addition or subtraction problems to find the answers using black for one number and white for the other. The book was full of ideas: photographer/lima beans with faces on them; airports with planes made from some sort of sticks used by a dentist; (I finally bought a bag of small airplanes to use.) You could just let your imagination run wild with ideas. I made a set of 10 cards for each game and put it in a rubbermaid box along with the manipulatives and labeled the box. Then I would have a pocket for each student with the numbers or problems I wanted them to work on that week. Some of the slower students may have 2 ones, 4 twos and 4 threes. Another student may have all the numbers from 1 to 10. I would even sneak in the number zero because they needed to know that concept as well. When the student completed all 10 cards, they would raise their hand

and I would check their work. Then I had a small book in their pocket as well. Inside it I would put the date and a smiley face. When their book was full of smiley faces, they would get a reward. The students felt so proud of themselves for their accomplishments when they could take their smiley book home and show their parents--even the ones who only did the lower numbers. Hey, you shouldn't have gotten me started. Now I can't stop. I loved teaching.

SUSAN: Really, you could go on forever and I would be willing to listen. I do not have a network of other homeschooling mothers (nor do I really want one, I am just not a very social person) so I don't get a lot of feedback with what I am doing. In fact, I'm pretty much doing it all alone, so it's really nice to talk to someone. :)

From your experience, do you think it is better to focus more on sight reading, or phonics? I've been doing some pre-reading words with Isabella (I, a, go, up, is, for, you, the, and, away, etc...) but it almost seems easier for her to just concentrate solely on phonetics. She's got the beginning sounds concept down (I just love hearing her go around saying things like juh...juh...juice starts with j!) but she has problems with ending sounds. I'm not really sure where to go, because she can rhyme easily, but when I'm trying to get her to sound out a word she can't get past the first sound very well.

BETTY: I taught phonics and sight reading. The phonics comes first. I taught the short and long vowel sounds and then started with simple words to sound out like: cat, dog, bed, did, not.

The vowel sounds were the hardest, but they are in most all words. There was a little story that helped my students learn the short and long vowel sounds. I will try and remember it and write it out for you.

SUSAN: That would be great!!

BETTY: The attached story should help your child learn the short and long sounds such as:

Long A as in acorn

Short A as in apple

Long E as in elephant

Short E as in eagle

Long I as in ice cream

Short I as in igloo

Long O as in octopus

Short O as in oval

Long U as in unicorn

Short U as in umbrella

DEAR READER,

I SENT SUSAN THE PDF FILE OF THE VOWEL STORY. IF YOU WOULD LIKE THE FILE, JUST REQUEST IT AT jaybcain@gmail.com AND I WILL SEND IT TO YOU AS WELL.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS YOU WISH ANSWERED, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME AND IF I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER, I WILL TRY AND FIND IT FOR YOU, OR IF YOU JUST WISH TO TALK, I WOULD LOVE THAT, TOO.