

Great Books to Relearn

American History as a Parent

Episode 314

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

you're listening to the Homeschool Made simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. I'm Rachel Winchester, a fellow homeschool mom

Rachel Winchester [00:00:12]:

using this method with my own three children. Perhaps you hesitated to homeschool because you didn't think you knew enough about history

Rachel Winchester [00:00:19]:

or any other subject.

Rachel Winchester [00:00:20]:

Well, in this episode I share about my own continuing education as a homeschool mom, especially in the subject of the American history, and I hope it will encourage you in your own continuing education as well.

Rachel Winchester [00:00:32]:

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Rachel Winchester [00:01:27]:

A few months ago I shared with you about my reading life and how I find time to read as a homeschooling mom with three kids. And today I thought that I would share some of what I've been reading as my family's learned and studied history together. So I have three children and they are my oldest, two are in second and third grade. So we are on our second year in the American History cycle. You may or may not know that we love history around here at Homeschool Made simple. And we especially love to make it the skeleton or the backbone of our curriculum that everything else every other subject connects to and hangs on. And so we use history to guide our learning. And so we recommend doing American history when children are young because it's concrete.

Rachel Winchester [00:02:15]:

So doing your national history, because it's right there in your backyard. It's the air you breathe, you know, the world you live in is your nation. And so it's very concrete. And then as our children get older and are able to understand abstract concepts, they can understand going back in time and they can deal with the reality of false gods or mythologies and all of those kind of things. So of course, we read the Bible all throughout there, but the Bible is revealing the true God. So anyway, I wanted to share some of the books that I have read for myself as I've gone through American History with my kids, because I don't know about you, but I didn't exactly have the most wonderful history education or experience, you know, of learning history in school. I can remember one class in fifth grade where we learned about Mesopotamia. And I remember a really boring American history class that I took as a high schooler doing a dual credit class at a local college.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:24]:

You know, I had. I remember one class that I took in high school that was American History. And it was just pulling from a textbook book. And it's so sad that I didn't actually learn anything very significant during that time. So as we teach our kids, you know, we never arrive at a full understanding. It's not like our

education is ever complete. We continue learning our whole lives, and the same will be true for our children. But hopefully we are giving them a more robust education than we may have gotten for ourselves.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:57]:

And it gives us a great excuse and opportunity to learn and relearn and deepen our knowledge of our own history and our history of the world as we get into world history. So I have not gone through world history with my kids yet. I've only gotten about halfway through our American History cycle of three years, going through what we call the purple sheets, and it goes through the discovery of the Americas all the way into the modern era. So my family and I are just about to start Civil War. We're doing Civil War era this spring semester. So so far we have done the discovery of the Americas, colonial times, the war for Independence, and then westward expansion. So before I jump into some of the books that I've read and our family has enjoyed as family read alouds, I wanted to share with you some quotes. A few months ago, I read a book by David McCullough called the American Spirit.

Rachel Winchester [00:04:56]:

And it's a collection of different essays and mostly speeches that he has given that he gave over the years at different schools and, you know, commencement graduations and things. And some of these quotes really stuck out to me and I wanted to share with them with you as well, because maybe you're wondering, why is history a big deal? Or history is boring to me? And I want to share with you what he says. These are from a few different essays, but these are some of the quotes that stuck out to me, he says the lessons of history are manifold. Nothing happens in isolation. Everything that happens has consequences. We are all part of a larger stream of events, past, present and future. We are all the beneficiaries of those who went before us, who built the cathedrals, who braved the unknown, who gave of their time and service, and who kept faith in the possibilities of the mind and the human spirit. From history we learn that sooner is not necessarily better than later, that what we don't know can often hurt us and badly.

Rachel Winchester [00:06:03]:

And that there is no such thing as a self made man or woman. A sense of history is an antidote to self pity and self importance, of which there is much too much in our time. To a large degree, history is a lesson in proportions. Then later he says, history isn't just something that ought to be taught, read or encouraged only because it will make us better citizens. It will make us better citizens and it will make us more thoughtful and understanding human beings. But it should be taught for the pleasure it provides. The pleasure of history, like art or music or literature, consists in an expansion of the experience of being alive. Which indeed is what education is largely about.

Rachel Winchester [00:06:49]:

The teaching of history, the emphasis on the importance of history, the enjoyment of history should begin at home. So I love that. Of course, learning history is going to make us better citizens of our nation and of our local community. But it's also going to be enjoyable, especially if we do it in the right way. And I want to share this one last quote. He said there's no great secret to teaching history or to making history interesting. Barbara Tuchman said it in two words. Tell stories.

Rachel Winchester [00:07:22]:

That's what history is, story. And What's a story? E.M. forster gave a wonderful definition to it when he said, if I say to you the king died and then the queen died, that's a sequence of events. If I say the king died and the queen died of grief, that's a story, that's human. So I love that. And actually Carol used to share that in the seminars because I know that I heard her quote that in the past. So we want to give our children history. We want to enjoy history for ourselves.

Rachel Winchester [00:08:00]:

And if you haven't enjoyed history, it's probably because you haven't met the people and the places of history that when we enter in through biography and learning about the people of that time, it really brings it alive in a whole different way. So first of all, I want to tell you about Land of Hope. So I read the Young Readers edition, Land of An Invitation to the Great American Story. So before my kids and I began doing American history, or maybe right at the beginning, I read through volume one. I've seen Land of Hope, like the full textbook, and it is written by a history professor at Hillsdale, Wilfred M. Maclay. And so then the

young readers edition is put into two volumes. And it's a little bit lower level of reading, but I just wanted to read it to get a sense of the level of reading that it's on and maybe when it would be a good resource to use with my kids one day.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:01]:

It's definitely not one to introduce kids to history with, you know, with younger kids, but it's a great one to have and to get a big sweep of American history for yourself. So this first volume goes through. Yeah, through the Civil War and into Reconstruction. So that was really cool to be able to go through it and see, you know, even up till now, because my kids and I are just starting Civil War. So Land of Hope really covered that. So I kind of got the big picture, the big sweep. And then now I've been going into some of the details I think that every parent should read. How Shall We Then Live the Rise and Decline of West Western Thought and Culture by Francis A.

Rachel Winchester [00:09:45]:

Schaeffer. So we recommend this for high schoolers to read when they are doing their world history with the pink sheets. But I think that it is so significant. And the final chapters are incredibly prophetic. And I read it for the first time in 2020, and I really need to do a rereading. So I haven't read it this year, but I really want to read it again soon. And it's. It's not something you just casually pick up.

Rachel Winchester [00:10:15]:

But I especially like to do this sort of reading during rest time or, you know, during the afternoon. It's kind of a good time to do more heady reading that requires maybe a little bit more effort or work. And even just setting saying, like, I'm gonna read this for 10 minutes, and then I get to read my novel or I get to go outside or whatever, or making it special, like, I'm gonna make a little cup of tea and then just read the next chapter or read for 15 minutes, whatever. Then you can make progress through these books. And it's not about just, like, ripping through them, but just bit by bit. And some you'll enjoy, and some you'll kind of find that, oh, that's not really my favorite part of history, but you'll get to know the people. So then as we started Colonial America, I had started David McCullough's book called John Adams a few years ago, and I got about halfway. Okay, this book is 500.

Rachel Winchester [00:11:11]:

Okay, almost 600 pages. Okay, 600 pages long. Yeah. So it's. It's quite a book. Quite exhaustive of his whole life. And so I began it, and I got about. I don't know, a third of the way through, and I just set it aside, so I decided to pick it back up.

Rachel Winchester [00:11:32]:

And I just started where I had left off the first time, and I finished the book, and it was wonderful, of course. And I also like to read biographies as a bedtime book because it's just story. So it's kind of similar to a novel because it's just the story of someone's life. So it's just true, as opposed to a novel being a fictional story of someone's life. So I kind of do that interchangeably. But, yes, it took me a while to. To get through the 600 pages, but I did do it and is very enjoyable. And John Adams is such a significant person in American history and oftentimes overlooked or forgotten about in general.

Rachel Winchester [00:12:14]:

You know, we think of George Washington and Jefferson and Ben Franklin, and all those people were significant, but he also had a place, a very significant place in our history. And I just love his relationship with his wife. And you just see the great sacrifices that he personally and his family made to establish our country and how he was extremely formative in thinking about the governmental structure and the things that America really needed to be able to have their independence, have our independence. And I think one reason that he is marginalized is that he spoke his mind, and so people weren't left wondering what he thought. And so he clearly had either people who just didn't like him, you know, because he ruffled people's feathers because he was going to, you know, make his mark. But I loved that book. And then one that our family really enjoyed as we learned about colonial and like the Discovery and the Pilgrims and all that was. I read Eating the A Pilgrim Book of Food and Manners by Lucille Recht Penner.

Rachel Winchester [00:13:28]:

And this book has a little bit of story to it, and then it also has a collection of recipes in the back so that you can have a pilgrim menu for. For a pilgrim meal. So we actually had another family come over, and the other mom and I split up

the. Split up the menu. And it was really, really fun. My husband says it was a classic homeschool night, but, you know, it was. It was actually really delicious. So that was a fun little thing.

Rachel Winchester [00:13:57]:

To do. And then two of our family read alouds that we did during this time were the *Courage of Sarah Noble* by Alice Dalglish, which tells the story of a little girl who goes with her dad into the forest so they can build their family's new homestead. And then her dad actually leaves her in the woods to go get the rest of the family. And it's about her experience waiting for him. And then we also read *Justin Morgan Had a Horse* by Marguerite Henry. And this was about a horse that, you know, had a storied history and kind of went from through a few different owners. And then I guess Justin Morgan was the teacher that had it. It's been a little while since we read it, but we really like Marguerite Henry's stories and she has lots of horse stories.

Rachel Winchester [00:14:54]:

So if you have any children that really love horses like mine do, then they will really enjoy these stories. And you get a glimpse at like, especially with this story, a glimpse of what it was like for them to ride horses everywhere and depend on a horse and just the different lifestyle that they had during the colonial period. So then we went into the War for Independence. And one book that I read that is kind of more, I guess, less America specific was a book that I first heard about from JJ it's called *Remaking the How 1776 Created the Post Christian West*. And it's by Andrew Wilson, published by Crossway. And it goes through the different. The seven major developments that arose from events in 1776. So it kind of gives this whole picture of what's going on in the world during the time that the American Revolution is happening.

Rachel Winchester [00:16:01]:

So that was really interesting to see how globalization and the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution and the great and enrichment the American Revolution, the rise of post Christianity and the dawn of Romanticism all work together and really shaped the modern west into the culture that we, the society that we are, which he names it as the Weirder Society. Which I think weird is an acronym that other sociologists and people use to describe our society. But it

stands for Western educated, industrialized, rich, democratic, ex Christian and romantic. So I think just living in today, we don't realize how unique our point in our time in history is compared to the past that was before this modern era. And so it was extremely enlightening. And again, just read a little bit at a time and some chapters are, you know, more interesting than others, but it's okay if it's a little bit of work. It was a really helpful and really insightful book. I highly recommend that.

Rachel Winchester [00:17:14]:

So then a book that I included in my stack that I didn't actually read. But if you didn't read, or if you know me describing the John Adams book is a little bit overwhelming to you, then David McCullough also wrote a book called 1776, which is much more digestible in size. It's only not even 300 pages, so it's 294 pages. So it's much more easily digested in terms of you're not going to be reading this for six months, necessarily. And it covers specifically 1776, so you get a whole, a lot more characters. And I guess at the center of the drama is Washington and other key people, Nathaniel Green and Henry Knox, as it really covers the war especially. But I cannot commend to you enough David McCullough's work. They're so good, thorough, very readable, very enjoyable.

Rachel Winchester [00:18:18]:

And he even has the chapters are broken into, like, little sections. So it makes it really easy to just pick it up, read a, read a few pages and then put it down. And you're not stopping in the middle of anything. It's like a thought is complete, and then you can kind of just pick it up a little bit later and work your way through it really easily. Then another, the other one I read about, the War for Independence was by Albert Marin, and it's titled the War for the Story of the American Revolution. And so I guess this is what I read instead of 1776. So Marin books are for, you know, they're like, if you look them up in your library, they are juvenile, at least they were in mine. And so this one is like a little over 250 pages.

Rachel Winchester [00:19:12]:

Again, really easy to read and just gives you that picture of what happened during the war. He talks about the seeds of the revolution, like what began the war, what really brought it about, and then just goes through all the different

parts and you really get a comprehensive view of what it was like to be in colonial wartime. I mean, it was just grueling. And he talks about the war at sea, on the frontier, and just how it totally changed everything for America to become its own independent nation. And then one book that we read as a family during this time was, we read the Journeyman by Elizabeth Yates. And this follows a boy, Jared Austin, during the early 1800s in New England. And he's the son of a farmer. His mother died when he was a newborn baby.

Rachel Winchester [00:20:19]:

And so his dad has some, you know, baggage and doesn't really love the son because his wife died after he was born. And so the boy ends up becoming the apprentice to an itinerant painter. And they go around New England and colonial America, the colonies at that time. And you really get an insight into what it's like to travel through the colonies and to stay in inns. And just the way that they did art at that time, it made me want to stencil every wall in my house. So I haven't done that yet, but I'm working on it. And so I. We have really enjoyed any Elizabeth Yates books that we've read, so that was a really fun one.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:03]:

So that was everything about the war for independence and colonial America. So then the next semester, we moved into westward expansion, and once again I picked up a David McCullough book. This time I read the Pioneers, which is also probably a similar length to the 1776 book. I borrowed that one from the library, so I don't have it with me right now to reference, but it traced the story of people beginning to go down the Ohio river and settle into the Ohio River Valley. And just some of the things that happen. And he follows really specific people, and it's in the township of Marietta, Ohio. And so he follows especially, I remember a man named Putnam and Cutler. And so you just learn the different.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:54]:

How the town came up and the different way that they lived and the challenges that they faced and some of the craziness that happened on the. On the frontier as just all kinds of different characters came into play. You know, wealthy people coming and establishing themselves and doing interesting things. But they eventually established a. Call it a university. And just how they created civilization and began to bring some of these things that were already

established in the east. And they brought them to the frontier and they began to build those things, build colleges, build education, bring all of this infrastructure to this barren wilderness. And it's really amazing.

Rachel Winchester [00:22:43]:

So one book then. I read two novels during this period. One is by Willa Cather. And actually I have two Willa Cather books for you, but one. So I. I haven't read this recently, but several years ago I read *O Pioneers* by Willa Cather. So that would be a great one to read if you're in the westward expansion pioneer era. And she's well known for it, amazing author and just well worth your read, for sure.

Rachel Winchester [00:23:13]:

And then. So what I read recently was called *Shadows on the Rock* by Willa Cather. And it is actually set in a French Canadian township or settlement. And so what would happen was they came and settled from France, and then the ships would come and they would bring the goods and everything. And then once the ships went back to France, then the people were cut off from the rest of the world. And so it tells the story of this man who is an apothecary and his daughter. And he's a widow, widower. The mother died sometime before the story begins.

Rachel Winchester [00:23:55]:

And it just tells about their life in the. The rock because the. Their town is built into this rock. And so it just tells the story of their life there and her growing up. And it's very sweet. I really love the relationship between the father and daughter. Daughter in that story. But it's definitely.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:15]:

If you enjoy French culture or, you know, you know French, it's. It's probably right up your alley. I do not know French. So when I read something that has French in it, it's just kind of. I don't even know how to pronounce things and stuff. So there is some, you know, because it's set in a French Canadian settlement, so there is some of that going on there. But *Shadows on the Rock* by Willa Cather. And then I read *Giants in the Earth* by OE Rolvog.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:45]:

If you're in well read, mom, then you probably read that, too. And it is a story of a Norwegian family that goes out on the prairie with a group of other Norwegian families. They settle in the Dakotas. And it is brutal. The weather is brutal. Their subsistence is brutal. It is just a hard life. It will really put things in perspective for you.

Rachel Winchester [00:25:12]:

And this is the second novel, Norwegian novel that I've read, and it's just so fascinating, their culture and life. So if you are Norwegian or have Norwegian, you know, ancestors, it would probably be really interesting for you especially. But for anyone, I really enjoyed it. It's again, very long, so just bit by bit, but it's actually really tragic. So I'm sorry to say that, but it is. But it's definitely worth the read. And then our family, we read Caddy Woodlawn by Carol Ryrie Brink. And this was so fun.

Rachel Winchester [00:25:45]:

On the back, Jim Trellise is quoted saying, you take the Little House on the Prairie, I'll take Caddy Woodlawn. I thought that was funny because everyone knows Little House on the Prairie, but I feel like Caddy Woodlawn is maybe lesser known or at least maybe lesser read. And it was such an enjoyable story. So very fun. It follows a little girl, but she's a tomboy and she's often with her brothers, and it just follows their family's story and about family togetherness. Yeah, Caddy Woodlawn is a real adventure. She'd rather hunt than sow, plow them, bake and beats her brother's dares every chance she gets. Catty is friends with the Indians who scare most of the neighbors.

Rachel Winchester [00:26:27]:

Neighbors who, like her mother and sisters, don't understand her at all. Catty is brave and her story is special because it's true. Based on the life and memories of Carol Ryrie Brink's grandmother, the real Catty Woodlawn. Her spirit and sense of fun have made this book a classic that readers have taken to their hearts for over 50 years. Highly recommend that. And it does have a sequel of either Magical Melons or it's also called Catty Woodlawn's Family. So that was really fun for us. And then last but not least, so we are just beginning to get into

the Civil War era and I wanted to share just some books that I either have read in the past or plan to read as I go through this time.

Rachel Winchester [00:27:09]:

So we did. My kids and I reread a book called Fanny Crosby, Queen of Gospel Songs by Rebecca Davis. And it just tells the story of of Fanny Crosby, the hymn and gospel songs writer. She wrote over 8,000 hymns and gospel songs in her life and she was blind and that did not keep her from being used by God. And doing really awesome and wonderful work. We really enjoyed this book. I highly recommend Rebecca Davis's books to you. She has great biographies and Carol actually did a interview with her a few years ago.

Rachel Winchester [00:27:44]:

So you should search that on the or we can put a link to that in the show notes. Then another great book for the family would be the Hannah by Marguerite d'Angeli. And it tells the story of this little girl named Hannah who's a Quaker girl in. Okay. In Philadelphia. So nine year old Hannah, a Quaker living in Philadelphia just before the Civil War, longs to have some fashionable dresses like other girls, but comes to appreciate her heritage and its plain dressing when her family saves the life of a runaway slave. So it really sweetly articulates the struggle of a little girl wanting to have what other people have. And then seeing Cal because her family is set apart, then they were able to do something really wonderful and amazing for someone who had escaped from the South.

Rachel Winchester [00:28:35]:

And then another book that I plan to read this time is Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Again, I started this several years ago, but I never finished it because I was trying to read it at night and that was not a good idea because this is not a pleasant story. So it's definitely a daytime read during rest time, a little bit at a time. So I'm going to read that one. I think that's important to read. It was so significant during the time of slavery and when people, people were fighting for the abolishment of slavery. Other good ones that I have read in the past would be Freedom Train, the story of Harriet Tubman by Dorothy Sterling and Invincible Louisa by Cornelia Meigs. Megs M E I G S I read that one myself.

Rachel Winchester [00:29:25]:

Those would be great to hand to, you know, like an older elementary or middle schooler or read them together with them. But yeah, I read those a few years ago and I love Louisa May Alcott. And so if you have a daughter who really loves her, that would be a great book to read to learn more about her. And then I also plan to go into some Clara Barton books. When I was young. I do remember learning about Clara Barton and that was really fun. So I want to read a little bit more about her and have a better understanding of or just remember, you know, specifics of what she did. And then I'm also going to read some of Albert Marren's books.

Rachel Winchester [00:30:05]:

He has three books that deal with the Civil War era. One is on Abe Lincoln, one is on Ulysses S. Grant, which is called Unconditional Surrender. And then there's one on Virginia, or I think it's called Virginia's General, but it's on Robert E. Lee. So I want to read all of those to get those different perspectives and get a full bodied perspective on the Civil War and what it was like for everyone involved. It was a very hard time in our nation's history. And then I plan to also read Frederick Douglass and his narrative.

Rachel Winchester [00:30:43]:

So I've got some reading to do is what I'm saying. You can check back and see how much I get through. But I hope that this really inspires you and encourages you to continue your own education as you go through history together with your kids. Of course this isn't everything that my children and I read. We read through lots of books together during our school time. But this is just things that I read for my own curiosity and to go a little bit deeper. And there were so many things that I didn't read. So don't worry if you're not getting the whole scope of everything there possibly is.

Rachel Winchester [00:31:17]:

Just pick something. Even if you just read one book that gives you a more adult perspective on that moment in history, I think that will be well worth your time and will continue to enrich your own experience as you travel along through time with your children.

Rachel Winchester [00:31:36]:

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Rachel Winchester [00:31:42]:

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Rachel Winchester [00:31:45]:

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Rachel Winchester [00:32:01]:

will enable you to do. Blessings.