

Organizing and Cleaning Your Home

By Lorraine Curry



When home is in order, it seems that life is in order. It's no wonder, since God is not the author of confusion or chaos. A disorderly house can easily destroy the peace of an entire household, especially when something needed immediately cannot be found. But when we get organized, our frustrating moments will be fewer, and we will have more time for our families, for homeschooling, for ministry, or for working towards other goals.

You can spend several days in a row organizing and cleaning your whole house; or you can spread your work throughout weeks, months or even a whole year, by doing one area or room as you have the time. This is how I've cleaned recently. First I noticed that the top of the wardrobe with its silk flowers, and pictures needed cleaning; then I cleaned a shelf. Another day I washed the dining room ceiling. And then yet another day emptied and cleaned the pantry, which was a real mess, as it is a catch-all, being behind closed doors. At the same time, a couple of the children cleaned the back porch, which is another area regularly needing attention.

A good rule is to have a place for everything and keep everything in its place. If you don't have a place, make a place, or eliminate the need for a place, by eliminating that possession.

Prepare to Eliminate

The most important thing, and the best starting place is to eliminate -to get rid of as much as you can do without. To do this you will need grocery sacks, plastic bags, boxes (or similar containers) and a Magic Marker® for labeling what you plan to store. I prefer boxes because they stay open while filling, and close securely when done. I also like boxes

for trash because large and small articles can be easily tossed into them, and then dumped and reused.

When doing the kitchen, pantry, and bathroom, declutter one room or area (even one cupboard) at a time, and then clean that. For rooms that do not need as much attention or for lighter cleaning, declutter several rooms first, and then clean.

You may wish to sort your possessions into these five groups:

- 1.) items to trash
- 2.) items to keep, clean if necessary, and put back
- 3.) items to keep and store
- 4.) items to give away to a thrift store, individuals, or other charity; or box for a future garage sale
- 5.) items to recycle

Items to Trash

First throw away the really trashy things. This simple first step will make a lot of difference, and will inspire you to continue with your task. Don't stop to read, consider, or ruminate, just toss! Put your trash bags near the trash pickup area for a short while-in a garage, perhaps-and later, if you find you absolutely need something you threw away, you can go through the mess. (Yes, I have done this!)

Items to Keep

The things you will keep and put back right where they were should be dusted, vacuumed, or washed. Scrub everything that can be scrubbed. If you are cleaning out a cupboard of spices, for instance, make up a strong solution of dish washing liquid or other cleaner. Take everything out of the cupboard. Wash out the cupboard (use an old toothbrush to get in the corners) and then wash each item you plan to keep, before putting back. If you have two of one item, you can dump them together, although this is not always wise with perishables. (Our Zephi recently combined two jars of picante sauce when cleaning the refrigerator, without checking for spoilage, and the next day the whole batch was spoiled.)

Items to Store

Are you the type of person who can't bear to part with anything? You can box all those "treasures" that are cluttering your home, label with your marker, and store.

The rest of us will also have some boxes (fewer, of course!) of things that we want to keep but don't need at the moment. These are possessions such as seasonal items and personal keepsakes. If you haven't used something in more than a year, and yet still want to keep it, it would probably be in this category. The exception would be items that comple-

ment your home, such as an abundance of knick-knacks with Victorian decor. But many things in our homes are just in the way. Place these objects in boxes, label, and store under lock and key. This is extremely important, especially if you have young children who like to, and are allowed to, explore. You will not want days and weeks of organizing undone in a few minutes.

Items to Share

As you sort and toss, you may find things that are too good to toss, but are not needed nor wanted any longer. Put these items in separate boxes to give away, or to sell at a garage sale. Label accordingly, but keep these separate from your "save" boxes. What if Dear Husband loads the vehicle, and mistakenly takes Aunt Matilda's china to Goodwill?!

Remember that if a possession is not good enough for you to use or wear, trash it-no one else should have to use it or wear it. But if you are getting rid of something for another reason, and it is still in good condition, bless someone else with it by giving it away or selling it at a garage sale.

Items to Recycle

When you organize your closets and bureaus, you can sort into yet another group. We rarely buy paper towels, but instead use our old cotton clothes that we have cut into 1' to 1-1/2' squares, after having removed buttons, which you may wish to save and reuse for your sewing. These rags, recycled from clothing, can be used for cleaning, wiping up spills, washing cars, stripping woodwork and so forth.

Major Cleaning

Once your possessions are organized, you can begin cleaning. Cleaning is an unending and necessary fact of life, because dirt is part of

this life. I sometimes tell the children that we can look forward to no cleaning in heaven, but here it has to be done. Yet, I tend to neglect major cleaning for as long as possible. Then when we are expecting special visitors, relatives from afar, or the reporter from a newspaper, or when I just can't stand it anymore, we go on a cleaning blitz. One year I cleaned for a month. By the time I was done, I needed to start over!

Start Here

Because the kitchen and bathroom(s) take the most elbow grease and show the fruit of your effort the most, they are a good place to start. It takes me a day or two to do each well. It is best to do the interiors of cupboards, appliances, and fixtures first, as their cleaning alone, especially in the kitchen, could take a whole day. And cleaning appliances makes messes that you wouldn't want on a newly waxed floor. (Oven cleaning usually means spraying on an oven cleaner, letting set overnight-with possible drips-and then wiping clean; while defrosting and cleaning refrigerators is also a messy job.)

Next Day

After the interior of your appliances are clean, make a solution of water and a heavy duty cleaner in water as hot as you can stand. You may wish to wear protective eye wear, and you will certainly want to choose a sunny day, take down curtains, and turn all the lights on. Using a sponge or a wrung-out cloth, wash the ceiling in the room you have chosen to clean first. Rinse your cloth often and change water when dirty. Clean the light fixture next-taking it down to clean if possible, then wash the upper walls, the exteriors of cupboards and appliances in kitchen. Then wash lower cupboards, walls; and in the bathroom, fixtures.

Windows can be done now with clean cot-

ton cloths, paper towels, or crushed newspapers using a spray window cleaner (Windex®) or homemade cleaner (see side bar). Finally, after vacuuming or thorough sweeping (move appliances), attack the floor and baseboards on hands and knees with a scrub brush and strong solution (use rubber gloves, as some of these cleaners are very harsh and drying).

When cleaning anything in this manner, change water often and rinse until the water is almost clear, if you want a truly clean house. Several all-purpose concentrated cleaners available for washing smooth surfaces, such as Mr. Clean®, Fantastic®, or a generic cleaner from a warehouse store, such as Sam's.

After rinsing and allowing your floor to dry, give it a final touch with a coat or two of wax. Keep at it room by room and before long your whole house will shine!

Keeping Order

It really doesn't take long to keep your house in order. A key is to pick up soon after the mess is made, or better yet, never put anything down out of its place. You can have a 10 minute pick up each day before, or after, school. We vacuum once a week or as necessary, after the children have picked up. They can also have weekly chores, such as cleaning their rooms, cleaning the bathroom, and dusting.

Children and Work

God has blessed you in so many ways because of your children (as well as having blessed them with you!). The mutually beneficial relationship that family members share is seldom more evident than in the area of work. Our children make it possible for us to accomplish much more than we could without them. But, since we are a "team," our accomplish-

ments are also their successes and accomplishments.

Working is a very, very important part of education, and one that is almost completely overlooked by most schools. A phrase that I use often with my children is, "There's no fun like work!" I love to work because I love to see the results of work: a clean house, a redecorated house, a weed free garden, knowledgeable children, a quality product, and so forth. It is a real blessing to see children begin to demonstrate responsibility about work, by doing their chores well without being told. And even better is seeing them help in unexpected ways.

To train your children to work, start early, let them have some say in what they would like to do, enforce their choice until it becomes a habit, and let them know you need them. Teach that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Tell them, "Be not weary in well doing," and to do their work "as to the Lord, and not unto men." If you are financially able, pay your children for work well done; for "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Money does motivate, especially if your children are not already overly "blessed." But if you are not able to pay them, don't be concerned about it. They are paid in food, clothing, shelter, occasional trips and treats.

Husbands and Work

Do not try to delegate to your husband. More than likely he is working full time at a job, so whatever he does at home is an additional blessing. Just be thankful that he is supporting you and your children. Many men aren't these days!

My husband has helped a lot in our organizing, with his carpentry skills. For years I kept my fabric in a large hinged box. Every time I would try to find something, I'd make a mess

of everything else. Then we purchased an old wardrobe at an auction, and my he put shelves in it. It is a perfect storage solution for fabrics and notions. Shelves in a closet or even on a wall would work just as well. And he recently built bookshelves for our stock of antique books. They are so nice shelves, even a stranger commented on them. (They go up and around the top of a closet door.) If your husband is not skilled in this area, or does not have the time nor desire, let your boys try some of the handyman jobs. My son when nine, had already built a boat and a tool box.

God and Work

As I was writing the final paragraph of this article the Lord seemed to say, "You're not done yet." He reminded me of how the enemy can use our attempts at cleaning to get us into anger, criticism, and disrespect. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. If we are going to be angry, let's direct our anger at the devil who defiled God's beautiful world with dirt and clutter. And shoot him down with the gospel gun, overcoming evil with good. What an opportune time to sing along with praise tapes, listen to, and pray God's word, and to pray for those we are tempted to get bitter against. Our hands working; our minds, hearts and spirits in union with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Throw away, put away, store away, give away. Have fun in the doing, and enjoy the results-your clean, orderly, peaceful home.



About Lorraine Curry...

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Setting Up Your Home to Learn!

By Cindy Rushton



Homeschooling? Thinking about Homeschooling? BUT...do you have to turn your home into a school? No, my dear friend, you do not need to turn your home into a school. Your home can still be a HOME. A home ready to learn! Ready?

Ready? This is EASY as ABC...

- ♥ **Find a good nook!** It does not have to be huge. Certainly does not need to be expensive. All that is needed is a place that invites your children (and YOU!) to think, work through the studies (writing, reading, studying, proof-reading, projects, experiments...). Ask yourself, "Where do they gravitate toward to read...to research...to write...to print?" Keep in mind that each and every student in your family will be very different during the learning process, but most will appreciate having all of the supplies and equipment in a safe, quiet, comfortable place to study. When deciding on a spot, make sure that the spot has good lighting and a good, solid, clean, work surface. Make sure it is a good spot to think AND work on lessons." Set up the area with a nice table or desk with plenty of work area...comfortable chairs...limited distractions...shelves for books and notebooks...space for a computer and printer...convenient power supply...space for you to sit down and work with them during their lessons... and a specific spot for organizational bins that will hold supplies.
- ♥ **Get supplies together!** You probably have supplies ALREADY in your home. Use our list to remind you of which supplies you will need to gather for homeschooling. Gather them and organize them so they will be ready to

use when your children can snatch time to dig into their studies.

- ♥ **Easy access to materials and supplies!** Don't just gather supplies, give your children easy access to those supplies! Nothing else can encourage your children to dig deeper into studies like having the materials needed to learn AND free reign to use them. Gather the supplies you will need and store them in clearly marked plastic bins and containers. There are SO many options available. Find what will work for you and your family. Get paper and printable pages together. I have always stored ours in our school materials so the children had their materials on hand as they needed it. A quick glance can remind me that we need more. I buy all of our paper, ink pens, pencils, 3-ring binders, etc in bulk at Sam's Warehouse. During the

school breaks, many stores have supplies and paper in bulk for better prices than all year round. That is when we also stock up. We store it on our school shelves and have what we need as we work.

- ♥ **Invest in the best tools!** It may seem to be an added expense, however tools make all of the difference in the world! For example, you can buy a cheap stapler for under \$5.00 OR you can buy a long-arm stapler for \$29.95 at an office supply store. The difference? Well, we have bought SO MANY cheap staplers. They simply do not last. Plus, they are limited in what they can do. Now, contrast that with the long-arm stapler? They are built to last. You can use those for making any size booklet and for regular stapling. Just watch your most reluctant writer when they figure out ALL that they can do with one stapler! \$29.95 will be the best investment ever! ☺ Buy the best as you can. The investment is more than just for equipment, it is investing in your child's education!

- ♥ **Set up a Library!** YES! What homeschool is complete without bookshelves? Ok...what ONE thing is a dream of a homeschooling mother? Yep! MORE bookshelves! ☺ We only had a very, very few books when we began homeschooling. Want to know "HOW" I came into homeschooling? I had no idea what my children should read. I remember hoping that my favorites from childhood could be part of my children's education—not knowing that God had given me full authority to choose what my children could learn in our homeschool. It is funny now that the books that I DID have from my childhood were truly books that were classics—that SHOULD be passed from generation to generation. Of course, that included just a very few books. My

deepest prayer was for God to teach me how to find good books—isn't that SO amazing considering what we do as a business? It did not take me very long until I began finding great places with hidden treasures just waiting for us—used book sales at the library...yard sales...antique stores...even family! My collection grew very quickly. In fact, it took over the few bookshelves that we had and began my life pursuit of MORE bookshelves! ☺ Begin a library in your home. You won't be sorry! Gather the books that you have. Set them up in a logical order that would work for you and your family—catalog like the library? Set up by subjects...or authors? Set up to work for you. Begin to build bit-by-bit. You may want to begin with books that appeal to your child's interests. Or, you may want to begin collecting biographies (our favorites!) or picture books. They will add up quickly. So, how do you make it part of your homeschool? Simply set it up close to where your children study or gather to read. I set up our children's books upstairs in the playroom early on. I put them on their level. I made up THE RULE—you must always put away your book before getting another. The rest is history—or well, years of my children learning on every subject! ☺ Now, I am not nearly as likely to buy too many books now as I was in the early years when we were first getting started—there had to be a limit. Now, we buy the best and notebook the rest. We only buy books that I want to pass down to my grandchildren one day—the others we check out from the library and simply take notes into our notebooks from them (notebooks are also sure to be family heirlooms that our grandchildren will adore one day!). All of our resources are accessible and welcoming to our children. Having them in their own special

place has invited my children to learn at all times as part of our family life. Give it a try at your house!

♥ **Try Notebooking!** Notebooking...ahhh, just the thought makes me hyper! If I could ask every homeschooling family to do just one thing, it would be to just give Notebooking a try. I am sure that if you try just a bit, you will be addicted too! This is the one technique that pulls everything together--studies, research, real life, personal interests--EVERYTHING! It reaches even the most reluctant writer! It makes homeschooling fun and easy! Who wouldn't want to try that? Not just that! Everything that normally clutters up the busy homeschool home can be tucked away into a notebook! All of those books that you have read have great material, pictures, and information begging to be added into notebooks. All of those precious narrations can be safely protected in notebooks. All of those daily copywork lessons can find their home in notebooks on each of the topics that your children love so much. Even those awesome handouts that you have piled up from field trips can find the perfect home in your notebooks! Homeschooling is recorded. An heirloom is built! Just try notebooking! You will love it...and so will your most reluctant writer! How? First, learn about notebooking (we have TONS of information on our website and in most of our books about how to do it!). The basics are as simple as getting your supplies and turning your children loose. Once your children have a "place" to keep their work, the most amazing thing happens—they find themselves becoming more and more addicted to writing. It won't be long and you will find your children digging deeper into their studies. Oh, and it won't be very

long until you will find them hunting for their notebooks when "school" is out and they are just pursuing life interests. Then, you will know that education has become a lifestyle that will continue for their whole life!

♥ **Set up learning areas in your entire home!**

Learning does not just occur during table time or formal lessons. The beauty of a learning home is that children can find learning in every single corner of a child friendly home. Now, I am not advocating that you decorate your home like a kindergarten—in fact, your husband would probably want for you to promptly discontinue reading anything by me if I did. There is something about homeschooling that may excite some families to have blackboards and timelines on the wall...world maps on the dining table (which I think is ADORABLE!)...and art easels in the living room. However, if your husband is like mine, he might prefer that there be Home Interior on the wall rather than that good old timeline (how do you think we got started doing ours in our notebooks?). Rather than home being decorated like a school—why not develop a learning home. Something like a nice, clean library with bean bags and audio tapes/headphones—talk about great for a daily quiet time! What about a game room? Just a few organizers and shelves with all of those PIECES in their very own spot—yep, a man will gladly help you transform that old sunroom into a game room! What about a big comfy couch with room for the whole family to cuddle up for long read alouds? What about a TV area for educational movies, old classics, and the history channel? What about a Writer's Nook set up with all your children need to write and produce books? What about a computer/desk area for projects or a place for your

little builder to tinker around? How about a spot outside to play and "build" settings for their adventures? Oh, and don't forget about a big chest or closet with dress up clothes! Welcome your children and learning in your home!

Have a blast!

The tough part is over and the rest will be a blast! Are you more prepared than you think? Just go back over the list. Set up your home bit-by-bit to invite learning for LIFE! Not only will your children love it—but so will YOU! Have fun!



" Home is not just a PLACE where education happens—it is your primary MEANS of education. Creating a learning environment is the key. Make your entire home an exciting, vibrant place where learning is happening all the time. Make it a child-friendly environment that is rich in interesting, inspiring, mentally stimulating options at every turn. Use your home to engage your children's sense in the learning process and strengthen their emotional ties to the home—the smell of fresh bread baking, the sounds of Baroque Chamber music, the sights of beautiful Scripture calligraphy and interesting artwork. Your entire home should reflect your homeschooling values, from the way you arrange your furniture, to the books you leave out on the tables, to the pictures and verses you hang on the wall, to the way you use your kitchen. There should be no discernable dividing lines between "home" and "education." The natural atmosphere of your home should be alive with learning and life."

Sally Clarkson
Educating the Whole Hearted Child

Rain Gutters—INSIDE!

By Lorrie Flem



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I really like this idea and wanted to pass it on. For easy, cheap, and stylish organization try Rain Gutter Bookshelves! I know what you are thinking, probably the same thing I was. "What in the world are you talking about?"

Read on and give me a chance to explain. They are . . .

♥ **Amazingly easy.** Even I can cut plastic rain gutter to the length we want with an old bread knife. Of course, they will cut it for you at the store if you prefer.

♥ **Amazingly cheap.** \$15 will buy you some great space.

♥ **Amazingly stylish.** Use end caps and they are even attractive. If the standard colors available at your home improvement store just will not work in your house, then walk over a few aisles and pick up some of the new generation spray paints for plastic. This stuff is incredible and will REALLY broaden the shelves' decorating possibilities.

♥ **Amazingly space effective.** No floor space needed! The little chunk of wall space hidden at the side of your television can suddenly become great storage for videos. What about all those little Beanie Babies in your kids' room? Shower toys? Fit

some into the back of your entryway closet and your mittens and hats and gloves and scarves will all be contained. How about adding top to bottom shelves on the back of your pantry door for spices, macaroni and cheese, noodles, potatoes, seasoning packets, cereal boxes, and drink mixes?

♥ **Amazingly effective.** They work for books, videos, and CDs.

A home with "not nearly enough" room, can suddenly have plenty of organized spaces.

Before you think "uh . . . no!" check out some of the pictures and REASONS for them.

These are some links with pictures and explanations that might give you a better idea:

The concept...

http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah_chpt6_p4.html#rain-gutter

A GOOD close-up picture...

<http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/oliver.html>

http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/oliver_2.html



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If that is not exciting enough, we have a special JUST FOR YOU! Regular retail is: \$29.95. Our WEEKLY SPECIAL features our MYOBIB Printables on sale for \$25.00, PLUS free shipping to you, PLUS our special ORGANIZATION 911! HELP FOR THE MESSY MOM workshop on audio!



MAKE YOUR OWN BRAIN-IN-A-BINDER PRINTABLES includes over 260 pages! Pages include the following: Year-at-a-Glance Calendars! Birthday and Anniversaries to Remember! Yearly Events to Remember! Several Cute Options for Undated Monthly Calendars! Our Popular Weekly Goal Planner! Complete Address Book w/ Emergency Information and Contact Information! My Favorite Websites! Special Notes! Daily Planner Weekly Planner Homeschool Planner (complete with homeschool printable pages!)

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Make Your Own Brain-in-a-Binder Printables AND our ULTIMATE Mommy Menu Planner Book on CD...\$40.00

Stocking Up On School Supplies...

By Cindy Rushton



Are you just like me—do you just LOVE the **STUFF**. We all have scraps of paper...art plenthora of school and office supplies? If you supplies...school supplies...and of course, want to make ME happy, just dump me out at creative children. All we have to do is gather Office Depot or Office Max. I could spend and organize those supplies and direct their hours in those stores just perusing the shelves creativity!

of cool gadgets and supplies! And just imagine, my love of those gadgets and supplies works Ready to organize those supplies? Want to use great for homeschooling—isn't God cute to everything that you have to encourage your include the FUN stuff in homeschooling? young students? Okey, dokey! Let's look at what is there and how you can add supplies without going hungry for a month!

For some of you, I know it may sound sick, but the very best way to ensure that our children develop a lifestyle of learning lies with what we provide for them to work with during their lessons. The best way to encourage your young students is to **provide them easy access to all of the best materials** that will encourage them to enjoy creating books, notebooks, projects, pictures, cards, songs, and poems that communicate what they are taking in and thinking upon. That is what this article is all about!

Now we are to the next step in creating books—**gathering supplies for our children**. Oh, if you are on a tight budget, so typical of one income families, don't begin to think that this is where the limits are for you. In fact, this is where you will find that you already have exactly what it takes to turn your most reluctant writer into the next Nobel Prize winner!

Take a look around your home for the

Our Easy Shopping List!

⇒ Paper...

ANY kind of paper is game. In fact, you will need a wide variety of paper for different uses.

We mostly use **110 lb. white cardstock** for most of our children's pages for their books and their artwork. We usually chose either **white or colored 110lb cardstock** for our notebook covers and any notebook pages with artwork or that our children will be using markers or paint a lot. Most cardstock that we have found has been acid-free, economical, and the most durable for a wide variety of purposes.

As the years have gone by and their work, except copywork, has shifted to the

computer, now we primarily produce their work on the computer (scanning in illustrations or using pictures taken on the digital camera as their clip-art. For this, we like to use **20lb. copy paper**. We purchase ours in bulk at Sam's Warehouse so we have it on hand all of the time.

This works great also for pages that we print for their notebooks from the computer. When they were little, I printed those in bulk so they could just grab what they needed without my help. Now, they are very proficient with the computers and can print from my CD sets. Access is EVERYTHING!

Elisabeth has enjoyed using Scrapbooking techniques to design her notebook pages. For this, we have used bright colored paper and acid-free cardstock paper from our local office supply store or Sam's Warehouse. This paper is VERY reasonable. We always have a big supply of paper on hand for our children since we use Notebooking and Book-making for all of their studies. Plus, we are addicted to Scrapbooking, so we MUST have plenty of options on hand for those creative moments when they hit. We choose a wide variety of paper depending on what we need. Here is what we recommend...

- ♥ **110 pound white**...for an art project (great for watercolors and markers and glue projects), book or notebook covers, sturdy pages, and timeline notebooks/books.
- ♥ **110 pound colored**...for book and notebook covers... for sturdy pages... for mounting specimens... for mounting backgrounds for pictures and text.
- ♥ **Any pound**...any color! Great for

adding a touch of color and emphasis to any page.

- ♥ **Printed paper**...for cute combinations and contrasts! We also use cute stripes/prints/florals as backgrounds for our covers and pages. We have found MANY great options right at our fingertips!
- ♥ **Plain lined paper**...use paper for their level of handwriting. We cut out small strips for captions, titles, poems, labeling pictures and specimens. I keep them on hand in our supply cabinet. All the children have to do to write is grab a page and WRITE! (If you need help with lines for your plain paper, check out our website for printable pages with lines. You can print from our website for FREE!)
- ♥ **Copy paper**...for printing off of the computer and Internet.
- ♥ **File folders**...fold in a shutter-fold to make a fun, lapbook/desktop project! Great way to safely produce a whole project book with all of your little books. See Dinah Zike's books for how-to's, information to include, and great ideas! Another great resource that is HOT off the press is Tammy Duby's new book *The Ultimate Lap Book Handbook*. You CAN use 11 X 17 or 12 X 18 paper for nice desktop projects, but the file folders are very sturdy. Both can be stored in your Notebook or in a gallon size plastic bag.

Giving your children a wide variety and easy access BEGS them to get busy learning! Turn them loose!

⇒ **Pens, pencils, and markers...**

You probably already have these on hand! Encourage your children to write and research by having a *wide variety* of pens, pencils, and markers. For notetaking, you will need **pencils, pens, and highlighters**. Most any brand will work fine. For producing your books and special projects, look for acid-free, photo-safe supplies. They will last longer, look better, and be easier for your children to use. Your child may be like Elisabeth and have TONS of fun using **Gel pens**. Those are fun to use for journaling, labeling or hand-writing books. We keep a large supply on hand for Elisabeth to use on her little (and big!) projects! Also, another staple is **brush markers!** Elisabeth loves to use brush markers to illustrate her books, notebooks, and scrapbooks. The tip works much like a paint brush, making them great for coloring rubber stamps or adding color to their book sketches. Watercolor pencils are also great for this! Both of my children have loved to use **watercolor pencils** through the years. Watercolor pencils come in a huge variety of colors and can be used to add a touch of color to any page.

⇒ **Scissors!!!**

Who would have ever thought that there would be SO many options when it comes to scissors? We usually keep many different kinds so everyone in the house (except me when I NEED a pair!) has easy access! We have children's scissors, fabric scissors, embroidery scissors, decorative scissors (For scrapbooking, notebooking, and, of course, book making!), and craft scissors. You

probably have some of these around your home. The key is having them in an accessible place when your children are ready to create. Use scissors to make the books completely unique. We apply many of the ideas we use in our scrapbooks to make the pages in our books very, very special. Check out some of the pages from Elisabeth's and Matthew's books on our website—<http://www.homemade-books.com> for cute samples of how you can use the different edgings to make the pages just perfect!

⇒ **Glue...**

Here again, there are sooo many options available. Each has its own purpose. We try to always have fresh glue. The beginning of the school year is the best time to buy fresh glue because there are so many great Back-to-School sales. Stock up then on your Elmer's or 3M glue sticks, 3M spray adhesive, Elmer's liquid glue, rubber cement, mounting corners, and mounting tape. Keep them accessible for your little ones to freely use. We keep ours in our supply cabinet, ready-to-use at any time!

⇒ **Staplers...**

Not all staplers are alike. We have bought so many cheap staplers through the years that we can certainly testify of the importance of investing in the very best you can buy. We keep the *regular staplers* AND the *heavy-duty, long-arm booklet staplers*. These are especially great for making books and booklets, in addition to any other project your child may have in mind. They are well-worth your investment if your children get hooked on creating

Tips for Financing Those School Supplies!

- ♥ **Buy in Bulk!** Stock up at your local discount warehouse. Or, you may want to keep an eye out for the "back to school" sales and buy in bulk when they sell supplies at their best prices.
- ♥ **Get Freebies!** Many office supply stores offer free paper in exchange for old printer cartridges. Keep your eyes peeled for great offers!
- ♥ **Buy with a Friend or a Few Friends!** Why not split up bulk packages with a friend. Buy up those ink pens, notebooks, pencils, pens, glue, file folders, paper in bulk with a friend and split it up.
- ♥ **Don't forget!** Look around your house for what you already have—we all have SO many great supplies that we may have looked past because they were not gathered into our school bins. Gather them today!

books. You will find them using them regularly!

⇒ **Hole puncher...**

You probably already have one on hand. These are fairly inexpensive. If funds are really limited, buy a hand-held hole-puncher. You can line up notebook paper on top of your page as your punching guide. Of course, the 3-hole punchers are now so much more reasonable and save your time, making them well worth the investment. These can be used for a multitude of uses, but one great way to use them is to create your books in a 3-ring notebook binder style. Your children can design their own covers, hole punch the pages, and add the pages to the binder. Voila! Binding is DONE! Quick, easy, and inexpensively. If this is your option, you can find your binders reasonably priced at your local Sam's Discount Warehouse or office supply store.

⇒ **Notebooks...**

Speaking of notebooks... Our favorite notebooks are the **3-ring vinyl notebooks that have the clear pockets** on the outside so the children can design their own covers. We usually choose the white notebooks (Either 1 or 1 ½ inches thick, although some of the more beloved studies have required larger notebooks.) and fill it full of **plastic sheet protectors**. Then, all our children have to do is add their work each day. This is one of the greatest places to store your information while compiling your book. Of course, we LOVE Notebooking! Our homeschool notebooks have inspired many of the books that we have produced. As topics have grown in our notebooks, we have found PERFECT topics for our books. Everything from our notebooks can be used in our books too! Copywork, maps, narrations, letters, interviews and even illustrations can be used in books. Also, notebooks are the perfect place to store away your books to keep them safe! If you need more help with notebooking, check out our best-selling book *Notebooking! Yes! You CAN Be A Binder Queen Too!*

⇒ **Computer...**

Talk about turning a young writer loose! Our computers today invite our children to learn more deeply than ever before. They have the whole world at just a click away!

Whereas you do not have to have the best and the most updated computer to produce your own books with your children, I am amazed at the prices for great computers today. They have become affordable for every home! We suggest that your computer have a good publishing program. **Microsoft Office** is our pick. It is the most versatile and is now available in a *student edition*—just show your local office supply your proof of enrollment with your homeschool. We use **Microsoft Word** (included in the student's version of **Microsoft Office**) for writing our actual rough-drafts since it also has a built in spelling and grammar check. We use **Microsoft Publisher** (also in the set) for our actual book set-up. We operate **Microsoft Windows XP** for our operating system with our computers. It has a wonderful program that archives our digital pictures into files that are easy to use as clip-art for books and notebooks.

⇒ **Camera...**

Yes, you can use those disposable cameras if that is your only option. However, I must share our mainstay: *our digital camera!* Not only do you save money on film processing, but you can also "paste-and-clip" all of your pictures into documents that your children are writing. Printing is as easy as the click of a button. NOW...if

you have a nice camera, you can still have your film processed in most locations so that you can request a disc with the pictures on it. Those pictures can be used as clip-and-paste into your documents as well. This unleashes those children who are hands-on into a whole new world of writing and documenting what they are really learning. If they are your children who are constantly building, cooking, creating, or tinkering; they can document what they are learning step-by-step in their books and notebooks. Get those cameras out! Turn those little ones loose!

⇒ **Other "essentials" you probably have...**

The extras are what makes each and every project special in its own way, with the personality of the student. The sky is the limit! Again, these are probably already in your home. Gather them together and turn your little ones loose!

- ♥ Stickers!
- ♥ Rubber Stamps!
- ♥ Paper Cutters!
- ♥ Cutting Mat!
- ♥ Scrapbooking Books and Magazines!
- ♥ Paints!
- ♥ Ruler!
- ♥ Paper Cutter!
- ♥ Craft Knife!
- ♥ Scrapbooking Supplies!
- ♥ ETC!

Cindy,



I received your package of Homeschooling the Easy Way, and it is just wonderful! In fact, I canceled the kids lessons that day just because I couldn't wait to read it! :) It is so huge that I have barely begun reading it, but it has all been fabulous! Thank you so much for everything you do. You are very generous to bless us all this way. I pray that God has special blessings for you and your family. :)

Sandra

Relax, Have Fun, and Homeschool With Learning Centers

By Susan Bacon



This is a handout I recently used at a learning center workshop. After telling you what a learning center is and how you can use it with homeschooling your children I included a few learning centers you can try in your home. I hope you will find some interesting and fun things to use in your homeschooling experience.

A learning center is an area that contains a collection of activities and materials to teach, reinforce, or enrich a skill or concept.

A learning center must have a variety of activities for the children to do. It should be geared to your child's abilities, interests, and needs.

The learning center should contain a variety of materials to challenge all different types of learning styles. Things should be provided for those that are visual and learn best by looking at things, those that are auditory and learn best by listening, and those that are kinesthetic and learn best by touch and movement. You don't need to provide something for the all senses at each and every learning center, but it is best to include as many varieties as possible.

The activities at a learning center should be designed so that the child will be able to work alone with little or no parental assistance. The directions need to be written clearly, concisely, and explicitly so that the student will know exactly what to do and how to do it. If the student is younger the directions can be (in picture form or) recorded on an audio or videotape. The materials at the learning center that the student will be using should also be listed and near at hand.

Learning centers should be colorful, appealing, and motivating. Make sure the learning center is in a special place where

a child can think, discover, initiate and develop his learning.

Learning centers are used for independent study when your child has expressed an interest in a particular subject or when you want to develop some interest in a particular subject that hasn't already been studied or introduced. A learning center can be used as a follow-up for something you have worked on with your child already. A learning center can be used for an activity in place of a regular assignment to spruce up the day. A learning center can also be used as an enrichment activity to a lesson you are already involved with. Using a learning center you can incorporate other subjects, critical thinking skills, or problem solving skills.

Learning centers are especially great for homeschoolers because they can help your child's development of a large variety of abilities. Your student can learn the ability to think and work independently which will be essential in later life. After all, your job is first and fore-

most, to teach your child "how to learn". A great talent to develop with learning centers is the ability to follow directions, independent of you as a parent or teacher. Learning centers help children follow sequential procedure since the instructions at learning centers have to be a step by step process. You won't be there explaining the procedure and making sure it is done every step of the way. If a child is asked to participate in a learning center he or she can develop self-discipline and self-responsibility. If you give your child some choices of what to do at a learning center this can develop independence in decision making. Learning centers, being more interesting and able to challenge a variety of senses, help children develop longer attention spans. Thinking critically and creatively is something that learning centers easily provide as well. They also give your child the ability to extend and enrich one's knowledge. Last but not least, learning centers can provide an environment where the child can evaluate his or her own performance with a task, since most should be self-correcting.

Here are some learning center ideas with some suggestions of what to put on the task card. A task card is simply a card with the directions, some questions, and/or information as to what the child is to accomplish at the center. Task cards can be typed up on the computer, written on a scrap piece of paper, written on something clever that has to do with your learning center (such as at a letter writing center the instructions could be written on an envelope), or written on an index card. It is much handier for students working at a learning center to have a spiral ringed notebook or 3-ringed notebook to put notebook paper in so they can record their results. For younger children, that can't read, record their instructions on an audio tape or even a video tape or make sure what they are to do is in picture form. For those that can't write yet, have them re-

cord their results by talking into a tape recorder or recording themselves on a video camera.

Cereal Center Materials

With some cereal boxes and a few other items, you can stimulate your children to read, do math, and write. This is especially fun for those that like to eat after a learning experience. Gather a box of Alpha Bits, box of Rice Krispies, box of cereal with a recipe on the back of it, paper towel, 1 cereal bowl and spoon, dictionary, watch, notebook they can use to record learning center information in, task cards sitting beside the boxes of cereal. The last task card should say choose a cereal that you enjoy and have yourself a bowl of cereal. :)

Alpha Bits Cereal

- Get 2 spoonfuls of Alpha Bits. Put them on a paper towel. See how many words you can spell from your Alpha Bits. Younger children could be given a list of smaller sight words to copy. Older children can write them in their notebook.
- Take 4 spoonfuls of Alpha Bits cereal and make a wordsearch puzzle with them for a friend.
- Taking 4 spoonfuls of Alpha Bits cereal, use the watch to time yourself. Give yourself 1 minute and see how many words you can form from the letters. Time yourself for 2 minutes and see how many words you can form with the letters.

Cereal with a recipe on the box

- Read the recipe on the box of cereal. How long do you bake this recipe? How

much of the cereal do you use in the recipe?

- Read the recipe on the box of cereal. Double this recipe and record how much of each ingredient you would need to double the recipe. Then half the recipe and record how much of each ingredient would you need to half the recipe?
- Read the recipe on the box of cereal and try to think up one of your own that would be good to eat.

Rice Krispies Cereal

- Imagine that you fell asleep and changed into a Rice Krispy. You are inside a new box on the grocer's shelf. Write your story.
- If you were a Rice Krispy who would you rather be: Snap, Crackle or Pop? Explain why.
- Record what vitamins and minerals are listed on the Rice Krispies box. Is this a nutritious breakfast? Why or why not? Find a word you don't know on the cereal box and look it up in the dictionary. Use this new word in a sentence.

Book Center

Are you having trouble getting your child to read a book or story from a particular genre, by a particular author, or at a particular level? Rather than just assigning the book, set up a table in the house (could even be the coffee table or kitchen table) and place four or five books on it. The books can be by a particular author you want them to read (perhaps you want them to get into Shakespeare); in this case set up 4 plays of Shakespeare on the table. Perhaps you want them to read some biog-

raphies; choose 4 books on some people you think they might find interesting. Perhaps they aren't reading books at the level you want them to strive for; then choose 4 books that are on the level you want them to achieve, and put them on the table. If you were to add a picture from the Internet or a book about the author or a picture of the character in the story to the table it could invoke interest. A stuffed animal of a character in the story placed at the learning center is great for the younger set and older set too, actually.

- Read one of these books and draw a picture about it. Did you like this book?
- Choose one of these books and read it, then write down something that you liked about the story and something you didn't like about the story.
- Read one of these short stories and tell who was in the story, when it happened, and where it happened.
- Choose one of these books on the table and read a chapter in this book every day. When you are finished write down your favorite character in the story and your least favorite character of the story. Make sure you tell what characteristics the person in the story had that made you feel it was your favorite or least favorite character.
- Read one of these biographies and then find a website and compare what was said about this famous person in the book as compared to the website.

Comic Strip Center

Cut comic strip(s) into sections.

- Put the comic strip in order that the story happened.
- Put the comic strips into any order that you like and write the captions to your newly created comic strip.

Magnet Center

- Just have a wand magnet, horseshoe magnet or any other magnet for that matter, and place it in a basket container of magnetic marbles or paper clips. Add a piece of cloth and some paper.
- Take the magnet around the house and record everything the magnet is attracted to and is not attracted to.
- See how many paper clips or magnetic marbles you can pick up with your magnet.
- See if you magnet can pick up the paper clips through the piece of paper or through the cloth.

Electricity Center

- You need at least one 9-volt battery, some copper wire, a resistor - 100- ohm is good, a mini lamp, and 9-volt battery snap connectors. Have the battery snap connectors with the alligator clips already on the battery so children see how these connect. (all these can be found easily at Radio Shack)
- The battery is hooked up to the snap connectors with the alligator clips.
 - Hook the mini lamp's wires up to the alligator clips. What happens?
 - Then hook the resistor up to the one of the alligator clips, then to the battery. What happens to the light? Does it grow dimmer or brighter?

Sink or Float Center

You need a bowl of water and some items to try to float in the water. Make sure you have some unusual things like volcanic rock, which will float.

- Which items on the table float and which items sink?

Famous People Center

People are a large part of history. Print off pictures of famous people from the Internet along with their names and place them in big plastic bowl on the table. You can place a set of encyclopedias close by or set them beside the computer so they can search the Internet and have children find information about famous people. Another way to do this is to have books about the famous people you wish them to learn more about on the table. A big question mark on the table adds fun. If they know they have to choose a famous person to learn about each Thursday, for instance, this gives them something different to look forward to and also helps them develop responsibility and self-discipline.

- Find out about these famous inventors - what did they invent and when?
- Find something interesting about this United States president.
- What time period was this famous historical figure from? What was he/she famous for?
- Find something about one of these famous people that you don't think anyone else knows about.
- Write about what it would be like to live in the same time period as this famous person and be his or her friend.

Writing Ideas Box

A writer writes. The best way to develop writing skills is to write. Having a writing idea box center is a great idea to provide writing topics. If it is always available in your home, anytime you have an idea you can write it on a piece of paper and slip it into the box. If your kids need to write, send them to the writing ideas box center. Again if this is for younger children, let them record their story into a tape recorder and you type it up later. Adding a studious hat or a special ink pen (even one of those big feathered ink pens they use to sign up guests at weddings) that can only be used when at the center adds to the interest.

Story Ideas

- Whenever one of Lisa's teeth came out, she puts it under her pillow. The next morning.....
- "I'm so mad," said Archie the dragon, "nothing is going right for me." Tell Archie's story.
- You can have any pet in the world what pet would it be? Where would you keep it? What would you feed it?
- You are running very fast. Who are you running from and what are you afraid of?
- You and your family are on safari in Africa. Write a letter to a friend telling them about the weather, the countryside, the food, the transportation, your daily schedule and highlights of the experience.
- You are a scientist who has just made a valuable medical discovery that will save thousands of lives. You are being interviewed for a worldwide radio

broadcast. Write about yourself and your work and what you would like to tell the world about it.

- You have inherited a million dollars that you would like to use to feed hungry children and provide health services for poor families. Tell how you will carry out this plan.

Easter Egg Center

A stuffed bunny rabbit with a basket of Easter eggs makes a great start to a center. Place the task cards inside the plastic eggs. This makes a lovely spring learning center.

- If you lived in a world where you could visit one storybook character, who would you choose? Why?
- If you lived in a world where there was just one color, what color would you want it to be? Why?
- If you lived in a world where you could go back in time to meet one historical figure who would it be? Why?
- If you lived in a world where you could change places with someone for a day, who would you choose to change places with? Why?

Matching Footprints Center

Cut out footprints, both right and left. Find a list of whatever you are studying such as contractions. For instance you could put "can not" on the right footprint and "can't" on the left footprint. This is a self-checking learning center for learning things like compound words, abbreviations, antonyms, synonyms, homonyms, rhyming words, and many more.

Cars and Wheels Center

Cut out the cars and the wheels. You could use the cars and wheels for a self-checking learning center to learn about homonyms. For instance you could put "clothes" on one wheel and "close" on the other wheel. You could use the cars and wheels to learn about things like compound words, abbreviations, antonyms, synonyms, rhyming words, etc.

Key Center

On a table have an unusual looking key.

- This key is to your new room. Tell something about your new bedroom.
- This key is to an old secret room underneath the stairs. What would you find there if you used your key and opened the secret room?
- This key belongs to a haunted house. Who lives there? What does the house look like? What is in one room of the haunted house? Describe it in detail. Why and how did this room make the house haunted?
- This key opens the door to where someone you would most like to meet lives. Describe what the house looks like. Tell us about this person, what he or she looks like, the person's likes and dislikes.

Old Shoe Center

Take someone's old, worn out, too small shoe and place it on a table. Or you can find a unique shoe at the thrift shop to add real interest.

- This shoe belonged to one of your favorite cartoon characters. Who used to wear this shoe? Did he like his

shoes?

- This shoe belonged to an important scientist. What was this scientist working on when he or she last wore this shoe?
- This shoe belonged to a time traveler. Where was this time traveler from? How did this person lose only one shoe?

Globe or Map Center

You only need a globe or a map of a country, the world, or a state and your task cards and you have a learning center.

- Find Alabama on your map. What is the capital of Alabama?
- Find Japan on your globe. What country is close to Japan?
- Find a country in Asia and list some of its major cities.

Parts of Speech Pizza

Save your pizza box when you order pizza delivery. You will need construction paper, glue and scissors for this learning center. Put a circle of cardboard inside the pizza box, and depending on what part of speech you are working with, have them cut out pizza toppings and glue them on the parts of speech pizza. When they are done, you should have a deluxe pizza with nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, etc. covering it.

Stuffed Animal Math Learning Center

A basket of stuffed animals with math word problems involving animals makes a wonderful learning center. You can include a notepad with animals on it and don't forget a pencil with

animals on it or perhaps a pencil topper with animals on it. The task cards can be bundled up in one of the stuffed animal's hands with a rubber band or ribbon. A calculator can be included or not.

- A whale's head is just 72 inches long and the tail is as long as the head and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the body, which is $\frac{1}{2}$ of the whole length. How big is this whale?
- A snail starts at the bottom of a well 16 feet deep and crawls up 4 feet each day. Each night, however, the poor snail falls asleep and slips back down 3 feet. How many days will it take the snail to get over the top?
- I am told the turtle is twice as old as the elephant used to be when the turtle happened to be as old as the elephant is now. Oh yes, the elephant is now 18. How old do you think the turtle is?

Name 10 New Uses For...

Have a table with this title on it and once a week or everyday have a new object on the table. The students are to list 10 new uses for the object that is on the table each time they visit the center. Ideas include a band-aid, a brick, an old light bulb, an old stuffed animal, a pencil, an eraser, etc.

Fabric Paint Art Center

Hang a t-shirt in your child's size on a hanger above a table that is ready to use fabric paint on. Make sure you have the table and floor covered and a paint shirt handy. The task card on the table could say, "How about creating a favorite t-shirt by using fabric paint?"

Collage Center

One of my children's favorite centers was the collage center. At least every other week I would set out some paper, glue, scissors, and collage materials and the kids just went to town making the most wonderful creative pictures. Collage materials included sequins, pictures from magazines and old books, glitter, feathers, ribbons, lace, foam pieces, wooden pieces, felt, stickers, pasta shapes, beans, etc. (basically we used anything that wasn't nailed down) Make sure you vary your collage material.

Using Math manipulatives for critical thinking - Any math manipulative you own can be set on a table with a few task cards and be new and interesting to children.

New Vocabulary and/or Spelling Word Bottle

$\frac{1}{4}$ fill a small empty plastic bottle with salt or sand and place small letters in the bottle. The child moves the bottle around to make out all the letters. I found it best to write the letter on both sides of the paper and underline it so the children can tell whether the letter is right side up or upside down. I also numbered each letter so they knew what letter of the word they found. With older children numbering each letter of the word in sequence might not be necessary as they could unscramble the word easily enough. Then they write down the new spelling word from a list that you provide. Or perhaps you could introduce a new vocabulary word once a day or week in a new and interesting way. You can make a list of spelling words.

Menu Math

Go to your favorite restaurant and ask for a copy of their menu. This is a great way to work

with money. Give the child some real money to use or you can use play money or even money stamps. If you laminate the menu you can use it over and over again. Task cards could read as follows:

- You have \$10.57 today what would you order on the menu?
- You have \$20.00 what are you ordering today from the menu. How much change would you get back?
- You have \$40.00 to spend at the restaurant for you and a friend to eat dinner. What would each of you order? Don't forget you have to pay 8% sales tax so add that to the cost of your meal. Would you get any change back?

Shape Museum

Set out toothpicks and marshmallows on a table. (Marshmallows are easier to work with if they have been left out overnight). Task cards can read as follows:

- Make a shape with your toothpicks and marshmallows.
- Make a shape and tell how many vertices, how many angles, and how many sides your shape has.
- Make a shape with 6 faces and 12 sides.

P.E. Activities

A stopwatch is needed for this activity. To keep homeschool kids in shape use learning centers to give them activities. A task card could be taped to a basketball pole, an outside door, trampoline, etc.

- Take the stopwatch and time how long it takes for you to run around your

house.

- Take the stopwatch and time how many times you can bounce the basketball in two minutes.
- Jump on the trampoline for 2 minutes or ride your bike for 15 minutes.

Music Center

Provide CDs or audio tapes of a musician, markers and paper, and a book about the musician. Have children listen to the musician's music and read the book. Some possible task cards include:

- Draw a picture while you listen to the music.
- How does this music make you feel?
- After reading the book and listening to the music tell something interesting about the musician.
- What was your favorite song by this musician? When did the musician write or perform this song?

Rock, Gem, and Mineral Treasure Hunt

To pretty this center up use a treasure chest and fill it with sand. Hide rocks and minerals in the sand. Add a rock and mineral identification book and a book about rocks and you are set. Have children dig through the sand to find the rocks and minerals. Task cards could read:

- How many rocks and minerals did you find?
- What types of rocks did you find? sedimentary, igneous, metamorphic?
- Describe the minerals that you found

and try to identify what type of minerals or gems they are.

World History Timeline Notebook Center

A world history timeline notebook is great as a center activity. Simply make a special place with scissors, glue, pens, magazine pictures, special markers, stickers, postcards, reference books, and their timeline notebooks so they can set down each day and add something to it of their choice. If all the stuff is already set up and ready to go the more chance of it being worked on and interest to be sparked. Possible task cards could include:

- Add something to your notebook that happened in the 1500's.
- Research a United States president and add him to your notebook.
- Find something out about the French Indian Wars and add this to your notebook.

What happened to Roanoke Island Learning Center?

Several things in history happened and we

really don't know why it occurred. The disappearance of Roanoke Island, one of the first English settlements in America, was one of these occurrences. At the center put several history textbooks and non-fiction books that have information about Roanoke Island and let the children answer the following task card.

- Research the Roanoke Island settlement. Historians don't really know what happened to the settlement. Write a few paragraphs describing what you think happened to Roanoke Island.

Art Prints Center

Gather some Dover postcards or Art prints from a particular time period or by a particular artist and set them in a learning center. You can also add a book or an encyclopedia for more information about the particular artist. The following are some ideas for task cards.

- What is your favorite painting done by this artist? Why?
- Write 2 things you learned about this artist from the book. Then write 2 things you learned about the artist by looking at the art prints.



About Susan...

Susan and I go waayyyy back! Susan has always given me fresh and easy ideas for making homeschooling fun. In fact, that is her specialty—making homeschooling fun! Feel free to email Susan Bacon with questions or comments at bacons4@hiwaay.net



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