

Using Videos and Television to Your Advantage

By Brenda Rishia, former OCHEC editor

Not all that is viewed on the “electronic icon” that sits in your living room or family room is evil. For those home educating families who have access to television, a VCR, and the internet, they have the advantage of being able to use these resources for teaching and reinforcing knowledge. Science, math, and literature can all be augmented by watching corresponding videos that are available from various sources.

By checking upcoming television programming on PBS, (We use <http://tvlistings2.zap2it.com/gridall.asp>) we can set up and record worthwhile programs such as the PBS series called The Pioneer House, the 1800’s House, and The 1940’s House. These programs featured volunteer families who undertook to live for a few months in the exact lifestyle of the time period given, and endured the hardships, joys, and details of life in those circumstances. It was a fascinating experience to witness! Another very informative series was on architecture, which explored such topics as the design challenges of bridges to the building of skyscrapers. Although we do not have cable TV, our PBS channel has many of the same quality programs that are available through cable. We have just a simple set of “rabbit ears” on top of our television, plus a signal booster/amplifier available from Radio Shack (price approximately \$25 to \$50, depending on the strength of the signal you wish to capture). A tower antenna would be better for homes which are in not-so-great locations for picking up a good signal.

Our local public library is a great source for videos that can be used in the “home classroom”. We can obtain videos for older students (recommended age: 12—16) on historical personalities such as Laura Secord, Gandhi, Madame Curie, Beethoven (Beethoven Lives Upstairs), Nicholas Tesla, Helen Keller (The Miracle Worker), Oskar Schindler (Schindler's List), Jackie Robinson (The Jackie Robinson Story), Anne Frank (The Diary of Anne Frank), or Albert Einstein (Light to the Power of 2). Films on major historic events are available such as Julius Caesar, A Man for All Seasons, The Crucible, A Tale of Two Cities, All Quiet on the Western Front, The Longest Day, Chariots of Fire.

Personal and church libraries are another location to find Christian videos. A good friend has an extensive video library which she is willing to loan out to us on Christian topics from different ministries (more appropriate for teens/adults than the younger set). We saw the stories of John Huss, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other famous Christians,

“creation versus evolution”-type series by both Answers in Genesis and Kent Hovind, the Dr. Davis series on bringing up children, and for the older audience, presentations by well-known Bible scholars on apologetics and/or eschatology.

For videos based on classic literature, we always make certain our children have read the books first, then allow them to view the video. Watching the video can bring the story to life. We enjoyed Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Roots, Pride and Prejudice, Little Women, Old Yeller, The Red Badge of Courage, the Christy series, Little House on the Prairie, and Lust for Life (based on the biography of Vincent Van Gogh).

Nature series produced by companies such as National Geographic are very informative but sometimes are saturated with “evolution pollution”, as we laughingly call it. Other pro-evolution programs are Bill Nye- the Science Guy, Magic School Bus, and Kratt’s Creatures, so choose carefully. In spite of the above-stated bias, there are some excellent programs covering all sorts of sea creatures, desert animals, insects, beetles, etc.

The library also has many educational videos available on specific curriculum subjects such as math (for example, probability and statistics), and science (such as Cybernation).

Often as it happens with cooking, one has to see the person preparing the meal in order to understand how to do it. Watching how something is prepared rather than reading about how to prepare it (for visual learners, especially) can save many a burnt dinner or spoiled dessert. It took me many unsuccessful tries to get the knack of making bread dough, but after I had seen someone do it on TV, it all became very clear to me. For home economics, we record our favourite cooking shows and the multi-talented Martha Stewart. Her show, Martha Stewart Living, features crafts, gardening, excellent field trips, homemaking ideas, cooking and baking, and her web site (www.marthastewart.com) offers the recipes we see on the program (not to mention a bit of self-promotion).

Be aware that some of these movies may not be appropriate for younger viewers. There are also several reasons that a movie or program would not be suitable. Some films are simply good entertainment with little or no content. Others are suitable for adults but not for children. In some instances otherwise interesting films are disqualified by excessive violence, sexually explicit scenes, historical inaccuracy, or immorality. Parents need to be diligent in previewing any movie they choose for its suitability. There are some excellent web sites that review movies (but not TV programs, that I know of) such as www.familytv.com/canada/, www.gospelcom.net/preview/, <http://christianity.about.com/library/weekly/blmovies.htm?once=true&>

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One year we had a “video night” whereby we invited anyone from our support group to join us once a week during the summer months to enjoy a quality Christian video they wouldn’t otherwise be able to see. So gather the family together, put up your feet, get out the popcorn and enjoy an informative afternoon or evening with educational videos!

This article originally appeared in the OCHEC Spring 2003 newsletter.

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