



# What Homeschooling Taught Me About Education

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**M**y perception of the importance of liberty has been strongly influenced by my education. Not because of what I was taught, but how I was taught. My sister and I were homeschooled.

Instead of sitting in a classroom working at a desk, much of our learning during our younger years consisted of play and exploration. One of our favorite games we

dubbed “wounded soldier,” where one of us would pretend to be injured during the Crimean War and the other would act as Florence Nightingale coming to the rescue. Our dolls often joined the Green Mountain Boys or went on factory strike. One year, we had a medieval feast for our family’s Christmas dinner, complete with costumes and entertainment. We participated in a nature

program where we went maple sugaring, butchered poultry, and waded into bogs. Trips to the local library were the highlight of my week; our mom had to instate a limit of checking out only ten books per person per trip.

As I grew older, my family joined a co-op program where we met with other homeschooling families once a week. I participated in speech and debate, read Cicero in Latin, and acted out Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* with my co-op class. We participated in a mock trial competition in the courthouse. I learned about America's founding documents by reading and annotating the actual documents. Rather than learning from excerpts and multiple-choice tests, I read entire classic pieces of literature, wrote persuasive essays about them, and discussed the works with my class utilizing the Socratic method.

My education wasn't necessarily conventional, but it was perfect for my family. Learning wasn't bound by the confines of a classroom, and I was able to explore what I was truly interested in. I look back fondly on my education, rather than feeling resentful or thankful that it is over. Many of my favorite childhood memories revolve around homeschooling.

As I began my college application process, I was often met with skepticism from those unaccustomed to homeschooling. Would a homeschooled education be enough to get me the test scores I needed to attend the university I wanted? The answer is yes. I attended my university on a nearly full-ride scholarship and graduated last year debt free. My sister is currently attending her dream college on a substantial

academic and athletic scholarship and will graduate next year debt free, as well.

I noticed that homeschooling better prepared me for the independence that college requires. Attending a conventional school means your day is mapped out for you. Contrarily, as a homeschooler – particularly in high school – I was given a substantial amount of freedom to plan and organize my own time. I was forced to practice time management and build discipline at a much younger age, as I operated without the structure and boundaries conventional schools demand. My senior year of high school, I dual enrolled at my local community college full time. Because of this, after graduating high school I already had an entire year of college credits. I also already knew how to navigate a college campus, plan my own schedule, register for classes, and submit assignments electronically. With a full year of credits – primarily general education classes – out of the way, I was able to complete two majors in a normal four-year time frame and could have graduated at least an entire year early.

As an adult, I have realized that homeschooling allowed me to discover and pursue my talents and interests at a very young age. I now work as a grant writer for The James Madison Institute. In college, I majored in English and Political Science. These accomplishments came as a result of exploration in high school. As a highschooler, I expressed an interest in mock trial, speech and debate, writing, and literature. I toyed with the idea of potentially going to law school, becoming a librarian, or getting involved in politics. My parents encouraged me to seek opportunities that would allow

me to explore these interests. I volunteered at my local library and our county's teen court program weekly. I entered writing contests, judged mock trial, and attended a summer camp at the Capitol. Participating in these programs allowed me to explore my passions and interests, and to gauge whether there could be a future career for me in those areas. The exploration I had already pursued in high school allowed me to feel surer of myself as I entered college and eventually the workforce. Homeschooling allowed me the time and gave me the creativity to find out what I love.

School choice is crucial because when every student is funneled through the same educational system, creativity and originality are lost. Education is not one-size-fits-all, and students and parents need the freedom

to learn and educate in their own ways. Homeschooling is not strange or underground; it is a fast-growing and effective schooling method that deserves recognition.

School choice allows Americans the freedom to be individuals. Rather than forced conformity to a mass-produced education system, school choice produces unique and independent citizens more able to reach their full potential. Advancement of liberty means advancement of educational freedom.

*Adelyn Valencia is a grant writer for The James Madison Institute. This article is adapted from an essay published in the Foundation for Economic Education's e-book "Generation Homeschooled."*