Podcast # More Thoughts on Notebooking

Today I want to talk some more about notebooking, although I have really struggled with knowing what more to say about it. I’ve talked extensively about it, but I know there are quite a few of you who are still struggling to wrap your mind around it. I can say that If notebooking feels like a chore or a time-consuming burden to you; if it’s just one more thing on your to do list that you feel guilty you haven’t gotten to, I would say you have not yet caught the vision of it. While there is no one right way to do it, I hope sharing some of my thoughts on it may help you see your way more clearly so that it can become the delight it is meant to be. But more importantly will become one of your most important and valued tools in educating the hearts of you and your children..

I encourage you to read or re-read the section on Notebooking that begins on p. 141 of the Catch the Vision Reference bundle and also the Take 5 #79 on page 275 of the same book. There are lots of sample pages there and ideas to try out. There’s a free digital copy on the Forgotten Classics page if you don’t own a hard copy.

I have thought long and hard about what may be tripping you up. It seems so simple and straightforward to me. Simply put, when I find something I want to hold on to it, I write it in a notebook. IT can be a quote or an idea or reference to a story or a question. But I know it’s not simple for some of you. I’ve thought about your comments and the challenges you face. And I suppose the answer is that there is not one answer. So let me throw out a number of thoughts and see if any of them connect to what’s going on. .And then I’ll walk you through a few of my notebooking pages from My America Story Book. I’ve included pdfs that you can print out and follow along or you can just view them on your screen when we get to that point.

 There are some very basic things you’ve just got to pull yourself together to do. Someone commented that their paper and their pens are never in the same place at once. I can’t help you with that. You are going to have to work on that habit of keeping pens and paper handy. I suggest getting a little basket of some sort for notebooking supplies. Get a 3 hole punch—they are less than ten dollars on Amazon-- and punch holes in a whole ream of paper. That way you aren’t looking for the hole punch when it’s time to put your page in your 3 ring notebook and the pages end up getting lost. It’s already to go. And if you want to reinforce the pages, let your littles put the little sticker reinforcers on the holes. They might have fun doing that. Put some glue sticks, scissors, some pens and markers if you want to use markers—you don’t have to-- in the basket. When it’s time to notebook, just pull it out and you’re ready to go.

Some of you can’t decide on what kind of notebooks. Should they be bound or lined or 3 ring binders? I recommend 3 ring binders because you can add and take away as you want. These notebooks are meant to grow with you. I decided to do My America Story Book in a bound notebook and in some ways I regret it. While I do love having this volume that tells America’s story, there’s no way to add to what is there—every page is filled up. With a 3 ring binder, if I have something I want to add and ran out of room on the page, I can easily add another page. Also, I made a mistake and got out of order and I had no way to correct it. If a child makes a mistake, it’s much easier to toss a single piece of paper and start over again than to try and fix a page that is already bound into a book.

 Some of you have said it’s awkward to write on the pages in a 3 ring binder. The simple solution is to create the page before you add it to the binder.

Some of you are putting your pages in plastic page protectors. I would advise against that because, again, this is meant to be a living, growing document. Yes, you can pull a piece of paper out of the plastic sleeve and write on it, but that extra step may discourage you from adding a quote or something interesting you’ve learned. Make it usable and practical. Hopefully it will never be ‘finished’.

Should you use lined paper or plain? Depends on the age of your child. If he’s just learning to write, having the lines can be very helpful. I like blank pages because I can easily write smaller if I have more I want to include and adjust things to fit around pictures. It is perfectly acceptable to start out with lined and switch to blank. It doesn’t matter. Either choice is correct.

Some of you have been bothered by approaching history unchronologically. If you use a 3 ring binder, your notebook becomes your timeline. This is how and where your pieces are going to fit together in a very natural way. If you have a bound journal, all you can do is just keep adding pages with no organization. With a 3 ring notebook, you are able to add the pages where they fit in chronologically. When one notebook fills up, just take a section out and put it in a new notebook and keep growing.

My literature notebook is organized alphabetically by title. That way I can easily find the book I’m looking for. The collecting of gems and thoughts and lessons is the same for fictional literature as it is for historical stories, but I keep my real people separate from my fictional people. Fictional people don’t always give me their birthdays so it’s rather challenging to fit them in chronologically.

Some of you are worried about space. Starting out, if you want the back section to be for literature and the front for history, then that could work for awhile. I had suggested a separate notebook for culture where you’d do map work, places you hope to visit one day, traditions, etc. If that really topples your storage space, then don’t worry about it. But I do wonder if there are other things that you could part with to make room for one more notebook. Your culture notebook could be a family one so it would require just one. And do find an accessible place to store the notebooks—a place of honor-- so that you aren’t always looking for them in the pile of laundry under the bed. Treat them as the treasures they are meant to be.

Another obstacle some of you have to overcome is your need for perfection. I know it’s a real thing. It may come from your school days when you had to do it just right to please the teacher and get an A. . I would encourage you to start by making a perfectly bad page. Do it as perfectly wrong as you can think of. Ok. I’m kidding….just a little. Let yourself do something. And, again, if you use a 3 ring binder, you aren’t stuck with it forever. You can go back and remove any page that is really bugging you. Maybe knowing that option for redemption is in place will make you not so paralyzed in fear of doing it wrong.

I noticed last year when we started My America Story Book, some of you posted absolutely stunning notebooking pages. Truly beautiful and artistic. I would never ever want to discourage anyone from expressing their talents in that way. But the thought struck me, they’ll never be able to keep that up. You’ll have to correct me if I’m wrong, but I have a feeling that was the end of your notebooking pages. It is far better to glue a few pictures on a page and scribble something that struck you and to keep doing it than to create one masterpiece page. Maybe make a decision that you will occasionally do the full artistic rendition when you have the time and inclination, but give yourself permission to make simpler pages in between. You can always go back and re-create whatever you want to. Don’t let yourself get ‘baked in a squat’—if you read the Zig Ziglar reference I posted.

Another obstacle you tell me has to do with time constraints. You say you simply don’t have time. It takes me about 15 minutes to create a page in my notebook. It takes maybe 10 minutes to listen to a story, or I can read it much faster. That leaves me 23 hours and 30 minutes a day to do everything else. It really comes down to priorities, doesn’t it? When you truly catch the vision of notebooking, I guarantee it won’t be hard to find time somewhere in your week to fit it in. .

Notebooking will actually save you time. . What you may be spending hours trying to learn in Language Arts can actually be accomplished with the copy work you are doing in your Notebooking pages. I talk about that elsewhere. If you are spending hours answering study guide questions and doing ‘lessons’, I’m trying to suggest to you that there may be a more efficient and beneficial use of your time.

I have tried to make this entry into Notebooking as easy as I can. I heard you say there were too many stories to choose from. So I selected a bunch for you that I knew were loaded with ideas and gems and narrowed down the choices in My America Story Book and now My World Story Book.. One a day. You said you didn’t have time to look for pictures. So I found some for you. I’ll even deliver them, professionally printed, to your door for $5 a month. You said your voice gets tired or you have toddlers who don’t allow you to read aloud. So I recorded the stories. You said you can’t remember what you heard. So I linked the written text right next to the audio. I even threw in some music appreciation lessons—just click and listen. But I heard many of you have missed seeing those.

I hear you say you’ve fallen behind so you have stopped. . You can’t fall behind. The stories are just sitting there, patiently waiting for you. Whenever you want. And I even made it all free for those of you with tight budgets.

I’ve heard you say your lives are crazy and chaotic. I designed this for the craziest and most chaotic of lives to include something meaningful and useful every day, even if you only have a few minutes.

That’s how anxious I am for you to experience what I am trying to help you experience. Once you get started, you will be able to apply these methods to all your learning. The one thing I can’t do is do it for you.

I hear from some of you your kids are pushing back. They don’t want to do it. If you are ‘assigning’ them notebooking, I’m not surprised. If you are requiring they tell you what they got out of the story, they’re going to resist. The solution is found in this paraphrased scripture: , “When thou art converted, strengthen your children.” Have you found the joy in notebooking? If you haven’t, then how do you expect your kids to? Always start with you. Model it. If you can only set aside 15 minutes on a Friday, then set aside 15 minutes on a Friday. And if they still don’t want to do it—then you keep doing it and feeding your own soul and your own character and your own personality because that is how you are going to best influence your children anyway.

How do you create a page? Write the name of the person at the top of the page. Write the year that person was born in the top corner of the page for easy reference. You can look it up, but I included it on the My America Story Book page. I also like to add the year the person died. Now glue the pictures anywhere on the page. If that is all you can manage; if that is all your kids are willing to do, then it is enough. Start there. Put the page in the notebook chronologically by year of birth. And you have begun the process. At some point, if you hear or read something that strikes you and you want to remember it, look it up in the text and copy it on the page.

Keep in mind the ages of your children. I am not suggesting My America Story Book and lots of writing for your 5 year old. Although some of you may have 5 year olds who love it. Generally, I’d spend more time in Nature with younger children and introduce the history stories when they are 8 and older. Pay attention to the clues they are giving you.

I talked about ways to prepare your young children for notebooking in the notebooking presentation I referenced at the beginning of this podcast. You can prepare your littles for notebooking by letting them create little scrapbooks of things they care about—pictures they like, little poems they like, collections from nature. Children are naturally full of wonder and questions. We shut that down when we start demanding them to learn what we want them to learn. Don’t let that happen.

One way you can include your younger kids is to let them cut the pictures out for your notebook. Cutting with scissors is important for developing manual dexterity for the writing that will follow. Let them glue the pictures on the pages for you!

And are the pictures important? I believe so. They illuminate the text—just like the Celtic monks did. A picture is worth thousands of words.

I know of a 13 year old girl who loathed history and who hated writing even more. Her mother just kept playing the stories each day and one day, something finally clicked. And now listening to the stories and studying history has become her daughter’s favorite thing to do.. In fact, they were really busy one day and her mom suggested she forego the notebooking page that day. Her daughter said, “No way! That’s my favorite part!”

I have also heard from some of you that your child struggles with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Maybe you will use more oral work—remember there are audios available for My America and My World Story Book and mybelmonde.com has lots of stories to listen to. You may spend more time talking about the pictures or having them dictate things. But I can also tell you about the mom who said her teenage daughter struggled terribly with both dyslexia and dysgraphia. She got so excited about having a Great Souls notebook of her own, that she pushed through her obstacles to create one for herself and made great strides in her handwriting and reading. Wanting something is more than half the battle.

I remember someone in the group posting of a family they knew who celebrated the end of the school year by burning all their school work. Good riddance. I have just the opposite feeling for my notebooks.. If there was a fire and I had 5 minutes to gather my most priceless possessions, my notebooks would come with me.

Having said all that, I think there is something much deeper at the heart of the difficulty in comprehending notebooking well-educated heart style. I think it has a lot to do with the system of education most of us were raised in.

I remember what learning looked like for me in school. I was given a text to read and there were study questions at the back of the chapter. I soon realized I could skip reading the text and go straight to the questions because it was easy to go back and find the answers. It may ask a question like name the three reasons the Pilgrims came to the New World and I’d skim through the text until I would find: The three reasons the Pilgrims came to the New World were…and I’d just have to copy them out. Then in a few days, the teacher would give me a test with the same kinds of questions. I’d pass the test and then promptly forget most of it. I see the same thing in the curriculum I check out from time to time in some of the programs you may be using now and find the same kinds of questions. What is a delta? I just scan through the text until I find the word delta and it usually has the answer right after the word that can just be copied out. A delta is…

It’s a very straightforward way to learn.

Well, some of you may be having problems with the concept of Notebooking because you are also product of that system. It’s not your fault. Learning meant moving information around on a piece of paper. It’s like every single day of your life, a big dump truck full of information was backed up in your driveway, and your job was to move it around and clear it off because the next day, another dump truck was coming. And the day after and the day after. In fact, 183 dump truck loads of information had been carefully planned for you every single school year that you were required to get through. No wonder you were terrified to get behind! How would you ever catch up if you missed a day or two? And the one filling the trucks was someone who had no idea who you were or what questions you had or what you cared about. Your job was to work through it -and often you had to take it home to finish up the job and then be ready for another load the next day.

And yet the dirty little secret is, the truck was really just filled with fill dirt. And the problem with fill dirt is nothing really grows in it. It just fills up time and space. How much do you remember, or more importantly, use from your school days? .

This quote recently crossed my path, from an 1896 text:

"Perhaps the greatest danger...in the future, will be the great increase of knowledge...with the increase of knowledge the temptation will correspondingly increase to make the greatest possible amount of it the leading aim.

By 'cramming [the student's] mind to the utmost, "there are schools which out-herod Herod in the slaughter of the Innocents."

I believe that is exactly what has happened and is happening in our schools. We are cramming the minds of our students with information for which they have not yet found a use for and have definitely not asked for.. So when I suggest creating a notebook page, you may be thinking of the complexity of how to take all that information in the story and arrange all of it on a notebooking page. Which is tiresome and mundane. And not at all the spirit of what I’m suggesting.

However, what I am suggesting requires thinking and pondering and questioning and choosing, which that system has never allowed us to do.

I very clearly remember a text in the 7th grade that toppled my familiar and easy to manage system of learning. In this particular text, the questions at the end of the chapter required that I actually read the text and process it and think about what it was telling me in order to answer the questions. And what was worse, there wasn’t a right or wrong answer! I remember I hated it! I hated it so much. I didn’t want to have to think! I just wanted to get done with the assignment.

Some of you may be resisting notebooking as I am describing it because of that shift. If you have been raised in a system that never allowed you to interact with something at your own level, that never gave you the time and space to ask and answer your own questions, to never have the freedom to choose what matters to you; and then you are given something that requires you to read and ponder and process without any outside prompts, what I am suggesting may feel a bit uncomfortable and unnatural.

Remember—that which isn’t used atrophies from dis-use. And that includes our ability to question and to ponder.

So I would say, give yourself time and grace to allow yourself to learn to think again--as much time as it takes for you to read something and be aware of your own reaction to it.

This is the gift you are giving your children if you use notebooking in the way I am trying to help you see—the freedom to learn in a natural way; to move away from truckloads of information that require listing and outlining and defining and testing and instead, allows them to form their own questions, make their own observations, prioritize what matters to them, and feel the rush of excitement at those ah-hah moments when they make their own connections. Here, there are no pre-loaded dump truck loads of knowledge that make everyone feel so hurried and overwhelmed. There is plenty of time for freedom and choice.

But, you may be asking, how else are my kids going to learn everything they need to learn before they leave home? We might miss something!

Well, are we not here together to find a better way and a better use for these formative years?

Let me answer that question with a couple of quotes:

First quote:

“The only thing that counts in the world is character and education matters only so far as it helps to shape character. If it leaves character untouched, it is useless.” (Arthur Mee)

Second quote:

"It was not an untutored nor an ignorant world that battled long agonizing years on the shell-cratered no-man's land; but on the contrary, it was the so-called civilized and so-called educated world that shot the deadly missiles, sank the defenseless in the briny deeps, bombed the cities, and tortured and maimed the millions of the flowers of the nations.

"But were they really educated in the true sense of the word?

"They had the power of knowledge, but lacked the development of the moral and spiritual side, the lack of which permitted them to use their knowledge toward the destruction of mankind, instead of further teaching of the peoples of the universe, making them prosperous, happy, and contented."

-(-Spencer W. Kimball )

It comes down to deciding what matters the most to you. Take some time and analyze your days. How much time are you spending moving dump trucks loads of fill dirt around? Is it not leaving you enough time and mental energy to tend to the character of your children? And isn’t character simply the condition of one’s heart?

I am suggesting to you that you make that your first priority. And if there’s time for fill dirt and you want that, then fit it around that, not the other way around where you never get to it.

I have heard it said that airplane pilots train through simulations. These simulations are very effective because the mind cannot distinguish between the simulated exercise and the real thing. So having gone through it, when a similar situation comes up, the pilot can safely navigate through because he has been through the process already.

That’s what studying the stories of history and literature can do for us. Through the stories, we live through the experiences of others and our hearts begin to make decisions on how we will act in the face of injustice or fear or temptations. Through the stories, our hearts make choices of the person we want to be. Do we want to be the kind one or the cruel one? The greedy one of the compassionate one? Will we think only of ourselves? Our hearts are conditioned through the stories—and our character is formed.

I shared this quote a couple of days ago:
“One of the highest objects of life is the development of character; and the books read in childhood, when full of noble sentiments and actions, are among the surest means for the cultivation of those feelings and purposes that enrich the spiritual nature and result in a noble manhood and a beautiful womanhood.” (Edward Brooks)

Just like the subconscious mind of the airplane pilot can’t discern the real thing from the simulation, we can also learn about living life from literature even though the characters are not real. So notebooking in my literature gems looks just like my story of the world notebooks. I am mining for the same kinds of gems.

When I encourage you to draw heavily from the older books, it’s because those writers were very concerned with developing the character of young people. If you are trying to do notebooking as I describe it from recent books, you may find nothing to write about. Because they are mostly information loaded books. Not character and idea loaded.

Oh! If we would just immerse our children in the stories of lives instead of dumping information in their heads, what a difference we would see in our world! It was reading the stories of great people that was the life changing moment for Orison Swett Marden whose amazing story of overcoming difficulties has been shared by me in many podcasts and presentations. I even recorded his whole life story in BelMonde for you to listen to. And he changed the lives of millions of other people around the world by doing the same thing—sharing the stories of lives.

I definitely agree with him when he said: “We are taught nearly everything except the very thing we ought to know—the art of living.”

Studying lives is how we learn the art of living.

Many of you may have heard Greg Denning speak. He said the same thing. As a lost and troubled youth, he immersed himself in reading the biographies of others. It changed his life.

I have experienced the same things which is why I keep trying to sell it to you here. Let go of the idea that History is a subject to be taught with facts to master in youth. Nothing has ever happened in history—ever—that cannot be traced back to the character of individuals; the condition of their hearts. Nothing. All actions have been and are driven by Greed or Anger or fear or jealousy or compassion or duty or loyalty or love. Our children’s hearts need to understand that. That’s why approaching a study of history through the lives of people is so important and why their notebooking pages will help them to begin to sort that out.

I wish I had words to say what my heart so much wants to help you understand! But I feel like I keep falling short. That’s because matters of the heart are always difficult to translate into words.

Let me walk you through some of my actual notebook pages from My America Story Book and see if that will illustrate what I am talking about. You might want to pull those pages up now to follow along.

You’ll notice that a lot of my entries come because I’ve read enough now that I’m starting to recognize patterns and lessons and I make note of them. I use the tools I learned from John Muir Laws class on nature journaling: —I notice, I wonder and that reminds me of. In fact, I have started using them in my scripture study, when I’m looking at art, when I’m listening to music, when I’m reading anything. I just find myself doing it now without effort. So what you see on my pages is my brain on paper as I notice, I wonder and I am reminded of. John teaches that Love is about paying attention and these tools help me to pay attention which makes me love what I am reading even more.

Here’s my page on Marco Polo. Should it surprise you that right off the bat I noted “his story changed the world!” Christopher Columbus read the stories of Marco Polo and it lit a fire of desire to see this enchanting world of the East with his own eyes. In a world that is constantly fact checking stories, I made a note that it didn’t matter if the stories were true or not. The effect was the same. But I did note that on his deathbed, Marco said he had told the truth.

Then I noticed that the thing that made Marco stand out from everyone else was that he had the ability to see and notice all kinds of interesting things and brought those back to the Khan and made him a great favorite in the royal courts. I think the same trait makes people stand out today over those who go through life never noticing anything.

I did make note of a fact because it was interesting to me—he left home at 15 and was gone for 27 years! No wonder no one recognized him when he came home. He was 42 years old—just a little younger than my son.

Then I copied a passage that described the land of the East. “Crystal fountains kept the air pure and fresh, and great birds with gold and silver wings flew lazily from tree to tree, and one could not tell whether the city was more beautiful by day, when the sun shone down upon it and brightened the marble roofs and charming gardens, or by night, when the moon and stars were reflected in the lakes and rivers, and when the fountains glistened in the moonlight.”

Isn’t that a beautiful description? I tried to liken it to something I’ve seen. And I noted it there “The closest I can think of is Versailles.” And I wondered if Louis XIV had read the same things in Marco’s writings.

Then I posed another question—really nothing that can ever be answered. I had read that the Khan was very interested in Christianity as it had been taught him by the Polos. So he asked them to send back a couple of priests to teach his people.. But along the way, the priests became too full of fear because of the danger of the journey, and turned back. The Khan then found some Buddhist priests and China took a much different turn of events. Is there something in my life that I might have done that could make a difference but I turned back from fear? Could those two priests have imagined how their decision would affect so many lives?

And then this idea really struck me: “The king and ALL his people enjoyed their beautiful city, for they were so rich, they had to work very little. And this city, for the excellence thereof, hath the name of the city of Heaven…a man would think he were in Paradise.”

We dream of a society where there were no poor among them. China lived it. I can’t help but wonder how they did that? ALL enjoyed it. The distribution of wealth is definitely one of today’s global challenges. What might the history of China teach us? What were the conditions of their hearts?

And then, because I am always watching for clues about education, I noticed that ‘all the children went to school in the public parks and gardens.’ Is that not the perfect classroom?

Then I made a connection—when it talked about the fact that had Marco Polo not been thrown into prison, he may never have made a record of their travels and it would have changed the course of history, wouldn’t it? And it reminded me of others who I have been learning about who did their great work in prison: John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim’s progress, Cervantes wrote Don Quixote, the Apostle Paul gave much for Luke to write down, and Sir Walter Raleigh wrote a history of the world that was very popular at the time. I just came across another name I’ll have to add—Roger Bacon.

So then I posed the question for myself: “Might something that seems bad be turned to good? Like Covid quarantine?”

And then I wondered what happened in China that moved them from a time when everyone was rich to so many peasants? What can I learn from that? This question is tucked away for my later studies of China.

Then I ended with a happily ever after. Marco Polo got married sometime after the age of 42 and went on to have 3 daughters. I couldn’t help but wonder what kind of bedtime stories he must have had to tell them! It just makes him very human and real to me. And I have a picture there to bring him to life. When I read the name of Marco Polo, his image comes to mind because there it is—right there on that page.

In fact, all the pictures serve to make an instant recall of things I had learned about him.

Let’s do another one: Christopher Columbus. There’s the year he was born and died and where he was from.

After reading his story, the first thing I noticed was that he died thinking he was a failure. Might we do things and have no idea of our circle of influence? ! I observed “Little could he have imagined how the world would change because this single man Would not give up!”

There’s that lesson again for my character building—to not give up! I bump into that in story after story.

Then from his journal, I noticed the first song sung in the New World. I have read how rough and uncouth his sailors were, and yet here they were joining their voices in a sacred song and ‘brushing tears from their eyes. Adds another facet to who they were. You’ll notice a recording you can listen to. Close your eyes and picture the scene unfolding as you listen.

Then I couldn’t help but wonder if maybe it was the power of their music that made the natives trust them. I keep finding that in other stories, too, and always make note of it.

Above the picture of him in all his glory after his first voyage, I noted how fame is fleeting—people are so fickle. Not worth aspiring to fame.

Then I reflected on the people today who are toppling his statue. They just are clueless what opportunities he opened to us. I wrote, “We who enjoy freedom are the beneficiaries of Columbus’ willingness to do hard things.”

The whole story is messy and there are some really disturbing things that happened—yet look at the good that came from it. “God grows sunflowers out of manure!”

I noticed that he was an explorer and a discoverer—not a colonizer. He is criticized for his handling of the colonists—but that was never his desire or his strong point. If only he could have done that which he wanted to do most—explore and discover.

Again: In face of scorn and ridicule he NEVer gave up hope of success. Can I do the same?

I wondered at something—he actually accomplished what he needed to do on his very first voyage. He showed the world what could be done and they followed. But he reasoned he was supposed to find gold to reclaim the Holy Land and all the sorrow came from his later attempts at doing something that I don’t think God ever needed him to do. I don’t know if that makes sense….how many times do I try and figure out what God wants me to do and miss the mark because my own inclinations get in the way and bring hard things in my life that just didn’t need to happen?

It made me sad that such a great man died poor, sick and discouraged. The city annals made no mention of his death. Kind of back to my first reflection—that he died thinking he was a failure. I’ve run into quite a few great lives who felt the same way. Mozart, for one, was buried in some obscure grave. Van Gogh never managed to sell a single painting in his lifetime. That was true of several artists—their fame came only after their deaths. We often can’t measure our influence in our lifetime. We just have to do the best we can and leave the rest to God.

I won’t go into as much detail on some other pages—just a few highlights.

Bartolome Las Casas

After reading at how horribly the explorers treated the Native Americans, I was so happy to write, “Finally! Someone who is fighting for the rights of the Indians!”

How did he win their trust? “In this trying and difficult position, father las casas, by his kindness and thoughtfulness, won the respect and confidence of the Indians.

I found that pattern everywhere! It didn’t matter how cruel or seemingly savage someone was, kindness often softened hearts and even worked miracles. Love is the greatest power.

Here’s the theme again with Giovanni da Verrazzano. I included a little story that I copied:

“the sailors tried very hard to reach the shore, but the surf was so high, they were unable to do this. One brave sailor jumped from the boat and swam to the shore where Indians stood watching. But then fear overcame him and he tried to swim back to the ship. He would have drowned had not some of the Indians waded in and dragged him to shore. They stripped him of his clothes and started to build a big bonfire.

All the sailors—who were watching—though the Indians meant to burn him alive or cook and eat him.

To their great relief, the Indians treated him very gently and kindly; they dried his clothes by the fire and warmed him. When he was strong enough they led him back to the shore so he could swim back to the ship.

Later the Frenchmen had a chance to return the kindness, but I am sorry to say they did not do so. They came upon a little Indian boy, whom they seized and carried off to their ship. The mother of the boy came quickly from some bushes to rescue her son, and they would have stolen her, too, but they had to run to escape the rest of the tribe who had come to help her.

They quickly set sail with the little boy.

Need I elaborate on what that simple story is teaching my heart?

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca

After listing many of the hardships these men faced, I copied, “So they marched, and marched, and marched, day after day, and day after day, losing men all the time, until at last they reached the great sea..but it wasn’t Tampa Bay!

They were still hundreds of miles away from their ships. “We shall never get home! We shall die on this seacoast! And some of the great, strong, bearded men threw themselves on the sands and cried as though their hearts would break.

No matter how bad things look, a brave man NEVER gives up hope. Only de Vaca and 3 men lived. They walked across America to the Pacific Ocean.

Here’s Sir Francis Drake who was actually a charming pirate. “Pardon us sir. We are grieved to disturb you, but we will make amends. We will relieve you of the weight of the silver, and then your journey will be less wearisome.”

This is a case where I wish I had another page. Someone posted a poem attributed to him and I would love a place to add it.

Sir Walter Raleigh:

Here are some recurring lessons:

How fickle is fame and popularity—after all he did, Raleigh was beheaded.

I loved his wit—here were his last words while looking at the axe: “This is sharp medicine, but a sound cure for disease.”

Here is the influence of stories again—I love the painting: Storytellers told him wonderful stories about the great men of England, the soldiers and sailors, the poets and great lords. They inspired him to want to be someone great.

Here is reference to his long stay in prison—he was a poet too! For those of you who have boys who think poetry is a girl thing, here are two manly men—Drake and Raleigh—who were also poets.

We don’t always think of the wives. I found this picture and included it. What must his wife have thought of her husband’s daring escapades?

I have daughters who live in Raleigh—a place Sir Walter made possible; a place he longed to see for himself but was denied.

All these little things bring these men and women to life so they can teach me! I feel like I live in the company of greatness. I love looking through the pages of my notebooks and being reminded of their words and deeds and wisdom. They have become my friends and they constantly teach me how to navigate my own life. They will teach your children things that cannot be taught directly.

 We were driving through the Daniel Boone national forest a couple of weeks ago. I didn’t just see trees—I don’t even know how to put it into words. I could feel the bravery, the determination and persistence, the struggling to pave a path through that dense forest.. I watched Daniel Boone in my mind’s eye frantically searching for his daughter who had been kidnapped by the Indians. All the sacrifices of those early pioneers flashed across my heart as I drove and I felt so grateful for what they did for me as I sped across a paved highway in an air conditioned car. This is what the stories of history can do for us—everywhere we look we are surrounded by reminders of what true greatness looks like. . They make us to also want to do something to make the world a better place than we found it. Just like Daniel Boone did. And just like countless others.

This is the gift of Notebooking, Well-Educated Heart style. I hope something I’ve said has helped you overcome some obstacle that may be keeping you from enjoying this simple but far-reaching learning activity. Start simple and then let it grow in your own way.

.