

2026 Class Descriptions and Bios

1st/2nd Grade

Class: The Geography of *My Father's Dragon*

Teacher: Shelby Happe

Fee: \$5

Class size: 20

Description: This class centers on the beautiful book, *My Father's Dragon*, which we will read aloud together. It is a story about a young boy who travels to Wild Island to cleverly rescue a baby dragon from a group of animals who are exploiting him. The story lends itself well to learning basic geography and mapping skills, so we will be completing hands-on projects each day that focus on map reading, keys, the compass rose, landforms, and the rainforest biome. I hope to spark big imaginations in a warm and high energy classroom where every student is encouraged to share their unique ideas.

Teacher bio: Teacher Bio: I am a 12-year homeschooling mom of three. We have lived in the Southern Hills for 16 years, where we build homes as a family. My favorite homeschooling memories all revolve around sharing captivating and timeless stories with my kids, and I'd love to share that with your children too!

Class: American Sign Language

Teacher: Eirelyn Bender

Fee: \$5

Class size: 12

Description: We will be learning basic sign language. Starting with ABC's, how to introduce yourself, and basic conversation. Then we will be learning Bible verses in sign language. Learning a verse in English and in Sign Language can drastically increase your ability to remember the verses long term. We will be having a great time learning and "talking" with each other! We will be going on stage at the open house to show off the signs we have learned.

Teacher Bio: My Name is Eirelyn Bender. I am a homeschool graduate and still vividly remember my first ASL class when I was in first grade at Black Hills Homeschool Co-op. This class, and the wonderful teacher, sparked a life long love of learning ASL and being able to converse with those who find the world silent. Right now, I mostly use my knowledge to help our local Awana group memorize scripture with sign. I also run our

local youth group, enjoy pretty much every sport, and usually can be found behind an easel with paint brush in hand.

Class: Lego Fun

Teacher: Mariza Wolf-Bisnett

Fee: \$20

Class size: 20

Description: Lego building fun to include following direction builds, story telling and mini challenges. This will give your child a chance to practice public speaking, following directions, spacial awareness, creativity and team building skills, all while having a great time. Cost \$20 and children will keep their Legos at the end of the semester

Teacher bio: Hello, my name is Mariza Bisnett. I am a mom of three kids and have been homeschooling since 2009. I enjoy nature walks and plants of all sorts. I love spending time with my kids, which is a big part of why I love homeschooling.

Class: Board Games

Teacher: Julie Tomlin

Fee: \$3

Class size: 18

Description: Play both classic and new board and card games with fellow classmates, including Taco vs Burrito, Guesstures, Uno No Mercy, Clue Jr, Checkers, Ticket to Ride Jr, Apples to Apples, and more - or bring your own game any week and play in groups!

Teacher bio: I love homeschooling my four kids ages 6-16 (Kyle, Rachel, Jason, and Laura), studying the Bible, clogging, Zumba, ping pong, and logistics. I help as an admin for West River Christian Homeschoolers on Facebook and running the worship slides at Rimrock E Free. My husband is the director of Black Hills Christian Hall. I'm looking forward to sharing games at co-op!

Class: Loom Knitting

Teacher: Shalyn McPherson

Fee: \$25

Class size: 8

Description: In this hands-on class, the 1st and 2nd graders will learn the basics of loom knitting while creating cozy handmade projects. Using a beginner-friendly knitting loom kit, students will make a hat and a cup cozy as they build fine motor skills,

patience, creativity, and confidence. No knitting experience is needed—all supplies are included! They will bring home at the end of co-op, their creations and the loom.

Teacher bio: My name is Shalyn McPherson. My husband's name is Jon. I am a mom of seven, oldest is 19, and about to hit his second year of college and he's in the military. I also have a senior 17 year old, and a 11, 9, 7, 5 and my forever 16 month old Atlas who went to Heaven before us. I have been homeschooling for 13 years. I have been a part of the Black Hills homeschool co-op for seven years, in different capacities. Looking forward to another year.

Class: Life Skills

Teacher: Ruth Gabbert

Fee: \$15

Class size: 12

Description: In the life skills class, we will have fun learning about basic life skill for kids. Each week will focus on skills that we all need to make basic life great and running well. We will learn about outdoor survival skills, what to do in emergencies, health, safety, and basic first aid. We will also focus in on domestic chores, nutrition and basic meal prep, organization and time management, basic maintenance and using simple tools, and even some social emotion skills! Activities, hands on learning, games and more to make it fun!

Teacher bio: My name is Ruth Gabbert and I have lived in the Black Hills for 20 years. I love the outdoors: gardening, biking, hiking, Jeeping, camping, and just being with my husband of 16 years and our boys ages 8 and 6. Fitness is huge part of my life as well and I enjoy staying in shape by training for and competing in triathlons and running races. Before I became a mom, I was a fitness trainer and massage therapist. Now I enjoy homeschooling, homemaking, and being with my boys most of the time. I am thankful to God for the blessings and life I have been given and hope and pray I can be a blessing to your children!

Class: Pokemon Science Animals

Teacher: Heaven Butchart

Fee: \$10

Class size: 15

Description: Discover the world of Pokemon like never before! In this class, students will learn about the real life counterparts that Pokemon are based on. We will learn about biomes, predators and prey, the food chain and more! This class will give students a chance to learn about animals in a new way that makes Pokemon more than just a fictional game, but a learning tool that will guide us through the animal kingdom!

Teacher bio: Hello! My name is Heaven Butchart. My husband Andrew and I have been married for 12 years and have four children together. We have been homeschooling

since 2019. This is my 5th year teaching at this co-op. We love the outdoors, camping and being involved in sports and activities. We're always heading somewhere and joke that we are homeschoolers that are never actually home. I'm so grateful to teach and have my children take classes that broadens their horizons.

Class: Poetry & Tea Time

Teacher: Justine Trokey

Fee: \$10

Class size: 20

Description: Poetry; the best words in the best order. ~Samuel Taylor Coleridge
If the first words of man at the beginning of time were "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," then these first words of man were in poetry. While many of us may feel intimidated by the idea of poetry, it is a gift to give to young hearts and minds. From the lofty structures of sonnets and ballads to the flowing form of free verse, this class will explore the different poetic styles and several of the masters of those styles from Christina Rossetti to Robert Frost. As we muse on the words of the poets, we will also enjoy loose leaf teas from around the world and learn how to prepare them for our own personal poetry and teatime use.

Teacher bio: Justine Trokey was born in California, married in Arizona, became a mother in Nevada, and finally settled in South Dakota. She is married to the handsome and witty Trevor Trokey and together they have their version of the four little women and Laurie (four daughters, and a son, for those non-Alcott fans.) She is a graduated homeschooler now homeschooling her three school-aged children, loving what it means to "set the feast" of ideas in front of them. She calls Jesus her king, reads poetry for fun (obviously), likes to lift weights, has a slight obsession with the Old Norse culture, is an avid Inklings fan, struggles to grow her own food, but tries anyway, and is reading way too many books at the same time. "What are you reading?" is a dangerous question around her.

Class: PE

Teacher: Melody Gwin

Fee: n/a

Class size: 12

Description: PE/Outdoor time. We will be playing games and moving our bodies. The focus will be on outdoor time, as weather allows.

Teacher bio: Hello, my name is Melody Gwin. I have homeschooled off and on for 17 years. I have 7 children. I like going on adventures with my family. I like to discover new

places and trying different experiences. History and reading are some of my favorite things.

Class: Art

Teacher: Shannon Powell

Fee: \$10

Class size: 15

Description: Get ready to channel your inner artist! In our art class we will learn about the color wheel, elements of art, famous artists and using different mediums. Some of the mediums will include watercolor paints, color pencils, pastels and markers. Each week the students will complete their own project to bring home. I want this class to be fun for all the students. I'm a believer in that art is not about the product, it is about the process and having fun.

Teacher bio: My name is Shannon Powell, I'm married to Ryan. This will be my fourth year being involved in the Black Hills Co-op. I ran an in-home daycare for 14 years. We have 8 kids, with 7 bio kids/ adopted kids and 1 foster kid. We have three girls whose ages are 20, 15 and 5. We have five boys whose ages are 11, 11, 9, 7 and 4. Our family has lived in the Black Hills for 9 years and love calling it home. Despite our large family size we are very active, from camping, to hiking, we love the outdoors. Our kids are also involved in extracurricular activities including Trail Life, soccer and archery. As if we were not busy enough, we started a home sourdough business in 2023, called So Dough Daddy.

3rd/4th Grade

Class: Cookie Decorating

Teacher: Lori Lever

Fee: \$10

Class size: 18

Description: **Cookie Decorating Fun!**

Get ready to mix creativity with something delicious! In this hands-on class, students will learn how to decorate beautiful (and tasty!) sugar cookies using colorful royal icing and buttercream frosting. Each class, I'll provide homemade sugar cookies and all the decorating supplies needed. Students will learn fun decorating techniques such as outlining, flooding, piping, and adding creative details while exploring their artistic side. No experience is needed.

Teacher bio: Hi! I'm Lori, a homeschooling mom of eight who loves doing life and learning with my kids. Our days are usually filled with books, baking, gardening, and

plenty of time outdoors together. When I'm not teaching or chasing kids around, you'll probably find me baking sourdough, working in the garden, or enjoying the beautiful Black Hills with my family. Originally from Washington, I've loved putting down roots here and am so thankful to now call the Black Hills home.

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Class: Exploring God's Marvels Through Nature Study

Teacher: Alicia Christensen

Fee: \$10

Class size: 12

Description: Students will be exploring nature and learning the scientific method through experiments and observation. This class requires the students to be able to ask questions and focus their attention on a task while spread outside in nature without an adult right by their side at all points of time. They will be introduced to measuring tools and data collection. We will start together as a class to introduce concepts and observe some simple experiments, then use the knowledge learned by spreading out for our observations in nature, and come back together near the end of class to discuss our findings. Unless there is lightning, we plan to be outside no matter the weather, so

please have the students in appropriate clothing/shoes whether it is sunny, raining or snowing. They will need a writing utensil for writing down observations during the class.

Teacher bio: My name is Alicia Christensen. I have five kids that I homeschool in a range from kindergarten to 7th grade. For the past several years I have been teaching Handicrafts at our co-op and this year decided to try something new and more nature-based. I am passionate about getting outside and love any time that our family has for exploring nature trails. It is going to be such fun combining nature with a variety of science topics this fall!

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5th/6th Grade

Class: Cookie Decorating

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Class size: 18

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Class: Drama and Improv

Teacher: Carla Stevens

Fee: \$5

Class size: 10

Description: Students will be learning basic improv and speaking techniques in a fun, interactive class designed to get kids up and talking.

Teacher bio: Carla is a 16-year veteran homeschooler of four children, two of whom have graduated.

She is the wife of Charlie, and they have been married for 26 years (in November). They are an active-duty military family, and they have lived all over the US and abroad. They feel very blessed to live in the Black Hills area.

Carla has a background in music, theater, and oral communications. She has degrees in all three fields, and is very passionate about them. She enjoys helping kids become more comfortable with speaking and performing before others. Carla loves every aspect of music, and thinks it is a beautiful way to teach and to share God. Carla adores sharing her love of God, laughing, reading, and spending time in nature-especially with family. Hot coffee keeps her going, and considers baking to be cathartic.

Class: Exploring God's Marvels Through Nature Study

Teacher: Alicia Christensen

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Class: Board Games

Teacher: Julie Tomlin

Fee: \$3

Class size: 18

Description: Play both classic and new board and card games with fellow classmates, including What Do You Meme (family), One Night Werewolf, Utter Nonsense, Labyrinth, Nertz, Apples to Apples, Speed, Dutch Blitz, Telestrations, Catan Jr, Checkers, and more - or bring your own game any week and play in groups!

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Class: Tell a Story

Teacher: Sarah Brown

Fee: 0

Class size: 15

Description: Think creative writing with a flair! We'll not only be working on writing stories but lots more surprises you'd normally not think of. We'll be playing games and practicing public speaking skills to get the juices flowing in an easygoing atmosphere. This will be a very interactive class, but don't let that scare you away if you're an introvert. We won't take ourselves too seriously (don't worry, I never do) but my hope is to grow in our writing skills both on and off the page and encourage one another in the process. Please bring writing utensils to class. You're welcome to bring a notebook but there will be paper provided.

Teacher bio: Hello! I'm Sarah Brown and have been homeschooling for 10+ years. My husband, Nick, and I have been married for 20 years and have three kids, two teen girls and a two year old boy. We hail from Colorado and have been just outside Custer for almost four.

Class: Chalk & Oil Pastels

Teacher: Jessica Baas

Fee: \$10

Class size: 10

Description: Embrace the messy art! Pastels are expressive mediums full of color. We will blend, layer, and manipulate pigment with our fingers to create painterly effects. Students will create soft and bold drawings with dragon eyes, donuts, ocean scenes, and northern lights. Come willing to get dusty and messy, but everything washes up.

Teacher bio: Hello, I'm a homeschool mom who loves anything colorful and handmade. I was trained as a graphic designer, but I'd rather play with messy art. My husband, Kevin and I have 3 girls and we've been on this homeschool journey since 2011. My current favorite activities are quilting, making ice cream, and finding wildflowers on the trail.

Class: Breathing Narnian Air: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

Teacher: Trevor Trokey

Class Fee: N/A

Class Size: 25

Class Description: For our third year of Narnia at BHHC, we take on the 3rd novel (in written order) and explore it through the literary tradition Lewis was deliberately perpetuating in all his works of fiction (and defending in several of his non-fictions). We will join Edmund, Lucy, and "a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, [who] almost deserved it," as they board the Dawn Treader and journey to the very end of the World. Just like the painting in the attic, the images we meet in literature can pull us out of ourselves and the world we think we know, and into the wonderful and beautiful through the portal of God-given Imagination. Wave by wave, and island after island, our eyes will be further opened through meaningful symbols to truths too great for non-fiction – and, of course, we'll have a merry time the whole way, meeting Magicians, Dufflepuds,

Dragons, and even a Fallen Star! "All hands on deck! And bring me the horizon!"

Teacher Bio:

Delighted husband of Justine the Tea and Poetry Queen, and devoted father of five, I do my best to live and teach the Gospel. When I'm not directly engaged in ministry, I'm probably haunting a coffee shop, attempting life as an outdoorsman, or trying to impress Justine by reading poetry (it's worked at least once); In general, I'm trying to do all I can to defy the Machine of post-human modernity. Literature and Nature (both of them sworn enemies of the Machine) are two of my very favorite subjects, and I am thrilled to bring that passion to the next generation here at Co-Op!

Class: LARP

Teacher: Jordan Bender

Fee: \$13

Class size:

Description: Live Action Role Play- This class is a great opportunity for older kids to burn off energy and learn how to design and build LARP weapons. We will build "weapons" out of PVC pipe, pool noodles and duct tape to do battle! The first 15 minutes of class time is spent building and the rest of the class time is BATTLE! This class is mostly physical education with a healthy dose of crafting, design troubleshooting, sportsmanship and rules of engagement learning opportunities.

Teacher bio:My name is Jordan Bender. I have 4 boys, Elijah (14), Ray (13), Josiah (9), and Luke(7). My wife and I moved back to the hills 7 years ago. She works as a Lab Tech atMonument, and I do part time work as a Tile Installer. We both served in the Air Force,that is where we met. We live near the hospital in Rapid. I have a bachelor's degree in counseling from Lancaster Bible College and I am currently an instructor for Trail LifeUSA. I instruct kids 11-14 in outdoors skills with a Christ centered focus. I have worked with kids for the last 10 years in many ways and enjoying teaching. I am the main stay at home parent and oversee their home education. I have a heart to serve our Lord andSavior Jesus Christ and teach our kids to do the same.

Class: Jewelry Making

Fee: \$35

Class Size: 12

Class description: In this class we will go over the basics of jewelry making, how to use different tools and technics for different projects.

We will be learning how to work with string, wire, paracord, cotton cord and different sizes of beads.

We will be making things like necklaces, bracelets, keychains, pins, beaded flowers and more.

Teacher bio: My name is Taylor Jennings. I love all things Jesus, family, coffee and art. I have always loved being crafty and creative. Since having kiddos and becoming a homeschool family that has only increased!

I love sewing, embroidery, jewelry making, paper crafts, watercolor and printmaking. If it's creative...I want to try it! I hope to share a little bit of that excitement for creativity this year

Secondary (7th Grade & up)

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Fee: \$10

Class size: 12

Description: Students will be exploring nature and learning the scientific method through experiments and observation. This class requires the students to be able to ask questions and focus their attention on a task while spread outside in nature without an adult right by their side at all points of time. They will be introduced to measuring tools and data collection. We will start together as a class to introduce concepts and observe some simple experiments, then use the knowledge learned by spreading out for our observations in nature, and come back together near the end of class to discuss our findings. Unless there is lightning, we plan to be outside no matter the weather, so please have the students in appropriate clothing/shoes whether it is sunny, raining or snowing. They will need a writing utensil for writing down observations during the class. It is also recommended that they bring a calculator for some math calculations during a few of our classes.

Teacher bio: My name is Alicia Christensen. I have five kids that I homeschool in a range from kindergarten to 7th grade. For the past several years I have been teaching Handicrafts at our co-op and this year decided to try something new and more nature-based. I am passionate about getting outside and love any time that our family has for exploring nature trails. It is going to be such fun combining nature with a variety of science topics this fall!

Class: Printmaking – Pink Eraser Art

Teacher: Jessica Baas

Fee: \$20

Class size: 10

Description: In this beginner friendly class, students will carve pink erasers to make mini art prints. We'll develop images meant for block printing, use lino cut carving tools safely, and learn ink techniques. Stamp carving is a simple style of printmaking that's fun, bold, and unique. Each student will get a carving tool set and pink erasers. Basic

paper will be provided, but students may bring their own artist sketchbook. Class fee \$20

Teacher bio: Hello, I'm a homeschool mom who loves anything colorful and handmade. I was trained as a graphic designer, but I'd rather play with messy art. My husband, Kevin and I have 3 girls and we've been on this homeschool journey since 2011. My current favorite activities are quilting, making ice cream, and finding wildflowers on the trail.

Class: Breathing Narnian Air: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader

Teacher: Trevor Trokey

Class Fee: n/a

Class Size: 25

Class Description: For our third year of Narnia at BHHSC, we take on the 3rd novel (in written order) and explore it through the literary tradition Lewis was deliberately perpetuating in all his works of fiction (and defending in several of his non-fictions). We will join Edmund, Lucy, and “a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, [who] almost deserved it,” as they board the Dawn Treader and journey to the very end of the World. Just like the painting in the attic, the images we meet in literature can pull us out of ourselves and the world we think we know, and into the wonderful and beautiful through the portal of God-given Imagination. Wave by wave, and island after island, our eyes will be further opened through meaningful symbols to truths too great for non-fiction – and, of course, we'll have a merry time the whole way, meeting Magicians, Dufflepuds, Dragons, and even a Fallen Star! “All hands on deck! And bring me the horizon!”

Teacher Bio:

Delighted husband of Justine the Tea and Poetry Queen, and devoted father of five, I do my best to live and teach the Gospel. When I'm not directly engaged in ministry, I'm probably haunting a coffee shop, attempting life as an outdoorsman, or trying to impress Justine by reading poetry (it's worked at least once); In general, I'm trying to do all I can to defy the Machine of post-human modernity. Literature and Nature (both of them sworn enemies of the Machine) are two of my very favorite subjects, and I am thrilled to bring that passion to the next generation here at Co-Op!

Class: Physiology

Teacher: Ryleesa Weeda

Fee: n/a

Class size: 15

Description: This 8-week class will equip students with the knowledge and tools to understand and optimize their own physical and mental health using science-backed strategies from the Physiology First movement. Centered on the idea that the body isn't broken—it's responding exactly as designed to the input it receives—this course provides a foundation in how the brain and body work *together*, especially under stress.

Students will explore topics like:

- How breathing affects brain function and emotional regulation
- The science of sleep and how it powers performance and recovery
- Why cold exposure, movement, and posture matter for energy and focus
- How to harness heart rate variability (HRV) to build resilience
- Tools for self-regulation and stress management
- How to develop critical thinking around modern health myths

This course is part of a growing *movement to redefine how we support the health of our next generation*, providing students with a *roadmap for bringing a new, proactive, and empowering approach to health optimization for a generation to life!*

With a hands-on, engaging approach, students won't just learn facts—they'll gain lifelong skills they can apply daily to boost focus, emotional balance, and overall well-being.

Teacher bio: I am a homeschool mom of 3. I love being active in the hills at every opportunity: paddleboarding, hiking, and rock climbing. I'm a lifelong martial artist, holding a 3rd degree black belt in Taekwondo, and a purple belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Beyond that, I run a holistic wellness practice, using a variety of modalities and health coaching to help people feel their best and live their best life. I love learning about the human body, and Physiology First is my latest project.

Class: LARP

Teacher: Jordan Bender

Fee: \$13

Class size:

Description: Live Action Role Play- This class is a great opportunity for older kids to burn off energy and learn how to design and build LARP weapons. We will build "weapons" out of PVC pipe, pool noodles and duct tape to do battle! The first 15 minutes of class time is spent building and the rest of the class time is BATTLE! This class is mostly physical education with a healthy dose of crafting, design troubleshooting, sportsmanship and rules of engagement learning opportunities.

Teacher bio: My name is Jordan Bender. I have 4 boys, Elijah (14), Ray (13), Josiah (9), and Luke (7). My wife and I moved back to the hills 7 years ago. She works as a Lab Tech at Monument, and I do part time work as a Tile Installer. We both served in the Air

Force,that is where we met. We live near the hospital in Rapid. I have a bachelor's degree in counseling from Lancaster Bible College and I am currently an instructor for Trail LifeUSA. I instruct kids 11-14 in outdoors skills with a Christ centered focus. I have worked with kids for the last 10 years in many ways and enjoying teaching. I am the main stay at home parent and oversee their home education. I have a heart to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and teach our kids to do the same.