



MORNING
TIME
SNAPSHOTS

ANGELA'S MORNING TIME

"I LIKE IT WHEN THE KIDS GET INVOLVED AND ASK FOR "ONE MORE CHAPTER" OR WHEN THEY HEAR SOMETHING THAT SPARKS A CONNECTION WITH SOMETHING ELSE THEY'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT, AND THEN SUDDENLY YOU'RE IN A DISCUSSION INVOLVING SHAKESPEARE, ALEXANDER THE GREAT, THE JUST-WAR DOCTRINE, AND THE X-MEN, WITH THE EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD AND THE EIGHT-YEAR-OLD TRADING OPINIONS."

How many kids do you have and what are their ages?

I have eight kids -- seven boys and one girl. My oldest is 18 and will be attending college in the fall, but the others are all still at home. My daughter is 16, and the boys' ages are 12, 9 and 9 (identical twins), 8, 5, and 2.

How long have you been doing Morning Time?

For at least ten years. I was pregnant with twins, and we were in the process of moving a thousand miles from St. Louis, MO to a small town in upstate New York, and I found myself needing to spend a lot of time on the couch in the mornings. I had three kids at the time, ages 8, 6, and 2, and they would gather their drawing paper and coloring books and crayons and sit on the floor of the living room and draw as I read. They didn't want to stop after our normal Bible reading time, so I began to add read-alouds like Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series and nature study and science titles like the *One Small Square* books.

From there it was relatively convenient for me to add anything to this time that I really didn't want to miss as our days got crazier and crazier after the twins were born... and then my sixth child twenty-two months later. Some days Morning Time was most of what we did all day! But we managed to get through a surprising amount of reading in all subjects because we did it consistently (usually with a couple of toddlers crawling all over me as I read).

What do you call your Morning Time?

It doesn't really have a name in our house. It begins when I say, "Time to say prayers!" Because that's the first thing we do when we all gather together for our time in the morning; we pray. Sometimes that's all we do, but the kids know that if we have time we will not just say prayers; we will also read some books. It's been going on for so long that I guess it doesn't really need a name. But I usually use the

phrase "Morning Time" when I talk about our morning family work with other people, because it's a lot less confusing.

Typically how long does your Morning Time take on an average day?

Forty-five minutes seems to be a good time for us. Sometimes we will go on for up to an hour and a half if everybody's interested, but it's hard to sustain everybody's attention and keep the little ones out of trouble for more than forty-five minutes. (Actually, keeping the little ones out of trouble for the whole forty-five minutes is pretty impossible, but usually by that time we've reached everyone's limit.)



There are plenty of times, though, when we start late or the teenagers have too much work or we have to be somewhere or everyone's sick, that our Morning Time only lasts between 15 and 30 minutes. On those days, I usually just focus on faith -- saying our prayers, maybe going over the Latin prayer we're memorizing, talking about the saint of the day, and then getting a handle on where everyone's day is

headed. I usually have our subjects prioritized in my head, and if our time is short, I just go in the order of importance.

What is your favorite Morning Time subject or activity?

I'm not sure I have one! I like it when the kids get involved and ask for "one more chapter" or when they hear something that sparks a connection with something else they've been thinking about and then suddenly you're in a discussion involving Shakespeare, Alexander the Great, the just-war doctrine, and the X-Men, with the eighteen year old and the eight year old trading opinions.

Those conversations don't happen every day, but I think that the garden-level conversations we do have every day are probably just as important (if not more) because they indicate to me that grappling with ideas -- not just swallowing and regurgitating them -- has become a habit in our family.

What is your kids' favorite Morning Time subject or activity?

That changes from year to year and from kid to kid. Last year the big hit -- which surprised me -- was Logic. I used *The Fallacy Detective* by Nathaniel and Hans Bluedorn, which is designed to be done together as a family, and I slated it for Morning Time two days a week when my teenagers didn't have early classes. I expected my oldest three (12th grade, 10th grade, and 6th grade at that time) to pay attention, but I never expected the response my then 3rd grade twins gave the book!

They would pick it up and read ahead when we were done. We had great discussions, and the learning stuck such that various kids will still call out fallacies they recognize in TV commercials, presidential debates, and dinner time conversation with their siblings.

What is your biggest struggle with Morning Time?

I'm going to cheat and mention two, because they are both about equally big. The first struggle I have is trying to accommodate kids of all ages, from age five or so all the way through high school. When it comes to material, I usually try to shoot for the middle, or to use classic literature with a wide appeal. For instance, I think that this year I am going to read Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" in Morning Time. It's listed on Ambleside Online's Year 4, but I see no reason that it wouldn't "count" for my sixteen-year-old's high school literature, and my five- and eight-year-olds will probably pick up something from it, too.



Another problem when there are teenagers in the mix is that they have a lot to do. Often they're enrolled in outside classes -- either online or outside of the home -- and trying to organize Morning Time around their schedules can be difficult. In my experience, teenagers tend to take work for outside classes a little more seriously than work from Mom, so they can be a little impatient with Morning Time if they

have a lot of work to do for those classes. To deal with the problems we were having, we only have Morning Time with everyone on the days when my teenagers don't have morning classes. The other days, I keep Morning Time at the same time and just focus on the younger boys.

The other struggle I have had with Morning Time for years is keeping the little ones quiet and calm enough so that I can read. When my big kids were younger, I had everybody get "something to do" before they sat down, but even when everybody has "something to do," that doesn't guarantee that everyone will be calm and quiet. At this point, I think I've learned to tolerate a certain level of chaos. It used to make me want to give up, but over the years I have seen enough fruit in spite of it to know that it's probably more important just to carry on than it is to have a perfectly attentive audience.

What are some of your favorite Morning Time resources?

I think my favorite Morning Time resources are the booklists shared by other homeschool mothers and various homeschooling sites on the web. In particular, I rely heavily on [Ambleside Online](#) for ideas.

Aside from the titles I mentioned above, a few of our favorite Morning Time read-alouds over the years have been:

- *Black Ships Before Troy* by Rosemary Sutcliffe
- *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
- *The Blessed Friend of Youth: Saint John Bosco* by Neil Boyton
- *Egermeier's Story Bible*

Another resource I like for Catholic homeschoolers is *Saints for Young Readers for Everyday*, which comes in two volumes, one for January - June, the other for July-

December. The biographies are short and geared to an upper elementary reading level, but the books work very well for a variety of ages in Morning Time.

What are some of the ritual practices you include in Morning Time?

Our Morning Time always begins with me calling out, "Time to say prayers!" Then we all gather in the front room to say our prayers. After prayers, we usually check the liturgical calendar to see which saint's feast day it is, and then we go over any memory work -- Latin, times tables, etc.

If I am just reading to the younger boys, I read from a story Bible at this point, and then we go on to our read-alouds, which may be literature, history, nature study, or faith-based. Depending on the time we have, everyone's attention span, and the length of the chapters, I will read a chapter, section, or poem from one to three books.

Before everybody leaves the room, I make sure to touch base with them about their plans for the day. We are relaxed classical/Charlotte Mason homeschoolers and mix the pursuit of individual interests with assignments in the areas which my husband and I consider important.

How have you seen Morning Time bear fruit in your home?

Although the kids do learn a lot from the material that we cover in Morning Time, I see most of the "fruit" in the form of family togetherness, especially as children grow into the teen years. Sometimes when you have teens and little ones, it can feel as if you're raising two different families.

The teens have outside classes and social engagements and jobs. At home, they spend a lot of time working on their own. It can feel like you barely see them all day, even if they're still in the same house. Morning Time brings everyone together, if

only for half an hour or an hour. In the strictly practical sense, it allows me to get a sense of what everyone has going for the day, since we do usually talk about our plans. But it also, I think, helps to build a sense of who we are as a family.

Everyone hears the same books and says the same prayers during that hour. We all talk to each other -- about more than Legos or video games or TV shows or why Child X should not be allowed to unload the dishwasher because he always puts the cups in the cabinet wrong. Morning Time helps to build and solidify our common foundation. The prayers we say and the books we read help to strengthen our sense of who we are as a family.

ABOUT ANGELA

Angela Boord homeschools her brood of eight on five acres in northern Mississippi, where she also raises backyard chickens and attempts to grow a garden. She spends her days reading books to kids, cleaning crayon out of the carpet, admiring Lego creations, and trying to keep seven boys fed. She



wouldn't trade it for anything. You can find her online at www.threeplustwohomeschool.com, where she blogs about relaxed homeschooling and life with lots of boys.

TERM: _____

MORNING TIME PLAN


