



HOMESCHOOL PLANNING
FOR PURPOSE AND PEACE

PAM BARNHILL

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Published by

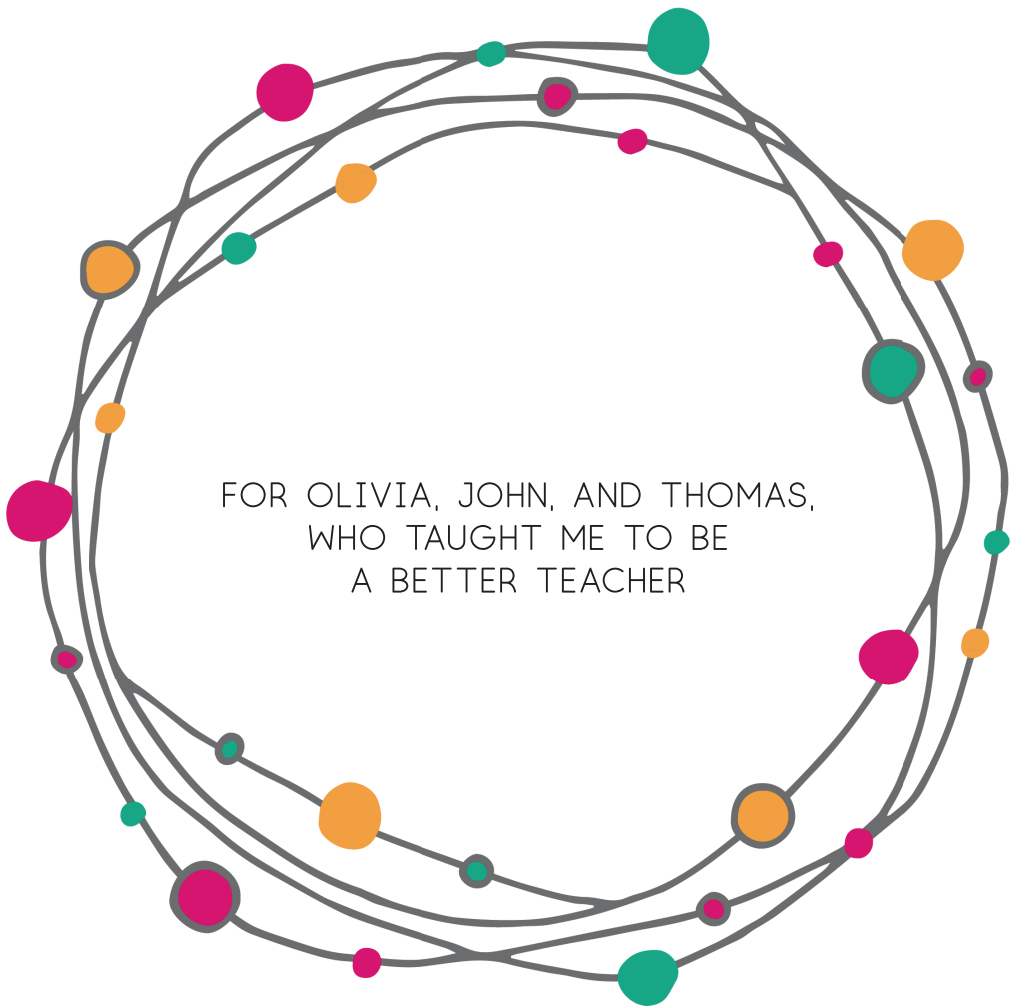
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ISBN: 978-0-9997421-2-9 (paperback), 978-0-9997421-3-6 (epub)

Editor: Harmony Harkema

Publishing and Design Services: MartinPublishingServices.com



FOR OLIVIA, JOHN, AND THOMAS,
WHO TAUGHT ME TO BE
A BETTER TEACHER

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is broken into distinct planning steps you can follow to plan your homeschool year. In each chapter, I lay out exactly how to go about creating your plan and provide encouragement, inspiration, and ideas. Most chapters also include one or two sidebar articles by either me or another seasoned homeschooler to give you additional information, insights, or just another way of doing things. Finally, each section contains action items. By completing each action item, you will create a plan for your homeschool year!

COMPANION PLANNING FORMS

I have included copies of all of the necessary forms throughout the book. You may feel free to make as many copies of these forms as you need for your own personal use.

For color downloads of the forms, plus a library of additional forms, calendars, and editable planning pages, you can purchase the Planning Forms Library Lifetime Access at planyouryearforms.com.

FOREWORD

Planning a homeschool year is a daunting task. I know moms who are thrilled at the prospect of planning for a new school year and others who dread it. Either way, everyone usually flounders and flails along the way.

My own methods of planning a school year have evolved as I've become more confident as a homeschooling mom. I've learned to start with the children in front of me (knowing where they are and where they need to go), to consider my own strengths and weaknesses, and to operate from a mindset of flexibility and freedom. I've also learned to lean heavily on other homeschooling moms during the spitballing stage getting feedback from like-minded friends is not something to take for granted. That's where Pam comes in.

Taking a big beautiful idea and making it actionable and packed with purpose is where Pam shines—she's the first one I go to when I need to hash out the nitty-gritty. Over the past nine years, I've had the distinct privilege of picking her brain at every stage of the planning process. The simple steps she breaks down in this book will move you from a hesitant and shaky, "I think maybe we should homeschool next year?" to an enthusiastic "Hey! We're going to homeschool next year!"

It may seem like an impossible task to teach multiple children at different age levels and plan an entire year's work for purpose and peace. I'm overwhelmed by the prospect of it every single year. The book in your hands and the planning pages at your disposal will give you the tools you need right now (and then again next year, and again the next) to prepare for a year of home education worth relishing, delighting in, and living with gusto.

You can do this, homeschool mama. You've already taken the best first step by picking up this book. Now let's hook arms and let Pam show us the way.

Sarah Mackenzie
Read Aloud Revival

INTRODUCTION

THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU

My husband and I started toying with the idea of homeschooling long before our children were school-age. I taught public middle and high school for seven years and had become disillusioned with the state of the public school system, its emphasis on testing, overcrowding in the classroom, and the increase in student behavior problems.

Knowing you want to homeschool early on in your children's life is both a blessing and a curse. Yes, I had years to research and plan for the first day of kindergarten. I had years to obsess over the perfect method of instruction, the perfect curriculum, the perfect day.

As you can likely guess, my children did not fit neatly into my perfect homeschooling plans. They had their own ideas, their own agendas, their own developmental timetables. It was a struggle to get them to sit for long stretches and soak up my carefully constructed units. My oldest did not read easily. She hated math. My second child was either clamoring to be a part of what we were doing, needing my attention, or destroying another part of the house.

It didn't take me long to realize I had missed a vital part of the planning process. In considering my vision of the perfect homeschool day, I missed the fact that my children are not perfect and neither am I (though I'm pretty close). My perfect plan ignored the most important factor of all: the people in front of me.

Make no mistake, I am not advocating exclusively child-led learning. Planning is a triad: the plan, the child, and the mother. Why was I creating an expectation for myself to spend hours outside studying nature when I hated being outdoors? I hate the heat, the bugs, the possibility of snakes. Ick. I don't know a woodpecker from a warbler, and yet I felt guilty for not checking off my scheduled nature study box each week. The same goes for elaborate crafts, piles of cute printables, and morning calendar time. While these things work great for some homeschooling families (maybe even you!), they were simply not me.

My epiphany came when I decided I was no longer striving for the perfect homeschool plan. Instead, I would strive for the perfect plan *for us*: the plan I would actually implement, the plan that would work for my children. I threw out everything that wasn't working, shut out the noise from the homeschool "experts," and blocked out the voices from my public school past. I took a long, hard look at who we are, what we are willing to do, and the things we actually enjoy. Then I scheduled in those things, became a happier homeschool mom, and started to feel successful. Funny thing is, my children thrived as well.

Homeschool planning is a big subject for one little book. Most veteran homeschoolers have created their very own methods of planning that work best for their families. Who am I to come along and say that my way is the best way?

I'm not. In fact, my goal in writing this book is not to show you the one right way to plan, but instead to encourage you and give you ideas for making the plan and the process *your own*. No matter how you decide to plan your homeschool, I want you to break free from your old paradigms about education and the expectations placed on you by the state, your family, and that supermom in your homeschool group. Instead, I want you to approach planning your homeschool by looking first at what is right for your children, your family, and yourself as a teacher.

Success breeds success, and confidence brings even more confidence. A good plan will help you build those things, and a good plan begins with the people in front of you, both in the mirror and across the breakfast table. Let's get started!

CHAPTER 1

CAST A VISION

When I was a teacher, there were not enough classrooms in the high school where I taught. Every room was filled every period. Therefore, during my two planning periods, I spent many hours in the teacher workroom grading papers, preparing lessons, and listening to the older teachers lament the fact that they no longer got to teach what they loved. Instead they spent all of their time teaching to the FCAT exam. I was saddened to see so many people who were passionate about their subject and their students be throttled by the system to which they had given their lives. It had a huge impact on my decision to homeschool, though I didn't realize it at the time.

Has anyone ever asked you why you homeschool? If they did, could you tell them? I used to have problems with this. I would stumble over my words, not really sure how to explain my convictions, worried that the next thing out of my mouth would give offense (easy for anyone when you're discussing a touchy subject, and super easy for me).

Then, one day, I sat and recalled those days in the teacher workroom. I thought about all the things I wanted to give my kids through homeschooling. I took the time to contemplate and write about what I wanted their home education to do for them—the opportunities, the practices, the things we valued in our day-to-day. It was only after doing that—after casting a vision for what our days could look like and what was important to our family—that I began to be able to articulate why we were doing what we were doing.

While some folks are looking for a fight when they question your desire to homeschool, many are simply curious. You might be the only homeschooling parent they've met. The concept is completely foreign to older generations. Whether their motives are confrontation or curiosity, I have found that the best way to answer people's questions is to have a clear idea of the vision you have for your homeschool.

In addition to answering questions, a vision also serves multiple purposes in your homeschool. It acts as a compass for making your plans and a call to action when motivation lags. As we contemplate how we want our homeschools to look, the only thing that really matters is the kids in front of us. Are we doing what is right for them? How would we know? To know that, we need a homeschool vision statement.


WHAT IS A HOMESCHOOL VISION STATEMENT?

Let's start with what a vision is *not*. It is not a picture of the human you want your child to be in twenty years. That is beyond your control no matter how hard you try. And we never waste time creating a plan for things beyond our control. It will only frustrate us.

So what *is* a vision statement? It is a statement of intent. It is comprised of the things that are important in your homeschool. A vision is not about what the future results of your homeschool will be, a vision is about what the day-to-day atmosphere of your homeschool can look like.

I love this quote by Rosabeth Moss Kanter: "A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more."

Homeschooling without a vision is kind of like wandering around in the dark with your hands tied behind your back and then being surprised when you stub your toe. Why? Homeschooling is hard, and when we humans find ourselves facing something difficult, we are easily distracted and head off in directions we never meant to go, taking the easier path. When we come up against something hard, we might try switching curricula mid-year or we might feel despair our kids are behind other kids and push too hard (which rarely works), or we might even consider putting our kids in school.

 *Homeschooling without a vision is kind of like wandering around in the dark with your hands tied behind your back and then being surprised when you stub your toe.*

If you know your "why" for homeschooling, though, and can articulate it, then you are better equipped to face tough times and answer critics—even the one who lives in your head.

There are a number of ways to go about writing your homeschool vision. I am going to present a few different ways you can do this. Don't stress—just choose the method that appeals most to you.

ONE VISION STATEMENT METHOD

Your vision statement is a manifesto of sorts about the education taking place in your home.

A helpful place to start is to look into the future. Ask yourself, *As my children graduate from my homeschool and leave my home, what kind of people do I want to see before me? What skills do I want them to be proficient at? What books do I want them to have read? What ideas do I want them to have been exposed to?*

Imagine that future young adult standing in front of you. Now sit down and make a list of what he has experienced and what he is capable of. Try to keep it general, about 10-15 items. This is a document you will review one or two times a year, but even then you will not want to slog through 100 bullet points. List only general ideas and skills, not specific booklists and benchmarks.

The longer vision statement is not something you are going to spring on the stranger who asks you why you homeschool, but it might be something you discuss over tea with a friend who is considering the homeschooling path for her own family and who questions you more deeply about your methods.

Some vision statement bullet point examples might be:

- We want our children to be able to comfortably and effectively communicate through spoken word and in various forms of writing from formal to informal.
- We want our children to have a relationship with the great works and thinkers of Western culture, including the literature and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome and the doctors of the church.
- We want our children to have a working familiarity with the geography of the world around them and be able to identify major countries, landforms, and water features.

Your specific vision statements may look very different in content from the ones above, but they should be unique to your family and the kind of education you desire for your children. Don't forget to include practical, physical, and artistic (music, dance, visual arts) skills as well as academics.

Keep in mind that a vision is exactly that—something you see for the future and not a current reality. While your vision statement will give you purpose as you plan and work, it may not end up being completely true. The person in front of you ten years from now may have different plans or abilities than you imagined. That doesn't mean you avoid creating a vision, but it does mean we consider the person and his or her individuality. *The vision is the tool, not the master.*

THE OUTLOOK INVENTORY METHOD

Another way to create a vision is to use the Homeschool Outlook Inventory. I have included a copy of this at the end of this chapter.

Imagine your children twenty years from now, as they are thinking back on their homeschool years. Now write the answers to these questions.

1. What do you want them to say about their homeschool experience?
2. What do you want them to do as adults (what are their skills, loves, desires)? (Remember: This is not a list of their accomplishments of the past twenty years, but instead skills and loves you would *like* them to have.)

3. What do you want them to think about you as a homeschool mom?
4. How do you want them to feel about being homeschooled?

Once you have given some thought to these four questions and written down your answers, consider how you can work toward those results. The means you use to work toward what you want your kids to say in the inventory are the statements that make up your vision.

To help you craft these vision statements, you are going to ask yourself the following three questions about the responses you wrote:

- What actions do you need to take as a homeschooling mom?
- What subjects and activities do you need to include in your studies?
- What kind of atmosphere do you need to create in your home?

Then write two kinds of statements:

1. In our homeschool we strive to . . .
2. In our homeschool we refuse to . . .

Talk this over with your husband. If you have older kids, discuss it with them.

About those “refuse to” statements: I often use the negative phrase to check myself where I try to push too hard or be too strict—it mainly checks my tendencies and not my kids’ tendencies.

If you don’t end up with negative statements, that is OK—you do not need to have both. This is *your* vision.

Here are a few examples:

- In our homeschool we strive to share good stories and discussions together as a family every day.
- In our homeschool we refuse to be dictated to by man-made timelines, and we allow each student to work to his or her own potential and ability without being rushed or pushed by artificial constraints.
- In our homeschool we strive to practice basic skills like reading, math, and handwriting with consistency that will lead to mastery.

A series of these statements will comprise the vision that you have for your homeschool.

You can write as many of these statements as you need to in order to encapsulate the vision you have in mind for your homeschool, but the idea is to create a broad view of what you hope to accomplish. You should end up with ten or fewer statements or your vision will likely be too specific.

Here is an example of how one of my outlook inventory statements translated into a vision statement.

Under “What do you want them to say about their homeschool experience?” I wrote, “We got to do things I couldn’t have done if I had gone to school. Those things we got to do enriched my life.” I would love for my kids to describe homeschooling to someone that way one day.


So I wrote a vision statement that looks like this:

“In our homeschool we refuse to let table-learning rob us of the opportunity to get out and experience the world. We will not value seat work over feet work. Homeschooling lends us an amazing opportunity to be in the world and learning from it. These opportunities will be seized.”

I personally know this is a particular issue of *mine* because of my introversion and my public-school-teacher-mindset baggage. Therefore it is important that this is part of my vision as a reminder, so that when I am faced with the decision to attend a half-day gardening class for twelve weeks, participate in a cool field trip, or take off school for three weeks and travel across the country with my kids, I will remember that experiential learning is just as important as finishing the math book.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

In business circles, a short one- or two-sentence synopsis of a business’s purpose and benefits is called an elevator pitch. This pithy statement is the answer to the question, “So what do you do?” I have a homeschooling resources website called *Homeschool Solutions with Pam Barnhill*. When I meet someone and they want to know what I do, I tell them, “I have a website that provides helpful tips and resources to homeschooling moms.”

 *If you know your vision, then you are able to evaluate opportunities, curriculum, and plans against it.*

As homeschoolers, we can use the elevator pitch technique to create a one- to two-sentence vision statement for our homeschool. This is a great tool to have when strangers ask why we are homeschooling, but it is also a fabulous tool to have as you sit down to craft your homeschool plan each year. Why? It can become a litmus test for us as we plan. Test everything you are considering adding to your plan against the statement you make in your elevator pitch.

Let me give an example. Back to my website for a minute. Let’s say I am approached by a company that sells barbecue sauce. They know my audience is largely moms, and they offer me compensation if I will post about their barbecue sauce on my blog. For a moment I might consider partnering with this brand. Yet if I held that barbecue sauce up to my elevator pitch, I would be able to see that even though I could possibly spin it to fit my content (kind of), it really doesn’t fit with my vision of providing helpful tips and resources for homeschooling moms. So I say no to the sauce (darn it).

It is the same as we plan our homeschools. If you know your vision, then you are able to evaluate opportunities, curriculum, and plans against it. If it doesn't fit, toss it. You have a standard to evaluate against.



HOW TO USE A HOMESCHOOL VISION BOARD FOR INSPIRATION

BY AMY MILCIC

IT'S NICE TO HAVE OPTIONS. Different homeschools need different tools, resources, and routines.

And those tools, resources, and routines may change as your homeschool goes through various ages and stages. In an effort to best meet the needs of our homeschool, I had to change up our approach to a homeschool mission statement. The traditional list of rules and goals on a white piece of paper just wasn't cutting it. But I knew we still needed something to keep us on track. Something to reference when life gets busy or we're caught up in our learning adventures.

At the time, our homeschool consisted of five boys ages 12, 10, 6, 4, and 1, plus a squirrely mom who tends to jump down more rabbit holes than Alice. We needed a simple and affordable solution that could benefit all of us.

WHAT IS A HOMESCHOOL VISION BOARD?

A homeschool vision board is a DIY visual tool that displays your goals, dreams, and themes for your upcoming year. It's a collaborative project; you work with your kids to discuss, select, and create your homeschool vision. I define a homeschool vision board as *a collage of images, quotes, art; all that inspires and encourages, combined to give an overall sense of a theme or topic*. A homeschool vision board is a visual representation of your homeschooling goals, hopes, and dreams for the upcoming year.

A homeschool vision board can help if you:

- Tend to over-plan your year
- Have good intentions but lose focus
- Have different ages and stages
- Have difficulty staying on track with goals

I'm a planner girl and love the planning process. All those books and resources and great ideas are exciting and energizing until it comes to following through. That's when lists and plans and piles start to stack up in my beloved planner. Brilliant ideas are forgotten on slips of paper and sticky notes. I always have the best intention of sorting through those ideas but find they evaporate when I need them the most. Jumping down rabbit holes with my boys is awesome, but I consistently need a way to get back on track.

As my boys get older, I find we're functioning with an erratic homeschool schedule. After fighting the chaos, I've learned to embrace what is and just roll with it. I need practical tools and resources to remind me of our purpose and goals. I'm a visual person (one of the reasons that I love all those planners and lists). If I can't see it, it usually doesn't happen. I need more than just words. My boys love visual reminders, too. Homeschool vision statements (a set of principles you select to guide and support your homeschool goals) are typically one of the first things you're encouraged to create when you begin your homeschool adventures. You "need" a vision statement, or your homeschool will fall into a pit of despair and ruin. And I have nothing against vision statements per se. They're helpful to many families. A traditional, written homeschool vision statement, however, does not work for us. When we tried to use a written homeschool vision statement, it sat in a binder and collected dust. In the middle of a busy homeschool day, I'd forget what it said, get completely off track, and struggle to regain focus.

After giving the whole situation some thought, I realized that our homeschool needed a *visual* reminder of our vision statement, something that's easy to see and reference throughout our day. A Homeschool Vision Board was the solution!

BENEFITS OF A HOMESCHOOL VISION BOARD

A homeschool vision board provides you with a visual reminder to reference throughout your day. When you place it in your homeschool area, you'll find it a helpful and inspirational resource to keep you on track. If you have younger kids in your homeschool, a homeschool vision board is fantastic because pre-readers and early readers can understand and benefit from the visual cues.

Your homeschool vision board can be a fun, collaborative project that's easy to put together. Using a few affordable items, as well as common household materials, you can work with your kids to find and create pictures to represent your homeschool goals, hopes, and dreams for the upcoming year. One of the best parts of a homeschool vision board is that every member contributes to its creation. It truly is a collaborative effort that unites your family and encourages ownership of your homeschool.

OUR HOMESCHOOL VISION BOARD

The beauty of a homeschool vision board is that it's a custom creation that represents *your* family's interests and goals. Every board will have a different look and feel that makes it unique. Our homeschool vision board has always been a work of collaboration. My boys and I have fantastic conversations about past homeschool years and what we're looking forward to in the year to come. We love listening to each others' ideas and figuring out ways to merge them to create a homeschool vision for all of us.

As you work on your homeschool vision board, you share thoughts and feelings about your homeschooling adventures. You find yourself looking forward to studying subjects, picking out volunteer projects, and planning field trips. The best part: your homeschool vision board becomes a collage of the good intentions and hopes of your entire homeschool!

All ages can participate in the creation of your homeschool vision board. Little ones can scribble on paper or point to pictures in a magazine (heck, they can even rip them out). Older students can work with younger siblings to plan and prepare. Pre-readers and early readers are part of the process, working beside older siblings. Everyone has a sense of ownership and feels recognized.

If you're looking for a creative, hands-on project that brings your family closer together, you'll want to gather your supplies to get started right away on your homeschool vision board!

For more information about how to create your own homeschool vision board including a free printable tutorial with questions, visit Amy's website at <https://rockyourhomeschool.net/product/create-your-own-homeschool-vision-board>.



HOW TO USE YOUR VISION

Now that you have a printed copy of your vision in your workbook, keep it handy. I will be asking you to do a vision check often as you work on the various steps, and you might need to take it out and use it in your planning.

Every year, as you sit down to plan and evaluate curriculum, pull out your vision statement and reread it to refresh your memory. You may choose to make changes to it. As your children change, and as you change and grow, the vision should change and grow with you. Use it as a starting point for deciding what plans to make and what resources to buy. The following chapters will show you how.



ACTION ITEMS

- ① Create a vision for your homeschool. You might start this process by chatting with your husband and even some of your older children. Use any of the methods described in the chapter that appeal to you.
- ② Turn to your Vision form and jot down your vision statements. Then set it aside for a day or two.
- ③ Now is a great time to do the vision board activity with your kids if you desire. While not required, it can be a fun peek into their wants, needs, and desires.
- ④ In a couple of days, come back and reevaluate what you have written. Make changes, grab a new form, and finalize your list. Store it away in your homeschool binder to be consulted in the future.
- ⑤ Create an elevator pitch for your homeschool. It is probably most easily written after you've completed a longer vision statement. Review your vision statement and summarize in 1-2 brief sentences why you homeschool.
- ⑥ Once you have written your pitch, practice saying it until it rolls easily off your tongue. Now you have something quick and practiced to say when strangers question you, but you also have a mantra to repeat as you stroll a curriculum fair and are tempted to spend money on everything shiny and new!

OUTLOOK INVENTORY

What do you want them to say about their homeschool experience?

What do you want them to do as adults (what are their skills, loves, desires)?

What do you want them to think about you as a homeschool mom?

How do you want them to feel about being homeschooled?



