

# BECOMING A UNIT STUDY PRO

## Video Workshop Transcript

**Welcome to the *Unit Study PRO* workshop!** My name is Deanne and I am delighted to be here with you today, for you see, I am a Unit Study P.R.O. and I am here to show that each one of us are capable of becoming a Unit Study P.R.O.

What is your first thought when you hear the words, “Unit Study”? Do you break out in cold sweat and feel totally overwhelmed? Or, do you LOVE the idea of unit studies and think they are a great option...for someone else. You just aren’t creative enough, organized enough, or possible even adventurous enough.

Maybe you are like me. You find unit studies to be a great option for your children and you want to incorporate them as much as possible—and you’re simply here looking for fresh ideas and information. In our family, like many home-school families, we began homeschooling with a traditional textbook approach and while this was easy to implement in our home, my children quickly became disinterested. As I began to research other options for our second year of homeschooling, we literally “fell into” unit studies after my husband accepted a “barter payment” for a job. His payment? A comprehensive Unit Study curriculum called *The Weaver*.

We quickly adapted and began to love the idea of learning together as a family, and we also found that the subjects seemed to make more sense interrelated. We found unit studies to be fun and successful in our home and although we did not incorporate unit studies every year (more on that later!) we definitely found them to be a valuable learning experience. My goal for this workshop is to equip you to become a Unit Study PRO whether you chose to utilize one of the quality, prepared curriculums available or desire to create your own unit study.

On the Rainbow website, you will find our Unit Study Workshop Handout. If you are able to open it or print it off before we begin, I think you will find it beneficial.

But let’s begin with a brief definition of the term Unit Study. A unit study is thematic or topical approach to teaching as opposed to the traditional, individual subject approach. In other words, rather than teaching each subject separately, a unit study integrates many or nearly all subject areas into a unified study—usually centered around a particular subject or event.

What are the benefits of the Unit Study Approach? There is an Ancient Chinese proverb that says, “Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand.” While many of us may recognize this instinctively, turn-of-the-century educationist Edgar Dale illustrated it with research when he developed his “Cone of Learning”—which basically infers that after two weeks we remember only 10% of what we read, but 90% of what we do!

If you can take a look at this cone graphic that was developed based on his research, you will see that we remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we both hear and see, 70% of what we say or share with others, and 90% of what we both say and do.

Other research has shown that we learn 80% of what we personally experience and 95% of what we teach, which is perfect for our older children using the unit study approach because frequently they’ll be called upon to explain concepts to their younger siblings.

The beautiful thing about Unit Studies is that we are able to incorporate each of these learning opportunities in our children’s education, allowing our children to retain more of what we teach them. Another benefit to the Unit Study approach is it provides a solid platform for organizing your homeschool by allowing children of multiple ages to learn together. Unit Studies allow families to study the same topics, do activities together, while challenging children at their own level. You will also find a benefit in family dynamics, as the unit study approach with their activities will help your children to develop closer relationships.

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So what are the characteristics of a Unit Study P.R.O.? As I mentioned before, each of us are capable of becoming a Unit Study PRO, and the secret is found in 3 simple steps:

1. **Pick your topic.**
2. **Research your topic.**
3. **Organize your topic**

But before we create a Unit Study using the 3 PRO steps, let's define the different types of Unit Studies.

First is the All Inclusive or Complete Unit Study. All Inclusive curricula incorporates most academic areas into the theme or topic being studied. Although they're considered complete, they do not include Phonics and Math curriculum (although they may include practical math activities or possibly even recommend curriculum). Most all inclusive or complete unit study curriculum are one year in length.

Literature Based unit studies are those that focus on reading a specific book or series of books while studying core subjects: LA, Science, History, and Geography, as it appears in the selected literature. Time varies for the literature based unit studies, and they may last from one month to one year. Some literature based unit studies may also be considered all inclusive.

Subject or Topic Based Unit Studies are the miscellaneous ideas that you come up with that can create the foundation of a unit study. They can last from one week to one month, but possibly may be longer.

Within this category would be the history based unit studies. Those are unit studies that center all other subjects around a historical event or timeline. They may or may not be Chronological in nature and typically are not complete enough to be considered a complete or all inclusive curriculum.

Other topics that you may form a unit study one would be a science subject, a current event or historical event, or even possibly music and art. Frequently, these studies are not yearlong studies but instead are short term lasting one week to one month. With this approach, you may need to add more core curriculum than with some of the other unit study types.

Now that you are familiar with the different styles of Unit Studies, let's focus on becoming a Unit Study P.R.O. Who is a Unit Study P.R.O.? Why, you are, of course! Becoming a PRO at Unit Studies really centers on 3 simple steps. If you were able to print the handout, turn to the first page. There on the bottom left-hand side, you'll see our PRO acronym.

The first step in becoming a Unit Study PRO is **"P": pick your topic**. There are several things to bring into consideration as you look at picking your topic, including...

- The ages of your children. You want to make sure the unit study you select is age-appropriate. You'll also want to ensure that as you create your unit study or select your unit study, you want to pick one that is going to teach to your oldest child. Younger children are going to be able to come alongside the oldest child and learn while the oldest is being challenged in their own learning, but also there'll be opportunities for your oldest child to take what they're learning and explain it to their younger siblings, which will enhance their own learning.

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When you pick your topic, another consideration is going to be:

- The interests of children and mom. We all recognize in our homes that if children are interested in a topic and want to learn about it, they're going to be more engaged in the learning process. This is also true for moms. Moms, it must also be a topic we ourselves are interested in, or we are actually not going to do the work necessary to get the unit study done.

Another consideration as you pick your topic is going to be family dynamics. There are several factors under your family dynamics. The first is:

- The number of children. Unit studies are typically designed for group learning and group activities. Although it's very possible to do a unit study with one child, you may find that mom or dad may need to be more involved in that group learning.
- Health issues will also have an impact on your unit study, the health of your children and the health of mom. In our experiences when we were doing the Weaver curriculum, my daughter actually broke her right arm, which for a season we did try to continue on doing that unit study, but found that it was definitely too labor-intensive for mom to not only work with a younger sibling but also do the projects that my daughter should have been doing but was unable to with her broken arm. In that case, we actually put that unit study on hold for a season and came back to it. But another consideration is the health of mom. Because unit studies do involve the direct role of mom in doing the activities and organizing and coordinating and overseeing the activities that your children do, if mom has health issues, you may have to rethink how you're going to do unit studies in your home. For my family again, there's been health issues in myself for several years off and on, and we found that the literature based unit studies tend to work well in our home during that season because they were things that you could continue with the core of the learning (reading the books either on the couch, or even on bed-rest at one point).

Other family dynamic considerations would be:

- Anticipated life changes, like moving or the birth of a child. If either of those are in your near future, rather than embarking on a lengthy one year unit study, you may want to look at a short term one week to one month study.
- And financial considerations can also fall under this family dynamics. You will typically find that mom-created unit studies using the library, the internet, and things you have around the home are going to be fairly inexpensive to do, but they're also going to take a great deal more of mom time. Whereas if you buy a pre-packaged, prepared unit study curriculum, there's going to be less preparation and less time needed from mom to make it happen, but it's also going to have more cost involved.

And finally, the last consideration under Pick Your Topic is the:

- Available time. While unit studies do require mom time to plan and prepare, that time is generally made up with the lessons being done with all your children at once. You will typically find that with unit studies it takes less time in your day to do a unit study with five children as compared to teaching five children five different subjects at five different grade levels.

The next step in becoming a Unit Study PRO is **“R”**: **research your topic**.

This is where you actually take the topic that you've chosen for your family and you find out what's available for doing this unit study. The internet, I think, is probably for most of us our number one go-to place for information, and while there's nothing wrong with that, there's a couple of things I just want to mention as a caution.

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The first is parental supervision. Often times when we are researching a topic, we will involve our older children and teenagers in the research. As a parent you need to be aware of the websites they're visiting; you may want to install some software on their computer that would help to monitor any websites they may go to.

The second thing is Wikipedia. While Wikipedia can be a good springboard for finding more information by following their links, Wikipedia is something that's considered open and able to be changed and edited by pretty much anybody, so the information on Wikipedia may or may not be reliable.

Other places you can do research would be your library or taking advantage of inter-library loans. If you're like most homeschool moms, your own bookshelves are another place you can look; most of us, I think, have ample learning materials on our own shelves.

During your research, you're also going to want to look for local opportunities for field trips that will tie into your unit studies. For us in our area, we have zoos, a Wildlife Prairie Park, an Abraham Lincoln Museum, we have a river paddlewheel boat; we have several things in this area that can be tied into a unit study.

And then finally under your research, you're going to want to have some people resources as well. Talk to your homeschooling friends, talk to people at church. Your local librarian, even, is a possibility of someone you can speak with. The goal here is to try to get your children connected with someone in your community who has first-hand or personal experience with the topic that they're studying, as this will give them some new insights into the topic they're studying.

And finally, **"O": organize your topic.**

This is the third step in becoming a Unit Study PRO. This is where you take your research and all the great ideas that you've had, and you organize them. You select the books, the videos, the websites that you want to use. You determine which activities are going to be incorporated. You schedule those field trips, because the reality is if they're not scheduled, they frequently don't happen.

Finally under Organize Your Topic, you're going to want to contact the knowledgeable people in your community and set an appointment up for your children to go in, meet with them, ask them questions, and even interview them about their experiences.

Are you ready? After we've gone through the steps here of becoming a Unity Study PRO, let's practice; let's develop a unit study together.

In the handout on page 3 you will find our brainstorming page and on page 4 our planning page. You are welcome to reproduce these for your own personal use. But let's get started and plan a Topical Unit Study!

I chose the Titanic for this demonstration, simply because it is a unit study that I created for my son when he was 7. At that age he became fascinated by the Titanic. My original plan and intent was for a one-month study. However, my son was so engaged (and really enthralled) about learning about the Titanic that our study lasted two years. Ah, the beauty of a Unit Study. To be honest, we only formally studied the Titanic for approximately 6 months, and the rest of it was more of a casual approach roughly once a week. Interestingly, as I began to pull together his notebooks for a refresher for walking through the steps of planning a unit study, my son commented to me, "Mom, is it weird that I loved the Titanic as a child, and I'm plan on joining the Navy after I graduate this year?" Definitely a moment of mom-pause there.

But anyway, turn to page 3 of your brainstorming page there. As you can see, in the **Topic** section we have the Titanic. We'll start here on the left-hand side under **websites**. I'm going to just go ahead and give you a few websites we found that were beneficial to save time:

- *titanic1.org* is a website dedicated to everything Titanic.
- There's an interactive, linked timeline at *titanic-titanic.com*.
- *History.com* also has some excellent interactive websites on the Titanic (*history.com/interactives/titanic*).
- There's an online Titanic museum (*onlinetitanicmuseum.com*), and there's
- an entire encyclopedia dedicated to everything Titanic (*encyclopedia-titanica.org*).

Some **activities** that you can do... Before we get started and I run through quickly some of the activities that we did as a family related to the Titanic, take a minute and see if you can brainstorm some activities here. If you come up with any activities that I don't have on my list, I'd love for you to shoot me an email when we're finished with this workshop and let me know what they were, because then I can add them to my activities list as well.

But some activities that you can do related to the Titanic are:

- Do some mapping activities on the route of the Titanic.
- You can study the parts of a ship, and have your children draw and diagram the ship.
- You can study ship speed.
- Study icebergs and glaciers.
- You can study Morse Code, which was the main communication on ships at the time.
- You can create a timeline.
- You can study the culture and styles of clothes of 1912.
- And of course there's a variety of water experiments that you can do.
- You can study hypothermia.
- And you can even have some copywork based on quotes from the books they read or even Bible verses.

**Videos** is our next area to plan or brainstorm some ideas from. Netflix and the Library are both excellent resources for movies.

For our family, we did not watch the newer *Titanic* movie that's available, simply because my children were so young. And of course now that they're adults... We still have not watched the full new *Titanic* movie. My son has sat and watched the ending where the ship sinks, because he finds that, of course, the most fascinating part. But there is a 1953 version of the movie *Titanic* with Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Wagner that we viewed, that is pretty interesting. *A Night to Remember* is another older movie that is dedicated to the last evening of the Titanic.

The History Channel has some excellent documentaries on the Titanic, and National Geographic as well as some excellent documentaries on the Titanic, including videos where they find the shipwreck and recovery of the artifacts.

**Field trips:** field trips related to the Titanic may be a little more challenging to line up. For my family, since my son was so engrossed in the study, we took a 9-hour road trip to the Children's Museum in Cleveland, OH, for their Titanic exhibit. At that Titanic exhibit was an Omnimax Theater presentation of *Titanica*, which gave you the feelings of experiencing what it was like to be on the ship.

If you live near the ocean, you can actually take your children to the ocean when the weather's cooler and the water temperature is colder. Have them wade in the water to have them get a feel for what the cold ocean water would have felt like. If you're near a U.S. Coast Guard, you may want to visit the Coast Guard and possibly talk to them about water rescues or what it's like to live on a ship. If you're lucky enough to live near a Coast Guard station that has an ice patrol, they would be interesting to talk with as well, because the ice patrol portion of the Coast Guard was actually developed in response to the Titanic disaster.

**Books:** there are a wide range of books you can select for a study on the Titanic. Obviously, there's books that deal directly with the Titanic, and anymore you can find books that are written for every age group from preschool up into adulthood that deal with the Titanic disaster. Books on icebergs and glaciers. You can have your children read books on ships, including what's inside a ship and how a ship is built. You can read a biography on Samuel Morse and books on Morse Code and learn how to do Morse Code. And you can even read biographies on survivors, which although most of them are out of print now, many have been reprinted or you can actually find them in a lot of local libraries.

**People resources:** this may be a bit more challenging to find, since there are no survivors left of the Titanic. There is a YouTube video available called *Survivors and What They Saw* which is actually interviews with various survivors of the Titanic. You can also, as I mentioned before, possibly talk to a Coast Guard member or maybe someone who's been in the Navy and can share the experiences of being on a ship and what it's like to be on a larger ship.

Now that we have created quite a list of possible ideas for a Unit Study—it is time to organize them, re-look at them and determine which of these will work best for you and your family. It is important to remember that just because you have a great “brainstorming” idea, you do not necessarily have to use it in your Unit Study.

On page 4, our planning page—this is where we really take all our great ideas and break them down into our plan of what we want to accomplish with this study.

Under **Spelling & Vocabulary**, there is a variety of things you can do that would tie into a study on the Titanic, including nautical terminology (including bow, stern, knot, port, hull, mast, etc.). You can look at terminology related to hypothermia, have your children learn what frostbite is, lethargy, shivering. You can also have younger children learn glacier terminology (including ice caps, ice fields, the ice shelf, the iceberg, and so on).

**Penmanship** is our next area for planning. As I mentioned previously, you can do copywork, including quotes from a book, or possibly Bible verses that tie in.

The third thing that we'll want to plan is **writing** assignments. These will need to be age-appropriate for our children because of the nature of some of the information; it may not be appropriate for younger children to dive into some of the aspects of a Titanic study. But some things you can do would be have your children create a notebook with pictures and even snippets of information on Titanic passengers and different crew members.

You can do some research projects, which of course are going to need to be age-dependent as well. Younger children can do a research project on how the Titanic was built, and older children can do a research project on class distinctions. Your children can summarize the story of the Titanic disaster. You can do a report on the recovery efforts. Children can be a newspaper reporter and create a headline and article on the Titanic disaster. And older children—at the conclusion of the study—can take all of the information that they've learned through their readings, watch one of the Titanic movies, and write a comparison and contrasting paper on what we really know happened versus how it's portrayed in the media.

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**Literature & Reading Comprehension:** this part of your unit study can be done as something as formal as a book report that you have your children do that they can prepare and even give orally. You can do something as simple as a narration and dictation exercise based on the Charlotte Mason approach.

The *Magic Treehouse* actually has a guide & book available that deals with the Titanic disaster if you find that you need more help with some of the steps in doing some reading comprehension.

**Music & Art:** for art you can have your children draw a Titanic ship and label it; older children could even draw an inside view of a ship. You can have your younger children draw an iceberg at the conclusion of your study on icebergs and glaciers—making sure that the majority of the iceberg is beneath the water. You can build a telegraph machine from a cardboard box and have your children practice Morse Code. And for music, you can study the life of the band leader, Wallace Hartley, who chose to remain with several of his band members on the deck of the Titanic as it sank. He did this as a ministry to other people, just to encourage them through the disaster and to help bring a sense of peace into the situation. It's been suggested that *Nearer, My God to Thee* is the last song he conducted.

**P.E.** class is another consideration. There's a couple of things you can do with P.E. that would be fun, I think, with children. If you live near water, you can have them row a boat or a canoe one knot. If you're not near water, you could take the one knot and have them jog that or walk that far. When you study hypothermia, you can do various exercises with your children as a way to increase body heat and temperature.

**History, Geography, and Social Studies:** when you look and are planning a unit study, you're going to very quickly learn that the history, geography, and social studies aspect, as well as the science aspect of a unit study, are typically the easiest things to pull together, and you'll frequently find that these are areas you need to reduce a little bit in order to have enough time to do other things. So I'm just going to quickly run through some things that we did in history and in science, and obviously again, you would probably not want to do all of these if you were doing a short-term one month study.

First thing we did was a timeline. We constructed a timeline from 1880 to 1920. Just a couple of things we had on the timeline: the construction of the Titanic began in 1909, but it did not sail until 1912; in 1912 there were 48 U.S. states, and the first zipper ever used was used in 1912.

We did a lot of mapping activities, primarily focused on the route of the Titanic, including where it was built, where it sailed from, its destination, where it hit the iceberg and went down. Older children can actually use latitude and longitude if you can get a hold of a chart of the Atlantic Ocean for them. Younger children can actually map where it's believed where the iceberg broke off from the glacier, which is Greenland.

You can study the clothing styles and culture of 1912. You can do a study on class distinctions; older children can actually identify how class distinctions impacted survival rates.

You can do some biography reading on the people that were on board the Titanic. For example, Mr. & Mrs. Isidor Strauss who died together on the Titanic (he was actually the co-owner of Macy's Department Store); Rev. John Harper and his daughter Nan; Capt. John Smith; Major Archibald Butt was actually the military aide to President Taft, and he also perished on the Titanic.

You can study the Marconi Wireless Radio Transmitter, which was the means of communication during the Titanic's time. You can have your children learn Morse Code. It's typically thought that SOS means "Save Our Ship," but in actuality it doesn't stand for anything. SOS is commonly used as a distress call because it's easy to tap out using Morse Code, because it's three short, three long, and three short taps. The distress call was actually CQD which stands for "Come Quick Distress," but it's very laborious for typing out when you're in a crisis situation.

As I mentioned before, the U.S. flag had only 48 stars on it at the time of the Titanic disaster in 1912; you can have your children research what the 48 states were, including which states were added in 1912.

And older children can do a research project into the United States and British investigations into the Titanic disaster, including what recommendations came out of those investigations.

For **science** class, just several things we did (and again, these are going to be age-dependent): you can study glaciers; you can study hypothermia, including learning the symptoms, the treatment, and prevention of hypothermia; as part of your glacier study one thing you can have younger children do is melt ice cubes and graph the melting time, asking the question, “Does the amount of ice make a difference in melting time?” Take several different plates and put one ice cube on one, two on another, three on a third one, etc., and have them check that hourly and document the time when it’s completely melted.

Another experiment children can do is by asking the question: “What freezes faster, salt water or fresh water?” And to do this, you just have them make a hypothesis and place one cup of freshwater, and one cup of freshwater plus two and a half teaspoons of table salt to mimic ocean water into the freezer. Check it every thirty minutes and see if there’s any progress or any changes. Which freezes faster? While icebergs primarily are freshwater, the ocean *would* have an impact on the iceberg’s ability to melt.

Younger children can also float items in freshwater and saltwater, and see if they float equally, and have them research those results. And if you want to bring a little more interest into that science experiment, you can actually continue to add salt to your saltwater mixture and see if the amount of salt in the water makes a difference in how things float.

**Math** activities: there’s a great deal of math activities you can do with a Titanic study, and again these are going to be practical math activities and not a complete math curriculum.

Some things you can do: calculate the Titanic’s speed, converting Knots to Miles Per Hour; calculate the distance the Titanic sailed before she hit the iceberg; graph the temperature of the water in your science experiments; you can have children research the number of lifeboats and their seating capacity, compared to the number of people on board. What is the percentage of people without an option for survival? You can even have children calculate the number of lifeboats that would have been necessary for everyone to survive. And you can have older children consider the statistics of the Titanic passengers. There were 705 survivors, and 1523 who drowned; what percent survived? Have your children locate breakdown of men vs. women who survived, and even have them locate the survival rate between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd class passengers and have them analyze this information.

**Bible and Life Lessons:** well, there’s a great deal of life lessons that can be learned from the Titanic disaster. Just three quick ones that we did:

- The first thing we did was study the leadership and the responsibility of Captain John Smith, the captain of the Titanic, and I had my children research and discuss with me whether they felt he was a good leader and why they believed that way.
- You can also discuss the concept of “Women and Children First,” which was the captain’s order as the ship sank. Is this philosophy still popular in today’s culture? Why or why not? Discuss the changes in the past one hundred years in our culture that has had an impact on this philosophy.
- You can also do a Bible study on pride. It’s been reported that the Titanic’s designers stated, “God Himself couldn’t sink this ship.”

And then scripture for copywork in our final section here:

- Job 37:10 “From the breath of God ice is made, and the expanse of the waters is frozen.
- John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this: that one lay down his life for his friends.”
- Song of Solomon 8:7 is actually on the memorial monument of Mr. & Mrs. Isidor Strauss, and it says: “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”
- And Acts 16:31 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,” which are reportedly the last words of the Rev. John Harper.

**Congratulations!** You have just planned a Unit Study! The only step that is left is transitioning your planning page into daily activities and choosing your resources. The daily activities step is often the most fun step, because it is where you see your great ideas take on Life.

For my family, we found it beneficial to have a weekly goal or plan, instead of a daily one. Often times, we would become so enthralled with one section of our study, that we would not want to move on. In foreign language this is called “immersion learning” and it really applies to all areas of learning. Having a weekly goal enables us to continue to move forward and achieve our learning while at the same time allows us the time we need to become ingrained and thoroughly enjoy the subject matter.

You may find you want more direction as you begin to create your own unit studies. There are several valuable resources that are available to help you in the planning.

*Unit Studies Made Easy* by Valerie Bendt offers 4 books in one: including *How to Create Your Own Unit Study*, *The Unit Study Idea Book*, *For the Love of Reading*, and *Success with Unit Studies*. It’s loaded with practical advice and tips to ease your transition into unit studies.

*The Joy of Discovery* is a guided system for creating unit studies based on the I-3 approach: Individual, Inquiry and Instruction.

*Booster Shot! Energize Your Homeschool with Unit Studies* is the newest offering from Unit Study expert, Kym Wright. In this book, she covers the “nuts and bolts” of unit studies; how to create a plan; and strategies to energize your unit study. She also has a great Unit Study Q&A section in the back where common unit study questions are answered by three different homeschooling moms.

*Study Starters* is a CD-ROM for your computer that has introductory information on planning a unit study, and printable PDF forms for you to use for creating the framework for your own unit study.

Finally, the *Unit Study Daily Lesson Planner*. If you find that you need that step-by-step, day-by-day instruction, then there’s a unit study daily lesson planner that will help you to organize your thoughts into a daily plan.

But what if you are still not sure about incorporating unit studies in your home? Many families like my own began our unit study journey using a prepared curriculum. Let’s take a brief look at available unit study curriculum products.

If you remember from the definition at the beginning of our workshop, the all inclusive or complete unit study incorporate most academic areas into the theme or topic being studied, even though you do still need to add phonics and math. Some examples of an all inclusive or complete would be:

- *The Weaver Curriculum*. *The Weaver* is 5 volumes long and thematically centered on the Bible. At the completion of the 5 volumes, you would study Genesis 10 through the Life of Christ. Each volume is expected to take approximately one year.
- **KONOS**: KONOS is typically considered to be the “granddaddy” of all unit studies as it’s been around for so long. The original KONOS was 3 volumes in length, and each volume was expected to take 1-2 years to complete. It has since been subdivided into smaller sections, however, for those who would like to try the KONOS approach without investing in the full curriculum. KONOS is thematically centered on Biblical character traits (for example attentiveness, obedience, courage, and wisdom). It also contains extensive amounts of hands-on activities.
- *Trail Guide to Learning* is a U.S. History and Geography centered comprehensive unit study. While most unit study history curriculum approaches history through a chronological world lens, the Trail Guide to Learning believes it best to teach children U.S. History and Geography first because it’s what they are most familiar with and it allows the children to develop critical thinking skills so when world history is studied they are better able to comprehend the causes and effects of the diverse world events. *Trail Guide to Learning* series incorporates Science, Government and Economics, Art and Music, Writing Skills, games and activities, and critical thinking activities.

The first volume, *Paths of Exploration*, teaches through the character and experiences of explorers who shaped us as a nation with their vision, determination, bravery and sacrifice. Key figures studied: Columbus, the Jamestown settlers, the Pilgrims, Daniel Boone and Lewis and Clark. Primary science with *Paths of Exploration* focus involves acquiring the basic skills of observation and recording (both in drawing and writing), and a study of the solar system and beginning life science through studying the animals and plant life of the explored areas.

Volume 2 is called *Paths of Settlement* and it examines the settling of our nation through the lives of leaders who made a difference by standing for their beliefs. Key events studied include the Colonial Period, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War and Westward Expansion. Primary science focus is on Earth Science (including geology, weather, land forms, climate) and the impact of these factors on the settlement. Key figures include George Washington, Paul Revere, Abigail Adams, Francis Scott Key, Clara Barton, Robert E. Lee, and Abraham Lincoln.

In Volume 3, students study scientists and inventors who used their talents and abilities to provide better ways of living and working. Through this study, they will study the Industrial Revolution through the 20th Century. Key figures studied include Ben Franklin, Samuel Morse, George Washington Carver, the Wright Brothers, and Thomas Edison. Science at this level focuses on the Scientific process, Physical Science and human anatomy.

- Another all inclusive or complete unit study is *Learning Adventures*. *Learning Adventures* is organized around a chronological history study that employs quality age-appropriate literature and a plethora of “real books.” *Learning Adventures* also incorporates a biblical and Christian worldview along with a Bible and character study. There’s also a great depth inquiry into a wide breadth of science topics, and a lot of hands-on activities. Unlike many Unit Studies available, the focus here is on literature and writing skills, so a supplement is only necessary for Math.

Literature Based unit studies are those that focus on reading a specific book or series of books while studying core subjects, such as Language Arts, Science, History, Geography, as it appears in the selected literature. Many literature based unit studies may also be considered complete or all inclusive. Examples of Literature Based Unit Studies would include:

- *Five in a Row*, *Beyond Five in a Row* and *Before Five in a Row*. This is a literature-based unit study curriculum guide that covers social studies and character, language arts, math, science, and art. The literature selections contain positive moral values reflecting Biblical values, although there is no Bible content. You can use it as a stand-alone curriculum for preschool or supplement with phonics and math for older children. Curriculum is called “Five in a Row” simply because you spend five days in a row reading the same quality children’s book, which gives you the basic theme for each of the subjects studied. The author provides all of the reference material you’ll need in the volumes as background for your studies. There is a wide variety of hands-on activities and projects in these books.

*Before Five in a Row* is written for children ages 2-4; *Five in a Row* volumes 1-3 are written for children in Pre-K to 3rd grade; *Five in a Row* Volume 4 is specifically designed for 7 and 8 year olds, and actually contains Biblical content even though the others do not; and *Beyond Five in a Row* is written for the 3rd-7th grade student. With *Beyond Five in a Row*, rather than reading one book per day, children read 4 chapter books in one year.

- *The Prairie Primer*, which is based on the *Little House* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. *The Prairie Primer* contains 9 units, each corresponding to a *Little House* book. Each of the units will cover virtually all subject areas including history and geography as it relates to the *Little House* books, science, health, nutrition, practical skills, literature, writing, geography, Bible, character building, as well as crafts and other projects. There’s a weekly planning guide which highlights the resources and materials to be gathered before you start the study and also help you direct the focus of the study. With *The Prairie Primer*, the author recommends that you use Ray’s Arithmetic as your math course while you do the study, as it helps children become immersed in the culture of the 1800s.
- *Further Up and Further In* is another literature based unit study that is centered on the C.S. Lewis books *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It’s written for grades 4-8, but it’s easily adapted for other ages. It contains 7 units (one for each of the *Narnia* books), and covers Bible, History, Science, Geography, Social Studies, Health, English, Art and music.
- *Where the Brook and River Meet* is brought to us by the same author as *The Prairie Primer*, Margie Gray, and it’s a literature based unit study is based on the classic book *Anne of Green Gables*. It’s written for the junior high and high school student, and incorporates history, geography, literature, composition, Bible, fine arts, social studies, economics, health, physical and occupational education, and life skills. The author also recommends a one-year Latin course, in keeping with the spirit of the Victorian era. For high school students you would want to add an age appropriate math course as well as a lab science in order to meet their high school requirements.
- *Portraits of American Girlhood* is a literature based unit study that is based upon the *American Girl* books. It is arranged in chronological order arranged in chronological order of their time periods beginning with Felicity and ending with Molly. Each unit is designed to take approximately six weeks to complete, and this unit study actually incorporates social studies and history, diverse science topics, biographies of famous people, U.S. geography through history, supplemental math activities and character education. Language Arts is also covered in detail, and includes dictionary skills, literature, grammar/usage, general writing skills, creative writing and journalism. With this study also, you would only need to add a math course.

- *Creating Curriculum Using Children's Picture Books*: this study is actually more of a guide, and it uses 18 children's books (including books like *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, *Corduroy*, *Goodnight Moon*, *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, *The Polar Express*, and many others). This guide will give you a story summary, a "before the story," "during the story" and "after the story" activity suggestion. A helpful shaded box that points out themes, skills, vocabulary, and related books. And it's also followed by "connections" to various curriculum areas including language arts, math, science, problem-solving and social skills, fine motor, gross motor, visual discrimination, art, and creative dramatics. It includes reproducible pages and is designed for children Pre-K to 1<sup>st</sup> grade. With this study, with Pre-K it would be fine, it would be enough; for older children in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, you would also want to add phonics and math to it.
- *On the Loose with Dr. Seuss*: Dr. Seuss was passionate about making reading fun so that children would gain what he felt was the most important skill for success in life: reading. This book uses 23 Dr. Seuss books as the basis for a wide variety of reading, writing, thinking, art, and research activities. There's also background information on Dr. Seuss. Activities greatly vary but imagination and thinking are important ingredients in all of them. You would also want to add math, phonics, and other language arts skills alongside this guidebook.

Subject or topic based unit studies: these can be anything from history to a variety of different subjects. Prepared history based unit studies curriculum include:

- *History Revealed* by Diana Waring and revised by Answers in Genesis. This is a chronological study of history beginning in Genesis and ending in 1955. Designed as a multi-learning style program, all of the activities and projects during each of these weeks utilize one of four different learning styles, making this curriculum easy to use with anyone who wants to study history from a Biblical perspective. This is accomplished through diverse activities, audio CDs, research projects and reading assignments. It is for grades 3-12.
- TRISMS is another prepared history based unit study, and it's a thorough history based unit study that incorporates literature, science, history, geography, rhetoric, writing, vocabulary, art, music, and architecture. Periods of history are chronologically studied as well as from a religiously neutral position. One aspect setting TRISMS apart from other history curricula is their writing assignments correspond to Institute for Excellence in Writing's *Teaching Writing Structure & Style*. It is for grades 5-12.

Short term unit study guides typically will last one week to one month, and they may require (once again) more core curriculum alongside the topic. For those of you who are wanting to try out unit studies and not sure you really want to commit to them, this is a great place to start and will often make a great summer study or even provide a nice break from your traditional curriculum. Some examples would be:

- The Homeschooling Learning Network CD-ROMs. There are studies available on Presidents, US History, Life Science, as well as other topics.
- Intellego is also on CD-ROM format and has subject matter that deals with baseball, the Great Lakes, American Government, whales, orchestra, and the Solar System.
- Amanda Bennett has also taken her unit study guides and put them into CD-ROM format. She has studies available on patriotic holidays, American heroes, auto racing, and elections, just to name a few.
- Kym Wright has some short-term unit studies available in topics such as photography, microscopes, flower arranging, and botany.

# BECOMING A UNIT STUDY PRO

Video Workshop Transcript

Hopefully I have shared some resources that will inspire your own Unit Study Adventure! Just remember: ***You are a Unit Study P.R.O.!*** Pick your topic, research your topic, and organize your great ideas—it really is that simple!

Thank you for joining me today. It is my hope that you have a greater understanding of the Unit Study approach and feel confident in stepping out in your role as a Unit Study P.R.O. If you have any questions about Unit Studies (or other homeschool curriculum), I would be delighted to talk or email or even live chat with you! I can be reached at [consultants@rainbowresource.com](mailto:consultants@rainbowresource.com) or at 888-841-3456.