

TOP 102 TOP PICKS FOR Homeschool Curriculum

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Choosing the Right Curriculum and Approach
for Each Child's Learning Style

by Cathy Duffy



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Note: Contact information and prices listed for resources in the following chapters were the most current information available from publishers at the time this book was written. You will need to confirm current price information when you make your purchases.

Dedication

To the thousands of dedicated homeschoolers who have resisted the impulse to imitate “real schools” and have chosen instead to figure out what is best for each of their children, even if it meant writing their own curriculum. You have made the world of homeschool curriculum far richer than the most well-funded schools in the world.

~ Cathy Duffy

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CHAPTER ... 1 ...

How on earth do I figure out what curriculum to use?



One of the saddest sights I've ever seen was opening day of a three-day homeschool convention. Day one had been designated for only new homeschoolers. Five hundred or more raw homeschooling recruits streamed into an exhibit hall featuring well over one hundred different vendors. Where to even start? Each vendor, naturally, claimed that his or her products were absolutely essential and the best thing on the market. If they had come with unlimited resources, newcomers could easily have dropped a few thousand dollars at the first few displays they visited. I'm certain many felt overwhelming guilt when they did not buy what they were told they needed. That's probably why so many were in tears after the first few hours of the convention.

They knew they needed to buy curriculum, but how on earth could they figure out which one to buy when they didn't even know what they needed to teach? The escape route for many beginners is to simply go to the larger companies that have complete packages for each grade level. Whatever grade the child would have been enrolled in next year at the local school becomes the grade level of the curriculum purchased.

Sometimes, but not often enough, representatives of these major publishers will take time to explain to inquirers that even if they sell a "fourth grade" package, such a package might not be the best choice for this particular child. Your nine-year-old might need fifth grade math and third grade reading material because math comes easily to him and reading does not.

That doesn't make him a poor student or a "problem." It does mean that he's a fairly normal child, whatever "normal" means. After all, our children are not standardized products. None of them look alike (at least not much) on the outside, so why should we expect them to be alike on the inside—the way they learn, their interests, their abilities, and their temperaments?

One of the beauties of homeschooling is that it allows us to recognize and nurture each one of our very special individual children. We have the glorious opportunity to help them figure out who they are, what they want to be, and how they might get there.

In homeschooling, we can take detours unimaginable in the traditional classroom. If a nine-year-old is interested in rocket science, homeschooling parents can nurture that interest by allowing their child to move ahead of grade level science topics into this more specialized area. With guidance, their child can search the library and the internet for biographies, books, articles, videos, and websites devoted to rocketry. Parents can supervise and assist while their child builds rockets, fiddles with fuel cells, designs recovery parachutes, estimates trajectories, and learns safety precautions.

That fourteen-year-old who wants to be a veterinarian can arrange to work two days a week with the local vet, getting hands-on experience in their potential career. By the end of high school, it will be easy to decide whether or not to spend all those years (and all that money) in college to achieve that goal. Their other schooling can also be designed to support this budding career with research and writing about animals, physiology, and related topics. They might study uses of and attitudes toward different animals within different cultures. Math and economics studies might include cost comparisons for animal care in traditional zoos versus natural parks.

I think you get the idea. Asking a supplier for a standardized package of curriculum ignores the individuality and special needs and interests of your child.

You can see this more easily if you compare feeding your child's body to feeding his mind. You don't expect all children to eat exactly the same amounts and types of food. Some have particular food allergies. All have preferences and dislikes. And some burn up twice as many calories as others.

Likewise, mental nourishment should take into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of each child—teaching to their strengths and helping to overcome weak areas. There should be extra "nourishment" for those special areas of interest, and it should be provided at a pace each child can handle—not too slow, not too fast.

If you are a new homeschooling parent, and you expected to just purchase a packaged curriculum and be done with it, this sounds like bad news. Where on earth do you begin? There are far too many choices. How do you know what your child needs? How can you figure this out?

That's the purpose of this book. First, in Chapter Two we will cover some basic approaches you might wish to use: traditional textbooks, Charlotte Mason education, classical education,

unit study, unschooling, independent study, working under an umbrella program, or an eclectic mixture of approaches.

I'll walk you through some questions that will help you identify which approach (or mixture of approaches) is best for you. In Chapter Three I have created examples for you as if I were filling in the charts and answering the questions in Chapter Two myself. This should give you a clear idea of how to proceed.

Then, in Chapter Four, I help you narrow things down even further by identifying your children's learning styles and figuring out what features you should be looking for in a curriculum to achieve the best fit for each child.

Many parents wonder what should be covered at each grade level, especially if they choose "ungraded" curriculum. Are you doing enough? Too much? Might your child's frustration be due to expectations that are beyond his maturity level? In Chapter Five, I discuss academic goals and how to figure out what you should cover in each subject area. I also explain how the Common Core and other sets of academic standards might be used, while simultaneously raising concerns about those goals overriding your own.

My intention with these first few chapters is to help you become goal-oriented rather than curriculum-driven. Too many new homeschoolers let that grade-level package of curriculum they purchased dictate the content, methods, and even the schedule they follow. In other words, the curriculum itself drives their homeschooling.

To be goal oriented means working in almost a reverse fashion. You determine what your children need to learn. You decide what methods to use. And you set up your own schedule. Then you find curriculum that has the content and methodology that fits your agenda, and you use it on your own timetable.

After you use the first few chapters to figure out what content and methods are right for your children, you will be ready to explore my top 102 curriculum choices in Chapter Six to see what is likely to fit your situation. To make this easy, I have included charts that help you readily identify which resources have the features that you will be looking for, features you will have already identified in the early chapters of this book.

Each product featured as a Top Pick also has a complete review in the following chapters. The page number of the review is in the last column of the Top Picks charts. Select likely candidates from the charts, read the full reviews, then make your decisions. I have also included prices and contact information in each review so you will know whether or not a product fits your budget as well as how to find it.

Obviously, there are many more products than the top 102 that I have chosen for this book. You might have a specialized need or a specialized topic that is not addressed by any of these resources. If so, you might want to consult my website at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com for more possibilities.

Please fight the temptation to jump right to the chart of Top Picks and the reviews! Take the time to work out your own philosophy of education and discover what you really should be doing with your children before exposing yourself to the temptation of what is still an overwhelming number of resources from which to choose. I think you'll enjoy the journey of personal discovery that happens along the way.

CHAPTER 2

Drill and Kill, Real Books, Delight-Directed Studies... What's best?

Jane Jones has just shown up at her first homeschool support group meeting. One of the moms is sharing about the fantastic unit study they've just completed on trains. Since they live in the Sacramento area of California, they visited the marvelous train museum in Old Sacramento. A trip on the modern Amtrak train provided a contrast to the old trains her children explored at the museum. Books they read about the building of the trans-continental railroad and development of the frontier provided the historical background. The children learned a few "railroad songs" and each painted a picture of his or her favorite old train. It was great fun and a terrific way to learn history.

Listening to this, Jane feels absolutely overwhelmed. How on earth can she do that sort of study? How would she know what to do? How could she tell if her children were learning anything? What about meeting requirements? What Jane really wants to know right now is what phonics program works best. If she has to make up a unit study for every topic, homeschooling just isn't going to work for her family!

It is so easy to be intimidated into thinking that your homeschool should mimic those of seasoned veterans. They seem to have a handle on things. Their kids are impressive. They're obviously doing something right. But the question you really need to consider is whether or not what they are doing is right for you.

It doesn't take long to figure out that veteran homeschoolers are, overall, very independent and strong-minded. Chances are you could poll half a dozen such parents and discover they have half a dozen different ways they homeschool. There is no single RIGHT way to homeschool that everyone figures out after a few years.

In fact, the diversity of resources and methods is one of the beauties of homeschooling. Need an audio CD to teach parts of the body to your child who just loves to sing all the time? Need a math program that uses colorful blocks to teach multiplication for that child who just has to

SEE how math works and not just memorize rules? Need a science program that lets you teach all of your children the same topic at the same time? You name it, and there's likely something in the homeschool marketplace to meet your requirements.

But how do you figure out what you need? You can try to find a professional curriculum counselor to work through this with you. That's great if there's one available in your area and you can afford it. However, if that's not practical for you, the material in Chapters Four and Five will help you sort this out by addressing curriculum selection from the two most important perspectives: what fits with your family's philosophy of education, and what works for each of your children's learning styles.

We'll start at the family level to sort out some big picture ideas about education. What we come up with is actually a philosophy of education. Don't let the word "philosophy" turn you off, because figuring out a philosophy of education is not as difficult as it sounds. Someone once remarked that philosophy is nothing more than common sense dressed up in fancy clothes.

So we start with some common sense questions. I want you to really think this through as you read. There are lines on which you can write down your thoughts as you consider these questions. Let's begin with a question about the big picture—about what the overall content of "school" should be.

What do you think is most important for your children to learn?

You are not likely to come up with just one answer to this question. Instead you will come up with a number of things you consider important. Before you start writing, here are a few more questions that might help you think about content:

If there were no laws requiring you to educate your child, what would you want them to learn? Would that list include strong academics, work skills, study habits, a love for reading, familiarity with scripture, physical fitness, artistic expression, practical life skills, computer knowledge, ethical attitudes? What else might you add?

At this point, you should write down only broad categories rather than specifics like "I want my child to learn to write poetry in fifth grade." Your list might include words, phrases or sentences. For example, you might write out a list with such items as:

- college prep academics
- strong independent study habits
- extensive reading from many genres
- scripture study and memorization
- art appreciation and expression
- familiarity with computer programs such as Microsoft Word and Excel

Or you might write your ideas more expansively:

- I want my children to grow up to be self-directed learners who know how to teach themselves.
- I want my children to love to learn, so I want learning to be as fun as we can make it.
- I want my children to have high aspirations for both college and their careers.
- I want my children to have virtuous characters and strong ethical foundations.
- I want my children to develop habits of physical fitness that will stick with them all their lives.
- I want my children to take challenging academic courses for high school so they will have opportunities to win scholarships to prestigious colleges.

How do you think learning should happen?

We need to next consider ideas about methods of education. Keep in mind that answers to this question are heavily influenced by your own children and your own experiences. If you have very compliant children who love to play school just for fun, you might naturally think learning should always happen in traditional school fashion. But that's not your only choice. If you have a rowdy group of very active children, you might already be thinking they need lots of activity, movement, and freedom in their schooling. At this point, the question might be difficult to answer because you simply haven't thought about or investigated possible options. If so, try jotting down just a few notes and come back to this topic later after you have read the rest of this chapter.

How do you want to teach or operate your school?

As you consider this question, you will probably start to see that what you believe about content and methods shapes your thinking about how you will actually do things. For example, if you consider it a high priority that your children learn structure and discipline you are more likely to follow a predictable schedule and use tests on a regular basis. On the other hand, if you put a higher value on developing creativity and delight in learning, you might keep the schedule very flexible so your child can concentrate on that project she started without stopping to complete her language workbook exercise.

Here are more questions to help you think through how you might operate. Make some notes as you consider each question. You might also need to revisit this section after you've worked through the next few sections that help you figure out which approaches to education are likely to work best for you.

Do you want to try to teach most or all of your children together, at least for some subjects?

How much of the time do you want (or are you able) to work directly with your children?

How much of the time do you expect your children to work independently? (Caution: Don't expect children below about age eight to do a lot of independent work.)

Do you want to use real books (biographies, historical novels, books written about particular science topics, etc.) as part of your curriculum?

Do you want to include field trips? What type of field trips?

Do you like to make up curriculum as you go, adapting to the needs and interests of your children, or do you prefer things well planned out in advance?

Do you need a set schedule to get things done or would you prefer more flexibility?

Do you prefer a curriculum that is thoroughly laid out in advance by someone else and that tells you what to do when?

Any additional thoughts about how you want to operate?

Writing down your thoughts about the above questions should have helped you clarify some of your goals and preferences. Now you can use the “Approaches to Education” chart to begin to identify which of the possible approaches to homeschooling are most likely to work for you.

The first column on the chart on the next two pages lists possible features and methods you might be looking for. When you read one that reflects your own ideas, move over to the boxes to the right of the statement, and circle every number in that row. The number means that the targeted feature or method is present to some extent in the approach in the top heading. If the box is gray, that means that this feature or method is not characteristic of that approach. For example, “predictable structure” is not something you usually find in a unit study approach. Unit studies tend to use a variety of books and activities, often emphasizing different subject areas from day to day. So the box under Unit Study across from “predictable structure” is grayed out. Some features or methods are found in resources for a particular approach some of the time, but not always. Those boxes have a “1” rather than a “2.” For example, the Charlotte Mason approach does not always translate into a predictable structure. Some Charlotte Mason resources have predictable structure and some don't. In such cases the “1” gives this feature “half credit” when you add up your columns.

After you've gone through the entire chart, add up the total of the circled numbers in each column. The number in the denominator of the fraction at the bottom of each column is the number of total points possible in the column for each approach to education. The total of your points in each column will be the numerator (top number) of the fraction—what you write in. Divide the numerator by the denominator for each column total. You will then have percentage numbers for each column that you can easily compare.

Keep in mind that the column with the highest number doesn't win. If you look only at your total in each box, the eclectic approach is likely to come out on top every time since there are so many boxes (a possible total of 36). That could be very misleading. Instead, you need to look at the fraction or percentage. Any approach with almost all of the numbers circled (the highest percentage) is likely to be in line with your philosophy of education, and there might be more than one approach that qualifies!

The goal of this chart is to help you identify the approach or approaches that are most likely to appeal to you. If you see that you have many circled numbers under both traditional and classical education, and few under unschooling or unit studies, you've already narrowed your

More About Each Approach

Next, read the following descriptions for the different education approaches to verify your conclusions from the chart. As you read through these descriptions, you will be refining your own educational philosophy.

Traditional

A traditional home educator might use either textbooks or worktexts (worktexts contain within a single book both textbook-style instruction and work pages to be completed by students), but there are distinct books for each subject area: math, language arts (often broken down further into separate spelling, grammar, composition, literature, and vocabulary books), history, science, etc. These books are almost always written for use in regular school classrooms, although the publisher might have taken homeschool use into consideration.

When used as the publisher intends, such curricula generally help a homeschool function much like a regular day school. Children will be studying what many other students at their grade level are studying.

In most cases, teacher's manuals, answer keys, and other teaching aids are available. These sometimes are so classroom oriented that they are of little use to the homeschooling parent, but other times they are essential to the program. For example, BJU Press's language courses are designed to be taught from the teacher's manuals. Some course instruction appears only in the teacher's manual. Student books are adjuncts that support the lesson in the teacher's manual with practice exercises or activities.

Traditional programs generally give parents a sense of security while helping establish routines and teaching methods. They sometimes make homeschooling a less frightening venture because the curriculum seems somewhat like what parents themselves used in school.

Many parents begin with a traditional approach, gradually shifting to other approaches as they gain experience and better understanding of what works for their children. Others stick with a traditional approach, finding it easier for record keeping, scheduling, and accountability.

Some parents choose traditional approaches that allow their children to work independently because of time constraints or learning styles. Some students (especially those beginning homeschool past the primary grades) actually prefer this type of approach because it feels familiar and comfortable for them.

However, traditional curricula sometimes take more time to use since they often include activities, presentations, practice, and review that are needed when teaching an entire classroom of children. Even self-paced programs such as Alpha Omega *LIFEPACs*—not designed for an entire class to use together—target the amount of practice and review to the average classroom situation. For example, traditional grammar programs frequently reteach and review the same grammar concepts year after year.

Sometimes traditionalists are chided for recreating “school at home” because the experience varies little from that of regular day school settings. The concern is that traditionalists sometimes miss out on those special moments when a child comes up with a question that begs for immediate exploration. Many parents manage to find a good balance using traditional curricula while still retaining enough flexibility to respond to teachable moments when they arise.

Some parents are just trying out the idea of homeschooling. They figure that if it doesn't work

out, they'll put their children back in school next year. These parents often want to use a traditional curriculum, frequently coupled with a fairly consistent schedule similar to that of day schools, so their children can easily integrate into a regular day school classroom in the future if need be. The big caution here is that the traditional methods might make the homeschool experience boring and unappealing, creating a self-defeating experience from the beginning.

The choice is rarely all or nothing when it comes to traditional curriculum. While some homeschoolers enroll in programs that prescribe only traditional curriculum, most homeschoolers are free to choose one or more traditional resources along with resources that might reflect other approaches as I describe under the "Eclectic" approach later in this section.

Examples of traditional curriculum publishers would include A Beka Book, BJU Press, Modern Curriculum Press, Scott Foresman, Macmillan/McGraw Hill, Houghton Mifflin, Alpha Omega, and Rod and Staff.

Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason was a turn-of-the-century educator who frequently used the term "twaddle" to describe much of what passed for curriculum content in traditional texts as a useless waste of a child's time and energy. For example, she warned against children's history textbooks saying, "...for this intelligent teaching of history, eschew, in the first place, nearly all history books written expressly for children....and as for what are called children's books, the children of educated parents are able to understand history written with literary power, and are not attracted by the twaddle of reading-made-easy little history books."¹

Through her many years of teaching, she determined that there were better ways to teach children that stimulated a love for learning and helped children retain knowledge more effectively than traditional methods, all while respecting the nature of the child. She believed in a child's innate ability and desire to learn and the need for teachers to restrain themselves from controlling all learning. Mason says: "[T]he teacher is too much with us, late and soon. Everything is directed, expected, suggested. No other personality out of book, picture, or song, no, not even that of Nature herself, can get at the children without the mediation of the teacher. No room is left for spontaneity or personal initiation on their part."²

Mason wrote about the importance of nature walks and outdoor learning: "[T]he knowledge most valuable to the child is that which he gets with his own eyes and ears and fingers (under direction) in the open air....the claims of the schoolroom should not be allowed to encroach on the child's right to long hours daily for exercise and investigation."³

Even so, Mason was not an advocate of unschooling. (Unschooling will be defined later in this chapter.) She believed in directed learning as well as teaching a child self-discipline and good habits. She says, "Even the child who has gained the habit of attention to *things*, finds *words* a weariness. This is a turning-point in the child's life, and the moment for the mother's tact and vigilance....never let the child *dawdle* over copybook or sum, sit dreaming with his book before him. When a child grows stupid over a lesson, it is time to put it away. Let him do another lesson as unlike the last as possible, and then go back with freshened wits to his unfinished task."⁴

Mason is well known for her use of narration rather than workbooks. She outlines the idea: "When the child is six...let him narrate the fairy tale which has been read to him episode by episode, upon one hearing of each; the Bible tale read to him in the words of the Bible; the well-written animal story; or all about other lands from some such volumes as *The World at Home*. The seven-years-old boy will have begun to read for himself, but must get most of his intellectual

nutriment, by ear, certainly, but read to him out of books. Geography, sketches from ancient history, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Tanglewood Tales*, *Heroes of Asgard*, and much of the same calibre, will occupy him until he is eight.... He should have no book which is not a child's classic; and... it must not be diluted with talk or broken up with questions, but given to the boy in fit portions as wholesome meat for his mind, in the full trust that a child's mind is able to deal with its proper food." She goes on to explain that the teacher should read "two or three pages, enough to include an episode; after that, let her call upon the children to narrate...."⁵ The child then retells what has been read in his or her own words.

Mason also emphasized the importance of developing the imagination and the value of making connections between topics studied to enhance memory. She says, "If the business of teaching be to furnish the child with ideas, any teaching which does not leave him possessed of a new mental image has, by so far, missed its mark. Now, just think of the listless way in which the children too often drag through reading and tables, geography and sums, and you will see that it is a rare thing for any part of any lesson to flash upon them with the vividness which leaves a mental picture behind. It is not too much to say that a morning in which a child receives no new idea is a morning wasted, however closely the little student has been kept at his books."⁶

Charlotte Mason's ideas are generally implemented in the elementary grade levels. Hallmarks of a Charlotte Mason approach to education are the use of real books rather than textbooks for reading, history, geography, and science; the narration technique; nature learning; hands-on learning; making connections between various topics; inclusion of study of the fine arts; and a focus upon both development of good habits and a love for learning in children.

Charlotte Mason's ideas about education are incorporated into many unit studies (discussed later in this chapter) to varying degrees, and that would be an easy way to get started in this methodology. However, if you don't want to use a unit study, you can still learn how to easily implement Mason's ideas by reading one or more of the following books on her methodology.

A Charlotte Mason Education and ***More Charlotte Mason Education*** by Catherine Levison (A Charlotte Mason Education, www.catherinelevison.com): These are very practical, to-the-point books that will quickly help you understand Mason's methods.

A Charlotte Mason Companion by Karen Andreola (Karen Andreola, www.homeschoolhighlights.com/books/companion.shtml; available through many distributors): Andreola presents an in-depth journey through Mason's philosophy of education.

SimplyCharlotteMason.com (www.simplycharlottemason.com): At this website you will find print books, ebooks, audio and video recordings, and many resources for understanding and implementing this approach.

You might also want to check out one of the free websites that provides concrete help for those pursuing a Charlotte Mason education:

Ambleside Online (www.amblesideonline.org) has lesson plans and book lists for all grade levels plus a supportive online community.

Mater Amabilis (www.materamabilis.org) has lesson plans for all levels for Catholic homeschoolers in both the U.S. and the U.K.

Classical

Classical education is based on models of learning that go back to the Middle Ages, although

its earliest roots lie in the Greek and Roman civilizations. Dorothy Sayers was one of a number of scholars who re-popularized this method of learning in the twentieth century. Two current proponents of classical education, Gene Veith, Jr. and Andrew Kern tell us in the introduction to their book on the subject: "Classical education provides a conceptual framework for mastering the entire range of objective knowledge. It also offers a theory of human character development, and it contains a teaching methodology that is demonstrably effective and eminently practical."⁷ They go on to tell us, "Classical education cultivates wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness and beauty."⁸

Personally, I think the greatest value of classical education is that it engages learners with the most important ideas—ideas about God, about life, about purpose. Classical education challenges the vocational orientation of most modern education by instead concentrating on learning that forms the inner person—their character and virtues. At the same time, classical students learn how to think, how to learn independently, and how to present their own ideas—all of which ultimately prepares them for a wide range of vocations.

Veith and Kern also tell us, "The substance of classical education is the liberal arts curriculum."⁹ Among those "arts" are three stages or categories grouped as the trivium. The trivium's three stages are labeled grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric. They provide a sequential focus for education in the elementary through high school years. You start with the grammar stage and work up through the rhetoric stage.

The word "grammar" as used within classical education means much more than the nuts and bolts of a language. Rather it is the basic structure, skills, and knowledge of any subject. Thus, in the elementary grades, a child learns the grammar of math, language arts, social studies, and science, and maybe also the grammar of religion and other electives.

In the logic or dialectic stage, students analyze information and make connections. Then rhetoric describes the stage where the young person has assimilated knowledge, thought creatively about what he or she has learned, and now expresses his or her own ideas through speech and writing at what would likely be considered adult levels.

Some classical education proponents follow the progression of the trivium, making significant changes in methods and materials as they move through the stages. Others tend to mix the stages, for example, by having children in elementary grades participate in Socratic discussions (dialectic type activity) alongside studies of basic English grammar.

A major component of classical education for dialectic purposes is the reading and discussion of real books. Consequently, "Good Books" and "Great Books" programs have been developed that use classic fiction and non-fiction titles both for knowledge and as springboards into the world of ideas and questions. Socratic dialogues are used to stimulate students to think about what they have read, to work through important questions, to move to higher levels of thinking.

Below are websites with actual lists of (or links to) the Good Books and the Great Books. Generally, the Good Books lists include modern literature and identify books appropriate for younger children through adults while Great Books lists include older literature that has acquired "classic" status and is likely most appropriate for teens and adults. Some classical programs, particularly at high school level, work with books from these lists, while others apply the methods to their own selection of books.

Great Books and Good Books lists:

www.classical-homeschooling.org/celoop/1000.html

www.ccel.org/index/subject/classics - links to books in electronic format

www.grtbooks.com/

www.interleaves.org/~rteeter/greatbks.html

www.home.comcast.net/~antaylor1/greatbooksstjohns.htm

Other classical education programs, especially for the elementary grades, focus on other learning strategies more than on using Good Books or Great Books. For example, many such programs follow Dorothy Sayers' beliefs about children's ability to memorize in the grammar stage, so they build much of their curriculum around memorization as a means of obtaining knowledge.

Personally, I believe that the goal of acquiring knowledge and skills at the grammar level does not necessarily dictate a particular methodology, so variations of classical education methodology that use methods other than memorization and drill at the grammar stage might be equally appropriate for building a foundation to move on to dialectic and rhetoric stages.

An even larger question is the role of classical languages in classical education. Historically, study of Latin and Greek was always at the foundation of classical education. More recently, emphasis on the structure of the trivium and reading the Great Books seems to have displaced the study of Greek.

As you can see, there is quite a bit of discussion (and even disagreement) about the nature of classical education. It will be up to you to decide which elements of a classical education are most important. One thing to keep in mind is that classical education generally requires more direct instruction and interaction than do some other approaches. It is often more teacher-directed than other approaches. To read more about classical education:

The Well-Trained Mind (2009) by Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise (W.W. Norton & Co., order through bookstores or distributors): This is a secular book that lays out comprehensive, detailed classical education programs for all grade levels with a strong college-prep emphasis. Even if you don't do everything the way they suggest, this is a treasure trove for anyone considering classical education.

Teaching the Trivium: Christian Homeschooling in a Classical Style by Harvey and Laurie Bluedorn (Trivium Pursuit, www.triviumpursuit.com): The Bluedorns, pioneers in classical Christian education, temper their enthusiasm with cautions about pagan content. Rather than buying into the "Great Books" model of classical education, the Bluedorns apply the methodology while carefully selecting resources that support a biblical Christian worldview. They suggest numerous ideas for content, presentation, and timing but leave it to parents to decide what makes sense for their own children. They approach their subject from a Reformed Protestant perspective. Even those Christians who might not share the Bluedorn's theological perspective should find this book helpful if their goal is to use the classical model of education by drawing from it that which is worthy while staying true to biblical principles.

Classical Christian Education Made Approachable (Classical Conversations, www.classicalconversationsbooks.com): The folks at Classical Conversations wrote this very readable, 110-page book that both argues for the classical approach and explains what it is. It outlines each subject area in relation to the classical model, stressing the importance of learning Latin. It also outlines the trivium, the basic principles and approach underlying a classical education.

Natural Structure: A Montessori Approach to Classical Education at Home by Edward and Nancy Walsh: This book is now available free at the Natural Structure website (www.hstrial-nwalsh.homestead.com/index.html). "Natural Structure" is the name given to this form of education which combines Montessori and classical education. Edward and Nancy Walsh have brought them together by adopting the framework of the trivium and quadrivium as outlined by Dorothy Sayers, then using Montessori's detailed teaching methodology to present the content. The program as presented in this book is Montessori-style education, but with resources selected to ensure content coverage reflective of the various stages of classical education. As children move past the preparatory and grammar stages of the trivium, Montessori materials are used less frequently and methodology becomes more similar to other forms of classical education. The Walshes rely on Montessori's original ideas, including her foundational Catholic perspective. While *Natural Structure* can be adapted by those with other religious beliefs, it does not readily fit non-religious situations. (Learn more about Montessori education at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montessori_education.)

Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America, by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Andrew Kern (Capital Research Center, www.capitalresearch.org; order through Amazon or other booksellers using ISBN 189293406X): This book covers the broad range of classical education, the different approaches and different settings as well as key organization and resources. This is one of the most objective resources if you are trying to sort out what approach within the classical education models you might use.

Unit Study

Unit study, sometimes called delight-directed study, appears under different names and formats but can be recognized by the presence of a unifying theme. Rather than approaching each subject and topic as isolated things to be learned, information is integrated across subject areas, helping children better understand what they are studying. According to the theory behind the unit study approach, when children really understand what they are learning because of the integration of subjects, they remember it better.

A unit study might focus on one primary subject area or many subjects. The major published unit studies generally encompass social studies, science, and the fine arts, with varying amounts of coverage of language arts and religion. Generally little to no math is included.

Examples of comprehensive unit studies are *Tapestry of Grace*, KONOS (www.konos.com), and *Five in a Row*. Examples of limited unit studies are Amanda Bennett Unit Studies (www.amandabennett.com), *Further Up and Further In* (www.cadroncreek.com), and Media Angels science units (www.mediaangels.com). (Those without web addresses are reviewed in this book.)

Here's my paraphrased example of a typical unit study that comes from the first chapter in *KONOS Volume 1* on the character trait attentiveness.

First, we choose an aspect of attentiveness we wish to study such as listening and sound. We study related scriptures, then study about the human ear (science), listen to music (music), make musical instruments (crafts), study about musical composers (music history), practice listening games (character development), study about and apply the speeds of sound and light to thunder and lightning (math and science), and write a headache commercial describing irritating noises (creative writing). These ideas are only a fraction of what is offered within a typical KONOS unit!

However, there are also limited unit studies that focus more narrowly on a single subject. For

example, a study of horses might include the history of horses and the different breeds around the world, a study of their anatomy and physiology, and a written research paper on a horse-related topic. Thus, history, science and language arts are taught around a single theme selected primarily as a science topic.

You might also create your own limited unit study from resources on hand. For instance, if you are studying about the California Gold Rush, you could study those sections in a California history textbook along with sections about mining and minerals from a science textbook. You might also integrate a language arts activity by assigning a creative writing task related to the Gold Rush.

Unit studies typically use real books rather than textbooks for learning material. Many unit studies incorporate Charlotte Mason's ideas on the use of real books, nature study, and narration.

Unit study is often, but not always, multi-sensory, using hands-on experiences or activities for more effective learning. Most unit studies are constructed so they can be used across a wide age span, with adaptations suggested for various levels. Unit studies for high school level tend to be more book-based than activity-oriented. While unit studies at elementary levels require heavy parental involvement, those for older students frequently require a good deal of independent work.

Unit studies work best for families with more flexible schedules since activities might take more or less time on any given day. Most also require preparation and presentation time. You will need to gather materials and resources for the study and figure out how to use them. The different published unit studies vary in how much of such work is already done for you.

The parent or teacher generally spends more time working directly with students in most unit studies—reading aloud, discussing, or leading an activity. The trade-off for extra time invested is that children better retain the information presented in such interesting ways, and parents are then relieved from reviewing and reteaching the same material again. An added bonus from this type of learning is that it tends to get children excited about the process—a real motivational boost.

Some parents are overwhelmed by the idea of unit studies, but a few unit studies (e.g., *KONOS In-A-Box*) provide all the resources you need and tell you exactly what to do when, making the prospect far less daunting.

Unschooling or Relaxed Homeschooling

The idea of letting children follow their own inclinations in their education has been called unschooling. The philosophic ideas behind this approach are most often associated with John Holt, author of numerous books such as *How Children Learn*, *How Children Fail*, *Instead of Education*, and *Teach Your Own*. Holt's books are available from libraries and bookstores, especially from Holt Associates/Growing Without Schooling at www.johnholtgws.com.

A true unschooler would allow a child to determine what, when, how, and even "if" a child learns anything. But few people go to that extreme. What seems closer to reality in most unschooling situations is a much greater consideration for each child's interests and the timing of when they tackle various topics and skills. Also, unschooling parents often ask for their children's opinions about resources and learning methods. This approach is also sometimes called "relaxed" homeschooling.

Hallmarks of an unschooling approach are likely to be a very loose schedule, emphasis on developing a love for learning, rare use of traditional textbooks unless selected by the child, more hands-on projects and more field trips.

To learn more about unschooling, read one of John Holt's books listed above or:

The Unschooling Handbook by Mary Griffiths (Random House, www.randomhouse.com; order through bookstores or distributors): Mary Griffiths helps explain what unschooling might look like with anecdotes and examples from many different families. She also includes specific ideas about how to help your children become educated without the normal structure and curriculum.

The Relaxed Home School by Mary Hood, Ph.D. (Ambleside Educational Press, www.archersforthelord.org): This is a practical book that seems to reflect what many families are actually doing. Mary Hood stresses the need for goals coupled with an openness to many ways of attaining them. She suggests letting children have significant input into goal and strategy decisions, taking into consideration their talents and interests.

Independent study

I include independent study as a distinct approach even though it often uses resources listed under other approaches. The key idea here is that parents are looking for resources that allow a student to operate with little direct teaching or interaction regarding lessons. This means there has to be a preset curriculum that is self-instructional.

School of Tomorrow, Alpha Omega (LIFEPAC curriculum), and Christian Light all have courses very similar in structure that work this way although these are not your only choices for independent study.

In the aforementioned curricula, a number of booklets (typically 10-12 for a year-long course) comprise a course. Each booklet contains information students read, much like that found in textbooks. Short sections of text are followed by questions which students can answer from memory or by referring back to what they have read. If they get most answers correct, they move on to the next section. If not, they review the material and answer questions again. Periodic tests operate the same way. So a student, theoretically, masters the material before moving on from each section. No direct teaching is required other than checking answers.

Alpha Omega took their LIFEPAC curriculum a step further by creating a computer-based version called *Switched-On Schoolhouse (SOS)* as well as a web-based version called *Monarch*. See the review of both programs in Chapter Thirteen.

While the above-mentioned resources are designed for independent study, many textbooks may also be used this way. Some of A Beka's textbooks work well this way. *Saxon Math* from *Math 5/4* and up are primarily used for independent study.

Independent study works best for self-directed learners who are responsible about their use of time. Most young learners do not do well with independent study, but many high schoolers thrive on it.

Parents faced with difficult time constraints often see independent study resources as the only way they might manage to home school. However, it is important to keep in mind that when you choose independent study resources, you forsake most of your opportunities to adapt to meet learning style needs of your child.

In addition, the format of independent study means that most learning is at lower levels of thinking—knowledge and comprehension—rather than the higher levels of synthesis and analysis. Answers for lower level questions can be simple, factual answers, while those for higher level questions tend to be complex and subjective—the type of answers that requires sentences,

paragraphs or discussion rather than multiple choice or fill-in-the-blanks.

While the previous paragraph describes resources designed particularly for independent study, there are many others that homeschoolers use for independent study that actually involve higher levels of thinking. Examples are *Wordly Wise* vocabulary series, almost any of The Critical Thinking Co. books, Apologia Science courses, *Old Western Culture*, and *Math Without Borders*, all of which are reviewed in this book.

Eclectic

For want of a better name, we identify those who pick and choose from among a variety of philosophies and resources as “eclectic” homeschoolers. In reality, I suspect the large majority of homeschoolers are eclectic to some extent. Few homeschoolers use everything in a given curriculum. Most homeschoolers tend to supplement even the best resources or programs with other interesting things they find.

The goal for eclectic homeschoolers is generally to combine the best ideas that work for their family. This might even mean using philosophic opposites such as a very structured grammar program and a discovery approach to science.

Eclectic homeschooling requires more parental decision-making and responsibility, so it works best for those with some experience and/or confidence. Many homeschoolers will start their first year with a traditional program or even a unit study. Then the next year, they’ll branch out, keeping what they liked from the prior year and adding new ideas and different resources each year.

While using an eclectic program generally means putting it together yourself, Sonlight Curriculum actually has put together eclectic programs for you. Each level includes a mixture of workbooks and real books that you might say represents a mixture of traditional, Charlotte Mason, and classical approaches. Sonlight is a great place to start if you really don’t know which direction you would like to go.

Packaged Program

I use the designation “Packaged Program” to mean a program that provides your curriculum plus oversight and record keeping. These programs generally have a preset curriculum with only a few possible options (e.g., Calvert with optional advisory teaching service at www.calvertschool.org, Christian Liberty Academy’s full enrollment option at www.homeschools.org, or K12’s online program at www.k12.com/courses). Enrollment in such programs provides parents with not only curriculum but guidance and evaluation assistance.

Packaged programs can be a boon to parents who want assistance in choosing curriculum, planning schedules, and maintaining records. Generally, these programs don’t require a great deal of preparation or teaching time, although there are exceptions. Some packaged programs might use resources for independent study such as computerized curriculum (e.g. *Switched-On Schoolhouse* or *Monarch*), and some will use a mix of resources from various publishers. Programs offered under the supervision of curriculum publishers such as A Beka or BJU Press generally stick closely to resources they publish themselves.

The negative trade off when using such programs is that you lose some flexibility in curriculum choices and scheduling and in your ability to adapt to each child’s needs. Nevertheless, such programs help parents who lack confidence, are disorganized, or do not have time and energy to go it alone.

While many packaged programs are very restrictive about curricula choices, there are some

that allow families to choose from among a broader range of curricula, and there are some like the aforementioned Calvert and Christian Liberty Academy that offer options where you can use their curriculum without reporting and accountability requirements.

Yes, this is confusing, so check out such programs carefully before enrolling. In addition to the obvious questions—How much does it cost? What grade levels do they offer? Is it Christian, secular, etc.?—ask what curriculum they use, what alternatives might be available, what sort of record keeping they require, if there are time limits, if there is any possibility of a refund once students have begun the program, and how much help is available.

Finding Packaged Programs

I've mentioned Calvert and Christian Liberty Academy since they have been around quite a while, but there are many other such programs available that meet the needs of families with various educational and religious philosophies. Following are links to two very helpful websites that have lists of such programs with brief annotations.

http://a2zhomeschooling.com/home_school_programs/home_school_programs_dlps/
www.christianhomeschoolers.com/hs_christian_schools.html

Figuring Out What Works For You

Okay. You have added up the numbers on the chart, read through the descriptions of different approaches, but you still might not have developed a clear preference. Take heart! You can narrow this down even more as you consider some very practical issues. Your thoughts about the questions I pose next are so important that I've left space for you to jot down your responses on each one.

How much confidence and/or experience do you have regarding homeschooling?

If you have a great deal of both, then you will probably do fine with unit studies, unschooling and loosely structured approaches. If not, you might easily be overwhelmed by resources that require you to make many choices, find resources, plan projects, and create your own assessment. It is sometimes better to start out with more structure, gradually adding more and more adventurous ideas as you gain confidence.

How much time do you have available for working directly with your children and for planning and preparation?

Be realistic about this! If you've got two little ones in diapers, a beginning reader, and more work than hours in the day, choosing curriculum that requires lots of preparation, direct instruction, and your constant attention will inevitably cause you undue stress, destroy any household routines you may have had, and make the homeschooling experience an unhappy one for everyone. It doesn't matter how much you love real books, project learning, and field trips if you don't have time to do them.

Figure out where your children REALLY need you and which subjects MUST be taught this year, then find the most efficient resources you can for those. If there is time left over, add more subjects and interactive learning activities. This doesn't mean your budding reader needs to

learn how to read from a computer program. While that's possible, it will be much better if you squeeze in *some* time for one-on-one work together.

Keep in mind that you can easily provide some reading instruction as you go about your daily routine. You can have magnetic letters on the refrigerator that your child identifies by sound while you're preparing a meal, or have your child find letters on signs as you drive to the grocery store. The same idea applies to math. Have your child count silverware while setting the table, maybe adding the total number of spoons and forks. Or have them count coins that made it all the way through the laundry into the clothes dryer.

If you are one of the fortunate few with plenty of time, you have much more freedom to choose time-consuming resources. However, most of us are somewhere in between the two extremes. We can usually function well if we balance some one-on-one time with some group time and some independent study time.

I strongly recommend trying to group your children together whenever you can for efficiency's sake. It's easiest to do this with religious devotions and instruction, history, science, and the arts. Math and language arts generally require more individualized work. Of course, methods like unit study and Charlotte Mason work better for grouping children than do traditional curriculum or correspondence courses which have different books for each student for each subject.

So how much time do you really have to devote to homeschooling, both for direct teaching and for planning and preparation?

How much money can you spend?

If the world were your oyster and cost were no problem, then choices would be simpler. Unfortunately, most of us have sacrificed a second income and operate on a limited budget, so we cannot buy everything we would like to own.

First, I would like to reassure you that the most expensive resources are not necessarily the best. Expensive resources sometimes provide more assistance for parents, saving you time and energy. However, sometimes they only provide you with many more things that you will feel obligated to do, but which are really not essential to your goals. If your child does not need lots of hands-on work to grasp math concepts, money spent on a program with pricey math manipulatives would have been better budgeted for a family vacation or a more comprehensive science program.

Secondly, you might not even need many resources designed primarily for educational purposes. We already have a wealth of everyday learning resources if we simply open our eyes to learning opportunities that surround us in real life. Kitchens are loaded with possibilities for learning and applying math. Building projects, board games, budgets, checkbooks, allowances, family businesses, and shopping add even more opportunities. Children can practice language arts if you simply capitalize on opportunities all around you—writing thank you notes for gifts, creating shopping lists, writing directions to their friend's home, and copying and posting a "quote for the week" or memorization verse on the refrigerator are just a few examples.

You *do* need information beyond your own limited knowledge, but your local library stocks more books than you can hope to own. Make friends with your librarian and get the most out of this marvelous resource.

The easiest way to tune into learning opportunities in your environment is to ask yourself what it is, specifically, that your child needs to learn then think about how he or she might learn

it with whatever is available. For example, your son needs to learn both standard and metric linear measurement. Grab a ruler or yardstick marked with both inches and centimeters and start measuring and comparing. Need to teach about adjectives? Use many, many of them as you talk to your child—get flowery, silly, alliterative, and imaginative: "Just look at this fuzzy, filthy, fungus-covered floor covering! It must need vacuuming." Then challenge your child to come up with his or her own descriptive sentence. (Be careful not to include over-used words like "very" and prepositional phrases like "under piles of junk." Explaining the difference is another lesson.)

I could continue with many more examples, but I think you get the point: learning need not happen the way it happens in schools. This means you can save some of the money you might have spent to recreate a traditional school at home. Keep this in mind as you come up with a budget amount for your homeschooling.

How do your religious beliefs impact your homeschooling?

Families have different feelings in this regard. For some families, spiritual knowledge and development is the highest priority. Some parents make academic excellence or something else like raising independent, self-motivated learners their highest priority. Religion might be a lower priority or it might have no place at all in their homeschooling. Many families haven't thought about their priorities enough to know how to answer this question. I want to suggest to you that thinking through this question is very important. Religious beliefs will play a role in your home education whether you plan for that to happen or not.

Many parents think that most secular textbooks present a neutral education, one that doesn't include any kind of spiritual viewpoint. In reality, all resources reflect a spiritual outlook, even though it might not be Christian. Now, I can just picture some of you shaking your heads and saying, "Come on. There's no religion in my child's spelling book." Or, "Math doesn't have anything to do with religion!"

A humorous piece which has been wending its way around the internet for a number of years illustrates the point I'd like to make. I have no idea who originated the first version, and it has been updated with additions to reflect ideological changes on a number of websites where it is posted. Here's a version I pulled from one website:

"The Loggers New Math"¹⁰

Teaching Math in 1950: A logger sells a truck load of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is $\frac{4}{5}$ of the price. What is his profit?

Teaching Math in 1960: A logger sells a truck load of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is $\frac{4}{5}$ of the price, or \$80. What is his profit?

Teaching Math in 1970: A logger exchanges a set "L" of lumber for a set "M" of money. The cardinality of set "M" is 100. Each element is worth one dollar. Make 100 dots representing the elements of the set "M." The set "C," the cost of production, contains 20 fewer points than set "M." Represent the set "C" as a subset of set "M" and answer the following question: What is the cardinality of the set "P" for profits?

Teaching Math in 1980: A logger sells a truck load of lumber for \$100. Her cost of production is \$80 and her profit is \$20. Your assignment: Underline the number 20.

Teaching Math in 1990: By cutting down beautiful forest trees, the logger makes \$20. What do you think of this way of making a living? Topic for class participation after answering the question: How did the forest birds and squirrels feel as the logger cut down the trees? There are no wrong answers.

Teaching Math in 1996: By laying off 40% of its loggers, a company improves its stock price from \$80 to \$100. How much capital gain per share does the CEO make by exercising his stock options at \$80? Assume capital gains are no longer taxed, because this encourages investment.

Teaching Math in 1997: A company outsources all of its loggers. The firm saves on benefits, and when demand for its product is down, the logging work force can easily be cut back. The average logger employed by the company earned \$50,000, had three weeks vacation, a nice retirement plan and medical insurance. The contracted logger charges \$50 an hour. Was outsourcing a good move?

Teaching Math in 1998: A laid-off logger with four kids at home and a ridiculous alimony from his first failed marriage comes into the logging company corporate offices and goes postal, mowing down 16 executives and a couple of secretaries, and gets lucky when he nails a politician on the premises collecting his kickback. Was outsourcing the loggers a good move for the company?

Teaching Math in 1999: A laid-off logger serving time in Federal Prison for blowing away several people is being trained as a COBOL programmer in order to work on Y2K [Year 2000] projects. What is the probability that the automatic cell doors will open on their own as of 00:00:01, 01/01/00?

These are mostly exaggerated examples of what folks have found in math textbooks over the years. You might have noticed that there's no mention of religion in any of them. But what does it imply when feelings take precedence over the facts of math as in the 1990 example? Or, what about the other agendas (like ecological extremism) that work their way into supposedly neutral subjects? And what do you think of presenting business ethic questions as mere mathematical calculations rather than moral challenges?

Do you doubt that some very different beliefs about God and man, man's purpose in life, and man's responsibilities in relationship to others shape many texts used in schools?

Even more subtle are the choices of what to include and what to leave out of textbooks. For example, history books that rarely mention key religious events or pivotal figures in church history, in effect, dismiss religion as irrelevant. Less subtle are science texts that teach that accident and random chance are what brought man out of a primordial stew to our present evolving state.

More blatantly, in supposedly secular literature texts and readers we often encounter folk tales of various gods that show us how each of the gods "blessed" those who followed their instructions. The implication is that all "gods" are simply reflections of different cultures and are equally real. Those same texts probably include no stories about the one, true God and

certainly none that give Him precedence. You can probably see how this type of content might be offensive to monotheists.

Parents who try to leave *all* spirituality out of learning are either purposely or inadvertently teaching their children a materialistic philosophy. If spirituality and transcendence never enter the discussion, you are teaching children that the world consists only of what they experience with their senses and know with their minds. It might allow for the possibility that God exists, but if He does, He is so irrelevant that He has nothing to do with important things like history and science. Even though most people don't think of materialism as a religion, it serves that purpose with its own answers to the big questions of life and the reason for our existence.

If, on the other hand, you believe in God, it should be important enough to impart to your children—or else what's the point of believing in Him at all? If faith and knowledge of God are important, then they need to be incorporated into the learning process within the content as well as the methods of presentation. You teach what you believe and you demonstrate your belief by the way you act, how you speak, and how you treat people.

You must keep spiritual goals and influences in mind as you select your curriculum. A resource might be very popular with homeschoolers in general, but it might not reflect your family's spiritual beliefs. Sometimes you can work around these issues with minimal effort, but sometimes it's more trouble than it's worth and you would be better off using other resources. Be especially careful when selecting resources that your children will be using independently. You might seldom look at the curriculum once they start working, and you won't have opportunity to spot content that undermines your family's beliefs.

Back to the question: How do your religious beliefs impact your homeschooling?

Before you pull all of this together, look at the samples in the next chapter to see how to combine the information you've gleaned to put together your own philosophy of education.

CHAPTER 3

Putting Together Your Philosophy of Education

There was a lot to work through in Chapter Two, and you might be confused at this point. To help make things clear, I have created examples of how this might look as you work through each section of Chapter Two. I've written responses and completed charts as I would have when my sons were about ages 7, 10, and 12.

After you read through these completed questions and charts, I'll show you how it all comes together. Let's begin with the first three questions.

What do you think is most important for your children to learn?

Remember that "1" indicates highest priority, "2" the next highest, and "3" the lowest.

Priorities

I want my children to:	Priority Level
<i>have a strong sense of God's reality in all aspects of their education.</i>	1
<i>love to learn, so that they will become self-educators.</i>	1
<i>have a broad education so they can consider lots of possibilities for their future.</i>	2
<i>develop excellent reading skills.</i>	1
<i>develop excellent thinking skills.</i>	1
<i>develop excellent communication skills.</i>	2
<i>learn how to work with other children and adults in groups.</i>	2
<i>develop good work habits.</i>	2
<i>develop excellent knowledge of scripture and religious beliefs.</i>	1
<i>prepare for college so that they have more life choices.</i>	1
<i>develop a heart for service to others.</i>	1
<i>cover all the normal subjects so they can pass tests when necessary.</i>	2

<i>figure out their special talents and gifts.</i>	2
<i>be computer literate.</i>	2
<i>have exposure to the arts and develop some "artistic" skills.</i>	2
<i>be physically fit.</i>	2
<i>develop a strong Christian worldview.</i>	1
<i>read widely from both classic and good books .</i>	1

Notice that there are still some blank lines. You don't have to fill all of them in just because they're there. On the other hand, if you need more space, feel free to grab another piece of paper and make your list even longer. Also notice that there are no level "3" entries. I realized that I had so many level "1" and "2" entries that any entries that might be level "3" were too low on my priority list to even bother writing them down. However, you might write out your own list, then find on reflection that some of your entries actually rate a level "3."

How do you think learning should happen?

I have three very active boys who need to be able to move around and do lots of hands-on learning. I want lots of interaction and experiential learning. I also want them to learn how to operate independently and learn to teach themselves through their independent reading, especially as they get older. So a balance that combines these two ideas is best for us.

How do you want to teach or operate your school?

Do you want to try to teach most or all of your children together, at least for some subjects?

Absolutely!

How much of the time do you want (or are you able) to work directly with your children?

I want to start together in the mornings for about 1½ to 2 hours, do some group classes or park days a few afternoons a week, and have them work independently or one-on-one with me the rest of the time.

How much of the time do you expect your children to work independently?

My middle son works independently better than the other two—at least a few hours a day. My youngest will do a few, scattered, 15-minute to half-hour periods of independent work. My eldest will do at least two hours of independent work as long as I check up on him frequently.

Do you want to use real books (biographies, historical novels, books written about particular science topics, etc.) as part of your curriculum?

Definitely.

Do you want to include field trips? What type field trips?

Yes. Field trips related to unit study topics plus any good opportunities that come up.

Do you like to make up curriculum as you go, adapting to the needs and interests of your children or do you prefer things well planned out in advance?

I like to have a general plan completed during the summer for the coming school year, then adapt as I go.

Do you need a set schedule to get things done or would you prefer more flexibility?

Flexibility, although we need to start with together time first thing in the morning.

Do you prefer a curriculum that is thoroughly laid out in advance and that tells you what to do when? *No.*

Any additional thoughts about how you want to operate?

I want my lesson plans to become my record keeping books, so I work from my spiral notebook that I use during each summer to make general plans for the year. I periodically fill in my lesson plan/record book for the next few weeks with specific books and page numbers, activities, field trips, etc. so it is easy to make changes to my original plan.

I'm not concerned about grading in the elementary grade levels, but I will give grades once in a while so they have concrete feedback about how I think they are doing. Grading becomes more important to me in junior high.

Note: When I complete this chart I come up with high numbers (and large fractions) for unit study, Charlotte Mason, unschooling, classical education, and eclectic approaches. Traditional education, independent study, and packaged programs are clearly not my preferences.

Approaches to Education

I prefer:	Traditional	Charlotte Mason	Classical	Unit Study	Unschooling	Independent Study	Eclectic	Packaged Program
predictable structure.	2	1	2			2	2	2
that children have many real life experiences for learning—nature studies in the woods, building projects, etc.		②	①	②	②	②	②	
children read historical novels and biographies rather than textbooks.		②	②	②	②		②	①
a program that is thoroughly laid out for the teacher and provides a feeling of security.	2					2		2
a grammar program that emphasizes rules and memorization.	2		2			2	1	2
workbooks, teacher manuals, and answer keys for most or all subjects.	2					2	1	2
children to work independently as much as possible.	1				2	2	1	1
mental training and mental discipline be placed as higher goals than stimulating curiosity and interest.	2		1			2	1	1
curriculum that ensures that my children cover the same things other school children might be learning.	2					2	1	1
informal evaluation of my children by talking over what they've read and looking at their work rather than by testing.		②	②	②	②		①	
that younger children do a significant amount of memorization, repetition, and recitation.	1		1			1	1	1
that teens gets a strong background in the Great Books of western civilization.		①	②	①	①	①	①	
to emphasize developing a love for learning more than the ability to work in a structured, methodical way.		②		②	②		①	
that teens develop a "life of the mind" more than vocational skills.	①	②	②	②	①	①	①	①
Total points for each column on THIS page	1	11	9	11	10	4	8	2

presenting children with facts and information to learn rather than allowing them to choose their own topics to investigate.	2	1	2	1		2	1	2
highly structured resources that script what teacher and child are supposed to say and do.	1		1			1	1	1
lots of discussion and interaction in the learning process.		②	②	②	①		②	①
covering subjects (e.g., history, science, religion) at the same time with the same material with as many of my children as possible.		②	②	②			②	
making connections between different subject areas, showing how pieces of information relate to one another, and viewing that as a high priority in learning.		②	②	②	②		①	
project-based learning.		①		②	②		①	
to teach children one-on-one as much as possible.	2	1	1		1		2	2
that children learn grammar in a casual manner—e.g., some instruction, use of a grammar handbook, then working on mastery in their own writing rather than working primarily through a grammar text.		①		②	②		①	
to keep structure to a minimum so that interesting learning ideas can be pursued as they arise.		①		①	②		①	
to make field trips an essential part of schooling.	①	②	①	①	②		①	
to give children freedom to determine what they will study and when and how they will do so.				1	2		1	
an investigative approach that stimulates children to pursue information and research on their own.		①		②	②	①	①	
flexible curriculum and schedules so I can capitalize on “teachable moments.”		①	①	②	②		①	
a mixture of structured learning and experiential/discovery learning.		②		②			②	
to set my own goals and schedule rather than adopting someone else’s.		①	①	①	②		①	
to select curriculum and methods that suit my child’s learning style rather than curriculum and methods widely recognized and accepted by authorities.		①	①	②	②		①	
that computer-based learning be a significant part of the curriculum.	1					1		1
Total points for each column on THIS page	1	17	10	21	19	1	15	1
Total points for each column on PREVIOUS page	1	11	9	11	10	4	8	2
Total for each column: add the above two lines and enter total as the numerator (top number) of the fraction	$\frac{2}{22}$	$\frac{28}{31}$	$\frac{19}{29}$	$\frac{32}{34}$	$\frac{29}{34}$	$\frac{5}{24}$	$\frac{23}{36}$	$\frac{3}{22}$
Percentage for each column: divide numerator by denominator	9%	90%	66%	94%	85%	21%	64%	14%

Check Your Results

As I read through the actual descriptions in Chapter Two, I find that there are elements of unschooling that appeal to me, but not enough of the philosophy that I would really consider unschooling as my own approach.

I really like certain aspects of classical education—Great Books, discussions, higher level thinking—but I'm not enamored with some of the memorization-based programs that are also called classical education. This dilutes my strong preference for the aspects I like and makes my preference for classical education appear weaker than it actually is. (This should be a caution to others who, like me, prefer some aspects of what is labeled classical education. You need to investigate resources described as classical to ensure that they really are what you want.)

With my highest numbers appearing for unit study and Charlotte Mason approaches, it would make sense for me to see if there is a way to incorporate the classical education and Charlotte Mason ideas I like within a unit study format. (Yes, such curriculum actually exists!)

The Next Four Questions—The Reality Check

Next, I wrote down some notes on the next four questions, thinking back a few years to when I had children in elementary grades through junior high:

1.) How much confidence and/or experience do you have regarding homeschooling?

I have lots of confidence and enough experience that I don't mind trying unusual approaches.

2.) How much time do you have available for working directly with your children?

My time is very limited because of other demands. My husband doesn't have much time to help. But I can work with other families to do some group classes, so that will help on the time question. I have about 3 hours a day available for direct teaching and interaction. I need to do a lot of planning over the summer when I have more time, then I should have about three or four hours each weekend to plan for each week.

3.) How much money can you spend?

We're on a limited budget, so I should spend less than \$1000 total this year.

4.) How do your religious beliefs impact your homeschooling?

My religious beliefs are a critical part of homeschooling. They will underlie everything we do. I would like to use resources that reflect my beliefs, but I can work with others as long as they are not in direct conflict.

When I consider my answers to these four questions, I can see that my time constraints will make time-consuming planning and projects difficult. I need to compromise on my desire to do unit studies and a lot of project learning. Money will be a limitation, but I'm not set on only one way of doing this, so I can look at many different options.

Incorporating religious beliefs is easy within Charlotte Mason, unit study, and classical education approaches since they use real books and require discussion and interaction.

Putting It All Together

Now I am ready to gather what I have learned so that I can verbalize my own personal philosophy of education and what that might look like for my family. While you can do this in any order you wish, I will describe my own process.

First, I summarized my educational philosophy primarily from the first section, actually copying from some of what I wrote there. I did not need to include everything from that section.

My philosophy of education: *I believe that my children's education should help them develop a strong sense of God's reality in all aspects of their lives. I want my children to love to learn so they will become self-educators who choose to learn on their own. I also want them to have strong academic skills so they have the tools for independent learning. I want them to have a broad education since I do not know what direction God has for each of them.*

Next, I looked at the chart where I've circled numbers reflecting different educational approaches. I've already come to some conclusions about which approaches I like. In my notes following the last four questions, I already noted that one of my highest priorities, incorporating religious goals into education, is easier to do within one of the "real books" approaches.

Another priority I set in the first section—and one of my strongest—is that my children love to learn. That means I will want to be particularly attentive to methods and resources that are appealing to them and that encourage that love of learning. I know enough about learning styles to recognize that this might mean choosing different resources for each of them. However, I noted in the last section that we have a limited budget so I might not be able to purchase everything I would like to use. Time is also a precious commodity. I know I don't want to plunk my boys down with workbooks all the time if I really want them to love learning. On the other hand, they will have to do some independent work both for their sakes and mine. I do not have time to do everything with them, and I want them to eventually become independent learners, so they DO need to learn how to work independently.

I will need to come up with a balance of interesting, interactive learning activities and independent work. I realize that I can primarily use the educational approaches I prefer, but I will probably have to include some traditional workbooks just to make things manageable.

I want to incorporate education with a Christian worldview, even more so at junior high and high school levels. That will narrow down my choices in some ways. I would like to use classical methods from the dialectic and rhetoric stages for a good part of worldview education.

Realistically, I can see that my time demands are going to be heavy. One of the smartest things I can do is work with all three of my sons together whenever possible. Unit studies might help me do that. Group classes with other families will be another way to help with the time issue.

All of this tells me that I should probably look to unit study ideas, especially those that have a strong Christian worldview orientation plus those based on either Charlotte Mason's ideas or classical education (the latter especially for my eldest sons). I can likely use traditional textbooks for subjects not covered by the unit study.

Now it's your turn. When you've completed this section, go on to Chapter Four to see how understanding both your own learning style and the learning styles of the children you'll be teaching will help fine tune your curriculum choices.

CHAPTER 4

Learning Styles: How does MY child learn best?

If you are like me and most other parents I've asked, teaching your child to read is probably the scariest part of homeschooling. We have this sense that if we blow it with reading, then how can we possibly accomplish anything else?

Given that so many of us share this common insecurity, you might well be one of the thousands of parents who shelled out \$200 to \$300 for one of those reading programs that have been widely advertised. The glowing testimonials really convinced you that this would be money well spent.

Like thousands of parents who invested in such programs, you might have had a very discouraging experience with the program. Let's say you bought the one that teaches the alphabet and phonetic sounds to rap tunes. When you played the first CD for your child to listen to, you discovered a couple of disconcerting things: your child doesn't like rap music, and your child couldn't make any connection between what he was hearing and letters on a piece of paper. If you figured this out quickly enough, you were able to return the program within the allowable time and get your money back. If not, the program got added to your collection of white elephants.

So how do we save ourselves this sort of expensive grief? One of the best ways is tuning in to our children's learning styles.

Unfortunately, this was something I learned after making some big mistakes in my initial curriculum choices. When we first began homeschooling in 1982, my strongest conviction was that I wanted to use a Christian curriculum. The only Christian curriculum publisher I knew of was A Beka Book. This was the "dark ages" of homeschooling—a time when most publishers were not interested in selling to homeschoolers, if they even knew such a thing as homeschooling existed. Nevertheless, I went to a great deal of trouble to obtain A Beka worktexts to use with my two eldest sons, first and third graders at the time.

It took no more than two weeks to figure out that this sort of curriculum was about the worst

choice possible for my eldest son, Chris. You'll understand why shortly when you read the description of the Wiggly Willy learning style. I had to get busy adapting and doing other things to enable Chris to learn. If it depended upon him working through A Beka lessons—reading the text and completing the activity pages—we were doomed.

So I first started using methods relating to learning modalities. You might already be familiar with learning modalities, the idea that people tend to prefer one of three types (or modes) of sensory input:

- auditory (hearing)
- visual (seeing)
- kinesthetic (feeling or experiencing with one's body)

Understanding learning modalities might forewarn the parent whose child is not an auditory learner to avoid phonics programs that rely heavily upon audio CD's. Learning by listening would not be the method of choice for such a child.

Learning modalities helped me with Chris since I knew he was a kinesthetic learner. I pulled out math manipulatives and other concrete objects to teach lessons even though A Beka made no provision for that sort of learning. However, it was a lot of work to come up with such adaptations for different subjects while also sorting out what parts of the A Beka worktexts I might still be able to use.

Learning modalities help to a certain extent, but it's a bit too simplistic. For example, what do you do with a child who is a strong auditory learner but who can't sit still long enough to listen to a lesson being read to him?

That's where learning styles come in. The term learning style refers to the way (or style) a person most easily learns and processes new information or skills. Learning styles are just a bit more complex than learning modalities. Learning styles include awareness of children's preferred learning modalities, but they go further to look at other personality and learning traits such as a desire to work with other people or independently, an orientation toward either the big picture or the details, and preferences for a more or less structured environment.

Learning modalities play a partial role in understanding learning styles. For example, the kinesthetic learning modality is an obvious match with Wiggly Willy learners. However, visual and auditory modalities cross learning style boundaries, and should be taken into account no matter which style learner a child seems to be.

Which System Is Best?

Experts have come up with many different systems and labels for identifying a person's learning style. All of them are useful. The most significant differences are in their complexity. Some systems are so complex that an expert needs to administer an assessment and analyze the results.

When I first read about learning styles, hardly anyone was using them to address the needs of children. The first book I found that did so was titled *Learning Patterns and Temperament Styles* (published by Manas Systems) by Dr. Keith Golay. Dr. Golay discussed learning styles in relation to traditional, public school classroom settings. Although it was very useful, the fact that it lacked a Christian outlook and didn't address homeschooling motivated me to come up with my own approach that I use in this book.

The learning styles I use in this book fall into four categories. Yes, it could be much more complex, but our goal with learning styles is not a thorough analysis of each of our children so much

as developing an awareness that each one will have ways of learning that are easier and ways that are tougher. By identifying learning styles, we are able to choose teaching methods and materials that are more likely to be successful for each child.

For example, one child's learning style might be very physical in a whole-body sense. This child learns math best when she puts two blocks plus two more blocks together, then counts to see that there are four. She needs to move her body as she counts each number. She learns prepositions best by putting her teddy bear ON the chair, UNDER the chair, OVER the chair, and BESIDE the chair. You can imagine how challenging children with this learning style might be to teach in a typical classroom setting!

Another child with a different learning style responds well to traditional classroom textbooks. He learns just fine by reading textbooks and doing workbook exercises. He doesn't need to feel or experience things to learn. But he also depends upon the predictability and security of those workbooks. He really struggles when it comes to creative writing and art projects.

Yet another child learns best when it's a social experience. She thrives on "unit study days" when you get together with a few other families to do all those creative unit study activities together. She blossoms when she gets to role play a character in a historical event. Her writing is impressive because she wants to do her very best on her writing project that she will be reading aloud to her group class.

Recognizing these differences within each of your children will help you make better choices in the methods and materials you use. But that's only part of the curriculum equation.

But Of Course My Way Is Best!

The other part of the equation is the parent's own learning style. The reality is that we parents have our own learning style preferences. And we tend to teach our children in ways that WE learn best rather than ways THEY learn best. So our preferred learning style, by default, becomes our teaching style. That's what we're most comfortable with. That's what comes naturally to us.

Structure, organization, and schedules will be important to some of us, while exploration, creativity, and flexibility will be higher priorities for another parent. Some parents love to do messy art projects while others would rather their children watch an art appreciation video. There's no right and wrong to such choices. Rather, it is a matter of recognizing your own preferences then checking to see if those methods are really what work best with your own children. I like to think that in God's graciousness and wisdom, He usually gives parents children of contrasting learning styles so we have more opportunities to stretch and grow.

The next two pages will help you identify your own learning and teaching style. Read through the description of each learning style. Don't get hung up on the names at the top (Wiggly Willy, Perfect Paula, etc.). These are the labels I use to help you remember each style, but they don't mean that those with a Wiggly Willy style are all male and that Perfect Paulas are exclusively female.

Also, for adult learning styles, I intermix both learning and teaching examples. If you have not yet experienced teaching, consider some of these characteristics from your perspective as a learner.

You are not likely to find that every item under any one learning style fits you while none under the other three do. More likely, you will find a number of items under one learning style that describe you and only a few under one or more of the other learning styles. Try to rank yourself

in descending order from the learning style most like you down to the one least like you. If you should find that you are fairly evenly spread across one or more learning styles, that's just fine.

Adult Learning/Teaching Styles

Wiggly Willy

- has trouble organizing and following through
- would rather play and have fun than work
- tends to do things impulsively
- probably did poorly in school (often due to lack of interest or boredom)
- looks for creative and efficient solutions to tasks
- dislikes paperwork and record keeping
- prefers activity over reading books
- prefers to teach (or learn) the fine arts, physical education, and activity-oriented classes

Perfect Paula

- likes everything neatly planned ahead of time
- likes to follow a schedule
- is not very good at coming up with creative ideas
- is comfortable with memorization and drill
- gets upset easily when children don't cooperate
- worries about meeting requirements
- often prefers to work under an umbrella program for home educators
- prefers to teach (or learn) with pre-planned curricula
- is more comfortable with "cut and dry" subjects than those which require exploration with no clear answers

Competent Carl

- likes to be in control
- thinks and acts logically
- likes to understand the reasoning and logic behind ideas
- is selectively organized
- likes to work alone and be independent
- is impatient with those who are slow to grasp concepts and those who are disorganized
- is often uncomfortable in social situations and has trouble understanding others' feelings and emotions
- tends to avoid difficult social situations
- likes to make long-term plans
- prefers to teach (or learn) math, science, and other logic-related subjects rather than language arts and social studies

Sociable Sue

- enjoys social interaction
- likes to belong to groups, especially for activities
- worries about what other people think
- tends to be insecure about how well he/she is doing
- is idealistic about expectations and goals
- may or may not be organized, depending upon accountability

- is more interested in general concepts than details
- prefers to teach (or learn) subjects related to language arts, social studies, and, possibly, the fine arts

If I create an analogy as to how adults with different learning styles might visit Disneyland (or Disney World or Universal Studios, etc.), I think it might help you sort this out even better. For Wiggly Willy, it's all about the rides. He wants to experience all of them. Forget the shops and the shows that you sit and watch.

Perfect Paula is likely to have organized the event in the first place. She'll make sure there's a meeting place in case someone gets lost. She'll know what time various events take place and try to schedule out the day to make sure she gets to all the things that are on her list.

Competent Carl won't mind going off on his own if everyone else takes too long figuring out what they want to do. He'll choose rides over shops, but particular shows might also intrigue him. His choice activities will be ones with special effects, because the fun for him is in figuring out how they did it.

Sociable Sue will make sure all her friends have come along. She'll enjoy whatever happens as long as everyone sticks together. For her, the fun is in the company. They could spend hours standing in lines waiting for rides and that would be as much or more fun than anything else.

Pay attention to your group next time you go to a theme park and see if you can't identify some of these patterns!

If you matched up a single learning style with most of your characteristics and found very few that described you under the other three, you will have to pay more attention to learning styles than a parent who is more evenly spread across the learning styles. You might tend to be lopsided in the learning methods you use with your children, leaning heavily toward those favoring that especially strong learning style of yours.

On the other hand, if you recognized a number of your characteristics in two or more learning styles, you are likely to have an easier time adapting to the needs of your children since you already have a tendency to work across one or more learning styles.

Keeping in mind what you've discovered about your own learning and teaching style, it's now time to try to identify your children's learning styles. Remember that your children, just like adults, are not likely to fit neatly into only one category. They, too, are likely to have one stronger learning style, and one or two that are weaker, and maybe one that just doesn't fit them at all.

Children's Learning Styles

Wiggly Willy

Wiggly Willys are those children who learn best by doing—the hands-on learners. They like to be free to move around and act spontaneously. Do you have a little boy who just seems to fall off his chair if he has tried to stay put for more than ten minutes? That's typical for a Wiggly Willy.

They have short attention spans most of the time, although it's interesting to see how their attention span lengthens when they get into something of their own choosing! These children are usually not interested in deep thinking or analysis if it means sitting still very long.

On the other hand, they generally do very well with hands-on projects. They can be very creative and imaginative.

These are carefree children who live for the moment. However, they can be difficult to

motivate. Wiggly Willys hate being bored. They'll create "interesting moments" to break the boredom.

They don't think ahead about consequences, positive or negative. You cannot usually motivate them with: "Study hard and get good grades so you can get into a good college ten years from now." Ten years from now is a non-existent concept for them, so why on earth would they sacrifice present pleasure for that? These children need short-term goals and immediate rewards.

Wiggly Willys can be disruptive in groups. Sometimes these children are labeled as having attention deficit disorder (a disorder that I do believe is real), although the actual problem is that, because of their age and temperament, they really need to be moving around more than is allowed in a typical classroom.

Perfect Paula

I call our second type of learner Perfect Paula. This is the responsible child who likes to see that everything is done correctly. She likes things to be clearly structured, planned, and organized.

Perfect Paulas have a narrow comfort zone. They feel more secure when things are orderly. Consequently, they seldom act spontaneously and are uncomfortable with creative activities that lack specific guidelines. For example, if you want them to do an art project, they will say, "Show me what it's supposed to look like." They want to make sure they will do it correctly rather than seize an opportunity to express their own creativity.

They follow rules and respect authority, and they often feel it their duty to make sure everyone else does likewise. They like to follow a typical school curriculum and feel that they are accomplishing the same things as other children their age. They prefer to be part of groups, and they need approval and affirmation to let them know that they are doing what is proper.

Perfect Paulas can be easier to homeschool than other learners, but you might have to work at helping them develop more flexibility and creativity.

Competent Carl

Competent Carl likes to be in control of himself and his surroundings. He tends to be analytical, constantly trying to figure out what makes things tick. Problem solving is typically something he enjoys.

Their analytical and logical bent typically makes math and science their strong subjects while the more subjective humanities (i.e., language arts, literature, social studies) might be weaker subjects.

Social skills can be another weak area. Often Competent Carls have difficulty understanding and relating to their peers. Because of this, and sometimes simply by choice, they enjoy solitary activity. They expect others to operate the same way they do, and they don't find it easy to adapt to other ways of doing things.

Competent Carls tend to be self-motivated and enjoy long-term, independent projects. They have their own ideas about what they want to learn, as well as when and how they want to learn.

Some Competent Carls love to brainstorm—think out loud. These more verbal Competent Carls will probably want a more interactive learning environment or at least one that allows them to ask questions and talk through what they are learning. One-on-one teaching or small groups are likely to be better than large groups for Competent Carl.

Sociable Sue

Sociable Sues are, of course, sociable. They often have warm, responsive personalities. They are interested in people, and as they get older, that interest expands into ideas, principles, and values.

But they also tend to be big picture people; concepts are more interesting to them than details and technicalities. They don't like memorizing names and dates for history, but they want to understand how different cultures and events affect one another.

They love change and new things. They can be very excited about a new project or assignment but easily "lose steam" once the novelty has worn off. Sometimes you have to switch what you are doing or add something new with Sociable Sues to reignite their interest—a different curriculum, a new supplemental workbook, an educational game, a field trip, etc.

They are motivated by relationships and care a great deal about what others think of them. They like to be recognized and acknowledged for their achievements. Because of this they will sometimes be over-achievers, putting out extraordinary effort to impress people.

For the same reason, they are vulnerable to conflict and criticism. They often dislike and avoid competitions, preferring cooperation so that no one's feelings are hurt.

Cautions

I have to throw out a few cautions here as we talk about children's learning styles. First of all, think of a typical two-year-old child in terms of learning styles. Most two-year-old children fit into the Wiggly Willy category. They don't sit still very well. They are totally hands-on as they explore their new and expanding world. They aren't interested in deep thinking, long-range planning, or delayed gratification.

But they grow beyond their two-year-old world and, eventually, their true learning style becomes evident. This might happen at age five, eight, or ten. They might seem one learning style as they begin kindergarten then seem a very different style at age ten. So don't try to peg your preschooler's learning style. And don't think you've figured out your older child's learning style and expect it to remain forever the same.

Another caution. It's tempting to use learning styles as an excuse to ignore bad behavior or spiritual issues: "My son's a Wiggly Willy, and he just can't sit still."

Every learning style has both positive and negative character qualities. Wiggly Willys can be enthusiastic and fun-loving, but they struggle with self-discipline. Perfect Paulas can be very self-disciplined, but they might also be bossy or self-righteous. Competent Carls can be so self-sufficient that they lack charity or concern for others. Sociable Sues can be very concerned about people but absolutely hopeless when it comes to other areas of personal responsibility.

Recognizing these strengths and weaknesses in each of our children helps us identify our job as parents. We build on their strengths, but we also help them overcome their weaknesses.

Conflicting Learning Styles

Maybe you have already spotted the biggest problem with learning styles—the potential conflict between the learning styles of parents and children. For example, let's say you identify many of your own characteristics under "Competent Carl." You tend to be a very logical, analytical type person. You like independent work. And you've got little patience with drama queens. You might have an especially hard time with your Sociable Sue daughter who tries to use emotional manipulation to get out of doing what she doesn't want to do.

Or consider a very common situation in homeschooling, Perfect Paula mom and Wiggly Willy son. Mom has her lesson plans organized, her curriculum well-planned, and her daily schedule

on the refrigerator for all to see. Wiggly Willy would much rather be outside doing practically anything other than school. He freaks out at the sight of the inch-thick math workbook, not to mention the pile of other books mom has purchased to make schooling easy for her to manage.

A far less common situation might be the reverse of our last scenario: Wiggly Willy mom and Perfect Paula daughter. Mom gets up in the morning and it's a beautiful day for a field trip. Besides, she has yet to get around to creating any lesson plans, so a field trip is a good excuse to put off planning for another day. Meanwhile, her daughter has compared notes with her age-mates and knows that she is way behind on math. And she worries that their real-book and field-trip approach to history might not help her know enough to get a high score on the standardized test she'll have to take at the end of the year. She would just love it if her mom would get some REAL school books and let her stay home and do school.

Most of us parents tend to think that the way we like to approach homeschooling will be equally appealing to our children. One of the most important lessons we can take from learning styles is that the opposite is more likely true. As parents, we need to stretch ourselves out of our own learning style comfort zones to try to meet our children's needs.

For parents without a single, strongly-dominant learning and teaching style, this will likely be easier. Such parents will more easily adapt to their children's needs than will the parent with a narrower range of personal learning styles.

Teaching to Their Strengths: Methods That Work Best

Meeting your children's needs in terms of learning styles does not mean that you have to construct your entire curriculum around these learning styles. Generally, your children will have stronger subjects and weaker subjects.

Perhaps your child is good at math and weak in language arts. If you are using a math program that doesn't really use methods best for that child's learning style, but he is still learning just fine because math comes easily for him, then don't worry about it. Stick with what you are using. But if language arts are a challenge, then you will want to look for resources and methods for composition, grammar, spelling, etc. that work best with his learning style.

Use your knowledge of learning styles as a tool to help you tune into your child's needs and to choose methods and materials that help in troublesome areas.

Let's look at methods that are most likely to work with different learning styles.

Wiggly Willy

Wiggly Willy is a kinesthetic learner. The more he can use his body and his senses to learn, the better. So hands-on learning works well. That might be math manipulatives, building projects, making 3-D maps, learning facts set to music, and anything else that involves both large and small-muscle movement plus as many senses as possible.

When you need to directly teach Willy, it is best if you can use a multi-sensory approach; the more he can hear, see, and touch what he's learning, the easier it will be for him to tune into and remember the lesson.

If you recall, Willy has a short attention span, so if you have something important to say to him, say it quickly. Don't use it as the final point in a five-minute lecture. He won't have heard you past the first minute unless you've done something interesting to re-engage him.

These children really need freedom to move around. Often they learn best when their bodies

are moving. Some therapists have recommended that children with attention-deficit disorders do things like practice saying math facts while jumping on a trampoline. I know this isn't the way they do things in school, but it might be a very good idea to let Willy play with something in his hands while you are trying to present a grammar or history lesson.

Project learning can work well with Wiggly Willys, but you need to keep in mind that these children do not think about consequences so they need supervision. If they tackle a project, set up periodic checkpoints so you can ensure they are staying on task and making progress in the right direction.

Likewise, unit studies often are a good choice for Wiggly Willys. Many unit studies include a healthy mix of book learning (including real books) and activities that stimulate and hold his interest. Unit studies that offer a number of activity options are especially good since Willy probably will need more hands-on activities than the average learner.

If you do not want to get into a total unit study approach, you should still consider using real books rather than textbooks, especially for history and science, but also for other subjects. It can be like creating your own mini unit studies that stay within a subject area. For example, for science in the elementary grades, choose three or four topics to study during that school year. Find one or two good resource books on each topic as your sources of information—these will have far more information than a typical textbook, and will invariably be more interesting. Find ideas for hands-on activities, experiments, and field trips related to each topic. Then study those three or four topics in-depth instead of trying to cover ten to twenty topics superficially as do most textbooks. (Actually, this approach to science is good not just for Wiggly Willy, but for all types of learners.)

Wilys are easily overwhelmed by what seems to them too much reading or pencil-and-paper work. A math book with one hundred practice problems on a page might look impossible. However, half that number of problems broken down into 25 per worksheet, supplemented with practice using manipulatives or a computer game, would be no problem at all, even if the total number of practice problems were higher.

Another example: an assignment for an older child to write a lengthy report should be broken down into manageable chunks due each day rather than one big project due in two months.

If math is a problem area, you should use manipulatives like Cuisenaire Rods or Base Ten Blocks to teach new concepts. You can purchase these as supplements to use alongside a more traditional math text or you can purchase a program that has manipulatives built in such as *Math-U-See* (reviewed in this book) or *Right Start Math* (www.rightstartmath.com).

Consider supplementing even these manipulative-based programs with math games (card games, board games, or computer games), applications through building projects, cooking activities, etc.

For beginning readers, use a movable alphabet (i.e., rubber or magnetic letters children can arrange into words), phonics games, and interesting reading material.

For Wilys who are generally reluctant writers, try first making a shape book (like a boat or a car) or some other interesting art format for presentation of the writing project. Then have Willy write what goes into the book. Houghton Mifflin Publishing has a website with free shape book patterns at www.eduplace.com/rdg/hme/k_5/shapebook/toc.html. Lapbooks might be another way to accomplish this within some subject areas. (Learn about lapbooks at www.lapbooking.wordpress.com.)

With Wiggly Willys you should probably reduce your use of traditional texts and workbooks,

and try to find resources that are stimulating and interesting.

Wiggly Willys pose special challenges, but the trick is for parents to pay attention to what does and doesn't work, no matter how unusual it might seem. In summary:

Wiggly Willy Prefers:

- hands-on activity
- multi-sensory audio-visual aids
- short, dynamic presentations
- freedom to move around
- whole-body physical involvement
- project learning
- texts or workbooks that are not overwhelming
- learning games
- variety in learning methods

Perfect Paula

Many parents wish all their children were Perfect Paulas when it comes to homeschooling because they actually care about doing what's expected and pleasing you. Perfect Paula tends to work well with typical school curricula. She likes the security and predictability of knowing what's expected and how it is to be done each day. She can usually work well independently as long as instructions are clear.

However, recall that Paula has a narrow comfort zone. She's most comfortable with review, repetition, and drill because she's already familiar with most of the answers. New concepts can be challenging. So work closely with her when introducing new concepts. Give her lots of encouragement at this stage.

Paula would rather receive information than think creatively. She's not likely to do as well in a Socratic discussion (classical education method) as most other learners. If you are planning such a discussion or other activity that will take Paula out of her comfort zone, give her plenty of advance notice, reassurance, and as much encouragement as possible.

She's not likely to be enthusiastic about creative writing, dramatizations or other self-expressive learning activities. You should not eliminate these from her experience but introduce them gently, a little at a time. Unit studies might be a good tool for stretching Paula since most of them offer a variety of activities that might be used in this way.

One of the biggest problems for Paula is that she might do well memorizing and repeating information (typical for early elementary grades) but struggle when it comes time to start making connections, analyzing and synthesizing information.

For example, A Beka's math program might be working fine up through third or fourth grade. Paula loves the continual practice, clear presentation of the rules for each process, and she does well on timed drills. But by fourth or fifth grade, she might be struggling because A Beka has not explained concepts—why math processes work the way they do. She memorizes her math facts very well and knows how to do multi-digit multiplication and division, but two-step word problems throw her for a loop. You might want to use math manipulatives or supplemental books alongside A Beka that present math “brain teasers” to push her to deeper levels of thinking so she develops conceptual understanding. Or you might want to choose a program that incorporates more work with math concepts like *Math Mammoth* or Singapore's *Primary Mathematics*.

Paula probably will not need as much hands-on work as Wiggly Willy, so a manipulative-based

program is generally not essential, although it might be helpful.

Perfect Paula is likely to be weak in creative writing skills so you should look carefully at some of my Top Picks for developing composition skills.

Since the structure of most traditional curricula fits Perfect Paula's learning style fairly well, you should probably look for supplements to help with difficult areas and to stretch her beyond her comfort zone. In summary:

Perfect Paula Prefers:

- workbooks
- consistent structure in both schedule and curriculum
- rules and predictability
- lectures or lessons that follow an outline
- repetition and memorization
- drill and review
- time to prepare for any discussion
- gentle help to develop creativity and deeper thinking skills

Competent Carl

If you recall from looking at adult learning styles, control is a big issue for Competent Carl. He has lots of ideas of his own and little patience for listening to others. So discussions are okay only if he gets to do a lot of talking. He'll tune out of an hour-long lecture—or even a fifteen-minute lecture! Unlike Perfect Paula, however, he might love Socratic discussions if questions are meaningful and such discussions are productive.

Many Competent Carls like to think out loud or brainstorm. For example, you might find that he writes better when you first take plenty of time to talk through possible organizational strategies or ways to tackle writing assignments rather than leaving him on his own to figure it out.

Because of his logical mind, he prefers curriculum that is well-organized and purposeful rather than entertaining with lots of extra activity involved. He wants to know in advance what he is doing and why. Structured, traditional curriculum can work well for Carl as long as it doesn't have too much busy work built into it.

Carl has plenty of his own ideas to explore, so long-term independent projects can work well for him. One approach that can work well is to present the learning objective and offer two or three possible ways for Carl to achieve it. Let him choose, then write up a learning contract that details what assignments will be completed and when they will be turned in.

Competent Carls are more likely than other learners to challenge you with, "Why do I need to learn this?" It's probably wise to take time to explain why to him since it will improve his motivation if he understands the purpose for each task.

He's also likely to challenge you about repetition, practice and busy work. Sometimes Carl doesn't like to do review and practice once he's already covered something, even though he really needs the practice for proficiency. However, sometimes he is correct, so you should choose curriculum with a minimal amount of busy work and review or have him skip such material when it is unnecessary.

For instance, once Carl knows how to read fairly well, let him read books selected from your "approved" list rather than reading anthologies (textbooks). You can use novel study guides (such as those from Total Language Plus and Progeny Press) or carefully selected supplemental activity books or workbooks if you want to work on comprehension, vocabulary, literary analysis,

and other reading skills. He will be more engaged in the process if he is able to select what he wants to read and if he isn't bogged down with what he might consider redundant exercises in a reading text or workbook. You can focus on particular skills he needs to develop rather than that wide range of skills covered in a text.

While Competent Carls generally prefer independent work, you will probably want to involve them in some group learning situations simply to help them develop social skills. For example, you might do a family unit study where everyone is together for foundational reading or discussion. Carl would then pursue the same topic as your other children by doing more independent research, reading, and writing while you continue with group activities with the rest of your children. You might also have Carl participate in a Friday afternoon art activity with the whole family.

Probably the most important thing to keep in mind with Carl is that he wants his learning to be efficient. Don't bog him down with manipulatives and hands-on activities if they aren't helpful. That can do more harm than good. In summary:

Competent Carl Prefers:

- independent work
- logically organized lessons
- clear sense of purpose for lessons
- long-term projects
- talking rather than listening
- problem solving
- brainstorming

Sociable Sue

Sociable Sue is a perfect candidate for unit studies such as *TRISMS*, *Tapestry of Grace*, and *Five in a Row*—all reviewed in Chapter Thirteen. She will thrive on group projects and interactive learning. Read-aloud sessions will also be appealing to her, so using real books rather than textbooks might be a good choice.

Sue picks up on social dynamics better than other learners. She's sensitive to your attitude toward subjects, so you had better choose curriculum that you can be enthusiastic about. If she senses that you don't like the curriculum, she probably won't like it either. You will also notice a dynamic that makes things even more complicated—if her friends like or use a particular resource, she's likely to have a positive attitude about it solely for that reason. This can play havoc when you try to purchase resources since you're not likely to know ahead of time what her friends are going to be enthusiastic about.

Because approval from others matters so much to Sue, she generally likes public presentations such as reading her writing assignment aloud, dramatic reading of a poem or speech, performances (e.g., music recitals), or sharing her artwork.

Creative activities usually are more appealing than repetitious review and drill. Sue gets bored with the same learning format. She thrives on variety. Choosing a resource that alters the lesson format from time to time is a good idea. Otherwise, you will need to supplement or adapt what you're using to keep her motivated. Often, hands-on resources you might choose for Wiggly Willy work well for Sue because they require social interaction.

One of the worst things you can do with Sociable Sue is to purchase a workbook-based program that is designed for independent study and expect her to spend three hours a day working

in isolation through her books. She can work like this for short periods, but not all day. If you have to use independent workbooks, alternate sociable or interactive learning activities with the workbooks to keep her going.

Sue will also need help learning how to persevere even when learning isn't sociable and fun. She has to develop the self-discipline to follow through on assignments even when it gets boring. In summary:

Sociable Sue Prefers:

- real books
- unit studies
- discussions
- social interaction
- enthusiastic teaching
- variety in types of resources
- creative writing
- public presentations
- novelty and creativity in curriculum presentation
- situations where she is personally recognized and valued
- (needs but does not necessarily enjoy) repetition for detail and help with self-discipline

Keep In Mind Learning Modalities

As I mentioned earlier, your children might also have a strong learning modality—visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. They might learn best by seeing, hearing, or hands-on experiences. For example, a Sociable Sue who is kinesthetic will prefer more project-oriented learning while an auditory Sociable Sue will prefer more sedentary, read-aloud activity. Coupling what you discover about both learning styles and learning modalities gives you a great deal of information that you can use to make better curriculum choices for each child.

Teach to Their Strengths

You can see that teaching methods appropriate for one type of learner might be ineffective for another type. This does not mean that you teach each type of learner only with methods that suit his personality and temperament. For some children, it would be all fun and games, and they would learn no self-discipline.

Instead, you use methods that work best for each child when introducing new or difficult subject matter. Once they have grasped a concept, use other more challenging methods when they are less likely to be stressful or produce failure.

You can help strengthen students' weak areas such as short attention span or lack of creativity by working on these problem areas within subjects that are especially interesting to your child or subjects in which they excel. For example, many Wiggly Willys do not like writing assignments, but reading an exciting historical adventure or biography aloud, then asking them to draw a picture about the story and write a few descriptive sentences will develop writing skills in a more enjoyable way than most workbook activity.

After initial instruction, you should review and reinforce learning through methods that will help each child stretch himself and strengthen his weak areas. For example, a very active Wiggly

Willy can learn math by using objects, without paper and pencil. Once he has mastered a concept, he can get out the paper and pencil to do review and practice.

To sum it up, with both younger and older children you should teach new concepts through a child's strongest learning style then review and practice using other learning style methods that are not as comfortable.

It helps if you recognize those subjects that are easier and those that are more difficult for each child. While there are some typically strong subjects within each learning style, there are many exceptions. Wiggly Willys usually prefer physically-active subjects such as music, the arts, and athletics. Perfect Paulas like more structured and predictable subjects like math, spelling, history, and geography. Competent Carls often excel in math and science, exhibiting less interest in the humanities. Sociable Sues will often prefer whatever subjects are presented with the most enthusiasm and interaction, but their strong areas tend to be writing and literature, languages, social studies, and performing arts. These are very general observations that may or may not apply to your child.

You must observe which subjects consistently are handled with ease and which cause frustration. Then, for the frustrating subjects, consider using other teaching methods that better fit your child's learning style. Avoid using the difficult learning methods with a child until he understands the basic concept and has reached a review or application stage.

Matching Learning Styles To Curricula

When I put together the charts of my Top Picks (in Chapter Six), I did not include columns headed only Wiggly Willy, etc. This is because there are rarely direct matches between resources and learning styles. Instead, there are columns for primary characteristics of curriculum that tends to suit each of the four learning styles: "Multi-sensory/hands-on (WW)," "Structure/rule-oriented (PP)," "Appeals to logical/analytical learners (CC)," and "Has social activity/interaction (SS)."

But you also need to look at other columns that might be equally important such as whether or not it works for independent study, how easy it is for the teacher to use, how much writing is required, or what methodology it reflects. Only you can decide which characteristics of a particular curriculum are most important.

Sometimes your teaching style and your child's learning style are drastically different. Suppose your child really needs a unit study approach with lots of creative activity. But your Perfect Paula style makes you shudder at the thought of trying to gather all the stuff you need plus having to choose among activities. What if you choose the wrong ones? And then how will you know if your children did enough or too much?

There are what I call "compromise solutions" for such situations. For example, KONOS (www.konos.com) publishes *KONOS In-A-Box*, a unit study that includes step-by-step instructions plus all the books and materials (even craft materials) you need. Cornerstone Curriculum publishes *Making Math Meaningful*, a math program that includes manipulatives but has scripted lessons that tell parents exactly what to say and do. (If you need to look beyond the Top Picks, check out over one thousand reviews at my website: www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.)

So keep in mind that while you are looking for resources that suit your children's learning styles, you must also choose resources with which you can work.

Motivation

Motivation is often a two-part process. If you want a child to do well in math, then you motivate him first by providing a program that fits his learning style and makes it easier for him to grasp concepts. If you can make learning more enjoyable for children (not that it always will be!), you solve part of the motivation problem. By using creative approaches and relating learning to the interests of your children, you make learning more of a partnership than a struggle.

You also might try to improve motivation by using rewards or incentives. You will have to decide where to draw the line between incentives and bribery, but bribery doesn't usually work well in the long run.

Just as different style learners are likely to be successful with different learning methods, they are also likely to respond to different types of rewards or incentives.

Wiggly Willy might respond well to prizes, special trips, play time, or food—the more immediate the reward, the more effective. Perfect Paula can be motivated with stickers, good grades, and other concrete affirmations as well as with personal praise. Competent Carl, who enjoys being independent, can be motivated by self-designed contracts, or rewards of free time. Sociable Sue—interested in people and relationships—is more likely to be motivated by personal affirmation (praise) and recognition or an opportunity to do something special with a friend.

Experiment with different types of motivation to figure out what works best with each of your children. Don't be afraid to use different incentives with each of your children.

Disguised Learning Disabilities

A word of caution is needed here. Sometimes you can mistake the characteristics or evidence of a learning disability for a learning style. If you have tried everything—paid attention to learning styles and methods and retaught five different ways—and your child still “doesn't get it,” he or she might have a learning disability. Sometimes a child will appear to be a Wiggly Willy because a learning disability interferes with reading, writing, or thinking processes. If the work is too difficult, your child might act bored, restless, or inattentive to avoid dealing with the “impossible” task. Active learning that requires less paper and pencil work or reading will appear successful, but it is only masking the real problem. You will see this when you have already taught a concept and they seem to have grasped it. Picture teaching multiplication with manipulative blocks—when you transition from the blocks to writing down what they have done, they are unable to make the shift.

If you suspect that your child has a learning disability, you should seek professional assistance. Generally, your local homeschool support group can recommend a professional in your area who can help you determine what is going on.

Fine Tuning

The goal here is not labeling your child but becoming aware that each child will have strengths and weaknesses in the ways he or she learns. You have to recognize your own tendency to teach the way you like to learn rather than the way your children learn best. Then you need to look for resources and methods that best meet the needs of your child, while still being practical for

you to use.

When you combine your philosophy of education and ideas about approaches you would like to use with what you have discovered about learning styles, you can fine tune your curriculum choices.

For example, I ended Chapter Three noting that unit study, Charlotte Mason, and classical education ideas should be part of the curriculum for my sons. When I add learning styles to the mix, I know that my Wiggly Willy eldest son still needs some projects and hands-on learning mixed in with the worldview and unit study type education I would like to pursue. I would still like to shift toward classical education, so when I look at the charts of my Top Picks in Chapter Six, I find that *Tapestry of Grace* looks like it fits the situation quite well.

In addition, since math is my eldest son's most challenging subject, I need to be particularly careful about his math program to find one that still has manipulatives at junior high level. In Chapter Six, I look for math programs with a "4" or "5" in the first column for multi-sensory/hands-on, then go to the actual reviews in Chapter Ten to find those that carry on with manipulatives up into junior high and beyond. *Math-U-See* looks like a good option since it has manipulatives and continues with them up even into high school.

Now there's one more thing to take into consideration: what will you actually teach your children this year? The next chapter will help you figure that out.

CHAPTER 5

Who should learn what, and when?

Most home educators worry about whether or not their children are keeping up with what “other schools” are teaching. This sort of concern can be a helpful prod to keep us focused and making progress. However, it can also be a distraction or even a diversion from what we really need to be teaching each of our children.

On both state and national levels, there has been a push to develop common standards for each subject area that describe what all government school students should be learning. As those standards have been developed, textbooks have been rewritten to reflect them. While there are minor variations from state to state, standards are actually similar enough across the country that a handful of textbook publishers produce books that can be used in just about every state. The current push toward adoption of the Common Core State Standards is the natural progression of a decades-long process. Thus far, Common Core Standards have been developed for math and language arts. Here are a few examples from the Common Core State Standards so you can see what I am talking about:

From kindergarten English language arts standards:

- RF.K.1. Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.
Follow words from left to right, top to bottom, and page by page.
Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.
Understand that words are separated by spaces in print.
Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.¹

From fourth grade mathematics standards for "Operations and Algebraic Thinking":

- Use the four operations with whole numbers to solve problems.
4.OA.A.1 Interpret a multiplication equation as a comparison, e.g., interpret $35 = 5 \times 7$

as a statement that 35 is 5 times as many as 7 and 7 times as many as 5. Represent verbal statements of multiplicative comparisons as multiplication equations.

4.OA.A.2 Multiply or divide to solve word problems involving multiplicative comparison, e.g., by using drawings and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem, distinguishing multiplicative comparison from additive comparison.

4.OA.A.3 Solve multistep word problems posed with whole numbers and having whole-number answers using the four operations, including problems in which remainders must be interpreted. Represent these problems using equations with a letter standing for the unknown quantity. Assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies including rounding.

Gain familiarity with factors and multiples.

4.OA.B.4 Find all factor pairs for a whole number in the range 1-100. Recognize that a whole number is a multiple of each of its factors. Determine whether a given whole number in the range 1-100 is a multiple of a given one-digit number. Determine whether a given whole number in the range 1-100 is prime or composite.

Generate and analyze patterns.

4.OA.C.5 Generate a number or shape pattern that follows a given rule. Identify apparent features of the pattern that were not explicit in the rule itself. For example, given the rule "Add 3" and the starting number 1, generate terms in the resulting sequence and observe that the terms appear to alternate between odd and even numbers. Explain informally why the numbers will continue to alternate in this way.²

For a number of reasons, national standards for science and history are being developed by different organizations. You should be particularly aware of the Next Generation Science Standards, which have already been adopted by at least ten states as I write. While they are not under the "Common Core" banner, the Next Generation Science Standards operate in the same fashion as Common Core standards. These science standards promise to be controversial, especially because of their treatment of the topic of evolution.

If your state hasn't adopted the Common Core or the Next Generation Science Standards, you might want to investigate your own state's standards for math, language, and science as well as those for other subjects.

Because these standards are so detailed, the compilation of standards for each state could fill an entire book per state! So I cannot, of course, include the standards themselves within this chapter. Instead, here are websites where you can access standards for yourself:

- www.corestandards.org - Common Core State Standards Initiative website where you can find the newest national standards for math and language arts
- www.nextgenscience.org/next-generation-science-standards - website for the Next Generation Science Standards
- www.educationworld.com/standards/state/ - Education World, a site that links you quickly to sets of standards for each state

It is important that you notice how detailed and prescriptive some of these standards are. In years past, schools had much more freedom to teach what they deemed most useful within the general subject areas. A class with many English as a Second Language students would spend more time on language fundamentals and oral language before tackling more sophisticated grammar and composition skills. The more general directives left much to individual schools

and teachers to determine as far as teaching each classroom of children. Interestingly, the Common Core Standards use more general language than do some other standards documents. Nevertheless, state and national standards leave little room for schools or teachers to determine what to teach because coverage of so many specific topics is required.

Schools are held accountable for teaching to the standards by high-stakes standardized tests, the type of testing required under recent educational reforms. These tests ask questions based upon the standards. Such tests have big consequences for students as well as for schools and teachers. Student advancement to the next grade level, or even high school graduation, might hang in the balance. High-stakes tests might also determine whether schools (and teachers) gain or lose funding, whether principals and teachers lose their jobs, whether schools get taken over by the state, and even whether students might be given vouchers to attend private schools.

Homeschoolers are in the awkward situation of having to determine whether or not they need be concerned with the standards. It depends upon homeschooling requirements in your state, whether or not your children are required to take standardized tests (as well as what type of standardized test), your own goals, and maybe even your willingness to “work outside the box.”

A side effect of the standards movement has been that private and homeschools have often adopted those same standards by default rather than on purpose as more and more resources are written to align closely with the Common Core. And that means many homeschoolers end up teaching the same things as do government schools simply because that is what is in textbooks.

Challenging the Standards

Most parents rarely question what their children are learning in school unless it has to do with sex or drug education. They assume that whatever the school has decided to teach must be what children need to learn. This might or might not be true.

There are two underlying assumptions within the standardized approach that need to be challenged: the uniformity of children and the authority of government to dictate education.

As to the uniformity of children, anyone who has spent any time at all around children knows that they are as different as pistachio ice cream and pepperoni pizza. The notion that they should be learning the same things as all other children who happen to be their age is silly when you think about it.

Children develop on their own personal timetables. Some are ready to read at age four and others at age six or seven. Some can easily learn their multiplication tables at age seven and others at age nine. As I discuss in Chapter Four on learning styles, some children can read something in a book and learn it easily while others need to touch, handle, or manipulate things to get information into their brains.

The notion that you can put thirty children of the same age in a classroom and expect that all will learn at approximately the same rate and through the limited ways information is presented might work if children were machines to be programmed. But children are so much more complex than this.

Personally, I believe that God created each child as an individual with particular gifts, abilities, and interests. He has a unique plan for each one. God’s creativity gradually becomes visible within each child as he or she matures, an unfolding delight that we can either appreciate or deny. We appreciate it by recognizing and working with each individual child, or we deny it by trying to force children to adapt to others’ ideas about how they should grow and learn.

Regardless of religious beliefs, in light of the individuality of each child, parents should view their state's educational standards or the Common Core Standards with skepticism rather than accept them as a foundational directive for homeschooling.

The second problem with standards challenges the right of government to dictate what a child should learn. In addition to the issue of children's individuality, there's a problem regarding the purpose of education and, consequently, its content.

Government management of schools springs from a societal concern that everyone be educated, as well as the government's desire to maintain peace and order—a sort of conformity—within society. It has nothing to do with religious beliefs and personal development except as it affects larger societal goals. At the present time, societal goals are primarily economic.

The mantra of much of the national education reform legislation over the past three decades has been “educating for the high-skill, high-wage jobs of the 21st century.” Translation: children need to learn knowledge and skills that others have predetermined are necessary to prepare them for the workforce.

We see this very clearly in our present educational system at the high school level. Education is becoming primarily about vocational training rather than development of an individual person with a body, mind, and soul. Part of that training might require learning enough to get into college, so they can get a degree, so they can get a job—simply a more complex form of vocational training.

While young people should be prepared to get a job when they get out of school, many parents believe that education is as much or more about personal development, learning to think, developing integrity, and spiritual development. After all, what benefit is it to raise young people who have the knowledge and skills to make lots of money if they are culturally, spiritually, and ethically clueless?

Worldview

Speaking personally, as a Christian I think one of the most important components of homeschooling is worldview education. Our worldview is a reflection of our foundational beliefs. It addresses some of the most important life questions: Is there a God? Who is man in relation to God? What is the purpose of our life on earth? Is there life after death? Our worldview determines how we think about life at the deepest level as well as how we live.

Everyone operates by one worldview or another. The default worldview of our modern society is a materialistic humanist worldview. (Some might call it secular humanist.) It teaches that man is an accidental product of evolution. There is nothing more to him than his physical existence. God doesn't exist and there's nothing after death. It shouldn't be surprising if people with this worldview believe that they should try to get the most they can from this life because this is all there is.

In contrast, a Christian worldview colors everything with the belief in God's existence. Because God is real, we believe He has revealed truth to us. Part of that revelation is the reality of life after death, the fact that we have a soul, and the fact that Jesus Christ died for us so that we can have eternal life with God. This understanding means there's much more to life than the present physical reality. There is a larger purpose and meaning to almost everything. Our lives are not to be lived as if we are accidental entities. Instead, God calls us to live life mindful of the purposes to which He has called us.

Conflicting worldviews—whether they be Christian, Secular, Jewish, Buddhist, or something else—produce some conflicting educational goals. Certainly, they all share some common goals such as acquiring reading, writing, and computation skills. However, we are likely to differ in some choices of other subjects to be taught, what is to be taught each year, the amount of time and attention we spend on each subject, and details within subject areas.

Homeschooling parents should use Common Core or other standards as well as the resources built around them with caution. Parents need to have goals for their children's education, but these should not simply be copied from government schools. The time required to teach to government-selected standards steals time that you might devote to other goals that are more important to you.

Choosing Your Own Goals

The ideal way to come up with your own goals is to start from scratch and figure out what you think is important for each child to learn, then write it all out. For example:

- Religion or Bible study might be a major subject in your curriculum even though it is not on any standards list and no standardized test asks any religion questions. It might be important enough to you that this is the first subject covered every day of the week.
- If your family lives abroad for months or years, you might want your history studies to spend much more time on other cultures and civilizations than that of your homeland.
- If you are following a classical education model, you might teach your children Latin in the elementary grades as a foundation for study of primary sources written in Latin in high school.
- You might be a musically inclined family, so music education is a higher priority for you than for most other families because much of your family life and activities involve music.
- If you live in a seismically active area that just experienced an earthquake, you might want your children to study geology now rather than two years after the event.

Realistically, this approach will probably be too cumbersome for setting all of your goals. The more realistic way to do this is to also look at one or more lists of standards for inspiration, then work from those to come up with your own goals. (Of course, this assumes that you have the freedom to create your own goals which is, fortunately, still true for most homeschoolers.)

A shortcut might be to simply adopt the goals of a curriculum program that you trust. However, you have to establish at least a few of your own goals to figure out what curriculum you might trust, and even then you will still need to make some adaptations.

Generally, you will start by setting goals before selecting curriculum. You can use the sets of educational standards available on the internet as a starting place for selecting goals for different subject areas. You might look across a range of grade levels to find standards that are appropriate. Then you can add additional goals of your own.

For example, I might agree with most of the Common Core standards for third grade mathematics, but I do not agree that children at this age need to be able to determine the perimeter of polygons (CCSS Math Content 3.MD.D.8). If my children have to take a standardized test, this is an item they are likely to be tested upon. So I then have to decide whether a higher test score or sticking to my conviction is more important. Since I live in a state that does not require standardized testing for homeschoolers, I would opt to drop determining perimeters from my goals for third grade. I also believe it important that children develop a Christian understanding

of math from the earliest years, so I would add a goal that my child understand that mathematics reflects God's order and consistency. I might illustrate this concept for my child by trying to get him to come up with another sum than four when I add two items plus two items. The impossibility helps him understand that the consistency of math reflects the nature of God. So, essentially, I use the standards as a guideline and customize.

My situation might be a bit more complicated if my third grader has already mastered about one quarter of the standards or goals listed for third grade. Then I look to the fourth grade list to see which goals might be better drawn from that level.

I do this for each subject as much as is practical. When it comes to history and science, I generally find my goals are so different from the state goals that I work from scratch. Further on in this chapter, I will share some ideas about studying those subjects.

There are no goals or standards already written for religion or study of the Bible, so you're on your own there. However, once you've worked through the other subjects, you should understand how you might do this for religion or Bible study if you choose that as a subject for your curriculum. Likewise, you will not find goals for learning Latin or other foreign languages for the elementary grades, and you will have to come up with your own standards or goals.

Now some of you might be considering unit studies or a real books approach at this point and are wondering how you can match up your goals or standards with these approaches. Actually, it works well as long as you understand that all of the objectives or standards covered in a year-long unit study or real books program are unlikely to be found in a single grade level list of standards.

Unit studies and real books programs usually assume that children will be at many different grade levels. Some programs try to categorize learning activities by groups of grade levels (e.g., K-2, 3-6, 7-8, 9-12). Some are written for only grades four through eight or some other limited audience. Still others leave it to you to sort through all of the activity choices on your own to identify grade levels. You might find that the study you undertake this year and the activities you choose reflect goals from second, third, fourth, and fifth grade levels. You will not be covering all the "normal" goals for any one of those levels in a single year, but over the course of three or four years you will have done so. Consequently, using unit studies will require you to have a more long-range view of your goals.

In reality, if you stick with a comprehensive unit study program such as *Tapestry of Grace* or *Connecting With History*, or a real books program like *My Father's World* or *Sonlight*, the authors have thought this through so that the necessary material is covered over a span of years. Many unit studies and real books programs will also tell you what subject areas they do and do not cover so you will know what other resources you might need to purchase. More traditional curricula have their own sets of goals, and you might do well to simply adopt those goals. Just keep in mind that you can always teach more or less than what is in any textbook.

What Do I Do With My Goals Now?

Writing down your goals is next. You can use the reproducible chart at the end of this chapter or you can work from other lists of goals that might come from a list of standards, from a publisher, or from another resource. If you start with someone else's list, I suggest you add three columns to the right as is done on my reproducible chart. For example, in the sample below, I've adopted some goals from California's Common Core State Standards for Mathematics for second grade math⁶ then added the columns to the right.

Sample Chart: Writing Out Your Own Goals

School Year: 2014-15

Student Name: Brandon Smith

Goals for Math	Introduction	Review/ Practice	Mastery
1. "Use addition and subtraction within 100 to solve one- and two-step word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions...."			
2. "Fluently add and subtract within 20 using mental strategies. By end of Grade 2, know from memory all sums of two one-digit numbers."			
3. "Determine whether a group of objects (up to 20) has an odd or even number of members...; write an equation to express an even number as a sum of two equal addends."			
4. "Use addition to find the total number of objects arranged in rectangular arrays with up to 5 rows and up to 5 columns; write an equation to express the total as a sum of equal addends."			
5. "Read and write numbers to 1000 using base-ten numerals, number names, and expanded form."			
6. "Count within 1000; skip-count by 5s, 10s, and 100s."			

The reason I add the three additional columns is that teaching a child about a concept one time rarely means he or she has learned it. Generally, you'll need to review and/or practice the material until they know it. By setting up the three columns, you will remind yourself to go back over these goals to make sure you work toward actual mastery rather than simple, short-term retention.

These standards or goals can now help you in three ways:

- figuring out what to teach
- checking progress through the school year
- assessing year-end accomplishments

Note that many resources state their goals clearly and have forms or charts for tracking progress that might work just as well.

Figuring Out What to Teach

Sometimes when we start homeschooling, we have no idea where to begin. It really is helpful to have a list of standards or goals to use as a reference point for what others might be doing. Assuming you are familiar with what your child already knows (through observation, your

own experience, testing, or an evaluation by someone else), you can look at these lists and determine at what grade level your child seems to be functioning. My hope is that you will consider your goals *before* selecting your resources so that you choose those that are accomplishing what is most necessary for your child each year.

You should set goals that are challenging but not frustrating. If there are goals listed at a lower grade level that your child hasn't yet mastered, you need to consider whether to make them a priority, put them off until later, or skip them altogether. If you choose to add them, write them down on the list with your other goals.

Your lists of goals might also help you figure out what comes next. For example, if your child has mastered construction of basic sentences, your list of goals will remind you that writing a paragraph might be the next skill to tackle. Or if you are using a real books curriculum, you can check your list of goals to ensure that the appropriate skills or concepts are being taught as you progress. For many, the curriculum you choose will set the sequence for teaching, but your list of goals might remind you of additional goals that need attention.

Checking Your Progress

Are you pushing your children too hard? Are you too lax in getting things accomplished? Your list of goals can help answer questions like these. Refer back to these lists of goals for each subject as often as you need to. How many have been introduced, reviewed and practiced, and mastered? Are you making reasonable progress on checking them off? If you've checked them all off by the end of the first quarter you might be pushing your children too hard. If by the end of that same first quarter, you have checked off fewer than a third of the introduction boxes and nothing beyond that, you might need to get more focused on reinforcing your initial lessons. If you reach the end of the third quarter and half of your goals remain untouched, you need to do some serious evaluation of how you are operating—too many field trips and park days? Lack of self-discipline on the part of parents, children, or both? Overly ambitious goals? Don't panic. You still have time to make mid-course corrections.

Assessing Year-End Accomplishments

At the end of the year, instead of judging your accomplishments by completed (or incomplete) textbooks, judge by how many of your goals have reached mastery level. If you find that you have fallen far short, don't despair. If you've gone way beyond your goals, don't plan to take a year off.

Instead, spend some time evaluating. Did you set reasonable goals? Did you set too many goals? Did you include some that could have been skipped? Did you underestimate your child's ability? Did the curriculum you selected work well in helping you meet your goals? Did your child go through a period of emotional turmoil causing some of your goals to be put on temporary hold? Did you move, have a baby, experience a death in the family or some other event that accounted for lost school time? Do you have too many books for your children to get through, some of which contain material that is purposeless busywork?

If you haven't a clue why you are having trouble, it might help to find a veteran homeschooler or someone else with some educational experience who will look over what you are doing and give you some advice. Sometimes enrollment in a program to get professional

advice is a wise investment.

After this, consider what you might do about what you have learned from your evaluation. Should you plan to do summer school? Should you consider following a different type school schedule, e.g., shifting from nine months on/three months off to year-round schooling with periodic week-long breaks? Do you need to get more organized or work out a different type schedule? Is your child having such difficulty accomplishing things that you ought to get him or her tested for learning disabilities? Are you all so unhappy with the way you are doing things that neither you nor your children are motivated to get things done? Do you need to rearrange things so that a particular child gets more one-on-one attention? Perhaps a different curriculum might help the situation.

I know you will be able to add more questions to these lists, but I think you get the idea. Your goals should be your touchstone to help you get focused, stay focused, and accomplish what needs to be done.

Of course, you never want to become a slave to those goals to the point where you ignore the needs of your children. Even the best of plans needs to be modified from time to time. You might even find yourself adjusting your goals on a quarterly basis rather than waiting till the end of the year. That's great! It means you've taken control of what is going on and are really tuning in to your children's needs.

As you gain experience, generally you will feel freer to create your own goals and worry less about what everyone else is doing.

CHAPTER 6

Top 102 Picks

By this point you should have some insight into what philosophy of education appeals to you. You know what teaching style is most comfortable for you as well as which learning styles work best for each of your children. You should also have a fairly good idea of what subject matter and skills you actually need to teach this year.

That's a lot of information, but it doesn't do you much good unless you can match up what you've learned with the many curriculum options available to you. That's the purpose of the chart at the end of this chapter. The chart helps you easily identify key features or characteristics of each resource.

The following descriptions of the meaning of each column will help you understand the information in the chart. I have generally used a scale of "1" to "5" with "5" representing the highest correlation with the feature listed in that column while a "1" usually means that it has little or none of this feature.

I'll explain the chart headings as well as other "codes" that I use below.

Column Headings

- **Multi-sensory/hands-on (WW)** - A "5" in this column means this is a particularly good choice for the kinesthetic learner, the one who needs movement and multi-sensory activity. This resource fits Wiggly Willys best, but Sociable Sues often benefit from similar curriculum since it usually involves some sort of personal interaction.
- **Structure/rule-oriented (PP)** - This is likely a more traditionally-structured resource that has a consistent format and/or a rules and memorization approach. Perfect Paulas generally prefer this sort of resource because it's predictable.
- **Appeals to logical/analytical learners (CC)** - Resources with a "4" or "5" in this column

require higher-level thinking and analysis and particularly appeal to Competent Carls.

- **Has social activity/interaction (SS)** - items with a “4” or “5” in this column require an interactive setting. Sociable Sues prefer learning in such settings rather than independently. The interactive setting might be as minimal as a parent working directly with one child.

- **Needs parent/teacher instruction** - A “4” or “5” means you will need to read, explain, or otherwise present information to your child. It might be only a short introduction after which a child can work independently, in which case it has a mid-range number of “2” or “3.” If you are short on time, don’t choose many resources with a high number in this column.

- **Independent study** - This column helps you plan your time as well as select resources that are best for each child. Some resources are specifically designed for one type of setting while others can be used in a number of ways. Abbreviations for each setting that should work for that resource are included. An independent study resource, "ind," allows the student to do most or all of his work on his own. One-on-one, indicated by "1 on 1," means a parent works directly with a child as he or she progresses through the lesson. Group, indicated by "g," means the resource works well in a setting with two or more students. Most resources will still have independent assignments or other work to be done in addition to a required group or one-on-one presentation.

- **Amount of writing** - If you have a child who is resistant to writing, you probably want to teach new concepts with resources that do not rely on a great deal of writing. On the other hand, if you are teaching a child at a stage where he or she needs to practice writing skills, you might purposely choose a resource that requires more writing. Generally, you’ll want no more than one or two resources that require a good deal of writing. A “5” indicates the resource requires a great deal of writing while a “1” means little to none. A “u” means it’s “up to you”—that the parent has a great deal of discretion to decide how much writing to require.

- **Prep time** - This one is fairly obvious. It will give you some idea about how much time you will need to spend preparing lessons or learning to teach the program. “5” means it will take a great deal of time, “4” less time, and so on.

- **Grade level specific (s) or multi-level (m)** - If you want to teach children at more than one grade level using the same resource, ungraded resources obviously work better because they will generally address the needs of a span of grade levels such as grades 1-5 or maybe even 1-12. An “m” indicates one of these multi-level resources. You might also want to use an ungraded resource for a third grade child who is working below grade level in reading and who will be discouraged by a textbook that advertises that fact with a “grade 2” designation. An “s” indicates resources designed to be used only for single grade levels. Some resources, marked "m/s" might be used either way or might differ by grade level.

- **Ease of use for teacher** - A resource might be great once you can figure out how to use it, but getting past that hurdle might be impossible for one reason or another. Most resources are not that difficult to use, but some *do* require more time than others to sort out. The most challenging ones are marked “1” or “2.” A “5” means it’s easy to figure out. You should avoid the more challenging resources if you are short on time. Also, if you are easily discouraged or confused, stick with resources labeled “4” or “5.” This might apply also if you are new to homeschooling.

- **Teacher’s manual** - Teacher's manuals are not created equal. Some are essential—the book or program cannot be used properly without them "e." Some are useful, but if you don’t mind figuring out answers yourself and skipping the extra helps they offer, you can manage without

them "u." Some, marked "ak," serve only as an answer key—usually you will want these if you are past second grade level material. And, of course, some resources do not have separate teacher manuals. Those are marked "na."

- **Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy** (see page 13) - A "4" or "5" indicates that this resource is very much based upon or supportive of Charlotte Mason's ideas. Mason's ideas about secondary education are a bit different from those for the elementary grades, so it is difficult or impossible to rate upper level resources in this column. Those have generally been marked "na."

- **Supports classical education** (see page 15) - Resources with a "4" or "5" are based on or supportive of classical education. However, keep in mind that folks have differing ideas about what classical education requires, especially in the elementary grades, so read my reviews of these items carefully.

- **Religious content** - This column reflects the religious or non-religious perspective presented. Secular resources, marked "s," might sometimes have content offensive to Christians, although many strive for religious neutrality. Because religious resources I review fall within limited categories, I use "p" for Protestant and "c" for Catholic. Be aware that some religious resources have minimal religious content or it is expressed such that almost everyone is able to use the resource. Similarly, many secular resources will be inoffensive to those wanting to provide their children with a religion-based education. I use the "sc" designation for resources that, while written for secular or non-sectarian audiences, have content that should present no problems for Christians. The code "p/c" indicates resources suitable for all Christians. Check the full reviews for details or cautions.

- **Page # for review** - This is where you will go to find the complete review for each resource.

Working Through The Charts

Let's consider our first example. You've worked through the earlier chapters and discovered the following.

- ~ You lean toward traditional curriculum, but you also like the idea of using real books to make learning more interesting.
- ~ Your ten-year-old daughter, an only child, seems to be a Perfect Paula in regard to learning style.
- ~ She is likely to thrive on traditional workbooks and independent study for just about every subject except composition.
- ~ You want Christian curriculum.
- ~ You like structured lessons that do most of the work for you.
- ~ Teacher preparation and presentation time is not an issue since you have plenty of time.
- ~ You don't really need hands-on or multi-sensory resources, but they might be more fun.
- ~ She doesn't like to write, so that area needs special work this year.
- ~ Your daughter will be working at fifth grade level.

Starting on the left-hand page of the first chart, read through the charts looking for resources that reflect the characteristics and needs you've identified such as those listed above.

Given this situation, you don't really need items with a high rating in the second column. The

third column will be more useful as a starting place since it lets you know which resources fit your daughter's Perfect Paula need for structure and order. Then the sixth column deals with direct teaching needed. She really likes to work independently, so you want to look for resources with a low number in this column.

The seventh column will help you spot items that will work for independent study, but you might also look for one or two that you can use one-on-one since you have time for some interaction with your daughter.

Also, you should specifically focus on a composition resource appropriate for a group so you can invite another child to join your daughter for a writing class to make that subject more interesting to her.

Continuing on the right-hand page, "Amount of writing" is of concern in that she needs more writing practice than she's had. You might look for at least one or two resources that require at least some writing and one that requires a great deal.

Prep time isn't an issue, and either multi-level or specific grade level resources will suffice since you will be teaching only one child most of the time. You want resources that are easy to moderately demanding for the teacher ("5" to "3") because even though you have the time, you do not want to be bothered figuring out a complicated program. You are easily overwhelmed if you have to get very creative in putting together lessons.

You like to purchase teacher's manuals when they're available so you'll order those that are marked as essential or useful.

You want Christian material, but you're willing to use secular resources as long as they're not offensive to you. (You will need to check the individual reviews on secular items for mention of possible content problems.)

Resources among my Top Picks that seem to fit the bill for this example:

- *Horizons Math* is a structured math program that has minimal hands-on work and works well for independent learners.
- *Switched-on Schoolhouse/Monarch Social Studies* is a computerized course that allows independent study.
- Progeny Press study guides and the associated novels for literature allow students to read and write about real books, while providing you, the teacher, direction as to how to ask appropriate questions and teach reading skills within the context of each book.
- *Wordsmith Apprentice* should work well for that "group" writing class you plan to organize for your daughter and a friend to provide more interaction.
- *Easy Grammar* is a simple-to-use workbook approach for learning grammar independently.
- Either *BJU Press Science* OR *Switched-on Schoolhouse/Monarch Science* should work since your daughter wants structure and accountability in her learning, and you like quizzes and tests to help ensure she is actually learning something, either of these might do. You might also plan to get together with another family to do science experiments, using those from the curriculum or experiments from a supplemental book.
- Then you will need to choose your own Bible curriculum.

Let's take another example. We'll say you're a harried mom for whom time is the most critical element since you've got five children, three of them school age. We'll focus primarily on your eight-year-old son to keep this example manageable.

You've determined the following.

- ~ You lean toward an eclectic approach to education.
- ~ You put a high priority on making learning engaging so that your children will love to learn.
- ~ You don't mind using Christian resources as long as they aren't too "preachy."
- ~ You are not overly concerned about tests and grading in these early grade levels.
- ~ Wiggly Willy describes your son so you'll be looking for hands-on and multi-sensory resources.
- ~ You have minimal preparation and presentation time.
- ~ You want to teach all of your children together whenever possible to save time, energy and the hassle of dealing with three different texts for every subject. You will look for resources that allow you to teach history, science and fine arts to the whole group.
- ~ Your Wiggly Willy can work independently in short bursts, so using some workbooks for independent study would be helpful.
- ~ Your son is in third grade, but he'll need a lower level math course since he's working below grade level in that subject. He can work at third grade level for other subjects.

Given this challenging situation, you might choose the following:

- Susan Wise Bauer's *The Story of the World, Volume I* is a book that you can read aloud and discuss with all of your children together for history. You will appreciate the minimal preparation time required. You would also purchase the companion curriculum guide and use ideas and activities from it with all of your children.
- *Noeo Biology I* lets all of your children participate together listening to the books and doing activities. The pre-packaged experiment kits make this a practical choice. The amount of writing seems perfect.
- *Easy Grammar* provides grammar basics in preparation for next year when you want to move into a more challenging grammar resource. Again, no prep or presentation required once you are past initial lessons on prepositions.
- *Spellwell C* teaches spelling rules while reinforcing his phonics knowledge. He can do this independently most of the time.
- Since math is so difficult for him, *Math-U-See Beta* level might be the solution. The hands-on materials for this program make it easier for him to grasp math concepts. You will need to watch the videos to understand how to present concepts, but once you've been through it, you'll be able to work much more efficiently with your other children. Alternatively, you can let your son sometimes watch with you, stopping the DVD and trying out what has been shown. The *Beta* title won't alert him that this program is typically for second grade.

Why Aren't There Any Bible or Religion Top Picks?

Good question! I suspect that most of those reading this book will see Bible or religion as an essential part of their curriculum. In Chapter Five, I also mentioned teaching a Christian worldview as a possible goal very much related to Bible and religion. The problem here is the huge number of possible options.

Do you want to focus more on scripture memorization, doctrinal teaching, developing a relationship with Jesus, studying church history, or some other area? Are you ready to get into an intense worldview study? Each of these might be appealing at one time or another to families,

but you cannot do it all at once. And the content and methodology might differ based on each family's faith tradition. Consequently, aside from two possible worldview courses reviewed in Chapter 14, I decided to leave those choices up to you rather than state my own preferences. However, if you want to investigate the possibilities, check out my reviews online at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com under the sections for both "Bible/Religion" and "Worldview."

A Few Last Notes

Just because I have included an item within my Top Picks does not mean it is perfect. I have selected some items about which I have reservations. But I know they meet certain needs very well. After working through the charts, please take time to read through the reviews of items you think will meet your needs. Remember the saying, "One man's trash is another man's treasure"—things that bother me about a particular resource might be the very things that make that resource a good choice for you!

From time to time, I mention one or more of my Top Picks within a review of another product, usually for comparison or because the products work well together. When you see a product mentioned without a website address or source, it is generally going to be a Top Pick reviewed within this book. It should be easiest to find reviews of those products by using the index at the back of the book rather than these charts. The biggest exception to this is in Chapter Thirteen where I list many resources without source information that are used for single levels of each comprehensive program. Many of these listed resources are not Top Picks. My purpose there is to give you a sense of the types of resources used. Also, those resources are available from the publisher of each program, so there's no searching required.

The charts begin on the following page. Please note that contact information and prices listed for resources in the following chapters are the most current information available from publishers at the time this book was written. I try to post updates for significant changes in the resources reviewed in this book under "Updates for Top Picks" on my website. However, you will need to confirm current price information when you make your purchases.

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

	Multi-sensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/ rule-oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/ analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity/ interaction (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/ teacher instruction	Independent study=ind, one-on-one =1 on 1, or group=g
Phonics, Reading, and Literature						
All About Reading	4	5	3	5	5	1 on 1
Explode the Code	print-1, online-3	5	3	2	print-1, online-3	ind
Logic of English Foundations	4	5	5	4	5	1 on 1, g
McRuffy Phonics and Reading	4	4	2	5	5	1 on 1, g
Noah Webster's Reading Handbook	2	3	3	3	5	1 on 1
Phonics Pathways	3	4	4	4	5	1 on 1, g
Teach a Child to Read with Children's Books	4	1	2	5	5	1 on 1
Daily Reading Practice	3	3	3	3	3-5	1 on 1, g
Drawn into the Heart of Reading	3	3	4	5	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Progeny Press Study Guides for Literature	2	3	3	3	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Teaching the Classics	1	3	4	5	5	1 on 1, g
Total Language Plus	2	3	4	4	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
BJU Press Literature (grades 7-12)	2	3	4	3	4	ind, 1 on 1, g
Old Western Culture	1	2	5	optional	2	ind, g
Language Arts: Grammar and Composition						
A Beka Book Language series	1	4	4	1	2	ind, 1 on 1, g
Analytical Grammar	2	5	4	3	4	1 on 1, g
Building Christian English series	1	5	2	2	3	ind, 1 on 1
Create-A-Story	5	2	4	5	4	group of at least 2
Easy Grammar	2	5	3	1	2	ind
Essentials in Writing	4	4	2	2	1-3	ind
Jump In	3	3	2	depends on interaction provided	3	1 on 1, g
Language Lessons for Today	2	3	2	5	5	1 on 1
Michael Clay Thompson Language Arts	2	3	4	4	4	1 on 1, g
Saxon Grammar and Writing	1	5	5	2	2	mostly ind

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

Amount of Writing: 1-5 or u=up to parent	Prep time	Grade level specific =s or multi-level=m	Ease of use for teacher: 1=difficult through 5=easy	Teacher's manual: e=essential, na=not available, u=useful, ak=answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy (na=not applicable)	Supports classical education	Religious content: Protestant=p, Catholic=c, Secular=s, Secular but "Christian-friendly"=sc	Page # for review
1	2	m	3	e	3	3	sc	73
2	1	m	5	ak	3	3	s	76
3	2	m	4	e	1	3	sc	78
3-5, increases by level	2	s	2	e	3	3	sc	80
1	1	m	4	e	3	3	p	84
2	2	m	5	e	3	3	sc	85
1	varies	m	2	e	5	3	sc	86
4	1	s	4	e	3	3	s	90
u	4	m	3	e	5	4	p/c	91
u	2	m	4	e	5	4	p	93
4	5, less with experience	m	2	e	5	5	sc	94
u	2	m	5	e	5	4	p/c	97
u	depends on parent's familiarity with the readings	s	3	e	3	3	p	99
5	1	m	5	e	4	5	p/c	102
4	1	s	5	ak	2	5	p	108
3	1	m	4	na	2	4	sc	111
4	1	s	4	e	1	3	p	113
4	2	m	3	na	4	3	s	115
3	1	m/s	5	e	2	2	sc	117
4	1	s	5	e	2	2	sc	120
4	2	m	4	e	2	2	p	123
3	1	s	5	na	5	3	p/c	124
4-5	3	m	3	e	5	5	s	125
4	1	s	5	e	3	4	sc	129

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

	Multi-sensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/ rule-oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/ analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity/ interaction (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/ teacher instruction	Independent study=ind, one-on-one =1 on 1, or group=g
Teaching Writing Structure and Style Seminar	3	4	4	4	5	1 on 1, g
Winston Grammar	4	4	3	4	4	1 on 1, g
Wordsmith series	3	3	4	depends on interaction provided	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
WriteShop	4	4	3	4	5	1 on 1, g
Language Arts: Spelling, Vocabulary, and Handwriting						
All About Spelling	4	5	3	5	5	1 on 1
Building Spelling Skills	1	5	4	2	2	ind
English from the Roots Up	2	4	4	3	5	1 on 1, g
Spelling Wisdom	1	4	2	4	5	1 on 1, g
SpellingYouSee	2	5	2	4	4	1 on 1, g
Spellwell Series	3	4	3	5	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Vocabulary from Classical Roots	2	5	5	2	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Vocabu-Lit	3	3	4	2	3	1 on 1, g
Wordly Wise	2	3	4	3	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Handwriting Without Tears	3-5, depend- ing on op- tional items	3	3	3	5	1 on 1, g
Peterson Directed Handwriting	2	4	3	3	5	1 on 1, g
A Reason for Handwriting	2	4	3	4	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Getty-Dubay Italic Handwrit- ing Series	3	4	3	4	4	1 on 1, g
Mathematics						
CTC Math	4	4	3	2	1	ind
Horizons Math	3	5	4	3	4	ind, 1 on 1
Life of Fred	3	3	2	5	varies	ind, 1 on 1
Mathematical Reasoning	4	1	4	5	4	1 on 1, g
Math Mammoth	3	4	4	4	4	1 on 1, g
Math-U-See	5	4	5	5	4	1 on 1, g
Singapore Math (Primary Mathematics)	2	4	5	3	4	ind, 1 on 1, g
Teaching Textbooks	3	3	4	1	1	ind
Saxon Math Intermediate 3 and up	1	4	4	2	2	ind, 1 on 1, g
Horizons Pre-Algebra	4	4	4	3	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
Kinetic Books	3	4	4	2	1	ind
MathHelp	3	4	4	2	1	ind

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

Amount of Writing: 1-5 or u=up to parent	Prep time	Grade level specific =s or multi-level=m	Ease of use for teacher: 1=difficult through 5=easy	Teacher's manual: e=essential, na=not available, u=useful, ak=answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy (na=not applicable)	Supports classical education	Religious content: Protestant=p, Catholic=c, Secular=s, Secular but "Christian-friendly"=sc	Page # for review
4	3-depends on how the course is used	m	3	e	5	5	sc	131
2	2	m	3	e	3	3	sc	133
4	2	m	4	e	4	3	sc	134
4	2	m	4	e	5	4	p	137
1	2	m	3	e	3	3	sc	140
3	1	s	5	ak	2	5	p	143
u	5	m	2	e	4	5	s	145
5	1	s	4	na	5	1	p	146
4	1	s	4	e	4	4	sc	147
2	1	s	4	ak	2	2	s	150
2	1	m	4	e	3	5	s	151
3	1	s	4	ak	3	2	s	152
3	1	m/s	4	ak	2	5	s	153
3	2	m	4	e	3	3	s	155
4	1	m	4	e	3	3	s	156
4	1	m/s	5	u	3	3	p	157
4	1	m/s	3	e	4	3	s	158
1	1	m/s	5	na	na	na	s	162
5	2	s	4	e	3	4	p	164
2	1	m	4	na	4	3	sc	168
2	1	s	2	na	4	2	s	170
3	2	s	3	ak	4	3	sc	173
3	3	s	3	e	4	3	sc	175
3	2	s	3	e	4	4	s	179
2	1	s	5	na	3	3	sc	182
3	1	s	5	ak	1	3	s	186
4	3	m	3	e	4	4	p	194
1-2	1	m	5	na	na	3	s	196
2	1	m	5	na	na	3	s	197

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

	Multi-sensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/ rule-oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/ analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity/ interaction (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/ teacher instruction	Independent study=ind, one-on-one =1 on 1, or group=g
Discovering Geometry	4	3	4	4	4	1 on 1, g
Math Without Borders	1	4	4	1	1	ind
History/Social Studies						
All American History	3	4	5	4	3	ind (high school only), 1 on 1, g
BiblioPlan	4	3	3	5	5	1 on 1, g
Catholic Schools Textbook Project	2	4	3	3	varies	ind, 1 on 1, g
A Child's First Book of American History	4	3	3	4	4	ind, 1 on 1, g
A Child's History of the World	2, higher with full course	2	3	5	4	ind, 1 on 1, g
The Classical Historian	2	2	5	4	5	1 on 1, g
Genevieve Foster books	2	2	4	4	2	ind, 1 on 1, g
Guerber History Series	2	3	3	4	2	ind, 1 on 1, g
History of the World (MFW edition of DK Book)	4	3	5	3	3	ind, 1 on 1
The Mystery of History	4	3	3	5	5	ind, 1 on 1, g
The Story of the World (with study guides)	4	3	4	5	5	1 on 1, g
TruthQuest History	3	3	4	4	4	1 on 1, g
Ultimate Geography & Timeline Guide	5	3	5	5	5	ind, 1 on 1, g
Science						
Apologia Science for Jr. & Sr. High	3	3	4	2	1	ind, g
Behold and See Science Series	3	3	3	3	3	1 on 1, g
Berean Builders Science	4	2	4	4	5	1 on 1, g
BJU Press Science, grades 1-6	3	4	3	3	4	1 on 1, g
Christian Kids Explore Science Series	4	2	4	5	5	1 on 1, g
Elemental Science	4	3	3	4	varies	1 on 1, g
Exploring Creation Young Explorer Science (Apologia for grades 1-6)	4, but might have too much writing	4	4	4	5	1 on 1, g
God's Design Science Series	4	4	4	4	4	1 on 1, g
Noeo Science	5	3	4	4	5	1 on 1, g
The Rainbow	4	4	4	4	4	ind, 1 on 1, g
Supercharged Science	5	2	5	3	depends on program	ind, 1 on 1, g
The World of Science (MFW/Master Books Edition)	5	1	3	3	depends how it is used	ind, 1 on 1, g

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

Amount of Writing: 1-5 or u=up to parent	Prep time	Grade level specific =s or multi-level=m	Ease of use for teacher: 1=difficult through 5=easy	Teacher's manual: e=essential, na=not available, u=useful, ak=answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy (na=not applicable)	Supports classical education	Religious content: Protestant=p, Catholic=c, Secular=s, Secular but "Christian-friendly"=sc	Page # for review
3	3	m	1, but 4 with videos	e	n/a	4	s	198
3	1	m	5	see review	na	4	s	200
varies	2	m	4	e	3	3	mildly Christian	213
4	4	m	2	e	3	5	p, see review	215
3	2	m	4	e	2	3	c	218
1	1	m	5	na	5	5	sc	223
1, more with full course	1, more with full course	m	5, 4 with course	u	5	5	s	224
5	4	m	2	e	4	5	sc	225
1	1	m	5	see review	4	3	s	229
1	1	m	5	na	3	4	p/c	230
1	1	m	5	na	4	2	sc	231
u	4	m	4	e	5	2	p	232
u	3	m	3	e	5	5	sc except Vol. 2 (see review)	235
u	3	m	2	e	4	4	p	238
3	4	m	2	e	5	4	sc	240
3	2, labs require more	m	4	ak	4	4	p/c	246
varies	varies	s	3	na	2	2	c	250
varies	2-3	m	3	e	4	5	p/c	253
u	4	s	4	e	3	3	p	256
u	5	m	3	e	5	3	p/c	257
1-4	4	m	4	e	5	4	s	260
4	3	m	3	na	3	3	p	262
3	3	m	3	e	3	3	p	264
3	2	m	4	e	4	3	p/c	266
3	2	s	4	e	3	3	p/c	269
varies	varies	m	3	na	3	3	sc	270
1	1	m	4	na	4	3	sc	272

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

	Multi-sensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/ rule-oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/ analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity/ interaction (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/ teacher instruction	Independent study=ind, one-on-one =1 on 1, or group=g
Unit Studies/All-in-One Programs						
BookShark	3	3	3	3	4, lots of reading together	ind, 1 on 1, g
Complete Curriculum	2	5	4	2	3	ind, 1 on 1
Connecting with History	4	3	4	5	3-5, varies by age	ind (older students), 1 on 1, g
Easy Peasy	2	3	3	3	varies by age	ind, 1 on 1
Five in a Row	3	3	1	5	5	1 on 1, g
Heart of Dakota	5	4	3	5	varies by age	ind (older students), 1 on 1, g
My Father's World	3	3	4	4	2-5, varies by level	ind (older students), 1 on 1, g
Sonlight	3	3	3	3	4, lots of reading together	ind, 1 on 1, g
Switched-On Schoolhouse or Monarch	2	5	2	1	1	ind
Tapestry of Grace	4	3	3	5	5	g
Time4Learning	4	3	2	2	1	ind
Trail Guide to Learning	4	3	4	4	varies by level	1 on 1, small group
TRISMS	2	4	5	3	varies by student	ind, 1 on 1, g
WinterPromise	3	3	3	4	3-5, varies by age	1 on 1, g
Electives						
The Critical Thinking Co.	3	3	5	3	3	ind, 1 on 1, g
The Fallacy Detective	1	3	5	2	2	ind
The Art of Argument	1	4	5	2	3	primarily ind
A Young Historian's Introduction to Worldview	3	2	4	4	5	1 on 1, g
What We Believe series (worldview)	2	3	3	4	5	1 on 1, g
Artistic Pursuits	3	3	3	3	varies	1 on 1, g
Feed My Sheep	5	2	4	4	4	ind, 1 on 1, g
Beethoven Who?	4	2	3	4	5	1 on 1, g

Chart of Top Picks (1 = low, 5 = high)

Amount of Writing: 1-5 or u=up to parent	Prep time	Grade level specific =s or multi-level=m	Ease of use for teacher: 1=difficult through 5=easy	Teacher's manual: e=essential, na=not available, u=useful, ak=answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy (na=not applicable)	Supports classical education	Religious content: Protestant=p, Catholic=c, Secular=s, Secular but "Christian-friendly"=sc	Page # for review
3	2	m/s	4	e	5	3	sc	278
varies	2	s	3	e	1	1	s	278
u	4	m	1	e	4	5	c	281
varies	1	m/s	4	na	4	2	p	285
u	2	m	4	e	5	1	s, p with supplement	287
u	2	m	4	e	5	3	p	289
varies	2	m/s	3	e	5	3	p	293
3	2	m/s	4	e	5	3	p	299
3, much is on the computer	1	s	5	na, except for specific courses	1	1	p	301
u	5	m	1	e	5	5	p	304
1	1	m/s	5	na	1	1	s	307
u	4	m	3	e	4	3	p	310
5	3	m	3	e	3	4	s/p/c - adaptable	314
varies	3	m	3	e	4	1	p	317
2	1	m	4	e	3	5	s	323
1	1	m	5	na	5	5	p/c	325
3	varies	m	4	ak	3	4	p/c	326
1	5	m	3	na	3	4	p/c	327
1	1	m	5	na	3	3	p	328
2	3	m	3	na	4	3	sc	331
1	3	m	4	e	5	4	p	333
1	1	m	4	na	3	3	p/c	334

CHAPTER 7

Phonics, Reading, and Literature

While I believe that phonics is a critical component of a good reading program, not all children learn best from programs that use an intensive phonics approach. One child seems to figure out the phonetic elements in words on his own with little direct instruction while another needs explicit instruction with plenty of practice and reinforcement. One child is content to learn to read with syllables and lists of disconnected words while another prefers the context of meaningful sentences.

Whatever you decide works best for each of your children, please make sure that they do not learn to read only by memorizing individual words. Sight-reading without any decoding skills (identifying phonetic elements) makes it practically impossible for children to sound out unfamiliar words.

You might choose to work with any one of the excellent reading/phonics programs available. These programs are generally similar in their goals, but they vary greatly when it comes to methods and presentation. Some programs offer leeway for a less formal presentation while others are more rigid and detailed. Some begin teaching phonics with the “consonant-vowel” approach (e.g., "ba, be, bi, bo, bu") while others reverse this, beginning with vowel-consonant combinations (e.g., "at, am, ad"). Some programs include readers, while others don't. Some have games or hands-on activities, while others rely only on oral and written activity.

I have selected programs that approach reading from a variety of educational philosophies. There is certainly something for everyone amidst all the choices.

I have to mention that there are many other excellent phonics and reading programs that I could have included. Please forgive me if I've left out your favorite! Also, don't forget that some comprehensive programs such as Sonlight and My Father's World incorporate reading and phonics into at least their kindergarten and first grade levels, while teaching other reading skills in subsequent grades.

I would be remiss if I didn't also mention one of the most valuable resources for teaching beginning reading, even though it isn't a program. Ruth Beechick's *The Three R's* (Mott Media, www.mottmedia.com) is a compilation of three smaller booklets that were previously published separately. Two of the booklets are on math and language arts, while the third, titled *A Home Start in Reading*, addresses phonics and reading. *A Home Start in Reading* de-mystifies the process of teaching a child to read and gives you enough instructional material that you could actually teach your child to read from those 32 pages. I know that this approach is too "bare bones" for most parents, but even if you choose to use a more complete resource, this book will help you know what's important and what is not so that you are in control of your program rather than the reverse.

Following the reviews of phonics programs, I've listed some beginning readers (beginning on page 87) that you might want to use alongside your program. Once past the beginning reading and phonics stage, children need to shift their primary focus to comprehension and understanding as well as the study of worthwhile literature. While some reading programs build these aspects into their courses, others do not. To make certain you consider resources for broader reading skills, I have included some Top Picks that address those needs following the list of readers. Then at the end of this chapter are reviews of resources for teaching literature for junior and senior high school, along with a list of recommended literature (real books) titles.

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Phonics and Beginning Reading

All About Reading



by Marie Rippel
 All About Learning Press, Inc.
 615 Commerce Loop
 Eagle River, WI 54521
 715-477-1976
www.allaboutlearningpress.com

All About Reading (AAR) is an intensive phonics program for preK through about fourth

grade that uses Orton-Gillingham methodology. With this method, 97% of English words can be learned according to phonetic rules, leaving only 3% to be learned as sight words.

AAR consists of two main parts: the *Pre-reading* program (teaching essential pre-reading skills) and the *Reading* program (consisting of *Levels 1* through *4*). I will briefly discuss a few features that apply to the entire program, then I will divide my review into two parts, covering the *Pre-reading* program first, then the rest of the program.

AAR is a highly interactive multi-sensory program that needs to be taught by the parent or teacher. However, the open-and-go lesson plans are scripted and illustrated, making it simple for the inexperienced parent or teacher to present the lessons with little or no prep time. Even though it is scripted, AAR is easy to adapt to each child's needs by selecting among the suggested hands-on activities, choosing their favorite books for read-aloud time, and adjusting the pace and amount of interaction.

The phonetic readers are beautifully

illustrated hardcover books that could stand on their own. They feature finely detailed black-and-white drawings that are a delight in themselves.

All About Reading Pre-reading Program

basic package: \$79.95,

deluxe package: \$119.95

The *All About Reading Pre-reading Program* teaches essential pre-reading skills. The primary focus is on what Rippel calls the Big Five Skills™ that are foundational to a child's future reading and spelling abilities: print awareness, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, listening comprehension, and motivation to read.

The *AAR Pre-reading Program* components are a teacher's manual, a student packet, two read-aloud books, the *Letter Sounds A to Z* app, a Ziggy the Zebra hand puppet used to help teach many of the lessons, a card filing box, reading divider cards, and a tote bag.

Lesson plans include pictures and illustrations so you can quickly see which components of the program you'll need for each lesson. It should take no more than fifteen minutes to read the introduction and start teaching.

The student packet includes the *My Book of Letters* student activity book, a progress chart, picture cards, letter sound cards, uppercase and lowercase alphabet charts, and a certificate of completion.

My Book of Letters contains one or two activity sheets for each lesson in its 192 pages. Some activity pages function more as teaching tools while others focus on arts and crafts, but all activity sheets contribute toward teaching the Big Five Skills. The activities can be simplified for children who don't need as much of the cut-and-paste craft work. You will need some additional resources for the activity pages such as scissors, glue, crayons, scraps of fabric and yarn, paint, toothpicks, cotton swabs, colored pencils, a hole punch, star stickers, pipe cleaners, glitter, and twigs.

The cards in the student packet are printed and perforated on card stock, ready for you

to separate and store in the special card filing box that comes with the complete set. The alphabet charts in the student packet are used as teaching tools.

The read-aloud books are titled *The Zigzag Zebra* and *Lizard Lou*. *The Zigzag Zebra* introduces letters and their sounds in the context of rhymed text that often is a bit silly—just what children love. Alligators, kangaroos, frogs, snails, yaks, and other “critters” are the subject matter. *Lizard Lou* continues in the same vein but with lengthier poems, some from famous authors. These read-aloud books are used to develop listening comprehension and recognition of sounds in relation to illustrations. Poems contain sentence structure and vocabulary likely a little beyond what is already familiar to most preschoolers, so you might have discussions about some of the words and sentences. The nature topics themselves are also likely to engender discussion.

The *Letter Sounds A to Z* app (for computers and mobile devices) displays the letters of the alphabet. Children click on a letter to hear the sound. Only short vowels are included. Parents already familiar with the phonetic sounds might not need this.

All of the components and activities in the *Pre-reading Program* work together nicely to contribute to the development of other readiness skills as children work with following directions, cutting, and coloring as well as listening, comprehending, identifying syllables auditorily, making inferences, developing vocabulary, and otherwise acquiring the Big Five Skills.

Although you can purchase individual components, you will probably want to purchase one of the packages. The deluxe package includes all eight components, while the basic package includes all items except the puppet, the tote bag, and the card filing box.

Levels 1 through 4

Basic Interactive Kit - \$21.85,

Deluxe Interactive Kit - \$43.85

Beginning in *AAR Level 1* and continuing through *Level 4*, the five key components of reading shift to: phonological awareness, phonics/decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Before starting *Level 1*, students should already know the alphabet and be able to identify both uppercase and lowercase letters. They might have completed the *All About Reading Pre-reading Program*, but that is not required if you have introduced the alphabet and other pre-reading skills in some other fashion.

You will also need an Interactive Kit, which is used in *Levels 1* through *4* of the reading program as well as the free Phonogram Sounds app for computers and mobile devices that you can download from the website. There are two Interactive Kit options: Basic or Deluxe. Both kits include a set of letter tiles, magnets, and reading divider cards to organize the phonogram and word cards in your index card box. The Deluxe Kit adds a customized storage box for the cards, star stickers for use on the progress chart, and a custom tote bag for storing all the components. (Note: the *All About Spelling* program uses the same letter tiles, so if you are using both the reading and spelling programs, you can avoid duplicates by purchasing individual items instead of a complete Interactive Kit.)

In addition to the essential items for *AAR*, you should also have a 2' x 3' magnetic white board for both storing and working with the letter tiles. Once you have set up your letter tiles and separated the phonogram and word cards, the program is easy to use. The scripted lesson plans guide you step by step. If you are not familiar with the sounds of the phonograms being taught in a lesson, you can use the Phonogram Sounds app to click on any phonogram to hear the pronunciation.

The *AAR* program is incremental. The first lesson of *Level 1* uses phonogram cards and letter tiles to teach the four sounds: /m/, /s/, /p/, and /ā/. Tiles are also used to introduce

blending for three-letter words and to demonstrate how switching the first letter (e.g., using the words *Sam* and *Pam*) changes only the initial sound. Students also learn to identify vowels and consonants, which are color coded on the tiles. Activity sheets in the student workbook add additional practice and, sometimes, additional instruction.

Lessons continue in this fashion, occasionally alerting teachers to strategies for overcoming common problems they might encounter. The introduction of letters follows a progression similar to that of other intensive phonics programs, gradually introducing vowels with consonants in a way that allows students to begin reading immediately.

All levels of *AAR* provide fluency practice through the word cards, practice sheets in the activity book, and readers.

The student activity books are a major component and add much variety to the lessons through short reading games and activities that motivate young learners. For example, in Lesson 3 of *Level 1*, students play “Feed the Monster” by reading words and then “feeding” them to the monster.

The hardcover readers in *Levels 1* through *4* are just as top-notch as those for the *Pre-reading Program*, with lovely illustrations and relatively interesting content for vocabulary-controlled reading material.

AAR can be used independently or together with the *All About Spelling* program. Handwriting is not included as part of this reading program.

All About Reading Level 1

materials: \$99.95

Lessons in *Level 1* cover both short and long vowels, as well as some consonant digraphs, sight words, and even compound words.

AAR Level 1 materials include a teacher’s manual, a student packet, and three hardcover readers. The student packet contains the *Blast Off to Reading!* student activity book, phonogram cards, word cards, and a viewfinder

bookmark. The perforated phonogram and word cards need to be separated and stored in a 3" x 5" index card box or the Reading Review Box offered by the publisher.

All About Reading Level 2

materials: \$99.95

AAR *Level 2* continues to teach additional phonograms and rules such as the jobs of "silent e" and twelve new phonograms. Students use letter tiles to learn how to divide words into syllables as a decoding strategy.

The *Level 2* materials include a teacher's manual, a student packet (including the *Leap into Reading* activity book), and two hardcover readers. You will continue to use the letter tiles from the previous level. Practice sheets are separated into "Easier Vocabulary" and "Harder Vocabulary" sections; you can work with both sections or just one, depending on your student's needs. They include phrases and sentences to provide practice that is closer to reality than simply reading word lists.

All About Reading Level 3

materials: \$119.95

All About Reading Level 3 broadens students' horizons by teaching 17 new phonograms and exploring syllable types, suffixes, prefixes, and syllable division rules. Increasing emphasis is placed on reading comprehension and fluency through pre- and post-reading discussion activities. The *Level 3* materials include a teacher's manual, a student packet (including the *Swing into Reading* activity book), and two hardcover readers. Figurative language (personification, similes, onomatopoeia) is introduced, and practice is provided to help students develop meaningful expression when reading aloud.

All About Reading Level 4

materials: \$119.95

The fourth and final level in the AAR program builds on previously introduced concepts by teaching a wide range of suffixes, 15 new phonograms, words with silent letters, and words with unaccented syllables. It also

introduces students to more advanced concepts such as word morphology, dialects, and words with influence from other languages (Greek, Spanish, French, and Italian). The *Level 4* materials include a teacher's manual, a student packet (including the *Soar with Reading* activity book), and two hardcover readers. A variety of story elements and additional examples of figurative language are also covered.

Summary

All About Reading is a very reasonably priced option for an interactive, multi-sensory reading program that is scripted and easy to use. All components except the student workbooks and star stickers are reusable, so the value is even greater when you use it with more than one student.

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Explode The Code

by Nancy M. Hall



EPS Literacy and Intervention
PO Box 9031
Cambridge, MA
02139-9031
800-225-5750
www.epsbooks.com
student books -
\$9.40 each,
teacher's guides -
\$9.35 each

There are fourteen separate workbooks in this series, although you might not want to use them all. Many families use *Explode The Code* as their primary phonics teaching resource, but you might want to use these for phonics reinforcement alongside something like *Noah Webster's Reading Handbook* (reviewed later in this chapter) that doesn't have a writing or workbook component. Some families also use *Explode the Code* with older children who have a weak phonics foundation.

These workbooks each teach selected

phonetic concepts rather than covering most or all of them in each book. Students learn all phonetic concepts by completing *Books 1* through *8*. While phonic decoding skills are the primary focus, reading comprehension and vocabulary also get some attention.

Books are printed in black and white. They feature large print and less of it per page than some other phonics workbooks, making them a good choice for children who can do only limited amounts of writing or have trouble focusing.

Students should be able to do most work independently once someone has read the instructions for that page to them. After a while, students will become familiar with the types of exercises and will seldom need even that assistance.

Books 1 through *8* are the most important. The content of each is as follows: *Book 1* - short vowels; *Book 2* - initial and final consonant blends; *Book 3* - open syllables, silent-e rule, digraphs, and simple diphthongs; *Book 4* - syllable division rules; *Book 5* - word families, three-letter blends, "qu, ey," and the three sounds of "ed"; *Book 6* - more difficult diphthongs and r-controlled vowels; *Book 7* - soft "c" and "g," silent letters, sounds of "ear, ei, eigh," and the digraph "ph"; *Book 8* - suffixes and irregular endings. *Books 1½, 2½, 3½, 4½, 5½, and 6½* offer more practice on topics covered within *Books 1, 2, 3*, etc. respectively. Post-tests are included within each book.

If you use *Explode The Code* as your primary teaching tool, you will need to provide reading practice with other books.

Teacher's guides each cover a number of books. For example, the teacher's guide for *Books 1-2* covers *Books 1, 2, 1½, and 2½*. Guides include the program description, answers, and dictations for the post-tests. Other teacher's guides are for *Books 3-4* (includes *3 ½* and *4 ½*), *5-6* (includes *5 ½* and *6 ½*), and *7-8*.

Those with preschoolers or kindergartners might want to use the "primer" series of three

books that teach letter formation, phonemic awareness, sound/letter correspondence, tracking, and other pre-reading skills. The three books are titled *Get Ready for The Code*, *Get Set for The Code*, and *Go for The Code*—also known as *Books A, B, and C*. A single teacher's guide covers all three books.

Explode The Code Online

12-month subscription for one student - \$65

Explode The Code Online provides web-based instruction using lessons adapted from the entire series of *Explode The Code* books. Lessons are presented in full-color with audio instructions so that children may work independently. Student responses are recorded and their progress assessed. The program then makes adjustments for students to move ahead or review so that they are working only on skills they need to learn. The program might even skip lessons that review a concept if the student has demonstrated mastery. As a helpful extra feature, students are rewarded with various colored "buttons." The parent or teacher can quickly glance at the buttons and see how well a student is doing by the color of the buttons instead of analyzing results.

You can use the program by purchasing a one-year subscription. *Explode The Code Online* can be accessed from your computer or from your iPad or Android device. Students may access all levels during that subscription period. You can renew for subsequent years as needed. The program will track one student per subscription, and you can purchase additional subscriptions. This program can serve as your core program for teaching reading.

I think the online option might be even more appealing than the books since it tailors assignments for students. This keeps students from getting bored and frees the parent from having to decide which books or lessons a student needs to complete.

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Logic of English Foundations

by Denise Eide

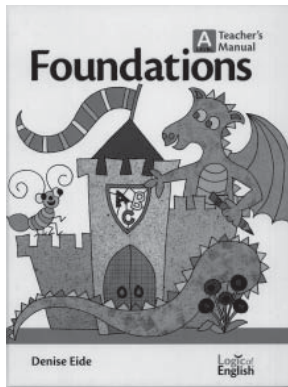
Pedia Learning, Inc.

10800 Lyndale Ave. S

Bloomington, MN 55420

507-250-2557

www.logicofenglish.com



See review for prices.

Foundations courses A through D comprise the beginning program within the Logic of English's language arts program.

While it can be used with children ages four through seven, *Foundations* is probably ideal to begin at kindergarten level for most children. You will generally use two or more courses per year. The publisher suggests various sequences on their website, but the most common sequence will be to complete two courses per year. That means you might complete levels A and B in kindergarten and levels C and D in first grade. From there, you can move into *Logic of English Essentials*.

Some might recognize the underlying *Writing Road to Reading* philosophy for teaching language arts in *Foundations*. In her book, *The Writing Road to Reading (WRR)*, Romalda Spalding promotes teaching reading, writing, handwriting, and spelling together for mutual reinforcement. *WRR* also has students learn all of the sounds for each phonogram at the same time. That means that when the letter "a" is introduced, students learn the three primary sounds the vowel is likely to make rather than just the short-a sound as is taught in most programs. These *WRR* strategies are included in *Foundations*.

In addition, *Foundations* helps children learn the way sounds are formed by the mouth, tongue, and voice box from the very beginning so that children develop awareness of these

sounds by listening for the sounds, feeling how they are pronouncing them, and watching the teacher pronounce them.

Foundations recommends teaching cursive first rather than printing (called "manuscript" in *Foundations*), but it includes instructions for both so that you may choose which you prefer. They do this very clearly in the teacher's manuals with side-by-side green boxes for cursive instruction and blue boxes for printing. You need to be sure to choose either the manuscript or cursive student workbook for each level.

Foundations is a thoroughly multi-sensory program, although it is left to the teacher to decide whether or not children are ready for handwriting worksheets in course A. Author Denise Eide points out that some children should practice forming letters with large motor movements while they are developing the requisite fine motor skills. Both large and small motor activities are included in the program with many interactive activities and games built into the lessons. Multi-sensory activities are presented both as basic learning strategies and as "Multi-Sensory Fun" sidebars that are sometimes optional.

Lessons are written for classroom instruction but can easily be used for teaching a single student. There are occasional group activities such as a "Writing Relay" game that you might have to skip. Some group activities really help students grasp the concepts, and you can often do them with just a parent and a child.

Detailed lesson plans are scripted with instructions for each step of the lesson which makes it easy for the inexperienced teacher or parent. Some lesson preparation is required. Each lesson lists the objectives and materials needed at the beginning. In addition to the course materials, you will need a few items such as Lego® blocks (or something similar), markers, crayons, chalk, scissors, glue, and crackers. For course A, you will also create a "sensory box" using a shallow pan or box filled

with salt or cornmeal; students can practice writing phonograms in the sensory box.

The program also comes with a custom whiteboard with a five-inch tall writing line on one side and rows of $1\frac{1}{16}$ inch lines on the reverse. The teacher generally uses the large line to demonstrate strokes and letter formation. Students practice in various ways. First, they “write” with their arms or fingers in the air, on the ground, in the sensory box, on handwriting cards (that come with the program), and on the whiteboard. Then they write with markers on the whiteboard, in the workbook, or on handwriting practice pages. Gradually they progress to writing with pencils and pens. Methods vary from lesson to lesson.

After every fifth lesson there is a review and assessment lesson so that parents and teachers can make sure students have mastered concepts before moving on rather than for assigning grades. Optional practice ideas are included for you to use as needed to address weak areas identified by the assessments.

Student workbooks are printed in full color. Some pages at the back are used to construct readers. The student workbook is used within the context of the teacher’s lesson presentation and cannot be used for independent study. You will need one student workbook for each level in your choice of cursive or manuscript.

The *Foundations* program also requires other specialized items from Pedia Learning: Basic Phonogram Flashcards, Phonogram Game Cards, the custom whiteboard described above, *Rhythm of Handwriting Tactile Cards* (with raised, sandpaper-like strokes, letters, and numbers), and the *Rhythm of Handwriting Quick Reference* folder. (For the last two items you will choose either manuscript or cursive style.) *Foundations* recommends that you have two decks of the Phonogram Game Cards. These are published in three versions: manuscript, cursive, and bookface. You should probably purchase a bookface deck plus either of the other decks. The publisher recommends

a few other optional items you might consider such as letter tiles and *Bob Books* readers.

Foundations A

Course A has 40 lessons and 8 review lessons. It teaches all of the single-letter phonograms “a” through “z” and their various pronunciations as well as the phonogram “qu.” This level presents only the lower-case forms. Students develop phonemic awareness in words as they learn to identify initial, middle, and ending sounds in words. Students are introduced to blending with auditory activities from the beginning of the program. The blending activities prepare students for lesson 21 which presents the first three spelling (and reading) words: cat, dad, and sad. Students might write the words or spell them with letter tiles. By the end of course A, students can read many high-frequency consonant-vowel-consonant words and some one-syllable words with consonant blends.

A colorful hardcover book, *Doodling Dragons: An ABC Book of Sounds* is part of the course materials for course A. The first week or two, you will also be reading aloud your own Dr. Seuss books as part of each day’s lesson since these books help introduce phonograms by “playing” with the sounds of words in a delightful way.

Foundations B

Course B continues with upper-case letters and more complex phonograms with lessons numbered 41 through 80. As with course A, there are eight review lessons. Students learn how to identify vowel sounds by marking them with curved lines, straight lines, and two dots (i.e., breves, macrons, and umlauts). They also draw lines to identify phonograms such as “tch.” Ten spelling rules are taught in the course. Spelling lists are included in every lesson except the review lessons. Students practice forming the words by writing them or using letter tiles. There are no spelling tests. By the end of course B, students are reading and writing sentences such as, “Did you

clean the sink?" The emphasis is on auditory and visual recognition more than on written work at this level. Optional challenge activities include dictation sentences. Eight readers that you assemble yourself are at the back of the student workbook, but you can purchase pre-made readers if you wish. You might want to use additional practice readers.

Foundations C

Course C adds 11 more spelling rules, 27 multi-letter phonograms, and the schwa sound. Students learn to read multi-syllable words. As students become more fluent readers they are given paragraphs to read with questions to answer about what they have read. This level has 40 lessons with eight review lessons. Eight readers are again included at the back of the student book, but as children become more fluent readers they often need even more additional reading material.

Foundations D

Course D has 40 lessons and 8 review lessons. Instead of the readers at the back of the student workbook, it now uses real books such as *Little Bear* and *Mouse and Mole* that you obtain separately. Students learn ten more spelling rules and some advanced phonograms. They are expected to write sentences with minimal help and begin to construct their own sentences. Reading comprehension skills are taught as students learn to sequence events, identify the main idea and the main character, and explain how the story was resolved. Note that course D is being released as I go to print with this book.

Summary

Foundations is a little more advanced than some other programs if you begin with A and B at kindergarten level. Correlation to the Common Core Standards at the front of each teacher's manual shows that A covers some first grade level standards as well as those for kindergarten while B covers even a few standards for second grade. Consequently, you should proceed at a pace that is comfortable

for each child, using the multi-sensory activities and pausing at the review lessons to make sure students have mastered the necessary concepts before moving ahead.

You can purchase the Foundations Complete Set which at this time includes courses A, B, and C (\$268 for print editions, but price will vary with customization) or you can purchase a Foundations Reusable Resources Set (about \$85) and only course A (\$56) and *Doodling Dragons* (\$15) to get started. Sets are configured to reflect your preferences for manuscript and cursive styles. Workbooks are sold either as print books or as PDFs with either a family or classroom license. A family license is the same cost as the print book, so you might consider this option, perhaps printing some pages in black-and-white and others (such as the storybooks) in color.

Foundations makes the *Writing Road to Reading* methodology easy to use without any training. It provides thorough coverage of language arts for the early grades in an integrated fashion that saves you the trouble of selecting separate handwriting and spelling programs.

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McRuffy Language Arts Programs



by Brian Davis, M.A. Ed.
 McRuffy Press
 PO Box 212
 Raymore, MO 64083
 816-331-7831
 email: sales@mcruffy.com

www.mcruffy.com

Kindergarten, First Grade, or Second
Grade Complete Special Edition
Curriculum - \$129.95 per level

McRuffy Language Arts programs for kindergarten through fourth grade cover phonics, reading, spelling, grammar, and composition. Optional handwriting workbooks easily integrate with the other components of each course. While the complete programs for all levels are very good, I particularly like the kindergarten, first, and second-grade programs, especially their coverage of reading and phonics.

Most phonics programs require direct instruction for the beginning levels, but some reduce the amount of direct teaching around third grade. However, McRuffy continues with a teacher-intensive program all the way through. This might be helpful for struggling readers, but I think some parents might want to use a program that does not require so much direct instruction once students are able to read independently.

This program made my Top Picks list for a number of reasons. It is a comprehensive program that uses proven teaching methods, and it has full-color workbooks and readers. Teacher's manuals are easy to use. It incorporates multi-sensory learning, and it is surprisingly low priced. Even better, if you have more than one student or reuse the program another year, you need only purchase a second set of workbooks.

Both teacher and student books have lay-flat spiral bindings, student books have laminated covers and sturdy pages, so they should hold up well. Teacher's manuals have step-by-step lesson plans and include reduced, color reproductions of student pages. Lessons are scripted, making it easy for the inexperienced teacher to know exactly what to do and say. Even so, there are frequent open-ended questions that might lead you off the script for a short time. This is not a predictable question-response

type program.

There are two teacher's manuals for each level for first grade and above. At the beginning of each teacher's manual (only in the first volume of two-volume sets) are an overview of the program and its components, a scope and sequence, spelling lists, game ideas, suggestions for helping students with creative writing, and other helps. There are also two student workbooks for each level.

I reviewed the Special Edition which is the latest edition and the one most readily available to home educators. The most noticeable difference is that these are printed in color while earlier editions were not. However, the Special Editions also have more material than the earlier editions.

Kindergarten Level

McRuffy teaches phonics in a fairly traditional fashion. Students should have some exposure to the alphabet before beginning the kindergarten program. The first lesson begins by having children identify the letters "a" through "e." They learn that there are capital and small letters as well as how to distinguish between them. They learn the /ă/ sound and they write both capital and small "a"—all within the first lesson. Students begin blending the letters "b" and "a" together in lesson three. This is a rapid pace for students who do not already have fairly good phonemic awareness and who do not already recognize the letters of the alphabet by name. The program quickly moves students into reading sentences with lesson 23 presenting "Pat has a cat" for students to read. The kindergarten level introduces all of the letters, both long and short vowels, some digraphs, a few sight words, and the names of colors. Spelling is taught as reinforcement for phonics.

There are two sets of readers for kindergarten. These are printed in color on matte-finish card stock. In the first set of ten readers, each book has only four pages. In the second set of twenty readers, each book has from 12 to 15

pages. Illustrations do provide visual clues, but as sentences get longer, and especially when there is more than one sentence on a page to read, students will not be able to rely on visual clues to decode the words. The teacher's manual directs conversation about each story that expands beyond simple comprehension into critical and creative thinking. Students practice "story creating" orally, in writing, and with cut-out puppets.

The program does include some drill. As part of a daily routine, children are drilled on the alphabet, sounds of the letters, short vowels, long vowels, capital and small-letter identification, color names, and other words they have been learning. Flashcards and laminated charts for drill and review are in the resource pack for this level.

A typical lesson might begin with some drill and review. Then following the script in the teacher's manual, you introduce a new concept. Students complete a workbook activity related to the new concept. These activities might be matching columns, circling the correct answer, reading and writing phonograms or words, puzzles, fill-in-the-blanks, word searches, or cut-and-paste activities.

In some lessons students will use "sliders." Sliders are sleeves constructed from heavy card stock into which you insert strips of letters or phonograms that will appear in the window. Corresponding phonograms that will allow students to create words are already printed on each slider. Preprinted forms with sliders and instructions as well as preprinted strips for the sliders are in the resource pack.

Games add another hands-on, interactive dimension to this program. Laminated game boards and playing pieces come in the Resource Pack that comes with the program. You will cut out game cards and other pieces from card stock in the resource pack. Many games can be played solo, but most are more fun with at least one other player, even if it's a parent. The Resource Pack also includes cardstock pages

with figures from each storybook. These can be cut out, colored, and mounted on ice cream sticks for use as puppets. Students use these to retell the stories or do creative story telling.

Each story has a coloring sheet with lines for writing at the bottom so that students can add a caption or write a sentence. Students who prefer to draw might instead use the formatted pages in the resource pack that have space for drawing their own pictures and writing their own captions or sentences.

McRuffy Press Flip & Draw™: Ruff's Pre-Writing is an extra bonus included in the Kindergarten Resource Pack. This resource for developing eye-hand coordination helps children learn basic handwriting strokes and skills such as controlled lines, curves, and slant. This ingenious book has a clear overlay that can flip to cover either the front or back of any page in this book. Students should use fine line wipe-off markers as they practice tracing the various lines and shapes as well as printing their own names. The 30 pages in the book are also reproducible. The *Flip & Draw* is not incorporated into the lesson plans. Use it as you wish.

The teacher's manual includes models for handwriting in both traditional and modern manuscript (printed) forms. At the front of the teacher's manual you will find suggestions for tactile learning for students who might benefit. Also, there are "Assessment Item Analysis" grids for the weekly assessments that will help you identify potential problem areas.

The kindergarten program also teaches language fundamentals: sentences, periods, question marks, capitalization of the first word in sentences, rhyming words, antonyms, and vocabulary. Adding handwriting instruction with McRuffy's books (choose from traditional or modern manuscript or cursive workbooks) or those from another publisher rounds this out into a total language arts program.

First Grade

The McRuffy program for first grade provides students with a *Language and Reading*

workbook (*LAR*) and a *Spelling and Phonics* workbook (*SAP*). Instructions in the two-volume teacher's manual direct you to teach from both workbooks and one of the storybooks in most lessons.

The first unit of *LAR* is largely review of concepts taught in kindergarten. From there it progresses to more challenges phonograms, prefixes and suffixes, contractions, and two-syllable words. By the end of first grade, most of the phonograms will have been introduced.

LAR workbook activities include writing words or sentences, sorting, circling, matching, alphabetizing, unscrambling words, proofreading and making corrections, puzzles, fill-in-the-blanks, and multiple-choice questions. The amount of writing increases significantly from the kindergarten level. The *LAR* workbook also includes a few original poems that students will read with the teacher. Phonics activities that follow relate to each poem. Every fifth workbook page is an assessment of phonics, language, and reading skills.

The teacher's manual instructs you to direct students in writing their own stories, often developing their ideas based on discussion of one of the storybooks. For story writing, you can use the reproducible forms from the resource pack that comes with the program (your choice of either single pages or forms to create books) or any other paper you choose. Instructions for creative writing, the writing process, and how to make a book are at the front of the first volume of the teacher's manual. Creative writing is one area where the instructions are general rather than detailed. Students determine what they want to write about from your discussion time, then it is up to you to direct and assist them with ideas from the manual.

The *SAP* workbook is somewhat similar to other spelling programs, although the lessons relate directly to *LAR*. The first five weeks review concepts taught in kindergarten. After that the lessons work with a new list of spelling

words each week. Words with common phonetic elements are introduced on Monday, and students complete workbook activities Monday through Thursday. Friday is for the weekly spelling test. Four weeks out of the year, the lessons review phonetic concepts previously covered in spelling lessons—sort of a comprehensive review and reinforcement. Activities vary from lesson to lesson, sometimes overlapping with broader language arts skills such as adding suffixes and identifying rhyming words.

First grade level includes 34 storybooks that each have about 16 pages. The resource pack for first grade is very similar to that for kindergarten minus the flash cards. While it also has games, there is no packet with dice and pawns as there is for kindergarten. (You can use those from the kindergarten set or from any other game.)

Second Grade

The second grade program is constructed like the first grade program with a two-volume teacher's manual and two student workbooks: *Language and Reading (LAR)* and *Spelling and Phonics (SAP)*. It quickly reviews previously taught phonics skills then adds more challenging phonograms such as "ou, ough, augh," and "ph." Common phonetic elements continue to serve as the basis for spelling lists. The grammar component is much stronger as the program introduces nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, types of sentences, tenses, quotation marks, syllables, homophones, contractions, root words, prefixes, suffixes, and other topics. It teaches then reviews each topic a number of times.

The second grade course is very strong in developing reading skills. Some lessons use graphic organizers to analyze story elements, but much reading skill development occurs through the interactive dialogue led by the teacher. The 28 readers for this level generally have 16 pages each. Stories are quite complex with lengthy dialogues and many paragraphs

per page. However, they still retain full-color illustrations on every other page. In addition, the LAR workbook includes non-fiction reading activities. The newest edition has added ten lessons on fables and folktales.

Composition work continues to challenge students with creative writing activities, but it also teaches book report writing, letter writing, recipe writing, and a few other forms of expository writing.

Instead of a resource pack there is a Test and Assessment Packet. While there are assessments in the earlier levels, those for second grade include four-page quarterly tests along with phonics and language tests for every fifth lesson.

McRuffy's optional handwriting workbooks include either printing or cursive options or a transitional book that covers both, with your choice of either traditional or slant-print style printing. Handwriting lessons correlate with phonics and spelling instruction. These worktexts are bound at the top and lie flat which makes them easy for either right- or left-handed students to use.

Of course you can continue with this excellent program beyond second grade level, but I especially like the very solid and easy-to-use foundation in reading and language arts it provides for the early grades when it is so crucial.

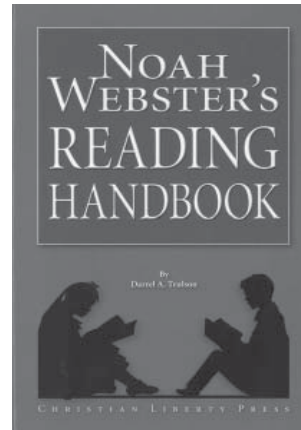
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Noah Webster's Reading Handbook

Christian Liberty Press
502 W. Euclid Ave.
Arlington Heights, IL 60004
800-348-0899
email: custserv@homeschools.org
www.shopchristianliberty.com
\$10

This has got to be just about the cheapest resource for teaching phonics and beginning reading! It does a very adequate job, which

should not be surprising since it's an updated version of Webster's original *Blue-Backed Speller* that was used to teach thousands (at least!) of children in past centuries.



It follows a fairly standard progression, introducing short vowels first then using consonant-vowel practice to help beginning readers learn to blend. Next, long vowels are taught, followed by consonant blends and digraphs, vowel

blends (diphthongs), the various sounds of the vowel "o," modified vowels ("ar, er, ir, or, ur"), suffixes ("ing, er"), and silent letters.

Practice words and sentences are included on each page as soon as is appropriate. Lengthier reading selections (Bible-based) are at the back of the book. Rules are presented in boxes at the bottom of pages, but this program does not teach very many rules compared to programs such as *All About Reading* and others based on *The Writing Road to Reading* methodology. A few pages of technical information are at the back of the book for parents who want to better understand the functions of the alphabet and sounds.

No frills, no confusion, straight-to-the-point phonics, and there seems to be little missing other than more work on sight words, complete treatment of the "ough" sounds, and the extra practice and review students need to really master reading skills.

Add this to your list of possibilities if you're looking for a simple, uncluttered approach for teaching basic phonics. This book also suits remedial learners of all ages who need to learn phonics. If using it with kindergartners or first graders, consider using Christian Liberty Press's *Adventures in Phonics* series for written practice and reinforcement which I review at

www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

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Phonics Pathways

by Dolores G. Hiskes

Jossey-Bass/an imprint of John Wiley & Sons
800-956-7739

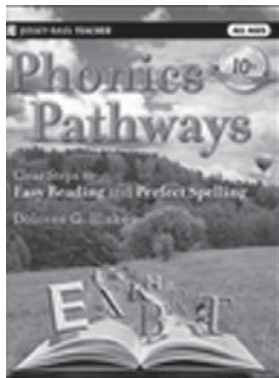
www.josseybass.com

Also available through the author at
Dorbooks, Inc.

800-852-4890

www.dorbooks.com

Phonics Pathways - \$32.95



Phonics Pathways is a complete phonics program, self-contained within one large book so you do not need a separate teacher's manual.

The program will work for all ages as well as for remedial read-

ers. Sounds of the letters are taught, beginning with short vowels. As each consonant is taught, it is immediately used to begin making blends with the short vowels. Beginning blends are taught "consonant-vowel" (i.e., "ba, bi, bo," etc.). Because of the quick movement into blending practice, children are soon reading three-letter words.

One problem that crops up in this and other programs that begin with consonant-vowel combinations is that children guess at vowel sounds since actual vowel sounds are generally determined by what comes after the vowel—and in the early stages of the program there's nothing "coming after" to give them a clue. When children start reading long vowel words they need to be taught to scan ahead for signals such as silent-e that determine the vowel sound. *Phonics Pathways* has tried to address this problem in their newest editions by adding diacritical markings to vowels when children might run into problems determining

the vowel sound.

Multi-sensory learning methods (hearing, saying, tracing, writing) are used with each letter. Upper and lower case letters are shown from the beginning, although children work primarily with lower case letters. You might need to take some extra time to work specifically on recognition and writing of upper case letters, although this could be done late in the program.

Each new concept taught is followed by words, phrases, or sentences for practice, so no extra reading material is necessary. Reading practice is designed to improve tracking skills from left to right. Some of the phrases and sentences are purposely nonsensical or humorous to keep it entertaining. The "Dewey the Bookworm" character and positive-thinking type proverbs are also used throughout the book for the same reason.

The program covers all phonetic sounds, diacritical markings, suffixes and prefixes, plurals and possessives, contractions, and compound words. Teaching instruction is on each page, and it is brief enough that no significant preparation time is needed.

One oddity worth noting pops up frequently in the instructions. Sometimes they are written directly to students even though students of this program cannot yet read sentences this complex. But this is no big deal. Parents or teachers just need to read through the instructions and present whatever is necessary to students.

An index to spelling rules, spelling and pronunciation charts, plural and suffix spelling charts, and two pages of "Vision and Motor Coordination Training Exercises" are at the back of the book. Try some of these exercises if you have a child who seems to have minor learning disabilities.

Phonics Pathways introduces "pyramids" as another reading strategy within its lessons. Reading exercises expand in pyramid fashion from a single word to complex sentences.

Within each pyramid, the single word is repeated in each subsequent line, but each time one or more additional words are added to create and then expand a sentence.

Phonics Pathways is among my Top Picks because it does a great job of teaching phonics, it is very reasonably priced for such a comprehensive program, it is easy for parents to use, and it has options that can make it more multi-sensory.

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Teach a Child to Read with Children's Books, fourth edition

by Mark Thogmartin and Mary Gallagher
New Learning Concepts, Inc.

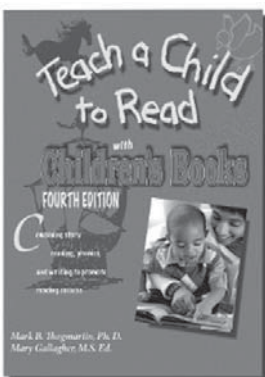
PO Box 338

Bloomington, IN 47402

800-925-7853

www.teachachildtoread.net

\$24.95



I have reviewed more phonics and reading programs than I can recall over the years. I have written up reviews of many that I liked and found useful and ignored many others. However, when I actually taught my own children to read, I never used a complete phonics program. I used bits and pieces and ideas from some programs, but we primarily used real books, magnetic letters, and encounters with the real world for developing reading skills.

This might sound totally disorganized to you, but there was an underlying progression as my children first learned some of the letters and their sounds, then started recognizing some words, then mastered more letters and sounds, gradually building up a reading vocabulary from simple words to more complex. While I had a few simple beginning practice readers

on hand, the most successful “learn to read” books were my sons’ own favorite books like *Green Eggs and Ham*.

As I read through *Teach a Child to Read with Children's Books*, I felt like I was reading a description of my own experience. One of the most important recommendations in this book is that we read lots and lots of books to our children from the time they are little. Children develop a love of books, and they learn what reading is all about and how it works by watching and interacting with someone who reads to them. This is so foundational that the authors point to a study that tells us that, “Children who entered school with a large bank of vocabulary words they had heard and used consistently scored higher on vocabulary and comprehension tests at ages 9 and 10 than those whose vocabulary was limited” (p. 14). But it’s not just about good test scores. Rather it’s about developing a love for reading.

The authors, Mark Thogmartin and Mary Gallagher, discuss the conflicts between the intensive phonics and whole language camps over how to teach reading, showing that the best approach uses both methods. The authors identify problems at both extremes. Children taught with pure whole language approaches do not usually learn how to decode; everything is learned through sight and context. On the other hand, children taught with some intensive phonics programs, get so bogged down in the rules and minutiae of phonics that they associate the drills and workbooks very negatively with the whole idea of reading.

Instead of either extreme, they propose a combination of both, but one that starts with and continually works from good children’s literature with phonics used when and as is appropriate. The phonics instruction grows from the child’s own curiosity and interaction with words.

Recognizing that word formation and writing reinforce reading skills, the authors present an integrated use of magnetic alphabets, all

sorts of beginning writing formats, dictation, copying, story writing, writing letters, and much more.

This is not a step-by-step program, but rather a guide for parents to create their own program. Lest that sound overwhelming, they present very concrete suggestions and steps that you might follow, including a lengthy journal from one homeschooling mother who taught her daughter this way. But the methodology cannot be presented as scheduled lesson plans, because the essence of it requires that we respond to our children's own developmental timetable and select books that appeal to them.

One parent might find herself working through Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham* over and over with her child as I did while another might be focused on Eric Carle's *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* Parents will likely have a shelf full of favorite books that a child requests to hear every day, but each child is likely to have his or her own personal favorites that make great jumping off points for beginning reading.

At the back of the book are lengthy lists of children's literature that might be good choices for different levels. One list recommends read-aloud books that are predictable and use rhymes and patterns—elements that are particularly appealing to preschoolers. Some books on this list, such as Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, might appeal to older children. The read-aloud recommendations also have a separate list for chapter books and short novels that you can continue to read aloud to older children. Other lists are recommendations for books that children might tackle themselves at each of five developmental levels from emergent readers (preK) through about second grade level.

Lest you still think this is a totally disorganized method, record keeping forms are included. Among these are a checklist for tracking "Basic Concepts about Books and Print," a "Letter Identification Checklist," "Letter

Identification Check Sheet," (these last two are two different forms) "Lesson Plan/Journal," "Books Read," and "Known Words." While you might use other methods of accountability such as writing "known words" on a large sheet of paper covering the back of a door, these forms might provide parents the security and accountability they need.

I think that Mark Thogmartin and Mary Gallagher's research and recommendations are so important that I would love to see every parent of preschoolers read this before making a decision about purchasing any other program.

Beginning Phonics Readers

When children are learning phonics they need lots of practice with simple reading material. Beginning readers are sometimes included in phonics programs, but other times you need to find your own. Those listed below are not included in my Top Picks since they are only representative of what is available.

A Beka Book

Box 18000

Pensacola, FL 32532

877-223-5226

www.abeka.org

\$16.95 for all 13, teacher edition - \$17.95

These are 13 small, colorful readers, divided into three sets of readers. The sets progress in difficulty, reflected in the set titles: "I Learn to Read," "I Do Read," and "I Can Read Well." They begin with short-vowel words, shift into long vowels by the fourth book, and continue up through words like "south," "ground," and "bright." You can purchase the individual books or you might purchase the teacher edition that includes all of the readers in one comb-bound book.

Bob Books

Scholastic, Inc.

800-325-6149
www.scholastic.com
\$16.99 per set

These sets of beginning readers are phonetically organized with controlled vocabulary, yet the stories are a bit more interesting than many other such readers. Illustrations are simple black-and-white line drawings with occasional color accents. Both the stories and drawings have a child-like character. Teaching instructions are short and simple.

The series begins with *My First Bob Books: Pre-Reading Skills* and *My First Bob Books: Alphabet* to prepare a child for reading. Each set contains 12 books.

The next five sets are the actual readers that will correlate with many phonics programs. *Set 1: Beginning Readers* (12 books) concentrates on short-vowel words. *Set 2: Advancing Beginners* (12 books) continues with short-vowel, consistent words, adding double consonants, blends, endings, some sight words, and longer stories. *Set 3: Word Families* (10 books) adds longer words and suffixes. *Set 4: Complex Words* (8 books) adds sight words, new blends, and longer complex words. *Set 5: Long Vowels* (8 books) adds long vowel words.

In addition, there are two sets of *Sight Words* readers, one for kindergarten and one for first grade. Each of these sets has ten readers. Both sets support a phonics approach while introducing sight words. Finally, the newest set, *Rhyming Words* (10 books) focuses on three- and four-letter rhyming words.

Reading for Fun Enrichment Library

A Beka Book
877-223-5226
www.abeka.com
\$49.45

Fifty-four small readers come in this boxed set. While they do not follow as strict a phonetic progression as the *Phonics Practice Readers* (reviewed next), they do begin with short vowels and gradually increase the phonetic

complexity. For most children, you will still need additional practice with short vowel words beyond these readers. While there are a few Bible stories and some character-building stories, most are about children, fairy tales, nature, and other common subjects. Books are illustrated in full color. The price is very reasonable for so much good quality reading material.

Phonics Practice Readers

Modern Curriculum Press/Pearson Learning
800-848-9500
www.pearsonschool.com
\$26.97 per set

For variety's sake, Modern Curriculum Press offers two different series (B and C) of these secular readers from which you can choose. You need not purchase them all. Within each series are four sets: short vowels, long vowels, blends, and digraphs. Each set consists of ten, eight-page books. You might need only short and long vowels before your children are ready for many beginning reading books. These are inexpensive and colorfully illustrated. Each set comes with a teacher's guide.

Beyond Phonics

Once children have begun to read, the natural inclination is to get a reading program with readers and workbooks. However, this is another place where focusing on your goals can save you time, money, and effort, and possibly produce better results with your children. Here are four things to think about before deciding what to do next:

1.) If one of your goals is to improve decoding proficiency—which means being able to figure out how to say or read words—just about any reading material that is not too difficult can be used as fodder for practice. Those early reading books by Dr. Seuss and others can be much more fun than readers while providing essentially the same type decoding practice.

2.) Other goals should have to do with children understanding what they are reading. You begin at lower levels of thinking, asking children to narrate back simple data or events from what they have read. As they progress, you move on to more challenging levels of thinking. Children begin to interpret what they read, draw parallels to their own experience, or make connections to other things they know. Later, they begin to compare and contrast, analyze, and otherwise focus more on the content than on the mechanics of reading. Reading programs can help with this, but simply applying Charlotte Mason's narration techniques with real books can accomplish the same thing.

3.) Readers and workbooks were created to help teachers with classroom management rather than because they are the best way for children to develop reading skills. With groups of children, it is much easier to manage them if everyone is reading the same book and completing the same workbook pages. However, in our homeschools, our children are generally all at different levels with reading, so we are not trying to keep all our children on the same page at the same time. In fact, I wish you luck if you even try to do such a thing!

4.) A reading program might help you stay on track and focus on some of the necessary skills if you are working with a child individually. A program might be more useful for the parent than for the child! But the downside is that your child has to read someone else's collected anthology of readings, many of which might have little appeal for your child. Your child also has to work through the exercises created to go with that particular anthology whether or not those exercises really target skills your child needs at the time.

All of this doesn't mean that reading programs are necessarily bad. But I have found that selecting real books for my children to read and using supplemental resources to focus on particular skills has been far more fun

and effective for all concerned. There are so many supplemental resources for reading that are useful that I want to warn you that the selections I have made for my Top Picks are very arbitrary and limited. Please explore other options too. You can easily find them at teacher supply stores, in catalogs, and online. Some will be broad in their skills coverage, while others might focus narrowly on comprehension, work with analogies, or other particular aspects.

Here I have gravitated toward some that I believe work well when you skip traditional reading programs with children past the beginning reading stage. Since reading real books is part of my recommended strategy, many of my recommendations here include guides for doing this. (Note: some resources for vocabulary are reviewed in Chapter Nine, and they might also be part of your reading skills development strategy.)

For those who might be leery of abandoning traditional reading programs, I suggest you pay particular attention to *Drawn into the Heart of Reading* (reviewed later in this chapter) since it provides structure for a real-books approach that might give you the confidence to give it a try.

Those who still want traditional readers or reading programs might check out one of the following series.

A Beka Books has a number of readers with teacher guides for each grade level. Many readers have a single theme such as nature, heroes, or fables; some are anthologies; and some are novels. (www.abeka.com)

Christian Liberty Press Readers are an assortment of readers with different themes for different levels. (www.shopchristianliberty.com)

Little Angel Readers (Stone Tablet Press) are a set of beginning readers for Catholic children. (www.stonetabletpress.com)

Nature Readers (Christian Liberty Press) feature science topics as the content. They are a bit more like real books than other readers.

(www.shopchristianliberty.com)

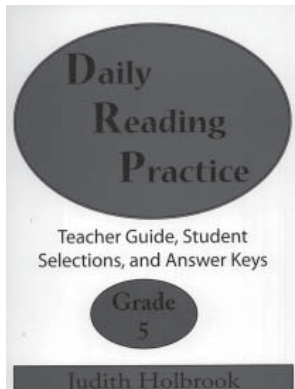
Pathway Readers (Pathway Books) are an excellent Amish series that reflect the rural, agricultural Amish community. Content is God-honoring and wholesome. These readers also have companion workbooks. (available through distributors such as www.rainbowresource.com or www.milestonebooks.com)

BJUPress reading courses combine anthologies and novels in complete reading programs that include workbooks. (www.bjup.com)

Rod and Staff's Bible Nurture and Reader series has been very popular with homeschoolers looking for Biblical content and no fantasy or modern sagas of cultural decadence. This series also includes workbooks. (606-522-4348 or Milestone Books at www.milestonebooks.com/?rodstaff.com - an unofficial site)

Resources for Developing Reading Skills

Daily Reading Practice



by Judith Holbrook
DGP Publishing, Inc.
630 Becky Road
Blairsville, GA
30512
706-745-1005
www.dgppublishing.com
teacher guides
- \$29.95
each, student

workbooks - \$5.95 each

The *Daily Reading Practice* series helps students in grades one through ten develop a surprisingly broad range of reading skills. Each week, students read and reread a short passage then practice a variety of language arts skills based primarily on the reading passage. Daily activities for the week are repeated with a different passage each week. Some activities will be led by the parent or teacher while some

will be completed independently. With two or more children, you will probably work through some activities together. Younger children will definitely need more interaction. On some days the activities will take just a few minutes while others will require more time.

Each week's activities build progressively upon the previous weeks' lessons. During each week, each day's lesson begins with students reading the same literary passage. For example, in fifth grade, students begin on Monday by identifying the subject of the passage, the author's purpose, and the genre, and they create their own title for the passage. On Tuesday, they work on vocabulary to identify synonyms, antonyms, base words, definitions, and contextual meanings. Wednesday is devoted to reading skills such as inferences, reading comprehension, understanding idioms, identifying the "conflict," and using visualization skills to draw something mentioned in the passage. On Thursdays, students identify the main idea, the topic sentence and details, and the author's viewpoint. On some Thursdays they might, instead, practice "skimming," use graphic organizers to clarify information in the passage, or work with figurative language. On Friday, students identify key words in the passage then write their own summary of the passage from those key words.

The activities I have described for fifth grade level are simplified and limited for younger students and expanded for older students. For example, on Mondays, first graders listen to the passage as it is read aloud, discuss what the passage is about, and work with the parent or teacher to come up with a title. In contrast, tenth graders take it up a notch or two from what I've described for fifth grade by also doing such tasks as identifying the author's tone, identifying genres from a broader list, and writing definitions of idioms.

For each level there is a teacher guide as well as a student workbook. The teacher guide begins with a few pages about using the course

that you really should take time to read. These pages are followed by Help Pages (which are also included in the student workbooks) that provide notes for completing the tasks for each day. Think of these pages as a quick reference guide. Both students and teachers might need to refer to these notes throughout the course.

The teacher guide also includes copies of each week's reading passage in a larger font. These are most useful in a class or group situation where students do not have individual workbooks. However, student workbooks are very inexpensive, so I expect most homeschool students will work directly in workbooks.

Following the reading passages in the teacher guide are the answer keys. These are identical to student pages but with all of the answers overprinted. Suggested key words and summaries are provided for Friday's lessons, and graphic organizers are shown for some of Thursday's assignments. The layout makes it easy for the teacher or parent to guide students through each day's activities. On the other hand, the layout is my only area of complaint. Each week's activities, including the reading passage, are all presented on a single page at every grade level. Since first graders have briefer reading passages and fewer assignments, the font is relatively large and the pages don't appear overly crowded. The pages gradually become more crowded. While this is okay through the middle grades, by tenth grade, the font has gotten very small, and pages are quite crowded. Some students won't have trouble with this, but others might. You can view free sample pages on the publisher's website in advance so you can judge for yourself.

While there are other reading skills resources that tackle some of the objectives addressed in *Daily Reading Practice*, I don't know of anything else that does such a comprehensive job. By focusing on the same reading passage every day for a week, students learn to read closely and develop skill in finding and retaining information. But moving beyond reading

comprehension, *Daily Reading Practice* also works on vocabulary, literary analysis, critical thinking, and composition.

One might question the value of working with the same reading passage for an entire week, but the variety of exercises that work with the material in such different ways teach an attentiveness in reading that students seldom experience.

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Drawn into the Heart of Reading

by Carrie Austin

Heart of Dakota Publishing, Inc.

1004 Westview Dr.

Dell Rapids, SD 57022

605-428-4068

www.heartofdakota.com

packages: Level 2/3 - \$78.12, Level 4/5

- \$84.55, Level 6/7/8 - \$88.98, Superset

- \$134.29; individual student books: Level

2/3 - \$21.95, Level 4/5 - \$28.95, Level

6/7/8 - \$33.95



Subtitled, “A Multi-Level Reading Program to Use with Any Books You Choose,” this guide can be used along with your choice of real books for children in grades two through eight. It

consists of a teacher's guide that covers all levels plus student workbooks, available at three levels: grades 2-3, grades 4-5, and grades 6-8. You will also want to purchase the appropriate level of *Book Projects to Send Home*, small activity books published by McGraw-Hill and available through Heart of Dakota Publishing for \$9.95 each.

You should start with one of the packages that each include the teacher's guide plus one student book and a Sample Book Ideas list. The Superset includes the teacher's guide plus

all three student books and the Sample Book Ideas list. You may also purchase additional student books individually.

You can use *Drawn into the Heart of Reading* as a core reading program (assuming young students are already able to read independently) or as a supplement. It is arranged into nine sections, each focused upon a different genre: biography, adventure, historical fiction, fantasy, mystery, folk tales, nonfiction, humor, and realistic fiction. You or your students select books representative of each genre. Because the program is structured for different levels of difficulty you can reuse it for a number of years, even reusing the same level but having your student read different books from each genre.

The program is written for use with groups or individual students; groups can be either your own children working at various levels or same-level groups. *Drawn into the Heart of Reading* is also a Christian character-building program that incorporates scripture and biblical standards. For most families this means that your entire family will be reading books from the same genre, discussing and comparing similar story elements, and learning about the same character traits.

Some broader language arts skills are covered, and students do a good deal of writing, increasingly so as you move up each level. The guide suggests that young students may dictate some of their lengthier responses rather than writing them themselves. It also suggests writing responses on a whiteboard for students to copy.

The writing assignments themselves actually bring up one point of concern I have with the student workbooks. Workbook pages are formatted for students to fill in boxes, blanks, and circles in response to questions and instructions. However, once in a while the space allowed seems inadequate, especially in the *Level 2/3* workbook.

In addition to writing activities, the program incorporates a good deal of discussion, a little

drawing, and lots of project ideas. This can be a strong multi-sensory program depending upon which elements you choose to use.

The large, softbound teacher's guide (with lay flat binding) features daily lesson plans with specific instructions for work to be done together with students as well as for independent work for each of the three levels. I really appreciate an extra feature found in each student book called "emergency options." On days when there is no time for the "together" activities, you can turn to emergency options that will fill in with independent-work assignments.

Overall, I really like the flexibility of this sort of reading program that allows parents and children to select their own reading material. The drawback to this approach is that children might be reading books with which parents are unfamiliar. Unless parents have time to also read the books, they might have trouble determining whether or not their children are identifying characters, actions, motives, plot, etc. correctly. Children might narrate to a parent about what they are reading, but a parent's ability to ask probing questions is limited. The teacher's guide does direct students in the first two levels to read some portions of their books aloud to parents, which helps somewhat to overcome this potential problem. Another possible strategy is for parents to provide a list of books as options—books with which parents are already familiar. In response to my concern, Carrie Austin told me that "having the parent skim the chapter as the child answers the questions provides accountability and helps give the parent a good idea of whether the child's answers to the questions are going in the right direction."

Suggested questions range from simple comprehension through higher-level thinking skills. Thus, children learn to read more thoughtfully and analytically as they work through the "lessons."

I suspect that after parents and students have worked through a number of books using

this program, parents will feel more comfortable allowing children to use unfamiliar books since children will have become accustomed to noticing key information and thinking beyond the surface of the story.

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Progeny Press Study Guides for Literature

Progeny Press

PO Box 100

Fall Creek, WI 54743

877-776-4369

email: progeny@progenypress.com

www.progenypress.com

guides in either CD-ROM or digital download versions for: lower elementary - \$11.99 each, upper elementary - \$17.99 each, middle school - \$18.99 each, guides for high school level - \$21.99 each



Progeny Press novel study guides are tools for parents who want to use real books rather than literature anthologies with their children or for supplementing study of an anthology. Available for all grade levels, they focus more on critical analysis and reading comprehension than on writing and spelling skills (as in *Total Language Plus* which is also reviewed in this chapter). Four guides are recommended per year for one full literature credit.

Although written by different authors, all come from a Christian perspective. Thus, we find questions that refer to scripture such as “Read Proverbs 17:17. ‘A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.’ Tall John was Sarah’s friend. At the end of Chapter

7, how did he comfort her?” (from *The Courage of Sarah Noble* study guide).

The study guides deal with both literature as art and literature as a reflection or source of ideas. At the primary level children study vocabulary and meaning and introduce literary constructions and style. At older levels there are studies of vocabulary, literary terms, plot, and so forth, as well as studies about the characters, events, and ideas presented.

The format varies from one study guide to another but with many common characteristics. A synopsis and some background are presented first. Ideas for pre-reading (and sometimes mid- and post-reading) activities are next. Then studies are divided up to cover groups of chapters at a time. Questions go well beyond the recall level, asking students to infer meanings, identify symbolism, draw analogies, and apply principles to their own lives. Each study section has vocabulary activities along with comprehension, analysis, personal application, and thought questions. At older levels, a lengthier writing assignment completes each section. A variety of vocabulary activities are used within each guide, so the studies maintain a higher level of interest than those that use the same format for every lesson. Particularly at younger levels, guides include extra activity suggestions; for example, *The Courage of Sarah Noble* study guide includes some art, craft, game, and cooking suggestions.

Students might be able to work through the study guides independently if their reading skills are adequate, although discussion enhances any literature study. Answer keys are found at the back of each book, so each study guide is self-contained aside from the novel itself. For independent study, all answer keys for grades four and up are now removable from the printed workbooks. All study guides are reproducible for your family.

Within the Progeny Press series are a number of study guides geared for the primary grades. They are for books such as *The Courage of*

Sarah Noble; Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie; The Long Way to a New Land; Ox-Cart Man; Sam the Minuteman; and Wagon Wheels.

Study guides geared for the upper elementary grades include such titles as *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever; The Cricket in Times Square; The Door in the Wall; Little House in the Big Woods; Sarah, Plain and Tall; and Charlotte's Web.*

Middle school titles stretch sometimes as low as fifth grade and up through eighth grade. Among them are *Amos Fortune, Free Man; Bridge to Terabithia; Carry On Mr. Bowditch; The Hiding Place; The Giver; Johnny Tremain; The Magician's Nephew; Maniac Magee; Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; and The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe.*

For high school level, there are a number of study guides for both novels and plays such as *The Red Badge of Courage, The Yearling, Heart of Darkness, Jane Eyre, Hamlet, Out of the Silent Planet, To Kill a Mockingbird, A Day No Pigs Would Die, The Great Gatsby, A Tale of Two Cities, and Perelandra.*

Guides for 109 books (with more being added each year) are available as printed books, on CD-ROM, or as downloadable PDF files. The CD-ROM and downloadable versions for grades four through twelve are fully interactive. The interactive versions include weblinks, but even more useful is the fact that students can answer multiple-choice questions and complete their written work entirely on the computer. However, you will probably still want to have students participate in discussions and complete some of the other optional activities that will not be done on the computer. The digital answer keys are in a separate file so you can keep the key on a separate computer if need be. The novels themselves are also available from Progeny Press.

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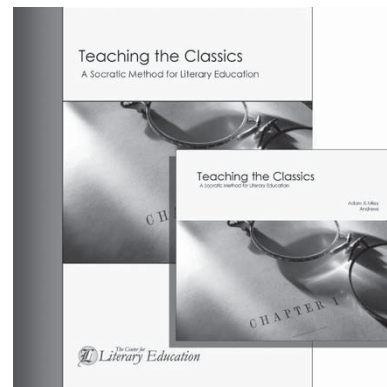
Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education

by Adam and Missy Andrews

The Center for Literary Education
3350 Beck Road
Rice, WA 99167
509-738-2837

www.centerforlit.com

DVDs and book - \$89, Ready Readers - \$29 each, Reading Roadmaps - print: \$39, download - \$29



Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education teaches parents and teachers how to understand and analyze literature

using Socratic questioning and discussion. This seminar consists of a book and a set of four DVD's.

I began my review by reading through the book. Halfway through the book, I began wondering why I would need the DVDs. The book was so well explained and provided concrete models to work with. I expected the DVDs to be redundant. To my surprise, they were not. On the DVDs, Adam Andrews presents a live seminar, covering the material in the book and much more. His goal in the seminar presentation is to ensure that parents and teachers leave feeling competent to apply the methodology themselves. I think he accomplishes this very well while also providing the sort of inspiration that makes you feel like you just can't wait to try this out.

The DVDs run about 5½ hours. I expect you might watch through the entire course, then come back and re-watch sections as you begin to work with the different teaching strategies with your students.

In the first half hour or so of the seminar, Andrews lays the foundation. This part could possibly be a little redundant for those already

very familiar with classical education, Socratic questions, and their use in conjunction with literature. But, it is absolutely essential for those unfamiliar with these things. Once past the introduction, Andrews introduces a method of tackling literature that applies to adult level fiction all the way down to children's story books. In fact, children's stories are generally easier to work with, so he recommends beginning (even with high school students) by analyzing a story written for children.

Three very useful appendices at the back of the book are referenced during the seminar. The first appendix contains "The Socratic List," an extensive, ten-page list of questions to use for discussions, arranged under broader categories of key questions. Questions are arranged from easier to more challenging levels of difficulty in each category. The teacher should select just a few of these questions to use for each discussion. Appendix B is an annotated, recommended reading list catalogued under three levels for young children through high school. Appendix C lists and defines literary devices students will learn to identify such as metaphors, alliterations, and onomatopoeias.

To help you get started, Andrews uses a number of literary works to demonstrate how to work through different aspects of analysis and discussion. Among this eclectic selection are "Paul Revere's Ride," *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Macbeth*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and "Casey at the Bat."

You can teach all types of literature once you've gone through this seminar. No other student books need to be purchased other than the literature itself. You might purchase (or borrow) one or more of the *Norton Anthologies*, *Cliff's Notes*, or other resources that will provide you with context and background information for a particular piece. But the reproducible "Story Chart" (for identifying plot, theme, characters, setting, and conflict)

and questions at the back of the *Teaching the Classics* book provide the rest of your "lesson plan."

You can begin to have Socratic discussions with younger children, assisting them in completing the Story Chart until they are able to do this on their own. Older students can follow up with essays or papers that further develop a particular topic. Andrews recommends *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style's* approach for teaching composition skills.) See that review in Chapter Eight.) The two programs fit together very well.

The Socratic dialogues generated by this type of learning are effective far beyond the knowledge of literature. They teach children how to think and how to express their thoughts. Within those dialogues, it will be up to the parent or teacher to introduce his or her own worldview perspective. Some of the questions naturally lead into that type of discussion, particularly with certain books. Andrews' recommended reading list includes a wide variety of books while shying away from current popular literature in favor of more classics that are likely to be great for discussion.

For those who want a stronger worldview emphasis, the *Worldview Supplement* has two DVD's and a 60-page book that expand ideas for worldview analysis.

Reading Roadmaps

Many parents have requested additional help in selecting literature and identifying themes. So Adam and Missy Andrews have also published *Reading Roadmaps: A Literary Scope & Sequence for K-12*. In this book, they lay out a number of options that range from daily or weekly literature lessons to "seasonal" lessons that are taught about four times a year. They identify their top recommendations for literature to be used and chart out plot, conflict, theme, aids/devices (e.g. allusion, parody, epic) for each literary work, arranging them by grade level. They also offer an alternative literary selection for each of the recommended

works. Additional helps at the back of the book address writing from literature, learning objectives for each grade level, grading, and the major historical periods for literature with lists of exemplary works and the authors. *Reading Roadmaps* simplifies the process of using *Teaching the Classics* by doing some of the work for you.

Ready Readers

And if that's not enough, the Center for Literary Education also offers *Ready Readers* that do even more of the work for you. You can teach just about any literary works you want using the format taught in *Teaching the Classics*. *Reading Roadmaps* helps you select titles and know the key elements to address. However, some parents prefer more guidance, especially if they tackle literature with which they are not very familiar. *Ready Readers* are teacher's guides for specific collections of books that provide solid guidance for teachers who want to teach literary skills with great literature.

Thus far there are four guides. *Ready Readers 1*, *Ready Readers 2*, and *Ready Readers 3* each cover from five to ten children's books. *Ready Readers: The Chronicles of Narnia* covers the seven books in that series.

While any of the *Ready Readers* might be used with students even up through high school, they each present literature that is suitable for children who have achieved a minimum reading level. *Reader Readers 1* might be used as young as kindergarten, since it uses ten children's books, most of which might be read in one sitting. For *Ready Readers 2*, children in at least third grade will be reading up to five books, including *The Trumpet of the Swan* and *Misty of Chincoteague*. For *Ready Readers 3*, they should be at least sixth grade since they will be reading up to five novels, including *Treasure Island* and *The Hobbit*. For *Ready Readers: The Chronicles of Narnia*, students should be in at least fifth grade. You need not read all of the books covered in a guide in one year. You can use whichever titles you like. The only guide

where the order in which books are read will matter is *Ready Readers: The Chronicles of Narnia*. Note that most of the books featured in *Ready Readers* appear on the lists in *Reading Roadmaps*.

Parents and teachers should first become familiar with *Teaching the Classics* methodology before using the *Ready Readers*. Guides all follow the *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation. Children identify the context, structure, and style of each work and complete a "Story Chart" graphic organizer for each book. A series of Socratic questions keyed to "The Socratic List" in *Teaching the Classics* is used to help students move from comprehension level to deeper thinking and analysis of the literary works.

The teacher's guides include overview summaries of plot, the conflict, setting, characters, and the theme for the benefit of the parent or teacher. Then they present the questions that help children to identify all of these things and more at a deeper level. For example, in the study of *Prince Caspian* in the fourth of the *Ready Readers*, the parent or teacher will ask, "What does the protagonist think is the most important thing in life?" The teacher's guide then provides you with a detailed answer so you will know what sort of response to expect from your child. Completed story charts are also included.

I love the approach of *Teaching the Classics*, and I'm very pleased that the Center for Literary Education has taken extra steps to make the methodology that much easier to use.

Summary

Socratic teaching requires more from the parent or teacher than most of the study guides for novels that are popular among homeschoolers. The teacher must read and be familiar with the literary works to be able to lead a discussion.

Once a parent or teacher becomes familiar with the techniques taught by *Teaching the Classics*, those techniques are likely to

become “second nature”—teaching this way will become easier and easier. And you are likely to enjoy it so much that you won’t mind the extra time it might take.

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Total Language Plus

by Barbara Blakey

Total Language Plus, Inc.

PO Box 12622

Olympia, WA 98508

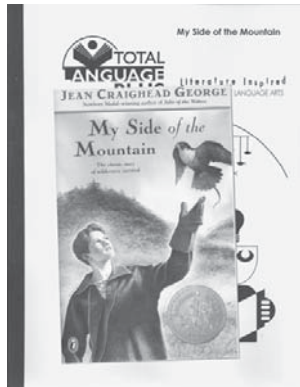
360-754-3660

email: customer@totallanguageplus.com

www.totallanguageplus.com

guides for grades 3-4 - \$25.95 each,

guides for grades 5 and up - \$21.95 each



Total Language Plus (TLP) novel study guides cover “...reading, comprehension, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, and analytical and critical thinking with a Christian perspective.” Each volume is both stu-

dent study guide and workbook for study of a companion novel. Study guides are written for various levels from third through twelfth grades. For example, the study of *Caddie Woodlawn* is suggested for grades five and six while *Anne of Green Gables* is for grades seven through nine.

Students read sections of the novel each week and answer comprehension questions. But that’s only one aspect of TLP. The week’s study also includes vocabulary work consisting of four lessons working with words drawn from the reading. There are also four activities for a list of spelling words drawn from the reading. Grammar worksheet activities include dictation exercises and grammatical work with the dictated material.

In the guides for fifth grade and up, lessons

dealing with grammar, writing, and spelling rules are for application and review rather than instruction. There are occasional exceptions in some of the high school level guides such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Around the World in 80 Days* which do include some instruction in composition and literary analysis. Aside from that, a basic understanding of grammar, spelling, and composition skills is assumed in the guides for grades five and up.

The TLP guides targeting grades three and four maintain intensive coverage of reading comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary, while they add detailed grammar and composition instruction along with some spelling rules. These levels also have students create and work with spelling and vocabulary flash cards in drills and games. Keep in mind that you might need to use other resources for grammar for these levels because grammar instruction is spotty; there is no set progression of skill or topic coverage. Because of the additional content, these guides are larger than the others.

In all of the guides, students create their own glossary toward the back of the book by entering definitions and parts of speech labels for their vocabulary words each week.

At the beginning of each unit are Enrichment/Writing suggestions. These always include writing activities, but other activities depend upon the book being studied. For example, the guide for *Around the World in Eighty Days* includes map and geography work. Some activities are not tied directly to any one chapter so you can use them when, if, and how you wish. You can select more activities to turn your study into an in-depth unit study or choose fewer and stick to the basics. You might use some of these for discussion and some for writing assignments. The activities are presented as suggestions rather than as fully developed plans, so they will require independent research and work beyond what is presented in the guide. TLP’s effectiveness in developing broader writing

skills is also dependent upon your selection of assignments from the Enrichment/Writing suggestions as well as upon your work with your students on the writing process within those assignments.

Study guides get more challenging at high school level, especially with the addition of extensive writing activities and oral readings. I am particularly impressed with the quality of the writing activities. They teach and stress organization and planning, while offering students ideas about the main points they might wish to include. This is very helpful since this seems to be a challenging area for many students, and many parents are unsure about how to develop these writing skills. TLP's writing assignments at upper levels should provide a significant part of your composition instruction.

In addition, the level of the vocabulary and spelling in advanced-level guides is quite challenging. The amount of both vocabulary and spelling practice is appropriate for high schoolers, although some students might need to work on additional vocabulary words that are at a less challenging level.

A "Note to Teachers and Students" at the beginning explains how to use each study guide. Answer keys are at the back of each book. Suggested responses are given for some questions, but parents really need to read the novels themselves to be able to fairly evaluate all student responses as well as to be prepared for discussions. Other than that, preparation time is minimal. Students will need access to a Bible, dictionary and thesaurus for some of their work.

The number of lessons in the various volumes of TLP ranges from five to eight, so some books are likely to take longer to study than others. Generally, a volume should take from nine to ten weeks to complete, so plan to complete about four per school year.

If impatient students want to read through the novel quickly rather than spread it out,

they can do so covering the comprehension and critical thinking questions as they go and working through the remainder of each week's lessons on a slower schedule.

You need to obtain the novel for each study, so TLP sells inexpensive copies. There are more than 50 guides for novels available at this time. Among novels covered for third and fourth grade are *Charlotte's Web*, *Pippi Longstocking*, *Shiloh*, *Sign of the Beaver*, and *The Whipping Boy*.

Among novels for which TLP has guides for fifth grades and up are *My Side of the Mountain*; *The Cricket in Times Square*; *The Light in the Forest*; *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; *A Wrinkle in Time*; *Johnny Tremain*; *The Bronze Bow*; *Wheel on the School*; *The Call of the Wild*; *The Hiding Place*; *The Swiss Family Robinson*; *Carry on, Mr. Bowditch*; *Anne of Green Gables*; *The Scarlet Letter*; *Oliver Twist*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*; and *Jane Eyre*.

Three additional anthology guides are also available. *American Literature: Nonfiction*, *American Literature: Poetry* and *American Literature: Short Stories* are intended to be used along with the guides for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Scarlet Letter* to comprise a high school level American Literature course. The *American Literature* guides include examples of poetry and short stories, but you will need to find most of the readings used along with the study guides within anthologies or on the internet. These guides include planning schedules for completing the modules that might take from six to ten weeks each depending upon the academic needs of students and the time available.

In all of the aforementioned guides, scripture verses are often used for dictation, and exercises have very general Christian references once in a while such as in the example sentence given for the word "approbation" which reads, "God bestows His approbation on all who seek to do His will" (*TLP: The Swiss Family Robinson*, p. 80).

TLP guides might serve as a supplement or a primary learning tool depending upon the needs of each student. It should be your primary resource for reading skills; you do not need another reading program. It complements other instruction in grammar, composition, and spelling. However, it might be your primary resource for composition at high school level.

Focus Guides (\$8.50 each), a new series of much smaller guides to novels, do not include spelling or grammar and have limited work with vocabulary. Instead, they focus on reading comprehension, substantial writing assignments, scripture applications with memory verses, and either a particular writing skill or a character trait. For example, the study of *Animal Farm* works on discernment, while the study of *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* pays special attention to descriptive writing. Guides are written for students about sixth grade level and above. These guides should each take only about three weeks to complete. There are more than ten *Focus Guides* at this point, and you might use a few of them as a significant part of your language arts program each year. The scripture applications give the *Focus Guides* more overt Christian content than the other TLP guides.

Junior/Senior High Level

Literary analysis becomes more important with older students. There are some excellent series that use high quality literature and do a good job teaching literary analysis and appreciation. Some of my personal favorites use the literature as a springboard for teaching Christian worldview.

Anthologies that contain collections of short stories, poetry, scripts, and excerpts from lengthier writings can be very helpful for exposing students to a broad range of literary types without overwhelming them with ones they find less appealing. It might also be an

easier way to introduce them to more variety in literary genres than you could cover with complete books. So sometimes it makes sense to select a literature anthology for study rather than a selection of complete books. Keep this in mind when making choices for your children. If they need broader exposure or if that better fits your educational goals, then you should use an anthology like the BJU Press literature courses or extra resources such as the *Norton Anthologies* (found at www.wwnorton.com but easily located at libraries or through online sources such as Amazon). If you would rather go in-depth with a few of the best books, then *Teaching the Classics*, *Old Western Culture* courses, or the novel study guides from Progeny Press or Total Language Plus might better suit your situation.

No matter which way you go, junior and senior high school students should be reading at least a few full-length books each year. Because this is so important, after the upper level reviews I have included a list of recommended reading for high school level (gathered from a number of sources) that might help you make selections. Notice that some of these books are covered by study guides in the Progeny Press and Total Language Plus series reviewed earlier in this chapter.

• • • • •

BJU Press literature courses for grades 7-12

BJU Press
Greenville, SC 29614
800-845-5731
www.bjup.com

Not all literature courses are created equal. Some seem to have selected reading material to meet multicultural or social goals rather than as examples of good literature. Others seem to focus on simple comprehension questions (e.g., identify the protagonist and the antagonist) and never get into “meaty” discussion questions that really engage students.

The BJU Press series for grades seven through twelve does a great job on both literary selections and worthwhile questions, especially if you are interested in developing a strong Christian worldview in your students. Courses in the series are *Explorations in Literature* (7th), *Excursions in Literature* (8th), *Fundamentals of Literature* (9th), *Elements of Literature* (10th), *American Literature* (11th), and *British Literature* (12th).

They feature an interesting mix of reading material. Many reading selections authored by non-Christians are included both for literary value and to help students learn how to identify different perspectives authors bring to their works. However, literary analysis and enjoyment is taught from a Protestant perspective; so much so in *American Literature* and *British Literature* that those with other religious beliefs will have trouble with some of the selected readings, discussion questions, and the “Scriptural Application” part of the lessons presented in the teacher editions. Application sections at all levels almost always relate the reading selection to biblical ideas or principles.

One of the main purposes of this series is to help students progress beyond reading simply for pleasure to enjoying reading for inspiration and wisdom. Discussion questions are one of the primary tools used to make that happen.

The discussion questions are particularly good in this series, and they can be used for either oral discussion or writing assignments. At junior high level, they focus more on recall and comprehension. *Fundamentals* and *Elements* shift toward more literary analysis, helping students grasp the fundamentals of critical interpretation and recognize the literary elements at work in a piece of literature. *American Literature* and *British Literature* draw upon the literary concepts taught in earlier grades and challenge students to think critically about the pieces they read—to analyze the text, to synthesize ideas, and to evaluate ideas from a biblical worldview. For example, *American*

Literature includes a short story “The Minister’s Black Veil” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Among the discussion questions are the following: “In your opinion, does Hooper’s self-imposed isolation represent self-denial for the edification of others, or is it symbolic of misdirected religious zeal? Discuss Hawthorne’s theme in light of I John 1:8-10” (p. 306).

Parents and teachers need to be familiar with the readings so they can lead discussions. While students can do a certain amount of work independently, parents will need to invest some time preparing for each lesson. Teacher editions provide background, analysis, and suggested answers, so even teachers without a background in literature can teach these courses. As with all literature anthologies, parents and teachers are not expected to use every selection. Choose some from each section to fit your own goals and time schedule.

Each course includes a student text and a two-volume, spiral-bound teacher edition. Teacher editions have images of reduced student pages. Below the images of student pages and in the side margins is valuable teaching information. Also, words, sentences, or paragraphs in the reduced student pages of the teacher’s edition are highlighted in different colors to match corresponding colored margin notes for the teacher. These highlighted sections can indicate a point of discussion, a definition, an example of a literary element, or a cross-reference.

Teacher editions for *American Literature* and *British Literature* provide reproducible, supplemental activity pages and teaching helps located at the back of the book. Teacher editions for *Explorations*, *Excursions*, *Fundamentals*, and *Elements* include a Teacher’s Toolkit CD-ROM (inside the back cover) with teacher support materials, such as worksheets, graphic organizers, reading quizzes, writing rubrics, and standardized test practice in reading and vocabulary.

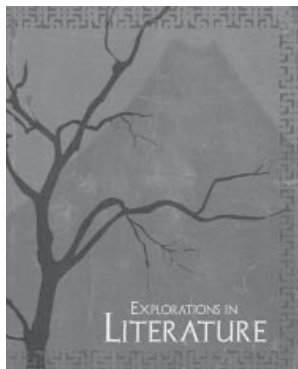
Tests and answer keys for each course can

be ordered separately, but subject kits for all courses include tests and answer keys along with a student text and the teacher edition.

**Explorations in Literature,
Fourth Edition**

subject kit \$137

Explorations in Literature and *Excursions in Literature* courses for junior high are similar in format, so these first two paragraphs describe both courses. Lessons in the teacher edition follow a format of overview, objectives, potential problems (e.g., objections to authors portraying animals as having human qualities), introductory discussion, the reading, analysis, application, and additional activities. Suggestions for journal writing are given. Vocabulary words with definitions are inserted right into the text of each piece in the student text.



There are questions at the end of each literary piece (or section of a piece for lengthier writings), and these are preceded by an insert called the "Thinking Zone." Thinking Zones are visually-separated inserts

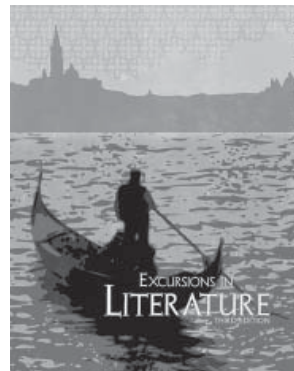
that might take up about a third of a page. Thinking Zones highlight key literary elements and show how they have been implemented in the selection students have just read. They feel more like sidebars than instructional material although they accomplish the latter's purpose. Questions that follow are thought provoking, addressing literal, critical, interpretive, and appreciative elements. Each unit has a review in the student textbook. Reviews are tests that include multiple-choice, true/false, matching, and short-answer questions along with one or two essay questions.

Explorations in Literature, written for seventh grade, covers a wide range of themes while

emphasizing character. Content sections are titled Courage, Nature and Man, Generosity, Our Land, Humility, and Family. While some selections are by well-known authors (e.g., Carl Sandburg, O. Henry, Charles Finney, James Thurber, and Gary Paulsen), most authors are not readily recognized. Nevertheless, both literary quality and appeal for young teens are high. Selections are primarily prose, but there is also some poetry.

Excursions in Literature, Third Edition

subject kit \$137



See the description in the first two paragraphs under *Explorations in Literature* since the format of these two texts is similar. The unifying theme of this eighth-grade text is a Christian's journey through life, including

choices he must face. Illustrations from scripture appear at the end of each unit. The text continues the character emphasis of the seventh-grade book. Units are titled Choices, Friends, Viewpoints, Adventures, Discoveries, and Heroes and Villains. Some authors and writings (or excerpts) included are *Ben-Hur* by Lew Wallace, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, "The Banks of the Sacramento" by Jack London, *The Princess and Curdie* by George MacDonald, and "Make Me Thy Fuel" by Amy Carmichael. A short novel, *In Search of Honor*, is studied in the final unit; it is included within the textbook.

**Fundamentals of Literature,
Second Edition**

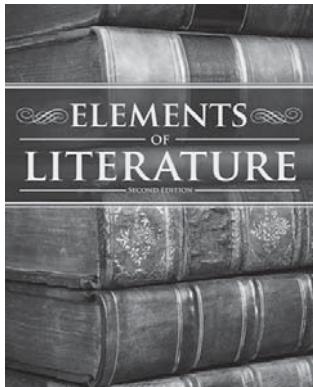
subject kit \$142, Cyrano De Bergerac DVD - \$14.95

Suggested for grade nine, this textbook is the foundation for the study of literature throughout high school. It teaches conflict, character,

theme, structure, point of view, and moral tone through both traditional and contemporary selections. Representative authors are Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Shakespeare, Carl Sandburg, Sir Walter Scott, John Donne, and Saki (H.H. Munro). The drama *Cyrano De Bergerac* is also included within the text, but an optional DVD presentation of the story is available separately.

Elements of Literature, Second Edition

subject kit \$137, Romeo and Juliet DVD \$14.95



This text, suggested for tenth grade, teaches literary analysis at a more challenging level than does *Fundamentals of Literature*. It delves into topics such as imaginative comparison, sound and syntax, allusion and symbol, and

irony through literary selections from genres such as fiction, poetry, biography, and drama. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is included for study within the text. You might want to use the optional DVD of selected scenes from a BJU Press production of *Romeo and Juliet*. The DVD also has director's explanations of what has happened leading up to each scene.

American Literature, Updated Second Edition

subject kit \$142

This text, written for eleventh grade, covers American literature from the colonial period up through the twentieth century. Representative authors are William Bradford, Benjamin Franklin, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Samuel Clemens, Thornton Wilder, and Bruce Catton. Selections are organized by historical literary periods, while addressing some of the philosophical movements that influenced literature. There

is significant discussion of the worldviews reflected by authors and their works.

British Literature, Second Edition

subject kit \$142, Macbeth DVD \$14.95

This twelfth-grade course covers eight literary periods from Old English to Modern. Selections are often chosen to illustrate philosophical and cultural issues from various perspectives. Religious developments receive far more attention here than they do in most other British literature texts. Representative authors include John Wycliffe, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas More, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Robert Browning. The play *Macbeth* is also included for study. An optional DVD of *Macbeth* is available.

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Old Western Culture: A Christian Approach to the Great Books

by Wesley Callihan

Roman Road Media, LLC

739 S. Hayes St.

Moscow, ID 83843

208-596-6936

www.romanroadsmedia.com

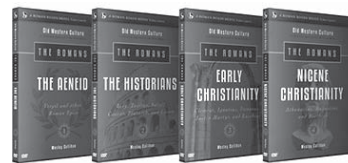
DVDs: \$56 per unit or \$224 for all four

units, Blue Ray DVDs: \$62 per unit;

one-year online streaming subscription

for complete course (four units) - \$224;

printed student workbook - \$12 each



Old Western Culture: A Christian Approach to the Great Books will

eventually be a series of four Great Books courses for high school students. Thus far only the first two courses, *The Greeks* and *The Romans*, are available. The next two courses will be *Christendom* and *The Moderns*.

The *Old Western Culture* video course series makes it possible for students to get a Great Books education through independent study using video lectures, student workbooks, and

term papers along with the literary works. This is high-quality classical education although it lacks the element of Socratic discussion with other students and a mentor. Each completed course should earn a student two high school credits: one for literature, one-half credit for history, and one-half credit for philosophy or theology.

Students will read many classic works of literature as they become familiar with some of the most influential books that have shaped western civilization.

Classic Christian works will also be included in the series, including some not on the Great Books list. In the introduction to *The Greeks*, course teacher Wesley Callihan presents a great explanation of how the Enlightenment influenced the generally-accepted lists of the Great Books, and resulted in the exclusion of many classic Christian works—some of which he will be teaching in this course.

Each course is presented in four units, with 12 lessons per unit. It should take about nine weeks to complete each unit, although an alternate schedule shows how each unit might be completed in as little as seven weeks. The amount of reading is about 30 to 40 pages a day with the nine-week schedule, so I would be very cautious about shortening the schedule.

Each unit has its own theme. In *The Greeks*, the four units are “The Epics,” “Drama and Lyric,” “The Histories,” and “The Philosophers.” In *The Romans*, the four units are “The Aeneid,” “The Historians,” “Early Christianity,” and “Nicene Christianity.” You can see from these unit titles that the courses delve into history, religion, the arts, and philosophy as well as literature.

For each unit there is a set of four DVDs that comes in a case—four sets of DVDs per course. You can choose standard DVDs or Blue-Ray. There is also a streaming option that you might consider.

There are separate student and teacher books for each unit. The first DVD of each

unit includes two PDF files: one for the student workbook and one for the teacher edition. The teacher edition is the same as the student workbook but with answers overprinted. If you prefer, you may purchase a print edition of the workbook that has the student pages at the front and the answer key presented separately at the back. You can also download these files from the publisher’s website, something you will need to do if you select the streaming option.

Each unit begins with one or two introductory lectures. Students answer questions in the workbook after watching each lecture. After the introduction, students immediately begin to read the assigned pages in the work being studied. They have “Reading Questions” in their workbook to answer before they watch the next video lecture. Video lessons continue along with both Lecture and Reading questions. The questions include some comprehension questions, but they also pose more challenging questions that get into literary analysis and the author’s intent.

“Discussion Topics” show up at the end of most lessons. These might be used for discussion if someone is available with whom to discuss them, but they might also be used as essay assignments. For each unit, students will write a 750- to 1200-word term paper, and some of the Discussion Topics would be great for those papers. For example, one “topic” in the “Drama and Lyric” unit is, “Why is pride such an important theme in Greek literature? If hubris was a fatal flaw, then why was humility not considered a virtue?” (p. 24).

A Christian outlook is assumed as is evident in questions such as, “Of which book of the Bible do some passages in [Hesiod’s] *The Works and Days* remind you?” (“Drama and Lyric,” p. 34).

Lectures, which are all presented by Wesley Callihan, make readily apparent his complete familiarity with each of these works. He speaks comfortably without notes as he provides

background and commentary to help students understand each work at a much deeper level than if they read the books on their own. Callihan is a gifted teacher—so much so that I think parents might want to watch the lectures along with their students for their own enlightenment.

Lectures include images of art works that relate to the stories or the period under discussion. Within each DVD set, you get a full-color booklet of about 20 pages with relatively small images of just some of the featured artwork, each accompanied by commentary. Students might simply enjoy the art work as interesting graphics with their lectures, but if you wish you can expand the study into the art to add another dimension, and probably another half-credit. These booklets can also be downloaded from the publisher's site (www.romanroadsmedia.com/materials/) for free, and you can enlarge images for better viewing with the downloaded files. This allows students to see the full-color details of each work for more in-depth art exploration.

Free final exams are available to download at the publisher's website. Two versions are made available. If students score lower than 90%, they should take the alternate version a few days later.

The course includes a note about the questionable content in some of the course material such as mature themes, sexual immorality, worship of Greek and Roman gods, and graphic battles in the literature plus nudity in classical artwork. Parents should decide in advance whether or not they want their children exposed to these things, and if so, how they might discuss them.

At appropriate points, Callihan suggests his favorite translations of each of the works, but he also has links to free online versions of each work even though these might not include the best translations. Nevertheless, students can access all of the assigned reading material without having to purchase anything

more. (Sometimes, as with *The Greeks: The Histories*, digital versions of the recommended readings are already included on the DVDs.) Also, Roman Roads Media has produced a companion text titled *The Roman Roads Reader for Drama and Lyric* (to accompany *The Greeks: Drama and Lyric*) that covers seven out of the ten required authors for that unit. Keep this in mind rather than purchasing all of the resources for that unit separately.

Roman Roads Media has web pages for each published unit with links to the required literary works plus titles and authors of recommended translations. There are sometimes links to free audio-book versions. These web pages also include free supplemental resources such as a chart of the Greek and Roman gods.

For many years, I've believed that it should be possible to provide study of the Great Books for those unable to participate in group classes either in person or online. Great Books enthusiasts rightly are concerned about the value of the discussion process in learning. But I would rather have something available that makes the Great Books accessible to more students even if it does not conform to the ideal. I think Wesley Callihan has done a fantastic job of providing such an option, and doing it in such a way that students engage with great literary works at a deep level and begin to ponder some of the most important life questions. His inclusion of Christian works and a Christian perspective might even make this an improvement on some "live" Great Books courses.

Note: *Christendom* is due in Spring of 2015 and *The Moderns* in Autumn of 2015.

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Recommended Reading for High School Level Literature

The following are taken primarily from core literature recommendations for high school students, but I have added a few titles I think important from a Christian perspective (indicated with [c]). Some of the listed titles are recommended by educational authorities but are not necessarily titles I personally would recommend.

- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and other works by Mark Twain
- *The Aeneid* of Virgil
- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll
- *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque
- *All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren
- *Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*, and other works by Leo Tolstoy
- *Anne Frank: Diary of A Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *Anne of Green Gables* and other titles by Lucy Maud Montgomery
- *Billy Budd*, *Moby Dick*, and other works by Herman Melville
- *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
- *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown
- *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer
- "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and other works by Alfred Lord Tennyson
- *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok
- *Christy* by Catherine Marshall
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- *Cry the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton
- *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and other works by Charles Dickens
- *The Death of Socrates* and other works by Plato
- "The Devil and Daniel Webster" and other works by Stephen Vincent Benet
- *The Divine Comedy* by Dante
- *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes
- *Exodus* by Leon Uris
- *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway
- *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck
- *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Pearl*, *The Red Pony*, *Of Mice and Men*, and other works by John Steinbeck
- *The Great Divorce*, *Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, and other non-fiction by C.S. Lewis [c]
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Gulliver's Travels* and other works by Jonathan Swift
- *The Guns of August* by Barbara W. Tuchman
- *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and other works by William Shakespeare
- "The Hollow Men" and other works by T.S. Eliot
- *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and other works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer
- *In His Steps* by Charles M. Sheldon
- *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison
- *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte
- "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and other works by Washington Irving
- *Lés Miserables* by Victor Hugo
- *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass
- *The Light in the Forest* by Conrad Richter
- *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott
- *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt
- *The Marquis' Secret* and other works by George MacDonald (in updated versions)
- *The Martian Chronicles* and other works by Ray Bradbury
- *Men of Iron* by Howard Pyle

- *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson
 - *1984* and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell
 - “Oedipus Rex,” “Antigone,” and other plays by Sophocles
 - *Okay for Now* by Gary D. Schmidt
 - *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn
 - “Ozymandias” and other works by Percy Bysshe Shelley
 - *Paradise Lost* by John Milton [c]
 - *Perelandra*, *Out of the Silent Planet*, and other fictional works by C.S. Lewis
 - *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan
 - “The Pit and the Pendulum” and other works by Edgar Allen Poe
 - *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
 - *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli
 - *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman
 - *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw
 - *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
 - “The Road Not Taken” and other works by Robert Frost
 - *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe
 - *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne
 - *Silas Marner* by George Elliott
 - *The Spy* and other works by James Fenimore Cooper
 - *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein
 - “Tiger, Tiger” and other poems by William Blake
 - *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells
 - *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
 - *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, and other works by Robert Louis Stevenson
 - *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith
 - *The Trilogy of the Ring* by J.R.R. Tolkein
 - *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and other works by Jules Verne
 - *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe
 - *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte
 - *The Yearling*, *Cross Creek*, and other works by Marjorie K. Rawlings
-

Obviously, the above list is not comprehensive. You might also want to focus more on the Great Books, only a few of which are included in the above list. Websites where you can find lists of the Great Books are on page 16.

CHAPTER

8

Language Arts: Grammar and Composition

“Language Arts” is a broad term that encompasses all areas of English communication. Thus, reading, phonics, grammar, composition, handwriting, spelling, and vocabulary are all part of language arts. However, in the world of curriculum each of these subjects is often isolated from the others. While focusing on a single area can be useful at times, it often makes sense to integrate the various language arts areas with each other. You might want to use resources such as *Total Language Plus* study guides for novels (reviewed in Chapter Seven) that develop various language arts skills in relation to each novel that is read. Or maybe you will choose a unit study program (such as those reviewed in Chapter Thirteen) that integrates language arts with other subjects such as science and history.

Since I have already covered reading and phonics recommendations in Chapter Seven, in this chapter, I will present my Top Picks for composition and grammar. Then you will find my Top Picks for spelling, vocabulary, and handwriting in Chapter Nine. I combine composition and grammar resources in this chapter since these two subject areas are often combined within language arts courses. Also, they are usually the primary focus of language arts once past the beginning reading stage. Reviews of my Top Picks are in alphabetical order, but notice that some resources are just for grammar, some just for composition, and some for both.

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A Beka Book Language series

A Beka Book

PO Box 19100

Pensacola, FL 32523

877-223-5226

www.abeka.com

I include A Beka's *Language* series in my Top Picks with some hesitation. I know that some homeschoolers have strong negative feelings about these books. However, I think they are very useful when used with discretion. That means parents pick and choose how much of which activities to use within each book.

On the plus side, A Beka *Language* does a thorough job with grammar instruction. I've yet to find anything I like better, especially at upper grade levels. Over the years, as A Beka has published new editions of these worktexts, they have beefed up instruction in composition skills. However, A Beka's composition instruction remains pedestrian in comparison to other available options.

Grammar and broader language instruction is A Beka's forté, and their approach will be especially appealing to parents who want their children to know all the ins and outs of grammar, including sentence diagramming.

As good as the grammar coverage is, it does repeat much of the same material from year to year. So you might use A Beka for alternating years. For example, use A Beka one year, then the next year focus on composition with one of the other great resources available, while using *Daily Grams* (reviewed under *Easy Grammar*), *Editor in Chief* (www.criticalthinking.com), or another such tool to review grammar skills.

For first and second grade A Beka closely integrates grammar and composition instruction within their curriculum for teaching phonics, reading, spelling, and handwriting. It is possible to use only the *Language* books (especially *Language 2*) for these early grades apart from the rest of the curriculum, but since that is not the publisher's intent, I do not encourage you to do so. A Beka *Language* books stand on

their own for third grade and above, so only those courses are the focus of this review.

A Beka is well known for strong Christian and patriotic content in their books. They incorporate these topics throughout their exercises. For example, in *Language 3*, a lesson about capitalizing the first words of sentences has five practice sentences that, taken together, read as a paragraph about the American flag. In a lesson on quotation marks, one child asks his friend, "Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior?" A punctuation exercise uses the sentence "D.L. Moody was a great preacher." Bible stories are frequently used in the same manner.

All books except those for grades 11 and 12 are in worktext format; instruction and exercises are in a single, consumable student book. This makes it easy for students to complete most of their work independently.

An answer key for each book has answers overprinted on reproduced student pages. Books for grades one through six are printed in full color with appealing illustrations. Upper level books are very businesslike in appearance, printed in two colors with no illustrations.

Separate student quiz/test books and answer keys are available for every level. A Beka also has either *Homeschool Language Arts Curriculum/Lesson Plans* or *Parent Guide and Student Daily Lessons* for each grade level. Both have detailed lesson plans and extra teaching ideas. Homeschool editions of these teacher's books for each level coordinate spelling, vocabulary, handwriting, reading, and language lessons from A Beka books for all these subjects—not just language. These teacher's books are not essential, and I suspect most homeschoolers will be able to function well without them.

For grades one through six, A Beka offers a parent kit and a child kit for each grade level for language arts. These kits include all of the resources for all of language arts (grammar and composition, reading, spelling, etc.). The kits

might be helpful if you are using A Beka for all of your language arts, but not otherwise.

The book titles in A Beka's language series are a little confusing. *Language 1, 2, and 3* are for grades 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Then *Language A, B, and C* are for grades 4, 5, and 6. *Grammar and Composition I through IV* are for grades 7 through 10.

For grades 11 and 12, A Beka provides a single *Handbook of Grammar and Composition* and companion workbooks for each year. Instruction is in the handbook, while practice activity is done in the workbooks and separate writing assignments.

I provide brief descriptions of each level below, but you can access a detailed scope and sequence at www.abeka.com/HomeSchool/ScopeAndSequence.aspx.

Language 3

student worktext - \$16.35, answer key - \$21.50, curriculum - \$40, test book - \$5.75, test key - \$11

Language 3 reviews beginning grammar skills such as punctuation, capitalization, suffixes, and proper word usage that are typically taught in resources for this level. It also introduces parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives), simple diagramming, and beginning composition skills.

The *Language Arts 3 Curriculum* book adds suggestions for developing composition skills not found in the worktext, so if you are relying on this course for composition as well as grammar coverage, you might want to purchase the *Curriculum* book. However, instruction and assignments are in the student worktext, so there is some composition coverage without the *Curriculum* book.

A "Handbook of Rules and Definitions" toward the end of the student book is handy for reference. Periodic quizzes are in the worktext.

It is possible to work only from the student worktext, but you should probably also purchase the answer key. A separate student test booklet and answer key are also available.

God's Gift of Language A (grade 4)

student worktext - \$16.60, answer key - \$21.50, curriculum - \$35, quiz/test book - \$5.75, quiz/test key - \$11

Most instructional information is found in the worktext. Compared to the rest of the series, *Language A, B, and C* do a more thorough job on composition skills. Consequently, the first third of *Language A* focuses on the writing process, although it also includes mechanics such as punctuation, abbreviation, capitalization, and possessives in this section.

The second section teaches all eight parts of speech along with traditional sentence diagramming. The third section concentrates on word usage and dictionary skills. Review exercises or quizzes (depending upon how you choose to use them) are at the end of each section. One quibble: When they teach letter writing and addressing envelopes, they spell out state names in addresses which is unacceptable to the post office.

A set of Language Charts (\$11) is also available. These are small "posters" with the steps of the writing process, state of being verbs, and other helpful items that you might post in your "classroom" area. The same charts are used for grades four through six.

God's Gift of Language B (grade 5)

student worktext - \$16.60, answer key - \$21.50, curriculum - \$35, quiz/test book - \$5.75, quiz/test key - \$11



Both writing and grammar skills receive comprehensive coverage in *Language B*. Writing instruction covers topic sentences, paragraphs, and transitions. Outlining, taking notes, and preparing bibliographies

are also taught in the context of report writing. Students complete a library research

report, including use of note cards and creation of a bibliography.

Capitalization, punctuation, word usage, dictionary skills, and parts of speech are reviewed extensively, with more complex concepts added to those taught last year. The text also introduces complements and the use of a thesaurus.

God's Gift of Language C (grade 6)

student worktext - \$16.60, answer

key - \$21.50, curriculum - \$35,

quiz/test book - \$5.75, quiz/test key - \$11

Language C covers most of the same material we find in *Language B* but at more challenging levels. Grammar, composition, and mechanics are thoroughly reviewed. If your child has studied grammar in a hit-or-miss fashion up to this point, this is a good book for reviewing and making sure that everything has been covered. However, it will probably be overwhelming for a child who has studied little to no grammar. While this worktext is intended for sixth graders, the "C" designation allows you to use it for an older child if need be since the grade level is not obvious.

The writing process is taught with explanations and examples. However, instruction moves quickly from composing a paragraph to writing a research paper using note cards and including a bibliography. As with grammar instruction, there is some review, but it is likely to be too challenging for the student who has not already done a significant amount of writing. "The Student Writer's Handbook" is a helpful reference aid placed at the end of the text. Note that cursive rather than printed words are used in diagramming examples.

Grammar and Composition, Books I – IV (grades 7-10)

worktexts - \$18.05 each, teacher keys - \$21

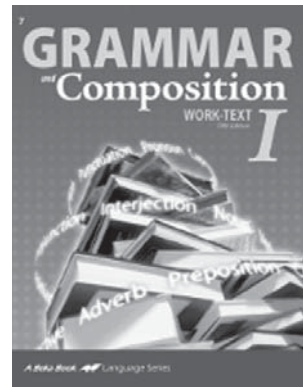
each, quiz/test books - \$6.75 each, answer

keys - \$10.75 each, either homeschool curriculum or parent guides - \$17 each

These worktexts offer thorough review of grammar with fairly comprehensive coverage of writing skills. A significant handbook (more

than 75 pages in *Book IV*) is at the back of each book for handy reference.

Instruction is presented in a rules-and-explanation format in boxes at the beginning of each lesson. In the composition lessons, the explanation sometimes extends to a few pages. This is followed by practice and application exercises.



Students who have been studying grammar every year will find these books repetitive. However, those who have neglected grammar for a few years should find them comprehensive enough to catch up on missed

concepts. Since these books review parts of speech, punctuation, capitalization, types of sentences, diagramming, library skills, and other concepts they need to know, students are certain to cover anything they might have missed or forgotten in regard to grammar.

Composition skills begin with paragraph structure, outlines, improving style, writing summaries, book reports, and research papers in the first two books. The series continues through writing projects such as critical book reviews, character sketches, and research papers in the fourth book. From the first book on, lessons on writing research papers include instructions for footnotes and endnotes as well as how to document digital sources. The fourth level adds an unusual but helpful section on diction.

If you purchase only the student texts and teacher keys, you might have difficulty figuring out how to use the writing instruction and assignments. If this is the case, you might want the *Homeschool Curriculum/Lesson Plans* for grades seven or eight or the *Parent Guide and Student Daily Lessons* books for grades nine or ten. The *Homeschool Curriculum/Lesson Plans*

are intended for parental use but could easily be referred to by students. They list daily activities and page numbers so it is easy to see what needs to be done each day. I really like the *Parent Guide and Student Daily Lessons* books for ninth and tenth grades since they are written for students to use. These include detailed, daily lesson plan assignments for students. Students can use them to check off assignments as they complete them and to keep track of time spent each day. Parents have a line to initial when they have checked each day's assignment. Separate test and test key booklets are available.

Handbook of Grammar and Composition plus Workbooks V and VI (grades 11-12)
handbook - \$19.40, workbooks - \$9.05 each, answer keys - \$11.75 each, test/quiz booklets - \$6.75 each, answer keys to tests/quizzes - \$10.75 each, *Homeschool English Parent Guide and Student Daily Lessons* - \$17 each

Workbook V is for 11th grade and *Workbook VI* is for 12th, while the *Handbook* is the primary instructional resource used for both. The *Handbook* presents numbered rules with examples in a more comprehensive fashion than some other handbooks since some do not include examples. This is an excellent handbook with thorough coverage of both grammar and composition, including research papers and up-to-date information on footnotes and citations. Grammar coverage, which includes sentence diagramming, is extensive. The companion *Workbooks V* and *VI* direct students to study particular sections in the *Handbook*, then apply what they have learned in exercises or writing activities.

You will want the answer keys to the student workbooks, but the test books and their answer keys are optional. The *Homeschool English Parent Guide and Student Daily Lessons* should be very useful. These are daily, detailed lesson plans that tell the student exactly what to do. There are lines for students to check off

assignments as they complete them; lines for them to note time started, time completed, and total time; and lines for parents to initial when they have checked the student work.

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Analytical Grammar

by Robin Finley and Erin Karl

Analytical Grammar

7615 Vista Del Rey Lane

Raleigh, NC 27613

919-783-0795

www.analyticalgrammar.com

JAG or *JAG Mechanics*: student and teacher book set - \$39.95 each, student books - \$19.95 each, DVDs - \$19.95 each

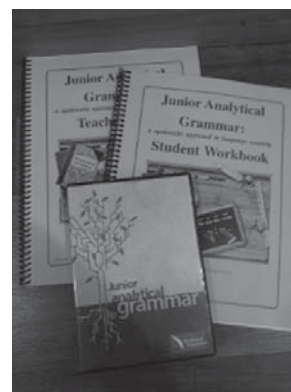
AG: student and teacher book set - \$94.95
student book - \$49.95, DVD set - \$39.95

AG Reinforcement & Review - \$19.95

High School Grammar Reinforcement books - \$19.95 each

Robin Finley drew upon her years of teaching experience to come up with very practical course material for covering English grammar. *Junior Analytical Grammar (JAG)* and *Junior Analytical Grammar: Mechanics (JAGM)* are appropriate for fourth or fifth graders, while *Analytical Grammar (AG)* should be used for students in grades six and up.

JAG might be completed in as few as eleven

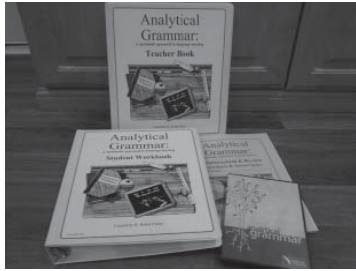


weeks. It focuses on parts of speech and syntax (word functions within a sentence), introducing sentence diagramming early in the process. While it also has writing assignments at the end of each lesson, it does not cover

punctuation, usage issues such as verb tenses and comparative forms of adjectives, dictionary skills, comprehensive composition skills, and other language art skills. *JAGM* can be

used to cover punctuation, capitalization, and usage when students have completed *JAG* (or even for older students just after the first part of *AG*.) With fifteen week-long units, *JAGM* can be used in the same year as *JAG*.

AG is more comprehensive than *JAG*. It reviews and expands upon *JAG* in the first ten units. These ten units should be used during a single school year (likely sixth grade). You can continue that same year with the next section (units 11 through 17) which cover sentence structure, clauses (adjective, adverb, and verbal), and appositives. Or you might save this section for the next school year.



Units 18 through 28 of *AG* teach punctuation. Of course, students will have learned some basic punctuation before

this point, but Finley saves intensive punctuation instruction until this point because she says, “students must understand the grammar of the English language before they can be expected to internalize rules of punctuation.” The final lessons in units 29 through 35 deal with specialized usage issues such as pronoun-antecedent agreement, who/whom, and errors regarding adverbs and adjectives. Although the book is divided into its three “seasons” to spread out over two or three years, an older student (grade nine or higher) can easily get through the entire program in less than a full school year.

Lessons follow a common format in both books, beginning with an introductory page or more of “notes” that teach the lesson. The parent/teacher should go through this material with the students, especially in *JAG*. Three exercises follow. Students should complete only one of these per day, going over each completed exercise with you before going on to the next one. A writing assignment follows the

exercise, and then each unit ends with a test. Complete grading information is provided for the teacher. Finley thought out all of the difficulties in grading sentence diagrams as well as writing assignments, and she has come up with easy ways for parents to score student work.

These courses have a combination of special features that set them apart from others:

- Students learn parts of speech and syntax at the same time.
- Diagramming is a key component.
- A sentence parsing process is used that is similar to a flow chart approach with questions and answers.
- Grammar is taught thoroughly so students need not repeat the same material year after year. It is taught in context so students are more likely to understand and remember it.
- “Notes” pages remain in student books while exercise pages are removed. The student ends up with a reference notebook at the end of the course.

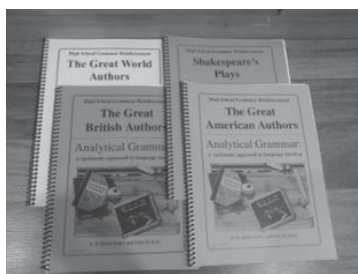
Since Finley suggests taking a break from *AG* after the first ten units, she has created a *Reinforcement & Review (RR)* book with exercises for students to continue sharpening their grammar and writing skills. As with *AG*, *RR* is divided into sections. The first 18 worksheets use excerpts from well-known literary works and are intended for students to use, one every other week, during the break from doing *AG*. Students parse sentences, write paraphrases, then parse AND diagram sentences using all of the concepts taught in units 1 through 10. Answer keys for these worksheets are in this same book. The next section in *RR* is intended as a week-long review after the break between units 10 and 11 for those who need to do a little more intensive work before continuing on into the next section of *AG*. Students review their notes pages from *AG* then complete these worksheets in *RR*. At the end, ten more reinforcement lessons like those at the beginning of *RR* are to be used during the next scheduled break between units 17 and

18. These are higher-level reinforcements that cover everything from unit 1 through unit 17. While RR is not essential, I think breaking up the AG course with the RR worksheets will be more interesting for students in addition to giving them more practice.

A few additional notes on AG: while this book has composition activities, it isn't intended for composition instruction such as how to structure a paragraph or essay. Also note that although the AG course is expensive, you will be using it over at least two years. While AG isn't a specifically Christian curriculum, one of the literary selections is Psalm 23, and I spotted one sample sentence that mentioned Jesus and His disciples. Books are all plastic-spiral bound.

Overall, these courses do a thorough job with grammar and diagramming and are easy for both teacher and student to use. However, you might need to work through sentence analysis and diagramming together with some students more than others. Optional teaching DVDs are available for JAG, JAGM, and AG; these feature Robin Finley or Erin Karl providing instruction for each lesson and demonstrating a few practice sentences. The DVDs can lighten the load for parents. In the end, I think most students will appreciate the efficiency of this approach even if it is challenging.

High School Grammar Reinforcements



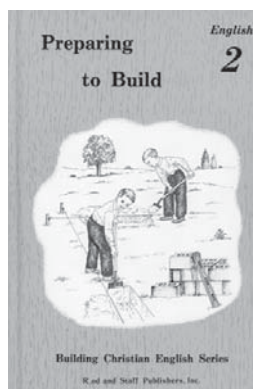
them to have some sort of review or practice on skills.

Robin Finley and Erin Karl have teamed up to create four books for this purpose. Each book has activities that reinforce sentence parsing and diagramming, grammar analysis,

punctuation, and usage. With 18 lessons per book, you would use approximately one lesson every two weeks for a school year. Each book also contains its own answer key. You might select a book to coordinate with literature studies. The titles are *The Great American Authors*, *The Great British Authors*, *Shakespeare's Plays*, and *The Great World Authors*. Sentences and passages with which students work all provide information about authors and their works that is readable for its own sake—something we rarely find in grammar resources.

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Building Christian English series



Rod and Staff
Publishers
PO Box 3
14193 Hwy. 172
Crockett, KY 41413
606-522-4348

The *Building Christian English* series for grades two through ten is excellent for those who prefer a formal academic approach and don't need any fluff. Comprehensive coverage, clear explanations, examples, and plenty of practice provide a solid, if unexciting, foundation in the language arts. A great deal of scriptural content as well as frequent references to farm life also serve to differentiate this program's content from most others. Some of the examples and writing assignments reflect Mennonite life so strongly that non-Mennonite children might have trouble relating to them. Despite these possible drawbacks, instruction in grammar and other language arts is better than in most other programs.

Books are all hardbound, printed in black-and-white with minimal illustrations. Children do not write in the textbooks, so they can be reused. But that means that students need to write their answers and compositions in

a notebook. The teacher's manuals include teaching instructions plus answers to student exercises. Lessons require teacher involvement and allow for some independent work, increasing the latter at higher grade levels.

Like other classroom-designed texts, these books include extra busywork for classroom purposes, so it is not necessary for children to do all exercises. Both oral and written exercises are included within each lesson. The amount of writing might be too much for some students, especially at the younger levels. If this is the case, more exercises can be done orally or skipped altogether.

Original composition work is included, but there is a minimal amount in comparison to other written exercises until students reach ninth and tenth grades. Answers, oral reviews and written quizzes are in the teacher's manuals.

For grades three through eight there is a set of extra worksheets (\$3.25 each level). Grades two through eight have test booklets (\$2.25 each). Tests are combined with editing worksheets for assessment for grades nine and ten. While worksheet sets are essential for levels nine and ten, for other levels they provide additional work rather than serve as the primary source of student exercises.

Building Christian English 2, Preparing to Build

student book - \$12.95,
teacher's manual - \$15.95

In keeping with its subtitle, this book lays groundwork by providing substantial work in both composition and grammar. Coverage is very broad and comprehensive for a second grade text. Composition work includes basic sentence structure up through paragraph development and writing poetry. Grammar includes parts of speech (nouns, verbs, pronouns, and adjectives) and usage. Other chapters work on alphabetical order, dictionary use, synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms. Diagramming is not introduced until the third grade.

Building Christian English 3, Beginning Wisely

student book - \$12.95,
teacher's manual - \$15.95

This level introduces nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs as well as noun usage as subject or direct object. Diagramming is taught along with each part of speech. Dictionary work, capitalization, punctuation, and oral communication are also taught. At this level, the teacher's manual states that the worksheets, oral reviews, and written quizzes are not required for the course.

Building Christian English 4, Building with Diligence

student book - \$15.95,
teacher's manual - \$20.95

The grade four text includes all basic parts of speech except interjections, along with diagramming. Original composition writing is included, but it teaches within limited patterns reflecting Rod and Staff's educational philosophy—emphasis is on organization and clear writing rather than upon creativity. There are many student exercises in the textbook, so it is unnecessary to purchase the extra worksheets with even more exercises.

Building Christian English 5, Following the Plan

student book - \$16.95,
teacher's manual - \$22.95

This comprehensive text covers the eight basic parts of speech, writing skills, speaking and listening.

Building Christian English 6, Progressing with Courage

student book - \$17.95,
teacher's manual - \$24.95

This text reviews and expands upon previous levels. There is heavy emphasis upon grammar. It might be too detailed for some students, but Rod and Staff's comprehensive grammar coverage in elementary grades allows students to concentrate on other language skills in high school if they master grammar by the end of

eighth grade. Composition, listening, reading, and speaking skills are also taught.

Building Christian English 7, Building Securely

student book - \$17.95,

teacher's manual - \$24.95

English 7 covers grammatical concepts that other publishers spread out through high school, so this text is more difficult and more comprehensive than most others for seventh grade. While that might be fine for some students, it might be too detailed or have too much busywork for others. Using the exercises selectively helps overcome such problems.

Building Christian English 8, Preparing for Usefulness

student book - \$17.95,

teacher's manual - \$24.95

This book reflects the shift from learning grammar to applying it. Remaining elements of grammar are covered, but more importantly, students work with many forms of written communication.

Building Christian English 9 and 10, Communicating Effectively, Books One and Two

student books - \$15.95 each, teacher's

manuals - \$19.95 each, tests and

editing sheets - \$2.90 each

By high school, students have thoroughly studied grammar, so the emphasis shifts toward composition and speech. For the most part grammar and mechanics are reviewed, although a few more complex grammatical concepts are taught. Chapters alternate between grammar and composition/speech. Even then, grammar chapters all have subsections on "Improving Your Writing Style," "Improving Your Editing Skills," or "Improving Your Speaking Style"—students are continually working to improve writing and speaking skills.

These two books were written with much in common so that either can be used first. *Book One* covers outlining, arguments, writing book reports, character sketches, letter writing, and

poetry while the second covers parliamentary procedure, descriptive essays, expository essays, bibliographies and footnotes, and story writing.

I appreciate the fact that Rod and Staff is one of the rare publishers that recognizes that grammar skills can be mastered in fewer than twelve years.

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Create-A-Story



Create! Press

PO Box 2785

Carlsbad, CA 92018

760-739-9550

email: orders@createpress.com

www.createpress.com

Create-A-Story game - \$44.95, Stepping

Stones game - \$24.95, workbooks - \$21.95

each, Writing Adventures Game Pack - \$24.95

The folks who came up with the Create-A-Story board game deserve high praise for incorporating some of the best story-writing strategies into a game format that should be great for students about fourth grade and above.

The game actually has two parts: the first, moving around the game board and collecting cards that will become components of your story; and the second, putting the pieces together into an actual story, then writing and scoring the story according to how many of your game cards were incorporated into it.

Part of the difficulty for young writers is

figuring out what to write about. It is sometimes difficult for them to come up with characters, plot, theme, setting, conflict, climax, and resolution, all while using elements of style like description and dialogue. This game makes the process much easier by providing a number of these elements for the writer.

There are decks of cards that have topic sentences, settings, characters, plot elements, resolutions (as in how the story turns out), lessons (the moral of the story is...), descriptions (e.g., hairy, cold and rainy, majestic), and dialogue (words like “laughed,” “questioned,” and “roared” that are to be used after direct quotes). Some blank cards are included so you can add story elements of your own.

Every player selects a topic sentence card before play begins, then as they move around the board they land on other story elements and draw a card each time from the dialogue deck if the space says “dialogue,” from the description deck if the space says “description,” etc. There are some “Free Choice” spaces so players can select a story element they are lacking.

When they reach the end of the game board path, they are ready to put their story together. They need not use all story element cards they have drawn, but they get points for those they do use. They will generally have some cards that just won't fit with the others, but they should still have plenty with which to work.

Each player takes an Outline Sheet from the pad provided with the game and begins to write down story elements he or she plans to use. Players decide which characters will be good guys or bad guys. They choose which plot to use. Then they write down the key plot elements: the conflict and four steps for what happens first, second, etc. All of this has to lead up to the resolution shown on one of the cards they have drawn.

After they've written down these story elements, they actually write their story. The length of the story should depend upon the age and ability of a child. With a younger child, I

might require them to sort through all their cards and limit their selections to fewer than I would allow an older child, just to keep the story brief. Generally, I would expect stories to be anywhere from one to two pages long, but it certainly is possible for students to write much longer stories if time permits.

Once stories are complete, you use the score pad that assigns point values for the various story elements that were used in the story. As the teacher, you can also set your own standards for spelling and grammar, perhaps giving extra points in those areas. Note that references to transition words on the score sheet and in the instructions are a bit confusing since no list of transition words is actually included in the game. However, the list is available on the publisher's website at: www.createpress.com/pages/tips.htm along with free downloads of a “Writing Adventures Journal Plan” (to help students learn to journal) and a supplemental teacher's manual for the Create-A-Story Game.

The game requires adult assistance unless you have older students who have become familiar with the game and who are able to select and fashion story elements together without assistance. There are pawns for up to six individuals or groups of players; children can write stories on their own or as teams in a cooperative effort. However, the game will actually work with only one child if you think of it as a tool for writing a story rather than a competition. Ultimately, story writing is the goal more than winning the game even though children might not catch on to that right away. The story elements in the game will frequently require silliness and creativity to fit them together into a cohesive story. That means that children are likely to have a lot of fun figuring out which ones to use and how to put them together.

Stepping Stones, another game from the same publisher, provides students (about sixth grade and above) with guidance and inspiration for

expository writing. Students tackle informative, persuasive, comparison/contrast, or operational essays as they move through the game board, actually writing as they move through each step. This game is more controlled than Create-A-Story in that students select cards in a particular order that fits the writing process.

Graphic organizers and outline masters serve as additional tools to guide students step-by-step. Parent or teacher assistance is required. This game is a little more complex to figure out at first, but like Create-A-Story, it makes the writing process much more interesting and manageable.

Create! Press publishes other products that you might find useful for composition and grammar. Their two workbooks, *Writing Adventures, Books 1 and 2*, teach basic grammar, punctuation, and composition skills in a format that seems most suitable for older students needing remedial work. Beginning with identification of subjects and verbs, the first book presents simplified, condensed coverage that should help a student gain a foundational grasp of grammar. All activities include writing as well as what I would consider optional drawing activities. Composition lessons move quickly from sentence building, through paragraphs to very short stories (as students might write in the Create-A-Story game). The second book adds more challenging grammar lessons and shifts into essay writing. A number of reproducible visual organizers for essay writing are included.

The Writing Adventures Game Pack reinforces lesson material in the *Writing Adventures* workbooks. A double-sided game board comes with sets of sturdy cards (that you need to cut out) and playing pieces. You can play numerous variations depending upon which side of the board and which cards you choose to use: identifying parts of speech, punctuation corrections, subject/verb agreement, editing sentences with errors, identifying phrases, constructing sentences from sentence parts

collected as players move around the board, constructing compound sentences, and identifying similes. Although designed as a companion for the workbooks, these games also work well on their own.

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Easy Grammar series

by Dr. Wanda Phillips

Easy Grammar Systems™

PO Box 25970

Scottsdale, AZ 85255

480-502-9454

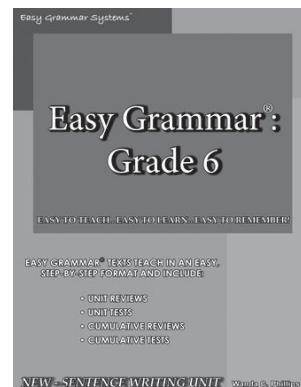
800-641-6015

www.easygrammar.com

There are essentially two strands in the *Easy Grammar* series for the elementary grades: teaching books and review books. I will use the term *Easy Grammar* to refer to the teaching books and *Daily Grams* for the review books. To make things interesting, *Easy Grammar: Grade 2* is actually a teaching and review book! You can use either teaching or review books or both for all other levels.

Easy Grammar

Easy Grammar teacher editions: *Grade 2* - \$26.95, *Grades 3 & 4* - \$29.95 each, *Grades 5, 6, and Plus* - \$34.95 each; student workbooks: *Grades 2-6* - \$13.95 each, *Plus* - \$14.95; test booklets - \$4.95 each for 2-6, \$5.95 for *Plus*



Let's start with the teaching series. There are six books in the *Easy Grammar* series: *Grade 2*, *Grade 3*, *Grade 4*, *Grade 5*, *Grade 6*, and *Plus* (for grades 7 and above). The *Easy Grammar* books, with the exception of

Easy Grammar: Grade 2, are very similar to one another. These books are not really that

specific to grade levels, so, for example, you might use the book for grade five with children in grades four through six. Also, you do not need to use all of these books since they contain so much repetition. You can use one volume then follow up with *Daily Grams* for a few years before switching back to a teaching volume.

I will begin with *Easy Grammar Grade 2*. This book is unique (in this series) with a format of daily lesson plans. *Grade 2* can be used either as your primary teaching resource or as a supplement. Lessons need to be taught rather than used independently, although some students might be able to complete a good part of the work on their own.

Each daily lesson consists of four to five types of exercises that include capitalization, punctuation, alphabetizing, dictionary work, parts of speech, prefixes/roots/suffixes, synonyms, homonyms, antonyms, rhymes, and sentence combining. Rules or explanations and examples are provided within the lessons for each topic that is likely to be new or in need of review. The book has 180 lessons and is intended to be completed in one school year. All principal parts of speech up through interjections and conjunctions are introduced although with only a very brief introduction for each of the more difficult parts of speech. My biggest hesitation with this book is whether or not it is necessary to go that far into parts of speech in second grade. Other than that, the coverage of other language skills is great.

Now we can move on to *Easy Grammar: Grades 3 and up*. *Easy Grammar* books use the same approach and repeat much of the same material from book to book, albeit at slightly higher levels of difficulty. For example, *Grade 3* teaches a list of 28 prepositions while the two highest level books teach a list of 53 prepositions.

Each very large—the smallest volume is almost 500 pages—*Easy Grammar* book follows a pattern of brief, straightforward grammar

instruction followed by examples then exercises. Most of the time, younger level books combine instruction and activity so that both together take up just one page per lesson. Upper levels sometimes take a page or two for instruction followed by one page of exercises.

You will need a teacher edition that includes everything in the student book plus answer keys. Student pages in the teacher edition are reproducible, but that's a lot of photocopying. Instead of photocopying, you can purchase student workbooks that contain instruction and activity pages.

The layout makes *Easy Grammar* self-instructional for the most part. In the teacher editions, one page is the reproducible student worksheet, while facing it is an identical student page with answers overprinted. This arrangement makes these answer keys very easy to use. Teacher editions include reviews, tests, cumulative reviews, and cumulative tests, all of which help students retain previously-taught information. Separate test booklets are also available if you do not want to photocopy or use those in the teacher edition.

This program is unique in presenting prepositions before other parts of speech. By teaching students to identify prepositions and prepositional phrases before other parts of the sentence, it eliminates such problems as confusing the object of a preposition with the subject.

Parts of the sentence are designated by underlining, circling, and making notations rather than by diagramming. In addition, it covers phrases, clauses, punctuation, capitalization, types of sentences, fragments and run-on sentences, and letter writing.

Author Dr. Wanda Phillips strongly recommends that you teach the lessons in order since they include cumulative review of previously covered topics. The exceptions might be punctuation, capitalization, and letter writing, which can be taught whenever you choose.

Grammar topics are taught one at a time without significant integration of topics. You

will find more grammatical detail taught in programs from Rod and Staff and A Beka than in *Easy Grammar*, but the essentials are here.

The format is repetitious. To add variety, you might supplement with *Grammar Songs* (www.audiomemory.com), *Editor in Chief* workbooks (www.criticalthinking.com), or other resources.

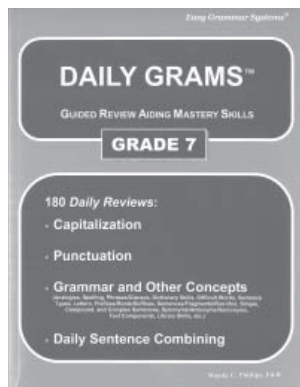
Easy Grammar is especially good for students who struggle with grammar. Sentences are fairly short which makes identification exercises easier. Once students figure out what is being done in the exercise, they can continue the pattern without much effort. Also, there are fewer exercises per lesson compared to most other courses.

After completing *Easy Grammar Plus*, students can continue with the *Easy Grammar Ultimate Series* which I review after *Daily Grams*.

Daily Grams

Daily Grams: teacher editions, either print or digital download - \$26.95 each, student workbooks - \$13.95 each

Daily Grams are a marvelous tool for reviewing and practicing grammar skills without boring students with an entire grammar course year after year. These books assume that students have already been instructed in the relevant grammar concepts and simply provide reinforcement and practice without instruction. Each grade-level book becomes progressively more difficult reflecting what is assumed to have been taught in corresponding *Easy Grammar* books.



I love the easy-to-use, page-a-day format. It should take only about ten minutes per day. Each page has exercises in capitalization, punctuation, general review, and sentence combining. Answers are at the back of the

book. You can make photocopies of the work pages or purchase student workbooks.

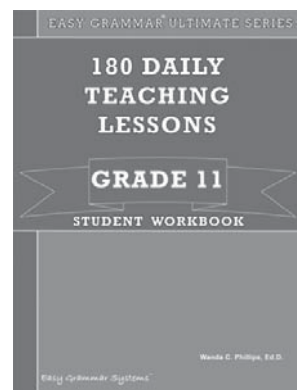
There are five *Daily Grams* volumes for grades three through seven plus a single book for junior and senior high. These are available as printed books or as ebooks.

While you can use these alongside an *Easy Grammar* volume, I recommend using them for a year or two in between *Easy Grammar* volumes. You would skip some levels of *Easy Grammar*. *Daily Grams* might also be used in the same way with other publishers' grammar courses since most repeat the same material year after year and *Daily Grams*' scope and sequence is similar to that of most programs.

Ultimate Series

Ultimate Series: teacher editions - \$26.95 each, student workbooks - \$13.95 each, test booklets for Grades 8-11 - \$5.95 each

Older students have yet another choice with



the new *Easy Grammar Ultimate Series*. While some students have used *Easy Grammar Plus* and *Daily Grams* in junior and senior high, the *Ultimate Series* offers more challenging material, but in a format similar to *Daily Grams*.

The *Ultimate Series* books, one for each year for grades eight through twelve, require only about ten minutes per day. The format for each of the 180 lessons in each book is the same with work on five topics per day. Every lesson has sections on punctuation, capitalization, and sentence combining. The other two sections cover other grammar concepts such as parts of speech, phrases and clauses, homonyms, analogies, and types of sentences. Brief instruction is provided. These texts do not assume that students have already attained a mastery of grammar. Students who already know the rules and concepts can

simply complete the exercises to practice their skills while those who need explanations may read through them.

You need only purchase the teacher edition since it has reproducible student pages and an answer key at the back. However, student workbooks are also available to save photocopying. Information for the teacher at the beginning of each book is brief, and a brief list of skills taught will help you find a lesson on a particular skill if you need to target an immediate issue. Separate assessment booklets are available for *Grades 8 through 11*—there is no assessment booklet for *Grade 12*. The *Ultimate Series* seems like an excellent way to provide just the right amount of grammar instruction for older students.

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Essentials in Writing

by Matthew Stephens

Essentials in Writing

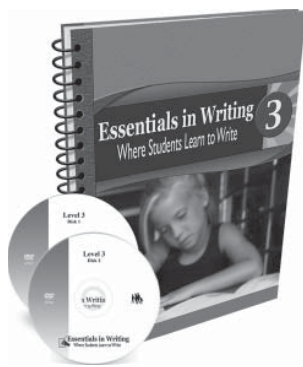
5337 S. Campbell Avenue, Ste. AA

Springfield, MO 65810

417-256-4191

www.essentialsinwriting.com

DVDs only - \$50 per course, set of DVDs and printed manual - \$67 per course



Essentials in Writing is a complete language arts program for grades one through twelve with teaching presented on DVDs.

Instructor Matthew Stephens is energetic, interacting with an unseen classroom of students for each level. He continually works on a whiteboard while teaching. DVD lessons vary in length depending upon the topic to be covered.

An instructional manual/student workbook (which I will continue to refer to as the manual) in your choice of either printed book or

downloadable PDF files is required for each student. For each lesson, students first look at the manual's assignment, then watch a segment on the DVD. Afterward, they read through and complete the manual pages for that lesson. There is often a significant amount of instructional material in the manual, especially at older levels, so no textbook is needed. In fact, the manuals for levels nine through twelve are referred to as textbooks. Sometimes students will watch a DVD lesson then work on manual assignments for one, two, or three days, but generally video and manual assignments are completed the same day.

While most of the teaching is done for you via the DVDs, some parent interaction will be necessary, especially for younger children. Answer keys are at the end of the set of manuals for the younger levels.

Older students will probably need to discuss their ideas for their compositions and get feedback as they proceed. High school level courses do not require answer keys; instead they have rubrics and scoring guides that assist parents in evaluating compositions. These, too, are found in the downloadable PDF files or print books. In addition, there are samples of student work within the books so parents have something to which they can compare their own student's work. The samples should also help students understand what is expected.

The combination of DVD lessons and manuals is equivalent in amount of content to other comprehensive language arts courses, and instruction on composition skills is more advanced than in most other programs. For example, composition skills are developed beginning in first grade. Parts of speech (but not diagramming skills) are introduced gradually, beginning in first grade.

The sequence of topics is somewhat similar from level to level, beginning each level with instruction on sentence structure and grammar, shifting toward more composition work, and generally concluding with poetry in the

elementary grades. Upper levels begin with sentence structure (e.g., clauses and proper construction), then progress through paragraphs, essays, and research papers. There is enough repetition that you might even be able to skip a year once or twice.

The "Letter to Parent," found in each manual, includes instructions for parents for administering the course. For the older levels, it suggests various options, including working on some of the essay lessons, switching to the research paper, then returning to work on more essays.

I mentioned that composition instruction is advanced, but Stephens teaches in increments that are manageable for children to handle, walking students through the steps of the writing process on most assignments. He always models the type of writing students are to do. So while it might be more advanced, it is not more difficult. Stephens also uses graphic organizers at different points to make it easy for students to organize their ideas before beginning to write. Check list forms are included for students to verify that they have met the requirements of an assignment.

While there is repetition from year to year, much more time is spent developing writing skills rather than reviewing grammar. This means these courses are likely to appeal to students who might be bored with other courses that spend a great deal of time on grammar review each year.

The publisher's website lists the table of contents for each course and includes the number of class periods the course should require, the number of video lessons, the number of manual pages, and a list of each lesson's title. (This information is not in the downloadable files.)

Each level is packaged in a DVD case, with two to four DVDs per level, but the printed, spiral-bound workbook is optional. With each set you receive a link for the downloadable manual files. PDF files need to be viewed and printed from your computer while the video

presentations can be watched on any DVD viewing device. Manual pages are designed with a large font, plenty of space to write (even for some composition activities), and some clip art illustrations. If you use the PDF files, you should probably print the entire collection out and have it accessible since the pages themselves make it clear when they are to be used; this information is not presented on the DVDs.

Level 1

First grade begins with review of proper letter formation then moves into beginning sentence formation, punctuation, capitalization, and other introductory grammar. It introduces nouns and their use as subjects as well as action verbs. Students learn to write paragraphs, letters, and poems.

Level 2

The course for second grade teaches sentences, subjects, predicates, nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, plurals, capitalization, and punctuation. For composition, it introduces the writing process, teaching students how to write narratives, paragraphs, notes, journaling, invitations, and poetry.

Level 3

The *Level 3* course covers sentences, complete subjects and complete predicates, plurals pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, predicate adjectives, possessives, capitalization and punctuation, and alphabetical order. Working through the writing process, children learn to write friendly letters, paragraphs, narratives, descriptive paragraphs, thank you notes, invitations, journal entries, informational reports, and poetry. It even introduces the creation of a bibliography with a fill-in-the-blanks approach in lesson 51.

Level 4

Fourth graders review subjects and predicates, adding compound subjects and predicates. They expand their learning about sentences to include more complex sentence forms as well as independent and dependent clauses. Nouns, pronouns, and verbs are

reviewed. Composition work includes writing letters, narratives, descriptive paragraphs, persuasive paragraphs, informational reports with source documentation, poetry, and other forms of writing.

Level 5

Level 5 reviews sentences, subjects, predicates, clauses, nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, with additional work with prepositions and prepositional phrases. It teaches about the use of figurative language as well as how to write dialogue, narratives, letters, descriptive paragraphs, persuasive paragraphs, comparison/contrast writing, summaries, informational reports, and poetry.

Level 6

Level 6 covers most of the same topics again, adding appositives, writing with a point of view, expository essays, persuasive letters, and a research project, spending significantly more time on expository essays and the research project in comparison to other topics.

Level 7

Level 7 is similar in content to the sixth grade course with the addition of an intensive grammar review at the conclusion of the course. However, these grammar lessons are optional and there are no worksheets for the grammar review. Stephens suggests showing these lessons to students at the beginning of the school year, then coming back and reviewing the lessons if or when needed. I applaud Stephens' choice to make these lessons optional since most students have had sufficient grammar at this point and should spend more time on composition work. Writing assignments at this level are challenging enough that this course could also be used by older students who haven't yet mastered the skills taught in these lessons. Grading rubrics are added beginning with this seventh grade course so that parents can actually score the compositions if they so desire.

Level 8

Lessons work through sentence structure,

paragraphs, and essays, also introducing research papers this year. Students really work through the writing process as they draft, edit, and rewrite their papers. As with seventh grade, optional, intensive grammar lessons (without worksheets) follow the final lesson of the rest of the course.

Levels 9-12

High school level courses are all very similar to one another, gradually increasing in the level of difficulty. They each review sentence structure and paragraphs so that students without adequate prior instruction should still be able to work at their grade level. Work on essays and research papers gradually increases in difficulty, and students tackle many different types of essays. Eleventh grade adds writing responses to literature. Research papers are to include MLA (Modern Language Association) references, including a list of "works cited." Stephens teaches students how to write their own citations, but he also recommends internet sites that are helpful for creating correct citations; users enter the required information on forms, and the site formats it into the correct citation. (Note: It is not cheating to use these websites since the mechanics of creating citations are complex, varying by the type of reference work. Professional authors and academics often use them.) High school students should probably have an *MLA Handbook* for reference. While Stephens explains how to look up MLA guidelines on the internet, having the *MLA Handbook* is probably more efficient.

Watch for *High School Creative Writing* and *High School Technical Writing* courses which are also in the works.

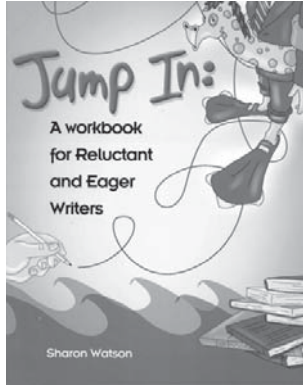
Summary

Essentials in Writing courses free up parents' time by providing the instruction along with reinforcement activities and writing assignments. Courses require little to no preparation time and are very easy to use. The price is very reasonable for courses that include both DVD

instruction and manuals. Even better, Stephens offers free support via phone or email.

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Jump In



by Sharon Watson

Apologia
Educational
Ministries, Inc.
1106 Meridian
Plaza, Ste. 220
Anderson, IN
46016
888-524-4724

www.apologia.com
student worktext -

\$30, Lifeguard's Locker - \$10

Jump In is a two-year writing program for middle school students. While most appropriate for grades six through eight, it can also be used with high schoolers who need more work on basic writing skills or need a user-friendly approach to motivate them to improve their skills. Written particularly for Christian homeschoolers, it is designed for students to work independently most of the time, and it assumes a Christian audience with references to favorite Bible verses, church activities, judgments about Greek gods and goddesses, spiritual motivations of characters in stories, and other Christian experiences and attitudes.

The course consists of a student book plus a teacher manual titled *The Lifeguard's Locker: A Parent/Teacher Manual for Jump In*. Both are essential. The 248-page student worktext includes instruction, activities, and assignments plus helpful reference tools at the back. Assignments are presented in seven sections of varying length: pre-writing skills, opinion, persuasion, exposition, description, narration, and poetry. Within each section, lessons are presented as a series of skills so that students approach each type of writing in bite-size chunks. For most of the activities student will write directly in their workbook, spending

from five to twenty minutes per lesson on writing activities. I particularly like the way Watson has interspersed activities throughout the instruction to ensure that students are processing and applying as they learn. At the end of each section of skill lessons students are given a number of writing assignments from which to choose. These lengthier assignments might take anywhere from two to ten days to complete and will likely be done either in a notebook or on the computer.

Jump In is a fairly comprehensive course. It provides instruction from brainstorming, topic selection, and construction of a composition (with an introduction, body, and conclusion) all the way through the use of citations and creation of a bibliography. The exposition section of the workbook expands to include lessons on writing biographies, book reports, book responses, newspaper articles, how-to articles, and compare-and-contrast essays.

The student workbook itself can be completed in one school year. What transforms *Jump In* into a two-year program are the "10-Minute Writing Plunges" found in the teacher manual. These are a number of writing prompts—four per week for September through May—that are the basis for ten-minute writing assignments to be completed Monday through Thursday. You are free to substitute your own writing prompts if you wish. On Friday, students select their favorite of the four papers they have written that week and polish it to be turned in on the following Monday. The "Writing Plunges" are not intended to be used at the same time as students are working through their other lessons. They should be used on their own as the second year of the program or they can be used to break up the workbook lessons by spending a month or more on "Writing Plunges" between sections of the book.

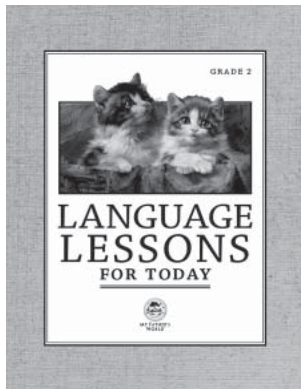
The student workbook is very attractive. Printed in full-color, it includes illustrations and graphics that break up the print and keep students from getting overwhelmed. Students

will also need a grammar reference book or additional instruction if they are weak in grammar; suggestions are included in the teacher manual.

The Lifeguard's Locker has answers for the activities when they are predictable answers, and it also has an extensive section on evaluating lengthier student work with reproducible forms and samples of completed forms—very helpful for the inexperienced parent or teacher.

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Language Lessons for Today



My Father's World
PO Box 2140
Rolla, MO 65402
573-202-2000
email: info@
mfwbooks.com
www.mfwbooks.com
\$19.95 each

Language Lessons for Today (LLT) is adapted from Emma

Serl's *Primary Language Lessons (PLL)* and is presented in two separate books: *Grade 2* and *Grade 3*. *LLT* books cover all of the elements of language arts for grades two and three except reading, phonics, and spelling.

Like *PLL*, *LLT* is very much a Charlotte Mason approach to language arts with its underlying presupposition that exposure to excellent use of language is in itself an important method of learning. *LLT* also bears the Charlotte Mason hallmarks of narration, picture study, copywork, oral composition, dictation, drawing, and poetry memorization.

While a number of other publishers have reprinted revised versions of *PLL* since it is now in the public domain, My Father's World's *LLT* versions probably have the most significant revisions as well as much new content not in the original. There are 102 lessons in each *LLT* book (204 lessons in all) while the original book has only 164 lessons.

LLT starts a little more “gently” than the original book. For example, lesson 2 requires only copywork rather than copywork and dictation. Grammatical work with “is” and “are” in the third lesson of the original book has been shifted back to the seventh lesson in *LLT*. Instead, the third lesson in *LLT Grade 2* has students practice oral composition by explaining about squirrels in complete sentences. These differences in pacing are very minimal, but they do provide children a little more time and practice to acquire the necessary skills.

LLT's content is also updated in other ways. Dates are more current rather than references to 1911 and other dates from the original book. When students learn about initials used in a person's name, they work with names that might be more familiar such as C.S. Lewis, Ulysses S. Grant, and A.A. Milne rather than names of poets from past centuries. Letter writing and addressing an envelope reflect current usage. A letter written in cursive to be used for copywork in the original has been replaced by a letter in a manuscript font, and that letter is a model for the student's own letter rather than straight copywork. (This reflects the current ambivalence over cursive instruction, leaving it up to parents to decide when or if to teach it rather than assuming second graders have learned cursive.) And finally, God is mentioned more frequently in *LLT* than in *PLL*, especially in *Grade 3*.

While there are significant revisions, many poems, fables, and pictures as well as lesson material from the original have been retained. However, even then, some sentences have been rewritten. For example in *LLT Grade 3*, a conversation between a hummingbird and a butterfly has been rewritten to remove the word “stupid,” and the conclusion to that conversation has been rewritten in what I think many would consider a more appropriate fashion. Many of the original black-and-white illustrations have been retained from *PLL*, but additional images have been added, including

a few printed in full color in each book. Most of the added images and lessons fit seamlessly into the original material, but a few images such as the full-color “Zuni Pottery Maker” image are clearly of a different character than the originals.

Lessons in *PLL* gradually became more challenging, and we see the same progression through the two books of *LLT*. In addition, instruction in dictionary usage has been added to *LLT Grade 3*.

Following Charlotte Mason’s recommendations, discussion is used for many of the lessons, and a child will answer many questions orally. Some questions provide opportunities for children to give either a written or oral response. You can choose which option works best with your child, especially as you first begin these lessons. Children will eventually be providing written responses, and they will also be doing copywork and drawing. You will need separate notebook and drawing paper on which students will work. These pages should be collected into a binder.

You can choose how much copywork a child should do each day. *LLT* often reminds parents that a particular copywork or other writing assignment might be completed over a number of days.

Parents should find *LLT* much more helpful to them than *PLL*. If a topic has been introduced previously in an earlier lesson, that lesson might be referenced at the beginning of a follow-up lesson. For example, when students are to address an envelope for the second time, the lesson references the first lesson where it shows how to address an envelope. Probably even more useful are answer keys at the back of each book that have suggested answers for exercises.

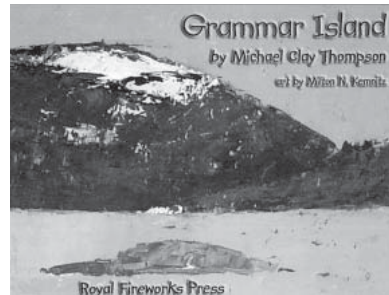
LLT books are not meant to be written in. You can use one book with all of your children, and there is no need to photocopy pages as worksheets. Lessons should take about 15 minutes per day. No advance preparation is

needed, but parents must work closely with their children through each lesson most of the time.

PLL and various revisions of it have been very popular among homeschoolers. However, until now Hillside Education’s versions written for Catholic homeschoolers have been the only ones with really significant content revisions. *LLT* now provides the entire homeschool market with a much improved option, and I look forward to an *LLT* version of *Intermediate Language Lessons* for higher grade levels.

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Michael Clay Thompson Language Arts



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Classical educators have brought attention to a language arts program that might otherwise have had little visibility in the homeschool marketplace. Michael Clay Thompson’s language arts program (MCT) should be viewed as collections of five books per level beginning about third or fourth grade level. There are six levels (or years) available. Although written with gifted students in mind, these might be used for a much broader range of students up through high school, adjusting the choice of levels appropriately. The program covers grammar, composition, poetry, and vocabulary, all at more challenging levels than are typically found in other texts for comparable grade levels. While you can use some of the books on their own, the integration of the five books for each level creates a synergistic effect: the

whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. The catalog shows the six levels divided into two sets with the first three levels designated “elementary” and the second three levels “secondary.” However, “secondary” books are suggested for grades six and up. Despite the grade level recommendations, I would suggest starting at the beginning of the series in most situations since there is a cumulative “building” process that occurs with these books that might be difficult to plug into midstream. Following is a list of the five titles for each level with suggested grade levels.

- Level 1 - for 3rd grade and up: *Grammar Island, Practice Island, Building Language, The Music of the Hemispheres, Sentence Island*
- Level 2 - for 4th grade and up: *Grammar Town, Practice Town, Caesar’s English I (or CEE 1), Building Poems, Paragraph Town*
- Level 3 - for 5th grade and up: *Grammar Voyage, Practice Voyage, Caesar’s English II (or CEE 2), A World of Poetry, Essay Voyage*
- Level 4 - for 6th grade and up: *Magic Lens 1, 4 Practice 1, The Word Within the Word 1, Poetry and Humanity, Advanced Academic Writing 1*
- Level 5 - for 7th grade and up: *Magic Lens 2; 4 Practice 2; The Word Within the Word 2; Poetry, Plato and the Problem of Beauty; Advanced Academic Writing 2*
- Level 6 - for 8th grade and up: *Magic Lens 3; 4 Practice 3; The Word Within the Word 3; Poetry, Plato and the Problem of Truth; Advanced Academic Writing 3*

Each book has both a student text and a teacher manual. However, in some cases you are able to get away with purchasing only the teacher manual if you are teaching a single student since the manual includes the student’s text. Students always need to see the pages since artwork and layout are often as much a part of a lesson as the text. Thus, a

student and teacher may work together in a book if need be, but the student DOES need access to each book. (Students definitely need to write in the *Practice* books—*Practice Island, Practice Town*, etc, but these are the only ones that function like workbooks.) Teaching information is often separated into a section at the back of the teacher manual, but some of the teacher manuals have small boxes and circles with teaching suggestions overprinted on student pages. These are unobtrusive enough that you can still have a child reading from the book. (Less expensive Home School Parent Answer Manuals can be purchased instead of teacher manuals for *The Word Within the Word* series and *The Magic Lens* series as well as for *Advanced Academic Writing 2*.)

Thompson’s approach especially appeals to classical educators for a number of reasons. Most obvious is vocabulary study based upon Latin and Greek stems. (A brilliant addition is Thompson’s occasional references to Spanish vocabulary and grammar since Spanish, too, draws on Latin roots and is a “living” language with which students can easily connect.) Use of classical literary examples as lesson material and composition assignments based upon literature are just a few examples of how literature is incorporated. Thompson frequently uses a Socratic approach for teaching—using questions to help students discover answers or concepts for themselves. Socratic questions are really just part of a comprehensive teaching methodology that both expects and demands students to be mentally engaged with the learning process at a high level. It is very respectful of the student, but it will not work well for an unmotivated student.

Another critical element—sometimes missing in other classical resources—is the inclusion of poetry instruction at each level.

Although the five books for each level have different titles from year to year, they cover five strands: grammar, grammar practice, writing (composition), vocabulary, and poetry.

MCT Grammar

Grammar books (in sequential order by level) are titled *Grammar Island*, *Grammar Town*, *Grammar Voyage*, *Magic Lens 1*, *Magic Lens 2*, and *Magic Lens 3*. In all six grammar books, Thompson strives to simplify the presentation of grammar by using four “lenses” through which a sentence might be studied: parts of speech, parts of the sentence, phrases, and clauses.

While grammar instruction is thorough, the core instruction is given at the beginning of each year, with practice and application during the rest of the year. Thompson calls it “front-loading.”

All eight parts of speech are covered each year, with the level of complexity gradually increasing from year to year. Similarly, parts of the sentence are studied, with even the first level (*Grammar Island*) including subject complements, prepositional phrases, and identification of clauses.

Thompson teaches a variation on traditional diagramming. He begins by teaching a strong vertical break between complete subject and complete predicate. But after that, diagramming plays a minor role in comparison to “four-level analysis,” a technique used at all levels as students analyze sentences for parts of speech, parts of the sentence, phrases, and clauses. The four-level analysis is introduced in both *Sentence Island* and *Practice Island* at the first level then used in all the grammar books for the rest of the levels. The *Practice* books for subsequent levels provide pages with sentences for students to analyze at the four levels.

MCT Writing

Writing is taught with a strong grammatical approach. Titles of the first three books—*Sentence Island*, *Paragraph Town*, and *Essay Voyage*—reflect the sequential development of composition skills. *Advanced Academic Writing* books 1, 2, and 3 (for the last three levels) teach students to write formal academic papers following MLA (Modern Language Association)

guidelines. *Advanced Academic Writing* teacher manuals each include a CD-ROM with a library of Thompson’s comments on student papers that he has accumulated over the years. These are comments that he has used repeatedly enough that he “recorded” them rather than rewrite them each time. A parent or teacher can use these comments to save the time it would take to figure out how to create his or her own comments.

MCT Vocabulary

Vocabulary study eschews the idea of grade level vocabulary. Instead, from the very beginning, students are introduced to interesting and challenging words such as aqueduct, suburbs, spectacular, spectrum, introduction, and reduction. The first book, *Building Language*, offers a gentle, artistic introduction to vocabulary by creating an analogy of architectural arches to word stems. This heavily illustrated book should be a fun exploration of language that includes reading, discussion, creative writing, oral review, and quizzes that might be done orally or in writing. *Caesar’s English (CE)* books I and II ratchet up the academic challenge significantly with a number of interactive activities that challenge students to analyze and apply stems and words. Analogies play a prominent role. Vocabulary continues to transcend typical grade-level lists with words such as vulgar, undulate, countenance, and prodigious in *CE I* and derision, sanguine, inexorable, alacrity, and obsequious in *CE II*. Spanish gets special attention in both *CE* books.

Classical home educators requested even more content than what is already in *Caesar’s English*, and Thompson obliged by greatly expanding those two books into two, two-volume *Classical Education Editions (CEE)*—both the original and *CEE* are available. The *CEE I* has 192 additional pages of material with many new photographs of Greek and Roman art and architecture, maps, word searches, a biography of Julius Caesar spread throughout both volumes, original poems by Michael Clay

Thompson, more on English-Spanish language relationships, and fifteen essays by Dr. Thomas Milton Kemnitz on topics such as Roman architecture and methods of construction. A single Implementation Manual for the teacher for each CEE course includes reproduced student pages with answers and comments overprinted or inserted where appropriate. I particularly like the way the CEEs reinforce and build vocabulary through the poetry and essays.

The *Word Within the Word* (WWW), books 1, 2, and 3 (vocabulary books for the last three levels), emphasize the Latin and Greek roots of words. Many activities can be done independently or through group discussion while some written activities *must* be done independently. For example, one activity directs students to “translate the following ostentatious, ponderous passage into graceful, direct English.” Lengthy passages follow that include sentences such as, “He had seen it all: mendacious miscreants, peripatetic mendicants in dishabille, philandering officials, hedonistic values, pulchritudinous youths wallowing in puerile narcissism, venial sins, dissembling sycophants, refractory recidivists, querulous neighbors—a world replete with sins and problems” (WWW:3, p. 123). You can see how this type of assignment really challenges a student to understand and apply vocabulary.

The newest editions of WWW have added classical content. WWW: 1 adds a discussion of the Greek experience in the classical age between 490 and 323 B.C., including relationships among the Greeks and between the Greeks and the Persians. WWW: 2 has a similar discussion of Roman history from the founding of Rome until the assassination of Julius Caesar. WWW: 3 looks at how the Romans healed their divisions and found peace by resorting to a government based on a strong man, and then how they used the peace and resulting prosperity to transform the ancient world.

MCT Poetry

If you want to instill in your children a love of poetry but find most teaching resources less than inspiring, you will likely love Thompson’s approach that includes poetry study at every level. Even from the youngest level, students learn to appreciate the beauty of language and the skill of an outstanding poet who has carefully selected words not just for meaning and rhyme but also for the actual sounds the words make. All six books explore the technical and mechanical aspects of poetry as well as the aesthetic and emotional. The last three books delve further into philosophical questions such as the nature of man and whether beauty and truth are relative or absolute. Thompson presents the questions in a Socratic manner, encouraging thought without offering definitive answers. Those teaching a Christian worldview might want to expand such discussions within that context.

MCT Literature Courses

A literature component has recently been added to this curriculum. Five courses are available thus far, and they are suggested for use with specific levels in the MCT language arts curriculum since they become progressively more challenging. (The Search Trilogy course is suggested for both Levels 3 and 4 which leads me to believe that the new trilogy in the works covering Charles Dickens’ Christmas stories: *The Chimes*, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and *The Haunted Man* will be suitable for one of those levels.) Each course consists of three complete books (novels for all but the final course) plus a parent manual. The five courses are:

- Level 1, The Mud Trilogy, features three novels about Mud the fish (from *Sentence Island*) written by Michael Clay Thompson.
- Level 2, Alice, Peter, and Mole, includes the three novels *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Wind in the Willows*.
- Level 3 and/or 4, The Search Trilogy,

includes *Treasure Island*, *The Call of the Wild*, and *The Invisible Man*

- Level 5, The Time Trilogy, studies *A Christmas Carol*, *The Time Machine*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.
- Level 6, Autobiography, studies the non-fiction works *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, and *Walden*.

The books studied are special editions annotated by Thompson that include original illustrations when they are critical to the text. Annotations include vocabulary definitions, four-level analysis of selected sentences, and comments on literary elements. Thompson places the emphasis on reading and discussion instead of worksheets and comprehension questions. He includes in the parent manual selected quotations for oral “quote quizzes” where students identify either the speaker or who or what is being described. He also provides “Creative Questions and Activities” that you will most likely use for discussion as well as “Study Questions” that may be assigned for written work. Thompson provides many suggestions as to how you might use the various learning strategies with children of different ages.

Summary

As I mentioned previously, the five books for each level work together, and literature studies now round out the language arts curriculum. Grammar books provide an understanding of the structure of language used throughout all the books. Vocabulary study prepares students to explore a wider variety of literature with understanding. Poetry books feed the imagination for writing and allow students to experience the beauty of aptly chosen words they might have just learned in their vocabulary study. And all of this prepares students to be able to express ideas in their own writing. I suspect that most parents will be inspired by these books, just as I was, since they reveal aspects of language arts that offer beauty and meaning.

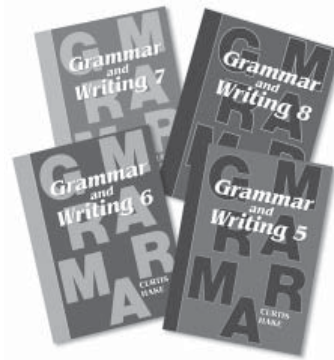
Royal Fireworks Press offers either complete or basic homeschool packages for the language arts curriculum at discounted prices through their website with package prices ranging from \$135 to \$230 per level. Basic packages eliminate teacher manuals or student books when it is possible to work with only one or the other. Prices for the MCT literature program can be found at <http://www.rfwp.com/series/mct-literature-program>.

The Royal Fireworks Press website also has Michael Clay Thompson's free downloads, video clips and implementation slide shows to assist parents, and the publisher sponsors online support forums to which both the publisher and the author regularly contribute.

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Saxon Grammar and Writing

by Christie Curtis and Mary Hake
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
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Austin, TX 78759
800-289-4490
email: info@saxonhomeschool.com
www.saxonhomeschool.com
\$78 per kit for each level



Saxon Grammar and Writing (SGW) uses the same educational methodology that has popularized the Saxon math books. Courses for grades four through eight are

designed so that students can do much of their work independently. New concepts are taught in small increments, building upon prior concepts in a spiral fashion that helps students retain what they have learned. Lessons also offer continual review.

There are three components for each level: student edition, student workbook, and teacher

guide. Both the student edition and student workbook serve as worktexts with instruction, exercises, and assignments.

The student edition, the largest of the three books (with 107 to 112 lessons per volume) is the starting place. A brief introduction succinctly describes course content. At the top of the first page of each lesson is a box that says “Dictation or Journal Entry” followed by “Vocabulary”—a few words with definitions and sample sentences. Without instruction, students would not know that there are dictation passages for each week at the back of their student edition. (In the introductions to the student editions for grades seven and eight, a few vital lines have been added to direct students to dictation and journal topics in the appendices.) Students copy dictation passages on the first day they begin a group of lessons and study them on remaining lesson days until they reach a test day. Then they write the passage out from oral dictation as part of testing. Spelling and punctuation are learned primarily through the dictation exercises.

Each student edition has 100 journaling topics at the back. Students should write about these topics between the first day when they copy the dictation and test day, although they are not assigned for particular days. The bulk of the book is dedicated to instruction, examples, and exercises in grammar. Lessons follow a standard format of instruction accompanied by examples. This is followed by some practice exercises on the new concept and the vocabulary for that lesson. The review set is where students find the bulk of the exercises for a lesson. Reviews tackle previously-taught concepts. Italicized numbers next to each question indicate which lesson(s) taught the concept in case students need to review. While many students will like the variety in these exercises, others might prefer exercises all on one topic such as you find in *Easy Grammar*.

This is a fairly comprehensive English program covering grammar, writing, spelling,

punctuation, and vocabulary. Literature and reading are the only areas missing. Grammar instruction is very challenging and includes sentence diagramming.

The program does review and repeat through each level, so it is possible for a student to begin at any level. In fact the review is so extensive that you can easily skip some levels. For example, in both SGW 4 and SGW 5 student edition lessons have the exact same titles and cover essentially the same material in all except two lessons. However, SGW 4 provides diagramming templates for exercises while SGW 5 does not. Other levels are not quite this repetitive.

Aside from the dictation and journal assignments in the student edition, the separate student workbook is where composition instruction occurs. SGW has a stronger composition component than many other comprehensive programs, and it was increased even more with the second editions of levels five through eight published in 2013.

A schedule for the lessons—showing which days students are to do lessons from either the student edition or the student workbook—is found in the teacher guide. I would recommend making a copy of this schedule for students to have handy.

All levels work on paragraph writing as well as essay writing—persuasive, descriptive, and informative essays at first, but gradually adding other types of essays and honing essay-writing skills. Students also write personal narratives and imaginative stories, and they write in response to both literature and informational texts. Surprisingly, even fourth graders tackle a research paper with an outline, note cards, and a working bibliography. Research paper instruction is almost identical through all levels, but I question whether most fourth and fifth graders are ready to work at this level. Use your own judgment.

In addition to composition lessons, student workbooks have “More Practice” lessons that

are to be used in conjunction with student edition lessons. (Note that in the student editions it says “See More Practice Lesson 'x' in the Student Workbook.”)

The student workbooks also include a few supplemental activities that are similar to *Mad Libs* where students come up with a list of words that fit designations such as “abstract common noun,” “preposition,” or “nominative case personal pronoun (feminine).” They then slot these “parts of speech” into a pre-written story in the workbook, and the result is bound to be silly. This is a great way to review grammatical terms.

The content of the lessons sometimes integrates information about literature, history, geography, and character building. While U.S. history gets some attention at all levels, the eighth grade text brings in U.S. history and government even more through examples, exercises, dictation, and journal topics. This makes the eighth grade course an excellent companion for simultaneous study of U.S. history in social studies or history.

After the first ten lessons, tests are in the student edition after every fifth lesson. This does not follow a predictable schedule such as testing every Friday since there are five student edition lessons and sometimes one or more student workbook lessons between tests. Tests and answer keys for all components are in the teacher guide.

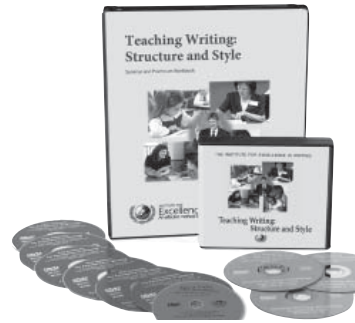
All three components for each level are printed in black and white in softcover books. There are no graphics other than those required for diagramming or other exercises. The books are definitely meant to be consumable books. Students can complete many of their exercises directly in the student edition and student workbook, but sometimes they will need more space for such tasks as rewriting sentences or diagramming. Thus, students will also need to maintain a notebook for some of their exercises as well as for composition assignments.

Saxon Grammar and Writing seems comparable

to the more rigorous grammar program in its coverage of grammar, and its composition instruction is better than that in most comprehensive programs. Also, the inclusion of diagramming distinguishes it from many other options. The distinctive *Saxon* incremental teaching and review approach—the same approach used in the *Saxon Math* series—will also attract fans as well as put off those who prefer more concentrated coverage of each topic in each lesson. I suspect parents will like this program since students can complete most of their work on their own, and even with composition assignments, students learn to self-evaluate to a certain extent. The content appeals to a broad audience that might be either secular or religious.

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Teaching Writing: Structure and Style seminar



by Andrew
Pudewa
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email: info@excellenceinwriting.com
www.excellenceinwriting.com

Teaching Writing Seminar - \$169, seminar workbook alone - \$35, *Student Writing Intensive Courses* (Levels A, B, or C) - \$109 per set, *Continuation Courses* (Levels A, B, or C) - \$199 per set

A few homeschoolers were so impressed with Andrew Pudewa’s *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* (TWSS) writing seminar that they went out of their way to make sure I reviewed it. I believe that their enthusiasm was well founded.

Two things seem to be stumbling blocks for homeschooling parents when it comes to

teaching composition skills: the difficulty of finding the right resources and lack of confidence in their own abilities to teach and evaluate. Andrew Pudewa presents writing seminars for parents and students that overcome the confidence barrier better than anything else I have yet seen. And his Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW®) resources give parents easy-to-use tools that help parents successfully teach a wide range of students.

Since attending Pudewa's seminars is not practical for many parents and teachers, he offers those same seminars in the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* course on DVDs. (An online streaming option will soon be available as well.) The video course consists of a seminar workbook plus ten DVDs: six DVDs with ten hours of seminar presentation, a two-hour DVD titled *Tips & Tricks for Teaching Through the Nine Units*, and three *Student Workshop* DVDs.

Parents and teachers learn how to teach both creative and expository writing. The course teaches both structure and style in such a clear manner that parents and teachers can quickly begin teaching students a repertoire of writing techniques. In addition, selected grammar skills are taught and applied periodically through the course so students better understand the relationship between grammar and good writing. Students continue to develop and apply techniques through actual writing activities taught throughout the course.

Parents may watch the entire course all at once or spread it out over weeks or months. Students might watch with them, but the DVDs really are focused on teacher training. Families who purchase the Teaching Writing/Student Writing Value Packages or Deluxe Combo Teacher/Student Writing Packages will have a week-by-week schedule available to help them pace the teacher training materials.

Pudewa does not try to cover all types of creative and expository writing but focuses on basic structures and approaches. Regardless,

this foundational development should be excellent preparation for students to build upon as they explore other forms of writing.

For example, one of the strategies Pudewa uses is to have students begin by making notes from a model composition. Students come up with key words to convey main ideas. Then they work from their notes to reconstruct the piece, not attempting to copy it, but using their own words, expanding with their own ideas and expressions. This strategy works very well since it provides a secure starting place so students are not worrying excessively about what to say. Instead, they concentrate on structure and style. The basic strategy of taking notes is then used throughout the program for various types of writing assignments.

The course as presented to students consists of nine units: 1. Note Making and Outlines, 2. Summarizing from Notes, 3. Summarizing from Narrative Stories, 4. Summarizing References, 5. Writing from Pictures, 6. Library Reports, 7. Creative or Inventive Writing, 8. Essay Writing, and 9. Critiques (book reports or basic literary analysis). It is best for your students if you teach the units in order, using a one-a-month model. The seminar workbook includes reproducible models that are an essential part of each lesson.

What I like most about this course is that Pudewa walks you through each strategy in detail. His teaching experience is very evident as he identifies and deals with problems that tend to crop up for both teacher and student. The lessons move along slowly enough for you to think and work through the process with his "live" DVD audience. This means that teachers are more likely to end up with a solid grasp of the course content, especially if they complete the writing assignments themselves as they watch the seminar lessons.

As mentioned above, the seminar set includes three *Student Workshop* presentations. *Student Workshops* are recordings of hour-long classes conducted with different age groups:

elementary, intermediate, and high school. These serve as demonstration classes. You might have students work alongside a “video” class to introduce them to some of the methods of this course.

Even more help is available through *Student Writing Intensive* DVDs (SWI). There are three levels (A, B, and C), each consisting of four-discs of actual classes, running about 7½ hours total. Each SWI also includes a *Structure and Style Overview* DVD which is a brief introduction to the various units so parents and teachers can get a quick overview of the *Structure and Style* course outline. However, this is not intended to replace TWSS. *Level A* is for grades three through five, *Level B* is for grades six through eight, and *Level C* is for high school. Students shown in the classroom settings reflect similar age group breakdowns as in the *Student Workshops*. Video classes focus on selected lessons from the seminar. A binder and a set of reproducible papers (models, checklists, reference sheets, and worksheets plus lesson plans and teacher instructions) come with the set of discs. As with the *Student Workshop* videos, students may work through these along with the video classes.

Once you have worked through the basic TWSS seminar and SWI, the *Student Writing Intensive Continuation Course* picks up where SWI ends. It features nine DVDs of video instruction, a CD-ROM with the teacher’s manual, ten class handouts, student samples, and a student packet with 162 pages of three-hole-punched, loose-leaf handouts that contain 32 weeks or more of writing assignments lasting one to two years.

For all of their courses, IEW allows parents to make copies of the printed material for their own children. However, each family in a co-op setting is expected to purchase their own set of student materials.

IEW also offers other related resources in their catalog or through their website. Among them are some actual lesson books that will

help you implement what is taught in the original seminar such as *Rockets, Radar, & Robotics*; *Following Narnia*; a variety of history-based lesson books; and more. These can be used in conjunction with the *Structure and Style* program or afterward. *Bible-Based Writing Lessons in Structure and Style* has lessons that you can begin using from the very beginning of the *Structure and Style* program while most of the other books need to wait until a little later. Many of IEW’s materials, including the core courses discussed here (except for *Bible-Based Writing Lessons* and history-based writing lessons) are written from a secular, but “Christian friendly” viewpoint. Materials with distinctly Christian content are designated on their website as such.

Note that the TWSS video course and companion seminar workbook are being updated for release in February 2015. Although the *Structure and Style* methodology remains unchanged, the revision will include features such as subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, a video streaming option, and other upgrades.

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Winston Grammar

by Paul Erwin

Precious Memories Educational Resources

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360-687-0282

email: liz@winstongrammar.com

www.winstongrammar.com

complete set - \$41 per level, extra student packet - \$17.50, supplemental workbook - \$11 each, supplemental workbook and answer key - \$18

One of the toughest parts of most English language courses is the part that deals with structure and syntax—the sort of thing that diagramming teaches. However, for one reason or another many students just don’t get diagramming. Instead of traditional diagramming,

you might prefer to use *Winston Grammar*.



Winston Grammar has both *Basic* and *Advanced* sets. All students

should begin with the *Basic* set. Although the *Advanced* set does some review, it assumes familiarity with the components and methodology introduced in the first set.

Winston Grammar uses key questions and clues for word identification. Rather than constructing diagrams, students begin by laying out color-coded cards in a horizontal fashion that correlates with the sentence under study. Then they use symbols and arrows to “mark up” sentences on their worksheets, showing parts of speech. There are larger colored cards that lead students through strategies for figuring out word functions within sentences. It begins by identifying only articles and nouns, but progresses up through prepositional phrases and predicate nominatives. Overall, it is a much more multi-sensory approach than most others.

The *Basic Winston Grammar* set teaches parts of speech, noun functions, prepositional phrases, and modifiers. It can be used with students at least fourth grade level or above. It includes a teacher manual, student workbook, and the cards, all of which are stored in a heavy-duty vinyl case. Four quizzes, a pre-test and a post-test are included in the student book. Extra student packets (student workbook and a set of cards) can be purchased since each student needs his or her own set.

In addition to the above, there is also an optional Supplemental Workbook for extra practice. This workbook corresponds exactly with the original in content and difficulty, offering “more of the same” for those students who need it. It comes with an answer key, but workbooks can be purchased without answer

keys for additional students.

Once students have mastered the basic course, they should continue with *Advanced Winston Grammar*, but not before seventh grade. This level moves on to more complex noun functions, reflexive pronouns, possessives, gerunds, infinitives, participles, and various kinds of clauses. Some of these sentences get very tricky! I think many of the lessons are fun for a parent and student to work through together, sort of like trying to solve a puzzle.

Precious Memories also publishes *Winston Word Works: A Usage Program* (\$27). This is a complementary program that focuses on the most common usage errors such as subject-verb agreement, use of personal pronouns, use of who/whom, correct forms of indirect object pronouns, and comparative and superlative forms of adjectives. (The components are similar to the other courses, but there is an additional quiz in the student book.) This course builds upon the *Basic Winston Grammar* procedures for identifying sentence elements. It can be used any time after completing the *Basic* set. You might use *Winston Word Works* between the two courses if a student completes the *Basic* set in fourth or fifth grade or if you want to save the *Advanced* set for high school.

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Wordsmith series

by Janie B. Cheaney
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352-475-5757

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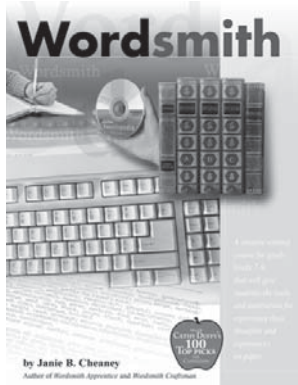
www.commonsensepress.com

print books - \$16 each, ebooks - \$11 each, teacher's guide for *A Creative Writing Course*: print - \$7, ebook - \$5

Wordsmith is a series of three books for developing writing skills. All books are available in either print or ebook formats. These are not age-graded, but they address skills at three different levels. My favorite book in the series is the original *Wordsmith: A Creative*

Writing Course for Young People, which targets students around junior high or beginning high school level. My review begins with that book then discusses the other two volumes in relation to it.

Wordsmith: A Creative Writing Course for Young People (revised edition)



Many students in upper elementary grades and junior high have learned the basics in grammar and need some help transferring grammatical knowledge into their writing.

Wordsmith assumes the student knows basic grammar. It moves on from there to work with grammar through written applications. For example, one assignment has them come up with vivid action verbs to replace weak verbs accompanied by adverbs. The goal is to sharpen writing skills by carefully choosing words for the best effect.

After working on grammar, they tackle sentence construction, again with the goal of writing more interesting yet concise sentences. Once grammar and sentence structure are under control, they can apply those skills to compositions.

Although *Wordsmith* does not teach all the different forms of writing such as reports, research papers, etc., it covers techniques that can be applied in almost any writing situation. Lessons work on skills such as describing people, narrowing the topic, and writing dialogue. At the end of the course, students write their own short story. Helps for proofreading and editing are included along with review quizzes.

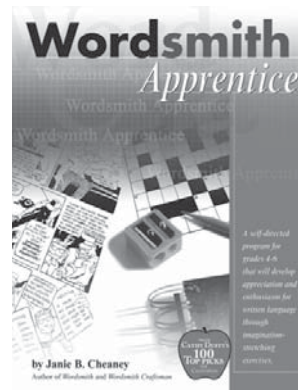
The student book may be written in or used as a reusable text by doing the brief activities in a notebook. Lesson organization is clear and well designed. Most students should need a year or more to work through all of the lessons.

Some teaching is required, primarily in the form of discussion and evaluation. However, students will complete much of the work on their own. The author's humorous touches scattered throughout the book add special appeal.

Parents or teachers who lack confidence in their ability to teach students how to write will appreciate the inexpensive teacher's guide. It includes answers, lesson plans, teaching suggestions, and ideas for expanding lessons. Parents with strong writing skills will probably be able to manage without it.

Other books attempt to meet the same goals, but the presentation here is better than almost everything else at this level.

Wordsmith Apprentice



Wordsmith Apprentice is a “prequel” to *Wordsmith: A Creative Writing Course for Young People*. Author Janie Cheaney translates the same enthusiasm, humor, and energy that so impressed me in the older-level book to

this course for younger students.

Using a newspaper-writing approach, she creates interesting writing activities that develop both grammar and composition skills. For example, in the first section teaching about sentences, students learn the four types of sentences then write four sentences to describe a news photo, mixing declarative, interrogatory, and exclamatory sentences. Stretching beyond the limitations of the newspaper format, students also write invitations, letters, and thank-you notes. “Comic-strips” introduce each new section.

Topics covered are nouns, verbs, sentences, modifiers, prepositions, paragraphs, synopsis writing (often neglected in other courses!), dialogue, opinion writing, and more. These

are covered within the context of newspaper tasks such as writing classified ads, travel articles, book reviews, articles, and headlines, as well as editing. Examples and some forms are included, not to stifle or limit students, but to help stimulate their imaginations and give them organizing tools.

Cheaney writes from a Christian perspective, although it comes through subtly. For example, students learn to recognize good synopses by deciding which one of three synopses most accurately conveys the story of David and Goliath. Then an assignment follows to write three synopses, one of which is for the story of The Good Samaritan.

This study is designed for students in grades four through six, and it can be used by students working independently (if parents or teachers read and respond to student assignments) or by a group of students of mixed ages and abilities.

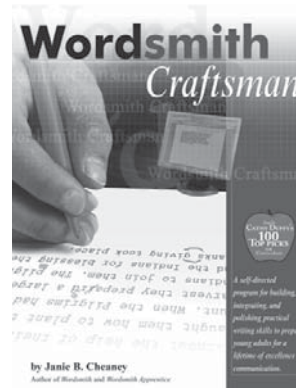
There is a two-page answer key at the back of the book. There is no teacher manual since none is needed. Suggested lesson plans are available free at www.common sensepress.com/wordsmith/wordsmith_apprentice_lesson_plan.htm.

Students who have already been introduced to grammar basics will find this a great way to apply what they have learned. Those without prior grammar instruction will need supplemental study defining and identifying grammatical concepts. All students will need a thesaurus and they should also have a newspaper to consult for examples. It need not be current, so you can carefully screen a newspaper for objectionable content.

Wordsmith Craftsman

Designed for high school students, *Wordsmith Craftsman* can be used after completion of *Wordsmith: A Creative Writing Course for Young People* or any other courses that have built up a basic foundation in grammar, mechanics, and composition. High school students who have done a great deal of grammar but little composition should probably complete the *Creative*

Writing Course before jumping into *Wordsmith Craftsman*.



This book is divided into three parts which can be used over a span of anywhere from one to four years depending upon the student.

Part One draws students into the writing process with practical, everyday writing tasks like note taking, outlining, summarizing, personal letters, business letters, and even business reports (although the last topic is addressed very briefly).

Part Two gets more technical with exercises on paragraph writing (narrative, descriptive, persuasive, and expository), word usage, and style.

Part Three concentrates on essay writing but builds on paragraph writing skills to create five types of essays: descriptive, narrative, expository, critical, and persuasive.

Cheaney does an excellent job of pointing out different organizational strategies you might use to construct different types of essays. Plentiful examples help students visualize their goals. Cheaney's emphasis on style encourages students to move beyond mechanical correctness to excellence in communication skills.

The book is written for a student to work through independently, receiving feedback and encouragement from a parent or teacher as needed. There is no teacher manual or answer key since they are unnecessary. Students should work through the lessons at a pace slow enough to allow time for them to practice and master the various skills. A ninth or tenth grader should not expect to complete the book in one year, although an eleventh or twelfth grader might do so.

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WriteShop: An Incremental Writing Program



by Kim Kautzer and Debra Oldar

WriteShop

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Alta Loma, CA 91737

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email: info@writeshop.com

www.writeshop.com

Basic Set (teacher's manual and *WriteShop I*) - \$117.95

WriteShop I student workbook - \$55.95

Starter Pack - \$139.95

WriteShop II student workbook - \$55.95,
teacher's manual - \$65.95

Handbook for Teaching in a Group Setting
ebook - \$13.50,

Copying and Dictation Exercises - \$6.95

WriteShop is another great resource for parents who lack confidence in their own ability to teach their students to write. It takes the guesswork out of the process.

The program is presented in a single teacher's volume and two student volumes, *Write Shop I* and *II*. *WriteShop* provides detailed daily lesson plans and instructions for teachers, and the student volumes have all the worksheets and forms they will need. The teacher's manual, which covers both *WriteShop I* and *II*, offers more than lesson plans. It also has instructions on how to edit and make comments as well as descriptions of typical student errors and probable solutions. Student sample writings are accompanied by edited versions and check-off lists with teacher comments so you can get a feel for how you might write your own responses to student work. Other helps in the manual

are answer keys; reproducible check-off lists, reference sheets, and forms; supplemental activity ideas; story starters; essay topics; and suggestions for writing across the curriculum. These features walk you all the way through activities, evaluation, and grading.

Not only do these features make the program easy to use but the authors have structured lessons to build from the ground up, covering sentence and paragraph structure and style before tackling lengthier assignments. The subtitle, "An Incremental Writing Program," refers to the way the program incorporates and builds upon skills taught in previous lessons. Because of this you should not skip lessons or change the order.

WriteShop is a great starting place for parents who have done minimal writing instruction with their children. *WriteShop I* targets students in grades seven through ten, though it can be used with students as young as sixth grade. Lessons in descriptive, informative, and narrative writing include describing a person, food, and place; explaining a process; writing a short report; and learning about tense, omniscience, and point of view in narratives. *WriteShop II* is written for students in grades eight through twelve, picking up where *WriteShop I* leaves off. Following a brief review of *WriteShop I* concepts, *WriteShop II* lessons cover advanced descriptive narration, point of view, narrative voice, and essay writing (including how to write a timed essay).

None of the writing assignments are very lengthy. High schoolers will still need to practice writing lengthier papers and research reports than are required by *WriteShop*. (Keep in mind that this program is not intended to cover all types of writing assignments. For example, there are no lessons on poetry or writing business letters.)

If you start this program with younger students, move through it more slowly, taking at least three years rather than two. Older students might be able to complete both volumes

in a single year if they are very diligent and have already developed basic writing skills.

The program works well for parents working with one or more of their own children, but it will also work in a group class situation. Co-op teachers will find the *Handbook for Teaching in a Group Setting* a helpful supplement to the teacher's manual. The *Handbook* is only available as an ebook.)

WriteShop does need to be taught. It is not designed for independent study even though students do much writing on their own.

Lessons—each of which might take about two weeks to complete—include “skill builder” exercises that focus on a particular skill, usually related to grammar or vocabulary. The “skill builder” activity feeds directly into the main lesson. For example, the second lesson is “Describing a Pet.” The “skill builder” teaches students to use a thesaurus to come up with more interesting words to replace overused adjectives and weak verbs. This skill is then incorporated into the pet description. Many of the grammar-oriented skill builders help students finally see the use of some of their grammar lessons.

Two weeks per lesson sounds like a lot of time, but the authors have incorporated more than the “skill builder” focus into each lesson. For example, the pet description also works with topic sentences, metaphors, similes, and concluding sentences. In addition, *WriteShop* teaches students to self-edit. Using lesson-specific “Writing Skills Checklists,” students work through their original assignment to edit, revise, and rewrite. The parent or teacher also has a unique “Teacher Writing Skills Checklist” for each lesson so you know what to look for when editing their papers. An evaluation form helps you come up with an objective grade for each final draft.

Students should also be completing the copying and dictation assignments that build skills of observation and attention, while working on various sentence constructions and broader

vocabulary. The *WriteShop* teacher's manual directs parents and teachers to choose their own copying and dictation selections from the Bible or exemplary literature. While this is fairly easy to do, *WriteShop* also has published a small booklet, *Copying and Dictation Exercises for WriteShop I*, with excerpts from well-known literary works that relate to each of the sixteen lessons. This saves parents and teachers from having to come up with their own passages.

I think the authors have actually resolved a critical problem some of us have encountered with copying and dictation by *requiring* copying first, followed by dictation of the same piece. This way, students have already encountered unusual punctuation or sentence breaks that otherwise might be unpredictable when encountered only through dictation.

The program is written by Christians; you will find occasional biblical references, primarily in the teacher's manual. However, the authors' Christian perspective also appears very subtly in lessons such as writing a description of a person where the authors caution the student to remember to be gracious and focus on a person's positive features.

WriteShop sells a Starter Pack at a slightly discounted price that includes the teacher's manual and *WriteShop I* student workbook plus *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* by Jane Straus, *Copying and Dictation Exercises for WriteShop I*, and a poster showing the five steps of the writing process. Older students using *WriteShop* should have a grammar handbook for reference. While *WriteShop* is not dependent upon any particular grammar handbook, the Starter Pack includes a Tips sheet that gives suggestions for incorporating the *Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation* with *WriteShop* lessons, so this should be a great package for getting started.

Overall, *WriteShop* is one of the best resources I've seen for group classes and for parents who need lots of help to teach writing.

Note that *WriteShop* also publishes a series

of three courses for kindergarten through third grade called *WriteShop Primary* and two courses for grades three through six called *WriteShop Junior*. These resources were written by Nancy I. Sanders and are structured differently. See my review of *WriteShop Primary* and *WriteShop Junior* on my website at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

CHAPTER 9

Language Arts: Spelling, Vocabulary & Handwriting

Spelling and vocabulary are lumped together because some spelling courses actually serve more as vocabulary courses as they move to upper grade levels. Also, if you have a child who is born with the “perfect-spelling gene” or a child who masters phonic and spelling rules in the early grades, it makes more sense to work on vocabulary than to waste time in a spelling program.

Handwriting recommendations follow spelling and vocabulary recommendations in their own section at the end of this chapter.

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Spelling and Vocabulary

All About Spelling



by Marie Rippel
All About
Learning Press,
Inc.
615 Commerce
Loop

Eagle River, WI 54521
715-477-1976

www.allaboutlearningpress.com

Basic Interactive Kit: \$22.85, Deluxe
Interactive Kit - \$44.85 - Level 1 teacher's
manual and student packet - \$29.95, Levels

2-7 teacher's manual and student packet -
\$39.95 per level

All About Spelling (AAS) is an incremental spelling program based on the intensive phonics approach of the Orton-Gillingham methodology. It uses multi-sensory activities that should work well with most learners.

Each lesson focuses on a single concept, such as a particular phonogram or spelling rule, and includes a spelling word list that reinforces that concept. Although the program shares many features with reading programs, and students will learn to read and write words, it is specifically geared toward teaching spelling. You might want to use it alongside *All About Reading* (also reviewed in this book) from the

same publisher since the lessons will reinforce one another.

Because *Level 1* teaches foundational spelling rules that apply to more advanced words in higher levels, most students should begin there regardless of what grade they are in. A placement test on the publisher's website will help you determine the correct level for your child.

Each level of AAS requires three essential components: the teacher's manual, the student packet, and either the Basic or Deluxe Interactive Kit.

The student packet for *Level 1* contains four sets of color-coded flashcards: Phonogram Cards, Sound Cards (for dictation), Key Cards (spelling rules), and Word Cards (spelling words). It also includes tokens for segmenting words, a progress chart, and a certificate of completion. Flashcards are printed on perforated cardstock, so you'll need to separate them and store them in your own 3" x 5" index card box or the Spelling Review Box offered by the publisher. With the exception of the Word Cards, the *Level 1* flashcards are all used again in *Levels 2* through 7. Student packets for subsequent levels include additional flashcards, level-specific materials, a progress chart, and a certificate of completion.

The Basic Interactive Kit includes the Phonogram Sounds app that will run on computers and mobile devices, a set of letter tiles, magnets for the letter tiles, and spelling divider cards for your index card box. (As the child moves through the program, flashcards are sorted behind dividers labeled "Review" and "Mastered.") The Deluxe Interactive Kit adds the Spelling Review Box, sparkling bee stickers for use on the progress chart, and a custom tote bag for storing all of the components.

The Phonogram Sounds app gives students practice in seeing, hearing, and identifying the phonograms. The letter tiles are one-inch square laminated tiles of all the letters and phonograms. The adhesive magnets go on the back of the letter tiles so you can use them on

a magnetic white board. Author Marie Rippel recommends using a 2' x 3' magnetic, erasable white board that you can also use for storing the tiles. Labels for various groups of tiles and an organizing diagram are included to help you arrange the tiles into categories. Some children may not need or enjoy the hands-on work with letter tiles, and for those students Rippel suggests that you write out words on paper or a white board instead.

AAS lessons are presented as "Steps." The Steps are fully customizable and designed to be completed at the student's pace, so depending on the needs of the student, each one might take a couple of days or weeks to complete.

Level 1

Step 1 in the *Level 1* book teaches the sounds of the individual letters—including such variations as the two sounds of the letter "g"—using phonogram flashcards. Parents who aren't familiar with the sounds of the phonograms, can learn them from the Phonogram Sounds app.

After introducing the letters and their sounds, *Level 1* teaches students how to "segment" words by identifying the individual sounds within them. Color-coded letter tiles are introduced, first for learning how to alphabetize the letters, then for constructing words.

Dictation begins early in the program in Step 4 when students are asked to listen to the sound of a phonogram and then point to the letter tile that makes the sound. In later lessons, students write the phonogram on lined paper then listen to and spell words with letter tiles.

By the end of Step 11, students are writing spelling words and several phrases such as "big dog." Step 12 introduces consonant digraphs "th, sh," and "ch," with subsequent Steps continuing to add more challenging phonograms and concepts like compound words and syllabication.

Level 2

Level 2 quickly reviews *Level 1* content

then adds 11 more phonograms. The program emphasizes rules and generalizations for spelling, and syllabication plays an increasingly important role. For example, students learn rules such as those on Key Card 5, which teaches that the vowel in a closed syllable is usually short and the vowel in an open syllable is usually long. The student packet includes “syllable tags” that students use in conjunction with the letter tiles to identify types of syllables.

“Rule breaker” words like *of* and *was* are taught at this level, but there are very few sight words. The amount of dictation expands to several phrases and sentences per day. Vocabulary introduced in *Level 2* ranges from simple words like *cake*, *late*, and *car* to more challenging words like *compost*, *humid*, and *prevent*.

Level 3

Level 3 adds suffix tiles and more syllable tags to the letter tile collection. In addition to work on suffixes and syllables, silent-e words receive more attention as students complete the *Silent E Book* that comes in the student packet. More challenging phonograms like the sounds of “oo” and ways to spell /k/ are taught along with contractions and homophones. Spelling words taught in *Level 3* are generally longer and more complex, with words like *childhood*, *graceful*, *we’ll*, and *giggle* being representative.

Level 4

Level 4 adds prefix tiles to the tile set, then continues to advance with more challenging phonograms like “eigh” and the four sounds of the letter “y.” Syllable types, syllable division rules, and spelling strategies are also taught at this level.

An example of a dictation sentence from the page 20 of this level is, “None of the students took the test today.” Examples of some of the more difficult words taught are *chimney*, *eighteen*, and *unhinged*.

Level 5

Level 5 adds phonograms such as “si” and

“ough,” while continuing work on other phonograms such as those that make the /er/ sound. Students also work on plurals, including irregular plurals. One sample from the dictation on page 62 is, “What flavor is the cake you’re baking for us tonight?” Some more-challenging spelling words from *Level 5* are *encouraged*, *equipment*, *gnome*, *perfection*, and *volcanoes*.

Level 6

Level 6 teaches phonograms like “mb, gu,” and “augh;” exceptions to the i-before-e rule; suffixes such as “able” and “ible;” some “rule breakers”; and other advanced facets of spelling. Examples of the more-challenging words are *agreeably*, *collectible*, *encouragement*, *sheik*, and *sheriff*. Many of the words are familiar words with suffixes that are often misspelled.

Level 7

Level 7 provides coverage through high school. The program covers advanced sounds, Latin roots, Greek word elements, French endings and silent letters, and some Spanish and Italian words. Examples of some of the words are *extinguish*, *convenient*, *solemn*, *bankruptcy*, *transformation*, and *psychology*. Students work on word analysis and learn to identify prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Letter tiles are frequently used for word analysis and word building.

Summary

Although *All About Spelling* is a rules-oriented program, the multi-sensory approach helps students to be successful. AAS addresses the three learning modalities in these ways:

- Visual: spelling rules are demonstrated with color-coded letter tiles. Flashcards for phonograms, rules, and spelling words also provide visual cues.
- Auditory: lessons are taught aloud and flashcards are reviewed orally. When learning new words, students hear themselves say the sounds as they write the corresponding phonograms.
- Kinesthetic: children build new words with letter tiles; write phonograms, words, phrases,

and sentences from dictation; and handle flashcards.

While AAS is not as multi-sensory as a program that includes songs and games, it should meet the needs of most children. And it uniquely incorporates multi-sensory learning all the way through high school.

AAS does not teach handwriting or letter formation. If you are teaching a young child who has not yet learned to write, you might choose a handwriting program to use in conjunction with AAS.

With the exception of the stickers and progress chart, all items are non-consumable, so you could use them with another student. However, if you are teaching two or more students simultaneously, each student will need his or her own student packet so you can customize the review portion of the lesson.

One of the most impressive features of this program is the instruction for teachers. Lessons are explained thoroughly and include teaching tips and cautions about common problems at pertinent points in each lesson. Because you learn as you go, the layout eliminates the need for you to first read through a separate manual whenever you need information. If you should need additional help, the publisher offers free phone and email support.

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Building Spelling Skills

Christian Liberty Press

502 W. Euclid Ave.

Arlington Heights, IL 60004

847-259-4444

email: custserv@christianlibertypress.com

www.shopchristianliberty.com

student books - \$10 each,

answer keys - \$5 each

It doesn't get any more affordable for solid spelling coverage than the *Building Spelling Skills* series. However, you can't describe these books as "fun" or "colorful." Instead, I would use words like "comprehensive," "thorough,"

and "challenging." Illustrations are mostly clip art, and books are printed in two colors.



Each worktext is divided into thirty-six units with five lessons per unit; this corresponds

to a basic thirty-six week school year with one lesson per day. Space for students to take their weekly unit tests is provided at the back of each book.

Courses begin in the early grades with a strong basis in phonics, shifting toward word origins and language principles in upper grades. The level of difficulty is higher than in most other series and even more so at upper levels. Also, there is Christian content throughout.

Each book is a self-contained, consumable student worktext. Students should be able to work independently through these books for the most part, especially past the early grades. Inexpensive answer keys are available for all books. There are no separate teacher guides. These last features coupled with cost effectiveness make these books very appealing for busy families with limited budgets.

Book 1

This first grade workbook serves as much for phonics reinforcement as it does for spelling. All but the last two units are designed around a phonics rule. (The last two units work on syllables.) The first five units cover the short vowels, working only on words with the designated short vowel sound. Almost all of the phonograms are covered in *Book 1*.

The variety of exercises within the lessons induces the child to practice writing words over and over. The number of words per lesson seems a little large in comparison to other programs, and the difficulty level also is advanced. Examples of the more difficult words are *voyage*, *poison*, *grudge*, *because*, *awkward*, and

laundry.

Space for children to take their weekly tests is provided at the back of the book. Teaching instructions are at the front. Some content and inserted verses and quotations identify the curriculum as Christian.

Book 2

Book 2 accelerates the emphasis on phonics rules with some intense phonics vocabulary. Weekly word lists are introduced with definitions of phonetic concepts (such as consonant digraphs) or rules of syllabication. Some of the lessons deal with root words, prefixes, and suffixes, and words with the digraphs "ch, sh, th," and "wh." There is plenty of practice in *Book 2*, but as in *Book 1* the word lists are generally more advanced than in other second grade programs. Examples of the more difficult words: *adage, foreign, cyclone, musician, disappear, although, exodus, and accomplish.*

Book 3

This book seems to build on *Book 2*, assuming that much of the phonetic vocabulary is familiar. Among lesson topics are consonant blends, consonant digraphs, hard and soft sounds of "c" and "g," vowel digraphs, and diphthongs. Phonics "Rules and Definitions" appear at the back of the book for reference. Like *Book 2*, it is very rule-oriented, reviewing previously-covered phonetic rules, then moving on to still more rules. The difficulty level still seems advanced with words such as *audience, dynamite, and luncheon*, but not quite as much so as the first two books.

Book 4

Book 4 continues in the same vein but moves on to accents, more complicated prefix and suffix work, contractions, possessives, compound words, and calendar and measurement words. Lessons also cover consonant digraphs, plural words, and irregular spellings. In addition, often challenging word endings are included, such as "el, le, al, ol, er, or, ent, ant, ible," and "able." Another interesting feature is a lesson on computer-related terms, updated in 2011.

Book 5

Book 5 is subtitled *The World of Words*. The first eight units deal with geography-related words, and the ninth unit deals with astronomical terms. Remaining units feature individual topics such as birds, sports, anatomy, economics, and terms related to church. Exercises are very eclectic rather than following similar formats each time. One might have students practice with antonyms or suffixes, while others concentrate on the unit topic with vocabulary and practical usage. There is a great deal of practical and academic usage in this book. For example, in Unit 2 students learn the names given to citizens in various countries (e.g., the Danish live in Denmark). In another example from Unit 19 on "Titles for Civil Officers," students learn job descriptions for mayor, notary, auditor, magistrate, constable, assessor, etc. *Book 5* strikes me as one that might be used whenever this type of study seems appropriate for a student rather than at a particular grade level.

Book 6

Book 6 differs from the other books in this series since it reviews the basic spelling rules students should have encountered in the early elementary years. This is a good time to review because most students have forgotten there are patterns to help them figure out the spelling of unfamiliar words even if they use that knowledge without realizing it.

Review does not take students back to one-syllable words but introduces challenging words. Suffixes and prefixes (including Latin and Greek prefixes) are also addressed in depth.

Spelling rule coverage is not as thorough as that found in *All About Spelling* or other resources that stress mastery of many spelling rules. However, this book should be very useful for the student who either never learned the rules or does not use them as a tool when needed. Many junior high students would do well to go through these lessons.

Book 7

Book 7 is obviously more difficult than *Book 6* with its smaller, more abundant print. Suffixes and prefixes are the organizing themes for all lessons, but vocabulary development is the overall emphasis. Students become familiar with many new and challenging words. Since spelling is practiced rather than taught in this book, students lacking spelling skills (rule familiarity) should use *Book 6* first. *Book 7* can also be used with students at older grade levels. Typical of words in the lessons are *psychic*, *infirmary*, *apologize*, and *noticeable*. Examples of some of the more challenging words: *prerequisite*, *antediluvian*, *expatriate*, *ostentatious*, and *recapitulate*.

Book 8

Word origins are the theme of *Book 8*, and this does not mean studying only Greek and Latin roots. Instead, lessons explore words from many languages and cultures including African languages, Arabic, Celtic, French, Hebrew, Italian, Persian, Scandinavian, Spanish, and more. Students need an unabridged dictionary to use alongside the lessons. Lessons are both fascinating and challenging—maybe too challenging for some eighth graders. I would also consider using this book with high school students.

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English from the Roots Up: Help for Reading, Writing, Spelling and S.A.T. Scores

by Joegil Lundquist

Literacy Unlimited

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www.literacyunlimited.com

\$29.95 each, Word Cards - \$18

In *English From the Roots Up*, Greek and Latin words are the foundation for vocabulary study in the broader sense of word derivations.

Children are unlikely to find the majority of the vocabulary words they learn here in their everyday reading, but they will be well prepared for new vocabulary they'll encounter in high school and college. Even more important than the actual vocabulary words they learn is the skill children develop in analyzing new words they encounter and being able to figure out their meanings.

Each lesson begins with one Greek or Latin word, teaches its meaning, then gives children a list of from three to ten English words derived from the root word. For example, lesson ten introduces the Greek word *kinesis* meaning movement. The lesson then teaches five words derived from *kinesis*: *kinetic*, *kinesiology*, *kinescope*, *cinema*, and *cinematographer*. The words *photos* (light) and *graph* (write or draw) were introduced in the first two lessons, so children are connecting the last word to two Greek words they have already learned. This can create a picture in students' minds of someone who can "draw" with "moving light," making it easier for children to understand that a big word like *cinematographer* refers to the person who decides how to compose the scenes that he wants a movie camera to capture. Children each need a set of 100 cards, one for each lesson. Each card has the Greek or Latin word with a border of green for Greek words and red for Latin words. On the reverse are the derived words and their meanings. You can purchase sets of pre-made cards or make them along with your students.

The goal is similar to that of *Vocabulary from Classical Roots* (also reviewed in this book) although the vocabulary words here are less commonly used than those in *Vocabulary from Classical Roots*. This program requires teacher presentation and interaction. Instead of a workbook, index cards (or purchased sets of cards), a file box, and a good dictionary are the primary learning tools.

The program might be used with students from middle elementary grades through college,

but I think junior high through high school the best time to use it.

Actual teaching information provided is brief but loaded with activity suggestions. The teacher is on his or her own to implement the ideas. Here are some examples of activity ideas: for the root *graph*, a number of related words are presented with accompanying ideas: “Telegraph—Let someone present a research report on Thomas Edison’s early days as a telegrapher. Let someone do a report on Morse code and give a demonstration of it.” “Lithograph—Discuss the process of lithography and talk about Currier and Ives. Their lithographs are still used every year as Christmas cards. Make potato or linoleum block prints.” These activity ideas could be turned into great unit studies. This resource is especially suited to the creative teacher who prefers general guidelines rather than detailed lesson plans.

A second volume is also available. It targets a slightly older audience, so it makes a good follow-up to the first volume. It teaches an additional 100 Greek and Latin root words with new activities and teaching notes.

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Spelling Wisdom

compiled and edited by Sonya Shafer

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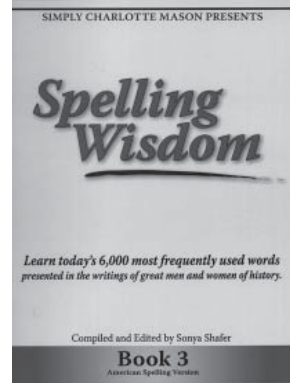
www.simplycharlottesmason.com

print editions - \$21.95 each, \$87.95 for the series of 5 books;

downloadable books \$14.95 each, \$49.95 for the series

Charlotte Mason taught spelling in the context of reading and writing rather than as an isolated subject. She used the method of “prepared dictation,” which Sonya Shafer has adopted for her *Spelling Wisdom* series. The series consists of five books that cover grades three through twelve. Each book will be used

for about two years or longer.



The bulk of each *Spelling Wisdom* book consists of dictation passages, many of which are taken from literary works by famous authors such as Charles Dickens, Daniel DeFoe, Winston Churchill, and Jane Austen.

Literary works include excerpts from novels, autobiographies, poems, speeches, Psalms, readers, and letters—almost all of these are from older works in the public domain. Shafer has added a few original passages so as to include newer words such as “computer” and “infrastructure,” and she has updated spelling and punctuation in some instances to match modern usage. More than 12,500 different words are used in the *Spelling Wisdom* series. These include the 6,000 most-frequently-used words in the English language. An index in the back of each book shows in which exercise each word appears in the book, so you can select a particular passage if there is a word a student needs to learn.

Students might use one or two passages per week. Passages become increasingly difficult and lengthier from book to book as well as within each book. *Book 1* is suitable for grades three through five, *Book 2* for grades five through seven, *Book 3* for grades seven through nine, *Book 4* for grades nine through eleven, and *Book 5* for grades eleven and twelve.

Students begin each lesson by studying the passage with a parent or teacher to identify words likely to be challenging. Students then study the challenging words by copying them, visually memorizing them, and practicing writing them. This process might take a short time or several days. Once students are confident that they can write every word accurately, they

will write the passage as the parent or teacher dictates it. Any misspelled words are restudied.

Literary passages often feature lengthier sentences and uncommon phrasing that might be unfamiliar to students who have not been exposed to literature of past centuries. This probably adds an extra dimension of difficulty as students listen to, recall, and write the passages from dictation. You might do well to have your children read some of the referenced literary works apart from *Spelling Wisdom* exercises so that they become more familiar with the language.

Christian works are referenced often enough that the series really appeals primarily to a Christian audience.

Brief instructions are at the front of each book. You can view these pages as part of a free downloadable sample file on the publisher's website. A parent or teacher needs to be involved in much of the lesson, although students might study words on their own. Shafer cautions against allowing a student to write a word incorrectly without immediately rewriting it correctly; you can see that this would require supervision most of the time.

The books are not consumable, and permission is given to copy pages for use by those in your immediate household. Generally, both parent and student should be able to work directly from a single book.

Spelling Wisdom books are also available as digital downloads. A British version of *Spelling Wisdom* offers the same series with British spelling preferences. British versions are available only as downloadable files. See the publisher's website for British prices.

A free YouTube video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGqakdjS_U features Sonya Shafer demonstrating how prepared dictation (and *Spelling Wisdom*) works.

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SpellingYouSee

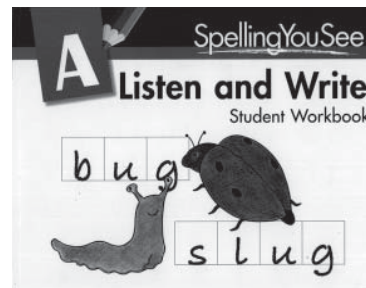
by Karen J. Holinga Ph.D.

Demme Learning

888-854-6284

www.spellingyousee.com

Level A: instructor's handbook - \$14, student pack - \$20; *Level B*: instructor's handbook - \$16, student pack - \$30; *Levels C - E*: instructor's handbook - \$14 each, student pack - \$30 each



Forget weekly spelling lists and spelling tests! *SpellingYouSee* (SYS), instead, uses a developmental approach to

spelling that is quite different from what we are used to in most spelling programs. Rather than grade level designations, the series identifies courses with letters A through G.

Level A Listen and Write

Level B Jack and Jill

Level C Wild Tales

Level D Americana

Level E American Spirit

Level F Ancient Achievements (not yet available)

Level G Modern Milestones (not yet available)

You start your child at the developmentally appropriate level. This is so critical that I'm including the website address for their placement guidelines here: www.spellingyousee.com/getting-started/. Check the placement guidelines before ordering.

The program progresses through five developmental stages: preliterate, phonetic, skill development, word extension (syllables, prefixes, and suffixes), and derivational constancy (words related by derivation of origins that share common patterns). While *SpellingYouSee* builds on a phonetic base, it goes beyond that to help students also master irregular words and words borrowed from other languages that make spelling so challenging.

Continual review is a hallmark of this program. Consequently, children practice basic

letter formation over and over in the younger levels, then practice writing very similar words and the same passages almost every day for a week. This way they develop a visual memory of words.

Students also learn to identify "chunks" (phonetic elements and consistent patterns) within words up through *Level G*, marking the chunks with colored pencils or highlighters. This process is referred to as "chunking." Students begin to color code the chunks in *Level B*, so sets of colored pencils are included with each course for *Levels B* and above. The program does not have children memorize spelling rules, but children learn the common patterns through continual exposure and "chunking" exercises.

SYS introduces a form of printing and uses it through all levels. The instructor's handbooks say that children should not do their copywork in cursive. They point out that "Copywork should be printed in order to develop visual memory. When students read, everything they see is in print, so they should use printing while learning to spell" (Frequently Asked Questions). There might be some truth to this, and I also realize that chunking is more difficult when students are writing with cursive forms. However, I think printing becomes quite cumbersome for writing lengthy passages. This is an issue to consider if you are using the program with older students.

SYS has daily lessons for 36 weeks for each level. Each week's lessons are labeled A through E for the five days of each week.

For each level there are a student workbook and instructor's handbook. For all except *Level A* the student workbook has two volumes called Part 1 and Part 2. Instructor's handbooks are relatively small books that offer teaching assistance that is most valuable at the first two levels. They also include answers keys and dictation material that is essential for each level. Answer keys include the color coding for the chunking.

Extra helps, including videos explaining some aspects of the course are available on a password-protected site. Use the code that comes with each instructor's handbook for free access.

Level A Listen and Write

Level A begins with letter formation, concentrating on lowercase letters. The course includes a laminated "Guide to Handwriting" showing the proper directions for letter formation. The style is a simple manuscript that—unlike the ball-and-stick method—teaches students to form letters without lifting their pencil except for just a few letters. The program stresses the importance of children holding their pencil properly. The font for a few of the letters—"a, l," and "t"—includes a slight curve at the bottom. While this is unusual, there is nothing wrong about it, and it might facilitate the transition to cursive.

Children trace and write six letters per day for six weeks. They also begin to trace and copy words such as cat, dad, and gas—only "short-a" words for the first four weeks—in preparation for upcoming dictation activities that begin the fourth week.

"Short-i" words are introduced the fifth week, with words for the other short vowels gradually introduced later. The seventh week, students begin to read words back to the teacher after dictation. Lessons for the first half of the course use only three-letter words, while four- and five-letter words are taught the second semester along with consonant blends (e.g., "st"), digraphs (e.g., "ck"), and double consonant endings (e.g., tall). Children write from 10 to 12 words each day from dictation.

Level A has only one worksheet per day, and each day's lesson should take only about ten minutes to complete. A child might not complete a page if it seems like too much work at that point. A sticker pack is included that can be used either for motivation or along with the suggested activities.

Once you are past the first few lessons and

understand how the lessons are completed at each level, the instructor's handbook has only one or two paragraphs of instructions per lesson. Lesson preparation time is very minimal even for the first few lessons.

Level B Jack and Jill

Level B has two worksheets per day, so there are now two student workbooks, Part 1 and Part 2. Students will use colored pencils (or highlighters) along with a regular pencil to complete the worksheets. The laminated "Guide to Handwriting" is included.

As in *Level A*, students begin by tracing and copying letters and words. They quickly move on to dictation with short-vowel words.

Level B also incorporates well-known nursery rhymes into the lessons, using the same nursery rhyme every day for one week. The rhymes provide copywork practice, serve as simple narrative devices, help with vocabulary development, help students distinguish similar sounds, and provide an auditory component to the lessons. Students begin by copying parts of the rhyme each day, paying attention to capitalization and punctuation as well as spelling. By the end of *Level B* students are expected to write an entire nursery rhyme from dictation.

Students learn "chunking"—the method used throughout the rest of the program. (The publisher will provide a symbol-coded answer key for parents who are color blind.) Instructions are given within the instructor's handbook, but they are also conveniently included at the beginning of each day's lesson. For example, for the second day of the ninth week, instructions at the top of the page tell the teacher how to present the nursery rhyme that day, then it introduces chunking with instructions about identifying "Bossy r" chunks and highlighting them with a purple colored pencil or highlighter. Through the rest of *Level B* and beyond, students become familiar with both vowel and consonant chunks as well as silent letters, endings such as "es" and "ful," as well as "overlapping chunks" where the final

"y" is changed before adding an ending.

"No rule days" appear on the fourth day of each lesson in Part 2. These offer opportunities for drawing or creative writing that should be very relaxed.

Copywork and dictation exercises for *Level B* and above should always be kept to no more than 10 minutes. Counting the number of words written from dictation correctly within 10 minutes helps you to evaluate a student's progress. Students should continually improve their speed and accuracy.

Level C Wild Tales

Level C begins with a few nursery rhymes as in *Level B* then shifts to non-fiction passages about all sorts of living creatures from black bears and bats to seahorses and penguins. From the eighth week till the end of the course, lessons follow the same pattern each week. Students have chunking exercises every day, copywork the first three days, drawing or creative writing added on the fourth day, and dictation on the last day.

Level D Americana

Level D continues in the same fashion as *Level B* with students completing chunking exercises each day. The reading passages are now from American history and culture featuring topics such as Thomas Jefferson, the Liberty Bell, Rosa Parks, Paul Bunyan, and Levi Strauss.

The first three days of each lesson students copy parts of the passage and mark the chunks. On day four, they are given the passage through dictation, with the parent or teacher supplying assistance as needed. On the fifth day, they write the same passage from dictation but with help only for punctuation and capitalization.

Level E American Spirit

Level E uses reading passages that highlight American ingenuity and inventiveness along with other positive character traits with stories of Patrick Henry, Mary Hays, P.T. Barnum, Harry Houdini, President John F. Kennedy, and others. The lesson format for each week is

the same as for *Level D*. While some passages in *Level E* appear to be more challenging than those in *Level D*, many seem to be on about the same level.

Levels F and G are not yet available.

Summary

While the program is unusual, the use of copywork and dictation reflect elements of both Charlotte Mason and Classical approaches that home educators have found to be very effective. Also, chunking bears some similarity to methods used in other programs that emphasize learning the phonograms, even though it is presented in a unique fashion in *SYS*. Some programs use only one or two of these three strategies but this combination of all three—chunking, copywork, and dictation—makes *SpellingYouSee* a promising option for helping children learn to spell. Free sample lessons for each level are available at the publisher's website.

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Spellwell Series

by Nancy Hall

EPS Literacy and Intervention

PO Box 9031

Cambridge, MA 02139

800-225-5750

www.epsbooks.com

student books - \$8.60 each, teacher keys

- \$5.05 each



The *Spellwell* series targets grades two through five with two worktexts per grade level. Books are designated A and AA for second grade level, B and BB for third grade level, C and CC for fourth, and D and DD for fifth. Teacher keys

are single books that each cover the two books for a grade level. This series designs lessons

around spelling rules or generalizations. Some of these are discovered by students as they look for patterns, while others are specifically identified. One or more “outlaw” words appear in each lesson, and space is provided for you to add your own words to be studied.

Lessons begin with a pretest. Students who get most or all words correct might be given an additional list of more-challenging words to study or the “alternative homework” I describe below.

A variety of age-appropriate activities help students recognize spelling patterns. Other thinking skills come into play in activities such as identifying rhyming words, words that fit the same categories, and antonyms and synonyms. Some assignments take students outside the workbook. They might be instructed to “find as many words with *ow* as you can.” To do so, they can use spelling words, ask friends or relatives, or consult a dictionary. There are occasional composition assignments as well as puzzles, scrambled letters, crosswords, and other more-entertaining activities.

A really nice feature is the “alternative homework” option at the bottom of many pages. If a student does well on the pretest, he or she should tackle the alternative homework option rather than the regular lesson activities. Of course, parents are always welcome to use alternative homework assignments whenever they seem appropriate. Alternative homework suggestions are very diverse. For example, page 23 in *Book CC* says, “Choose two of your longest spelling words. Make as many words as possible using these letters.” Page 33 of that same book instructs, “Write synonyms or antonyms for eight of your spelling words.”

All worktexts have lists of all spelling words covered at the back of the book. Some books have progress charts for recording spelling test grades.

Because of the variety, these worktexts might require more teaching or interaction than some others, but even using the most challenging

activities does not require a lot of input from the parent or teacher. Generally, these are very easy to use and will not require any lesson preparation.

Worktexts are printed in black-and-white, but they have some cartoonish illustrations and creative page designs that make them more visually interesting than books like *Building Spelling Skills*.

The flexibility and variety within *Spellwell* lessons is likely to make these especially appealing to Sociable Sues, although they should work well for all students. Another plus is the very low cost for both the student worktexts and the teacher keys.

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Vocabulary from Classical Roots Books 4-6 and A-E

by Lee Mountain, Norma Fifer,
and Nancy Flowers

EPS Literacy and Intervention

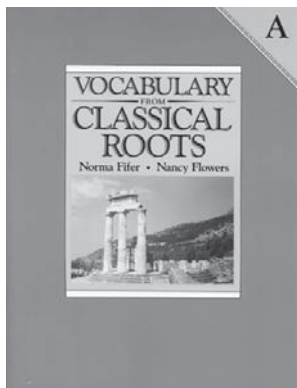
PO Box 9031

Cambridge, MA 02139

800-225-5750

www.epsbooks.com

student books 4-6 and A-C - \$13.25 each,
D-E - \$14.20 each; teacher's guides -
\$22.90 each



General vocabulary study makes sense for the younger grades, but the type of more specialized study with Greek and Latin roots we find in *Vocabulary from Classical Roots* becomes more useful for older children since they have

already built up a foundational vocabulary and can start to make connections with prefixes, suffixes, and roots. The publisher recommends levels 4, 5, and 6 for grades four through six and *Books A* through *E* for grades seven

through eleven, although the letter designations for the upper level books make them easily adaptable to students above and below the recommended levels.

The series draws upon both Greek and Latin roots simultaneously to expand students' English vocabulary. For example, the second lesson in *Book A* begins by introducing the Greek word *tri* and the Latin word *tres*, both meaning three. It goes on to a study of the words *trilogy*, *trisect*, and *triumvirate*. Greek and Latin words are not always this similar. Lesson four introduces the Greek word *pan* and the Latin word *omnis*, both meaning all.

Students with some exposure to Greek or Latin will immediately recognize the derivation of words from those languages. Other students without prior knowledge of those languages will develop some familiarity with Greek and Latin simply by using these workbooks.

Each book is written at an increasingly difficult level. Words with similar roots are grouped thematically for ease of study. A variety of exercises, including work with synonyms, antonyms, analogies, and sentence completion, helps students develop full understanding. "Nota benes" (important notes) include etymological, literary, historical, and geographic references that help develop cultural literacy. Suggestions for extended writing activities in *Books A* through *E* help older students to apply new vocabulary. *Books D* and *E* add exercises for testing vocabulary within the context of short articles. Periodic review exercises help students retain knowledge.

While students can work independently through most of the lessons, discussion should be helpful for most students.

A teachers guide and answer key for each level has teaching suggestions, exercise answers, and glossaries of some of the literary and historical references.

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Vocabu-Lit series

Perfection Learning

1000 North Second Ave.

Logan, IA 51546

800-831-4190

email: orders@perfectionlearning.com

www.perfectionlearning.com

student workbook (softcover) - \$11.95

each, teacher edition - \$19.95 each



The *Vocabu-Lit* series begins each lesson with an excerpt from a book, story, essay, poem, or speech. Within each literary piece, ten vocabulary words in bold become the focus of each lesson as students encounter

the words in a number of ways to develop a nuanced understanding of each word's meaning. After the literary piece, the layout in the first four books (*B* through *E* for grades two through five) differs from that of the rest of the series (Books *F* through *K* for grades six through eleven).

In Books *B* through *D* (not including *Book E*), students first copy definitions for each word from the dictionary in the back of their books. The next exercise focuses on context clues as students fill in the blanks with the correct words; in books for grades three and four students also circle the context clue within the sentence. Students identify synonyms and antonyms and work with word relationships in the next two sections. There are still two more activities for each lesson! One of them uses a graphic organizer to work with words. For example, one graphic organizer presents a word web for students to identify words or phrases from the story that relate to a particular topic. The final activity is a puzzle of some sort that uses the words from that week's list. Grade two exercises differ from those in the

other two lower-level books. They are simpler with students doing such things as circling yes/no answers or selecting one of two answers by checking a box. They skip the graphic organizers, but they do include puzzles and some composition activities.

Book *E* steps up the level of difficulty with more lessons and some activities more similar to those in books *F* through *K*. However, it has puzzles, games, and drawing activities for the final lesson exercise rather than introducing a writing assignment. Books *B* through *E* each have three or four reviews and no assessments. You will need the separate text booklets for testing if you think it worthwhile to test.

Books *F* through *K* for grades six and up have been rewritten for better alignment with the Common Core State Standards. The improvements should appeal even to those who oppose the Common Core. Students begin by reading an excerpt from fiction, non-fiction, speeches, and primary sources—both classic and contemporary.

In the first two exercises for each week's lesson, students work with context clues and prior knowledge to try to write definitions of the ten master words in that lesson. This serves as sort of a pre-test. Students then look up and write the definitions from a dictionary, comparing these with their own definitions. The third exercise has students work with the words in different contexts as well as with antonyms and synonyms in a variety of ways. Students are encouraged to consult a dictionary as needed. The next exercise seems easier as students fill in the blanks of ten sentences with the correct word. The fifth and sixth exercises vary from week to week. They include work with analogies, shades of meaning, words with multiple meanings, figurative language, root words, affixes, synonyms, idioms, foreign words and phrases, etymologies of words, oxymorons, and euphemisms. Each week's lesson concludes with an interesting writing assignment. Each assignment is different, reflecting many

different modes of writing. Some students will need assistance with composition skills for some assignments. The writing assignments are worth using as a substantial part of a student's composition work.

There are six review lessons, with one after every five lessons, and each review is followed by an assessment. You will likely spend at least one or two days on the review and a few days on the assessment. Both reviews and assessments use a variety of question formats. Reviews often require students to write full sentence responses. Assessments include questions in the same formats that students will encounter on both the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exams—new exams tied to the Common Core. In addition, assessments always include a written assignment. Interestingly, for the assessment composition tasks students are supposed to work through the writing process with peer review, revisions, and rewrites. And some writing assignments require research. Clearly, these extend the time required for the assessments beyond a single session. Note that previous editions of the upper level books used to conclude with puzzles and games rather than the writing assignments at the end. In my opinion, the new exercises are much more substantial and worthwhile in the new editions.

For all levels, teacher editions are the same as student workbooks but with overprinted answers.

You can easily skip the teacher edition for second grade, but you will probably want them for other levels to save you time even if you can easily figure out the answers yourself. Separate text booklets are available for grades five and up, but you shouldn't need them.

I particularly like this series for a number of reasons: the use of literary excerpts, the variety of activities, the selection of words (challenging yet more practical than in some other resources), and reasonable cost.

Sample pages are available at the publisher's website.

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Wordly Wise, Original series and 3000 series

EPS Literacy and Intervention

PO Box 9031

Cambridge, MA 02139

800-225-5750

www.epsbooks.com

student books - about \$11- \$12 each,
answer keys for original series - about \$10 each



I've seen many vocabulary resources over the years, but my favorite for general use remains the original *Wordly Wise* series, *Books 1* through *9*. (*Books A* through *C* in the original series are also available, but I think

other academic priorities preclude their use in the early grades.)

I suspect the popularity of *Wordly Wise* stems from its effectiveness and reasonable cost as well as the fact that students can work independently most of the time. *Books 1* through *9* are intended for grades four through twelve. However, vocabulary is somewhat advanced, so choose lower level books if your children are average in their vocabulary skills. I suggest starting average to bright students at fourth grade level with *Book 1*.

In this series, students use one list of words through four or five different types of exercises to become familiar with the word's usage in different contexts as well as its various meanings. Exercises include definitions, recognition of proper usage, word origins, prefixes and suffixes, analogies, and synonym substitution. Crossword puzzles at the end of each

unit reinforce learning from earlier lessons. Children must truly understand meanings to complete the activities.

The answer key for each level is relatively inexpensive and you will certainly want it to save time and energy since the exercises are often quite challenging.

One issue that might be viewed as a drawback occurs in *Books 4* through *9* of the original series. While *Books 1* through *3* include glossaries in the back listing all vocabulary words and their definitions, from *Book 4* on students must use a separate dictionary.

EPS Literacy and Intervention has continued to sell the original series, but they have also produced a newer series, *Wordly Wise 3000*[®], and that series is already in its third editions. *Wordly Wise 3000* retains many of the features of the original series. It teaches multiple meanings of some words. A variety of activities encourages students to think about vocabulary words and their meanings in ways that are more likely to help them actually make the words part of their vocabulary. A major difference is that the new series has added reading passages and some questions that require complete-sentence, original responses. Because some of these answers are more subjective, they require more time for parents to evaluate responses.

Book 1 requires direct teaching and differs significantly from the rest of the series. As with the original series *Books A* through *C*, I would probably skip it. However, I like *Books 2* and *3* of *Wordly Wise 3000* and consider them more useful than the original *Books B* and *C*.

The *Wordly Wise 3000* series numbers books to correlate with grade levels. *Book 1* is for first grade with the series concluding with *Book 12* for twelfth grade.

The inexpensive answer keys (about \$6) for home educators for any of the *Wordly Wise 3000* editions are not listed on the publisher's website, so you would do best to order through any of the homeschool distributors who carry

it such as www.christianbook.com, www.rainbowresource.com, and www.exodusbooks.com. You do not need the expensive teacher's resource books that are listed at the publisher's website.

Handwriting

There are quite a few factors to consider when selecting a handwriting program, factors such as which method to use, when to introduce cursive, the format for practice, and the content of the practice exercises.

Among the methods to consider are traditional handwriting with ball-and-stick printing and cursive with simple loops, the method that is most common. Another option might be programs that use slant print forms that are very similar to their cursive forms. These make the transition between printing and cursive little more than learning how to join the letters. Italic style bears some resemblance to a simple calligraphy. Some styles such as *Handwriting Without Tears* do not fit neatly into any of these three categories.

Some methods work better for left-handed writers, another factor to consider. The style you choose does not matter as long as it works for your child. After all, by the time we reach adulthood, most of us have modified whatever style we learned to create our own personal style of handwriting.

While traditionally publishers have structured programs so that students make the transition to cursive writing in second or third grade, there are many who prefer to teach cursive earlier, perhaps even omitting printing and beginning with cursive.

Programs vary in the amount and style of practice activities. You need to select a program with the correct amount of practice for each of your children.

Some programs have fairly bland content for handwriting practice, while others provide more interesting content or strong Christian

content.

Parents might even question the need to teach their children to write cursive at all, especially when they have resistant learners. They rationalize that much writing will be done on computers or other devices. However, circumstances inevitably arise in life where you need to make quick notes, and there might be times where you need to take lengthy notes without mechanical assistance. Printing can be too slow a process in such instances, so you will likely handicap your child by not teaching cursive.

Selecting from among the many handwriting programs for my Top Picks was difficult since there are so many good options. I ended up choosing programs representative of different styles to help you keep in mind the range of options. Also, remember that many comprehensive language arts programs incorporate handwriting, so you might not need a separate handwriting resource. Further, you might not need to continue with a separate handwriting workbook if students have mastered the forms and get plenty of practice through dictation or other writing.

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Handwriting Without Tears

Handwriting Without Tears

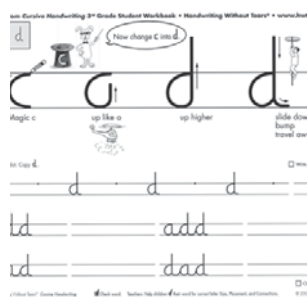
806 W. Diamond Ave., Ste. 230

Gaithersburg, MD 20878

301-263-2700

www.hwtears.com

student books - \$8.50 each, teacher's guides - \$9.50 each; see the publisher's website for prices for other products



Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) teaches handwriting for children in kindergarten through fourth grade. Some distinctives of this program are:

- uppercase letters are taught before lowercase
- groups of letters that have similar strokes or the same starting points are taught together
- letters are not slanted for either printing or cursive
- multi-sensory learning methods are used for instruction

HWT's style is simpler than traditional cursive, but it differs from most of the other "simplified cursive" forms in that there is no slant and some of the letters such as "e", "f", and "k" change form from printing to cursive.

I mentioned multi-sensory learning methods in the list of distinctive features. Kindergartners can use the 4" x 6" slate chalkboard to write individual letters. They might also use the 10" x 17" blackboard with double lines as they learn to write words. Auditory learners can listen to the *Rock, Rap, Tap & Learn* CD.

There are a teacher's guide and student workbook for each level.

Letters and Numbers for Me teaches kindergartners both capital and lowercase letters and numbers. It also covers beginning handwriting instruction in such skills as paper placement. *My Printing Book* for first grade introduces the correct use of either lowercase or uppercase letters in sentences along with punctuation as students continue to practice letter and word formation.

Up through first grade, students learn to print on double-line pages. This approach differs from the traditional triple-line format normally used. It eliminates the top line but leaves more space between lines. Children then focus more on formation within the double lines with extensions going above and below. In second grade, students begin to write on single lines.

The second grade book, *Printing Power*, reviews basic formation of letters and continues with word and sentence writing. Second graders ready to transition to cursive might use

the *Printing Power Plus* set which includes both *Printing Power* and *Kick Start Cursive*, a small book that introduces some cursive forms.

Cursive Handwriting, the third grade workbook, teaches cursive writing. Like *Printing Power Plus*, it begins with the letters requiring the simplest joins to make the transition easy. *Cursive Success* provides fourth graders plenty of practice to develop fluency in cursive.

All of the student workbooks for kindergarten through fourth grade are also available in Spanish and French.

HWT offers a number of other items as supplements or resources for older students. *Can-Do Print* and *Can-Do Cursive* are books that might be used by students fifth grade or above who still need additional work in either area. There are no teacher's guides for either of these books. Students originally taught another handwriting system but who need remediation might need to start in one of the lower level books.

Additional items you might want are wall cards, desk strips, HWT double line paper (in wide, regular, and narrow line widths), and "Big Sheet Draw and Write Paper" (large 11" x 17" pages with lines on the bottom half). Parents of struggling printers might find the packet of "Gray Block Paper" useful. The packet includes 26 pages each of four different styles of blocks that help children form letters and numbers correctly.

Lessons are designed to be presented by the parent or teacher although most work can be done independently once children have learned the basic forms. HWT is a great choice for homeschoolers since the instruction is very child-friendly. There's a reasonable amount of practice, but not so much that children feel overwhelmed. Also, the cost of the books is very low. The other items provide more multi-sensory learning but are not essential for every child.

HWT includes some broader language arts skills within its handwriting lessons, but other

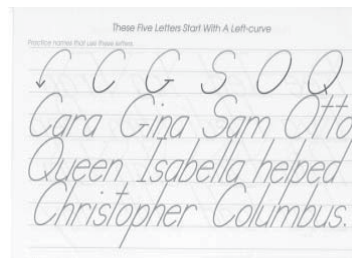
language arts coverage is very limited in scope. However, they have also introduced an additional resource for kindergarten called *Sentence School*, which is to be used alongside HWT. *Sentence School* is a 248-page, spiral-bound teacher's guide that comes with a set of 215 laminated word cards. It teaches spelling, grammar, composition, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (at levels appropriate for kindergartners) through brief, multi-sensory lessons.

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Peterson Directed Handwriting

Peterson Directed Handwriting
300 S. Hamilton Ave., Ste. 4
Greensburg, PA 15601
724-837-4900

email: mrpencil@peterson-handwriting.com
www.peterson-handwriting.com
homeschool basic kits: preK-K - \$23.60,
grades 1-4 - \$16.55 each; homeschool
complete kits \$34.50 - \$41.55



Peterson Directed Handwriting is another resource that should appeal to home educators since it is both inexpensive and thorough.

Homeschool handwriting kits include the teacher and pupil books plus a self-adhesive Position Guide and pencils for some levels.

The teacher's handbooks offer step-by-step teaching instruction as well as extra strategy helps and explanations about some of the research and theories behind the methodology. It covers types of pencils, how to hold them, desks and sitting positions, tips for teaching left-handed students, and more. This is one of the few handwriting programs where the teacher's handbook is a necessity because it contains so much useful information.

The methodology is standard ball-and-stick,

based on learning basic movement patterns to reinforce left-to-right tracking. “Printwriting” begins with the traditional one-stroke-at-a-time process. In second grade, slant print is introduced using a “no-lift” rhythm called “threading” to encourage mastery of good paper holding. It also introduces all cursive forms with gross-motor readiness lessons. Transition to a traditional cursive takes place in third grade. Form, slant, size, spacing, smoothness, and control are continually emphasized. Songs and rhythms that assist in teaching handwriting skills are available free upon request in MP3 format. An optional CD-ROM (included in the “complete” kit) offers animations for all letters—print, slant print and cursive. Your student can see the strokes written by an invisible hand on your computer screen. Peterson has materials for preschool through eighth grade, but I expect that the courses for kindergarten through fourth grade will be of primary interest.

In addition, Peterson Directed Handwriting offers printable e-workbooks, reproducible lesson-sheets, wall alphabets, pencil grips, and special education materials. Of particular interest might be *Shirley’s Books* (\$4.95 each), a four-book series of reproducible practice books in your choice of ball-and-stick print, two versions of slant print, or cursive. *The Left-Handed Writer* (ebook for \$9.95) might be of interest to those with left-handed students.

The Peterson Directed Handwriting website has many free how-to videos and an extensive resource library with research information and practical ideas for teaching handwriting. They also offer free online support.

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A Reason for Handwriting

by Carol Ann Retzer and Eva Hoshino
The Concerned Group
PO Box 1000
Siloam Springs, AR 72761
800-447-4332

www.areasonfor.com

teacher guide - \$24.95, student books - \$17.95 each



A Reason for Handwriting uses ball-and-stick printing and a traditional style cursive, with scripture as the writing subject. Scripture verses are modified to be understandable for children—more at younger levels than

older. One of the most popular features is the set of decorated border sheets in the back of the books for children to color and write their Verse of the Week. These completed pages are attractive enough to hang in prominent places, use as family memory verses, or send to grandparents and relatives.

Eight different books labeled K and A through F correspond to kindergarten through sixth grade. There is also a *Transition* book with a letter designation of T.

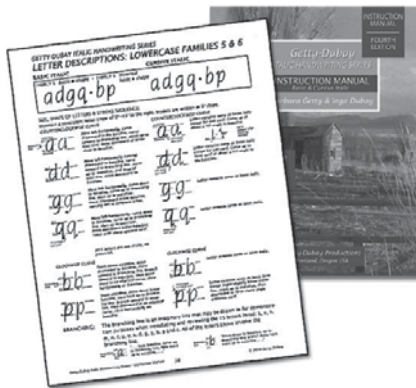
The first book, level K, is an introduction to printing for kindergarten level. The next two books, A and B, teach printing, covering the same skills but with different scripture selections. Lines have more space than in upper level books, so children don’t become frustrated by lack of space.

The *Transition* book covers the transition from printing to cursive and would typically be used in second or third grade. Books C through F all cover cursive skills using different scripture verses each year. Scripture for the four books is drawn from these areas: C - Epistles, D - Gospels, E - Psalms, and F - Proverbs. I would likely use book C for the first year of cursive (after *Transition*) since it provides foundational instruction. After that, you might select books according to scripture content since it is unlikely that you will need to use all of the books.

The *Handwriting Teacher Guidebook*, which covers all levels, includes brief lesson plans, principles of handwriting, valuable suggestions for correcting handwriting problems and working with different letter-connection combinations, teaching tips, vocabulary and skill lists for each student workbook, and reproducible master forms for skill development and evaluation. There are also supplemental exercises, games, and ideas. Initially, you should purchase a combination set of one student worktext and the teacher guide. After that you need to purchase only student worktexts.

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The Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting series



by Barbara Getty and Inga Dubay
Allport Editions
716 NE Lawrence Ave.
Portland, OR 97232
800-777-2844
www.allport.com
teacher guide - \$18.75, student
books - \$11.75 each

The Getty-Dubay Italic style handwriting, typically thought of as our third option, can be taught with this series of inexpensive handwriting worktexts for kindergarten through sixth grade.

Getty-Dubay Italic is somewhat similar to slant print in appearance, but letters are formed differently. This method has simple and clear letter forms with roots in calligraphy. Also, the

writing instrument is lifted far less often than when writing with a broad-edged calligraphy pen. Getty-Dubay Italic letter forms for printing and cursive are basically identical, with entrance and exit strokes added to the printed forms for joining letters in cursive. This makes transition from printing to cursive almost effortless.

These books teach students to use a “look, plan, and practice” approach to evaluate and improve their own work, beginning with the first step in *Books A* through *C* for kindergarten through second grade, then using all three steps in *Books D* through *G* for grades three through six. The books have full-color covers, and the print explaining lessons matches the Getty-Dubay Italic style.

The teacher guide (one book for student *Books A* through *G*) contains the scope and sequence for the series; discussion of materials; tips for teaching left- or right-handed writers; and techniques for teaching and evaluating shape, strokes, size, slope, spacing, and speed of writing. It also has blackline masters for various sizes of ruled-line paper, three letter formats, and an envelope.

Getty-Dubay Italic style handwriting looks impressive without requiring extraordinary effort. This method might be a good choice for children who have struggled with handwriting and need a new approach. Introducing italic style to children with handwriting difficulties has proven very successful in some cases. It gives them a fresh start, and the results can look good with little skill. Students need not begin in *Book A* (kindergarten level) but can start with the book for their grade level.

For children who need even more practice than that supplied within the workbooks there are blackline masters on a single CD-ROM that covers all levels *A* through *G* (\$24.75). Each half sheet references the page number in the corresponding book. Writing practice contains single letter and/or short letter combinations.

To make teaching Getty-Dubay Italic handwriting even easier, there is a DVD video (\$29.95) titled *Write Now! Italic Handwriting*.

For those who prefer more efficient instruction within a single book rather than child-oriented worktexts, the authors have produced *Write Now* (\$19.95). Although written for adult learners, children from about ages ten and up might be able to learn from it even if they need some adult assistance. *Write Now*

teaches basic Getty-Dubay Italic handwriting with plenty of examples and practice exercises. The practice content is very similar to that in *Book G*. Unlike the workbook series described above, it goes beyond simple italic into the use of different types of pens and more complicated calligraphy. Following the instruction is a brief, illustrated history of the alphabet. Lined guide sheets are also included.

CHAPTER 10

Mathematics

My top picks for math are a diverse assortment to suit different situations and learning styles. Since I've had to be selective, I have narrowed my choices to resources that fit the largest number of students.

You might have noticed that I have not included well-known programs from A Beka or BJU Press, and I should explain why. A Beka's math program is very traditional, does an excellent job developing computation skills, and has more than enough review and practice. Explanation of new concepts is included within student worktexts, so students can work independently most of the time. However, the series is weak in developing conceptual understanding, especially in comparison to programs like *Math-U-See* and *Singapore's Primary Mathematics* that made my Top Picks. A Beka's Curriculum Guides offer some teaching assistance, but my experience is that homeschoolers rarely use them. Instead, they are more likely to purchase only the teacher editions that serve as answer keys. However, some children are strong enough conceptual thinkers that A Beka still works very well for them.

In contrast, BJU Press's math program is strong on conceptual development. The drawback with BJU Press's program is that it needs to be taught from the teacher's edition. This is not a program for independent study. The teacher's editions include teaching strategies that explain concepts and address different learning styles. While this is very helpful, it also means that it takes longer to get through a lesson, either in planning and selecting what to use or else in actually completing the lesson with your child. Consequently, I find that many homeschoolers try to shortcut by just handing their children the workbook without adequate instruction. If you have time to use the program correctly, it is very good.

I have also had to leave out other math programs that would be great in certain situations but are not practical for most home educators.

Math Supplements

Narrowing down to the top resources also meant skipping all of the helpful supplemental items. This was especially frustrating when it came to math since there are so many great supplements that you really might need to use.

Check www.CathyDuffyReviews.com where I have such a large number of reviews of math supplements that they have their own index page! Meanwhile, here are just a few ideas to consider. All of these types of supplements can be found at teacher supply stores, homeschool distributors, and online sources.

- **Focused topical books:** When children struggle with a particular topic or skill, they often need to get a better understanding of the concept itself. Supplemental books are often the solution. The various *Key to...* series of workbooks from Key Curriculum Press are an example of this sort of thing. They have four series with a number of worktexts addressing each topic for *Fractions*, *Decimals*, *Measurement*, and *Geometry* (www.keypress.com). Other publishers offer single books on such topics.

- **Computer-based computation drill programs:** I won't mention any single program since there are so many good ones. This is one area where computers are really useful. Drill can be sooooo boring, but the computer can jazz things up, put it into a game format, add color, and make it fun.

- **Cuisenaire Rods, Base Ten Blocks, and other manipulatives** can be used as supplements alongside more traditional programs. If your children do not need *Math-U-See's* immersion in manipulatives, it can be relatively inexpensive to purchase a set of one of these other manipulatives and a resource book on how to use them to teach particular concepts. Cuisenaire actually has some activity books for working with the rods that are just plain fun.

- **Games:** many traditional games like Monopoly and Life have quite a bit of math built in. Other games have been developed specifically to focus on math skills. Check homeschool and educational product distributors such as those listed below for ideas.

- **Supplemental Activity Books:** Some children love to do activity pages when the math practice is linked to a dot-to-dot picture, puzzle, or something that provides a motivation for figuring out the correct answers. Drill and review in such formats is much more appealing than what is generally offered in math textbooks.

Some of the best sources for math supplements are:

- Activity Resources, www.activityresources.com
- Educational Learning Games, Inc., 727-786-4850, www.educationallearninggames.com
- Learning Resources, 888-489-9388, www.learningresources.com
- Nasco Math, 800-558-9595, www.enasco.com/math/
- Rainbow Resource Center, 888-841-3456, www.rainbowresource.com
- WCA Games That Teach, 800-559-9206, www.wiebe-carlson.com

Core Curricula

Note that I have arranged my Top Picks for math in a progression from lowest to highest grade levels rather than alphabetical order, although there is some overlap with programs covering many levels.

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CTC Math

by Patrick Murray

CTC Math

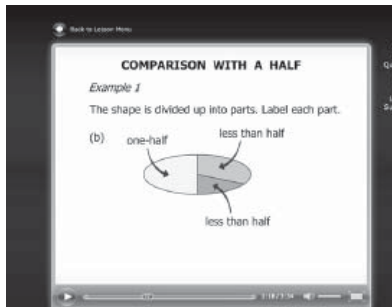
310-281-2217

www.ctcmath.com

Homeschoolers receive a 60% discount off the normal prices.

Individual student: \$11.97 per month, \$50.80 for 6 months, \$78.80 for 12 months

Family (2 or more students): \$15.97 per month, \$78.80 for 6 months, \$118.80 for 12 months



CTC Math is an online, subscription-based math program for kindergarten through high school created and taught

by Australian math teacher Patrick Murray.

For each course, lessons are divided into a number of “streams” or broad areas of math then further divided into topics within each stream. Then each topic will have a number of lessons. For example, kindergarten level has four “streams,” and the first one (Number, Patterns and Algebra) has eight topics, Number I, Number II, Patterns, Addition, Subtraction, Multiplication, Fractions, and Money. There are a number of lessons for each of these topics. This amounts to a lot of content at each grade level.

At the topic level, there are optional diagnostic tests that might be used either as pre-tests or post-tests for all courses up through Basic Math and Pre-Algebra (a single course). As pre-tests, you can find out if your child already knows a topic and can skip to the next grade level in that particular stream. You can also use either test as a final exam when a student has completed the lessons within that topic. There are two forms of diagnostic tests: standard or comprehensive. Both tests draw

from the same bank of questions, but comprehensive tests present about twice as many questions as do the standard tests. Diagnostic tests will tell the parent or teacher what a student knows or needs to learn, but the program doesn't automatically prescribe a grade level or course based on the tests.

The Basic Math and Pre-Algebra course introduces a “topic test” at the end of some (but not all) topical sections. This is a test that is to be printed and completed offline. Answers are then entered onto an online answer form for scoring. While these appear frequently in this course, they appear sporadically in high school level courses. Calculus has none, and Algebra II and Trigonometry appear to each have only one, yet Pre-Calculus and Geometry have a number of them.

On the menu, directly under the diagnostic tests are the lessons for that topic. When there are no diagnostic tests at upper levels, the menu just lists the lessons. Simply click on the first lesson and start.

Each lesson begins with a brief tutorial that runs from four to nine minutes. Tutorials use colorful graphics and animations with Patrick Murray's voice-over explanation. The consistency of hearing just one voice makes this program feel more personal and predictable than some other programs where the style of presentation and the voice-overs frequently change. Murray's Australian accent is very understandable. Murray and the written material in the program both occasionally use Australian (British) vocabulary and images with which students in the U.S. might not be familiar such as *colour* rather than *color* and images of a cricket bat and ball. This is not a huge issue, but students will likely encounter something unfamiliar at one point or another. Interestingly, the program uses U.S. currency, at least at kindergarten level. I notice that the screen tells me that the program is loading the U.S. Version, so they have clearly made some changes to the program reflecting the location

of the user. The staff at CTC Math tell me that the program has been available in the U.S. for less than a year at this point, and they are continually making changes in regard to issues like this.

Lessons teach in small increments with plenty of practice on each topic. The program allows students to go back and repeat lessons or jump ahead to a different topic if that is helpful.

You can print out a one-page summary of each video tutorial for handy reference or review if you wish. Unfortunately, there is only one tutorial for each topic, so if a student doesn't grasp a concept as presented in that tutorial, they don't have another option. Parents will need to watch for this. If a student seems to be missing a particular concept, they might need to use something besides CTC Math to teach that particular concept.

After the tutorial, students are given a series of interactive questions. Students type their answers into the computer or use the mouse to select an answer. The program immediately scores their work, and it also maintains student records. You can print a page showing the problems with their step-by-step solutions, but you cannot print worksheets of unsolved problems. CTC Math doesn't waste a lot of time with pointless animations and praise.

Sometimes lessons require students to type in words. If a kindergartner is asked to type in number words, yet the child knows neither the keyboard nor the spelling of the words, this can be quite challenging. This should only be a problem at the youngest levels.

If students don't answer enough problems correctly, they can re-watch the tutorial if necessary and then tackle a different problem set. The program has a huge database and will present one or more additional sets of problems that are different from the original set. So students can practice a concept as much as they need.

For each topic area, the program shows a

reward ribbon symbol that varies by level of accomplishment: bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The program also provides certificates of accomplishment for each section that parents can print out if they wish. Parents can access detailed reports showing topics studied, time spent, and quiz and test scores. Reports and certificates can also be automatically emailed to the parent or teacher as well.

The scope and sequence seems challenging in the early grades but less so as it progresses. For example in third grade CTC Math teaches both multiplication by single-digit numbers and division with remainders—neither is required by the Common Core State Standards (CC) until fourth grade. The scope and sequence on at least some core skills slows down after this. Multiplication with two-digit multipliers and carrying is taught in the fifth grade in CTC Math while it is listed as a fourth grade topic in the CC. Long division isn't taught by CTC Math until sixth grade while it is to be taught by the end of fifth grade in the CC. And long division with decimals doesn't show up until seventh grade in CTC Math while the CC says that it is to be taught by the end of fifth grade.

Keep in mind that many math programs used by homeschoolers (Rod and Staff's Mathematics for Christian Living series [reviewed on my website], *Singapore Math*, and *Horizons Math* just to name a few) are more advanced than either the CC standards or CTC Math in the upper elementary grades.

This doesn't make CTC unusable, but you probably need to speed up the pacing to keep your children close to grade level past third grade. At high school level, you might want to have students complete the Trigonometry and Pre-Calculus courses in addition to the core courses if you want them to have more rigorous coverage. Note that CTC Math courses go all the way through Calculus.

The early courses are labeled for kindergarten through sixth grade. These are followed by the Basic Math and Pre-Algebra course, a broad

course that seems to “catch up” the scope and sequence. Immediately following the Basic Math and Pre-Algebra course are Elementary Measurement and Elementary Geometry. The latter two courses cover geometry topics that are usually taught before high school level geometry, so students should complete the group of all three courses before tackling high school courses. There should be plenty of time to do so.

Students at all levels need to be familiar with paper-and-pencil math. Older students will need to do some paper-and-pencil work to solve complex problems in CTC Math. However, younger students also need to be given opportunities for paper-and-pencil problem solving since CTC Math at younger levels rarely makes their use necessary. A supplemental workbook, handwritten problems, or computer-generated worksheets should do the trick at little or no cost.

I concentrated on the courses for the early grades for most of this review, so those are the ones with which I am most familiar. In my opinion, CTC Math seems to be an excellent option for math coverage if you keep in mind the few cautions I’ve mentioned above. It is easy to navigate, and it is efficient in both the tutorials and the presentation of problems to solve. The fact that students can review and practice as needed is a real plus. Students can watch tutorials or jump in and try to complete the problems without watching the tutorial if they think they already know the concept.

CTC Math offers a number of subscription plans: monthly, six-month, or twelve-month. They also offer membership for a single student or a family plan for two or more students. The family plan for twelve-months is clearly the best deal, and especially so if you have more than two children! Each student is given an individual login, and the program tracks their progress. The student has access to all grade levels for the subscription period. This is especially valuable since it is difficult to identify

just one grade level that covers everything a particular child needs to learn, and your child might complete more than one grade level in a year.

While you might have to supplement for topics that students don’t understand from the CTC tutorials, and you probably need to have students complete some additional paper-and-pencil math practice, CTC Math should be able to serve as your core math curricula. It also works very well as a supplement since it is easy to locate topics for review or practice.

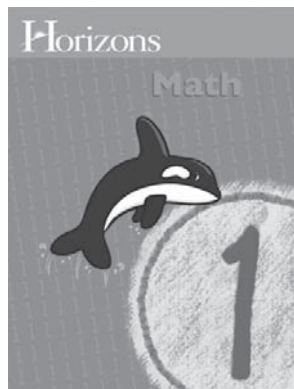
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Horizons Math

Alpha Omega Publications
804 N. 2nd Ave. E.
Rock Rapids, IA 51246
800-622-3070

www.aophomeschooling.com

sets for each level include a teacher handbook and two student workbooks: K - \$71.95, grades 1 through 6 - \$81.95 each, optional student worksheet pack - \$9.95 each



Alpha Omega Publication’s *Horizons Math* is a traditional math program for kindergarten through sixth grade. They also publish a *Pre-Algebra* course for junior high that I review by itself later in this chapter.

In *Horizons Math*, the teacher handbook is the primary component of the program although each level does have two full-color student workbooks.

The teacher handbook outlines every step of each lesson, listing objectives, materials needed, stories, poems, and games. Some preparation time is needed, and lessons must be taught.

Horizons Math uses a variety of manipulatives throughout all levels, although far more

in the early grades than in fifth and sixth grades. Among the manipulatives used are dominoes, counters, play money, place value materials, flannel board with numbers, abacus, beads, and flash cards. You will also use household items such as a calendar, an egg carton, a ruler, and straws. For the most part, these are things you can easily find or make yourself or they are relatively inexpensive items. Base Ten Blocks used at upper levels would be one of the more costly items. Charts at the front of each level's teacher handbook list manipulatives to be used and lessons for which they are to be used. Charts also show which manipulatives are essential and which are optional.

Each lesson has instruction on a new concept plus practice or review of previously-learned concepts. This continual practice and review marks this as a "spiral" curriculum.

Every lesson includes a number of activities that require interaction between teacher and student, often with hands-on materials. For example, one lesson in the first-grade program has paper-and-pencil work with a "hundreds chart," a regrouping demonstration with place value manipulatives, oral number-chart work, time-telling practice using small clocks, written place value practice, addition practice, writing the words for large numbers, and word problems.

Alpha Omega Publications (AOP) explains their scope and sequence as well as their course layout in great detail at the beginning of each teacher handbook. The readiness evaluation that is also found there will help ensure that you are selecting the correct level in the program. Readiness evaluations are also available for free at www.aophomeschooling.com/diagnostic-tests.

The teacher handbook is very well designed with each part of the lesson clearly labeled. Activity instructions are numbered and spaced so they are easy to locate and read quickly. All instruction is provided through one-on-one teacher instruction, demonstrations, and

hands-on activities.

Students have two separate workbooks (each about one-half inch thick) to cover each level. This is a lot of workbook pages, especially for kindergarten—generally two to three per lesson depending upon grade level. But the workbooks are appealingly designed with full color, large print, and variety in the layout. Illustrations, puzzles, and lesson explanations take up some space as well, so the overall impact is not overwhelming.

I suspect that many parents will be tempted to hand their children the workbooks and ignore the teacher handbooks, but there are important teaching instructions in the handbooks you should not skip. You should review the lesson plans and determine how much of each presentation is useful for each student.

Supplemental, reproducible worksheets are also included in the teacher handbook with clear indication of lessons to which they correlate. You can purchase the worksheets as a separate packet if you prefer not to photocopy pages from the teacher handbook. Periodic tests are in student workbooks, and answer keys to workbook pages, including tests, are in the teacher handbook.

Each level goes beyond most other programs, spending more time on development and practice of concepts and skills. The scope and sequence is purposely advanced. The *Horizons Math* program was not written to align with the Common Core Standards. However, it seems to cover the standards although sometimes at a grade level earlier than required by the standards themselves.

AOP's educational philosophy is also very evident in this program. They believe repetition and review are essential until a subject has been mastered to the point where it becomes second nature. They view math as both a basic functional skill and a communications skill that develops precision in thinking. Within this framework that emphasizes mental discipline, they have done an excellent job of

breaking tasks down into manageable increments while also building in methods that address the needs of various learning styles.

However, this also means that you might not need to use everything in each lesson with each of your children. Some children won't need all of the multi-sensory instruction and others don't need all of the practice and review (in spite of instructions to the contrary in the teacher handbooks). Exercise your own discretion as to what to use and what to skip.

Quarterly tests and a final in grades four through six, plus answer keys for workbooks, worksheets, and tests are all in the teacher handbook. Except for *Horizons Math K*, there is also a test after every ten lessons in the student workbooks.

This program was designed very much with home educators in mind, so there are very few classroom-only type activities that must be adapted or skipped.

Horizons Math K

The *Horizons Math K* program follows an advanced scope and sequence, closer to some publishers' first grade programs. Students perform addition and subtraction (two digits plus or minus one digit) with no regrouping by the end of the year. However, lessons are taught with visual aids and manipulatives to better help young children grasp concepts. Time, money, measurement, ordinal numbers, and introductory fractions are among other concepts covered. For home educators who want an advanced academic math program for kindergarten, this is a practical solution.

Horizons Math 1

The first grade program begins with concepts such as place value and counting by twos and fives—all within the first ten lessons. Addition advances through addition of triple-digit numbers with carrying from the ones column. Subtraction works up through three-digit numbers but without borrowing. In addition to basic number concepts (e.g., counting, addition, subtraction, place value), this level

teaches time, money, calendar use, measurement, fractions, sets, shapes, bar graphs, and estimation.

A solid foundation in number recognition and number values along with other concepts such as colors and shapes is essential before beginning this level. (This foundation is laid in *Math K*.) If children are weak in some areas, extra lessons in the handbook can be used to cover some topics. However, some children in first grade might need to start with *Math K*. Choose levels according to appropriate skill levels rather than equating them to grade levels.

Horizons Math 2

Math 2 expects that children have learned two-digit addition and subtraction with carrying, but it still reviews the concepts then moves on to larger numbers. Multiplication facts for 1 through 10 are taught along with place value, sets, correspondence, cardinal and ordinal numbers, shapes, graphs, fractions ($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$), measurement, temperature, estimation, ratio, the calendar, time, money, area, perimeter, volume, and decimals (in money).

Horizons Math 3

Math 3 covers the same topics as *Math 2* but at more challenging levels; e.g. multiplication teaches up through four-digit multipliers, division works up through two-digit divisors with remainders. Algebraic thinking is introduced with equations like $n + 5 = (7 + 2) + 4$.

Horizons Math 4

The readiness test at the front of the book will help you know whether or not your child is able to work at this level. It asks students to reduce fractions, multiply four-digit numbers by multiples of ten, perform short division, compare values of fractions with unlike denominators, round off numbers, understand ratio, add fractions with common denominators, and solve simple, algebraically-expressed addition equations.

Among concepts covered by the end of the course are long division with two-digit divisors,

adding and subtracting fractions with unlike denominators, converting fractions to decimals, adding and subtracting decimals, metric measurement, and multiplying or dividing to find equal ratios. Time, money, geometry, and graphs are also covered.

Lessons are designed to be presented by the teacher as with lower levels, but students should be able to do much of their work independently. Materials or supplies needed are listed, and you might have to plan ahead to procure some of these. One lesson describes a bingo game for the teacher to construct, but other than that, most materials are much more standard—counters, flash cards, rulers, Base Ten Blocks, a clock, and play money. While much of the lesson activity takes place within the two student workbooks for this level, there are additional activities such as mental math or manipulative work described in the lesson plans. About every other lesson uses a worksheet for which reproducible masters are found in the teacher handbook.

Horizons Math 5

Among concepts on the readiness test for *Math 5* (which students are expected to know before beginning this course) are division of two-digit divisors into dollar amounts with decimals; acute angles; diameters and radii of circles; similar and congruent figures; simple perimeter, area, and volume; ratios; addition of fractions with unlike denominators, addition and subtraction of mixed numbers, decimal values, and metric measurements. As with earlier levels, there is a great deal of review, so if your child has not yet covered all of these concepts, he or she might be able to pick them up through the review that is built into *Math 5*.

This course continues to stress both computation skills and understanding of concepts. Among concepts taught by the end of this course are multiplying three-digit by three-digit numbers, values of numbers with exponents, finding averages, division by two-digit divisors, least common multiples, multiplying and dividing

fractions, all four functions applied to decimal numbers, percents, and probability. Calculators are used, primarily for checking answers.

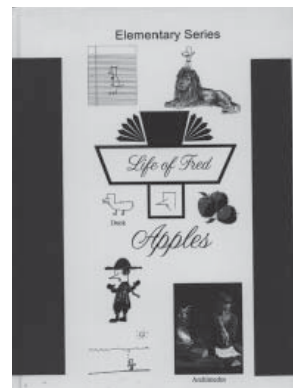
Horizons Math 6

Students beginning this level are expected to know how to work with fractions, decimals, and percents. They should also have been introduced to concepts such as congruency, similarity, diameter and chords of circles, and different types of averages. However, the continual review and spiral approach used throughout the program mean that these concepts are reviewed or retaught at this level. Still, the program moves beyond the level of most other sixth grade courses. For example, *Saxon Math 7/6* introduces the idea of ratio while *Horizons Math 6* goes further, teaching cross multiplication to solve for n . Geometry coverage is more complex with students learning to construct geometric figures using a compass and straightedge. Students continue to work with fractions, decimals, and percents. Consumer math topics such as check writing, banking, budgeting, and computing interest are covered along with more advanced equations, graphs, measurement, and problem solving.

Students who complete this course should be prepared for *Horizons Pre-Algebra*.

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Life of Fred Series



by Dr. Stanley
Schmidt
Polka Dot Publishing
email: stan@
stanleyschmidt.com
order from
Z-Twist Books
Z-Twist phone:
916-570-3839
www.ztwistbooks.
com

texts range from \$16 to \$39 each

Two features immediately make the *Life of Fred* math series appealing to many families:

low cost and courses designed for independent study. But there's much more to the *Life of Fred* books!

The books are written by Dr. Stanley Schmidt, a retired math teacher who loves math and wants to share his enthusiasm with students. Part of his strategy is to build his math books around the adventures of Fred, a very young (six years old in the *Geometry* text and five years old in the lower level books) genius who is a math teacher at Kittens University. The stories shift from silly to serious, outlandish to edgy. They are likely to be very appealing to learners who prefer something more than dry math—students who like to puzzle things out.

Fred's adventures are the jumping off point for math lessons. For example, Fred plays with his food and creates a polygon, or Fred might be pondering something mathematical, or teaching, or discussing a math topic with friends. As another example, in the following excerpt Fred's pet llama, Lambda, lives with Fred in his office:

He [Fred] looked across the room in the semi-darkness toward what he called "Lambda's office" and hoped that she was resting well. "Maybe 18 miles was a little long for our first jog," he reflected. Fred had constructed her nest using some fencing that he had found in the general storage closet in the math building. The fencing formed the longest side (called the hypotenuse) of the right triangle (that's a triangle with a right angle) which was her part of Fred's office. The shorter two sides of a right triangle are called the legs. Since many of his students often visited Fred during his office hours, the use of Lambda's office as an example of a right triangle would be a perfect illustration to use in his geometry lecture today (*Geometry*, p. 92).

All of this makes these texts much more user-friendly than most others. It also means that it takes longer to get through the mathematical material.

Surprisingly, the story line and discursions are not used to dumb down the courses.

Each lesson teaches a concept, albeit sometimes in a roundabout fashion through the story. Then there's a set of "Your Turn to Play" practice problems with complete answers and explanations if needed. Sometimes, Dr. Schmidt throws in some extra entertainment or information in the answer key. Your Turn to Play always shows up on a right hand page, and the answers are on the following page. (If you think your child might quickly flip to see answers in advance, try paper clipping the pages together.)

Throughout the series, Dr. Schmidt tries to teach for conceptual understanding rather than mere memorization of formulas and strategies. Students often see the practical application of a math concept before they learn how to solve the problem. They are likely to begin viewing math as puzzle solving or critical thinking rather than lists of problems to solve.

The story of Fred is an important part of this approach, and it takes up significant space within each text. And while it sometimes meanders into entertainment unrelated to the math topic at hand, most of the time it stimulates students to consider how math might be used to deal with a real life situation. Some of the excursions are rather funny—maybe more so for adults than children. For example, after Fred's ATM access code gets stolen and his checking account cleaned out, he realizes he has no budget for buying books. He imagines going without reading for three days:

This was too horrible to contemplate. Fred had once been at a lunch with a bunch of adults who were in the three-days-without-reading category. Their conversation was limited to: (1) My trip to Arizona. A complete description of all the bad things that happened on that trip. (2) The weather. (3) What I saw on television. (4) My kids. (5) Sports. (6) My health problems (*Dogs*, p. 75).

The storyline might be interesting enough to students that they plow through the books more quickly than you might imagine. However, children's interest spans vary, so it is difficult to predict how long it might take a child to complete any of the books.

One potential drawback I see in the elementary books is that the digressions and extraneous information might be overwhelming for some students, especially when Dr. Schmidt throws in something entirely new, such as a calculus equation, with no explanation.

Ten texts for the elementary grades—approximately kindergarten through fourth grade—are unusually titled with no grade level indicators: *Apples*, *Butterflies*, *Cats*, *Dogs*, *Edgewood*, *Farming*, *Goldfish*, *Honey*, *Ice Cream*, and *Jelly Beans*. They should be used in alphabetical order by the first letter of each title. While the first two books might be used by some kindergartners and first graders, they can also be used by older students who will work through them much more quickly. Students might complete two or more books per year. All students should work through the entire series since concepts taught in earlier books are frequently used in subsequent books. For example, the concept of functions is taught a few times in *Dogs*, then functions show up in problems beginning in chapter three of *Edgewood* without further instruction.

The progression and method of learning are unusual, and you might feel that your child is not doing enough math. But supplementing shouldn't be necessary. If you still want additional problem-solving practice, consider using games, manipulatives, or a creative problem-solving workbook rather than a traditional workbook.

Three intermediate books—*Kidneys*, *Liver*, and *Mineshaft*—should be used after the elementary books and prior to *Fractions* and *Decimals*. Dr. Schmidt recommends that students not begin *Fractions* before fifth grade. After *Decimals*, three books are used in what

is usually considered the middle school years: *Pre-Algebra 0 with Physics*, *Pre-Algebra 1 with Biology*, and *Pre-Algebra 2 with Economics*. They should be completed in that order and can easily be done in a couple of year's time. These texts treat physics, biology and economics just as they treat math, jumping from topic to topic with unusual connections to the storyline about Fred. Pre-algebra is covered in a scattered fashion along with a few more advanced concepts such as functions, calculating the molecular weight of sucrose, and balancing chemical equations. After these three texts, students move on to *Beginning Algebra*, *Advanced Algebra*, *Geometry*, *Trigonometry*, *Calculus*, and *Statistics*.

Parents have urged Dr. Schmidt to create more problem solving practice for algebra, so he has produced a supplement titled *Zillions of Practice Problems for Beginning Algebra*. The first 57 pages of this hardcover book are the problems and the next 198 pages are complete solutions and answers. Problems are grouped to correspond with each chapter of the textbook.

Beginning Algebra allows but does not require the use of a basic calculator. For *Advanced Algebra* through *Statistics*, students will need a scientific calculator but not a graphing calculator.

Beginning and *Advanced Algebra* serve as first and second year Algebra courses and cover traditional content at a relatively high level. Both of these texts and the *Trigonometry* text each have an optional *Fred's Home Companion* (FHC) book that I highly recommend. Each FHC has lesson plans for the corresponding textbook. FHCs also indicate which groups of questions students should answer, making it easier for students to pace themselves if they are working independently. Each core text has answers to some of the problems, and the FHC provides solutions to the rest of them. In addition, there are extra problems for students to solve (with their solutions provided).

Life of Fred Geometry content is actually quite

traditional, even though the presentation is not. The content is high level and challenging with proofs introduced in chapter one. Chapter eleven teaches constructions using a compass and a straight edge. Since *Geometry* operates with definitions, theorems, and postulates, students are supposed to create their own notebook in which they write down each of these as they encounter them in the text. There's a reference section in the back of the book that has all of these presented in the order they are encountered in the book, but students should record definitions, theorems, or postulates each in their own sections of the notebook.

You can read much more detail about individual courses in the reviews in on my website at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

As I reviewed *Life of Fred*, I spotted at least a few references to the Bible and churches that indicate that the author likely has a Christian worldview, but I didn't find any overtly religious statements.

In spite of their low cost, all of the *Life of Fred* texts are hardcover books, printed in black-and-white with clip art and line-drawn illustrations. There are no separate teacher guides or answer keys to purchase. In addition, the texts are non-consumable and might be used again for subsequent students.

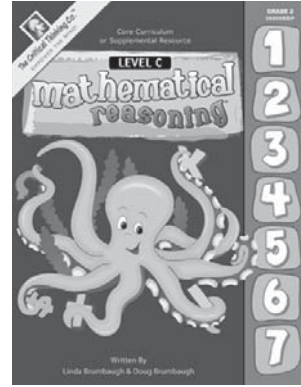
It is difficult to convey the full "flavor" of these texts in a review, but Dr. Schmidt does a marvelous job of helping students see the real value and applications of math. Sample pages are available at Dr. Schmidt's website, at www.polkadotpublishing.com so you can check out this unusual math series to see if it's right for your children.

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Mathematical Reasoning

The Critical Thinking Co.™
1991 Sherman Ave., Suite 200
North Bend, OR, 97459
800-458-4849

www.criticalthinking.com



A combination of challenging content, very attractive layout, variety, significant incorporation of thinking skills, and relatively low cost merited this series inclusion among my Top Picks.

This relatively new series should work very well for home educators since it works best taught one-on-one or in small groups. The series begin at preschool level and continues through sixth grade.

While the worktexts were written to be used as either core texts or supplements, they are comprehensive enough to serve as your core texts. There are fewer problems to solve in these books than in other programs—fewer problems per page although the books are quite large. So you might supplement *Mathematical Reasoning* books with additional hands-on activities, games, or practice problems, and you might also use the *Mathematical Reasoning Supplements* I describe at the end of this review. The first three books include a suggestion that you check out the National Library of Virtual Manipulatives at <http://nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/vlibrary.html>, a free website where students can work on math activities with simulated manipulatives. This site has activities up through high school level so you might also want to access it if you are using upper level courses or any other math program for that matter.

The *Mathematical Reasoning* series uses a spiral approach, introducing a concept then revisiting it a number of times at intervals. Students who like variety should love this series since there are seldom two pages that look similar. Pages always have at least one illustration and are so colorful that there is little white space on a page.

As one would expect of anything from The Critical Thinking Co. (TCTC), this series emphasizes critical thinking in ways you seldom encounter in other math courses. It includes some grid-type logic puzzles (like those in the *Mind Bender* series from TCTC) as well as puzzles from *Balance Benders* and *Cranium Crackers* books from TCTC. Other puzzles of many types are incorporated into exercises to challenge thinking skills as well as to make it more fun.

The authors teach proper nomenclature from the beginning. For example, they use the term “line segment” rather than “line” and the term “numeral” rather than “number,” even in the preschool books.

Conceptual development is exceptionally strong since the program uses numerous ways of explaining and applying each concept. Concepts are often introduced with visual representations, sometimes representations of Base Ten Blocks or other manipulatives. You might actually use manipulatives if that is helpful for your child, but they are not required.

At the beginning of the book are very brief teaching instructions. Each lesson has directions and brief instruction on a new concept when needed. Parents and teachers might need to work with students with more explanation, examples, and practice on a new concept before expecting them to solve problems or complete activities. Even for lessons on concepts that students already understand, they might sometimes need assistance to know how to complete an unusual activity.

Answer keys are included at the back of each book from *Level B* (Grade 1) and up. You should not need them for the first three books.

Books are challenging and sometimes move into topics that are beyond what is typically taught at each level. Be especially cautious to select the correct level, and do not be concerned if your child needs to start at what appears to be a lower level than you would expect.

Beginning 1 (Age 3) \$32.99

Beginning 1 introduces the numbers 1 through 5, both visually and with numerals. It even introduces the concepts of addition and subtraction (e.g., 2 owls + 2 owls shown with pictures) at the end of the book! Other topics are size comparisons (e.g., smaller and larger), shapes, colors, identifying similar objects, counting, one-to-one correspondence, patterns, order (first, second, ...fifth), measuring inches, the number line, numeral recognition, beginning logic (via *Mind Bender* types of puzzles), and the characteristics of triangles, squares, and rectangles.

There is a great deal of repetition in this book, and many concepts are those that children will be exposed to in normal activities around the house, so you can skip this book without missing anything critical. All concepts also show up again in *Beginning 2*. Some concepts in this book will be beyond many three-year-old children.

Beginning 2 (Age 4) \$34.99

Beginning 2 is similar in design to *Beginning 1*, but it covers numbers 0 through 13 as well as the concepts covered in *Beginning 1*. It starts with activities where students match numerals and groups of objects, so children should already be at least somewhat familiar with what the numbers 1 through 6 look like. Other concepts introduced in this book are the idea of zero, how to write numerals, working with a number line, visual estimation (i.e., which group appears to have more or fewer items), prepositional placement (e.g., how many dogs are in front of or beside the dog house?), dot-to-dot puzzles, right and left, and halves.

Level A (Kindergarten) \$39.99

The *Beginning* books emphasize counting, while *Level A* really moves into addition and subtraction but with sums not higher than 8 and subtraction problems with minuends (the top number) no higher than 7. Other concepts taught are odd and even numbers, patterns, counting and writing numerals up to 20,

identifying similar objects, order (first, second, etc.), geometric shapes, symmetry, attributes, equations for addition and subtraction, completing bar graphs, *Mind Bender* type logic problems, halves and quarters (only visual concepts), coins, and time telling.

Level B (Grade 1) \$39.99

Level B introduces place value, expanded notation, counting by tens, coins, directions (including compass directions), measuring inches, the concept of measuring by other units, completing a "hundreds chart," visual analogies, transformations, bar graphs, lines of symmetry, fractions and their numerical expressions ($\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{4}$), thermometers, the calendar, and time telling. There are also puzzles such as dot-to-dots, *Mind Bender* grids, and other logic puzzles. Base Ten Blocks might be especially helpful with *Level B* since they are shown visually in many lessons.

Level C (Grade 2) \$42.99

Level C teaches carrying and borrowing (regrouping) up through subtraction problems with two-digit subtrahends. It teaches multiplication via skip counting, arrays, and other visual methods while it also introduces multiplication equations. Division is briefly presented at the end of the book, but it is taught only as a function opposite to multiplication. Students start learning their multiplication facts this year but shouldn't be expected to have mastered them. Among other concepts in this level are surveys, probability, graphs, estimation, measurement, place value, odd and even numbers, metric measurement, fraction concepts, money with coins and bills, polygons, vertices, rounding numbers, writing number words, placeholders in equations, and many word and logic problems. An illustrated glossary and answer key are at the back of the book.

Level D (Grade 3) \$42.99

Level D continues with topics taught in *Level C* but with a heavy focus on multiplication and division up through the introduction of

long division with single-digit divisors. It also teaches fraction algorithms including addition, subtraction, and multiplication of simple fractions; recognition of like and unlike denominators; and finding equivalent fractions. Among other topics new at this level are beginning work with decimals, congruent figures, using the (x,y) form to identify locations on a coordinate grid, units of measurement, rays, angles, endpoints, perimeter, area, weight, least common multiples, reflections, translations, and rotations. There are also two pages of "Time Trials" on multiplication facts.

Level E (Grade 4) \$42.99

Students do lots of work with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division in *Level E*. Multiplication and division are taken to higher levels including teaching about remainders in division. While decimals receive some attention, fractions are the main topic. Among other topics added this year are factors, prime and composite numbers, mean/median/mode, inequalities, negative numbers, order of operations, working with improper fractions, and the concept of functions.

Level F (Grade 5) \$42.99

Fractions and decimals receive the most attention in *Level F*. Students continue to move to more challenging levels of study on concepts introduced in lower level books. New concepts are the use of a protractor, measurement of angles, elapsed time, computing a bank account balance, volume of three-dimensional objects, and geometric shapes such as hexagons and decagons.

Level G (Grade 6) \$42.99

Level G reviews concepts and skills students should have previously mastered such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. While review activities include basics such as how to do regrouping for subtraction, a set of practice problems for each concept is generally accompanied by a simple puzzle that can only be solved once all problems have been

answered correctly. Students encounter more challenging work with fractions and decimals as well as number properties, order of operations, measurement, geometry, and algebra. It even introduces the concepts of slope and functions. However, even the two latter concepts are introduced in a way that makes them understandable for students at this level. Mathematical puzzles such as magic squares and logic puzzles are just a few of the many critical thinking type activities built into the course.

Mathematical Reasoning Supplements
\$24.99 each

Those who want more of a challenge for their students might want to use one of the *Mathematical Reasoning Supplement* books. Three are available, one for grades two through four, one for grades four through six, and one for grades seven through nine. Each book is topically arranged with lessons under headings such as Geometry, Measurement, Fractions, Patterns, and Graphing. Topics vary by level. Books are printed in black and white but they include many math illustrations such as geometric shapes and patterns. These books stretch students to apply their math skills in non-routine problems. Many of the problems have “puzzle-solving” appeal. Each book is self-contained with a complete solutions guide at the back. Student pages are reproducible for one family or class group.

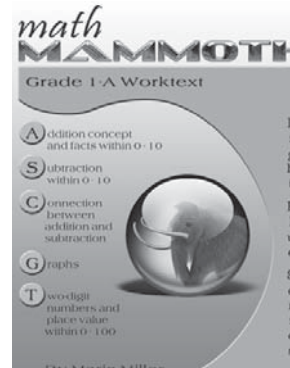
Sample pages from each book as well as the table of contents may be viewed at the publisher’s website. *Understanding Geometry*, another book in the series, is best for junior high students. My review of that course is at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

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Math Mammoth

by Maria Miller
Math Mammoth
www.mathmammoth.com
price for full sets for each grade level:

downloads - \$37.50 each, CD-ROMs - \$42.50 each, printed versions - \$56.80 each for *Grades One - Three* and \$57.80 each for *Grades Four - Six*; complete program for *Grades One - Six*: downloads - \$150, CD-ROMs - \$155



Math Mammoth seems to be an underground, “overnight success” in the home-school marketplace. With little fanfare, *Math Mammoth* has garnered lots of attention along with many fans in a relatively

short period of time.

Math Mammoth offers a few different options, but the primary thing to know is that the Light Blue Series is a complete core curriculum for grades one through six (with a pre-algebra course for grade seven in development) while the Blue Series is supplemental. The Blue Series’ content is almost identical to that of the Light Blue Series, but it is arranged and sold in small, topical units rather than as grade level texts—great for those who need to focus on a single topic like fractions.

Math Mammoth can be purchased in printed-book format, on CD-ROM, or as downloadable files. Printed books are purchased through Lulu or Rainbow Resource Center on the internet. (Links are on the Math Mammoth web site.) Most users purchase the downloadable versions, probably because of both convenience and cost. The price for downloads is fantastic—or even better, if you buy the bundle for *Grade One* through *Grade Six* it works out to \$25 per grade level. For those with downloading problems, all grade levels can be purchased on CD-ROMs. Keep in mind that you can print out the pages from either the download or the CD-ROM over and over again to be used with all children in your family.

The price alone is enough to cause you to

sit up and take notice, but the content is also top notch. Some people have compared *Math Mammoth* with *Singapore Math* since both programs teach for mastery and understanding. Both explain concepts thoroughly, generally using visual illustrations to present new concepts. Also, both programs employ a number of different ways to explain new concepts so they can reach different learning styles. *Math Mammoth* adds occasional use of simple, inexpensive manipulatives such as a \$10 abacus, ruler, measuring cup, and printable fraction manipulatives for *Grade One* through *Grade Four*. *Grade Five* introduces the calculator but teaches students to use it appropriately. Word problems and practical applications are used throughout the series so students gain a sense of how math might be used in real life.

While topics are presented in an order somewhat similar to most other programs, there are some purposeful differences. The scope and sequence is challenging, but not quite as much so as *Singapore Math*. For example fractions are introduced at the end of *Grade Three*, and decimals in *Grade Four*. Both receive extensive attention in *Grade Five*. However, decimals are more thoroughly developed before the presentation of multiplication and division of fractions so that the concepts are intertwined in a very sensible fashion. By the first half of *Grade Five*, students are already prepared to solve problems such as $(3,000 + 36)/(9 - 3)$!

Grade Five introduces plotting number patterns in a coordinate grid—a precursor for the concept of linear functions. Even though some topics could be challenging, the thorough explanations make it possible for even math-challenged students to be successful. Or you may skip some of these topics and save them for later.

Grade Six covers expressions and equations, ratios and rates, percents, decimals, factoring, fractions, positive and negative integers, coordinate graphs, geometry (area, surface area, and volume), interpreting charts and graphs,

and statistics. Here is an example of the word problems at this level: “The life spans of Mr. Short and Mr. Long were in a ratio of 3:7. Mr. Long lived 44 years longer than Mr. Short. How long did Mr. Long live?” (From the lesson on ratio problems, *Primary Math 6A*).

Grade Seven will be a complete pre-algebra course. It should be available by summer of 2015.

Most topics are taught for mastery although there is some “spiraling” where topics are taught first with some elements then revisited later with added elements. However, this is far different from Saxon’s spiral approach where topics are taught in small increments coupled with continual, extensive review of previously-taught concepts. *Math Mammoth* generally concentrates on one topic at a time for a number of lessons.

If you want more practice and review of any topics, the download comes with links for generating hundreds (at least!) of worksheets by topic. Problems are randomly generated, so you can create a number of different worksheets for the same topic if needed.

At the beginning of each chapter *Math Mammoth* books include many links to other sites on the internet for math games, tools, activities, tutorials, and worksheets. While you can certainly copy the URLs from a printed book, the convenience of hyperlinks in digital editions makes them much more likely to be used.

Time, money, measurement, graphs and other topics are included throughout the program. *Grade One* through *Grade Three* also include optional material about money in Canadian, British, Australian, South African, and European (Euro) currencies.

Author Maria Miller encourages parents to choose when to use the various sections rather than just plow straight through each book. This is really an amazing amount of material and resources for so reasonable a price.

The worktext format includes teaching

information directly on the worksheets. Pages are produced in full color, but it is not too distracting. You might choose to print these out on a black-and-white printer, but I did spot at least one instance with a number line activity where color mattered. There might be other such instances, but you can always look at the lesson directly on the computer if you run into a problem. (The preprinted book I received for review has a color cover but is otherwise printed in black-and white, so I assume that Math Mammoth views the color as optional.)

The worktexts are presented as PDF files, but they are enabled for annotation which means students can type directly onto the pages on the computer. While the computer does not correct or score the pages, students may print them out or save them. (Be sure to use a copy of your original files if you want to reuse them!)

There are some brief teaching notes at the beginning of each chapter that shouldn't be skipped. Even using these notes, explanations on the worksheets might be too brief for some students, so a parent or teacher should probably be assisting as students tackle new concepts. Parents will likely need to be more involved with younger students than older. Once students have grasped concepts, they should be able to work independently.

The program features plenty of thought-provoking word problems. These problems, coupled with the other methods of lesson presentation, will certainly help students develop both conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. However, some students might need help working through some of these problems. Author Maria Miller has also created a number of helpful YouTube teaching videos on specific topics that are available online for free.

Workbooks, tests, cumulative reviews, and answer keys are all included in the downloads or on the CD-ROMs. The Math Mammoth website offers free placement tests, free worksheets, and other helps.

The 2013 editions of this program meet and exceed the Common Core Standards, and you can see the alignment on Math Mammoth's website. However, the original versions of the books written prior to Common Core are also available as downloadable files or printed books. See the Math Mammoth FAQ page for information.

In my opinion, *Math Mammoth* is an amazingly well-developed program for such a reasonable price. *Math Mammoth* has created a very high quality product that can function as a traditional program while also taking advantage of the internet and the computer to enhance the courses with useful extras.

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Math-U-See



by Steve Demme
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MATH (6284)
www.mathusee.com
teacher packs: *Primer*
- \$31, levels *Alpha*
through *Zeta* - \$43

- \$45 each, *Pre-Algebra* through *Geometry*
- \$57 each, *Algebra 2 & Pre-Calculus* - \$72
each, *Calculus* - \$92;

student packs (include student text and test booklet except for *Primer* level): *Primer* - \$22, levels *Alpha* through *Zeta* - \$30 each, *Pre-Algebra* through *Calculus* - \$32 each; Manipulative Block Set - \$38, Fraction Overlays - \$33, Algebra and Decimal Inserts - \$22, *Skip Counting* CD with book - \$11; digital manipulatives - \$14.99

Steve Demme, creator of *Math-U-See*, combines hands-on methodology with incremental instruction and continual review in this manipulative-based program. It excels in its hands-on presentation of math concepts that

enables students to understand how math works. It is one of the rare multi-sensory math programs that continues to use manipulatives up through *Algebra 1*.

Manipulative Blocks, Fraction Overlays, and Algebra and Decimal Inserts are used at different levels to teach concepts, primarily using the “rectangle building” principle. This basic idea, consistently used throughout the program—even through algebra—is one of the best ways to demonstrate math concepts. There is also a digital app version of the manipulatives that offers a virtual experience with the manipulatives. The app is available for Apple devices and the Chrome browser right now, but Android and Kindle Fire versions are in the works too.

One of the things I think makes *Math-U-See* so popular is that many parents and teachers find that author Steve Demme’s presentations of math concepts helps them to finally comprehend much that they were taught in math but never understood. Parents and teachers with a new or renewed enthusiasm for math then do a much better job teaching their own children.

Math-U-See uses a “skill-mastery” approach, requiring students to demonstrate mastery of each topic before moving on. The program also builds in systematic review for previously learned concepts.

There are eight books for elementary grades titled *Primer*, *Alpha*, *Beta*, *Gamma*, *Delta*, *Epsilon*, *Zeta*, and *Pre-Algebra*. The Greek letter designations were chosen particularly to emphasize the order of learning rather than grade level designation. Students should move on to the next level once they’ve mastered the content of a book. These first eight books are followed by *Algebra 1*, *Geometry*, *Algebra 2*, *PreCalculus with Trigonometry*, and *Calculus*. Placement tests for the different levels are available free at the *Math-U-See* website.

Student workbooks and test booklets are softcover, and the pages are perforated and punched so they can easily be removed, written

upon, and placed in binders. Enrichment exercises have been incorporated into the student workbooks for *Primer* through *Pre-Calculus*. These optional, additional problems stretch students to higher levels of understanding and application of math concepts covered within the lessons.

Test booklets for each course have tests to be used at the end of each lesson plus four unit tests and a final exam. Neither student workbook pages nor tests are reproducible; you need to purchase books for each student. Student workbooks and test booklets are the only consumable items in each course.

Instruction manuals are printed in hardcover books with full-color covers so they can be used a number of times. Complete answer keys with solutions are included for all problems at all levels, an especially helpful feature at upper levels.

All books are printed in black and white. This is not a particular problem in the first four levels if students are working with the colorful manipulatives, learning the skip-count songs, and possibly watching the DVDs. In these levels, enrichment pages also offer engaging activities for those students who enjoy dot-to-dots, color-by-number, and other supplemental activities. These multi-sensory experiences make up for the bland workbook. However, as upper levels use manipulatives less and less, the plainness of the workbooks is a point to consider with some students.

The program covers all necessary math concepts, but it does not try to correlate the teaching of concepts at the same grade level or in the same order as some other programs.

For each level you need both the student pack and the instruction pack. The student pack for each level includes a student workbook and a test booklet for each level except *Primer*.

For *Primer* through *Algebra 1*, you will also need to purchase the set of Manipulative Blocks or the digital manipulatives app.

Math-U-See's manipulatives are primarily plastic blocks somewhat similar to Base Ten Blocks and Cuisenaire Rods, color-coded to correspond to each number. (See my review of both at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com/math-supplements/cuisenaire-rods.htm.) The blocks snap together like LEGOs[®]. Fraction Overlays are added at the *Epsilon* level, and Algebra/Decimal Inserts are added at the *Zeta* level. That means the same sets of manipulatives are each used over at least a few years.

The instruction pack for each level includes an instruction manual plus one or more DVDs that “teach the teacher.” Note that DVDs have subtitles for the hearing impaired. Parents must watch the DVDs to understand the basic concepts that are the foundation of the program. On the DVDs, Demme works through each level lesson-by-lesson, demonstrating and instructing. Demme’s presentation is enthusiastic and engaging as he clearly explains what he is doing and why. He throws in lots of math tricks, the kind that make me scratch my head and ask myself why they never taught us that in school.

The DVD presentations are critical components of the courses although instruction manuals have briefer lesson presentations of the same material covered on the DVDs. I expect that most parents will have their children watch the DVDs with them, although it was originally intended that parents with students below high school level watch the DVDs and then do their own presentations to their children.

After the initial viewing or lesson presentation, parents and children work through lessons together for as many days as it takes for children to master the concepts. Once students have grasped a concept, they practice and do problem pages on their own with occasional assistance. Typically, children should be spending about a week per lesson, but you need to take as long as necessary for your child to learn each lesson.

Primer will generally be the starting place for most kindergartners. The *Primer* level begins with essential number concepts and continues up through adding to make 10, telling time, and an introduction to subtraction. Children use manipulatives more than in upper levels of the program (and far more than in most kindergarten math programs).

There is no test booklet for the *Primer* level. At the early levels, you will also want to use the *Skip Counting and Addition Songs* audio CD. Both a “Bible” version and a “Science and Literature” version are included on the CD.

Alpha level focuses most heavily on place value, addition, and subtraction. *Beta* level teaches regrouping for both addition and subtraction. *Gamma* primarily covers multiplication while *Delta* moves on to division. Fractions are the main topic in *Epsilon*, while *Zeta* tackles decimals and percents.

Of course, other topics are included alongside these primary themes—topics such as money, measurement, geometry, time telling, graphs, estimation, prime and composite numbers, Roman numerals, and solving for unknowns. While manipulative use remains essential for understanding new concepts, the amount of time spent using the manipulatives decreases in *Epsilon* and *Zeta*.

Pre-Algebra topics are similar to those in other such courses: positive and negative numbers, exponents, roots and radicals, order of operation, geometry, ratio and proportions, and other such topics. One unusual topic for this level is irrational numbers.

There are plenty of practice problems in the latest editions of *Math-U-See*, but students who need more practice have free access to a computation drill program on the *Math-U-See* website. Parents need to choose which math concepts students will practice, then students use the program on their own. You can also use the website’s worksheet generator to generate and print additional pages of practice problems for courses up through *Pre-Algebra*. Problems

are randomly selected so you can produce a number of different worksheets for the same lesson, even though some problems might show up on more than one worksheet.

High School Courses

As you move into the high school level books, students are able to work more independently. The instruction manual for each level is written to the student. Students need to watch the DVD presentation then read through the instruction manual before tackling the workbook. Workbooks include extra instruction for unusual problems, especially for some of the honors or enrichment problems, but they do not serve as complete course books on their own.

The honors exercises provide more challenging work with critical thinking, word problems, and practical applications, plus test prep practice and preparation for the math required in advanced science courses. The addition of the honors exercises largely alleviates concerns I expressed in my review in the first edition of *Top Picks* about the program's ability to challenge advanced students. Students can also move through the texts more rapidly if they master the lessons quickly.

Even at high school level, Demme presents concepts simply and clearly, avoiding dense-sounding mathematical abstractions common to so many high school textbooks. The high school courses feature many word problems and applications that make the lessons more interesting. The instruction manuals include complete answers with step-by-step solutions for all the exercises and tests, plus a glossary and an index.

While some students might be able to work through the courses independently, many will need parental or tutorial assistance. Math-U-See offers online co-op classes for those who might want to take a course with other students under the supervision of an experienced teacher.

In *Algebra 1*, Manipulative Blocks and the

Algebra and Decimal Inserts are used, but less than in earlier levels.

Algebra 1 does not cover as much territory as do most other first year algebra courses. For example, complex work with radicals as well as motion problems are taught in *Algebra 2*, although they are included in most other first year courses. Slower students should find the pace very manageable. Honors lessons will challenge brighter students, but you can always speed up by moving students through the courses more quickly.

The rest of the upper level books no longer use manipulatives. However, *Geometry* students need a protractor, a compass, and a straight edge to draw constructions.

Math-U-See Geometry is fairly traditional in presentation and coverage, although it is an easier course than most. While it covers the standard topics, it does not go as far in depth as *Discovering Geometry*. For example, *Math-U-See Geometry* deals only with regular polygons when teaching about interior and exterior angles of pentagons, hexagons, etc. There is not as much work with tangents as you find in *Discovering Geometry*. However, *Math-U-See Geometry* introduces geometric proofs in lesson 24 and uses them through the end of the course. It also introduces trigonometry and transformations in the last three lessons. Algebra is reviewed frequently within the lessons. As with *Algebra 1*, *Math-U-See Geometry* should be manageable for average to slow students, and you can challenge advanced students with honors exercises or move them ahead more quickly into *Algebra 2*.

Algebra 2 moves on to new material rather quickly (as compared to many other second year algebra courses), bringing the total of *Math-U-See's* combined algebra coverage close to that of other publishers. It introduces matrices and determinants in the honors section of the last lesson but does not get into functions at all. Students should be able to move on to either pre-calculus or trigonometry courses

after completing *Algebra 2*.

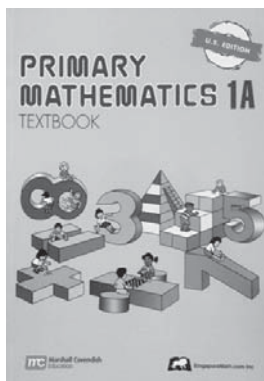
Math-U-See's PreCalculus with Trigonometry course dedicates a significant amount of space to trigonometry as one might expect from the title. Vectors, functions, logarithms, and a few other advanced math topics are also covered. *PreCalculus* students need a protractor, ruler, and a scientific calculator. (Note that this course and *Calculus* are the only *Math-U-See* courses that require a calculator.) This is a straightforward, fairly traditional course.

The *Math-U-See* series culminates with *Calculus*. While *Calculus* teaches the content typical of other calculus courses it also includes chapters titled "Physics Applications" and "Economics Applications" that help students grasp how useful calculus can be. *Calculus* does not include an honors component since the course already includes content that will challenge advanced students.

The DVD instructional component makes a huge difference, especially for these last two courses, since Demme does a great job of explaining and illustrating concepts. However, I very much appreciate the fact that the newest editions' instruction manuals for *Math-U-See* high school level courses now include a teaching component so that students do not have to rely entirely on the DVDs.

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Singapore Math/Primary Mathematics



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com

See review for prices

Everyone has heard how well foreign students, including those from Singapore, do in math compared to U.S. students. But few people understand why this is so. You will have a better idea of why they excel if you check out the *Primary Mathematics* program for the elementary grades. *Primary Mathematics* was first published (in English) for students in Singapore, so it was also called *Singapore Math* when it was first brought to the U.S. in 1998. Homeschoolers are much more likely to refer to it as *Singapore Math* rather than as *Primary Mathematics*.

Primary Mathematics has taken the home-school market by storm, and with good reason. This program teaches children to think mathematically rather than just having them memorize the mechanics of problem solving. *Primary Mathematics* lays a solid foundation for conceptual understanding using a three-step process, taking children from concrete, to pictorial, then abstract approaches to learning. Concepts are addressed from a number of directions that challenge students to think and understand.

Primary Mathematics is more advanced than just about every other math program used in the U.S. There are three different versions: the U.S. Edition that was adapted directly from the version used in Singapore but substitutes U.S. measurements, spellings and conventions; the Standards Edition that aligns with the math standards for California, changing the order of presentation for some topics and adding units on topics such as probability, graphing, data analysis, and negative numbers; and the Common Core Edition, which slightly reorganizes topics to cover those required by the Common Core State Standards (CC). None of these are "dumbed down" to align with standards.

The question that arises is which of these editions to choose. The scope and sequence remains challenging for all three versions.

A comparison chart at www.singaporemath.com/v/PMSS_comparison.pdf shows where each of the CC standards is taught in each edition. On that chart, you can see that *Primary Mathematics* continues to teach some standards at earlier grade levels than is required by the CC. Common Core Editions add a few very specific topics, and they review many topics at different levels to satisfy the Common Core. Consequently, those editions have more pages than others.

Standards and Common Core Edition textbooks as well as textbooks 1A through 2B in U.S. Editions are printed in full color while the rest of the U.S. editions are printed in two colors. (All workbooks are printed in black and white.) Color might be important for some learners, but the cost is significantly higher for Standard and Common Core Editions with text and workbook prices ranging from about \$14 to \$20 each compared to about \$12 each for workbooks or texts in the U.S. Edition.

All editions have periodic reviews. While U.S. and Standards Editions have cumulative reviews, the Common Core Editions do not. In the textbooks, concepts are taught thoroughly and sequentially within units rather than in a spiral fashion. The cumulative reviews are the primary means of reviewing previously-taught concepts since they are not addressed again in future units. With the Common Core Editions, the publisher wanted to allow teachers to skip units if they so desire, but to do that the publisher had to limit review to only what has been taught in each unit. Parents can create their own cumulative review by having students complete selected problems from each review, then revisiting problems from previous units at a later date. The supplemental Extra Practice books might also be used to create your own cumulative review.

The *Primary Mathematics* series has levels 1 through 6 which cover material for approximately grades one through six and beyond. The Common Core Editions have only levels

1 through 5. Each level has two textbooks, two workbooks, and two teacher's or home instructor's guides labeled A and B—that's four student books per course. Textbooks range in length from about 80 to 190 pages each. (Common Core Editions are significantly longer than others.) However, textbooks and workbooks are each about 10 by 7½ inches, with uncrowded, large print, so they don't intimidate students.

The textbooks might be used either as consumable or non-consumable books. In the latter case, students write answers in a notebook to preserve the textbooks. There are quite a few problems to solve between textbooks and workbooks, so I generally recommend letting students write in the books to save recopying the problems. (None of these books are reproducible.) Correlated workbook exercises are indicated at the end of each textbook lesson. Children should be able to work through workbook exercises independently once they can read directions without a problem.

While each level of U.S. and Standards Editions has both teacher's guides and home instructor's guides available (with the exception of Standards Edition levels 6A and 6B), the home instructor's guides are designed specifically for homeschoolers, are less expensive, and are what I recommend. You do not need both. Home instructor's guides cost from \$17.50 to \$20.50 each. Teacher's guides are less than \$30 for the U.S. Editions and \$51 to \$58 each for Standards and Common Core Editions. Common Core Editions have only teacher's guides right now (no home instructor's guides), and these are the only teacher's guides that include reduced pictures of student pages, a very helpful feature. Both the home instructor's guides and teacher's guides have lesson plans, teaching instructions, and answer keys.

The program requires one-on-one teaching throughout most lessons for the younger grades. Older students can be taught using

activities and lesson presentations from teacher's or home instructor's guides, but some students will be able to work independently through the books on their own. The guides incorporate work with hands-on resources, but you can skip those activities if they are not needed. Some children will find the visual representations in the textbooks sufficient.

Singapore Math Inc.® carries a number of supplemental books, many of which are keyed to the *Primary Math* series. *Extra Practice* books correlate directly with each level of each edition. Check their website for more information.

Placement tests are available at their website. If your child is not starting at the beginning of the program, it is vital that you use the placement test to determine the appropriate level. **Important note:** It is not unusual for a child to place one or two levels below their official grade level.

Primary Mathematics 1A and 1B

Book 1A begins with an assumption that children already have a basic sense and recognition of numbers. It begins with counting to 10, but by the fourth unit of the first book, students are learning subtraction. Single-digit multiplication is introduced in 1B, with division introduced very briefly immediately after. (Students are not expected to memorize multiplication facts yet.) The text stresses conceptual understanding over math-fact drill at this level. (Drill suggestions are given in the guides, but you might want to provide opportunity for more practice with math facts using other resources.) Practical applications are used in lesson presentation and word problems. In addition to the arithmetic operations, this first level teaches ordinal numbers, shapes, measurement, time telling, money, and graphs.

Primary Mathematics 2A and 2B

The second level teaches addition and subtraction with renaming (carrying and borrowing), multiplication and division, place value, measurement, money, introduction of

fractions, writing numbers in words, time telling, graphs, and very introductory geometric shapes and area.

Primary Mathematics 3A and 3B

This level has more advanced work on the four arithmetic operations including long division, fractions (equivalent fractions plus adding), measurement, graphs, time, and geometry. It also teaches two-step word problems and mental calculation. It will be challenging for most students to begin this program at the third level if they have been using a different math program. However, the pictorial lessons do help students pick up concepts they might not have been taught previously. Make sure that if you are just starting this program, you watch for this problem, and provide the necessary teaching before expecting your child to do the lessons.

Primary Mathematics 4A and 4B

At the fourth level, students learn all four functions with both fractions and decimals. Geometry coverage is also very advanced as students compute the degrees of angles and solve complex area and perimeter questions. Students also work with advanced whole number concepts (e.g., factors, multiples, rounding off), money, other geometric concepts, graphs, and averages. *Primary Mathematics* introduces two-digit multipliers at this level but doesn't really concentrate on two-digit multipliers and divisors until the fifth level. While students complete quite a few computation problems, the number of word problems seems to gradually increase at this level.

Primary Mathematics 5A and 5B

At the fifth level, students do advanced work with decimals plus multiplication and division with two-digit multipliers and divisors. They learn to work with percents and continue with advanced work on fractions, geometry, and graphs. Time and rate word problems, as well as other types of word problems, are given a great deal of attention. There are more word problems than drill type problems. Some of the

geometry taught at this level is rarely introduced before high school level. For example, students learn to calculate the degrees of angles in a parallelogram given the measurements of only two angles.

Primary Mathematics 6A and 6B

Because of this series' advanced scope and sequence, at the sixth level much of the work is more typical of other publishers' high school level texts. Students work with fractions, but a typical problem requires students to perform three different operations on four different fractions within a single problem, much like an advanced algebra type problem, although without variables. Common geometry problems are set up in proof-style format, although you need not require students to present their solutions in that format.

Among other concepts covered at this level are graphs, algebraic expressions, geometry (e.g., radius, diameter and circumference of circles plus the volume of solids), advanced fractions, ratio, percents, tessellations, and lots of word problems including time/rate/distance problems. It might be challenging for parents with a weak math background to use this level without some assistance.

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Teaching Textbooks

by Greg Sabouri and Shawn Sabouri

Teaching Textbooks

PO Box 60529

Oklahoma City, OK 73146

866-TOP-MATH (867-6284)

www.teachingtextbooks.com

complete sets: *Math 3 - Math 5* -

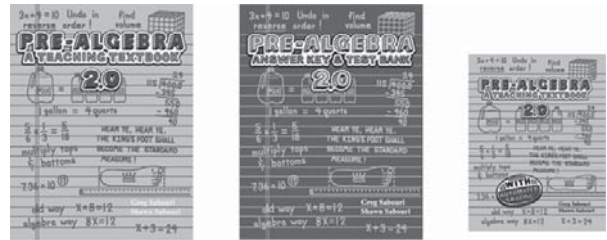
\$119.90 each, *Math 6 and Math 7*

- \$149.90 each, *Pre-Algebra* through

Pre-Calculus - \$184.90 each

I knew that the *Teaching Textbooks* series was going to be added to my Top Picks next time around as soon as I reviewed the first few courses. These fantastic courses were designed specifically for homeschoolers to solve some of

the issues that make math challenging for them.



CD-ROMs for each course actually teach the lessons. (CD-ROMs will run on either Windows or Mac systems.) Lectures on the CD-ROMs are audio presentations accompanied by step-by-step written explanations showing how to work each problem. Lectures are interactive, requiring students to answer questions from time to time, both to keep them engaged and to test their understanding. The screen designs are colorful and nicely illustrated without being too busy.

While it is possible to work only with the CD-ROMs, most students are likely to prefer having the print textbook as well. As students encounter more difficult problems on the CD-ROM presentations, such as with long division, they will then need to copy problems and work them on paper. The text saves the copying step, and it also provides an easy way for either student or parent to review a lesson.

Even when students use the textbooks, they need to enter their answers on the computer since each course tracks and grades student work. Students can try again if they miss a problem, but the program will report this.

This automatic gradebook feature generates reports for practice problems (which are optional), assigned problems, and quizzes. The final score (expressed as a percentage) does not include the practice problems. The program also reports whether or not students view the step-by-step solutions to problems. The gradebook can be edited, so the parent or

teacher can delete the record for a problem or an entire lesson if students need to redo them.

Textbooks are written directly to the student and do not assume the presence of a teacher. Explanations are clear and complete, with plenty of practical examples. In the textbooks, a light-hearted touch gives the texts a user-friendly feeling while avoiding silliness. This is evident in all of the courses in everything from the layout of the books and the program's interface design and style of type through the occasional cartoon illustration and the wording of the text itself.

Lessons are taught in a traditional fashion. The new concept is presented, followed by examples then practice problems. Next, students work through a set of problems on their own (about 18-25 problems per lesson). Problem sets include continual review of previously-learned concepts. In addition, key points are highlighted for quick student review. There are 95 to 142 lessons per course, with lessons grouped into chapters that concentrate on different topics. In all of these texts, students should aim to complete approximately one lesson per day. Adding in test days still should leave you at least 20 days in the school year for extra work on troublesome concepts, review, or “mathless” school days.

The soft-cover textbooks have plastic-spiral bindings and range from 612 to 872 pages in length. The paper is a bit thin for textbooks, but the books are already more than an inch thick. (*Pre-Calculus* is two inches thick!) Durability might be a concern. I know that is a lot of pages for each course, but there are two obvious reasons: each page is less crowded than pages in many other courses, and expanded explanations that make the material much more understandable take up extra space, particularly in high school level books.

Problem sets in each lesson are laid out so that students can actually do some of their work directly in the textbook. However, in high school level books it is not practical for

students to solve lengthy problems in the textbook. You might skip the textbook entirely and have students solve and answer problems in separate notebooks. Whether or not you purchase the printed textbooks, I would encourage the use of a separate notebook because you really want to see the work showing how a student arrives at his or her answer.

Indexes have been added to the newest editions of printed textbooks except *Pre-Calculus*. (Those who have texts without indexes can access indexes on the publisher's website.) Indexes are a real help—maybe another reason to buy a printed textbook. When a student needs to review a particular topic, the index and the print book are the quickest way to find such information.

The *Teaching Textbooks* series is a college prep curriculum even though it is not as rigorous as some other courses. However, textbooks for the elementary grades move at a slower pace than other series such as *Horizons Math* and *Saxon Math*. Of course, you can always move ahead more quickly with a child who excels. You might even select a grade level higher than the student's actual grade level. Placement tests on the publisher's website will help you select the correct level.

The *Math 3* through *Math 7* courses each come with a set of four CD-ROMs. *Pre-Algebra* and *Algebra 1* each have ten. *Algebra 2* and *Geometry* each have 12, and *Pre-Calculus* has 16. CD-ROMs include lectures, problems, quizzes, and complete solutions.

Significantly, students begin by watching a lecture on a CD-ROM then they might read the summary in the textbook. Next, they work the practice problems, mostly likely in the textbook, before entering their answers in the computer. For incorrect answers, they should watch the solutions on the CD-ROM. Then they are ready to tackle the problem set, entering answers on the computer. They can still view solutions if they continue to make errors. Voice hints are available for the

hardest problems. Parents should review progress before students go on to the next lesson. Each chapter concludes with a quiz. Note that courses also come with an answer booklet that is strictly an answer key for practice problems, lesson problems, and quizzes.

Math 3 and *Math 4* have an extra bonus—a game that drills students on basic math facts. This pops up every five lessons. Parents can erase game scores if they wish to give students more practice time with the game.

Pre-Algebra and above courses have detailed appendices that contain important formulas and summaries of key concepts.

Families are given permission to install the CD-ROMs on as many computers as they like, which means that two or more students might be working in the same course at the same time. Even better, each time a student completes a course, you can simply reinstall for a new student. That means that all of your children can use the course over subsequent years. (Note: after two installations, you will have to contact the publisher for new activation codes.) You can access free demos and samples at the publisher's website.

Math 3

Math 3 covers addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, money, time, geometry, and measurement, plus a final lesson that introduces percentages. Much of the addition and subtraction instruction reviews concepts that should have been learned at earlier levels since it begins with simple addition and very gradually builds toward carrying in lesson 47 and borrowing (regrouping) in lesson 87. Instruction on other topics also reteaches the basics before moving on to more advanced concepts. However, multiplication covers only through single-digit multipliers, and division covers only through single-digit divisors. Fractions are taught up through adding and subtracting fractions with common denominators. Numerous word problems help students with mathematical thinking and

practical application. This level also includes plenty of pictorial representations in the textbook (e.g., number lines, fraction circles, multiplication arrays, clocks, coins, different types of graphs), a good reason to *not* work only with the CD-ROMs.

Math 4

Math 4 reviews and re-teaches concepts taught in *Math 3* then continues to build new concepts. Reflecting the slower pace of *Teaching Textbooks*, concepts that generally appear earlier in other courses don't show up till near the end. Some examples would be multiplication by two-digit multipliers, long division, division with a remainder, and changing improper fractions to mixed numbers. Roman numerals are taught at this level.

Math 5

Math 5 again reviews the basics with the first 29 lessons heavily focused on addition, subtraction, and multiplication. It introduces rounding and estimation. Significant time seems to be spent on decimals before complete coverage of fractions, but both topics are covered extensively at this level.

Math 6

Math 6 reviews the four basic arithmetic operations, place value, and time. It spends a great deal of time reviewing and teaching new concepts with fractions, decimals, and percents. It also covers geometry (points, lines, line segments, angles, both area and perimeter for polygons, circumference for circles, and introduction of geometric solids), units of measure (including the metric system), and graphing concepts (e.g., thermometers, bar graphs, circle graphs). A group of chapters at the end of the course called "Additional Topics" gives special attention to order of operations, decimal remainders, equations, and probability. A student with weak math skills might be able to pick up what he or she is missing since this course is fairly comprehensive on arithmetic basics. It might be too repetitive for a student who already has developed strong skills in the basic

operations. (In my opinion, *Teaching Textbooks Math 6* is closer to *Horizon Math 5* in concepts covered. It is easier than *Saxon Math 7/6*.)

Math 7

Topics taught in *Math 6* are revisited with brief review. Then each topic is tackled at a distinctly more challenging level. For example, fraction instruction moves on to ratios, percents include work with fractions and decimals plus real life applications like commissions and sales tax, and geometry gets into computing the volume of solids. Statistics, probability, graphing, equations, and inequalities are also taught this year. Additional Topics chapters delve into powers, exponents, square roots, the Pythagorean theorem, and negative numbers.

Pre-Algebra

Pre-Algebra briefly reviews whole-number operations, fractions, decimals, percents, and measurement. Review has been greatly condensed from the first edition of this text, a commendable improvement. The rest of the book covers beginning algebra, negative numbers, exponents and roots—topics typical of all pre-algebra courses. *Pre-Algebra 2.0* added 37 lessons that tackle plane and solid geometry, functions, relations, graphing, statistics, probability, and other more challenging concepts. Additional Topics covered at the end of the text include distance/time and other formulas, using the distributive property to solve equations, and absolute value. Note that the 2.0 versions of both *Pre-Algebra* and *Algebra 1* have other small improvements. Every exercise problem now has a reference number telling the student in which lesson the relevant concept was first introduced. Extensive appendices with all important formulas, graphs, and other reference information have been added to both books. Backup chapter tests and supplemental exercises for each lesson are available upon request; however, these will not have step-by-step audio solutions to go with them.

Algebra 1

Algebra 1 seems to have more review of basic

operations and pre-algebra concepts at the beginning than do some other texts. *Algebra 1* version 2.0 has raised the bar a bit higher by adding sixteen new lessons covering functions, relations, statistics, probability, graphing with a calculator, the quadratic formula, absolute value, two-variable inequalities, and other more-challenging topics. These additions address concerns that version 1.0 was not challenging enough. Note that there are other small improvements that I already mentioned in my description of the *Pre-Algebra* course. With version 2.0, overall, topic coverage is similar to that of many other first year algebra courses, but with more thorough explanation. While this course covers the essentials for Algebra 1, it is not as advanced as either the third or fourth editions of *Saxon Algebra 1*.

Algebra 2

As with *Algebra 1* version 2.0, *Algebra 2* version 2.0 also addressed concerns that version 1.0 was not adequately challenging. Twenty lessons of new material, including logarithms, exponential functions, matrices, determinants, statistics, probability, and arithmetic and geometric sequences have been added to make the content similar to other Algebra 2 courses. More than 150 problems have also been added.

While *Teaching Textbooks* algebra courses are still not as advanced as some courses, they do include practical applications in areas such as banking and physics that make them more practical than others. Word problems in all lessons also help students grasp how they might actually use algebra in real life.

Geometry

Geometry uses a traditional Euclidean approach, beginning with a chapter on logic and reasoning, then moving on to definitions, postulates and theorems. Formal proofs are introduced very early at the beginning of chapter three. However, constructions are not really incorporated into the text; they're in the Additional Topics at the end. Analytical geometry using the coordinate plane is also reserved

for the end of the book. As with the algebra courses, practical applications and occasional word problems help students understand how they might make use of geometry.

Pre-Calculus

Pre-Calculus is the only course not yet updated to the newer format of the other courses. There is a textbook and three sets of CD-ROMs: a set of seven Lecture & Practice CD-ROMs, a set of seven Solutions CD-ROMs, and two Test Solutions CD-ROMs. The CD-ROMs do not require installation as do the revised courses. Pop one in a computer and it comes up with an easy-to-use interface listing lessons and your choice of lecture, specific problems, or the complete solutions.

Students can actually choose to use either the CD-ROM or the textbook—they will get the complete presentation either way with the exception of solutions and explanations to the practice problems which are only on the CD-ROMs. Students might work through a lesson in the textbook then use the lecture and practice problem CD-ROMs only when they need help working out the sample problems. It is very easy to quickly access a single problem.

The *Pre-Calculus* course includes problems modeled after those on the SAT II Math test and the CLEP Pre-Calculus test which should help students prepare for either exam. This is a challenging course that begins with functions and moves on from there. It covers various types of functions such as polynomial functions, radical functions, and trigonometric functions. It also teaches triangle trigonometry, trigonometric identities, vectors and polar coordinates, systems, matrices, determinants, advanced analytic geometry, sequences, probability, statistics, and introduction to calculus. Additional topics include Pascal's triangle, the binomial theorem, synthetic division, more on sines and cosines, more on complex numbers, De Moivre's theorem, and fitting a graph to data.

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Saxon Math Intermediate 3 through Calculus

by John Saxon, Stephen Hake, and others
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

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The *Saxon Math* program for upper elementary grades through high school has retained high popularity among homeschoolers year after year because of its

comprehensive content, reasonable price, and its instructional methodology that allows for and encourages independent study. Over the years, *Saxon Math* has added courses for the lower grades, with a series by Nancy Larson for the primary grades that I do not include in this review since I think there are better options for those grade levels. Most recently, they have introduced the *Math Intermediate* series for grades three through five that is similar in format and approach to *Math 5/4* and *Math 6/5*. These two series overlap each other for fourth and fifth grades, giving you two options. Saxon also has two parallel series of texts for high school. This review includes:

- *Saxon Math Intermediate* series 3 through 5
- *Saxon Math 5/4* through *Algebra 1/2*
- *Saxon Classic Editions* for high school math
- *Saxon Algebra 1* and *2* (fourth editions) and *Geometry*
- *Saxon Advanced Mathematics*

Homeschool kits include a non-consumable student textbook, either an answer key or solutions manual, and tests with their answer keys. Some student books are hardcover and some softcover. For some high school courses,

solutions manuals are available separately.

There are no teacher editions for the *Saxon* texts since each lesson in the student texts provides an introduction and explanation of the new concept plus examples and practice problems. These are followed by a set of problems that not only reinforces the new lesson content but also reviews previously-learned concepts. Parents might help students work through the beginning of the lesson, especially with the *Math Intermediate* series, but most students will be able to work through the rest of each lesson independently. Parents need to check daily assignments and tests, ensuring that students understand what they are learning. The program requires virtually no preparation time.

While most parents appreciate not having to directly teach the series that begins with *Math 5/4*, the newest editions have added a valuable feature that does require some interaction at the younger grade levels. The “warm up” box at the beginning of each lesson should be used orally. In that box typically are math fact drills, mental math problems, and a thought-provoking problem to solve. This interactive time also gives parents an informal tool for assessing student performance and understanding of concepts. Warm-ups at high school level can be completed independently by students.

One significant feature of the *Saxon* series that sets it apart from many other math programs is the incremental method in which concepts are taught. Once a concept is introduced it is incorporated periodically into the mixed practice that students encounter every day. In later lessons, the concept is developed more fully. Over time and through repeated exposure to a developing concept, students gain understanding and mastery. Unlike most traditional math texts where one content strand is taught and fully explained over a few consecutive lessons, *Saxon Math* has students work with a concept many times over the course of study. They revisit concepts in what is called a spiral method for frequent review

throughout each course.

In addition, practice problems review concepts taught from all previous lessons, and the styles of the problems vary constantly. For some students this works to strengthen their thinking ability and keeps things interesting while it’s just confusing for others. Be aware that some students might prefer arrays of similar problems that stick with fewer topics, and they might not do as well with either *Saxon Math's* teaching approach or the mixture of practice problems.

Saxon Math leans more toward rules in its presentation (i.e., memorizing rules and math facts) rather than a hands-on, conceptual orientation like *Math-U-See's* or *Saxon Math's* courses for the primary grades by Nancy Larson. Even though the program is not strong on teaching concepts, thinking skills get a good workout. This means that the program works best for students who do not need manipulatives and who tend to figure out mathematical concepts without a great deal of explanation. It is also good for those who like brain teasers like those troublesome time/rate/distance problems.

The latest editions of the texts correlate well with math standards, having incorporated more about topics like statistics and probability, additional word problems to develop mathematical thinking skills, and topical investigations. Up to this point, *Saxon* has resisted the use of calculators before *Algebra 2* third edition, but they have now included calculator instruction in the fourth edition of *Algebra 1*.

A helpful addition in the revised editions of *Saxon's* textbooks is reference numbers in the mixed problems sets. If a student misses a problem, the reference number next to the problem provides the number(s) of the lesson(s) where the concept was taught. Reference numbers are also included on the assessments. While new editions have added a second color to the black-and-white presentation, *Saxon Math*

books still lack visual pizzazz.

Saxon Math Intermediate 3 through 5

Homeschool Kits \$112 each

The *Saxon Math Intermediate* courses for grades three through five differ some from the *Math 5/4* and up courses in layout, and they require a little more teacher involvement. While some students will be able to work independently through most of the lessons, parents might need to teach new concepts for other students.

Math Intermediate homeschool kits include a Power Up Workbook along with the student text, a solutions manual, and a test book.

Each lesson begins with “Power Up” activities that include four categories of problems each time: math fact review, count aloud or “jump start,” mental math, and problem solving. The count aloud category is dropped from some of the Power Up sections in *Math Intermediate 4* and 5. The separate Power Up Workbook for each course is used for the written activities for the Power Up section of each lesson with one page to accompany each lesson. I suspect that some students will need assistance in completing these activities, especially at the beginning of the school year.

After the Power Up activities, a new concept is introduced along with sample problems that are completely worked out. The series includes some work on conceptual understanding as new skills and concepts are taught. However, concepts are taught with written or pictorial explanations rather than manipulatives (aside from fraction manipulatives used a few times in fourth grade), and conceptual development is not as strong as in *Singapore Math* or *Math-U-See*.

After the new concept is presented, some lesson practice problems provide students with practice only on the new concept. “Written Practice” problems follow with 15 to 20 problems per lesson for third grade that review previously taught concepts. The number of Written Practice problems increases to 30

per lesson in fourth and fifth grades. The Written Practice problems are wide ranging in approach, really challenging students’ thinking skills. Occasionally, students encounter an open-ended question that asks for both an answer and an explanation. Some lessons add an extra problem for “Early Finishers”—usually word problems that make real-world connections. These aren’t the only real-world word problems, since lessons generally have quite a few of them.

Students will need to work in a notebook or on other paper to complete lesson practice and written practice problems. They will not be writing in the hardcover textbook.

After every ten lessons there is an “investigation” lesson. Each of these will likely take an entire class period. For example, one investigation in *Math Intermediate 3* teaches about bar graphs then directs students to collect survey data by asking questions and create their own bar graph. Investigations will require parental/teacher oversight or direction.

Instead of a teacher manual, the solutions manual for each course has answers and complete solutions (when applicable) for all textbook problems. There is no need for a teacher manual in addition to this since the text is self-explanatory. There is no answer key for the Power Up Workbook, although parents or teachers should be able to check the answers fairly easily without a key. (There is a Student Edition Answer Key CD-ROM that includes the Power Up answer key available in the school edition for each course, but this has been omitted from the homeschool kits.)

The Homeschool Testing Book for each course has tests that follow every fifth lesson beginning after the tenth lesson, plus answer keys for all tests. Since tests are cumulative, the Test Analysis Form in this book is useful for identifying the lessons where tested concepts were originally taught in case a student needs to review that lesson.

The *Math Intermediate* series is aligned with

the Common Core State Standards. On the publisher's website they identify which lessons meet each of the standards for each grade level. *Math Intermediate 4* and *Math Intermediate 5* are very similar to *Math 5/4* and *Math 6/5*, respectively, in their content with some identical material. (You could be using either series to teach students in grades four and five.) However, there are some additional or expanded topics in *Math Intermediate* texts. For example, graphing points on a coordinate plane is introduced in an Investigation in *Math Intermediate 4* but is not taught at all in *Math 5/4*. (See the next column for an explanation of the titles that look like fractions.) Reciprocal fractions are taught in one lesson in *Math 6/5* while they show up in four lessons in *Math Intermediate 5*. Roman numerals were also added to *Math Intermediate 5* in an appendix.

Note that all three *Math Intermediate* texts refer occasionally to Lesson Activity worksheets that are not found in the homeschool package. These are available by contacting Houghton Mifflin Harcourt at http://my.hmheducation.com/homeschool_inquiries.

Math Intermediate 3 covers addition and subtraction review, multiplication through one-digit multipliers times three-digit multiplicands, division through one digit divisors into two-digit dividends, measurement, rounding, estimation, number concepts, geometric shapes, area, perimeter, time, money, calendar reading, graphing, and probability.

Math Intermediate 4 reviews addition, subtraction, and number concepts. Then it continues through multiplication and division of whole numbers. It also teaches fractions up through addition and subtraction of fractions and mixed numbers, including those with different denominators. Money is used to introduce decimal numbers. In addition, students study quite a bit of geometry, learn about averages, and work with tables, schedules, and graphs.

Math Intermediate 5 reviews quite a bit of

what was taught in *Math Intermediate 4*, then moves on to multiplication and division of fractions, all four functions with decimal numbers, and an introduction of percents.

Overall, the *Math Intermediate* series is very easy to use and allows students to do much of their work independently, so it should work well in many homeschooling situations.

Math 5/4 through Algebra 1/2

Most of the texts in this popular series have been around for many years and have gone through some revisions.

Saxon's two-digit grade level designations in the titles of *Math 5/4* through *Math 8/7* can help you figure out the correct grade level for each of those books, although free placement tests are available at the publisher's website. Typically the second of the two digits indicates the grade level usage for average to bright students. The first digit indicates the grade for students working a little below level. For example, *Math 7/6* would be for average to bright sixth graders or for slower seventh graders.

The situation with *Math 8/7* and *Algebra 1/2* is a little confusing since both are pre-algebra courses, and "1/2" merely signifies pre-algebra. *Math 8/7* was a late addition to the Saxon lineup, and was considered optional for a few years. However, with revisions to the other texts, *Math 8/7* now can replace *Algebra 1/2*.

Ideally, students will complete *Math 8/7* in seventh grade go on to *Algebra 1* in eighth grade. If a student is not ready for algebra in eighth grade, consider using *Algebra 1/2* at that point. There will be some repetition of content but struggling students will be better prepared to tackle *Algebra 1* if they complete both courses.

Saxon texts *Math 5/4* through *Math 8/7* start each lesson with "Warm Up" activities. These generally include math-fact practice, mental math problems, and a word problem. A parent or teacher should present the mental math problems orally and listen for correct responses. *Algebra 1/2* does not have Warm Up activities.

Math 5/4 third edition

Homeschool Kit \$93.10

This textbook should be appropriate for most fourth graders and those fifth graders who lag slightly behind grade level. Among topics covered in *Math 5/4* are addition (review), subtraction, multiplication (up to multiplying a three-digit number by a two-digit number), division (dividing by two-digit numbers), time, measurement, money, area, perimeter, fractions, mixed numbers, arithmetic algorithms, geometry and measurement, negative numbers, powers and roots, two-step word problems, decimals, averaging, estimation, patterns, sequences, statistics, probability, and Roman numerals. Saxon also sells Basic Fact Cards, an optional set of flash cards for working on addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division that might be useful at this level.

Math 6/5 third edition

Homeschool Kit \$93.10

This text continues developing arithmetic skills through multiplication and division of fractions and decimals while reviewing and expanding concepts of place value, addition and subtraction, geometry, measurement, and probability. Powers and roots, prime and composite numbers, ratios, and order of operations are also taught. Extra math drills for each lesson are at the back of the book. A few students might have difficulty with this text because it requires them to work in more abstract ways than they might be ready for.

Math 7/6 fourth edition

Homeschool Kit \$103.60

Math 7/6 is for average sixth graders or slower seventh graders. This text is especially good at providing cumulative review and expansion upon topics covered in earlier grades. Among topics covered at this level are fractions, mixed numbers, decimals, percents, ratios, rounding, estimating, exponents, working with signed numbers, square roots, beginning algebraic expressions, volume, angles, circles, prime factorization, ratios, proportions, statistics, and

probability. Especially notable are word problems that cause children to think of math concepts in a number of different ways to ensure understanding. These features make this a great choice for many students at this level.

Math 8/7 third edition

Homeschool Kit \$103.60

Math 8/7 reviews material introduced in the prior texts, especially *Math 7/6*, and provides pre-algebra instruction. The new edition covers word problems, scientific notation, statistics, probability, ratios, proportions, simplifying and balancing equations, factoring algebraic expressions, slope-intercept form, graphing linear inequalities, arcs, sectors, and the Pythagorean theorem.

Algebra 1/2 third edition

Homeschool Kit - 80.85, kit with solutions manual - \$115.95

This pre-algebra text can be used after completing *Math 8/7*. Plenty of review, a spiral learning process, thought-provoking word problems, and clear instruction that works for independent study make *Algebra 1/2* one of my favorite options available for this level, even if it is no longer needed. As is typical of the upper-level Saxon books, the level of difficulty rises sharply toward the end of the text. If your student starts to have more difficulty toward the end of the book, consider doing only half a lesson each day.

Among topics covered are fraction, decimal, and mixed number operations; scientific notation; exponents; radicals; algebraic expressions; solving equations with one variable; order of operations; ratios; geometry fundamentals; and graphing. *Saxon Math* has resisted the inclusion of calculator instruction even though most other texts for this level include it. While students can use calculators to solve problems when it is appropriate, they are not instructed to do so.

Saxon Math High School Options

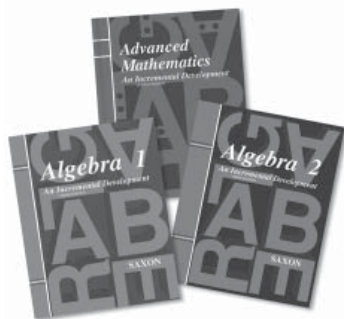
It is important to consider the design of the entire Saxon lineup of high school math courses

before starting into *Algebra 1*. Fortunately, Saxon now has two options with two parallel series of textbooks.

Originally, *Saxon Math* took an unusual approach by integrating algebra, geometry, and trigonometry into three textbooks titled *Algebra 1*, *Algebra 2*, and *Advanced Mathematics*. In contrast, most high schools teach one course in algebra, then geometry, then return to algebra. Saxon has continued to offer the integrated approach with *Algebra 1* and *Algebra 2* third editions, as well as *Advanced Mathematics* second edition—these integrated texts are now referred to as the “Classic Editions.” But they have recently published a new *Geometry* text and fourth editions of *Algebra 1* and *2* that follow the more typical sequence. I will discuss the third editions first then the fourth editions to concentrate primarily on *Algebra 1* and *2*. I will follow those reviews with information about the new *Geometry* course as well as the “classic” *Advanced Mathematics*.

Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 “Classic” third editions

Homeschool Kits: \$80.85 each; kits with solutions manuals: *Algebra 1* - \$124.20, *Algebra 2* - \$120.60



In *Saxon Algebra 1* third edition, coverage is comparable to that in other first-year algebra texts, although *Saxon Math* teaches the use of a graphing

calculator sparingly compared to many other courses. The spiral method of presentation and constant review helps students work fairly independently, a major advantage for parents who lack time and expertise.

Saxon Algebra courses seem to work fine for students who grasp math fairly easily but not so well for those who struggle with the abstract thinking required. Overall, *Algebra 1* is fairly

easy for students to work through on their own. Interestingly, I have yet to find a text that does a better job with time/rate/distance problems than does this one, even though I know that students still struggle with them in *Saxon Algebra 1*.

If students have used *Math 7/6* and *Math 8/7*, they might be ready for this book in eighth grade. Although many eighth graders will have no problem with this book, there are many who will not be developmentally mature enough to begin algebra for another year or two. If you feel that your child is not ready for *Algebra 1* at eighth grade level, consider using Saxon's *Algebra 1/2* first or you might have your teen begin *Algebra 1* in eighth grade, but move at a slower pace, taking one and a half to two years to complete it.

In the third editions, *Saxon Math* does an excellent job with algebra, but the geometry is weak in my opinion. Geometry is scattered throughout *Algebra 1* and *2*, and it is presented very briefly in both books. By the time students have completed both books they will have studied about one semester's worth of geometry. They complete their geometry requirement with the *Advanced Mathematics* book. Explanation of geometry topics is fairly brief, in *Algebra 1* and *2* and does not begin to compare with the quality of presentation in such texts as *Discovering Geometry* (reviewed at the end of this chapter).

A student planning to take only one year each of algebra and geometry (not recommended for college bound students!) could use Saxon's *Algebra 1* third edition, possibly skipping over geometry instruction and problems, and then using Saxon's (or another publisher's) *Geometry* text instead.

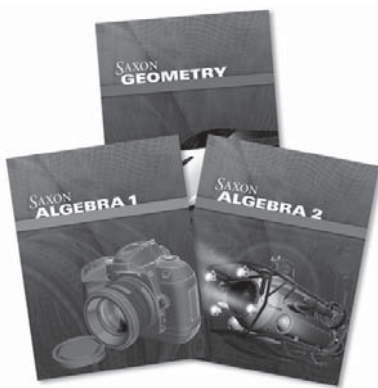
Students who complete both *Algebra 1* and *Algebra 2*, but who do not intend to continue through *Advanced Mathematics*, need to use another resource to complete geometry requirements. So they, too, might skip geometry activities within *Saxon Algebra 1* and *2*.

However, if a student is going to go through *Advanced Mathematics*, tackling a separate geometry course is likely to be redundant and overwhelming, so it would be better to stick with only the *Saxon Math* texts in that situation.

Algebra 2 third edition covers standard second-year algebra topics, although its inclusion of a significant amount of trigonometry is not a standard feature of all second year courses. Students will need a scientific calculator for this course. You might want to invest in a graphing calculator while you are at it so it will be useful for future math courses.

Saxon Algebra 1 and 2 fourth editions

Homeschool Kits with solutions manuals - \$124.40 each



The fourth editions of *Algebra 1* and *2* reflect a total rewrite rather than just modifications of the third editions. Both appearance and con-

tent are improved. The texts have two-color printing throughout with more graphic design. Each lesson begins with a “warm up” that includes one vocabulary question and five review problems. Investigations follow every ten lessons. One of the most significant content changes is the early introduction and frequent use of a graphing calculator with graphing calculator labs. Also, probability and statistics receive far more attention in keeping with current math standards.

One feature lost in the transition over the last few editions is the tongue-in-cheek humor of some of the word problems. John Saxon, the original author, often incorporated historically anachronistic references or offbeat content such as “In a picaresque novel about the

Spanish Main, the ratio of rascals to good guys was 13 to 5” (p. 149 *Algebra 1* second edition). The fourth editions have plenty of word problems and real life applications, but the humor has disappeared.

Other elements of Saxon’s methodology remain. Lessons are taught in increments followed by examples and a few practice problems. After that, students work on “Distributed and Integrated” practice problem sets with 30 problems per lesson.

The Homeschool Kits include the student text, a solutions manual with complete solutions for the warm ups and all practice problems, and a Homeschool Testing Book. The testing book has 23 cumulative tests plus your choice of three reproducible test answer sheets. It also has the answers for all the tests. In addition, a Test Analysis Form helps you identify lessons where concepts were originally taught, so that students can review if needed for problems they missed. Note that the third editions have answers to odd-numbered problems in the back of each student text, but there are no answers in the fourth editions. All answers and solutions are in the solutions manuals.

Note that the fourth edition of *Algebra 1* introduces trigonometry and more extensive work with quadratic equations and functions than does the third edition.

In keeping with the slightly advanced content of *Algebra 1*, the fourth edition of *Algebra 2* does much less review in the early chapters than in the third edition. (A Skills Bank at the back of the book provides some review if needed.) Instead of a thorough review, this text jumps quickly into functions, matrices, and determinants. More attention is given to functions, while matrices and determinants are not even taught in the third edition. Geometry is reviewed through problems and incorporated into lessons that apply algebra and trigonometry. There is more practical application of concepts through word problems than we find in many other *Algebra 2* courses. This text

should be a great option for those who need a challenging course that will prepare them for more advanced math.

The *Saxon Math* program has tended to be strong on skill development, but weaker on conceptual explanation and application. The inclusion of investigations in the fourth editions of *Algebra 1*, *Algebra 2*, and the new *Geometry* book (as well as in the newer texts for younger levels) reflects the publisher's awareness of this problem. This particular feature along with other improvements make the fourth editions my recommended option rather than third editions.

Saxon Geometry

Homeschool Kit with solutions manual
- \$130.55

Geometry definitely works best with the fourth editions of *Algebra 1* and *2*, since geometry instruction is already spread across the third edition *Algebra* courses. Using *Geometry* between or after fourth editions of *Algebra 1* and *2* will work much more easily.

As with the other *Saxon Math* texts, *Saxon Geometry* is written to students so it is possible for them to work independently. Since it has also been written for classroom use, there are a few issues that come up. The text sometimes refers to “working with a partner,” although those situations are easily adapted. The text is missing a few points of explanation. For example, asterisks next to some questions indicate problems that should be done in a classroom setting with the parent or teacher nearby as opposed to the student working independently. The asterisk indicates that students are likely to need assistance or explanation at that point, but the student has no way of knowing this. This and other such omissions should make little difference for most homeschoolers if a parent is available for assistance whenever it is needed.

“Geometry Sketching Software” is referenced in a number of the lab activities with instructions for its use, but it is not part of

the homeschool kit. The sketching software referred to is The Geometer's Sketchpad program from Key Curriculum Press (www.keycurriculum.com). The publisher tells me that it is not essential—students can skip those lab activities. However, I think that students going on to higher math would benefit from use of the software.

Also, one lab activity uses a graphing calculator. It walks students step-by-step through this particular assignment, but it does not teach broader use of the calculator, and students might first need a more basic introduction to the graphing calculator. Again, you could skip this lesson, but for students continuing on to higher math courses, it should be a useful time to introduce a graphing calculator.

One feature that assists students with self-instruction is the inclusion of sidebars with helpful instructional tips. There are plenty of word problems and practical applications throughout the text, and many problems incorporate algebra to help keep those skills current.

The content coverage is similar to other geometry courses, although it has a bit more trigonometry than some. Proofs are taught very early and are used throughout the course. Constructions with straight edge and compass are taught as labs within the pertinent lessons. Other labs have students do such things as make and use a hypsometer, cut and trace triangles to investigate symmetry and patterns, and create and use a spinner to conduct a probability experiment.

Saxon Geometry is a challenging course. It draws on higher level thinking skills more than some other courses—one reason why it might better suit students who have already completed *Algebra 2*.

Although *Saxon Geometry* lacks John Saxon's humorous touch, it does provide much more solid geometry instruction than is found in the other Saxon texts. In addition, the extensive work with proofs, challenging applications, and skill development suit the needs of students.

Advanced Mathematics, second edition

Homeschool Kit with solutions manual - \$126.45

Advanced Mathematics should follow *Algebra 2* for both the third and fourth editions. This text is one of the easiest for most homeschoolers to work with to cover advanced algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Originally designed to be a one-year course, Saxon now recommends that students take at least a year and a half to complete the course unless they are very bright. However, students who have worked through the fourth editions of *Algebra* and the new *Geometry* course should find more material to be at a “review” level and might be able to get through the text more quickly.

Advanced Mathematics includes the equivalent of the second half of geometry, plus advanced algebra, pre-calculus, and trigonometry. In the revised second edition, much of the geometry was moved to the front of the book rather than being spread out. This should make it easier for students who need to get through the geometry in preparation for PSAT tests in their junior year. In addition, geometric proofs are taught early on then used throughout the first half of the book.

Students will need a graphing calculator to use with this text, although the calculator is not used as much as in other texts for this level. Parents might decide to allow students to use a calculator more than is required.

Among other topics covered are logarithms, conic sections, functions, matrices, and statistics. This text moves even further into the theoretical math realm than do earlier Saxon texts. By the time students complete Saxon’s *Advanced Mathematics*, they should be on a par with students who have completed a pre-calculus course. This course should be particularly good for preparing students to do well on college entrance exams.

Calculus

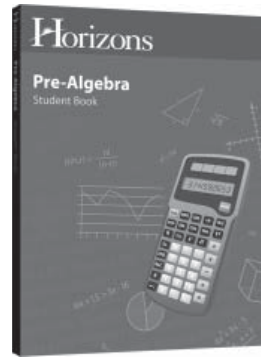
Saxon also has a text titled *Calculus with Trigonometry and Analytic Geometry*. Since few

students seem to be tackling calculus on their own, I will simply mention that the text is available. The review of that text is posted at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com/math/calculus-saxon.htm.

DVD Teaching Help

Some students do better when the Saxon courses are actually taught to them, so *Saxon Teacher* CD-ROMs (\$99 per course) might be the solution. These supplemental CDs are to be used alongside each course. Instruction is presented by an experienced teacher for selected Saxon textbooks.

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Horizons Pre-Algebra

Alpha Omega
Publications
804 N. 2nd Ave. E.
Rock Rapids, IA 51246
800-622-3070

www.aophomeschooling.com

boxed set with student book, teacher’s guide, and a tests & resources

book - \$90.95

Horizons Pre-Algebra course uses a traditional approach that also includes some use of manipulatives. Students who do well in math and who do not need the manipulatives might be able to work independently through most of the lessons. Some concepts and skills are taught directly from the teacher’s guide. Among those are the use of algebra tiles, fraction-decimal flashcards, a scientific calculator, and how to use a compass and protractor to draw a circle graph. There might be other concepts I’ve missed in this list, but at least the latter two would need to be taught to the student since they aren’t taught within the student text. This course would probably work best for most homeschoolers using a combination of some lessons being taught and others completed independently.

This is a challenging course. While it first reviews the basics of addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and number theory, it quickly moves into signed numbers, exponents, factoring, square roots, and order of operations. It continues through work with fractions, decimals, and percents including much practical application. A good deal of attention is given to graphs, probability, and statistics. Geometry covers perimeter, area and volume as well as topics like congruent triangles, and nets of solid figures (two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects as if they were opened up and laid flat), lines, angles, graphing points on a coordinate plane, and slope-intercept form. It even introduces trigonometry. Algebra topics include performing addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division of polynomials, including factoring.

The teacher's guide is useful. It lists concepts, objectives, and materials needed, but most useful are the teaching tips. Designed for a classroom situation, it mentions such things as students working on the board or students explaining problems for the class. Nevertheless, this course will work well for homeschoolers. Ideally, a parent working with a single child will use the teaching tips to teach the lesson with more concrete examples and explanations as well as the extra topics mentioned above.

Students will need a scientific calculator, protractor, straight edge, one die, colored pencils, and graph paper. (Three pages of graph paper are included at the back of the student text.) Other items such as blocks, scissors, tape, a party hat, and coins are used rarely and are open to makeshift substitutes.

While other simple manipulatives are used from time to time, the most important manipulatives for concept development are the algebra tiles. These are printed in full color in the Tests and Resources book and need to be cut out. I recommend that you laminate these for easier handling. The algebra tiles teach algebra concepts using the "rectangle-building"

method, similar to what is taught in *Math-U-See*. Personally, I very much like to use this visual representation for algebra to help students really grasp what is happening when they manipulate equations.

This book also has "formula strips" that are to be given to students for use in some lessons. These restate some basic formulas such as that for finding the area of a circle or measurement equivalents such as 1 mile = 5,280 feet and metric-English equivalents. There are 24 of these strips to be used with different lessons, and formulas are sometimes repeated on more than one strip. The reason for presenting formulas this way rather than in the textbook is that the strips are sometimes used with quizzes and exams where it would not be appropriate for the student to have access to the text. Of course, students need to memorize some formulas. The teacher's guide indicates which formulas are not given on the ACT/SAT tests (and therefore not on the formula strips) and must be memorized.

Fraction-Decimal Flashcards are used in a number of lessons, but these must be purchased separately. Some students will not need to use them and can skip them. Their use is directed from the teacher's guide, so students will not notice they are missing if they are working independently.

In the Test and Resources book are a total of 80 worksheets for the year, some of which may be used as quizzes. Only half of the lessons have a worksheet or quiz. These are noted in the individual lessons in the teacher's guide and are marked there as to which ones are appropriate for use as quizzes.

Every tenth lesson includes an interview with a Christian who uses pre-algebra skills in his or her career. Word problems in that lesson and some subsequent lessons are then based on the interview. Also in every tenth lesson, students are given a set of questions in multiple-choice, standardized-test format to help with test preparation skills.

A "Readiness Evaluation" and answer key is in the front of the teacher's guide, or it can be downloaded from www.aophomeschooling.com/diagnostic-tests. Sixteen tests and four exams are included in the Tests and Resources book. The teacher's guide has reduced pictures of student text pages and quiz and test pages with answers overprinted.

The student text is very attractively printed in full-color. The number of activities and problems to solve does not appear overwhelming compared to some texts that are dense with problems. However, some of *Horizons Pre-Algebra's* problems will take some time to complete. For example, one problem on page 170 instructs the student to "Find the mean, median, mode, and range. Then draw a histogram and a box-and-whisker plot. Football scores one Saturday were 14, 0, 7, 26, 13, 27, 36, 37, 24, 7, 7, 31, 20, 19, 24, 27, 17, 10, 31, 24, 24, 27, 41, 34, 16, 13." Many times there are charts to complete. Frequent word problems help students understand practical applications for what they are learning. There is plenty of work without pages appearing cluttered with problems.

The text is clearly written for a Christian audience with many references to church, pastors, a gospel magic show, designing shirts for a youth retreat, missionaries, and other church-related activities.

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Kinetic Books: Pre-Algebra, Algebra I, Algebra II



Perfection
Learning
PO Box 500
Logan, IA
51546-0500
800-831-
4190

email: orders@perfectionlearning.com
<http://homeschool.kineticbooks.com>
\$79.95 per course

Kinetic books has *Pre-Algebra*, *Algebra I*, and *Algebra II* courses that really take advantage of the computer as a delivery system by including multi-sensory teaching methods, games, interactive exercises, and student tracking. You enroll a student in a course for an annual subscription fee. The program is installed on your own computer (either Mac or Windows systems), but records are kept on their server so you can easily reinstall on another computer and still access your student's data.

A "Pacing Guide" serves as guide to the amount of material to be covered per lesson. A student clicks on a lesson to immediately move to where they need to begin. Students may also use a more detailed listing of chapter topics to navigate if they choose. The Pacing Guide divides material into lessons within which there are at least a few segments. For each segment students can learn from both a video presentation and a "text" segment on the same topic. Students can skip the video presentation but they must do the text segments. The videos feature a teacher working on a whiteboard, walking through the lesson, referring to the text segment being covered as they teach. This feature is great for students who need an actual teacher.

The "text" lessons are based on a digital text which you can print out if you wish. However, some features will be lost if you do so. The text segments frequently have buttons to "listen to explanation"—great for auditory learners. The auditory segments repeat key points from the printed material. Text segments also have practice and "Quick Check" problems that students answer online. A help button next to every question provides step-by-step help and/or the answer if students get stuck.

Quizzes and tests are also online. Scores are recorded and tracked. Parents can check on student progress whenever they wish. Because the program tracks the student, only one student can use a course subscription.

There are still more features that might be

useful to some students. Clicking on buttons at the bottom of the screen allows them to highlight and insert notes as well as to enlarge or shrink font size on the display and set other preferences.

I reviewed the *Algebra I* course and found it comparable to other text-based courses in coverage and general style, even though it uses multi-media forms of presentation. It teaches a concept, offers practice problems, then has the student complete exercise problems. Quick Check problems cover only the skill taught in the current lesson. At the end of each unit, a section of problems called “Kinetic Homework” covers topics from the past group of lessons. With both Quick Check and Kinetic Homework problems, students get a second try. Help and solutions are available but students then get no credit. However, in the homework, when a student misses a problem and/or looks up the solution, the same type of problem is presented again at the end until they get it correct. So this is very much a mastery type program.

For even more variety, there are mental math activities as well as interactive problems that combine math challenges with games. For those who want students to have traditional paper and pencil activity, “End of Unit Problems” can be printed out and solved. There are many problems in these sections so you might choose to use some rather than all of them. Answer keys to End of Unit Problems can be viewed online or printed out.

At the end of each chapter (which encompasses quite a few lessons) are a practice test and a “standardized test,” both of which are completed online with immediate grading after submission. The standardized test uses the multiple-choice bubble format while other quizzes and tests frequently require students to enter complete mathematical expressions. Since mathematical language is difficult to write from a standard keyboard, the screen pops up mathematical symbols and functions

for students to use.

There is more material in this course than most students would use. The digital text has 752 pages! But students need not use everything—only those elements that are helpful.

At the end of the digital text are supplemental lessons that some students might find useful. There is also an initial assessment with 97 questions. The answers for all of the initial assessment problems are available in the problem itself by clicking “Study Solution.”

Alignment of Kinetic Books courses with the Common Core State Standards is available on the publisher’s public school-oriented website. The *Algebra I* course has been adopted into several states, so it is clear that the publisher intends for these courses to compete with those from the major publishers to the traditional school market. The relatively low cost for course delivery makes these courses from Kinetic Books strong competitors against traditional printed texts, both in the traditional and homeschool markets.

A 30-day money-back guarantee allows you to make sure a course will work for your student.

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MathHelp Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Geometry

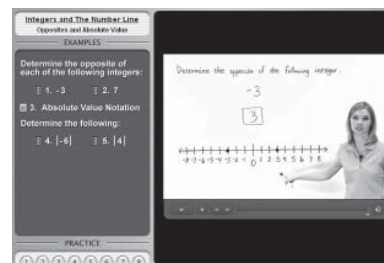
MathHelp

email: education@yourteacher.com

www.mathhelp.com

\$49.50 for a one-month pass or \$199.50

for a one-year pass, second student - \$50



MathHelp is a new name for one of my previous Top Picks, YourTeacher. MathHelp offers a number

of online courses, but in this review I feature their high school courses: Pre-Algebra,

Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2. (They also offer supplemental courses for grades five and six that are similar in design.)

A free trial at MathHelp's website provides the first ten lessons of each course for free, so you can get a good idea of how the courses work before you subscribe.

Subscriptions for homeschoolers are by the month or the year. With a single subscription you get access to Pre-Algebra through Algebra 2 as well as their supplemental courses, so this might be a super bargain if you have two or more students who can use different courses. Each subscription provides a single student name and access code, so you cannot distinguish and track student progress if more than one student were to try taking the same course at the same time. If you have two students taking the same course, it makes sense to subscribe for a second student; the second subscription price is heavily discounted.

These are complete courses. However, for those who want to use MathHelp as a supplement, they have provided a correlation of lessons to texts commonly used in public schools. These include correlations for most of the pertinent Saxon textbooks.

Probably more useful is the search box on the website where you can type in a math topic, and the system brings up a list of one or more lessons where that topic is addressed. Students are not limited to using only lessons from a single course! This might be especially helpful for students who need to review topics taught at earlier levels.

Lessons are presented in a video screen on the computer with course creator Mike Maggart or another teacher leading each lesson on a whiteboard. (You will need your computer speakers or a headset to listen to the audio for the presentation.) A notes section, viewed by pushing a button on the lesson screen, details the primary concepts of the lesson and can be printed out for reference and review. Practice problems are also provided (along with answers

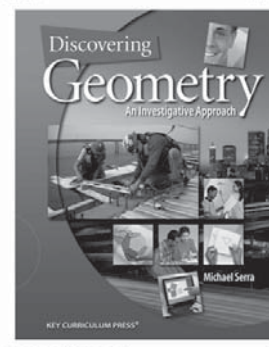
for self-checking). Then there's a self-test for each lesson that is automatically corrected. Scores for these self-tests are recorded and can be referenced by the parent or teacher online. In addition, each lesson has a "deep thought" problem for those needing an extra challenge.

Lessons are grouped into chapters, and chapters are grouped into units with another quiz at the end of each unit. Lessons are very thorough and offer a number of ways for students to learn and practice the material. Explanations are excellent. All these features make this one of the most truly independent-learning high school math courses.

On a personal note, a friend of mine who teaches continuing education for older students who struggle with learning in the regular classroom raved about these courses and has now used them with a number of students.

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Discovering Geometry: An Inductive Approach, Fourth Edition



by Michael Serra

Kendall Hunt

Publishing

800-542-6657

email: orders@

kendallhunt.com

www.kendallhunt.com

student text (print book plus online access)

- \$85, student text

online - \$78.50, bundle of student text and

Geometer's Sketchpad - \$100.12, teacher's

edition - \$98.53, solutions manual - \$42.35,

assessment resources - \$77.86

I used this text twice, each time with groups of three students with widely diverse mathematical aptitudes. Amazingly, after completion of the course, all my students actually thought geometry was fun! That's because *Discovering Geometry* truly uses a different approach to teaching the subject. This is a complete, college-preparatory course that is more inviting

than any other I have seen. It is now in its fourth edition, although the fourth is very similar to the third edition. Some chapters have been reorganized. An illustrated glossary and “Dynamic Geometry Explorations” have been added along with a few more projects, investigations, and opportunities for students to apply algebra skills in every chapter.

The first thing that students encounter in the book is art—geometric art. The art leads students into their first investigations about lines and shapes. Investigations by students help them discover postulates and theorems by inductive reasoning. Many investigations involve students in activities, especially making and working with constructions using a straightedge and compass.

Word problems are imaginative, and real-life applications are true-to-life. Mathematical thinking is the goal of this text rather than mere memorization of postulates and theorems.

The text moves from the concrete to the abstract—a strategy essential for many students to be able to succeed in geometry. In the teacher’s edition, the author explains his philosophy of gradually working through levels of thinking to the point where students are able to deal with proofs.

Paragraph proofs are introduced in chapter two as a means of getting students to organize data and explain their thinking process. Paragraph proofs and flowchart proofs are taught from chapters four through twelve, and directed two-column proofs are saved for the last chapter after students have mastered concepts and understand relationships between theorems. Even though two-column proofs are not taught at the beginning of the course, students are applying both inductive and deductive reasoning and working with logic and language leading up to the use of two-column proofs. In fact work with proofs is probably stronger and more effective than in many other texts. The fourth edition has added even more exercises that are specifically

focused on reasoning and proof skills. The text continually challenges students to explain why.

While I love this text, there’s a reason why more homeschoolers are not using it. It was definitely designed for classroom use. It requires cooperative learning with two or more students working together. It is possible that a parent could function as a second student for some of the activities, but it is more than a bit tricky for a parent to function simultaneously as teacher and student. Lest you view the cooperative learning requirement as a negative, I must tell you that it is one of the features that make it so enjoyable. This is primarily where students have the many “Aha!” experiences of this course. It will be well worth your while to pull together even a small group class to make this course work.

You need both the student text and the teacher’s edition. The full-color student text is available in hardcover or as PDF files that include weblinks. The text has “Hints for Selected Exercises” and answer keys for chapter reviews.

In addition to the aforementioned straightedge and compass, students will need a protractor and a ruler. Numerous other items are used to make this a hands-on course, although most of the time their use is optional. Among these items are drinking straws, interlocking cubes, geometric shapes, geoboards, meter stick, modeling clay, patty paper (the lightweight paper used to separate burger patties), toothpicks, and uncooked spaghetti.

The teacher’s edition is a larger hardcover edition that includes reproductions of student pages, with some answers overprinted in magenta. Other answers don’t fit on student pages, so those are in the margins at the bottom of the page of the teacher’s edition along with teaching information and other helps. Additional teacher information is in the forematter and at the beginning of each chapter. One valuable part of this information is course outlines that will help you schedule lessons,

tailoring the course for “standard,” “enriched,” or “block” schedules. Answers to all problems are found either in the chapter or at the back of the teacher’s edition. A separate solutions manual shows the steps leading to the answers. Parents who are not strong in math might want to have this on hand in case they get stuck.

Every exercise set in the student book includes some review questions. Reviews at the end of each chapter consist of about 50 or more problems. Assessment resources (quizzes and tests) are available separately.

The fourth edition has increased the number of opportunities to incorporate technology into learning, although use of technology is not absolutely required. Students can access “Dynamic Geometry Explorations” that help demonstrate concepts; these are free online and are often well worth exploring. The student textbook notes when and where to access them.

The author suggests that students have at least a scientific calculator and/or dynamic geometry software such as GeoGebra (free software at www.geogebra.org) or Geometer’s Sketchpad (available at www.keycurriculum.com). I expect that some form of dynamic geometry software might help compensate if you absolutely cannot find a second student. Students can create numerous constructions quickly on the computer and compare results, whereas it would be too time consuming to do many of them manually. However, you would not want to use the software as a total substitute for a student learning to create constructions with compass and straightedge. *Fathom Dynamic Data* (free at <http://concord.org/fathom-dynamic-data-software>) is another computer-based tool you might want to utilize with this text. Some projects using it have been added to the fourth edition.

You can see an entire chapter online to preview the text, and a free online 30-day trial is also available.

Videos to accompany *Discovering Geometry*

lessons are available for rental on Vimeo On Demand. The author himself teaches the investigations for chapters 3 through 11. You can rent the videos chapter by chapter with prices varying from \$2.99 to \$4.99 depending upon the length of each chapter. (You need to register at Vimeo first at www.vimeo.com/join, then go to www.michaelserra.net/weblog/discovering-geometry-video-subscription.html to rent the videos.) Subscriptions are for one year.

Note that while *Discovering Geometry* is published in a new edition from time to time, changes to date have not been very significant, so older editions will be fine as long as you can also get the teacher’s edition and solutions manual.

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Math Without Borders Home Study Companions

by David Chandler

Math Without Borders

email: david@mathwithoutborders.com

www.mathwithoutborders.com

\$69 per course for *Home Study Companions* (text are purchased separately)



The *Math Without Borders Home Study Companion* series offers high school math video teaching courses presented by David Chandler on flash drives in MP4 format. Videos serve as companions to Paul A. Foerster’s texts for *Algebra 1*, *Algebra 2* and *Trigonometry*, and *Precalculus*. *Calculus* is in the works. The *Math Without Borders Geometry* video instruction supports the text *Geometry: A Guided Inquiry* by Chakerian, Crabill, and Stein rather than a text by Foerster. The videos provide students with the presentations of an experienced teacher. Both videos and textbooks are required, but textbooks must be purchased

separately.

Each course needs to be copied from the flash drive onto your computer. Your computer needs to have speakers or headphones for the student to listen to the audio tracks for the instruction. Students will need either a downloaded scientific calculator they can use on their computer or a handheld calculator for all courses. Some courses benefit from the presence of a spreadsheet program; Microsoft Excel works as do the free Open Office Calc or Libre Office programs. The GeoGebra program is optional for *Algebra 1*.

While there are a number of somewhat similar math courses on DVD-ROM or through the internet, most of those designed for homeschoolers use texts that are not as challenging as those used with this series. Foerster's books, in particular, have long been recognized as among the best high school math texts. However, they assume the presence of a teacher and are too difficult for students to use on their own. The level of the math taught in each text is above average. For example Foerster's *Algebra 1* includes functions, trigonometric functions, and quadratic functions, topics often covered at higher levels in other series.

The *Home Study Companions* will work with earlier editions of each text, so you might find used copies at lower prices.

For the three courses using Foerster's textbooks, teacher David Chandler talks students through key concepts in each section of the textbook using a whiteboard to teach the concepts and work through examples. He follows the text, occasionally teaching in a slightly different fashion for the sake of clarity. Chandler sometimes expands on a topic that he knows is particularly troublesome to students. He pulls up an online calculator and other tools such as GeoGebra (a free, computer-based substitute for a graphing calculator available at <http://www.geogebra.org/cms/download>) to illustrate lessons. I very much appreciate his instruction on how to use a scientific calculator in many

different instances. (Students will need either a downloaded scientific calculator on their computer or a handheld calculator.)

After he has taught the concept, Chandler typically works through a fair number of examples before he leaves students to work through problems on their own. Answers to odd problems are at the back of the texts. Chapter reviews and/or chapter tests within the textbooks can be used for assessment. All except the *Home Study Companion: Algebra 1* should have enough solutions worked out for students that a solutions manual is not needed.

For *Home Study Companion: Algebra 1*, you should read through Chandler's notes online at http://mathwithoutborders.com/?page_id=4. The text you will need is *Algebra 1: Expressions, Equations, and Applications*. You will probably want a solutions manual. (Chandler tell you how to order the solutions manual.) The free Graphmatica shareware graphing program is helpful for *Algebra 1* although it isn't required.

The full title of the *Algebra 2* text is *Algebra and Trigonometry: Functions and Applications*. Students will need a spreadsheet program for this course. Chandler advises that you probably don't need the solutions manual for this course since he works through so many of the problems on the video. Read Chandler's notes for this course at http://mathwithoutborders.com/?page_id=9.

Precalculus with Trigonometry: Concepts and Applications is the text for *Home Study Companion: Precalculus*. Go to http://mathwithoutborders.com/?page_id=11 for Chandler's notes for this course. Chandler comments there, "I have taught out of several other Precalculus textbooks, but none of them is in the same league with Foerster when it comes to teaching problem solving and real-world applications." While Foerster's text has gone through a number of editions, the third edition is the best fit for this course since content (while similar) was rearranged from the second to the third edition. Video

solutions are provided for a large enough number of problems that you are unlikely to need a solutions manual. Students continue to use the free on-screen scientific calculator, Calc98 (<http://www.calculator.org/download.aspx>) and GeoGebra. In the last quarter of this course, he also introduces students to an even more advanced calculating program called Sage.

You can see from the technological tools Chandler uses that these courses are more sophisticated than many others used by homeschoolers. They will provide excellent preparation for those who will continue with higher math after they graduate. Familiarity with the “tools of the trade” will be a big bonus.

The *Geometry* course (combined video instruction and text) differs from the others with greater use of the textbook and less video instruction. Students work through a “Central Problem” that begins each chapter. The Central Problem itself is used to teach new material. Students study examples, work through practice problems, and do investigations. Throughout this introductory section, new concepts are introduced to lead the student toward a solution of the Central Problem. The result is all of the content is introduced in the context of a problem where it is immediately useful, rather than being left asking, “When will I ever use this?” Following this are a self-quiz, a review section and a review self-test. While answers to all of these problems are at the back of the book, the *Home Study Companion for Geometry: A Guided Inquiry* includes video solutions to problems in the review section.

Each chapter also has a projects section that expands upon concepts taught in the Central Problem section. This section has its own set of problems to solve.

While the *Home Study Companion: Geometry* has video solutions for the Central review section, it also has PDF files with complete solutions for all problems in both the Central and Project sections. (The text has answers but not solutions.) Solution sections often have additional commentary that is helpful to students.

Some chapters have “extensions” on the *Home Study Companion* to cover topics in the math standards that were not covered in the textbook. Sections for algebra review are also included.

Demonstrations using GeoGebra are used throughout the *Geometry* course. Students will also create their own geometric constructions, so they need to have a ruler (showing metric units), a protractor, and a compass. Graph paper and a scientific calculator are also required.

Sample *Home Study Companion* lessons are available on the Math Without Borders website. You might want to read Chandler’s notes for each course (links listed above) before purchasing since they provide detailed information about scheduling and course content that is very helpful.

Doing a quick scan on Amazon, it looks like all of the texts are readily available with the most expensive around \$70 and most much less than that. So the combined cost of text and *Home Study Companion* is quite low for courses of this caliber.

Homeschoolers should find *Home Study Companions* one of the least expensive ways to complete high school math courses at challenging levels with interesting course content. This combination of outstanding textbooks and an experienced teacher on the computer should make these courses practical even when parents lack math background.

CHAPTER 11

History, Geography, & Social Studies

Some of us cringe when we hear “social studies,” equating that term with the watered down mush that passes for history education in some textbooks. But the social studies label is not the culprit. The problem lies in emphasis and philosophy. Social studies is a comprehensive term which includes history, geography, and cultural studies. The public school system (in general) has overemphasized cultural studies, especially politically-correct cultural studies, at the expense of history and geography. With the increased emphasis on reading, math, and science in recent years, public schools are often not accomplishing much in any area of social studies.

In addition, social studies have often been used as tools for social engineering rather than to provide education in history. Christians have been particularly aware of the secularization of history—the sort of thing that translates our Thanksgiving holiday into a mutual admiration day between the Pilgrims and the Indians without any mention of God.

In reacting against the secular bias in textbooks, Christians have sometimes erred in moving to another extreme, rejecting cultural studies and reducing the subject to memorization of history and geography data. Neither approach is correct.

I think a great way to resolve this is to approach social studies as a newspaper reporter. Reporters look for the answers to the questions: Who did what? When did they do it? Where did they do it? and How did they do it? They might even ask, Why did they do it?

So, imitating a reporter, we look at the interrelationships of the three areas: history, geography, and cultural studies. The reporter’s first two questions are answered by the names and dates or time periods (history). The third question “Where?” is answered by describing the location (geography). The last two questions deal with the background of the event, motivations, and other influences, essentially putting an event in context (cultural studies). Our social studies should be like a good newspaper article, combining all the necessary ingredients.

A few history/social studies textbooks manage to pull all these elements together, but then you

have to deal with the biases of the authors. It is impossible to write an entirely neutral textbook. Even if the language is not slanted, every textbook will exhibit bias in the choices of what is or is not included. For Christians, textbooks that cover all of world history while paying little or no attention to religion reflect a bias that paints a false picture of a world that has developed without interaction with God. If you are a Christian who wants your child to develop a Christian worldview, then you will probably want to use resources that help you reach that goal by discussing God's actions and impact throughout history.

In regard to resources, there are at least three approaches to social studies. You might use any of these approaches exclusively or mix two or more of them. The three most common approaches are:

- History textbooks
- History through unit studies (which might use texts and/or other books such as biographies and historical fiction)
- Real books such as biographies, historical fiction, topic-specific books (e.g., a book about knights) as well as internet research

History Textbooks

Most history textbooks are rather boring. They try to cover lots of information, and that usually means they can allot only a few lines or a few paragraphs to each event. Textbook authors don't usually have space to make the interesting connections between events. Other than in the occasional sidebar, they can't tell us the personal history behind extraordinary events such as 21-year-old Nathan Hale's heroic declaration, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Learning history as sets of facts to be memorized and regurgitated for tests might even do more harm than good. It might teach children to despise history if they never get to experience the delight or amazement that comes from reading the "whole stories" of history.

The dumbed down language of some history texts for primary grades is another turn off. Increasingly, upper-elementary level history texts are showing signs of the same malady. Publishers, seeking to make their books more visually appealing, add lots of large color illustrations as they update history textbooks. They steal space for the illustrations from the lines of text, reducing them to short, choppy sentences, for the most part devoid of literary beauty or human interest.

I rarely encourage parents of children in the elementary grades to use traditional history textbooks, especially since we have so many better options available to us. Junior high level history books generally are little better with more content and fewer pictures. By high school, history textbooks have much more written material than do earlier levels, and there are some that are worth using.

I know I've made some sweeping generalizations here. There are a few exceptions. I've included reviews of a few history texts for elementary grades, but you will note that these exceptions are not the typical written-by-committee, state-approved textbook series.

Geography textbooks might be even worse than history textbooks. I have included only one resource that exclusively targets geography—*The Ultimate Geography and Timeline Guide*. This unusual book is so much better than traditional geography texts that, in my opinion, few other options come close.

History through Unit Studies

A unit study combines studies from multiple subjects around a common theme. Most unit studies have a strong historical component. Sometimes history is the primary theme with other subjects branching off from the study of history. Studying scientific investigations or literary works within their historical and geographical settings is a great way to make history as well as science and literature more interesting.

Unit studies generally recommend real books as sources of historical information. Some unit studies include historical information within their own material, but even then they generally direct you to other resources for further reading.

A few unit studies recommend history texts as the source of information, but they enhance the textbook information with stories, real books, and activities.

Some unit studies are structured in chronological order, so if you follow the publisher's sequence of study, students study history in its proper order. However, some unit studies are organized around other themes, and their history coverage jumps around—you might be studying ancient Rome one month, then South America the next. In such instances, timelines are essential for children to be able to grasp the actual chronology of events. If they can visually see events on a timeline it helps them put things in proper context.

Don't forget to check out my reviews of unit studies in Chapter Thirteen to see if you might want to use one of these for coverage of history. Increasingly, publishers are creating history programs that function like limited unit studies. Their primary focus is history, and they incorporate other subject areas to a very limited extent. *Mystery of History* and *BiblioPlan* (both among my Top Picks) are examples of this type of program.

Real Books

I'll never forget a television talk show interview with the Colfax family, homeschool pioneers whose sons were probably the first homeschoolers to receive scholarships to Harvard University. One of their sons was talking about his transition from homeschooling to the academic demands of the university. The host was probably trying to get him to acknowledge some deficiencies by asking about his history studies through high school. The young man admitted that he had never read a history textbook before going to Harvard. But, he continued, he had read many "real books"—biographies, historical fiction, and non-fiction. He surprised even himself when he discovered that through his reading he actually knew more history than his classmates who had each been through ten or more history textbooks. He attributed his acquired knowledge to his love for the subject that blossomed as he read about history in a way that brought the subject to life.

I have had opportunities to ask groups of veteran homeschoolers what actually worked best for them. The unanimous response is always, "Real books." Most did not start out with a real books approach, but after experimenting with it, they gradually shifted from exclusive reliance on textbooks to real books or a combination of both.

Because I believe so much in the value of real books for history, I am including lists of books by historical periods, followed by reviews of my Top Picks. Real books in the following lists are a mixture of historical fiction, biography, and even some legends.

"I have also included some "fact books." The fact book category encompasses such books as David Macaulay's intriguingly illustrated books *Cathedral* and *Pyramid*, and a number of colorful-illustrated information books such as those from Usborne and DK Publishing. See my review of *History of the World* (My Father's World edition of the original DK Publishing book) to get a general sense of what these fact books might be like.

I suggest using these fact books along with other books to ensure sufficient coverage of important topics. They can fill in the gaps when you are primarily using biographies and historical fiction. Keep in mind that most fact books strive for religious neutrality, and religious neutrality often means omission of important religious information and ideas or misrepresentation of religious beliefs. In addition, they sometimes include problematic content such as nudity in art.

I have *not* read all the books in these lists myself but have compiled the lists from my own experience and the recommendations of others. Therefore, I cannot vouch for the content of every book. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but it should be enough to get you started exploring history through real books.

You can choose an assortment of such books as the core of your curriculum, adding discussion, writing, and activities to accomplish your educational goals, or you can purchase a guide such as one of the *Literature Approach to History* guides from Beautiful Feet Books (www.bfbooks.com) that recommends particular books and provides questions and assignments for students in relation to the books.

I've included some titles that are written for adults but might be read aloud to older children. When I know the audience level for certain I've used (y) to indicate books written for younger children up through about fourth grade level and (o) to indicate books written for at least fifth grade level and older. (FB) after a title indicates that it is a fact book. I've also used the following notations for books that are part of well-known series:

- Landmark = Landmark Books
- CFA = Childhood of Famous Americans,
- Sower = Sower series

I have noted specific dates or time periods by many titles to help you choose books in a chronological sequence if you so desire. Also, I have sometimes mentioned the geographical area where a story takes place when I think it might be helpful.

Real Books by Time Periods/Topics

Ancient Egypt

- *Adventures in Ancient Egypt* by Linda Bailey (Kids Can Press)
- *The Cat of Bubastes* G.A. Henty (o)
- *Golden Goblet* and other titles by Eloise Jarvis McGraw
- *Into the Mummy's Tomb* by Nicholas Reeves
- *Moses* by Leonard Fisher

- *Motel of the Mysteries* by David Macaulay (FB)
- *Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt* by Elizabeth Payne (Landmark)
- *Pyramid* by David Macaulay (FB)
- *The Riddle of the Rosetta Stone* by James Cross Givlin
- *Shadow Hawk* by Andre Norton
- *Tales of Ancient Egypt* by Roger Lancelyn Green
- *Usborne Internet-Linked World History: Ancient World* (FB)
- *The Usborne Time Traveler* (FB) (y)

Ancient Greece and Rome

- *Adventures in Ancient Greece* by Linda Bailey
- *Alexander the Great* by Andrew Langley (Oxford) (y)
- *Alexander the Great* by John Gunther (o)
- *Ancient Greece* by Andrew Langley (o)
- *Archimedes and the Door of Science* by Jeanne Bendick
- *Black Ships before Troy* by Rosemary Sutcliff
- *The Children's Homer* by Padric Colum (o)
- *Classic Myths to Read Aloud: The Great Stories of Greek and Roman Mythology* by William F. Russell
- *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* by Ingrid and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (y)
- *The Iliad* translated by Richmond Lattimore (o)
- *The Librarian Who Measured the Earth* (about Ptolemy) by Kathryn Lasky
- *The Odyssey* translated by Richmond Lattimore or another translation by Robert Fitzgerald (o)
- *Tales of the Greek Heroes* by Roger Lancelyn Green (o)
- *Tales of Troy and Greece* by Andrew Lang (o)
- *The Trojan Horse* by Emily Little (y)
- *Usborne Internet-Linked World History: Ancient World* (FB)
- *The Wanderings of Odysseus* by Rosemary Sutcliff
- *You Wouldn't Want to Be in Alexander the Great's Army!* by Jacqueline Marley (y)

Bible Times and Ancient Rome

- *The Aeneid of Virgil* translated by Robert Fitzgerald
- *Against the World: Odyssey of Athanasius* by Henry W. Coray
- *Augustus Caesar's World* by Genevieve Foster (63 B.C.-A.D. 14, World) (o)
- *Ben Hur, a Tale of the Christ* by Lew Wallace (1st century A.D., Rome, Judea) (o-read aloud)

- *Beric the Briton: A Story of the Roman Invasion* by G.A. Henty (A.D. 61, Britain, Rome) (o)
- *Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth Speare (32 B.C., Judea)
- *Cleopatra* by Diane Stanley and Peter Vennema (1st century B.C., Egypt)
- *Classic Myths to Read Aloud: The Great Stories of Greek and Roman Mythology* by William F. Russell
- *Cultural Atlas for Young People: Ancient Rome* by Mike Corbishley (FB)
- *The Eagle of the Ninth* by Rosemary Sutcliff (A.D. 119, Rome)
- *Eyewitness Books: Ancient Rome* (Knopf) (FB)
- *For the Temple* by G.A. Henty (A.D. 70, Judea) (o)
- *Hittite Warrior* by Joanne Williamson (1200 B.C., Judea)
- *The Ides of April* by Mary Ray (A.D. 60, Rome)
- *Jason's Miracle: A Hanukkah Story* by Beryl Lieff Benderly (o)
- *The Lantern Bearers* (Britain at the end of the Roman occupation) by Rosemary Sutcliff (A.D. 450, Britain)
- *Pearl Maiden* by H. Rider Haggard (1st century, Judea)
- *Quo Vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz (A.D. 60, Rome) (o-read aloud)
- *The Robe* by Lloyd C. Douglas (read aloud) (1st century A.D., Rome, Judea) (o)
- *Runaway* by Patricia St. John (1st century, Judea)
- *Saint Valentine* retold by Robert Sabuda (3rd century A.D., Rome)
- *Spring Tide* by Mary Ray (o)
- *Usborne Internet-Linked World History: Ancient World* (FB)
- *The White Stag* (about Attila the Hun) by Kate Seredy (400s, Asia, Europe)
- *You Wouldn't Want to Live in Pompeii!* by John Malam (y,o)
- *Young Carthaginian* by G.A. Henty (220 B.C., North Africa) (o)

World History from the Fall of Rome through the Middle Ages

- *Adam of the Road* by Elizabeth Gray (1294, England)
- *Adventures with the Vikings* by Linda Bailey
- *The Apple and the Arrow* by Mary and Conrad Buff (1300s, Switzerland) (y,o)
- *Augustine Came to Kent* by Barbara Willard (600s, England)
- *Beorn the Proud* by Madeleine Pollard (800, Ireland, Denmark)
- *Beowulf the Warrior* by Ian Serrailier (1100s, England)
- *Big John's Secret* by Eleanor M. Jewett (o)
- *The Black Arrow* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1400s England)
- *By Right of Conquest or With Cortez in Mexico* by G.A. Henty (1500s, Mexico) (o)
- *Cathedral* by David Macaulay (1200s, Europe)
- *Columbus* by Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1492, World) (y)
- *D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths* by Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (Norse mythology) (y)
- *The Dragon and the Raven or the Days of King Alfred* by G.A. Henty (800s, England) (o)
- *Dragon Slayer (Beowulf)* by Rosemary Sutcliff (1100s, England)
- *The Hidden Treasure of Glaston* by Eleanore M. Jewett (1171, England)
- *If All the Swords in England (Thomas Becket)* by Barbara Willard (1100s, England)
- *In Freedom's Cause* (about William Wallace and Robert the Bruce and the battle for Scottish independence) by G.A. Henty (1300s, Scotland) (o)
- *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott (1300s, Europe) (o)
- *Joan of Arc: Heavenly Warrior* by Tabatha Yeatts (1400s, France) (o)
- *Joan of Arc* by Diane Stanley (1400s, France) (y)
- *The King's Shadow* (about King Harold of Saxon England) by Elizabeth Alder (1000s, England) (o)
- *The Lances of Lynwood* by Charlotte M. Yonge (1000s, Europe)
- *Leif the Lucky* by Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (1000s, Exploration of America)
- *The Lost Baron* by Allen French (1200s, England)
- *Magna Charta* by James Daugherty (1200s, England)
- *Men of Iron* by Howard Pyle (1300s, England)
- *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* by Howard Pyle (1200s, England)
- *The Minstrel in the Tower* by Gloria Skurzynski (1195, Europe)
- *Otto of the Silver Hand* by Howard Pyle (1400s, Europe)
- *The Red Keep* by Allen French (1165, Europe)
- *The Road to Damietta* (about St. Francis of Assisi) by Scott O'Dell (1200s, Italy)
- *St. George and the Dragon* by Margaret Hodges (legend, England)
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by J.R.R. Tolkien (1400s, England) (o)
- *Son of Charlemagne* by Barbara Willard (780, Europe)
- *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights and Other Arthurian Tales* by Howard Pyle (legend, England)
- *The Story of Rolf and the Viking Bow* by Allen French (1000s, Iceland)
- *The Talisman* by Sir Walter Scott (about the Crusades) (1300s) (o)
- *Tristan and Iseult* (Ireland, Britain) by Rosemary Sutcliff (legend, England)
- *The Trumpeter of Krakow* by Eric P. Kelly (1400s, Poland)
- *Usborne Internet-Linked World History: Medieval World* (FB) (y,o)
- *The Usborne Time Traveler* (FB) (y)
- *Vikings* by Elizabeth Janeway (Landmark

Book) (1000s, Exploration)

- *What Do We Know About the Middle Ages?* by Sarah Howarth (FB)

- *Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus?* by Jean Fritz (1492, Exploration) (y)

- *William Tell* by Leonard Everett Fisher (1300s, Switzerland) (y)

- *Winning His Spurs* by G.A. Henty (1190, The Crusades) (o)

- *Wulf the Saxon: A Story of the Norman Conquest* by G.A. Henty (1066, England) (o)

Renaissance to Modern Day— Other than U.S. History

- *By Pike and Dike* by G.A. Henty (1500s, Europe) (o)

- *Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes retold by Michael Harrison (Fiction, Spain)

- *Edmund Campion* by Harold Gardiner, S. J. (1500s, England)

- *The Hawk that Dare Not Hunt by Day* (Tyndale) by Scott O'Dell (1494-1536, England)

- *Ink on His Fingers* (Gutenberg) by Louise Vernon (1400s, Germany)

- *Isaac Newton* by John Hudson Tiner (Sower) (1642-1727, England)

- *Johannes Kepler* by John Hudson Tiner (Sower) (1600s, Germany)

- *A Knight of the White Cross* by G.A. Henty (1480, Europe) (o)

- *Leonardo da Vinci* by Diane Stanley (1400-1500, Europe)

- *Lysbeth: A Tale of the Dutch* by H. Rider Haggard (1500s, Netherlands)

- *Martin Luther: A Man Who Changed the World* by Paul L. Maier (1483-1546, Germany) (y)

- *Red Hugh: Prince of Donegal* by Robert T. Reilly (1500s, Ireland)

- *St. Bartholomew's Eve: A Tale of the Huguenot Wars* by G.A. Henty (1500s, France) (o)

- *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orey

(1700s, France) (o)

- *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens (1700s, Europe) (o)

- *This Was John Calvin* by Thea B. Van Halsema (1509-1564, Europe) (o)

- *Under Drake's Flag: A Tale of the Spanish Main* by G.A. Henty (1500s, England, Exploration) (o)

- *With Pipe, Paddle and Song* by Elizabeth Yates (1750, Canada)

- *The World of Captain John Smith* by Genevieve Foster (1580-1631, World)

- *The World of Columbus and Sons* by Genevieve Foster (1400s-1500s, World)

U.S. History

- *American Girls* series

- *America's Paul Revere* by Esther Forbes (y,o)

- *Amos Fortune: Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates (o)

- *And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?* by Jeanne Fritz (y)

- *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper (o)

- *Ben and Me* by Robert Lawson

- *Ben Franklin of Old Philadelphia* by Margaret Cousins (Landmark)

- *Benjamin Franklin* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (y)

- *By the Great Hornspoon* by Sid Fleischman

- *Cabin Faced West* by Jeanne Fritz (y)

- *Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink (o)

- *Can't You Get Them to Behave, King George?* by Jeanne Fritz (y)

- *Carlota* (Mexican War) by Scott O'Dell

- *Carry on, Mr. Bowditch* by Jean Lee Latham (o)

- *Clara Barton: Founder of the American Red Cross* by Augusta Stevenson (CFA) (y)

- *The Courage of Sarah Noble* by Alice Dagliesh (y)

- *Crispus Attucks: Black Leader of Colonial Patriots* by Dharathula H. Millender (CFA)

- *Daniel Boone Frontiersman* by Janet and Geoff Benge (o)

- *Diary of an Early American Boy* by Eric Sloan
- *Dragon's Gate* (about Chinese immigrants and the railroads) by Laurence Yep (y,o)
- *Fourth of July Story* by Alice Dagliesh (y)
- *Gold Fever: Tales from the California Gold Rush* by Rosalyn Schanzer
- *George Washington's World* by Genevieve Foster (o)
- *A Hunger for Learning* (about Booker T. Washington) by Gwenyth Swain
- *If You Traveled West in a Covered Wagon* by Ellen Levine (y)
- *Iron Dragon Never Sleeps* by Stephen Krensky (y)
- *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell
- *Jed Smith: Trailblazer of the West* by Frank Latham
- *Johnny Appleseed* by David R. Collins (Sower)
- *Johnny Tremain* by Esther Forbes (o)
- *Make Way for Sam Houston* by Jeanne Fritz (y)
- *The Matchlock Gun* by Walter D. Edmonds (y)
- *Meriwether Lewis: Boy Explorer* by Charlotta Bebenroth (CFA) (y)
- *Minn of the Mississippi* by Holling C. Holling
- *Mr. Revere and I* by Robert Lawson
- *Mother Cabrini* by Frances Parkinson Keyes
- *Patty Reed's Doll* by Rachel Laurgaard
- *Paddle to the Sea* by Holling C. Holling
- *Pioneers Go West* by George R. Stewart (Landmark)
- *Pocahontas* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (y)
- *A Pocketful of Goobers: A Story of George Washington Carver* by Barbara Mitchell
- *The Reb and the Redcoats* by Constance Savery (o)
- *Sam the Minuteman* by Nathaniel Benchley (y)
- *Samuel F.B. Morse* by John Hudson Tiner

(Sower)

- *The Siege of the Alamo* by Janet Riehecky and Valerie Weber (o)
- *The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth Speare
- *Sing Down the Moon* (about the Navaho Indians) by Scott O'Dell (o)
- *Sitting Bull: Dakota Boy* by Augusta Stevenson (CFA) (y)
- *Streams to the River, River to the Sea* (about Sacagawea) by Scott O'Dell (o)
- *Tree in the Trail* by Holling C. Holling
- *Treegate's Raiders* by Leonard Wibberly (o)
- *Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams?* by Jeanne Fritz (y)
- *Witchcraft of Salem Village* by Shirley Jackson (Landmark) (o)
- *The World of Captain John Smith* by Genevieve Foster (o)

Civil War Period and Slavery

- *Abe Lincoln: Log Cabin to the Whitehouse* by Sterling North (Landmark) (o)
- *Abraham Lincoln* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (y)
- *Across Five Aprils* by Irene Hunt (o)
- *Black Frontiers: A History of African-American Heroes in the Old West* by Lillian Schlissel (o)
- *Booker T. Washington* by Christine Taylor-Butler (y)
- *The Drinking Gourd* by F.N. Monjo (y)
- *Freedom Train* by Dorothy Sterling
- *Freedom's Sons: The True Story of the Amistad Mutiny* by Suzanne Jurmain
- *Gettysburg* by MacKinlay Kantor (o)
- *Go Free Or Die: A Story about Harriet Tubman* by Jeri Ferris (y)
- *Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons: The Story of Phillis Wheatley* by Ann Rinaldi (o)
- *If You Traveled On the Underground Railroad* by Ellen Levine (y)
- *Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl* by Harriet A. Jacobs (o)
- *Iron Scouts of the Confederacy* by McGriffon

- *The Life of Stonewall Jackson* by Mary L. Williamson
- *The Life of J.E.B. Stuart* by Mary L. Williamson
- *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (o)
- *Mary McLeod Bethune* by Eloise Greenfield (y)
- *The Negro Cowboys* by Philip Durham (o)
- *Perilous Road* by William O. Steele
- *A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass* by David A. Adler (y)
- *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco (y)
- *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane (o)
- *Rifles for Watie* by Harold Keith (o)
- *Robert E. Lee, The Christian* by William J. Johnson (o)
- *Robert E. Lee* by Lee Roddy (Sower) (o)
- *The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox (o-read aloud)
- *Sojourner Truth; Ain't I A Woman?* by Pat and Patricia McKissack
- *Stonewall* by Jeanne Fritz (y)
- *The Story of Harriet Tubman: Conductor of the Underground Railroad* by Kate McMullan (y)
- *Tales from the Underground Railroad* by Kate Connell
- *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (o-read aloud)
- *Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington (o)
- *Virginia's General: Robert E. Lee and the Civil War* by Albert Marrin (o)
- *Walking the Road to Freedom: Sojourner Truth* by Jeri Ferris (y)
- *With Lee in Virginia: A Story of the American Civil War* by G.A. Henty (o)

Modern U.S. History

- *Amelia Earhart* by Beatrice Gormley
- *American Girls* series
- *Andrew Carnegie: Builder of Libraries* by Charnan Simon (y)
- *The Bracelet* (about Japanese internment in WWII) by Yoshiko Uchida and Joanna

Yardley (y)

- *Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp* by Jerry Stanley (o)
- *Counting on Grace* (about the Industrial Revolution) by Elizabeth Winthrop (o)
- *Farewell to Manzanar* (about Japanese internment in WWII) by Houston and Houston (o)
- *Henry Ford: Young Man with Ideas* by Hazel Aird and Catherine Ruddiman
- *Rocket Man: The Story of Robert Goddard* by Tom Streissguth
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor (o-read aloud)
- *Ronald Reagan* by Montrew Dunham
- *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in WWII* by Penny Colman (o)
- *Smokestacks and Spinning Jennys: Industrial Revolution* by Sean Stewart Price
- *The Story of the Wright Brothers and Their Sister* by Lois Mills (y)
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (o-read aloud)
- *Understood Betsy* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher (o)
- *The Yearling* by Marjorie Rawlings (o)

Modern World History

- *America and Vietnam: The Elephant and the Tiger* by Albert Marrin (o)
- *The Collapse of Communism* by Stewart Ross (o)
- *The Crystal Snowstorm, Following the Phoenix, Angel and the Dragon, and The Rose and Crown* (19th century European politics) all titles by Meriol Trevor (o)
- *Hitler* by Albert Marrin (o)
- *The House of Sixty Fathers* (about China) by Meindert de Jong (y,o)
- *The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam* by Huynh Quang Nhuong
- *Number the Stars* (about the Danish Resistance in WWII) by Lois Lowry (o)
- *Stalin: Russia's Man of Steel* by Albert

Marrin (o)

- *Sweet Dried Apples: A Vietnamese Wartime Childhood* by Rosemary Breckler (y)
- *Teresa of Calcutta* by D. Jeanene Watson (Sower)
- *Twenty and Ten* (about WWII refugee children in France) by Claire Huchet Bishop
- *The Wheel on the School* (fictional story of the Netherlands) by Meindert de Jong
- *When Jessie Came across the Sea* (about a Jewish Immigrant) by Amy Hett (y)
- *The Winged Watchman* (WWII Nazi occupation of the Netherlands) by Hilda Van Stockum (o)
- *The Yanks are Coming* (about WWI) by Albert Marrin (o)

Which Books to Use When

Many homeschool distributors sell books such as those listed above. Some homeschool distributors list books under time period headings so you can easily find those you want to use for history studies. In addition to distributors' websites and catalogs, there are other resource books you can use to help you select your own books for historical studies. Some home educators glean ideas from books like *The Well-Trained Mind* by Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise (Norton) or *For the Love of Literature: Teaching Core Subjects with Literature* by Maureen Wittmann (Ecce Homo Press).

I know of one book totally dedicated to selecting literature for history. *All through the Ages: History through Literature Guide* by Christine Miller (Nothing New Press, www.nothingnewpress.com) is a 300+ page reference guide for selecting literature by time period. The largest section of the book features listings divided by chronological periods. Selections reflect a strong western civilization and Reformed Protestant perspective. In addition to chronological divisions, titles within those divisions are further broken down by age

groups covering grades one through twelve. Within age groups there are sometimes further divisions under headings such as overview of the era, specific events, biography, historical fiction, and culture. Other smaller sections follow a similar format, listing books for geography, science, math, the arts, and "Great Books of Western Civilization & the Christian Tradition."

Below are examples of the many websites that list historical literature by time periods that you might want to explore:

A Book in Time

www.abookintime.com

This secular list is arranged by time periods and levels, and it includes descriptions of books.

Mater Amabilis

www.materamabilis.org/ma/subjects/history/

This site has free lesson plans and helps for a Charlotte Mason approach for all grade levels (for both the U.S. and the U.K.). Real books for history are listed by topic and level.

Paula's Archives

www.redshift.com/~bonajo/history.htm#WMID

Un-annotated lists on this site come from a Protestant homeschool perspective. The lists include movies for each time period.

University of Delaware

www.udel.edu/dssep/literature.html

A secular university published these lists of recommended literature for social studies that are arranged by level.

Spine Books

Occasionally I mention spine books in my reviews, particularly in this chapter. Spine books might be textbooks, real books or any other book that provides an overview of a subject. A spine book is used as a primary resource

in conjunction with other resources, sort of like a unit study. A spine book typically gives you continuity and fills in gaps left by more specialized topical resources.

Reviews of History Resources

All American History

by Celeste W. Rakes

Bright Ideas Press

PO Box 333

Cheswold, DE 19934

877-492-8081

email: contact@brightideaspress.com

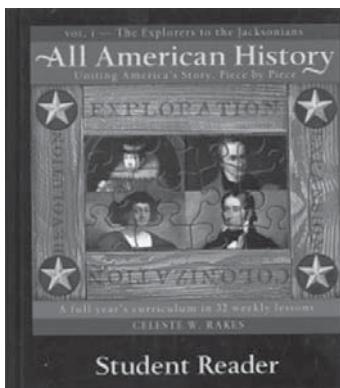
www.brightideaspress.com

Volume I or Volume II set - \$68 each,

extra student activity books - \$16.95 each,

AAH Junior, Vol. I or Vol. II - \$44.95 each,

high school test packet - \$7



All American History (AAH) is a two-year, two-volume course in U.S. history. It can be used by students in grades five through twelve, by either one student or multiple students

working at one or more grade levels. The *AAH Junior* edition allows you to include students in kindergarten through fourth grade to learn along with their older siblings.

The two volumes are titled *Volume 1, The Explorers to the Jacksonians* and *Volume 2: The Civil War to the 21st Century*.

AAH is distinctly different from traditional textbooks with its multi-age approach as well as its use of real books and hands-on activities. It should work very well in homeschool settings. Developed through use in co-op classes, it easily adapts for use with individual children. Each volume stands alone, but you need both

for complete coverage of U.S. history.

AAH purposely emphasizes social and cultural aspects of history as we often find in mainstream history texts for the elementary grades. The content should be acceptable to almost all home educators since it is presented objectively and without editorializing in comparison to some other options used by home educators. While it includes religious developments often ignored by other texts, these receive far less mention than one finds in history books from Christian publishers such as BJU Press, A Beka Book, and Christian Liberty Press. Those wanting a secular text should be comfortable with the minimal treatment of religion in this book. However, the student activity book's "For Further Study" suggestions and "Family Activity Ideas" in the teacher's guide occasionally offer some more overtly Christian topics. For example, one For Further Study question directs students to "Find out about John Eliot, the Puritan missionary who was known as the Apostle to the Indians" (*AAH Student Activity Book*, p. 81). With few exceptions, assignments and suggestions are not specifically Christian. This arrangement allows the parent who prefers a secular approach to skip any topics with which they are uncomfortable. While Christian parents have occasional opportunities in AAH to make faith connections, they might want to supplement with more faith-based resources or raise questions about biblical principles and historical characters and events.

There are three essential components to the course for each volume: the student reader, student activity book, and teacher's guide. The core book is the hardcover student reader. Similar to textbooks, student readers present historical information accompanied by black-and-white illustrations. A brief summary of key points concludes each chapter. The text of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are included in an appendix in both volumes. These are substantial books

with 442 pages in the first volume and 557 in the second.

Questions and assignments are all found in the consumable student activity books. Here you find activity pages, map forms, review questions, For Further Study assignments, and Images for Required Forms. The last item is a collection of illustrations (primarily of people) and flags to be used on activity pages. The illustrations in the student activity book are intended to be beneficial to both visual learners as well as kinesthetic learners, providing cut-and-paste activities to keep their hands engaged.

The required forms used with the images are one or more worksheets per chapter for students to complete that summarize key information from each chapter. The student activity book forms are intended to be filled in as the student is either reading the text or listening to the text being read. This is training in note-taking skills, and it encourages them to be active readers and listeners.

Activity book pages are perforated and three-hole-punched so they can be easily removed and put into a binder. At the end of the activity book are Optional Forms for Further Study. These forms require students to do more in-depth research on topics such as a Native American tribe, a Revolutionary War or World War battle, or a United States President. Some forms might be used more than once. While these are great for students in grades five through eight, high school students should probably be working at a more challenging level than is posed by these forms.

The course for each volume is broken down into four units, with eight lessons (chapters) per unit. The activity book has review questions for each lesson, but it also has a test at the end of each unit. An additional set of high school level tests are available.

The teacher's guides include reduced reproductions of all student activity book pages with completed answers and information to serve

as your answer key for all but the For Further Study assignments. (Suggested answers for those are included in the instruction pages for each lesson.) Answer keys include lengthy suggested responses for open-ended questions which are very helpful for parents who cannot keep up with the student reading themselves.

The teacher's guides have additional activity suggestions and recommended reading lists for three levels: kindergarten through fourth grade, grades five through eight, and grades nine through twelve. They also have checklists at the end of each unit to help you plan, showing which activities are required and which are optional. In addition, the teacher's guides include masters of the optional forms and all of the images. These images might also be used for a timeline as well as for a game as described in the teacher's guides.

Part of the reason this course is so suitable for homeschooling is that while the ideal audience is probably junior high, it easily expands for use with younger and older students. Younger students listen to highlights and key ideas from the chapter presented by the parent. They read real books related to the time period. (Annotated lists of age-appropriate books for each chapter are in the teacher's guide.) Younger students also participate in creating timelines, map work, and other hands-on learning activities. Bright Ideas Press has also come out with optional *All American History Junior* courses for both volumes that give students smaller amounts of material to read, add age-appropriate literature study guides, and provide alternative map work, activity pages, folder book projects, puzzles, and notebooking and coloring pages. The *Junior* program substitutes for the student activity books, but you still need the student readers and the teacher's guides.

It's even easier with high school students. While you choose from among the optional activities for students in elementary grades, older students complete most of the optional

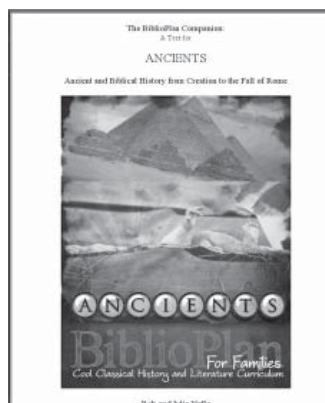
activities, especially the For Further Study questions and the optional forms. The student readers cover most topics very briefly, so it is essential that high school students delve deeper into some topics. They need to read at least one book per unit from the recommended reading lists. Optional test packets for high school students are also available for \$7 each. The biggest drawback for high school students is that they might need to complete both volumes in one year because of other credit requirements.

Another plus regarding this course for homeschoolers is that the components are very reasonably priced, especially the teacher's guide. To teach an additional student in the same family, you might share the student reader and purchase only an extra student activity book.

The books are very professional in appearance and presentation, but other than the covers, they are printed in black-and-white throughout. This should not be a big issue for most students.

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BiblioPlan



by Julia and Rob Nalle
email: contactus@biblioplan.net
www.biblioplan.net
prices vary by level, choice of format, and options; see the publisher's website for

price information

BiblioPlan offers a unique approach for teaching history to children at all grade levels together. *BiblioPlan* courses teach from a biblical Christian (Protestant) worldview, although not all resources used within the program do so. It accomplishes this by presenting the

same general topics to all students while using resources and activities suitable to various levels.

BiblioPlan identifies itself as a classical program, so it presents levels with reference to the grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric stages. It also uses the history-study guidelines from *The Well-Trained Mind*, Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise's book about classical education.

While the primary focus is history, students do significant work in geography as well as reading and writing (more as they shift to upper grade levels), enough so that they should also receive at least partial course credits for literature and geography, and possibly for composition.

The Bible is used heavily in the first *BiblioPlan* to teach both biblical history and knowledge of scripture itself. Church history receives significant attention in the second course. Subsequent courses feature biographies of significant Christians—"giants of the faith"—within each historical period and geographical area. So *BiblioPlan* will also provide either partial or full coverage of religion for each school year. A chart in the introductory pages of each Family or Teacher's Guide shows high school credits that might be assigned for each course.

There are four *BiblioPlan* courses:

- *Ancients*, which covers Creation to the Fall of Rome
- *Medieval*, which covers the Fall of Rome to the Renaissance (Note: while the focus is primarily on western civilization, this course does cover Asia, Africa, and the Americas prior to Columbus, as well as Islam.)
- *Early America and the World*, which covers from 1600-1850
- *Modern America and the World*, which covers 1850-2000 (Note: this course has a slightly conservative political slant.)

You should cycle through these four courses with your children, shifting them up to higher levels the next time (or even a third time) around. Selecting the activities and readings

for a higher level each time keeps the material fresh and age appropriate.

You can begin teaching a student in *BiblioPlan* at any level beginning with whichever of the four courses works best for you, although you should have the entire family working from the same *BiblioPlan* course each year.

BiblioPlan courses are written from a Christian worldview. However, their ecumenical approach make them usable by those from different denominations as well as by those holding young earth and old earth views. For example, *Ancients* begins with a discussion about the age of the earth, presenting different options with a respectful attitude. Noah's flood, the Tower of Babel and other biblical events are treated as factual. Occasional mention is made of evolutionary viewpoints, but generally with a tilt toward creationism. For example, *Ancients* acknowledges that both evolutionists and creationists believe that there was an ice age, but it presents dating explanations from both perspectives differentiating based on belief in either uniformitarianism or catastrophic processes.

Modern American and the World also reflects this ecumenical approach with coverage of some Catholic missionaries along with Protestants. Most Catholics should find *Modern American and the World* an excellent choice since it includes discussion of critical events such as Mexico's repression of the Catholic Church. (This is probably the best modern history text I've yet seen that includes discussion of Christianity without leaning almost exclusively toward Protestantism or Catholicism.) While the *Medieval* course treats Catholicism with respect, it highlights Protestant heroes and events.

Components

The core components of each *BiblioPlan* course are the *BiblioPlan* Family Guide and the *BiblioPlan* Companion. The *BiblioPlan* Companions each serve as your core book for history content (one for each course).

Assignments for readings in the *BiblioPlan* Companion are laid out in the weekly plans in the corresponding *BiblioPlan* Family Guide. Within each *BiblioPlan* Family Guide is a set of one-page, weekly lesson plans for 34 weeks. Lesson plans chart out which pages of which resources are to be used on a three-day per week schedule. Students might do independent reading, research, and/or writing between sessions depending upon their level. The schedule has rows listing optional resources for different age levels, writing assignments for the various levels, as well as assignments from alternate spine books.

Each course integrates historical literature including some titles related to Bible and church history. *BiblioPlan* courses differ from similar programs since they recommend many literature selections for supplemental reading but do not require specific books. Each course recommends optional spine books that you might choose to read from along with readings from the Companion. (A spine book is a broad history resource covering many events in history.) *The Story of the World*, *Mystery of History*, *Streams of Civilization*, *History of US*, and *Trial and Triumph* are examples of some of the suggested spine books. Recommendations of fiction for each unit are included in the Family Guide. Fiction lists are arranged by levels as well as for family read alouds. Lists include descriptions of the books, suggested age ranges, and the number of pages for each book. These descriptions are very helpful since you need to choose from among a number of options.

The Family Guides also list a composition assignment for each week, with assignments for three different levels: young writer, grammar, and logic levels. Assignments for the rhetoric level are in the Advanced Cool History books.

The *BiblioPlan* Companions surprised me with their breadth and depth of content. Written from a Christian worldview (Protestant), the Companions are somewhat like textbooks with readings and background

information, biographical sketches, timelines, bullet-point summaries, charts, maps, and "Fascinating Facts." Sections printed in black-and-white cover the basic narrative and timeline. Sections with colored backgrounds cover biographies and other special topics. Division of the content into the various sections breaks up the reading into more manageable chunks, and not all of the chunks are essential. This is important since the BiblioPlan Companions are lengthy books; the *Ancients Companion* has 354 pages, the *Medieval Companion* has 747 pages, the *Early Modern Companion* has 864 pages, and the *Modern Companion* has 588 pages!

While older students can read the BiblioPlan Companions on their own, parents need to read the appropriate sections aloud to younger students. The Cool History books for Littles (see description below) identify which sections in each Companion should be read. The Companions occasionally have "In Brief" sections that summarize information that is repeated in greater detail. Young students or others that are overwhelmed can get the key points from these sections without having to read everything. On the other hand, older students can skip the In Brief sections since they will be reading the expanded presentation instead. The Companions are also heavily illustrated with pictures and maps that support the text information.

Within the BiblioPlan Companions, geography is integrated at points where it connects with the history throughout each course, so students learn geography in context, an approach that I think works better than teaching geography on its own. The geography is supported by map work activities in the supplemental Hands-On Maps book for each course. World geography is stressed in the first two volumes and U.S. geography in the second two.

In addition to the Family Guide and the BiblioPlan Companion for each course, families will need the Family Discussion Guide plus

the appropriate Cool History activity book for each student. (These are described below.)

Weekly assignment charts in the Family Guides also include lists of the possible literature selections for four levels plus optional movies/DVDs or audio CDs. Another section of the assignment charts lists optional hands-on activities. There you'll find mention of other BiblioPlan products such as the Hands-on Maps, Family Discussion Guide, timeline figures, coloring pages, and crafts as well as mention of specific cards from Veritas Press' and Classical Conversation's history card sets if you want to use either of them.

Most BiblioPlan supplements are specific to each of the four *BiblioPlan* courses. Some are essential and a few are optional. Permission is given to reproduce pages of the following supplements for use within your family.

Cool History: These four essential books have assignments specific to each level. You need to purchase only the level(s) needed for your children. Choose from four levels: Littles (K-2), Middles (grades 2-6), Upper Middles (grades 6-8), and Advanced (grades 9-12). A fifth option is also available for those who want to use Susan Wise Bauer's *Story of the World*; Cool History Classics draw questions from both the Companion and *Story of the World*. A single Cool History Classics for each volume of *BiblioPlan* targets grades one through six. You would choose this in place of another Cool History if you know that you want to incorporate *Story of the World* as a spine.

In each Cool History, there is approximately one worksheet per week plus occasional supporting activity pages. Cool History books for Littles include the specific reading assignments in the Companion. With Middles level students, parents will need to use their own judgment as to which sections to read, probably reading most of the colored sections rather than the black-and-white sections. (Upper Middles and Advanced students should be reading almost everything.) While all levels have questions on

the readings from the Companion, other activities vary depending upon the level. For example, younger students have coloring activities. The two lowest levels have hands-on activities. The second and third levels start children into research activities, while the fourth level requires students to do significant research and essay writing. Examinations are included in the two upper levels. Answer keys are included at the end of each book.

Hands-on Maps: These are four different sets of worksheets with map work and geography activities that correlate directly with each *BiblioPlan* course. There are one or two pages per week to be completed. Work is primarily labeling and coloring, but sometimes students are asked to draw in boundary lines. Reviews and exams are included. They are available for two levels: Middles (grades 2-7) and Advanced (grades 7-12). Students at the younger levels should be given only selected assignments from the Middles book, and they will require parental assistance. By fifth grade, students should be able to complete map work independently.

Family Discussion Guide: Family Discussion Guides provide key points to review and discuss with children as well as a range of questions. Some questions are designed to develop a Christian worldview. Parents should pick and choose questions most appropriate for their children. Parents need to be familiar with material in the Companion since questions are based on its content, and they are also sometimes directed to retell stories or events from the Companion.

Timeline: A Timeline for each *BiblioPlan* includes pictures of people, places, and events that are printed in full color. These are a mixture of reproductions of artwork (especially portraits), drawings, photographs, drawn figures, and flags. The timeline itself consists of pages that can be mounted on a wall or put into a notebook. Timeline pages show where figures are to be mounted and include descriptive text. Unless you have a high-quality color

printer, you might want to purchase the print edition of this book rather than print it out yourself. The timeline is best for kindergarten through eighth grade.

Coloring Book: A Coloring Book for each *BiblioPlan* has pages with drawings of key figures or events for young students to color.

Craft Books: Craft Books for each *BiblioPlan* course have a number of activities for each unit. For example, when students are studying the Roman Empire, they might make a banner, hold a mock chariot race, dress up like roman citizens (and have a Roman feast), or make Roman warrior's equipment. For some projects, you'll need craft materials like a hot glue gun, paint, felt, pipe cleaners, and poster board as well as some unusual items like a ceramic flower pot. Craft books have activities to suit all ages.

Co-ops or Christian School Classes: *BiblioPlan* has created a special Teacher's Guide for those teaching co-op classes or in Christian schools. The Teacher's Guide for each *BiblioPlan* course provides very detailed instructions for teaching same-age or multi-age groups. Group class teachers would use this guide rather than the Family Guide. Teachers would also not need the Family Discussion Guide.

Summary

All of these resources work together to make it easy for both parents and teachers to present history in a far more interesting fashion than traditional textbooks.

BiblioPlan resources are available as ebooks or in printed hard copies, with substantial savings on ebook versions. Sample pages from the various resources as well as all of the options for purchasing bundles, print, or ebooks are available on the publisher's website. You can also download free, three-week samples of all four courses at the publisher's website so you can check it out before buying.

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Catholic Schools Textbook Project History Series

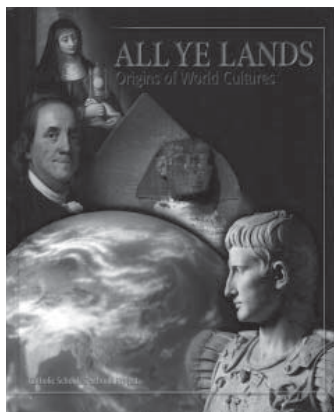
Catholic Schools Textbook Project

PO Box 4638

Ventura, CA 93007-0638

888-610-3354

www.catholictextbookproject.com



The Catholic Schools Textbook Project's goal is to produce high quality history textbooks that teach from a Catholic world view. Eventually, they intend to produce books for all grade levels. However,

they began with the upper grade levels first, and five books are available thus far.

The textbooks are fairly similar to standard history texts in methodology and presentation. However, the inclusion of the Catholic perspective means that some events are presented with a different slant and some events and people are included that might be skipped in a non-Catholic presentation. In addition, the overall scope and sequence leans somewhat toward a western civilization emphasis. Even with a Catholic emphasis, the texts avoid the temptation to make the actions of Catholics always look good in contrast to those with other religious beliefs.

Textbooks are available in hardcover editions and either epub or Adobe Digital editions. Both digital editions are available for purchase or for rent; the rental option greatly reduces the cost, and there are rental options for one, two, or three years. (The Adobe Digital Reader is a free download for PC and Mac systems.) Digital editions have an easily accessible table of contents for quick navigation. Because there are too many price options to list, I am including only the prices for full purchase for texts

and teacher's manuals. Check the publisher's website for rental costs.

All of the Catholic Schools Textbook Project texts are nicely illustrated in full color. The textbooks are written in more of a narrative style than many traditional texts, so they are fairly interesting to read. All of the student texts include chapter review questions and activity suggestions. *From Sea to Shining Sea* and texts above that level add chapter summaries of key points. Both volumes of *Light to the Nations* as well as *Lands of Hope* add lists of key concepts, dates to remember, and central characters at the end of each chapter.

Teacher's manuals do not reprint student textbook pages. They have extensive teaching material for each chapter that includes a chapter overview, chapter goals, paragraph-long explanations of each key piece of information students should master, vocabulary terms and definitions, review questions, optional activities, sample quiz and test questions, and answers to all of the questions. Sample questions can be used to construct your own tests, although this is a bit of work.

Student workbooks are available for each text on CD-ROM. You can purchase a classroom license (\$25) or a single-family license (\$10) for a year, or you can purchase a PDF or epub version (\$20 each). Workbooks have activities for subsections of chapters so students are continually reviewing and reinforcing chapter content rather than simply answering end-of-chapter questions. Workbook questions emphasize comprehension rather than deeper thought as do some end-of-chapter questions. Question formats are fill-in-the-blank, matching, circling, true/false, underlining, and crossword puzzles. There are also map labeling, drawing, and maze activities.

From Sea to Shining Sea:

The Story of America

textbook: hardcover - \$65, epub or PDF - \$50 each; teacher's manual - \$30

(Publisher's suggested grade levels: 5-9)

Beginning with early explorers such as St. Brendan and Leif Ericsson, this text tells the story of the United States up through the 1800s. Note that the text begins with the story of a saint, and it concludes with a chapter titled "Catholics in America." While a Catholic viewpoint crops up from time to time throughout the rest of the text, the presentation is not at all heavy-handed. In fact, in my opinion, this text could have used even more Catholic perspective. Missing, for example, are any mention of the Know Nothing movement and the development of the Catholic school system. However, the text is suggested for students in grades five through nine, and both topics do show up in *Lands of Hope and Promise*. Overall, this is an excellent text and one of the best choices up through eighth grade. I would generally recommend that ninth graders use the more-challenging text, *Lands of Hope and Promise*, for U.S. history. However, if you use *All Ye Lands* in sixth or seventh grade, it makes sense to follow it with *From Sea to Shining Sea*.

With 206 pages, the student workbook offers substantial review and reinforcement for the lessons in the text. However, it seems targeted at the lowest end of the age spectrum with activities generally appropriate for fifth and sixth graders rather than eighth and ninth. Activities include fill-in-the-blanks, matching, crossword puzzles, drawing, coloring, and map work. These activities work within the comprehension and memory realm rather than requiring students to do deeper thinking. Questions in the Chapter Activities that appear in both the student text and teacher's manual do stretch students to deeper thinking, but there are only a couple of these questions for each chapter. An answer key for the workbook is also included on the CD-ROM. I would have loved to see potential questions or even tests and quizzes themselves included on the CD-ROM to make test creation simpler for teachers and parents. The publisher tells me this is something they are working on.

Note: A free supplemental chapter on The Great Awakening is available at <http://catholictextbookproject.com/project/project-supplements.html>.

All Ye Lands: World Cultures and Geography, 2011 revised edition

textbook: hardcover - \$65, epub or PDF - \$50 each; teacher's manual - \$30
(Publisher's suggested grade levels: 6-9)

Major improvements and revisions were made to this second edition of *All Ye Lands*. The text is ambitious in scope. While the purpose is the coverage of world geography and cultures, it also attempts to present an overview of all of history by highlighting particular events and civilizations.

The first chapter introduces geography, then brief sections on geography appear at the beginning of most chapters. A "Things to Do" section at the end of most chapters provide map work activities. These usually include drawing and labeling, but they sometimes stretch into other topics such as longitude and latitude. Political maps are included throughout the text.

I very much appreciate the rewrite of the second chapter on prehistory. It makes it a little clearer than did the first edition that early man was of a different category than apes. It makes a definite statement that all people descended from Adam and Eve. However, I question its presentation of homo erectus as an ancestor of homo sapiens since current genetic research shows that homo erectus, at best, might descend from a predecessor common to both homo erectus and homo sapiens rather than being an ancestor. The text also accepts an old age for the earth and living creatures. In spite of the potential error regarding homo erectus, because of the nuanced presentation regarding prehistory, I think that both those who believe in evolution as well as those who reject it should be able to work with this text. For example, on the same page as the information about homos erectus it says, "Based on

several bits of evidence they have discovered, scientists have concluded that human-like creatures have been on the earth for at least 1 million years. This is not a fact, but a theory—an idea we form to explain facts we discover" (p. 24). You might want to add your own discussion regarding evolution and creation with your children at this point.

While views on prehistory might be debatable, once the text moves on to the Sumerian and Egyptian cultures (still in the second chapter), it is on firmer historical ground. It provides an excellent overview of world history and cultures. Granted, it is selective in coverage, but it balances out the development of Christian civilization (through Israel, Greece, Rome, and Europe) with study of China, Japan, India, Africa, Russia, and Latin America. Another chapter presents the United States within the context of world history.

At the end of each chapter are four different activities. "Let's Remember" questions require students to write out answers in complete sentences. "Let's Consider" questions can be used for discussion, personal reflection, or short essay responses. "Things to Do" are the map activities mentioned earlier. "Let's Eat!" is a food activity relating to the culture studied.

The revised edition has also added and strengthened connections to scripture.

***Light to the Nations, Part I:
Development of Christian Civilization***

textbook: hardcover - \$65, epub or PDF - \$50 each; teacher's manual - \$30
(Publisher's suggested grade levels: 7-11)

Published in 2008, this text uses an introductory chapter to lay the groundwork for the story of Christian civilization. It begins with Adam and Eve, and then deals briefly with prehistory, cautiously presenting the birth of civilizations without bringing in evolution. This leaves parents the freedom to deal with that topic separately. Within this introductory chapter it shows how God revealed Himself in preparation for his entry into history through

the Incarnation. With this background, chapter one then begins with the birth of Jesus and continues through the establishment of His church.

Against the backdrop of the Roman empire, it tells the stories of martyrdoms, evangelization, and the spread of Christianity, primarily through the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The Rise of Islam receives a good deal of attention since the conflict between Christianity and Islam was and remains such a major force in world history.

The text moves on through the so-called Dark Ages to the feudal and medieval periods. Students then study the rise of nations (Spain, England and France) and the Crusades, then the decline and decay of the Middle Ages that paved the way for the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. Religion and politics both became major factors in the wars that ensued following the Reformation, and the text follows this thread through European history up into the early eighteenth century.

The text also includes the creation and expansion of colonial empires, brief coverage of the American colonies, and chapters on Africa, the Age of Enlightenment, Capitalism, China, Japan, Latin America, and the Scientific Revolution.

After studying this text, students should have a clear understanding of the development of our western Christian civilization. This book and *Light to the Nations: Part II* fill the clear need for a study of world history that fully acknowledges the vital role Catholicism has played in the development of our own civilization. Although this is not a church history text, students will certainly learn a great deal about the development and growth of the Catholic Church, key figures in that development, and conflicts that have embroiled and shaped the Church.

At 574 pages, this is a substantial book. While it might be suitable for some seventh graders as the publisher suggests, I think it

will more likely suit students in grades eight through ten. You might want to use this text in ninth grade, *Light to the Nations, Part II* in tenth grade, and *Lands of Hope and Promise* in eleventh grade, and allow time for study of government and economics in twelfth grade. You should keep your own scope and sequence in mind as you determine when you might use this text.

Light to the Nations, Part II: The Making of the Modern World

textbook: hardcover - \$65, epub or PDF - \$50 each; teacher's manual - \$30

(Publisher's suggested grade levels: 8-11)

Part II continues the story of world history, picking up with the Age of Enlightenment. History coverage centers on Europe and Russia with attention to other countries and continents only in relation to them. Even among European countries, France gets more space than other countries. Three of the book's 20 chapters center around Napoleon and events concurrent with his time in power!

As with other texts in this series, church history and religious events are also given significant attention. Likewise the Enlightenment, the rise of romanticism, and other worldview-related movements are also addressed. All of this helps the reader understand historical events within a worldview context.

This text ends with discussion of the Catholic Church and the modern world with some excellent insights into a Catholic worldview of government and society, particularly the concept of religious liberty. However, it skips over most historical events from the late twentieth century to the present. Aside from brief mentions of a few events such as the creation of the European Economic Union and the exportation of American culture around the world, it essentially ends with the Communist takeover of China. Given that the most recent history is also omitted from *Lands of Hope and Promise*, you might want to use other resources to cover the late twentieth century and recent years.

At 650 pages this is definitely a high school (or even adult) level text. It provides much more detail on the topics it covers than do most high school history texts, perhaps too much for some students; I would not recommend it for junior high students. Nevertheless, it is an excellent text for students interested in history and willing to do the reading.

Lands of Hope and Promise: A History of North America

textbook: PDF - \$60, hardcover and epub versions are in the works, teacher's manual - not yet available

(Publisher's suggested grade levels: 7-12)

Lands of Hope and Promise is an outstanding history text. It does an excellent job of presenting United States history with fair coverage of both Protestant and Catholic views. It is, nevertheless, a Catholic history, so it includes stories of St. Elizabeth Seton and Dorothy Day as well as coverage of encyclicals that addressed prominent issues in America, especially economic issues. The political tone cannot be described as either conservative or liberal, although there seems to be a fairly strong leaning toward a constitutionally-limited government. For example, in reference to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, the text relates, "The centralization of government in the federal government, dreamed of by Hamilton, begun under Abraham Lincoln, furthered by the Radical Republicans and Reconstruction, perfected by Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, was about to reach its logical practical expression under F.D.R." (p. 758).

The text is quite long for a high school history text. The coverage is thorough, and the author takes the time to make connections between events and ideas so that readers understand the interplay of events. This is the sort of history we find more often written for adults who want to truly understand history rather than just rushing through a litany of names, dates, and places.

The text covers through 1973 then wraps

up the study in an epilogue suggesting topics for students to pursue that pertain to history over the past 40 years. The text justifies this unusual approach by explaining that “the author of this history text and its readers...are actors in the drama of contemporary history... We are caught up in the events we would wish to understand. They are too close to us” (p. 858). It is then left to the teacher to lead discussion or research into a lengthy list of topics. Perhaps, since students have already read 861 pages to get to this point, some might choose to end the course without addressing more recent events.

According to the title, this is a “history of North America.” While there is some coverage of Mexican and Canadian history, most attention is on the United States.

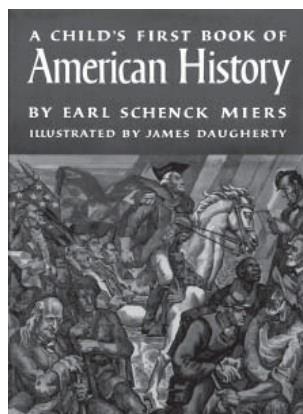
While *Lands of Hope and Promise* is suggested for grades seven through twelve, because of the book’s length and depth of coverage, I would recommend it for grades ten and above.

Summary

Overall, the Catholic Schools Textbook Project makes an extremely valuable contribution to Catholic education—one long overdue and sorely needed.

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A Child's First Book of American History



by Earl Schenck Miers, illustrated by James Daugherty
 Beautiful Feet Books
 1306 Mill St.
 San Luis Obispo,
 CA 93401
 800-889-1978
 email: letters@
 bfbooks.com
 www.bfbooks.com
 \$32.95

Beautiful Feet Books has re-published and updated *A Child's First Book of American*

History by Earl Schenck Miers, a book that should have very broad appeal in the home-school market. Children from about ages seven to twelve should enjoy the author’s lively, storytelling approach to history. The book also features more than 200 action-packed, colorful images by well-known illustrator James Daugherty.

Rather than a history text, Miers has written a chronological collection of 50 stories that highlight some of the most important events and people in the history of the United States. These include historical events you would expect such as the voyage of the Mayflower and the Boston Tea Party as well as a few cultural events such as the first game of intercollegiate football in 1869 and life on a cattle drive. Children also learn about scientific discoveries such as electricity and the invention of the radio.

Throughout the book, the author conveys a sense of the “American spirit” of pride, adventurousness, and determination as well as patriotism. While it is not an overtly Christian book, it discusses religious events positively. For example, it tells the story of the missionaries Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet in a positive vein, and it mentions President Abraham Lincoln drawing spiritual strength from prayer. Miers is aware of his young audience, so stories are presented appropriately for them. For example, the story of the Donner Party does not mention cannibalism.

The book does not try to cover all historical events. If children ages ten and above are reading it, you will almost certainly want to supplement with additional material, especially material on modern history, since this book ends at the conclusion of WWII. In fact, you might use *A Child's First Book of American History* as a supplement rather than your primary resource with students in middle school even up into high school. For children who will be studying U.S. History again before high school in some fashion, the coverage is fine

without supplements.

Most stories are just the right length for reading in a single session, although some might be better read over two sessions. While children about fourth grade and above should be able to read the book on their own, the writing style really lends itself to dramatic reading aloud. Here is a brief example from the story of "The Quest for the Seven Cities." It begins,

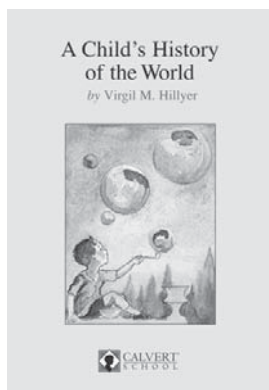
After six hundred years of fighting the Moors, Spain faced bankruptcy. A miracle was needed to save the country from financial despair, but in Spain fantasy often passed for truth. One such fantasy was the island of Antillia. No two map-makers could agree where in the unexplored oceans this island could be found, but all believed that whoever reached Antillia would find the fabulous Seven Cities (p. 25).

While there is an index, there are no end-of-chapter questions or other textbook features.

A Child's First Book of American History is one of the few children's history books that you might want to buy in the hard cover edition because you will probably want to hold on to it forever.

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A Child's History of the World



by Virgil M. Hillyer
 Calvert Education
 10713 Gilroy Rd., Ste. B
 Hunt Valley, MD 21031
 888-328-8285
 www.homeschool.
 calverteducation.com
 book - \$35, complete
 course with textbook
 - \$77, course without
 text - \$56

Hillyer's classic elementary-level world history, *A Child's History of the World*, is available as a beautiful hardbound edition with or

without companion course material. For years homeschoolers scrambled to find out-of-print copies of this book, paying premium prices for well-used copies. Finally, recognizing the demand, Calvert Education republished it in an updated edition. The update included the addition of events through the twentieth century as well as some minor content changes to archaic expressions and ideas.

The primary appeal is the writing style. Hillyer speaks to children in ways they understand, yet he doesn't talk down to them in the short, choppy sentences typical of most texts written for middle elementary grades. The difference is obvious in the page count—625 pages. Illustrations are minimal: a few maps, line drawings, and occasionally words arranged to convey an idea. (Can you imagine any modern publisher offering a textbook this length for fourth graders without color illustrations?)

Despite the lack of illustrations, Hillyer's book is far better than most of its modern counterparts in my estimation. It offers depth and interest lacking in most textbooks. History coverage reaches beyond Europe, the Middle East, and North America with selective topics on other countries and cultures. Children's imaginations will be engaged by the stories of history told in their proper settings with enough detail to make them come alive.

Hillyer clearly asserts Christian belief, although his biblical references imply a questioning of the truthfulness of Old Testament stories. Also, he sometimes slightly misinterprets the biblical text. For instance, he says, "King Saul had a daughter, and she fell in love with this... David the Giant-Killer, and at last they were married." This version overlooks the fact that Saul had promised his daughter in marriage to whoever killed the giant—it wasn't really a matter of falling in love. The beginning of the book also discusses cave men and prehistory in a manner with which some might disagree (e.g., cavemen talked in grunts).

A Child's History of the World really should

be read aloud together so such things as I've mentioned can easily be discussed when you encounter them. There are no chapter questions or assignments in the book.

This book and associated lessons are included in Calvert's fourth grade curriculum, but Calvert also sells the book by itself or as part of a history course. The course adds a lesson manual and a workbook. Lessons include outlines, activity ideas, and discussion questions. The student workbook has two parts. The first part is fill-in-the-blank comprehension questions for each chapter. The second part consists of activity pages with word scrambles, crosswords, projects, recipes, map work, and more.

The book itself is a good choice for the first world history text for younger students, and the course makes it easy for parents to expand learning beyond the reading itself.

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The Classical Historian

by John De Gree

The Classical Historian

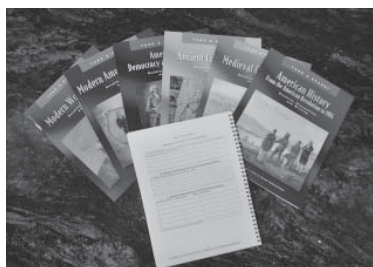
1019 Domador

San Clemente, CA 92673

714-623-6104

www.classicalhistorian.com

teacher guides - \$24.95 each, student books - \$18.95 each, *Teaching the Socratic Discussion in History* DVD set - \$79.99, individual DVDs for *Ancient* or *Medieval Civilization* - \$19 each, full course bundles: \$149.99 to \$249.99



These Classical Historian courses teach students how to read with discernment, how to

gather information, how to think about and analyze information, and how to discuss and write about what they have studied. They do so in the context of history courses covering different eras. Courses implement classical education strategies such as Socratic discussions and analytical writing. Classical educators will note that the methods used are appropriate for both the dialectic and rhetoric stages.

The *Take A Stand!* teacher guides are the core element in all courses, and they can be used on their own or within the Classical Historian course bundles. The teacher guides each outline a 32-week course of study.

For junior high students, there are three *Take A Stand!* guides:

- *Ancient Civilizations*
- *Medieval Civilizations*
- *American History from Columbus to 1900*

High school students also have guides for three courses available:

- *Modern World History* - opens with a review of western political thought then covers the "Age of Revolution" from the 1600s through the Cold War
- *Modern American History* - covers Reconstruction then selected topics up through "Nixon and Watergate" and "Technology as a Cause for Change"
- *American Democracy and Economics* - a classical approach to government and economics

A few pages at the beginning of each teacher guide explain the philosophy of the program. The second section of each guide provides practical information such as required course components, time required for lessons and homework, enrichments ideas, and directions for end-of-semester oral presentations. Part three of the guide lays out 32 lessons plans, one for each week of the school year.

Separate student workbooks are essential for students to work through the various assignments in the course.

The Classical Historian's *Take A Stand!*

guides can be used with a broad range of reference resources for historical information, but most parents and teachers prefer using the complete Classical Historian course bundles that incorporate the guides as well as appropriate resource books for each course. There is a bundle for each *Take A Stand!* guide,

Each Classical Historian bundle has a number of components. Common to each are a *Take A Stand!* teacher guide, the corresponding *Take A Stand!* student workbook, and *Teaching the Socratic Discussion DVD Curriculum*. Each course also has one or more resource books that provide at least some of the historical content for each course.

Each complete course begins with use of *Teaching the Socratic Discussion in History DVD Curriculum*—a set of three DVDs and a 77-page guide. This set helps parents/teachers and students learn this approach. (While it comes as part of each bundle, it may be purchased on its own.)

On the first DVD, author John De Gree shares some of his background, introduces the program, and explains how it works. The second DVD is an extended version of the first DVD, with additional material directed toward home educators. On the third DVD, "Tools of the Historian," we watch De Gree working with different homeschool families through some lessons. The guide includes instructions and forms so that you can actually teach your own students through a complete lesson on "The Fall of the Roman Empire," including the composition assignments.

(Parents and teachers who are interested can become certified Classical Historian Teacher's by working through this course and teaching some students. Requirements and instructions are in the guide.)

While the DVDs in the *Teaching the Socratic Discussion in History* set include demonstrations and explanations of the teaching process, the Ancient, Medieval, and junior high American History bundles each also include

a DVD showing John De Gree conducting Socratic discussions through the lessons for each of those respective courses.

DVDs are not professional, but they are very helpful for showing how this approach actually works in homeschool settings.

You might think it redundant to repeat *Teaching the Socratic Discussion* each year. Some of the basic concepts are repetitive, but each *Take-A Stand!* teacher guide has students work through Socratic discussions and writing skills using resources and topics from that year's textbook or resources on a particular historical period. This means that students practice applying skills in entirely new contexts each time.

While the teacher guide provides lesson plans and assignments, the student workbook for each course guides students in their reading and research as well as through discussions and extensive writing activities.

Students are presented with very brief statements about a key event in their *Take A Stand!* book then challenged to research and write in response to a questions.

For example, the first lesson in *Medieval Civilizations* has to do with the fall of the Roman Empire. The "take a stand" question is, "Based on the evidence you researched, what were the two most important reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire?" Three pre-writing forms follow. One is headed "Reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire." A first reason is given as a "freebie" followed by six more blank lines for students to add six more reasons they discover in their reading and research. The second pre-writing activity is headed, "Explain your reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire." Here students use a brief statement to explain each of the reasons they came up with in the first activity. Again, one explanation is supplied then there are lines for the student to add six more explanations. The third activity is a more complicated chart that has the student rate the reasons, ranking them as to relative

importance. All of this helps them arrive at their two most important reasons, which they are then asked to defend.

For their research, students might use the history books that come in the Classical Historian bundles or other resources. The more research they do, the more well-developed their information is likely to be. Junior high bundles for Ancient and Medieval periods each include only one additional book: *World History Detective* (Critical Thinking Co.). These courses have students use the internet for other research. All of the other bundles have at least two source material books. For example, the Modern American History bundle includes *A Patriot's History of the United States* and *The Patriot's History Reader* (both published by Sentinel).

Originally written for classroom settings, lessons in the *Take A Stand!* guides direct students to compare their own conclusions with those of classmates and consider whether or not they want to change their own conclusions before writing their papers. Discussion with a parent or tutor can substitute for class interaction, but however you manage it, discussion is essential.

After students have worked through these steps, they are ready to write their essay and pull it all together. They will first write one-paragraph responses then progress up through five-paragraph essays to multi-page essays. The instructions for each of the essays says, "In your essay, include a thesis, evidence, and explain how your evidence supports your thesis."

Essay assignments each have a chart for recording due dates for various assignments. In addition, grading rubric forms are included for the different essays. These can be used by both student and teacher.

Because these skills are taught incrementally and students master them a step at a time, Classical Historian courses are very manageable for students beginning in junior high. Students are given plenty of assistance with

skill development and pre-writing activities with a section of "skills assignments" at the back of each *Take A Stand!* guide as well as through the *Teaching the Socratic Discussion* lessons. (The author assumes that students already have basic writing skills.) The types of skills addressed in these sections are distinguishing fact and opinion, finding supporting evidence, taking notes, paraphrasing, using quotations, writing a thesis statement, writing a conclusion, outlining the essay, writing a rough draft, documenting sources, and creating a works-cited page. Rough draft and outline forms are included for the various essays. Parents or teachers might use the optional skill assignments as needed for their own students, skipping those that are unnecessary.

All of this sounds like fairly high level work especially for junior high students. However, author John De Gree assures me that he has used these very successfully with junior high students, many of whom were ESL students with very weak knowledge of history. While arguments and essays from some students might be shallow or poorly informed, the learning experience itself still takes them beyond where they would be with only a textbook. Students with a better knowledge base are able to form more complex arguments. If you use these books with high schoolers you should expect more depth of research and argumentation than you would from those in junior high. It's also important to note that assignments gradually become more challenging, eventually requiring the use of at least three sources, then five sources.

One reason why I think the Classical Historian approach works so well is that when students read and research with the questions in mind, they pay much closer attention than when reading simply to cover the material. When they have to analyze information, thinking about cause and effect and relative importance, they have moved to a much deeper level of thinking. Discussing their research

and ideas with others forces them to think logically and critically.

The Classical Historian's mission statement says that they are, "dedicated to promoting the American experiment of self-government under law, rooted in its Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritage. We believe in American exceptionalism and teach patriotism through all our materials." While this is the philosophy behind the program, Classical Historian resources can be used by those across the religious spectrum because they avoid biases both for and against religion by using a historical inquiry method. The curriculum includes questions that relate to religions without expressing belief or unbelief. For instance, the final lesson in *Ancient Civilizations* on the rise of Christianity poses the question, "Why did the Roman Empire change from persecuting Christians at the time of the death of Jesus to supporting Christians by the Fourth Century?" Students might come up with a wide range of answers and opinions depending upon their research resources and parental or teacher directions. Also, remember that the parent or teacher can always add other ideas to those presented in the book. Because of that religious neutrality, the curriculum has been approved for purchase by charter school students.

However, most, but not all of the textbooks and other resources in the bundles, are relatively neutral regarding religion in their viewpoints to make it easier for students to form their own opinions based on information. (Of course, you can use other resources instead of or in addition to those in the bundles.) Two resources might be considered as exceptions in this regard: *Lessons for the Young Economist* by Robert P. Murphy, used for *American Democracy and Economics*, is written from an Austrian economics viewpoint and supports limited government intervention, and *The Patriot's History of the United States* leans toward a conservative viewpoint both religiously and politically.

Some books as well as the *Teaching the Socratic Discussion in History* DVD set are used for more than one course, so you need not purchase a complete bundle for each course after the first year. Permission is generously granted for a parent or teacher to make copies of pages from any of the Classical Historian courses for their family or class group.

Games and Flashcards

The Classical Historian has produced supplemental games that should be useful, even with younger students. Go Fish Card Games in your choice of Ancient History, Medieval History, American History, or Constitution (\$11.99 each or a set of the three history card sets for \$29) can be used to play Go Fish or Collect the Cards which uses a series of three hints on each card for a quiz/review game. History cards can also be used to play Chronology (arranging cards in time sequence) or Geography (organizing cards by geographical area). Cards are illustrated, color-coded, and numbered.

American History Flash Cards (\$9.95 per set) are three separate sets of cards covering from early American history up through the beginning of the twentieth century. Each set has 52 cards, and each card has two questions with the answers on the reverse. These can be used for review, but I think they would also serve well as "trivia" questions used with any game board with a path.

Summary

The Classical Historian courses are proving to be very popular among homeschoolers who want to engage in discussions with their children, as well as among those who want their children to both know historical information and know how to analyze and write about that information.

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Genevieve Foster books

Beautiful Feet Books
1306 Mill St.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

800-889-1978

www.bfbooks.com

William Penn - \$14.95, all others - \$21.95 each



B e a u t i f u l

Feet Books has brought back into print some of my favorite books for world history for upper elementary grades through high school. This is a series of books by Genevieve Foster that were written around the 1940s. Titles published by Beautiful Feet are *Augustus Caesar's World*, *The World of Columbus and Sons*, *The World of Captain John Smith*, *The World of William Penn*, *George Washington's World*, *The Year of the Horseless Carriage 1801*, and *Abraham Lincoln's World*. They reflect a Christian culture although they don't have explicitly Christian content.

The beauty of these books is the storytelling approach to history. Foster begins with the day the key person was born and traces "goings-on" around the world throughout his lifetime. Foster makes the connections between people and events all around the globe that are usually lacking in textbooks. Because of this approach, even *George Washington's World* is a world history study. If you read these in chronological sequence you cover world history fairly well for the time periods they reflect.

The World of William Penn and *The Year of the Horseless Carriage 1801* are both briefer books which should work fine as read alouds for children as young as fourth grade. All of the other books are great for read-aloud time, but only with older students, probably at least fifth grade level. Younger children will be overwhelmed with the information and will not have enough background knowledge to make the necessary connections. Often the information comes "rapid fire," and even children fifth

grade and above will need to stop from time to time for discussion or explanation. You might even take time off in the middle of a Foster book to read a biography or historical fiction that narrows down to a single person or event for a change of pace.

Despite the danger of information overload, I love the way these books connect events that are happening simultaneously around the world.

For the adventurous parent, I suggest creating your own unit studies by jumping off on one or more topics within each section of any of Foster's books. While there are no suggested assignments, study or discussion questions in these books, you could easily come up with some of your own for independent reading and research. Note that all of the books have indexes that are very helpful when you want to locate information.

The author provided her own hand-drawn illustrations for all of these books. The illustrations are often helpful visualizations of the story content, including maps and drawings of key characters.

Beautiful Feet Books, publisher of the Foster series, also publishes "history through literature" study guides, some of which include study questions for the Foster books. For example, their *Early American and World History* guide for junior high uses the Foster books on Columbus, John Smith, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln along with other books. Their *Ancient History* guide uses *Augustus Caesar's World*. *The World of William Penn* is used with Beautiful Feet's new *Western Expansion* guide, and *The Year of the Horseless Carriage 1801* is used with their newly revised *Early American History* study guide for primary grades.

Whether you read these on their own, in conjunction with a Beautiful Feet history guide or as part of another unit study, I expect you and your children will enjoy Foster's books.

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Guerber History Series

by H.A. Guerber, edited by Christine Miller

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www.nothingnewpress.com

print editions: \$24.95-\$30.95, ebooks:

\$14.95-\$20.95



Christine Miller authored *All through the Ages: History through Literature Guide*, which I described on page 212. In her guide, Christine recommends using at least one overview or spine

book for each historical era in addition to titles that might focus on particular people and events. (An overview or spine book functions like a history text in covering the broad range of events in chronological order.) Because it can be difficult to find appealing spine books written from a Christian perspective, Christine has updated and rewritten a series of books originally written by H.A. Guerber (first published in 1898). These new books vary from minimal rewrites of Guerber's work to incorporation of her material into new books. The seven books in this series all begin *The Story of The ...* The titles continue: *Ancient World*, *Greeks*, *Romans*, *Middle Ages*, *Renaissance and Reformation*, *Thirteen Colonies*, and *Great Republic* (U.S. history to 1900). It is important to note that all of the material does not derive solely from Guerber's original work. For *The Middle Ages*, Miller also drew upon some historical works by Charlotte Yonge.

The Story of the Ancient World is based upon Guerber's *The Story of the Chosen People*, a biblical history focused on key figures and events of the Old Testament. Miller has added some

history of ancient civilizations that are closely related to the Old Testament, so you learn about Egyptians, Phoenicians, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians to better understand the historical context of scripture. Miller has also made a few changes to Guerber's wording. Most particularly she changes Guerber's original wording about the days of Creation that allowed for "day" to mean a longer period of time to an explanation that supports a literal 24-hour-day viewpoint.

Guerber writes with a lively style, and Christine Miller has retained that same engaging style in her adaptations and additions.

Part of what makes this type of writing more enjoyable is that the author's feelings and opinions show through the narrative. While this makes it more interesting to read, it also means that we get some of Guerber's original thoughts and attitudes that might seem odd or archaic. Generally, Miller has updated archaic language. She has also added explanations in the forewords regarding topics where she differed with Guerber. Miller chose to align ancient events with the biblical chronology of James Ussher rather than Guerber's. She also edited Guerber's passages concerning the development of man that reflected evolutionary assumptions.

None of these volumes strives to be comprehensive. Instead they focus on key events and characters. This works fine for an overview in the first four volumes, but I find the topics covered in *The Story of the Great Republic* curious from our 21st century perspective. Because that volume was originally written in 1899, events closer to that time period loomed large in the author's consciousness. Thus the Civil War and the Spanish-American War both get more attention proportionately than they do in more recent books. In spite of the original 1899 copyright of this book, it actually continues up through the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. Personally, I would be likely to use something else instead of this last

volume.

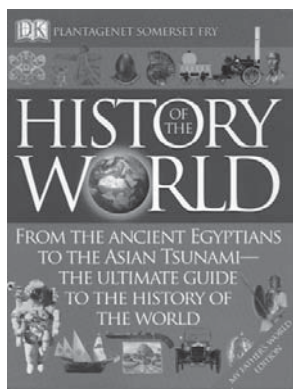
The reading level would make these books most appropriate for junior high level for independent reading. However, they can be read aloud with children from about fourth grade and up. There are no questions or exercises with any of these volumes. But if you use them as read-aloud books, following up with discussion, narration, writing, or other activities of your own, they will work fine with younger students. Older students could be assigned outlining, notetaking, or other written tasks to demonstrate comprehension.

Of particular note is the religious perspective. This series is Christian, and it does a surprisingly good job of fairly presenting both Protestant and Catholic positions. Even in the *Renaissance and Reformation* volume, you read about the good and bad from both sides.

All books are available in either print or ebook versions.

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History of the World (MFW edition)



by Plantagenet Somerset Fry and Simon Adams
DK Publishing in cooperation with My Father's World
Order from MFW at 573-202-2000
www.mfwbooks.com
\$39.99 (discounted to \$35.95 by MFW)

My Father's World (MFW), whose complete courses are also featured among my Top Picks, uses many "real books" as part of each course. They often use books from secular publishers, alerting parents to potentially problematic topics such as evolution and the age of the earth. Obviously, this is a potential problem that crops up frequently in world history books.

DK Publishing's *History of the World* is a classic example of a very useful book with problem

areas. MFW was selling so many of these books that they were able to work with the publisher to produce their own edited edition.

The most significant edit is the elimination of the first two chapters, "Introduction to Human History" and "Early People." These two chapters reflect belief in an old earth and the theory of evolution, making statements such as, "... life began 4,600 million years ago ..." (p. 10).

The MFW edition begins instead with 5000 B.C. and continues with the original text up through A.D. 2006. Pages and chapters are renumbered so that you cannot tell that the book has been edited.

This is a large, 378-page, hardcover book that might be used across a wide span of grade levels. It covers world history across time and around the world, introducing each time period with a two-page visual timeline. The timeline is divided into color-coded sections for Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania so you can see at a glance what was occurring during the same time period around the world. Timeline bars at the bottom of each page highlight where in time the events on each page fit in.

The book is heavily illustrated, with photos, drawings, and maps taking up at least half of the space on each page. Every paragraph is preceded by a heading or subheading so that it is easy to scan through the content.

Coverage of each topic is necessarily brief and selective given the limited space to cover so much information. Because of this, *History of the World* works best when used as a supplement alongside other books that provide more in-depth coverage. Students as young as about fifth grade are likely to enjoy exploring this book, "reading the pictures," and selectively reading the paragraphs on topics that interest them. Yet, this is the type of book that interests older students and even adults because it is so visually appealing and unthreatening compared to a text. While MFW includes it

among books used with their high school level *World History and Literature* course, they also sell it separately.

History of the World MFW edition is an excellent example of the fact books that I include in my list of real books for history. MFW is working with a few publishers to create more of these “edited” fact books that should work well for Christian home educators.

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The Mystery of History

by Linda Lacour Hobar

Bright Ideas Press

PO Box 333

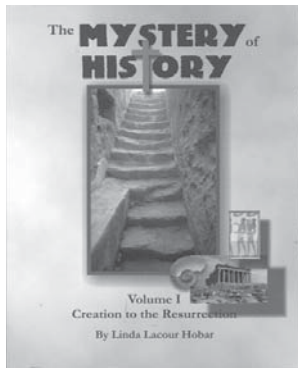
Cheswold, DE 19936

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email: contact@brightideaspress.com

www.brightideaspress.com

Vols. I or II - \$49.95 each; Vol. III: *Student Reader* - \$59.95, *Companion Guide* - softcover \$39.95 or either CD-ROM or download - \$29.95; Vol. IV - combination



of *Student Reader (hardback) and Companion Guide on CD-ROM* - about \$75

The Mystery of History (MOH) series is designed so that even inexperienced parents can

break free from traditional textbooks. The four MOH courses combine read-aloud information with age appropriate activities to create a multi-sensory curriculum for history and geography with a very strong biblical base. The first two volumes are designed to be used with children in kindergarten through eighth grade, although the reading level for *Volume I* is about third or fourth grade. The reading level advances about two years with each volume. Thus, the reading level for *Volume IV* is about ninth or tenth grade level. However,

activities and suggestions are included to adapt each volume to a much wider age span.

Titles for the volumes are:

- *Volume I: Creation to the Resurrection*
- *Volume II: The Early Church and the Middle Ages (A.D. 30-1460)*
- *Volume III: The Renaissance, Reformation, and the Growth of Nations (1455-1707)*
- *Volume IV: Wars of Independence to Modern Times (1708-the present)*

A number of supplemental items are available that correlate with each volume of MOH:

- Audio CDs - recordings of all stories in a volume read aloud by the author to the accompaniment of appropriate background music (This is a great time saver for busy parents, and it might be especially helpful for those children who like to hear the stories more than once.)
- Reproducibles CD-ROM - PDF files for all pre-tests; post-tests; quarterly worksheets; semester tests; individual maps; appendices; the suggested reading lists; and more
- Coloring Pages - downloadable PDFs that correlate with lessons
- Challenge Cards
- Notebooking Pages - PDF pages for younger and older students
- Folderbook files for creating folderbooks for each quarter of the course—full year available on CD-ROM or each quarter available as a download
- *History Through the Ages* timeline figures
- Craft Pak - eight related craft projects and reproducible coloring pages that supplement the study

Each volume is structured for a school year with four quarters divided into two semesters. Lessons are arranged in sets of three with the expectation that you will complete three per week. Each quarter begins with “Around the world” background and introductory information that you will want to read aloud with your children. Each week includes a pretest

designed to spark interest, so you want to present these in a light-hearted fashion (à la a *Trivial Pursuit* game) rather than as a test.

Three lessons follow, each with a similar format: read-aloud information is presented from the book then you choose an activity for each child to complete. An activity is given for each of three levels. For example, the lesson on Noah in *Volume I* suggests that young children play a Concentration card game. Middle grade to older students might use their Bibles to find answers to a list of questions regarding the account of the Flood. Older students might instead tackle the third option, which requires research about the supplies needed on the ark for Noah, his family, and all the animals.

At the end of every third lesson is a reminder for students to create “Challenge Cards.” These are 3” x 5” notecards with key information on each event. A color-coding system helps students group events by time periods. These are used for oral drill, games, or independent review. (Downloadable files for these cards may be purchased if you want to save students from having to create these cards themselves.)

Review activities are always included at the end of the three lessons, sometimes including field trip suggestions. Activities include work on timelines, maps, and a review quiz. Reproducible map masters are at the back of the book along with answer keys for the geography assignments. Author Linda Hobar recommends that you have both a Bible atlas and a historical atlas as references for map work.

Hobar also shares creative and inexpensive ideas for making timelines with detailed instructions for using folding sewing boards as the base for portable timelines, although any timeline will do.

You can see how all of this can break out easily into three days of lessons with their activities, a fourth day for timeline, mapwork, and quiz, and a fifth day for a field trip or focus

on other subjects. Other possible scheduling suggestions for different levels are at the front of the book.

I appreciate Hobar’s explanation of the shift toward increasing student responsibility that should take place over the years. She has a simple diagram that shows high teacher involvement with minimal grading for young children that gradually reverses to low teacher involvement and thorough record keeping and grading at high school level. This approach to education is reflected in the activities suggested for the different levels. Younger children will spend more time working one-on-one with a parent. They have more arts-and-crafts type activities that are not graded. Older students do more independent research and writing that is graded.

Volume I: Creation to the Resurrection

Volume I relies heavily on scripture since the Bible is a source for much of what we know about ancient times. Other than that, the historical information is all presented within this book as it would be in a textbook. No other reference works are required for this study except for research activities older students might pursue. However, a large list of other books and videos that expand upon subjects is in an appendix, presented lesson by lesson and broken down by age level.

Beginning with creation, the study follows biblical history, incorporating other sources as they fit into the chronological story. Thus, Stonehenge, early Egypt, and the Minoans are taught before Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. The little we know about world civilizations is represented by inclusion of lessons such as those on Chinese dynasties, India and Hinduism, and early Greek city states up to the point where the historical record broadens and we have more sources for learning about early civilizations. Although eastern civilizations are given some attention, the focus is much stronger on western civilizations.

While this is essentially a study of history,

it is also a Bible study of sorts with an apologetic flavor in spots. The appendix of *Volume I* includes an adaptation of *Campus Crusade's* booklet used for leading people to accept Christ. A letter to students at the beginning of the book direct students to that section of the appendix if they don't already have a relationship with God.

For *Volume I*, there is an optional set of eight audio CDs with the stories.

Volume II: The Early Church and the Middle Ages

The second volume follows the same layout as the first volume although the biblical chronology concludes after the first few weeks of the course. There are 28 weeks worth of lessons instead of 36 as in *Volume I*, but each lesson has more content. You will want to have access to an atlas for this volume, and some recommended atlases are listed in the introduction. Lists of additional resources you might use are at the back of the book.

Hobar's selection and presentation of topics is fascinating. Given the huge time period she covers in *Volume II*, she does a great job of pulling out key people and events so students get the big picture.

For *Volume II*, there are an optional set of 12 audio CDs with the stories and a cookbook.

Volumes III and IV

Volumes III and *IV* are formatted differently than the first two volumes. Each course is divided into a Student Reader and a Companion Guide. Student Readers are large, colorful, hardcover books, while the Companion Guides are sets of 500 to 600 black-and-white pages. Printed pages of the *Volume III Guide* come three-hole punched for insertion into your own binder, but you can also buy the *Volume III Guide* either on a CD-ROM or as a downloadable file. The *Volume IV Companion Guide* is currently only available on CD-ROM. Note that *Volume IV* is being released in quarterly segments as I write this review. All of the components

described should be available by 2015.

The *Volume III* and *Volume IV Student Readers* have more text than *Volume II* and significantly more than *Volume I*. Author Linda Hobar says the target audience for *Volume III* is primarily grades four and up, but *Volume III* seems to me best for junior high and high school level simply because of the breadth and depth of information covered. *Volume IV* was written for grades seven through twelve but seems especially good for high school.

Hobar suggests that "younger" (grades one through five) and "middle" students (grades six through eight) might listen in on parts of lessons in *Volumes III and IV* and participate in age-appropriate activities suggested in the Companion Guides—there are plenty of activities for all ages! Recommendations for appropriate books to read are also in the Companion Guides. The quantity of material as well as the depth of the content might still be too much for even some fifth and sixth graders. *Volume IV's* coverage of wars and philosophy makes it inappropriate to include younger students for many lessons.

Keep in mind that the writing style is very engaging, and this certainly helps to offset difficulty in the level or amount of content. Occasionally, the author suggests that "younger" or "middle" students stop reading at a certain point, and that older students continue with material that is deeper or more detailed. Lessons with particularly sensitive content include a note to the teacher at the beginning of the lesson or segment so you won't be caught off guard. This helps, but ultimately parents have to decide how much of the material to cover with children in lower grades.

Even given the amount of material in the readers, Hobar says that high school students should be reading additional books and primary source material from the extensive "Supplemental Books and Resources" sections in the appendices of the guides for *Volumes III* and *IV*. Hobar says that the combination

of reading and activities for *Volume III*'s "core curriculum" should take about one to three hours per week to complete, and *Volume IV* should take a bit more time. For a high school credit, students should generally be spending four to five hours per week. To fulfill the hours requirement, students might also tackle a research paper or a number of shorter reports. Assignments already in the *Guides* might easily be expanded into lengthier assignments, and some suggestions for this are provided in the *Guides*.

While high school students might complete both of the first two volumes of *Mystery of History* in one year, *Volumes III* and *IV* each provide enough material and suggested activities for year-long high school courses.

Keep in mind that high school students will need to complete a separate U.S. history course. If you need to condense MOH courses, you might skip some chapters, especially chapters in *Volume IV* that duplicate material in your U.S. history course.

Map activities in *Volumes III* and *IV* require at least two atlases: *Rand McNally Atlas of World Geography* (previously titled *Answer Atlas*) and *Rand McNally's Historical Atlas of the World*. Both are available through www.brightideaspress.com. *WonderMaps* (also from Bright Ideas Press) might take the place of both atlases for most assignments but not all, so *Wonder Maps* might fulfill almost all of your atlas needs for *Volumes I, II* and *III* (and, eventually, *Volume IV*). (*WonderMaps* is a customizable collection of over 350 different maps available either on CD-ROM or as downloadable files.)

Volume III covers the time period of the Reformation. Although Hobar does a better than average job of trying to present the Catholic side of issues (e.g., indulgences), the content is strongly Protestant.

Volume IV teaches modern history under four "war" themes: Wars of Independence, Wars of Ideologies, Wars of the World, and Wars of Modern Times and the Hope of

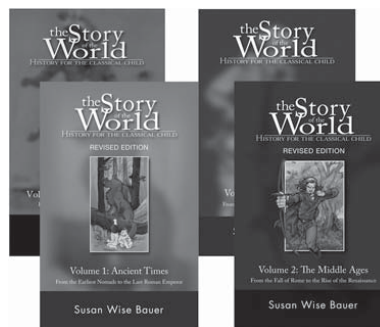
Mankind. In spite of these organizing themes, the course covers many other topics regarding culture and religion. Selected historical figures are highlighted such as Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, Hudson, Taylor, Helen Keller, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, and Nelson Mandela.

Volume III and *IV* have the same supplemental components as the first two volumes except for the Craft Pak. *Volume IV* audio CDs are not yet available.

This combination of self-contained history and multi-sensory activities should be very appealing to many homeschooling families.

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The Story of the World: History for the Classical Child



by Susan
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texts for Vols. 1-4: paperback - \$16.95, hardcover - \$21.95, PDF downloads - \$9.99 each, audio textbooks: on CDs: \$39.95 to \$54.95 or MP3 downloads: \$25 to \$35;

activity books for Vols. 1-4: paperback - \$34.95 to \$36.95 or PDF downloads - \$27.95 to \$29.50 each;

student page packets: print - \$9.95 to \$12.95 or PDF downloads - \$7.95 to \$10.35 each;

test packets: print - \$12.95 to \$14.95, PDF downloads - \$10.35 to \$11.95 each

The Story of the World (SOTW) by Susan Wise Bauer presents world history through

narration and storytelling in this four-volume series. While these books are written at increasing levels of difficulty, they might be read aloud to younger children and read independently by older. The SOTW books are available in your choice of hardcover, paperback (lay-flat binding), PDF downloads, and audiobook on CD or MP3 download.

Many will recognize Bauer as one of the authors of *The Well-Trained Mind* (www.wwnorton.com)—an exceptionally useful book on providing a classical education. This history series is intended to be used within the context of just such an education, even though it will also work within more traditional approaches.

The SOTW books have only a few black-and-white illustrations and a good number of maps. These are not colorful, history picture books for browsing since they are intended to either be read aloud or used for independent reading by older students.

The SOTW books are intended to be used as spine books around which you can build a complete study. To help you do just that, the author has also created activity books for each volume. These activity books serve as curriculum guides, providing parents with detailed information for creating multi-sensory lessons that can be used across a wide spread of grade levels. For each lesson there is a compilation of questions, narration exercises, reading lists (for both history and literature), map work, coloring pages, and activities to accompany each section of the text.

Reproducible student pages in *SOTW* activity books are segregated from lesson plans into their own section, which makes copying easier. You are given permission to copy these pages for only your family. However, Peace Hill Press sells the reproducible pages as separate packets which might be worth purchasing.

You will find some very unusual project ideas in the activity books such as mummifying a chicken and making Greek tattoos with pure

henna. Reproducible blackline masters in the activity books are used for all sorts of things—mapwork, board games, paper dolls, making a lighthouse, and more. Another useful feature is “Review Cards”—reproducible pages with illustrations and blocks of information on each card. They are to be copied onto card stock and cut out. (I would suggest enlarging each page slightly before copying.) These cards can be used as flashcards to review key ideas.

I particularly like the review questions that begin each section. These help children focus on the reading from the text. The narration exercises are also very helpful for parents who have trouble figuring out how to implement narration techniques. The guide truly supports the grammar stage of classical learning with its focus on information and comprehension.

In all four *SOTW* volumes, cross references are included to *The Kingfisher Illustrated History of the World*, *The Kingfisher History Encyclopedia*, *The Usborne Book of World History*, and *The Usborne Internet-Linked Encyclopedia of World History*. You would do well to purchase at least one of these additional basic resources. These books supply the colorful illustrations lacking in the core history books as well as more complete historical information on some topics. Other recommended books should be available through your local library, but they are optional.

For each of the four *SOTW* volumes there are also an activity book (available in both softcover and downloadable PDF versions), extra sets of looseleaf student pages, and test booklets with answer keys.

Volume 1: Ancient Times

Volume 1: Ancient Times addresses the time period from the earliest nomads (given a date of about 6000 B.C.) up through the last emperor of ancient Rome—no cave men or Neanderthals included! While the target audience is grades one through four, this book’s 338 pages provide a lot of material in

comparison to most world history texts for these grades. Nevertheless, coverage is not comprehensive because chapters are devoted to lengthy stories about key characters or events rather than tidbits about everything. On the other hand, the book does span civilizations around the world, including India, China, and West Africa in addition to the usual cast of western civilizations.

The presentation is not overtly Christian, although it recognizes and includes Christianity. Stories of gods and goddesses from other civilizations are retold without value judgments as to their validity. However, the author's own Christianity is still evident in the heavy weighting of biblical stories—lengthy accounts about Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and the beginnings of Christianity, as well as the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The entire activity book for the first volume is 320 pages in length, and the reproducible pages account for 127 of those pages.

Volume 2: The Middle Ages

Volume 2, which covers from the Fall of Rome to the Renaissance, is very much like the first volume, but is written for an audience in grades two through five. In her delightful style, Bauer covers a huge amount of territory with selective highlights that actually provide good introductory coverage. She hits touchy territory when it comes to the Reformation although she tries to balance her presentation better than do most authors. However, I suspect some Catholics might want to skip or “edit” her chapter on Martin Luther.

The activity book for *Volume 2* is even larger than the activity book for the first volume with 280 lesson plan pages *plus* another 182 student activity pages as compared to the 320 total pages of the activity book for *Volume 1*.

Volume 3: Early Modern Times

Volume 3 covers the era of England's Queen Elizabeth I through the Gold Rush and the Forty-Niners. It continues in the same fashion

as the previous volumes, targeting grades three through six. However, it seems a little scattered because it ambitiously tries to cover a huge swath of worldwide history in about 420 pages. It seems even more selective and limited in topics covered than previous volumes, although featured topics each get enough attention to present an engaging story. The activity book offers suggestions for expanding on any topics you wish with supplemental books and activities. There's much to be said for this approach in contrast to history texts that cover far more information but with little or no depth on any of the topics.

Volume 4: The Modern Age

Volume 4 continues from 1850 up through the 1990s. Meant for grades four through eight, this volume is more like a history text than the other books. It uses storytelling within the context of relating historical events rather than telling selected stories, making it more comprehensive in coverage than earlier books. In my opinion, this is one of the best options for world history for upper elementary through junior high levels. One issue that might give some parents pause is one of omission. Religion and its influence are seldom mentioned. Nevertheless, this is a very engaging history resource that should work for most families.

The activity book for *Volume 4* teaches students how to outline what they read in the text. Halfway through the book, students begin to write from the outlines, recalling and writing details to expand their outline into a composition. This activity book also adds *The Usborne History of The Twentieth Century* as another reference resource.

Summary

Both *The Story of the World* texts on their own and the expanded courses created by using the activity books are valuable contributions that fill a need for Christian-friendly but classically-oriented history study.

The publisher's website has samples you can

view as well as information about ancillary products.

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TruthQuest History

by Michelle Miller

TruthQuest History

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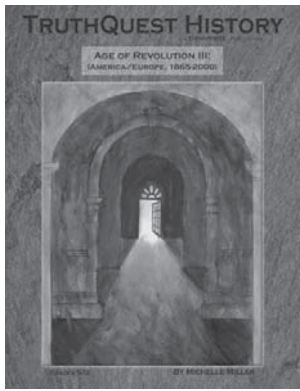
Traverse City, MI 49685-2128

email: info@truthquesthistory.com

www.truthquesthistory.com

print guides - \$24.95 to \$34.95 each, PDF

guides - \$19.95 to \$27.95 each



Many parents are insecure about using real books for history without some sort of guidance. *TruthQuest History* (TQH) is a great solution since it is a series of eleven volumes that serve as guides for a real-books approach to

history. All TQH guides are available in either print or digital format. While the series as a whole covers grades one through twelve, each guide targets either a younger or older audience.

Guides recommended for grades one through five are:

- *American History for Young Students I* (Exploration-1800)
- *American History for Young Students II* (1800-1865)
- *American History for Young Students III* (1865-2000+)

Guides recommended for grades five through twelve are:

- *Beginnings: Creation/Old Testament/Ancients/Egypt*
- *Ancient Greece*
- *Ancient Rome*
- *Middle Ages*
- *Renaissance, Reformation, and Age of*

Exploration

- *Age of Revolution I: America/Europe, 1600-1800*
- *Age of Revolution II: America/Europe, 1800-1865*
- *Age of Revolution III: America/Europe, 1865-2000*

Each guide is divided into many chronologically-organized topical sections rather than the typical chapter arrangement. Michelle Miller introduces each of these topics with background information written in a lively, informal, conversational style.

After reading the background information for context, you and your students read from real books to learn more information about the topic. Michelle recommends books, and sometimes chapters or pages within books, for each topic. She recommends a few spine books—books that are broad overviews of history such as *A Child's History of the World*, *The Story of the World* series, Dorothy Mills' series, and H.A. Guerber's history series. Then she lists many other books that cover specific topics. You can use spine books, topical books, or both. However, using at least some spine books will save you time. Video recommendations are generally added after the book lists.

Miller recommends some out-of-print books that you might still be able to find at a library, but she also includes many that are in print and available if you choose to purchase them. There are far more book recommendations than you will ever be able to use!

The chronologically-organized topical sections I mentioned earlier are further divided into subsections that address important people or events within a time period. For example, the section on The Roaring 20s has an introduction with a list of general resources. This is followed by subsections with their own resource recommendations on topics such as the Scopes Trial; Eric Liddell and the 1924 Olympics; Prohibition, bootleggers, and gangsters; women's suffrage; baseball and Babe

Ruth; Charles Lindbergh; Bessie Coleman; literary authors; scientists; music; and sports.

As you can see, you won't have time to cover every topic with real books. So it makes sense to either use a spine book for broad coverage along with a few narrower topic books or use as many topic books as you can reasonably get through and forgo efforts to cover very many topics.

Scattered throughout each book are a number of ThinkWrite exercises. These are writing assignments that require students to analyze the historical information they have learned from a Christian worldview perspective. For example, ThinkWrite 5 in *American History for Young Students I* says, "Please tell us your thoughts about America winning the Revolutionary War. How did America's Big 2 Beliefs shape the war? Do you think you can see God's hand in it?" (p. 91).

ThinkWrite questions are not intended to solicit only objective information. They also require children to make spiritual and practical connections. However, they still tend to support the philosophy of these guides. As long as you are aware of this and agree with Michelle's philosophy, this is not a problem. If you disagree, then you might want to come up with your own ThinkWrite-style of questions. Suggested responses to the ThinkWrites at the end of each book should help parents evaluate student work.

A unique aspect of *TQH* is a primary focus on the central questions of life: Who is God, and who is man in relation to God? How different people and civilizations answer these questions is reflected in the way they live and the choices they make. So these questions are the underlying focus of background information that Miller writes as she introduces each topic of study. This is probably most apparent in the *Beginnings: Creation/Old Testament/Ancients/Egypt* guide. You will be reading most of the Old Testament to your children through this study. The Bible might serve as your only

spine book! This book probably has more of Miller's commentary than do the other guides, especially in the first section dealing with Genesis. Miller does a fine balancing act of presenting the key truths while leaving doctrinal interpretations up to parents. She does stress biblical truths that undermine evolutionary presuppositions, and she recommends many resources that support a creationist viewpoint. It will be up to parents how far to investigate that topic. Note that Egypt used to be covered in *TQH's Egypt and Greece*, but study of Egypt was shifted and expanded into the *Beginnings* guide since it correlates historically with the story of the Bible.

TQH very much reflects a Francis Schaeffer approach to history based on his book *How Should We Then Live?* (In his book, which is published by Crossway, Schaeffer shows how historical events, scientific discoveries, artistic endeavors, literary pursuits, etc., were all shaped by religious beliefs and philosophies. Schaeffer's views are shaped by his Reformed Protestant beliefs.) In addition, Miller supports a limited-government perspective. Although she writes from her own Protestant viewpoint, from time to time she discusses conflicting Protestant and Catholic viewpoints on history, acknowledging right and wrong on both sides. I was pleasantly surprised to see this respectful balance, especially in the *Renaissance, Reformation* volume.

As you might have gathered by now, there is a very definite philosophy to these books. However, if you disagree with some of Miller's philosophy, you can still use these guides by skimming through the introductory material, sharing whichever parts of it you wish with your children, then moving on to the recommended reading and occasional video viewing. Some of the recommended books, particularly some of the spine books, reflect the philosophy described above. *The Light and the Glory for Children* (Revell Publishing) would be one such example. On the other hand, some of

H.A. Guerber's history books and *Famous Men of Rome* (from either Memoria Press or Greenleaf Press) are among others that are more neutral in their presentation. Since recommended spine books reflect a number of different philosophies, your choices of spine books will be particularly important in determining the tone of your study.

Supplements

TruthQuest History has collaborated with A Journey through Learning (AJTL) to create customized resources that help reinforce learning while providing hands-on and creative activities. Three downloadable PDF packages are available for each TQH guide. The first one, AJTL Binder Builder for TQH helps students create a fancy lapbook with lots of mini-booklets. The second, AJTL Notebook for TQH, provides notebooking pages for students to record information on most topics about which they are reading. AJTL Map/Timeline/Report Package for TQH includes maps, a timeline, historical figures to color, timeline markers, mini-timeline cards, and various report forms. All of these packages are optional, but they do enhance the courses.

Summary

You will have to watch the level of difficulty in the *TruthQuest History* guides. The three *American History* books are suggested as starting places for children in the primary grades. That does not mean that those guides are strictly limited to the primary grades since many recommended resource books are also good for older children. You could stretch to include children a grade or two older. However, all of the other guides begin at a higher level. While the publisher's website suggests the upper level guides for grades five through twelve, the guides include book recommendations for younger children as well, allowing you to stretch down to younger levels to some extent. The TruthQuest History website has an extensive discussion about how you

might select the appropriate guide(s) to use at www.truthquesthistory.com/howtochoose.php.

My impression is that all except the *American History* guides will work across the entire span of grades one through twelve as long as parents are judicious about how much information they give to each child—don't overwhelm the young ones, and *do* give the older ones plenty to work with. Ultimately, parents need to decide which assignments as well as which books to use with each child.

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The Ultimate Geography and Timeline Guide

by Maggie Hogan and Cindy Wiggers
GeoCreations, Ltd.

PO Box 51

Cheswold DE, 19936

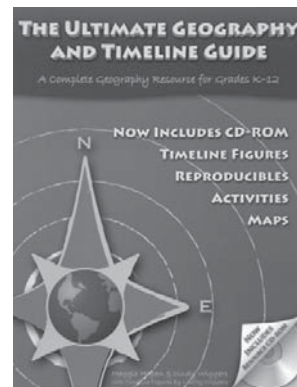
800-426-4650

email: contact@brightideaspress.com

www.geomatters.com or

www.brightideaspress.com

\$39.95



Maggie Hogan, and Cindy Wiggers have combined their wisdom and experience to put together this resource book for teaching geography to children in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

It takes a little time to explore the wealth of options found here. The first chapter, "Planning Your Destination," suggests basic teaching methods, describes notebook pages that students might create, and recommends basic supplies. Chapter two is sort of a primer course in geography—hopefully a refresher for most of us. It covers basic terminology and concepts, including the five themes of geography identified by the national

standards group for geography. Hogan and Wiggers show you how to incorporate the five themes into your studies. The next chapter is all about maps: different types, how to use them, map games, and more. All this is in just the first three chapters!

Chapters four and five focus on fun, games, and food as tools for teaching and enjoying geography. Here's where you can learn about letterboxing, geocaching, and trucker buddies—all of which sound like great fun.

Chapters six through ten teach parents how to teach geography through other subject areas. This is especially important since Hogan and Wiggers are unit study fans and see the inclusion of geography as an important element of such studies. To help you get into unit studies, the authors include two complete unit studies, one on volcanoes and one on the book *Hans Brinker or the Silver Skates*. Chapter eleven adds tips on teaching geography using the internet, including a list of great websites.

Chapters twelve through fourteen present what most people think of as the nuts and bolts of geography: mapwork and study of geographical features, climate, vegetation, natural resources, etc. Lesson ideas are divided into those for middle school and those for high

school.

Reproducible maps and activity sheets for games, weather reports, research and other activities described in this book comprise the next two chapters. Chapters eighteen and nineteen are about creating a timeline, and they include hundreds of reproducible figures (created by Liberty Wiggers) to use for your own timeline.

An especially fun feature of this book is the "Who Am I?" game that uses the reproducible pages of game cards on the companion CD-ROM.

In addition to all of this, the book includes an answer key, glossary, an index (very useful with a book such as this), and lists of additional resources you might want to use.

The CD-ROM that comes with the book has PDF files of all the pages you are likely to want to print, including timeline figures, game cards, vocabulary lists, maps, worksheets, record keeping pages, and much more.

In my opinion, this approach to geography will be far more interesting than a standard text on the subject. The fact that one book does it all for every grade level makes it even more appealing.

CHAPTER 12

Science

Let me pose a few questions about your own experiences learning science before we begin with reviews and recommendations. First, did you enjoy science classes when you were in school?

If you are like most people, your answer is, “No.” That was probably because you primarily learned from a textbook. Almost every textbook for the elementary grades takes the same mile-wide, inch-deep approach to science. They cover numerous topics but not with enough depth or interest to encourage curiosity or a love for science. At high school level, it switches to another extreme: vocabulary and memorization ad nauseam. High school texts stay focused on one subject but only provide depth through tons of dry factual information. Both approaches are a real turn-off to science.

On the other hand, if you are one of the few who found science enjoyable, what was it about those classes that made the subject enjoyable? I suspect the reason is that your teachers did not stick with the textbooks. You learned science by really digging into a topic, perhaps doing experiments or activities that made it fascinating.

Unfortunately, forgoing textbooks is a challenge for those of us who love the security of a textbook that boils a subject down to predictable, manageable, and measurable information. So how do we get past this problem?

Science can be an intimidating subject unless you develop a proper perspective. (I am speaking in these next two paragraphs from my own Christian worldview, but I suspect that while non-Christians might not agree with my underlying beliefs, they will share my conclusion.) Science, in terms of Christian education, means the study of God’s creation, its purposes, its functioning, and its beauty. We sometimes limit our idea of science education to memorization of plant structure, the names of bones, the periodic table and other such laborious data without seeing beyond to God’s purposes for each aspect of creation. Obviously, we do not have a total understanding of all of God’s purposes, but even with our limited understanding we can develop a sense of awe

for God's creative genius that has nothing to do with the labels we have come up with for His creation.

It seems to me that it is more important for children in the early elementary grades to develop an appreciation and love for God's creation—our bodies, the earth, plants, animals, the weather, and so on—than it is for them to begin memorizing details. Doing this does not preclude children learning some of the vocabulary of science, but it shifts the emphasis. Field trips, experiments, observations, and nature collections are all likely to generate interest in science. I believe that these activities should continue to be a major part of the science curriculum for all ages.

I also believe that attention to vocabulary and acquisition of facts become more important around eight to ten years of age. For those using a classical approach to education, think of this as part of the grammar stage. You want children to develop foundational knowledge and skills in science, but you begin by making it interesting so children more willingly acquire the knowledge and skills.

Consequently, I propose the following goals for teaching science for elementary levels (kindergarten through sixth grade):

1. Turn children on to science so they develop inquiring minds.
2. Expose children to many topics in science.
3. Teach children the foundations of scientific method—using orderly thinking to form, test, and evaluate hypotheses.

In my opinion, using science textbooks is often not the best way to meet these goals. Instead, you can turn your children on to science by teaching them to observe, experiment, read, and think about the things that surround us.

Why do they find pill bugs under rocks? Why can they “see” their breath when it's really cold outside? Children are naturally curious about the different areas of science but not usually according to a textbook's scope and sequence. It is far better to respond to an area of interest with an immediate internet search, trip to the library, field trip, or experiment that gives a child the information he or she is seeking.

If you limit science to a textbook, you will be missing “teachable moments” that are right in front of you. Although textbooks try to introduce a variety of topics each year at elementary levels, they have no way of predicting what will interest each child. Textbook authors cannot know that your family is taking its first trip to the ocean this year and that you want to explore seashells and ocean life in conjunction with that trip. They cannot know that your family just adopted a puppy, and your children need to learn all about dogs. They cannot know that your family finally bought a house with a backyard and this will be the year to learn all about gardening. It is much better if you and your children choose your own topics for science study that relate to your particular interests and activities.

Scientific method is a vital part of science education, but we seldom equate it with the sense of wonder and curiosity that children have. When children look beyond the surface appearances and ask, “Why did that happen?” they are beginning to apply scientific method. Scientific method begins with observations and questions. It continues when you work with your child to form possible answers and ways of testing those possibilities. This is real science, but it is the sort of thing that cannot be easily controlled and explained via a science textbook—you might end up spending too much time on one topic and not get through all of the chapters. Horrors!

However, when you choose your own topics and allow more time to cover fewer topics, you will be able to follow the rabbit trails your child discovers into areas you might not have had on

your agenda. This is the sort of learning that inspires great scientists. Think of Thomas Edison tinkering with all of his experiments and inventions, most of which came to nothing in themselves. The time he spent following his own curiosity, learning what did not work, ultimately contributed to his amazing successes.

So How Do You Know If You're Doing Enough?

Even if you are willing to abandon the textbook approach, many parents feel insecure determining at what level their children should be working on a science topic. Does making a model of the body's systems equally satisfy the learning needs of both a seven-year-old and a twelve-year-old? Probably not.

Kathryn Stout's *Science Scope* (Design-A-Study, www.designastudy.com) can help you plan a comprehensive sequence of study for science or it can work as a checklist for ensuring that everything gets covered. Divided into four main areas—general science, life science, earth science, and physical science—it lists specific topics under each heading and helps you identify appropriate activities for different age groups within each area. This is an extremely useful resource.

You might also be concerned about meeting science standards. If so, revisit my discussion of the standards and websites where you can identify your state standards in Chapter Five.

What To Do?

For the elementary grades I suggest choosing only three or four science topics per year, taking into account the general topics you feel should be covered as well as your children's interests. Then use information books, experiment and activity books (such as those listed under the "Anything But a Textbook!" section in this chapter), and field trips to put together an interesting study for each topic. You can continue to work this way through junior high, gradually increasing the amount of information that children are expected to learn. At high school, the course of study required for college entry becomes much more specific, and homeschoolers generally rely on textbooks or computer-based courses. However, you can still enhance high school level science courses by supplementing in the same fashion as I recommend for younger levels.

I can just imagine some parents reading what I've just written and saying, "Oh, great! I've got to go make it all up myself. Forget it!" Those of you who don't delight in creating your own courses can take heart. Others have done it for you. They have chosen one or just a few topics, found some real books that make the subject interesting, come up with activities or experiments, and put it all together in one place to make it easy for you to teach science through topical unit studies. If you are using a larger unit study that encompasses many subject areas, you are likely to find this approach to science already incorporated into your unit study.

It is impossible to narrow science resources down to "the best" while simultaneously covering all possible approaches for learning science. However, my Top Picks for science are representative of a wide range of useful resources, including some that support my own approach to science as well as other more traditional approaches. Bowing to the fact that at high school level most parents are concerned about meeting requirements for lab courses that fit the common categories—biology, chemistry, and physics—I also review resources for those specific courses.

“Anything But a Textbook!”

If you agree with my philosophy of science education, then you will probably be looking for real books on particular topics rather than textbooks. Many publishers specialize in heavily -illustrated, visually-appealing topical books. These are the kind of books children will pick up to read on their own. Some examples of this type of book:

- *Animal Lives* series (Teacher Created Resources)
- *The Awesome Forces of Nature* series - intermediate level (Raintree)
- *Blood and Guts* by Linda Allison - study of human anatomy and physiology (Little, Brown and Co.)
- *Castle, Cathedral, City, Mill, Pyramid, and Underground* by David Macaulay - these cover both science and history (Houghton Mifflin)
- *DK Eyewitness* books and DVDs (DK Publishing)
- *The Magic School Bus* series: *Inside the Human Body*, *Inside a Hurricane*, *On the Ocean Floor*, *Lost in the Solar System* and other titles by Joanna Cole (Scholastic)
- *National Geographic Kids* series (National Geographic Children's Books)
- *The New Way Things Work* by David Macaulay (DK Publishing)
- *Starting with Science* series (Scholastic)
- *The Visual Dictionary of the Human Body* (DK Publishing)
- *The World of Science* (My Father's World/Master Books joint edition)
- *Discovery Adventures*, *Discovery*, *See Inside*, and *Beginners* series plus other series (Usborne Books)
- *Zoobooks* - outstanding picture books for various age levels with the same text available in magazine (subscription), softcover print book, and e-book formats (www.zoobooks.com)

This list is only a very small sampling of what is available. Don't forget to include field guides, biographies of famous scientists, and historical fiction about scientific discoveries. Field guides begin to seem essential when you concentrate on particular topics. If you study birds, then you become curious about the species that you see in your area. The same thing happens with flowers, trees, rocks, and other topics—observing them closely makes you want to know more about them. I like the different series of adult guides from Peterson and the Audobon Society best, but look for simpler guides if you start with young children.

As far as biographies and historical fiction, you will find plenty of choices at the library and from homeschool distributors. I've included a few such titles here to get you started.

- *Alexander Graham Bell: Setting the Tone for Communication* by Mike Venezia (Children's Press)
- *Archimedes and the Door of Science* by Jeanne Bendick (Bethlehem Books)
- *Albert Einstein, Young Thinker* by Marie Hammontree; *Thomas Edison, Young Inventor* by Sue Guthridge; *Wilbur and Orville Wright* by Augusta Stevenson; and other titles (all from the Childhood of Famous Americans series from Aladdin)
- *Benjamin Franklin* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (Beautiful Feet Books)
- *DK Eyewitness Books: Great Scientists* by Jacqueline Fortey (DK Publishing)
- *Galen and the Gateway to Medicine* by Jeanne Bendick (Bethlehem Books)
- *The Mystery of the Periodic Table* by Benjamin D. Wiker (Bethlehem Books)
- *Pasteur's Fight Against Microbes* and *Marie Curie's Search for Radium* by Beverley Birch (Barron's Educational Series, Inc.)
- *The Picture History of Great Inventors* by Gillian Clements (Knopf)

Science Beyond Books

Don't limit yourself to books. Science kits, equipment, games, DVDs, and software can help get your children excited about science.

Absolutely crucial are hands-on experiences with science. Many programs have experiments and activities built into them. Sometimes supplementary experiment and activity books supply the magic ingredient that draws children into science. I particularly like resources that pose questions and stimulate thinking rather than those that simply outline steps in an experiment or present an experiment for "entertainment" without any exploration of what is happening.

Again, most homeschool distributors usually carry these types of resources. But there are a few companies that specialize in science and have catalogs or websites devoted just to science "stuff." Some of the best of these companies are:

- Carolina - 800-334-5551, www.carolina.com
- Home Training Tools - 800-860-6272, www.hometrainingtools.com
- Nasco - they also have specialized catalogs for art and math - 800-558-9595, www.enasco.com/science/
- Nature's Workshop, Plus! - 888-393-5663, www.naturesworkshopplus.com

I hope that just thinking about various possibilities will help you figure out what you might want to use with your own children. If you still need inspiration, check out the science section on my website at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

Curriculum

Some science programs are similar to unit studies, combining real books and a variety of activities for topical science study. (Note that I discuss unit studies at length in Chapter

Thirteen.) The *Elemental Science Classic* series and *Noeo Science* are among resources reviewed below that fit this description. This type of curricula best reflects my own ideas about how children should learn science. However, I have also included a few resources that use a traditional approach, and my other Top Picks for science straddle the line somewhere between the two.

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Apologia Science series for Junior and Senior High Levels

Apologia Educational Ministries
1106 Meridian Plaza, Suite 220
Anderson, IN 46016
888-524-4724

www.apologia.com

printed book courses - \$85 each, CD-ROM versions - \$65 each, multimedia companion CD-ROM - \$19 per course, audio books - \$19 per course, video instruction DVDs \$140 per course

Apologia courses are among the few options for college-prep lab science courses for junior and senior high that do not require someone to teach the courses. Another factor that makes them popular is their very reasonable cost.

Apologia offers courses for general science, physical science, biology, chemistry, and physics. I appreciate the options that accommodate a range of student goals—from the non-science oriented student who just wants the basics through the ambitious, college-bound student who wants advanced level courses. All courses offer engaging lab experiences.

Most courses are available in your choice of traditional textbook or CD-ROM versions. Textbook courses come as two-volume sets. The first book is the hardbound student text with color illustrations. The second is a soft-bound Solutions and Tests book with complete answers and explanations for questions from the student book as well as for the tests. Step-by-step instructions for lab experiments appear

in each chapter alongside the concepts they illustrate.

CD-ROM versions contain all of the textbook and solutions manual content plus multimedia video clips, animations, pronunciation guides, and other helpful tools. They also have nifty indexing so you can simply click on an index entry to go to that topic in the correct module on the CD-ROM. Those who select the textbook version of one of these courses can get the multi-media content by itself on an optional Multimedia Companion CD-ROM (available for most courses). Icons in the textbook alert students to available video clips they might want to pull up on each CD-ROM.

Students who benefit from auditory input might prefer to hear the textbooks read aloud. CDs with MP3 files have the complete student text content read aloud for each of the courses. Students still need the print textbook to read along with or refer to as they study and complete their work. Some students do better with an instructor, but if one isn't available, some of the courses have optional DVDs with experienced teachers presenting the courses.

Lab equipment and resources are also available for both levels of Biology and Chemistry.

A Christian worldview permeates these courses. Apologia brings in not just creationist views, but also other scientific issues and ideas in relation to Christianity.

All of these courses were written for independent study, addressing students directly. The conversational style of writing makes these texts much easier to read than most others. Brief information for parents or teachers is at the beginning of each Solutions and Tests book. Free support is available by email and phone. Students who need more oversight or outside prodding might want to enroll in one of the Apologia Academy internet courses.

In student textbooks, the text font is large compared to other science texts, but this makes it easier to read and less intimidating. That also means there has to be slightly less

content than in an equivalently-sized book with smaller type.

Books are divided into 16 modules, and each module should take two weeks to complete. Modules are divided into a number of topics and activities. Within each module are “on your own” questions. Students are to answer these as they proceed through each section, and answers can be self-checked within the textbook. At the end of each module is a study guide with additional questions. Answer keys are in the Solutions and Tests book for each course.

Students also need to keep a separate lab notebook to record observations and conclusions from their experiments. Several courses have optional Student Notebooks that I highly recommend. Student Notebooks reinforce course material and serve as lab notebooks.

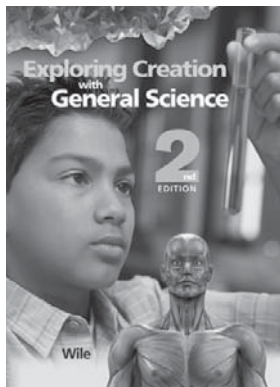
All textbooks have glossaries and indexes plus other helpful tools such as the periodic table and lists of the elements and their symbols. At the beginning of each book are lists of lab materials needed. Apologia specifies lab materials that, for the most part, can be found at grocery and hardware stores. However, the biology and chemistry labs do require some more specific equipment like a scale, microscope, and test tubes. Using some non-traditional lab equipment means students will not be familiar with all of the more complex scientific equipment when they enter college, but this should be a small liability given the practical advantages of this type of lab for homeschoolers. Lab equipment and resources for high school level courses are available from Apologia.

Exploring Creation with General Science and *Exploring Creation with Physical Science* are junior high courses targeted at grades seven and eight. *Exploring Creation with Biology*, *Exploring Creation with Chemistry*, and *Exploring Creation with Physics* meet requirements for high school lab courses.

Apologia also offers advanced courses in

biology, chemistry, and physics that, combined with the corresponding foundational course from Apologia, cover advanced content. The advanced courses are titled *Advanced Chemistry in Creation*, *Advanced Physics in Creation*, *Advanced Biology: The Human Body*, and *Exploring Creation with Marine Biology*. These are similar in format to the foundational texts, but *Advanced Physics* is illustrated only in black and white. CD-ROM versions of only *Advanced Physics* and *Marine Biology* are available. (Note that I have not reviewed *Advanced Chemistry*, *Advanced Physics*, or *Marine Biology*.)

Exploring Creation with General



Science

This is a broad general science course for junior high students that includes a significant amount of lab work, conveniently using household items. Topics covered include the history of science, scientific method, how to perform experiments, simple machines, archaeology, rocks, minerals, fossils, geology, paleontology, evolution and interrelated theories, living organisms, organisms and energy, classifications, and the human body. An optional student notebook is available for this course.

Exploring Creation with Physical Science

This 490-page text is the foundation for the most user-friendly, yet academically challenging physical science course for homeschoolers of which I am aware. It qualifies as a lab course with extensive experiments and recording activity. In fact, the first lesson *begins* with an experiment. The text carefully details how to perform this experiment as well as the expected results. It also describes possible corrections if the experiment is not working as it should. The text then uses the results as a platform to provide a basic explanation of molecules,

atoms, and chemical reactions. This and other experiments require only household chemicals and supplies.

Topics covered include air, atmosphere, water, the hydrosphere, earth and the lithosphere, weather, motion, gravity, electromagnetic force, electrical circuits, magnetism, atomic structure, radioactivity, waves and sound, light, and astrophysics.

While the content is appropriate and challenging, it is not as difficult as some physical science texts. For example, in discussing chemical bonds, it addresses overall positive and negative charges without going into valences as do some physical science courses.

An optional student notebook is available for this course.

Exploring Creation with Biology



This text is very similar in format and presentation to the *Physical Science* course. While it is traditional in its approach for the most part, it does not include study of the human body. Instead, human anatomy and

physiology are covered in a separate course, *Advanced Biology: The Human Body*.

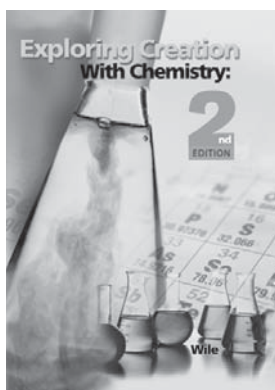
Clear explanations present concepts in a friendly fashion without oversimplification. Questions provoke thought rather than just recall of information.

With this text, lab activity becomes more demanding, although you have a choice about how much of it your student needs to complete. There are three levels of lab activity: household labs require minimal equipment and should be completed by all students; optional microscope labs require a microscope and slide set (kit available for \$316); dissection labs are also optional, but the dissection kit is only \$55. Instructions for all labs are found in the text. A

student notebook, which includes a lab notebook section is available for this course.

Exploring Creation with Chemistry

This text covers essentially the same content as most high school chemistry courses. Algebra 1 is a prerequisite. While the authors assume that the student has this math background, they do offer some math review.



The text presents concepts and guides students through practice exercises before leaving them to work on problems. Solutions to test questions include the math work, so students weak in math can figure out what they might have

missed. This sort of help is very rare in chemistry courses.

The authors have done a great job constructing lab activities with low-cost equipment while providing enough experience for a solid college-prep course. The labs are exacting in detail, achieving a great deal of precision with minimal equipment.

Apologia sells a Chemistry Glassware Set for this course (\$60) that provides the basic equipment you need. All of the chemicals you need are available at the grocery, drug, or hardware store. However, the second edition of the text for this course has added optional extra lab work for which you need to purchase a “secondary lab set” (\$157) that includes more specialized chemicals.

One negative point: chemicals are frequently introduced by formula but not by common names. This seems odd in a text that is generally good at making practical connections for students. However, Apologia explains the reason for this: “When you introduce every chemical with its name, the student is quickly overwhelmed by the names and thus ceases to remember them. Therefore, we only introduce

the names of practical chemicals that the student will encounter in everyday life. As a result, the student remembers the important names and does not get overwhelmed with chemical names he or she will never encounter.”

Apologia’s *Advanced Chemistry* course can be taken after this foundational course, possibly in the same year, for more advanced study.

Exploring Creation with Physics

This course will be quite challenging for students who attempt to work independently unless parents are knowledgeable and can help from time to time. However, it is still a good course for the student who does not intend to take much science in college. Coverage is adequate but not as complete as in some other high school physics texts. For example, there is no treatment of the properties of matter, heat transfer, atomic and nuclear physics, relativity or quantum physics. (Such topics are covered in some, but not all, high school level physics courses.) These shortcomings notwithstanding, the casual and illustrative prose goes a long way toward helping both teacher and student grasp inherently difficult subjects.

Lab activities are fairly simple for a high school physics lab course. Lab experiments seem to be designed to illustrate principles more than to provide opportunities for serious scientific work. Nevertheless, this course will satisfy most college entry requirements for a physics course with lab.

Science oriented students should consider adding Apologia’s *Advanced Physics* course.

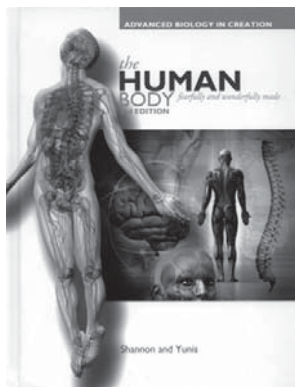
This is a math-based course; prerequisites are algebra and geometry up through beginning trigonometry. However, the math is not overly complex, and example problems are worked out in clear and thorough detail.

Apologia offers a Video Instruction DVD that might make this course more practical in some situations. The DVD (which plays only on computers that can handle .wmv files and open PDF files) features more than 20 hours of lecture and presentation of experiments. It also

has printable notes from the lectures. It does not replace the print or CD-ROM textbook.

Advanced Biology Course - The Human Body

Many parents will want to cover human anatomy and physiology as part of their teen's biology instruction. However, be forewarned that this is a challenging course with some content (especially the large amount of vocabulary to be mastered) more likely to be encountered in a college course rather than a high school course.



Along with the student textbook and the Solutions and Tests book, students will need other items which are all available through Apologia: a microscope (\$262); a set of prepared slides (\$73); a dissection specimens kit with a

cow's eye, cow's heart, and a fetal pig (\$44); and *The Anatomy Coloring Book* (McCann and Wise) (\$22). *The Anatomy Coloring Book* is a critical component since it has far more detailed illustrations than does the text. As with other Apologia courses, students need to keep a separate lab notebook. A student notebook, which includes a lab notebook section is available.

Although this is a very challenging course, it is designed such that students can complete all work independently. The publisher recommends it for twelfth grade but says it can also be used from tenth grade on if students have the prerequisites—first year courses in both biology and chemistry.

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Behold and See Science series

Catholic Heritage Curricula
PO Box 579090
Modesto, CA 95357

800-490-7713

www.chcweb.com

Catholic Heritage has developed a beautiful series of science textbooks for homeschoolers that features solid science content and plenty of hands-on activity.

The series extends from first to seventh grade. While *Behold and See 4* is an older book now in its sixth edition, all the other books were published in 2010-2014. Books are written by different authors and they differ in style quite a bit. Books for grades one through four are self-contained, each in a single, spiral-bound worktext, while grades five through seven each have two softcover books. All books except *Behold and See 4* and the workbooks for grades five through seven are printed in full color. Each course has an answer key at the back.



Many lessons include hands-on activities that are an important part of the learning process. You should really try to complete all of them if possible.

These books are written from a Catholic perspective and include scripture references. They present a strong belief in God as Creator, a pro-life position, and an attitude of love and concern for people as well as the environment. Within the "Note to Parents" at the beginning of *Behold and See 3* is a summary of official Church teaching regarding evolution. The author follows with comments that point out a few of the unproven claims of evolution. Aside from an indirect comment in *Behold and See 5* mentioning millions of years in regard to geological movements and a chapter in *Behold and See 6* explaining the Big Bang theory as

the best model to describe “what the universe was probably like right after Creation,” I could not find evolution discussed in the textbooks themselves.

The entire program is relatively easy to use. Activities and experiments require some pre-planning and supervision. Parents should plan to teach these texts rather than use them for independent study. Overall, this seems to me one of the best science programs for Catholic families.

Behold and See 1 and 2

\$26.95 each

The first two books are co-authored by Nancy Nicholson and Mary Pieczynski. The books share a similar format featuring two children, Josh and Hanna, who interact with their parents and each other in story dialogues throughout the books. Much of the scientific information is imparted within the stories but some is presented in a more traditional fashion.

Behold and See 1 is subtitled, *On the Farm with Josh and Hanna*. The text follows through each season on the farm as they learn about topics such as plants, mammals, weather, reptiles, fish, birds, vertebrates, skeletons, exoskeletons, trees, insects, and spiders. The final chapter shifts to the human senses. You will need to complete about two lessons per week to finish this text in one year.

Each lesson includes an activity. This might be a worksheet, a cut-and-paste activity, an experiment, a drawing, or something similar. Many activities for first graders aim at developing observation skills. Toward the end of the book, students record data from experiments as they begin to apply scientific method.

The few experiment supplies that you will need are listed in a box at the beginning of each lesson. Among the necessary supplies are a magnifying glass, seeds, soil, plastic wrap, dry oats, and magazines or catalogs with pictures of various types of leaves. The only challenging item might be the suggestion that you catch or purchase crickets to observe and keep as pets.

Behold and See 2, subtitled *More Science with Josh and Hanna*, shifts into the physical sciences with lessons on tools, machines, and energy. It also studies the water cycle, natural resources, conservation, erosion, the earth, rocks, volcanoes, the ocean, and marine life. The reading level is actually a little easier than the first grade book; students might be able to read parts of the lessons, although they should not try to work independently. There are more experiments, and they are more complex than in the first grade book. You will find some of the standard types of experiments such as testing the qualities of different types of rock and construction of a baking soda and vinegar volcano. There are a few activities that use foods. I particularly like the one for modeling the creation of sedimentary rock with raisins, coconut, nuts, graham cracker crumbs, butter, and other ingredients. Children do only a little more writing at this level.

Behold and See 3

\$44.95

Behold and See 3: Beginning Science, written by Suchi Myjak, is intended to be used as a general introduction to science. It begins with a chapter about the nature of science and scientific method, introducing the foundational concept that science is the study of God’s creation. The remaining nine chapters are divided into groups of three under the headings “Physical Science,” “Life Science,” and “Human Body.” Physical science covers matter, force, energy, the sun, the moon, and the stars. Life science teaches about animals, plants, and interdependence. The section on the human body begins with a correlation between the roles of the parts of our bodies and the roles of Christians as members of the Body of Christ. This is followed by an overview of body systems, the senses, nutrition, and health.

This book is loaded with investigations and experiments. Many of these use an inductive approach, leading students through an experiment and their observations to arrive at

conclusions or generalizations. For example, students construct a simple balance with balloons on each end to try to answer the question, "Does air have mass?" Each chapter ends with a substantial section of review questions and a beautifully-illustrated page for students to write a pertinent scripture verse.

Behold and See 4

\$24.95

Subtitled *Human Anatomy and Health*, this book was originally published in 1998 and is now in its sixth edition. The current 2014 edition is up-to-date and includes website addresses for investigation of some topics.

There is quite a lot of overlap in content with the last third of *Behold and See 3*. The first half of this book covers body systems while the second half teaches about nutrition, health, and first aid. *Behold and See 4* was written by Katherine Rode, R.N. and Dr. Mary Ann Grobbel, and the content is presented quite differently than the content of the third grade book. Even so, I would be unlikely to use these two books one right after the other because of the repetition.

Behold and See 4 has fewer activities, although it does include patterns for creating a child-size body with a skeleton and some of the organs. The book directs you to "make organs" using felt pieces that you sew together and stuff with batting. (The skeleton and ureters are only one layer of felt.) All of these are then to be sewn onto a cardboard outline of each child. You could simplify this project by using construction paper (and overlapping organs) and glue if the sewing is intimidating.

The two halves of the book were each written separately by one of the authors, and they are presented quite differently. The first half seems much more interesting—this is where you find the hands-on activities. Both sections have vocabulary lists. In the first half, vocabulary words are accompanied by their definitions. In the second half, definitions are in a glossary at the end. The first half includes optional

suggestions for supplemental activities for each section. Review activities for the first half are a series of word puzzles, a few activity sheets, and a Jeopardy type game. Many questions at the end of the chapters in both sections require full sentence responses.

Behold and See 5

text - \$36.95, workbook - \$12.95

Behold and See 5, by David Beresford, Ph.D., takes a large step up in the amount of content and the level of difficulty. It addresses a broad range of topics but selects a narrow subtopic within each one, providing more in-depth study than one usually finds in books for fifth grade. For example, chapter three is titled, "Food Webs, Resistance to Disease, and Conservation of Energy." While information throughout the chapter is interrelated, 11 pages focus specifically on the pesticide DDT under the subtopic heading, "Immunity in Insect Populations and Making Wise Choices." Using the story of DDT, graphs, charts, and data, it helps children (and adults!) understand how creatures can build up immunities or resistance, how improper use of pesticides or other control measures can create unintended consequences, and generally teaches them to think through complex interactions. Of course, this lesson applies far beyond the story of DDT. Chapter six in this text is titled, "Logic: Deduction, Induction, and Scientific Reasoning." While this chapter directly teaches about logic and reasoning, the entire book applies it.

Among other topics covered are metamorphosis, photosynthesis, the circulatory system, competition among plants and animals, seasons, atmosphere, the weather cycle, the earth and its composition, genetics, and taxonomy.

I found this text very interesting to read, even as an adult. Some fifth graders might find it challenging, but Dr. Beresford has done an excellent job of presenting complex ideas with stories, photos, examples, and diagrams that make it understandable.

The text is a non-consumable 226-page book. The 115-page, consumable student workbook includes experiment data sheets, written-activity sheets, review questions, tests, and answer keys.

Behold and See 6

text - \$46.95, workbook - \$14.95

Behold and See 6 is written by RoseMary Johnson, B.A. in collaboration with Dr. Richard P. Olenick, Dr. Amanda Beheler, Nancy Nicholson, and Mary Catalano, B.S. This gorgeously illustrated text is much larger than the others at 350 pages. The student workbook is 125 pages. The text is written as conversations rather than direct presentation of lesson material. This makes it very interesting to read. It includes experiments, activities, and website addresses for further exploration.

The text has three units focusing on physical science, biomes, and space respectively. As with the fifth grade text, topics are narrower than in traditional texts, and the authors explore each area more expansively. The result is high level science that is enjoyable to read.

Behold and See Life Science: Catholic Heritage Edition

text - \$48.95, workbook - \$16.95

Behold and See Life Science is ideal for seventh or eighth grades but it might also be used for ninth grade for students who need a gentler introduction to high school science courses. The course first covers basic chemistry then proceeds from cells up through increasingly complex life forms. About half of the text is devoted to systems of the human body, nutrition, and disease. The text concludes with chapters on animal behavior, animal reproduction, and ecology. I have written a lengthy review of this text that you can read at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com/science/behold-and-see-life-science.htm.

Summary

Catholic Heritage Curricula has done a great job of enlisting experienced scientists to write in an engaging manner about topics

they obviously love. Even with their diverse approaches, the entire series is excellent.

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Berean Builders Science Series

by Dr. Jay Wile

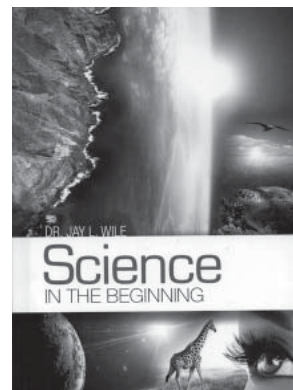
Berean Builders Publishing, Inc.

3001 W. Woodbridge Dr.

Muncie, IN 47304

(877) 794-3005

www.bereanbuilders.com



Dr. Jay Wile is well known as the original author of most of the Apologia science curriculum for upper grade levels. Now he has written the first two courses of an entirely new science curriculum for the elementary grades

that will eventually be a series of five courses. The titles are as follows:

Science in the Beginning

Science in the Ancient World

The Scientific Revolution

Science in the Age of Reason

Science in the Industrial Revolution

This series is built around three unusual features that result in a unique science curriculum. First of all, every lesson has a hands-on activity or experiment. The activity is generally introduced briefly, then detailed instructions walk you through each activity with students making their own observations. After the activity, the text discusses what the student should have seen or experienced. That activity serves as the jumping off point to then explore a scientific concept. Activities generally use simple household items, but sometimes you will need a few items that will take a little more effort to find such as a bird feather, iodine, or a live earthworm. Lists of required items are at the front of the book. The text alerts you

well in advance when something needs to be prepared in advance of a particular lesson. Occasionally a lesson will require particular circumstances—such as a sunny day—so you are forewarned and can plan accordingly, possibly rearranging lessons to align with the weather or other factors. While you will be using many items for the activities, the cost should be minimal.

The second unusual feature is that the courses explore science in chronological order. The first course draws its themes from the days of creation. From there, courses proceed chronologically, telling the stories of important scientists and their discoveries. This approach helps students understand how scientific understanding continually expands as scientists build upon the work and discoveries of those who have gone before them. Students study pertinent scientific concepts relating to each time period. Families might want to try to coordinate their history studies with the science curriculum some years, although that probably won't work well every year.

Thirdly, courses are designed so that all elementary level children in your family can participate in lessons together. Lesson material is presented in about two pages following each activity. This can be read aloud and discussed together. It includes some vocabulary that is presented with explanations that make it easier to recall, but it's not vocabulary intensive.

Each lesson concludes with Lesson Review, which is divided into three sections for "younger," "older," and "oldest" students. Dr. Wile uses these designations loosely rather than for designated grade levels. Younger students (non-writers) are given two comprehension questions to answer orally. Older and oldest students will create their own notebooks. Generally, oldest students will do what the older students do plus at least one additional activity. Often the additional activities involve higher levels of thinking or research. Older and oldest students might draw and label items

they are studying. They might research books, magazines, or the internet for information or illustrations. They might explain a scientific concept such as why oil and water don't mix or the difference between a bird's bill or beak (*Science in the Beginning*, pp. 208, 223).

I think it's important to add that the courses teach a Christian worldview. While this isn't emphasized in every lesson, worldview perspectives are frequently raised.

In each course, there six units with 15 lessons per unit. Three lessons in each unit are optional "challenge" lessons. If a student intends to complete all 90 lessons in the course, he will need to complete about one lesson every other school day. Skipping the optional challenge lessons will allow him to complete two lessons per week, a slightly slower pace.

Lessons are taught directly from the text, so parents and students share the same book. The hardcover textbooks have numerous, full-color illustrations and both a glossary and an index at the back. Print is large enough that a parent should be able to read while holding the book far enough away that children can simultaneously look at the illustrations.

The Helps and Hints softcover booklets for each course provide answers to the lesson review questions, and they also have reproducible tests—two for each unit—and answer keys. Dr. Wile does not recommend tests but provides them for parents who want to use them.

Science in the Beginning

Science in the Beginning, the first course, uses the days of creation as the organizing theme. The text presents lessons within six units for the six days of creation, with a brief summation of the seventh day when "God rested."

The courses present solid science content. For example the unit on the fifth day of creation begins by introducing the concept of classification. Then it teaches about saltwater and freshwater, osmosis and diffusion, vertebrates and invertebrates, how vertebrates

move in water, birds, and flight. Concepts are taught in relation to the themes, making each unit a bit similar to a unit study.

While a biblical worldview underlies this and other Berean Builders courses, and there are specific references to scripture, the emphasis in this first course is on “God as Creator” rather than on a particular position such as “young earth” or “old earth.” In the first course, Dr. Wile points out that human beings have much in common with the great apes, but rejects the idea that they are related. The word evolution isn’t mentioned. The course isn’t likely to be used by those who want to teach evolution. On the other hand, it should be very useful for those who hold to a creation model regarding the origin of life and view human beings as a special creation.

Science in the Ancient World (600 B.C. - A.D. 1519)

Second in this series is *Science in the Ancient World*. As with *Science in the Beginning*, lessons are grouped into six units with 15 lessons per unit. Units in this course are directly correlated to time periods, so *Science in the Ancient World* should work well alongside a world history course that begins with ancient times and works up to the early Renaissance.

The first two units focus on science before Christ, and most of what we know of early science comes to us from the Greeks. Dr. Wile does not just present the science topics and discoveries only as the Greeks taught them. For example, Hippocrates taught that the body contains four humors: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Dr. Wile explains how Hippocrates drew this conclusion, but he also explains what Hippocrates missed. In lessons 12 through 15, Dr. Wile explains what scientists have since discovered about blood, bile, and phlegm. As usual, activities help even the youngest students grasp the concepts.

Subsequent units continue through "Science Soon After Christ," "Science in the Early Middle Ages," "Science in the Late Middle

Ages," and "Science in the Early Renaissance."

The point I want to stress is that *Science in the Ancient World* is both a history of science as well as a treatment of modern science. Because historical chronology dictates the topics, the study of science jumps around rather than dealing with just earth science or life science. However, I think this approach makes science totally fascinating because it unites science and history, providing more context for understanding both subjects.

A Christian worldview is buttressed with points made from history, science, and philosophy. For example, lesson 63 about Nicholas of Cusa, explains first that he was a theologian and a bishop who also studied natural philosophy (science). The text tells us that, "Much of his writings dealt with the nature of God and how it can be seen in both natural philosophy and mathematics" (p. 191). The lesson goes on to discuss his invention of the barometer and his contributions to our understanding of water pressure and changes due to the depth of the water.

Summary

The remaining courses should be structured in the same way as the first two courses. While they might be used out of order, it will be best to use them chronologically.

I'm not aware of any other science curriculum similar to this. While it is a Christian curriculum, it avoids the apologetics flavor of some others that spend a lot of energy arguing for creationism and against evolution. Nevertheless, it helps students view science from Christian worldview. The use of hands-on activities to introduce lessons, the multi-age format, and the chronological approach in this series are also features likely to appeal to many families. This seems to me an excellent way to teach science, and an approach that should have exceptional appeal for classical educators.

Dr. Wile's goal is that students completing this series will be well prepared for junior high science courses. Given the solid science

content and a format that really draws students into the lessons, I expect that goal will easily be met.

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BJU Press Science series, 1-6

Greenville, SC 29614

800-845-5731

www.bjup.com



If you want a traditional style textbook for science in the elementary grades, BJU Press's *Science* series for grades one through six is one of the better choices. Recognizing that children have dif-

ferent learning styles, they have incorporated activities to suit different learners.

Each grade level has a homeschool kit that includes the student text, teacher's edition, an activity manual, tests, and an answer key for the tests. You need all components unless you choose not to test your children. You will still need to gather resources for experiments and activities.

Both textbooks and activity manuals for each course are attractively printed in full color with plenty of illustrations. BJU Press sells the same editions to both schools and home educators, so you will sometimes have to adapt activities written for class groups.

Scientific thinking is heavily stressed with the scientific method introduced at first grade level. Scriptural principles are incorporated with science applications in the curriculum. The fourth editions of these texts have an increased emphasis on helping children develop a Christian worldview.

Activities are at the heart of many lessons, especially at the early grade levels. Most activities are outlined in the teacher's editions but

data recording and some activities are done from the activity manual. That means these courses need to be taught—you cannot just hand your child the text to use independently.

The teacher's editions are well organized and easy to use. All of them include a Teacher's Toolkit CD-ROM that will run on either Windows or Mac systems. Toolkits include answer keys for the activity manual, reproducible pages, rubrics for grading activities, instructional aids and videos, extensive science fair information, and similar resources—most of which are optional.

Each chapter in the textbooks has a number of lessons and concludes with a review lesson to reinforce concepts taught throughout that chapter. Chapters are also color coded so you can easily tell which lessons are included within a chapter or unit in both the text and activity manual.

These courses require lesson preparation and presentation time, but if you follow the lesson plans in the manuals, you and your children should find the courses very engaging.

While courses are written for grades one through six, you can generally use one course for children who are one or two grade levels apart with a little adaptation to suit their abilities. (It will be most challenging to do this for first and second graders who are still developing reading and writing skills.) Courses are challenging enough that when you stretch to cover a range of grade levels, you should probably choose a grade level below that of your oldest student.

Recorded videos of a teacher presenting each course are also available online or in DVD and hard drive formats.

Grade 1 kit, third edition (\$171.50)

The text for first grade covers the following topics on an introductory level: senses, weather, seasons, health and safety, wild and tame animals, matter, sound, plants, forces, and the sun, moon, and stars. The Teacher's Toolkit CD-ROM includes sound files that are

used with some lessons.

Grade 2 kit, third edition (\$171.50)

Topics taught in second grade include the nature of science and basic science methodology, living things, plants, fossils, earth, natural resources, how the earth moves, light, matter and how it changes, movement, and the human body.

Grade 3 kit, third edition (\$171.50)

Topics at this level include cold-blooded and warm-blooded animals, plants, ecosystems, matter, sound, energy in motion, soil, rocks, minerals, weather, the solar system, and the human body.

Grade 4 kit, third edition (\$171.50)

In grade four, students study living things, insects and spiders, forces, machines, electricity, magnetism, light, the moon, water, oceans, weathering, erosion, the earth's resources, bones, muscles, and digestion.

Grade 5 kit, fourth edition (\$141.50)

Topics studied in fifth grade are minerals, rocks, fossils, dinosaurs, matter, energy, heat, weather, biomes, ecosystems, sound, light, the respiratory system, and the circulatory system.

Grade 6 kit, fourth edition (\$141.50)

Sixth graders study earthquakes, volcanoes, weather, erosion, natural resources, cells, classification of living things, atoms, molecules, electricity, magnetism, motion, machines, the stars, the solar system, plant and animal reproduction, heredity, genetics, the nervous system, and the immune system.

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Christian Kids Explore series

by Stephanie L. Redmond, Robert W. Ridlon, Jr., and Elizabeth J. Ridlon

Bright Ideas Press

PO Box 333

Cheswold, DE 19936

877-492-8081

email: info@brightideaspress.com

www.brightideaspress.com

\$34.95-\$39.95

I like the balance of information and activity in the *Christian Kids Explore* science series. Rather than books for specific grade levels, this series has five books that can be used with children spanning at least four grade levels.

All five books are divided into a number of units, with multiple lessons per unit. Lessons are ideal for use in two 90-minute block sessions a week rather than shorter, more-frequent classes. This gives children enough time to get into the activities and think about the concepts. Working on this schedule, you should be able to complete one book per year.

While parents or teachers will need to do some lesson preparation, it is minimal for the first two books and very manageable for the rest. Lessons are laid out so clearly that these courses should be very easy to use. There are numerous activity pages within each book that you are welcome to reproduce or print for your family from either CD-ROMs or downloadable files. Students should each maintain a three-ring binder in which they keep all of their science work.

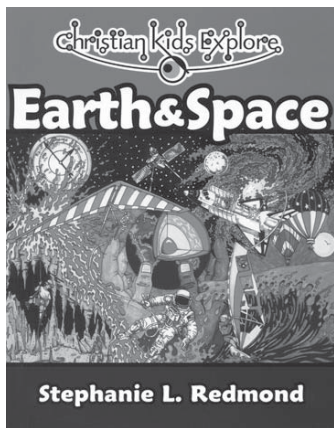
At the back of each book are answer keys plus lengthy lists of recommended resource such as books, DVDs, computer games, and kits that you might use to supplement your studies or challenge older students. You don't have to use other resource books, but each study will be much richer for students if you use some of the colorful picture books available on the different science topics. Since the *Christian Kids Explore* books are printed only in black-and-white, this might be especially important for some learners.

All of these courses include learning activities that help meet the needs of different learning styles—hands-on activities for Wiggly Willys, interaction for Sociable Sues, predictable vocabulary study and testing for Perfect Paulas, and independent reading for Competent Carls.

Christian Kids Explore Earth and Space and Christian Kids Explore Biology

Christian Kids Explore Earth and Space and

Christian Kids Explore Biology, both written by Stephanie L. Redmond, are very similar in design to one another. Both books target grades three through six but can be used selectively with children as young as kindergarten—especially the hands-on activities. They seem particularly good for third and fourth grade levels. However, *Biology* is slightly more challenging than *Earth and Space*. While two ninety-minute sessions per week are best, you can break lessons down into more frequent lessons for students with shorter attention spans.



Biology has an optional downloadable student activity book for \$7.95 with only the reproducible student pages from the textbook. You can purchase and print these for additional students. These pages

include Review-its, activity and experiment forms, unit review activities and quizzes, and coloring pages. These are duplicates of pages in the text rather than additional material.

The second edition of *Earth and Space* includes a CD-ROM in the back of the book that has printable lesson plans, all of the reproducible student pages (Review-its, activity and experiment forms, unit review activities and quizzes, and coloring pages), materials lists, and a bonus literature study guide for a science-related biography. Literature study guides (available for all courses except *Biology*) offer substantial activities—written work, discussions, and hands-on activities—but they are an optional part of each course. The literature study guide for *Earth and Space* is for *The Big Wave* by Pearl S. Buck.

The first session each week is “teaching time.” It begins with reading and discussing the information from the text. Students complete

a Daily Reading Sheet, write words and definitions for their vocabulary list in a notebook, and possibly work with flashcards. Younger students might do less writing, and older students need to do extended reading or research from real books and other resources from the lists provided at the back of each book.

The second session is “hands-on time” for experiments or activities. These don’t require expensive or exotic materials, but it will take a little work to gather the necessary items. For example, *Earth and Space* requires items like clay, a funnel, sun-sensitive paper, an atlas, a globe, vinegar, baking soda, chewing gum, and a paper plate. For *Biology*, among resources you need are pipe cleaners, a magnifying glass, old T-shirts, face paints, and alligator stickers.

There are also some artistically-created coloring pages—one per unit. Colored pencils are the perfect medium to use for these. The book also has numerous black line illustrations that children might color.

Vocabulary words, timeline entry items, and lists of materials needed are at the beginning of each unit. Each unit concludes with a quiz. *Biology* also includes a writing assignment at the end of each unit while *Earth and Space* suggests either a writing assignment or creation of a “folderbook” (directions in an appendix).

Other reproducible pages in the appendices include a Field Trip Journal form, Checking it Out experiment form, Write About It! worksheet for a unit composition, maps, scripture memory cards, recipes, supplemental activities such as word searches, and numerous other worksheets pertaining to the lessons.

A biblical worldview is presented throughout both books and is reinforced by scripture memory cards. Unit 2, lesson 3 of *Earth and Space* advances a creationist, young-Earth perspective, although it does present the broader context of scientific disagreement as well as disagreement among Christians. Most recommended resources for the lessons are secular and present alternative explanations. In

Biology, the first lesson advances a creationist perspective, although it takes no position on the age of the earth. However, recommended resource books tend toward a young earth position.

Christian Kids Explore Chemistry, Physics, and Creation Science

The next three books in the series are similar to each other, differing in format from the first two books. *Christian Kids Explore Chemistry*, *Christian Kids Explore Physics*, and *Christian Kids Explore Creation Science* were written by Robert W. Ridlon, Jr. and Elizabeth J. Ridlon. They are recommended for students in grades four through eight. The level of content in *Chemistry* and *Physics* is more advanced than in the first two books. *Creation Science* starts out at a very easy level, but the second half moves into significantly more difficult material. There are far fewer reproducible student activity pages, and the coloring pages for *Chemistry* and *Physics* are limited to a smaller selection in an appendix at the back of each book. *Creation Science* has many coloring pages.

Christian Kids Explore Chemistry is more than a simple introduction to chemistry. In 356 pages, the authors cover the basics of chemistry, including some topics often reserved for high school courses. But they do so in a way that is very understandable for younger students. They use a conversational style and familiar examples to which children can relate. While you might occasionally find topics like “covalent bonds” that are beyond your fourth or fifth grader, most of the presentation is so clear and concrete in the way it is taught that most students will understand and enjoy the lessons. You might even use this if you’ve got a high schooler who struggles with the math involved in chemistry.

The book begins with lessons on matter, measurement, elements, mixtures, compounds, atoms, molecules, the periodic table, mass, and atomic number. Then it advances into chemical bonds, formulas, names of compounds,

acids, bases, and chemical reactions. The next section deals with states of matter, and the final section gets into organic chemistry.

While older students might read the lessons directly from the book on their own, you will want to read the lessons to younger students, perhaps paraphrasing or skipping difficult sections as needed.

Following the lesson information is a Review-it section with fill-in-the-blank questions that depend only upon listening and comprehension at this point. You should photocopy or print out these pages as well as those for unit reviews, worksheets, and coloring pages.

“Think About It” questions that come next in most lessons might be used as follow-up for a hands-on activity, or they might require written work or discussion. These challenge students to understand and apply some creative thought to the lessons. Each unit concludes with a test.

At the beginning of each unit you will find a list of objectives, vocabulary words, and materials needed for all activities for the unit. Materials are mostly common household items, with the exception of things like Styrofoam® balls, Alka Seltzer®, and safety glasses for *Chemistry*; and a stopwatch, various types of balls, and a horseshoe magnet for *Physics*.

Hands-on activities are used to reinforce or help teach each lesson. These are frequently experiments, but sometimes they are things like building models of molecules, creating cards for elements of the periodic table, completing observation forms, doing word searches, or coloring pages.

The second editions of both *Chemistry* and *Physics* each include a CD-ROM in the back of the book similar to that described for the *Earth and Space* course. Those with earlier editions of *Chemistry* or *Physics* can purchase a downloadable file with the content on the CD-ROMs that are now packaged with new editions of the books (\$9.95 per course).

The CD-ROM for *Chemistry* includes a

literature study guide for Joyce McPherson's biography of Blaise Pascal, *A Piece of the Mountain*. While the rest of the study has minimal Christian content, this book centers around the spiritual life of this great thinker.

Christian Kids Explore Physics has 405 pages divided into six units on physics, matter, mechanics, matter in motion, energy in motion, and electricity and magnetism.

The relatively simple activities and experiments should be appealing, although some of the math (used in only a few activities) will be challenging for younger students. Examples of the activities include creating atomic models, observing balloon expansion and contraction in various temperature settings, plotting trajectories for a tennis ball rolling off a table, calculating bicycle wheel speed, and creating a compass. Simple household items are used for most of these. The optional literature study for *Physics* is based on the book *Ben Franklin of Old Philadelphia* by Margaret Cousins. This study takes a secular approach.

Although *Chemistry* and *Physics* are intended for a Christian audience and have occasional scripture verses in the sidebars, I found only scattered references to God. Those references were so generic that the books should be fine for any family who shares a belief in God as Creator. It would be very easy for parents or teachers with other beliefs to use these books with minimal adaptation.

Christian Kids Explore Creation Science differs drastically in this regard. It has significant religious content, advancing belief in a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and belief in a young earth.

In the first part, it teaches the creation model, six days of creation, and Noah's flood and its importance to the creation model. The second part, "Advanced Topics in Creation Science," are more challenging. Here the book addresses methods of dating and the age of the earth, the evolution model, problems with the evolution model, and other topics that defend

the creationist model.

The argumentation and evidence presented is often superficial. This might be appropriate for young students, but it certainly isn't for older students. So I am less enthused about this book than I am about the others in the series.

Christian Kids Explore Creation Science comes with a CD-ROM like the other courses. It features a literature study guide for Ruth Beechick's book, *Adam and His Kin*.

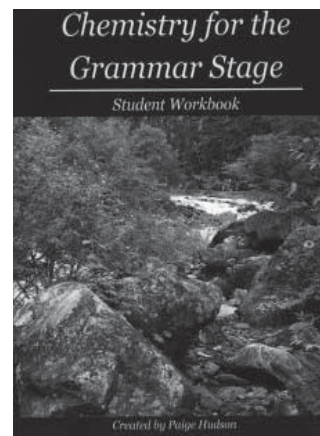
Summary

The *Christian Kids Explore* series is a good option for homeschooling families who want to teach children of various ages together. It makes it easy to provide interesting science education with hands-on activities.

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Elemental Science Classic series

Elemental Science, Inc.
info@elementalscience.com
www.elementalscience.com



course packages:
printed editions -
\$28.48 to \$40.99
per course,
ebooks - \$17 to
\$25.50 per course

My first impression of Elemental Science's Classic series (ESC) for grades one through eight was that it is

very similar to *Noeo Science* which was already one of my Top Picks. I expected to like the ESC series because, like *Noeo*, ESC's methodology is so close to what I describe at the beginning of this chapter.

The ESC series uses colorful fact books such as encyclopedias from Usborne as spines. Many ESC courses use more than one spine book such as *The Kingfisher Science Encyclopedia* and *DK Encyclopedia of Nature*, as well as some

supplemental books like *Marie Curie's Search for Radium* by Beverley Birch. The ESC teacher guides chart out daily lesson plans, drawing upon the spine and supplemental books for informational content.

The courses are designed with the classical trivium stages—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—in mind. The ESC series also leans somewhat toward the classical approach as described in *The Well-Trained Mind* (by Susan Wise Bauer) with its emphasis on written work, acquisition of facts, and testing. It has students write definitions for vocabulary words on Unit Vocabulary Sheets, write outlines or narrative summaries of their reading, write complete lab records and reports, and make timeline entries. Courses also include quizzes, reviews, and tests, although these are optional. Of course, you can adapt how much writing each student is required to do.

Courses also draw upon Charlotte Mason methodology, using narration and sketching along with the other learning activities. Students using the ESC series create a notebook for each course, but notebook creation is made easy with the separate student workbook for each course that has much of the work already done for you, especially if you purchase the printed edition of the workbook rather than the ebook.

Hands-on learning through science experiments is also built into the ESC series. You will need to gather resources for science experiments. Experiment instructions come from the required resource books rather than the teacher's guides or student workbooks. While experiment resources required for the Classic series are not very difficult to find, you might want to purchase their experiment kits that save you the trouble of hunting down items like the aquarium tubing, large suction cups, and an instant-read thermometer used for *Biology for the Grammar Stage*.

ESC courses were each written to target a span of two grade levels, but tips are included

for stretching each course to suit a wider age range, often using alternative spine books and adapting the amount of writing required.

The seven courses and their targeted grade levels are:

- *Biology for the Grammar Stage* - (1-2)
- *Biology for the Logic Stage* - (5-6)
- *Earth Science and Astronomy for the Grammar Stage* - (2-3)
- *Earth Science and Astronomy for the Logic Stage* - (6-7)
- *Chemistry for the Grammar Stage* - (3-4)
- *Chemistry for the Logic Stage* - (7-8)
- *Physics for the Grammar Stage* - (4-5)

Each ESC course package has both a teacher guide and a student book. Teacher guides for all levels include answers keys; scheduling options for either two days or five days per week; and sections with additional suggestions for reading, internet research, activities, and experiments. Teacher guides also include ways to expand upon the experiments along with discussion questions for you to use with your students.

In courses for the grammar stage, the student book is a workbook with custom-designed unit project sheets, notebooking pages, lab reports, and a glossary. The lesson pages are used primarily for recording information.

In courses for the logic stage, student guides expect students to be much more self-directed, so they include the lesson plans along with recording pages. At this level, there are also some pre-drawn but unlabeled drawings for students to complete. Courses for the logic stage direct students to work on a science fair project of their choice during one unit.

Optional coloring pages and lapbooking plans that have templates that coordinate with some of the courses are also available.

Elemental Science also has two courses for younger learners that I just want to mention. *Exploring Science* (for K4 and K5) and *Intro to Science* (for kindergarten and first grade) are similar in approach to courses for

older students although they use much more discussion, drawing, coloring, and “science play”—and much less writing—than do the upper grade levels. Brief teaching information is included in the teacher guides. For *Exploring Science*, the book *Science Play* (Williamson Little Hands Book) is the source of experiments, and many library books are used as resources throughout all of the lessons. *Intro to Science* uses *The Handbook of Nature Study* (Comstock Publishing) and experiments from *More Mudpies and Magnets* (Gryphon House) along with additional library books. You could easily use these two courses with students up through second grade for introductory science.

The program is presented from a secular perspective. While there is no direct teaching on evolution or religious questions in the teacher guides or student books aside from an optional lesson on the big bang in *Earth Science and Astronomy for the Logic Level*, required resources reflect evolutionary assumptions. You can read more about their perspective on Elemental Science’s FAQ page.

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Exploring Creation Young Explorer Science Series (Grades 1-6)



by Jeannie Fulbright
 Apologia Educational Ministries
 1106 Meridian Plaza, Suite 220
 Anderson, IN 46016
 888-524-4724
 email: mailbag@apologia.com
 www.apologia.com
 books - \$39

each, notebooking journals - \$24 each

At first glance, the seven Apologia *Exploring Creation* Young Explorer books look like standard hardcover textbooks for the elementary grades. They are nicely printed with full-color illustrations. But the focus on a narrow area of

science for each text and the methods of lesson presentation make these books significantly different from standard texts.

The *Astronomy*, *Botany*, *Human Anatomy and Physiology*, and *Chemistry and Physics* books address only those topics, digging much deeper into each than is possible in a typical textbook. *Zoology 1* teaches about flying creatures (birds, bats, flying reptiles, and insects). *Zoology 2* covers only creatures that live in water while *Zoology 3* tackles various orders of land animals including reptiles, amphibians, spiders, insects, worms, gastropods, and dinosaurs.

The series is also unusual in that each text is designed to be used with students from first through sixth grade. Since there are seven books and six grade levels, you might not complete all of the them.

The Young Explorers series is clearly Christian in outlook, continually reaffirming God’s role as creator. Occasionally, evolutionary beliefs are addressed directly, but these texts mostly take a positive approach by teaching a Christian viewpoint rather than attacking evolution.

Author Jeannie Fulbright writes as if she is chatting with her children, so the writing style is very conversational and personal.

This series uses an immersion approach, emphasizing depth over breadth with information, activities, writing, field trips, experiments, and other avenues to immerse the student deeply into each topic. Students gather enough information on each topic to begin to appreciate science, ask deeper questions, and look for applications around them.

Regarding methodology, Charlotte Mason’s ideas are most evident in the use of narration. Periodically, after a section of text there will be a narration prompt such as “Explain what you have learned about flight muscles and birds in flight” (*Zoology 1*, p. 61). You might even want to prompt for narrations more frequently than does the text.

“What Do You Remember?” questions at

the end of each chapter help to assess whether or not children are grasping the information. Parents can require students to write out answers or respond orally. Answer keys are at the back of each book.

To keep things interesting, the text is also broken up with "Try This!" activities. These are generally fairly simple activities in contrast to both the full-fledged experiments with data recording and the projects that come at the end of each chapter. Two of the projects for each course are actually term projects. Term projects, as well as some of the other experiments and projects, are quite involved, but they don't require esoteric resources. Lists of the necessary resources are at the front of each book, shown chapter by chapter, making it easy to plan ahead. Required resources include items such as matches, wires, empty soda bottles, red food coloring, plaster of Paris, plants, glycerin soap bars, and a pinecone. At the front of each text is a reproducible Scientific Speculation Sheet to be used for applying scientific method and recording experiment information.

Students create a notebook for each course. They can either use an Apologia Notebooking Journal or a binder to collect their notes, drawings, and records of experiments, projects, and field trips. Since the text tries to address the needs of students from first through sixth grade, notebook activities are frequently suggested under separate headings for younger and older students.

Notebooking Journals are hefty (about 200 pages each), plastic spiral-bound books. While it is certainly fine if you want to create your own notebooks with resources from the website and elsewhere, these Notebooking Journals make the process much easier.

The Notebooking Journals include a number of activities and resources for each lesson. Four sections directly support essential textbook material and activities. A Fascinating Facts section provides space for students to write their own summary of information from the

lesson. A "What Do You Remember?" section reprints the review questions from the text, allowing space for students to write their answers. Template pages in the journals support notebook assignments, activities, and projects in the text. Finally, there are Project Pages for recording observations and other information, as well as for inserting photos from activities and experiments within the text.

Other useful resources in the Notebooking Journals include scripture copywork pages, vocabulary crossword puzzles, cut-and-fold miniature books in which students can write key information, field trip sheets for recording information about each trip, and a 50-question final review for the entire course. There are also Dig In Deeper assignments that expand lessons with additional experiments, activities, research, and recommended reading and multi-media resources. These extra resources, including the final review, are all optional. Use whatever is useful and then remove the pages not being used from each student's journal so they are left with their own personalized notebook.

Younger students with less developed writing skills should probably use the new Junior Notebooking Journals for each course. These require less writing, have fewer crossword puzzles (but with age appropriate vocabulary), and omit the written review questions and final reviews. They add two more coloring pages per lesson and have handwriting lines appropriate for primary grade levels.

The resulting notebooks, whether the standard or junior versions, will have much more content than could be compiled into a lapbook. If you would rather have children create lapbooks, both Knowledge Box Central (www.knowledgeboxcentral.com) and A Journey Through Learning (www.ajourneythroughlearning.com) sell lapbook kits that correlate with these textbooks. (Check either website to see what lapbooks look like.)

The intended audience is probably my biggest

area of concern with the textbooks. The books are written at a reading level well beyond that of children in the primary grades. The texts include Latin and scientific names, sometimes including explanations of word derivations. There seems to be even more of this in *Botany* and *Zoology 1* than in the other books. While this should be fine for students in the middle grades, it might be too much information for younger students. Personally, I would probably start with the *Astronomy* text if my children were on the younger end of the spectrum, then follow with *Botany* and *Human Anatomy and Physiology*. After that, I would use any of the lengthier courses: *Zoology 1, 2, or 3* or *Chemistry and Physics*. Parents will likely read the text aloud to younger students, while older students can do much of their reading and work independently.

An added bonus with each course is a password to a dedicated website with extra helpful tools for each course. This information is provided in the front of each book with your course instructions.

Audio CDs with author Jeannie Fulbright reading the text are available for the *Human Anatomy and Physiology* and *Zoology* courses either as MP3 files on CDs (\$29 per course) or on standard audio CDs (\$39 per course).

Overall, there is more activity and variety in these courses than in traditional textbooks. The format makes it easy for parents to provide an excellent balance of information and activity that should be very effective for science instruction in the elementary grades.

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God's Design Science series

Answers in Genesis
PO Box 510
Hebron, KY 41048
800-778-3390

www.answersingenesis.org

\$89 for each set of three courses (each set has 3 student books with 3 teacher

supplements), \$299 for the entire series

The God's Design Science series courses, now in their third editions, are an outstanding program for grades one through eight.

There are four groups of books within the series. There are three textbooks in each group with a teacher supplement for each text that includes a resource CD-ROM with all of the printables, tests, and quizzes.

Titles included in each of the four groups are:

- Life: *The Human Body, The World of Plants, The World of Animals*
- Heaven and Earth: *Our Planet Earth, Our Weather and Water, Our Universe*
- Chemistry and Ecology: *Properties of Matter, Properties of Atoms and Molecules, Properties of Ecosystems*
- Physical World: *Heat and Energy, Machines and Motion, Inventions and Technology*

You can purchase the books in sets for each group—the three texts plus the three teacher supplements—or as a complete set of all the books.



There are a number of features that set these books apart. First, the books are ungraded. The “Life” and “Heaven and

Earth” groups are designated for the entire range of grades one through eight while “Chemistry and Ecology” and “Physical World” groups narrow to grades three through eight. If your children are in the early elementary grades, you should start with either of the first two series, saving the latter two for the upper elementary grades or junior high.

According to the authors, you might complete any of the groups of three texts in a single school year. With three books per group, you would complete three lessons per week,

spending about 20 minutes per lesson for younger students and 45 minutes per lesson for older students. The books are approximately 150 pages each, so I would recommend to families with younger children that they take their time and use only one or two books per year, allowing time for further exploration when they hit topics of particular interest.

Each of the 12 student textbooks has a teacher supplement book (that includes a CD-ROM) that serves as the teacher guide and answer key. The philosophical and theological information at the front of the supplement is critical for understanding the unique perspective and design of these textbooks; this information is a must-read for teachers. The CD-ROM contains PDF files with worksheets for some of the lessons, some of which are required as part of the expanded activities for older students. Many of these pages are data recording sheets or other means of recording observations. The CD-ROM also has quizzes for each unit and a final exam.

Brief teaching instructions are also found at the beginning of each textbook. They point out the color coding system used to indicate lessons and activities targeted for younger and older students. Older students generally are given more information and more-challenging activities in addition to (or sometimes in place of) the lessons and activities completed by younger students.

The books in this series all reflect a Christian worldview, including a young-earth view of creation. Contrasts are made between evolution and creationist views when pertinent to the topic, especially in the texts related to life science and earth science.

Hands-on experiments and activities that are built into every lesson are worthwhile and relate well to the topics. The activities and experiments include step-by-step instructions and are designed to teach scientific method as children observe, record information, discuss, and form conclusions. Lists of supplies needed

for each lesson are in the teacher supplement for each text. Supplies are generally not too difficult to obtain, although it does vary from book to book. *The World of Plants* requires things like yellow gelatin, bean seeds, flower bulbs, corn meal, dried moss, and bread slices—fairly easy items to find. *Heat and Energy* is a little more challenging, requiring items like copper wire, iron filings, steel BBs, a compass, and a magnifying glass. Even the chemistry books mostly use easily available items like Epsom salt, ammonia, and rubbing alcohol. Rarely, the supply list also mentions a reference book that you will need—such as a tree field guide to be used with *The World of Plants*.

Activities are followed by a "What did we learn?" section. These are just a few key questions for the teacher to ask to ensure that students understand the main points of the lesson. Suggested answers are provided in the teacher supplement.

Next is a Taking It Further section with questions that will help children extend their thinking to draw some conclusions or make additional connections or applications of what they have learned.

Interesting biographical sketches of scientists and inventors plus articles on special topics such as chemotherapy, artificial islands, and rattlesnakes appear sporadically throughout each textbook.

At the end of each book is a unit final project. These projects often encompass many topics covered within various lessons, so you should check out the unit project when beginning the course and consider having your child start work on the project early in the school year. They can then work on the project whenever it seems appropriate.

Textbooks are printed in full-color with numerous, high-quality illustrations and excellent graphics. The publisher has also made good use of color to highlight different portions of the lesson, making it easy to spot sections to be used with different grade levels.

The God's Design Science series is a practical choice for Christian homeschooling families as well as for classroom teachers in Christian schools. However, there are a few issues that you might want to consider as you use this series.

Textbooks are written to address a very wide age span. Even with the delineation of sections appropriate for older and younger students which help a great deal, there are some concerns. Many sections of text are dense with new vocabulary. Even following the guidelines of which material to use with each age group, you might find that some children will have a hard time just listening to and absorbing so much detail. For example, in the second lesson in *Our Weather and Water* (on the structure of the atmosphere) the text reads,

The earth's atmosphere consists of 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, and 1% other gases including hydrogen, helium, argon, and carbon dioxide. This combination of nitrogen and oxygen is the ideal atmosphere for life. Nitrogen is a relatively nonreactive gas. Its purpose in the atmosphere appears to be to dilute the oxygen. If the oxygen concentration was more than 21% fires would easily burn out of control (p. 12).

Note that within just these few sentences, you are introducing a number of vocabulary words and concepts unfamiliar to most children: the various chemical elements, the idea of percentages, nonreactive gases, dilution, and the relationship between oxygen and fires. This quote is from a section for students in grades three through eight. The above sentences might sound like gibberish to young students. For this reason, I urge you to use discretion as to which sections of text to read with young students. Sometimes you will need to simplify lesson material so that students can grasp concepts.

As I read through some of the lessons, I thought that I, personally, would very likely use the experiments and activities as the basis from

which I would present the lesson information rather than presenting information first. If younger children can see and touch things as they are learning they will be able to understand better than if they are listening to what (to them) sounds like abstract information. For example, in *Our Planet Earth*, a lesson on identifying different minerals includes experiments for children to identify four or five minerals themselves. I would have the minerals on hand and would talk about their different characteristics for identification while the children compared and tested the different samples. This might help solve the problem I mentioned regarding information overload.

Overall, I like this combination of information with experiments and activities plus questions to ensure understanding. The variety of activities effectively reaches children with different learning styles.

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Noeo Science Curriculum

Logos Press

207 N. Main St.

Moscow, ID 83843

email: service@canonpress.org

www.logospressonline.com/noeo

noeo science



biology 2

Grades 4-6 / Ages 9-12

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

For years I've advocated avoiding traditional science textbooks and, instead, choosing fewer topics to cover in more detail using real books and experiments. Obviously, many homeschoolers agree with me since publishers are

increasingly putting together courses that fit this description. I think *Noeo Science* has done one of the best jobs yet! You'll see why as you read on.

Courses are available for three levels. Level 1 courses target grades one through three, level 2 courses are for grades four through six, and

level 3 courses are to be used in grades seven through nine. It should take one school year to complete each course. The titles of the eight volumes in the series and their prices are:

- *Biology 1* - \$146.88
- *Chemistry 1* - \$167.61
- *Physics 1* - \$149.44
- *Biology 2* - \$131.74
- *Chemistry 2* - \$145
- *Physics 2* - \$154.90
- *Chemistry 3* - \$215
- *Physics 3* - \$205

You might have noticed that all courses are titled *Biology*, *Chemistry*, or *Physics*. Some science topics such as geology, weather, and astronomy overlap these three areas of science, so they are included at points within chemistry, biology, and physics where they fit most appropriately.

It doesn't really matter which order you use the volumes for each level. Choosing the most appropriate level is more important. However, you might easily shift a student who is at one end or the other of a level into the closest lower or higher level if it allows you to teach more than one child at the same time. While the titles of the books seem similar, the content at each level changes to cover different topics within biology, chemistry and physics (as well as other areas of science) so that students will have a broad and thorough science education after completing these courses.

Noeo Science takes its name from a Greek word meaning "to understand." While the courses stress understanding scientific concepts, they also want children to learn that, "The essence of science is simply observing and describing God's creation. When scientists make a new discovery, they are seeing another part of creation revealed...." (From the introduction to each book.)

The curriculum's approach is primarily a mixture of Charlotte Mason and unit study methods, but it also works well for those pursuing a classical education.

Each volume of *Noeo Science* targets a narrow range of topics under the general headings of biology, chemistry, or physics. For example, *Biology 1* covers weather, bacteria and fungi, sea life, amphibians, plants, insects, birds, and the human body. Despite the number of topics, extensive time is spent on narrower subsets of each of the above topics, using real books, observations, and experiments—all hallmarks of unit studies.

Charlotte Mason's influence is seen in the use of real books, the use of narration (oral and written), drawing, and creation of a notebook.

The curriculum is designed with lots of experiments and hands-on activity rather than in a traditional format. While children learn some vocabulary, the curriculum does not rely on the memorization typical of many science courses, and neither does it use typical worksheets and tests. That doesn't mean students do no writing. Reproducible forms in each volume are used by students for notebooking, drawing, recording data from experiments, writing definitions, and taking notes. Samples of completed student pages are included in the instructor's guide to assist parents. (Note: The reproducible pages are also available as free downloads at the Logos Press website.)

For each course, the key component is the instructor's guide which comes in a spiral-bound book. Each instructor's guide consists primarily of lesson plans that are laid out for each week in chart form for easy reference. They list the pages in books to be read, experiments to be completed, optional experiments, and optional websites to explore. Notes at the bottom tell you when students need to make notes or drawings for their notebooks or provide a narration.

Each instructor's guide also has a fairly brief explanation of how the curriculum works, the aforementioned reproducible pages, lists of required books and experiment kits, and a master supply list of items needed for other experiments and activities.

The books selected for each course are outstanding. For example, *Chemistry 2* books are the *Usborne Internet-Linked Science Encyclopedia*; *Usborne Internet-Linked Mysteries and Marvels of Science*; *Fizz, Bubble & Flash*; *Adventures with Atoms and Molecules*; *The Mystery of the Periodic Table*; and *Geology Rocks!* These are mostly colorful, illustrated books that children will love to explore on their own. Even better, both *Chemistry 2* and *Physics 2* use the same two Usborne books so you can save on the second course by purchasing a less expensive package that does not include those two books. You will develop a great science library with the books from these courses.

Experiments and Lab Work

Logos Press sells the *Noeo* instructor's guides packaged with sets of the required books and experiment kits, saving you money over the cost of buying items individually. However, you can purchase all items separately if you prefer. (Check the publisher's website for information on various options for purchasing individual components.)

Experiment kits from the Young Scientist Club (www.theyoungscientistsclub.com) are included in all courses for levels 1 and 2. *Biology 2* also includes an inexpensive slide microscope. More extensive kits from Thames & Kosmos (www.thamesandkosmos.com) are used with level 3 courses. The Young Scientist Club experiment kits for younger levels—with between five and seven kits per course—come bundled in boxes for each course rather than individually. It is important to note that the Young Scientist Club Kits have a number of experiments within each individual kit so there's even more here than you might think. Each kit includes its own instruction book plus equipment and supplies for all the experiments. These kits are relatively small and inexpensive, but they do contain some unusual items like a spring scale, glycerol, and a petri dish. You will need to collect some common household items (see the master supply list in each volume) to

use with the kits, but all of the difficult-to-get items are provided.

Chemistry 3 and *Physics 3* come with larger experiment kits, each with its own substantial manual. Students are not required to complete every experiment in each kit, but they might enjoy them enough to tackle the optional experiments on their own.

Physics 3 has two kits. A *Physics Workshop* kit (with all sorts of gears, pulleys, rods, building components, and a battery-operated motor) has 38 workshop projects for students to construct things from the kit. Most workshop projects are accompanied by experiments in which students use the workshop creation. For example, students build a force scale and type-two lever in a workshop then use it in an experiment to measure forces on a lever. The *Electronic Snap Circuits Kit* used in *Physics 3* can be used for building 78 projects for learning all about electricity.

Chemistry 3 has one large kit that includes chemicals and lab equipment as well as a complete manual with instructions for 251 experiments.

Some parents using level 3 courses will be concerned about high school requirements. While there is plenty of lab work in both the *Physics 3* and *Chemistry 3* courses, the labs do not require the mathematical measurements and calculations typical of high school level labs. The course material introduces ideas taught at high school level but does not go as far as usual for high school courses. For example, at least two of the books in the *Chemistry 3* course—*Eyewitness Books Chemistry* (DK Books) and *Material Matters: Mixtures, Compounds & Solutions* (Raintree)—discuss covalent and ionic bonds, yet none of them fully develop the technical aspect of how atoms bond with each other. Consequently, these courses are perfect for junior high and might serve as introductory courses for ninth graders that would be followed up later with more challenging, math-based chemistry or

physics courses.

Scheduling

Each course is laid out for 36 weeks—a full school year. Lessons are provided for four days a week. However, lessons for level 1 should take only 15 to 20 minutes a day, lessons for level 2 should take only 20 to 30 minutes per day, and lessons for level 3 should take 30 to 40 minutes per day. This means that you can easily double up your lessons and do science two days a week in longer sessions since even level 3 lessons twice a week would require no more than 60 to 80 minutes each. Of course, if students complete optional reading or experiments, that will take more time. In addition, many of the observations, activities and experiments in all of the volumes could be expanded beyond the minimal time required.

Worldview

While the curriculum itself reflects a Christian worldview, most of the resource books do not. The introduction to each book suggests using encounters with secular or materialist viewpoints in the resource books as opportunities for discussion rather than skipping over them. I also suggest that since the resource books are your primary source of information, Christian parents might want to add discussion about God's design or presence when it seems appropriate.

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The Rainbow



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email: dcdobbins@aol.com

www.beginningspublishing.com

complete year 1 - \$271, complete year 2 - \$162, text - \$85, Teacher's Helper - \$20, lab workbook - \$23

Serious science is coupled with a light-hearted approach and lots of hands-on activity in *The Rainbow*, a two-year course targeted at junior high level. Written specifically for Christian homeschoolers, *The Rainbow* has a softcover student textbook, a huge lab set, the Teacher's Helper (teacher guide), and a lab book.

The course is unusual because the text is intended to be used for two years. In the first year, students study physics and chemistry, and in the second year they study biology and applications (applied science).

The Teacher's Helper is the guide for the text as well as the labs, covering both years. The first year's lab set includes a lab notebook plus both durable equipment and consumable supplies. For the second year, you need additional equipment, supplies, and a new lab notebook, all of which is sold as a Year 2 set.

I really enjoy Dr. Dobbins' personal, friendly writing style in the textbook, and I think most junior high students will too. Here's a short excerpt to give you the flavor:

So you've given up on dissolving oil and vinegar together without killing people, but you are still convinced you are a smart chemist. So what do you do? Like every other good chemist in the world, you pick up the bottle of salad dressing and shake it really hard, then fret to remove the cap and pour the dressing before it separates again. But unlike the untrained non-chemists, you know the word for what you just did. You created a suspension (p. 118).

Dr. Dobbins explains concepts simply, frequently relating them to familiar experiences as he does above. Lessons are presented in small sections—about two pages each—with

a few questions following each section. Some questions are simple comprehension questions while others might be used for either discussion or written assignments. The student text is heavily illustrated in full color, so the pages are not crowded with text.

The Teacher's Helper outlines a schedule for three days per week for 32 weeks per year. It describes the purpose of each lesson, then also provides answer keys, section review quizzes, and troubleshooting ideas in case a lab experiment doesn't turn out as it should. A separate lab workbook for the student gives detailed and often humorous instructions for a weekly experiment.

The complete kit includes a neatly packaged set of lab materials with everything needed to carry out the experiments including such items as safety glasses, a marble roller assembly, a baseball, resistors, magnets, light bulbs, glass tubing, a syringe, PVC tubing, dye, and much more. You could conceivably collect your own materials from the list provided on the publisher's website, but it's such an odd assortment that you would be better off purchasing the kit from the publisher.

The complete kit also includes both the text and a lab book, but if you have more than one student, you will need to add an extra lab workbook and will probably want an extra textbook. Each lab workbook comes with a pair of safety glasses, an essential item for each student. Other than that, two students should be able to work cooperatively on the experiments using what comes in the kit. Those using this program with a larger group need to order multiple kits.

The curriculum is obviously Christian with its numerous references to God. Dr. Dobbins' treatment of the theory of evolution is interesting. He says, "In this text we will attempt to teach the general theory of evolution because a good education in the sciences requires it. We present it as a theory... which we ourselves do not accept" (p. 136). However, it does not

seem to me that evolution is taught in this text so much as it is undermined or argued against. Dr. Dobbins does not take a position on the age of the earth. Another sensitive subject might be human reproduction, but it is tastefully and conservatively explained.

Overall, I think this course prepares students with a solid foundation for more in-depth high school level science courses.

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Supercharged Science

by Aurora Lipper

www.superchargedscience.com



NASA
rocket
scientist,
university
professor,
pilot,
and mom
Aurora
Lipper is

dedicated to making science intriguing and fun for children. To that end she has created both online science curriculum and packaged science programs (which include materials and equipment) for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade.

In Lipper's "e-Science" Curriculum and Science Mastery Programs as well as in her individual courses, the emphasis is on learning by doing. In both the e-Science Curriculum and Science Mastery Programs, hundreds of experiments are available to students. Even better, videos of Lipper demonstrating how to do each experiment allow all but the youngest students to work independently most of the time. However, parents will need to pay attention to safety issues and oversee experiments as needed to ensure that students use proper procedures and reasonable caution. For parents who might not have a science background themselves, or perhaps don't have the time to teach it, these programs are a welcome

solution.

Lipper's specialty is in physics and engineering—not surprising given her background. So there are many experiments with electricity, magnetism, mechanics, matter, energy, light, sound, thermodynamics and much more. Chemistry and life science are also covered with some experiments in both beginning and advanced chemistry included. While hands-on experiments are the mainstay of Supercharged Science, there's much more to it.

e-Science Curriculum

monthly subscription fee: \$37/month for grades K-8, \$57/month for grades 9-12 or advanced younger students (at least fifth grade)

Supercharged Science offers the online e-Science Curriculum with options to suit students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. There are optional packages that include all materials for those who would rather not search out all the experiment resources themselves.

One thing that e-Science does better than almost everything else is use hands-on activities to connect scientific concepts with practical applications in the real world. Experiments use mostly inexpensive, easy-to-find items, so you can realistically gather your own materials. Once kids are excited by what they've built or experimented with, the course then introduces the academics. In this way, students have a deeper understanding of the material while enjoying it more than with a traditional textbook. Lipper explains that she has based this approach on how scientists work in the real world.

A monthly subscription fee gives your family access to an amazing number of resources—more than 800 experiments plus enough educational material for at least two to three years of science education. For kindergarten through eighth grade, you might need nothing more than what is on the website. Sign in on the website, select which lesson you wish to use and let your kids run with it. Science

experiments are buttressed with easily-digestible information to convey the key points students should be learning. Quizzes will help you check whether or not that's happening. For high school (or junior high students needing more challenging material), you can access textbook readings, exercises, and quizzes for a complete course with both academics and lab work. Even with all this, the video presentations and experiments provide an indispensable core. Beginning with a video presentation then completing the experiment is likely to create an excitement and curiosity about science that is difficult to achieve starting with textbook material.

In addition to the program material, Lipper teaches a live tele-class online every few weeks where students subscribed to e-Science can connect with her personally. While this component is offered live at a particular time, it is also recorded. Aside from the live tele-class, everything else can be accessed whenever it is convenient for you.

Unlimited support is provided for students and parents. Whatever part of the course you are using, feedback or advice from Lipper or another expert in the field of science a student is studying is always available by email. There's also a place to share ideas and comments with other parents and students.

A 30-day trial period will allow you to sample the program with no obligation and costs just one dollar. Even if you decide to enroll, you can still cancel at any time without any obligation. Also, there's no need to enroll for a full year at a time; you just pay month-by-month with no long-term commitment.

Science Mastery Programs

Silver - \$599, Gold - \$1195,
Diamond - \$1895 (programs include materials and equipment)

Science Mastery Programs are offered at Silver, Gold, and Diamond levels and include access to all of the online resources for time periods of one, two, and five years, respectively.

Each level includes parts and materials for 100 to 600 activities and experiments plus a nearly 200-page experiment manual. Extra kits for more specialized projects (e.g., robotics) are also included, with more such kits added as you move up to the Diamond level. All of the video and audio material is provided on DVDs and audio CDs so you need not be reliant on an internet connection, but you still have both options. The larger programs for Gold and Diamond levels are serious science programs that include everything you need for two to three years of science education.

Individual Courses: Ultimate Science Curriculum Series

\$74.95 each

You might prefer individual courses that target specific areas, so Lipper has created those, too, with courses for *Astronomy* (1, 2, and 3), *Chemistry* (1, 2, and 3), *Earth Science* (1, 2, and 3), *Electricity, Energy* (1 and 2), *Forces and Motion* (1 and 2) *Life Science: Biology and Microscopes*, *Life Science: Human Anatomy, Light* (1 and 2), *Magnetism*, and *Mathemagic* (which has lots of fun, math-related activities). Courses vary in length, taking from 12 to 32 weeks each to complete. Each course is contained on a single DVD that runs on your computer. (DVD video presentations will run on a television monitor, but the resolution will be much poorer.)

DVDs contain video presentations for each lesson plus a PDF student book for the course that includes material to read, questions to answer, and an activity sheet for each lesson. There is also a PDF Parent and Teachers Guide on each DVD.

Lipper recommends these courses for various age-range groupings from kindergarten through third grade up to grades five through eight. Generally, I would recommend most courses for even older students than does Lipper.

You can read more detailed descriptions of the individual courses in my online review

at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com/science/supercharged-science.htm.

Summary

Supercharged Science takes a secular approach but should not have any content in conflict with religious beliefs. They describe themselves as “creation neutral.”

Overall, Supercharged Science has put together some very comprehensive science education programs. Their online e-Science programs give students access to a high-quality curriculum that makes extensive use of hands-on activities and experiments to excite and motivate kids. The price is reasonable for all that you receive. If you want all of the extra parts and pieces too, you may want to consider their Science Mastery programs. Everything they sell comes with a full money-back guarantee and comprehensive technical support.

If you want to try out a free sample of the types of activities contained in these programs, you can download the “Science Activity Manual & Video Series” for free by going to: www.superchargedscience.com/opt/cathy-duffy.

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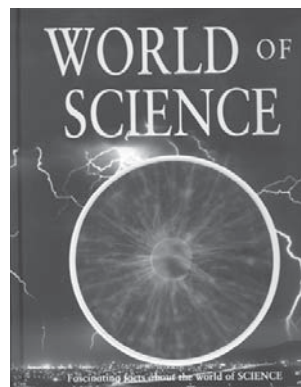
The World of Science

My Father’s World/Master Books joint edition

Order from My Father's World
573-202-2000

www.mfwbooks.com

\$24.99 (discounted to \$17.95 by MFW)



The World of Science is a lightly edited version of an original pictorial science book published by Parragon Publishing in 2004. My Father’s World (MFW) and Master Books worked with the original publisher

to keep this excellent introductory science book in print while editing out references to and images of early (prehistoric) man and correcting outdated information.

While there are many pictorial science books from publishers such as Usborne and DK Publishing, many of the most interesting ones include controversial information. So it is very helpful to have a book without such content. On top of that, *The World of Science* is a 248-page, hardcover book that you can purchase through MFW at a very reasonable price.

The World of Science, like many such books, dedicates about half of each page to full-color illustrations. This is the type of book that children (and maybe adults, too) are likely to explore for fun.

The book is divided into seven sections. The first six sections are topical, covering matter and chemicals; energy, motion, and machines;

electricity and magnetism; light and sound; earth and life; and space and time. Each section is divided into numerous subtopics, each one presenting foundational information along with examples of real-life science applications, science discoveries, and biographies of famous scientists.

Section seven consists of 40 pages of science projects with illustrated, step-by-step instructions. Many projects are quite simple but some (such as creating a water turbine or making an electric motor) are more elaborate.

MFW includes this book in their *1850 to Modern Times* course for students in grades four through eight, and that grade range is also my recommendation for this book's audience.

MFW and Master Books have created another similar special edition of *The World of Animals* that I also recommend to you.

CHAPTER 13

Unit Studies & All-in-One Programs

Making Learning Come Alive

Traditional textbooks were created for classroom management purposes—not because authors prefer to write them. Too often textbooks are written by committees, warped by state and federal goals, censored or slanted by publishers’ agendas, written with little sense of style, and boring beyond belief. Of course, there are some exceptions but not many. And even good textbooks reflect a compartmentalized approach to learning. Math stays in one book, while language remains in another. Spelling is in yet another compartment, and literature has to stay separate from both spelling and language.

Real life is not compartmentalized. Unit studies try to make learning more like real life by bringing a number of subjects together around a central theme for study. Unit study themes are infinite. Some unit studies follow historical timelines while others form their units around character traits, novels, geography, science topics, scripture, and other themes. Unit studies might take anywhere from a few weeks to several years to complete.

Unit studies can be narrow, topical studies such as a unit study on the theme of horses. In such a study, children might study breeds of horses, the history of their development, how horses have been used through history, horse anatomy and physiology, and famous horse stories. This sort of study covers science along with some history and language arts.

Other unit studies are more comprehensive. Most of these larger unit studies are at least year-long programs that cover history and science completely, while offering varying degrees of coverage of language arts and math. Most have arts and crafts mixed in, and many have strong religious components.

Many parents—but especially Perfect Paulas—might like the idea of unit studies but find it overwhelming once they get into it. In many unit studies, parents have to choose which books to

use, find those books at the library or figure out substitutes, choose among a number of activities, organize all of this, and then keep records of everything. The insecurity and worry about making “wrong” choices paralyzes them, and they quickly return to safe and predictable textbooks. Fortunately, some unit studies have taken this into account and provide much more direction and fewer choices—features that make it possible for those who prefer structure and predictability to still take advantage of unit studies.

Addressing Learning Style Needs

Unit studies can be a marvelous way of meeting all of the different learning style needs of children while providing an education vastly more interesting than what comes out of standard textbooks.

While unit studies vary in the types of activities they include, there are almost always some hands-on and multi-sensory activities to engage Wiggly Willys. Sociable Sues usually thrive on the interaction that is so much a part of most unit studies. Perfect Paulas might be uncomfortable with unit studies that change the lesson structure all the time, but they generally do well with those that follow a predictable format and spend plenty of time developing academic knowledge and skills rather than peripheral projects. Competent Carls usually love the independent reading and research required by many unit studies.

By selecting unit studies that have the elements that best fit your children, then selecting the appropriate activities for each child, you can bring everyone together to study the same topics.

Unit studies also help children overcome learning style weaknesses. After they have already been introduced to a topic or skill via a method that is best for them, choose other activities from the unit study that have them apply that knowledge or skill in ways that are not as comfortable. For example, Sociable Sue learns about a history topic as you gather everyone together to read aloud and discuss a biography related to the historical event. Sociable Sue learns the background and some interesting details of what happened in a way she enjoys. After that, you can assign her to do further independent reading on the same topic, requiring her to come to you to do a narration about what she has read. She would have a difficult time if she began with the independent reading, but sandwiching it between two interactive activities makes it more palatable.

All-In-One Programs

Many all-in-one programs pick and choose resources to assemble grade level packages. They might bear some resemblance to unit studies with their use of real books and activities that are suitable for a range of grade levels. However, all-in-one programs package those real books within grade level programs rather than telling you how to use them with the whole family. While all-in-one programs will often encourage you to use the portions of the program covering subjects such as religion, history, science, and the fine arts with children from more than one grade level, any single level of a grade-level program will not readily adapt for teaching children more than one or two grades apart. My Father's World and Sonlight are the most prominent examples of all-in-one programs.

Online Courses

Do you want to move your family to Asia for missionary work but wonder how on earth you can manage to continue homeschooling your teen? Did you flunk math all the way through high school and now desperately need someone else to teach algebra? Do you have an ambitious, bright student who is begging to go to a “regular” school so she can take Advanced Placement (AP) courses? Does your teen want a course on Greek philosophers with Socratic discussion, and you don’t have the time, knowledge, or inclination to teach such a course yourself?

All of these needs and more can be met with courses available to homeschoolers on the internet. Homeschoolers are at the cutting edge of online learning because of their openness to new ideas and the unusual needs many families have. For example, Fritz Hinrichs (www.gbt.org) began offering classical education courses online back in the 1980s. He has continually developed his courses and delivery methods as new technology and software have developed.

Homeschoolers are not the only ones taking advantage of internet technology. Even government schools have jumped on board. A challenging dilemma has surfaced as a result. Courses offered by government schools are usually free or of minimal cost to families, while those offered by private organizations can cost hundreds of dollars. But there is a significant non-financial cost when a homeschooling family uses courses funded by the government—loss of parental control.

While legal definitions vary from state to state, homeschoolers who enroll in government school courses are no longer considered to be homeschoolers. They are under the authority of the school’s teachers rather than that of their parents, even if they are completing their course-work at home under parental supervision. Parents no longer have the final say over course content and requirements unless they pull a child out of the school.

While parents, theoretically, have the ability to oversee what their children are reading and doing, the reality is that in most situations, children will work independently, and parents won’t know the actual course content. In most cases, they won’t be able to determine in advance if their child’s teacher will support or contradict their family’s beliefs and values. And for those interested in forming a Christian worldview in their children, government-school programs are usually counterproductive since they adhere to a secular, materialistic worldview. The bottom line is that the “free” courses often come with a hidden price tag.

Content and viewpoint problems can also crop up in online courses offered by private organizations that hold different worldviews from that of your family. However, you are often able to ask questions about teachers and worldviews in these situations. I would urge you to carefully investigate the content and viewpoints of any program before enrolling your child. There are many good programs that work well with homeschoolers and are up front about their religious beliefs and goals.

In addition to beliefs and goals, there are also choices regarding structure in online learning. Some programs use the internet for automated course delivery. Students log on to a course, work through it answering questions as they go, and receive a grade based on their work. Some of these courses are mostly text—little different than reading a textbook, while others are heavily illustrated with computer graphics and animations. Some courses are largely discussion based—this is especially true of classical education courses. Some use bulletin-board posting as a part of course requirements. Some require separate written work such as essays that are emailed to instructors. Some use the internet sparingly, making assignments in traditional textbooks,

relaying assignments and comments back and forth over the internet, with an occasional student chat room discussion. Anything that might be done is probably being done by some course provider somewhere.

Also, you need to think about your child's learning style when you choose online programs. Because most young children need active learning and interaction, online education is rarely a good idea for the elementary grades. However, it becomes much more appropriate for junior and senior high students. Even so, an older child's learning style should still influence your choice of such programs. For example, a Sociable Sue will much prefer online discussions to courses where she primarily reads text material online with minimal interaction.

There are two terms you need to know in regard to online courses: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous courses mean there are times when students and teacher are online and interacting at the same time—synchronously. Asynchronous courses are prerecorded, or there is written material that students may access at any time. There are no chats or sessions where students and teachers interact together simultaneously—unless they happen to do instant messaging. Referring back to my last example of the sociable child, she is much more likely to succeed in synchronous courses because of the real-time interaction with others.

Below are some of the online options. These are only a sampling of the many options available. The grade levels served by the courses are noted in parentheses.

- Angelicum Academy - www.angelicum.net
- Catholic, classical, mostly asynchronous but includes Socratic discussion groups (preK-12)
- Apex Learning - www.apexlearning.com
- secular, asynchronous; offers Advanced Placement, Honors, and exam prep courses (Courses are approved by the NCAA—often required for sports scholarships.) (9-12)
- Calvert Virtual Academy - www.calverteducation.com - secular, asynchronous with occasional synchronous sessions (6-8)
- Clonlara's Compuphigh - www.compuphigh.com - secular, asynchronous (Some courses are approved by the NCAA.) (9-12)
- Eagle Christian - www.eaglechristian.org - Christian, mostly asynchronous with some textbooks and real books (7-12)
- Escondido Tutorial Service - www.gbt.org - Christian, classical, synchronous discussions (9-12)
- K12 - www.k12.com - secular; asynchronous; uses a mixture of online activity, real books, and textbooks; advertised as "online public schools" (K-12)
- Homeschool Connections - www.homeschoolconnectionsonline.com
- Catholic, both synchronous and asynchronous (Access to all recorded courses is only \$30/month or \$330 a year!) (6-12)
- NorthStar Academy - www.northstar-academy.org - Christian, asynchronous with prerecorded lesson presentations and traditional textbooks; satisfies U.S., Canadian, or U.K. requirements (6-12)
- Oxford Tutorial Service - www.oxfordtutorials.com - Christian, classical, synchronous discussions (9-12)
- The Potter's School - www.pottersschool.org - Christian, synchronous (6-12)
- Schola Classical Tutorials - www.scholatutorials.org - Christian, classical, synchronous discussions (9-12)
- Scholars' Online Academy - www.scholarsonline.org - Christian, classical, synchronous (7-12)
- Time4Learning - www.time4learning.com
- secular, asynchronous (See review in this chapter.) (K-12)

Program Reviews

BookShark

8042 South Grant Way
 Littleton, CO 80122-2705
 866-668-0179
www.bookshark.com



When I first spotted BookShark at a home-school conference it looked very familiar to me—lots of real books for each level, parent guides to coordinate learning, and grid-charts showing what pages are to be read in each book each day. I thought it looked very similar to Sonlight's curriculum. It turns out that BookShark is a spin off from the owners of Sonlight, operating as a separate company. Since both programs are so similar to one another, read my review of Sonlight for a more comprehensive explanation of how both programs work. BookShark is available for kindergarten through seventh grade, although a few courses for grades six and seven are not yet available. Those courses, as well as all of grade eight, will be available for the 2015-2016 school year.

BookShark's programs are a non-religious version of Sonlight's programs. Fifth grade world history probably reflects this more than most levels. Gone are the stories of missionaries and a particular emphasis on heroes of the Protestant faith. In their place are stories of Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa.

There are also some other differences. Like Sonlight, BookShark offers your choice of complete grade-level packages or packages that cover one or more subject areas. However, the packages within grade levels are a little different. While Sonlight's Core packages encompass history, Bible, language arts, and reading, BookShark offers "Reading with History" packages for each grade level. Reading with History

packages include readers, but the bulk of language arts instruction is in a separate package. BookShark has made significant improvements to the language arts program over Sonlight's. Specifically, they have added weekly overviews, daily lesson plan scripts, and rubrics to give parents more guidance for teaching and evaluating student work.

In science, resources with a Christian worldview have been removed. For example, in Sonlight fifth graders watch the DVD *Unlocking the Mystery of Life* that presents an "intelligent design" view, but that DVD is not included in BookShark's fifth grade science. Sonlight's sixth through eighth grade science courses spend even more time on the origins (creation/evolution) debate, so BookShark replaces that material with more coverage of chemistry, physics, and other topics.

In choosing to use real books, both Sonlight and BookShark have to deal with content in some of those books that might be objectionable to some homeschoolers. However, such issues are generally pointed out in the instructor's guides in advance.

Despite differences in the programs, the educational approach and learning methods are really the same in both Sonlight and BookShark. The essential difference is that BookShark now offers an option for those who want to experience a "Sonlight education" from a non-religious perspective.

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Complete Curriculum

Complete Curriculum, LLC
 PO Box 451
 Flat Rock, MI 48134
 888-675-8398
www.completecurriculum.com
 or www.k12digitaltexts.com

Complete Curriculum has got to be one of the most inexpensive online curriculum providers available. They have digital-text courses for math, language arts, science, and social

studies for preK through twelfth grade, although some of their courses for grades 11 and 12 are not yet available. Digital textbooks



can be accessed online or downloaded depending upon which option you use to sign up.

Course content is aligned with the national standards. The outlook is secular throughout all courses. Consequently, hot topics such as evolu-

tion, the age of the earth, and others (found especially in science and history texts) are treated from a secular perspective. While students do learn vocabulary, concepts, and skills, courses stress critical thinking rather than rote learning.

Most courses have 180 lessons for the school year. (Some science and social studies courses have fewer.) The publisher says that lessons for each subject should take one to one and a half hours a day to complete, but many lessons I reviewed would not take that much time. The customer who alerted me to this curriculum told me that for kindergarten and first grade they usually completed all four subjects within about one and a half hours per day.

Lessons are laid out in a consistent fashion in the online teacher's manuals for every subject. For each lesson, the teacher's manual lists:

- the lesson objective
- key vocabulary words—that can also be used for spelling or vocabulary, or to help students comprehend what they will read
- materials needed
- literary selections when appropriate—some of which are presented within the online student manual
- an “engaging” question which the teacher uses to begin the lesson
- supplemental engagement activities for

some lessons

- extensions included for some lessons—these might be used with accelerated or lagging students
- technology resources—for some lessons, suggestions are given for utilizing technology, especially websites that contribute to the lesson
- additional notes to the teacher—these outline or summarize the lesson
- advance preparation or homework required—gives the teacher a heads up when extra time will be required
- lesson Wrap-Ups for review—only in math for kindergarten through second grade

For each course there is a student manual as well as a teacher's manual. These are accessed as PDF files from the publisher's website. You will certainly want to print out some or all of the student manual pages since many serve as worksheets. Lessons are presented in full color with plenty of illustrations. While a color printer makes using the pages much easier, you can work with a black-and-white printout if you have the computer file easily viewable. Some lessons or stories refer to colors in the illustrations that children will need to see. The teacher's manual for each course includes the student manual pages with answers for all worksheets, exercises, and assessments.

There are two options for accessing the courses. For a \$29.95 yearly membership fee at www.completecurriculum.com you have access to up to ten digital texts to use. While each text may be assigned to only one student at a time, you might have two or more students using the ten texts! You can download PDF files chapter by chapter, but you cannot download an entire book all at once under the membership option. With the membership option, lessons are editable so you can add or subtract lessons from texts in the series that you have added to your "shelf" (limit ten texts). You can also add attachments to a student lesson and then email a lesson to a student. The ability to

email lessons might prove valuable as it allows students to work from one computer while the parent or teacher accesses the teacher's manual from another computer. For lessons that allow students to type directly on the computer, you can save the completed lessons as PDF files or print them out. (The program also offers you the option of subscribing to an Adobe service that will transform PDF files into Word documents which should be easier to edit if you should wish to do so.)

The second option, at www.k12digitaltexts.com, provides immediate downloads of complete subject area courses by grade level, for \$12.95 per course or \$39.95 for grade level packages that contain eight digital books—textbooks for language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies plus teacher editions of each of the four texts. You may install texts on a personal computing device or a server for one classroom. Students can still access content from a computer or tablet without printing out the texts, but online access is not required after downloading unless a lesson directs a student to do online research.

Whichever option you choose, some additional resources are needed from time to time. For example in the eighth grade language arts course, there is a lesson on Thomas Nast, a famous cartoonist of the nineteenth century. Part of the lesson directs students to find and study present day political cartoons and comics. In another lesson, students need to access *Honi M'agel*, a Jewish folktale, on the internet. Science lessons require resources for experiments and activities. Math might require pennies or other manipulatives in the early grades.

Even though students can enter some answers into the computer, this is not a computer-based curriculum like *Switched on Schoolhouse* where students type in all responses which are then graded by the software. Some worksheets will need to be printed out in advance.

Students create notebooks for some subjects such as spelling and writing as well as a

Grammar Ring and a Vocabulary Ring where they collect rules and definitions they have written on index cards. High school students learn note taking skills and apply them across the curriculum. Students learn to integrate knowledge and skills through projects such as creating brochures, PowerPoint™ presentations, and research reports.

Language arts courses integrate all age-appropriate language arts skills—reading, literature, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, handwriting, and composition. It is expected that children have some familiarity with the alphabet prior to kindergarten; they should recognize at least some of the letters. Kindergarten teaches sounds and letters, beginning reading, writing, spelling, and printing along with other facets of language arts typically taught in kindergarten. Reading instruction is phonics-based, but it includes the introduction of many sight words. For reading material, Complete Curriculum's own *Progressive Readers* are used in kindergarten through third grade, while classic literature is included within the student manuals in the upper grades. Language arts lessons often revolve around the literary selections. Students begin to create a journal in first grade. They continue to learn all forms of composition, applying those skills within language arts and across the curriculum.

Math follows a standard scope and sequence at each grade level. Simple manipulatives and visual illustrations are used to teach concepts in the early grades—e.g., lima beans are used in first grade to learn simple addition, and number cards and strips are used in second grade. Cumulative reviews help students retain skills learned in previous lessons. For high school, Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry are available, and other courses are still in the works.

The science program is inquiry-based. Lessons begin by raising questions while students do observations and experiments. Students record and analyze data according to the scientific method even in kindergarten, albeit at a very

simple level. However, the Biology course for tenth grade has a rather limited amount of lab activity incorporated into some lessons. This is an area you will need to watch to ensure that science lab courses meet requirements of the college a student wishes to attend. I did not find health included within the science curriculum, yet that is a requirement in most states that you will have to cover in some other fashion.

Social studies courses cover history, geography, civics/government, and economics, with emphasis varying from grade to grade. All of these texts reflect a typical secular outlook as you might find in other texts used in government schools.

Kindergarten and first grade teach very introductory geography and history as well as community, citizenship, and character. Second grade continues with these themes, adding state history as students create a brochure-style mini-book on their own state. Third and fourth grade texts both present U.S. history, geography, and economics. The third grade text includes coverage of Native Americans. Fifth grade presents a history of the U.S. while sixth grade broadens to history of the Americas. The history of the Eastern Hemisphere is studied in seventh grade. Eighth graders study U.S. history again, this time from colonization through the Reconstruction. Ninth grade continues through modern history. Semester-long civics/government and economics courses are offered for tenth grade level. Then eleventh graders study world history and geography.

Throughout the social studies courses there are frequently challenging questions to consider, and students are often directed to read or research topics and present contrasting views. This is especially true for junior and senior high courses.

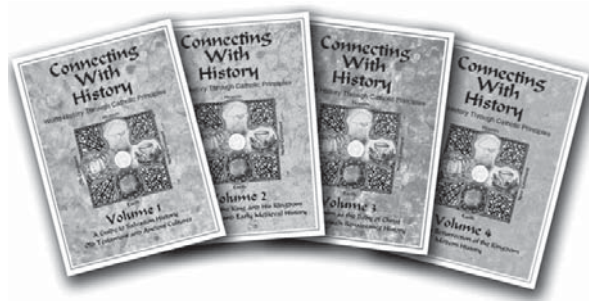
The quality of the writing in the social studies courses varies from text to text. Some texts seem to be collections of information while others have more of a story-telling

feel—probably the result of different authors.

Complete Curriculum does not oversee student work or issue diplomas or report cards. However, for families looking for an inexpensive, secular curriculum, this is a real bargain.

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Connecting with History



RC History
PO Box 73
Andover, MN 55304
877-895-6627
email: Sonya@rchistory.com
www.rchistory.com

Volume 1 - print - \$30, *Volume 2* - print - \$45, *Volume 3* - print - \$40, *Volume 4A* and *Volume 4B* - see review

Connecting With History (CWH) is definitely one of my favorite options for Catholic families. It is a unit study designed for teaching children in kindergarten through twelfth grade together, but it charts out lesson plans so that you can teach each child at his or her own level. It uses a classical education approach, focusing on the humanities and using real books with lots of reading and writing. I also appreciate that CWH follows a historical chronology.

In addition to complete coverage of history, CWH lessons can provide a major part of your geography and language arts curriculum. Grammar and composition skills are not taught, but there is plenty of practice in the application of grammar and composition skills along with plenty of reading and development of critical reading skills. While CWH is based on a Catholic worldview, it is not a complete

religion program. It will help children become very familiar with scripture, Bible history, and Church history, and many activities are related to religion. But it does not attempt systematic coverage of topics such as the Mass and sacraments.

The first three of a series of five volumes are available at this time, and the fourth and fifth volumes are being released in sections with some sections available in 2014 and others coming in 2015. CWH volumes are bound with a plastic spiral so that they will lie flat or you may purchase three-hole-punched pages to insert into your own binder. Each volume functions as an outline and teacher manual rather than a text, although *Volumes 2* and *3* have added some text elements not present in the first volume.

CWH uses a six step model for teaching that is explained at the beginning of *Volume 1*. Those beginning with *Volume 2* really need the information and forms from the first volume, so the teaching guide from *Volume 1* is available as a free download for those who purchase *Volumes 2* or *3*.

I will describe *Volume 1* then point out differences in the subsequent volumes.

Volume 1: Old Testament and Ancient Cultures

by Sonya Romens and Andrea Chen

Volume 1 consists of an introductory unit that takes one week to complete and ten thematic units that will take three to six weeks each to complete. The entire course can take from one to two years to complete depending upon which books you read and which activities you do.

For each unit, there are about eight to ten pages that provide background reading suggestions for parents. About a half dozen resources are listed at the beginning of the book, and parents are free to choose which ones they wish to use. CWH is structured around the time periods of *The Great Adventure: A Journey through the Bible* by Jeff Cavins. Even though

it is optional, you should try to use either *The Great Adventure* or the teen version titled *T3: The Teen Timeline*. Both studies are available in your choice of DVDs or audio CD presentations with a study guide and timeline. They do a marvelous job of presenting the story of salvation history and familiarizing the audience with the layout of the Bible.

Other resources such as *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible* and *You Can Understand the Bible* provide parents with foundational knowledge that will make it easier to lead discussions and answer children's questions. (At the beginning of each unit, specific page numbers are given for each suggested background resource.) Catechism references are also provided for parent preparation. While background reading is recommended, it is not a requirement. Parents can learn alongside their children as the family explores the books and resources together.

Parent information at the beginning of each unit also has discussion prompts, an overview, notebook activities, and exploration charts.

Discussion prompts are a lengthy list of questions that should be used to spark discussion and stimulate interest. The overview gives brief background information. You will probably want to pre-read this, then paraphrase ideas at a level your children can understand.

Notebook activities help children create their own notebooks that will include vocabulary words, timelines, maps, charts, and written assignments. Some copywork material is included in the book—primarily scripture passages and poetry. This material should also be used for memory work.

Exploration charts break down specific assignments for beginning (K-3), grammar (4-6), dialectic (7-9), and rhetoric (10-12) levels. Reading assignments are divided into three categories: core texts, basic reading, and additional literature. Most essential is the reading from core books. Each of the four levels requires from one to three core books. For

example, the grammar level requires *Bible for Young Catholics* and Usborne's *Ancient World*, while the rhetoric level requires a Bible, *You Can Understand the Bible*, *Genesis: The Book of Origins*, and *Exodus: Road to Freedom*. Basic reading assignments are from other books that expand the study as well as from Scott Hahn's *Salvation History* audio CD series (for rhetoric students). Examples of other books used along with CWH *Volume 1* are *Old Testament Days: An Activity Guide*, *Tut's Mummy Lost and Found*, *Science in Ancient Greece*, *Famous Men of Greece*, *Alexander the Great*, *Greek Lives* (by Plutarch), and *Mythology*. This is just a sampling of the many titles used! Additional literature options appropriate for each level are provided for each topical unit. Page or chapter assignments from these books are listed for each unit unless the entire book is to be read.

There is now also an optional CWH *Companion Reader* for *Volume 1* (\$16.95). It can take the place of a former recommendation, *The Old World's Gifts to the New*, but it offers more than that. The CWH *Companion Reader* is a collection of short stories and articles from out-of-print sources that includes historical narratives from authors such as Dorothy Mills and Charlotte Yonge, Greek mythology, fables, stories that illustrate spiritual principles, and Bible stories. The readings vary greatly in length as well as reading level, but most will work well for read alouds for all ages. Readings correlate directly with lessons although they are not yet incorporated into the lesson plans.

At the back of CWH *Volume 1* are eight forms that are used either for teacher planning or student reporting. Optional downloadable files of Ancient History Timeline Cards (114 cards for \$16.95) and Illustrated Report pages (\$7.95) are available for CWH *Volume 1*. These are real time savers, and they are likely to be more visually appealing than something you create on your own. Nevertheless, you (or your children) can create your own timeline pages or a larger timeline for your wall, and

children may write reports on the computer or use another format.

Volume 2: The Arrival of the King and His Kingdom

by Sonya Romens

CWH *Volume 2* covers the New Testament era and the beginnings of Christianity up to A.D. 1066. It is hefty than *Volume 1* because of some significant additions. Built into this volume are quite a few discussion guides for the novels recommended for various levels of the program. The discussion guides (which have been used by permission from Hillside Education) include vocabulary lists, discussion questions, activities, and projects.

In addition to the discussion guides, one of the most significant improvements is that the project and writing ideas have been expanded, both in number as well as with far more explanations and suggestions.

Some core resources from *Volume 1* are also used with *Volume 2*. Among them are the Bible (in a version appropriate for each child), *Ancient World*, *Bible History*, *You Can Understand the Bible*, *Usborne Time Travelers*, and *Roman Lives* (by Plutarch). Keep in mind that you will be using only those core books required for the level at which each child will be working.

Among additional core books required for CWH *Volume 2* are *Famous Men of the Middle Ages*, *Roman Britain*, *Augustus Caesar's World*, and *57 Stories of Saints*. You will also need to select a core history text. Titles for the various levels are: *Founders of Freedom* (beginning level), *The World's Story* (grammar level), either *The Old World and America* or *Light to the Nations* (logic level), and *History of the Church* from the Didache series (rhetoric level).

CWH offers choices of core books since some of the excellent newer options (e.g., the Didache series and Catholic Schools Textbook Project history texts) are much more expensive than some older resources. Many books from *Volume 2* are also used with the third volume,

so keep that in mind as you decide which books to buy.

As with CWH *Volume 1*, many other titles are on the list of basic books. Just a few examples are: *How to be a Roman Soldier*, *City, Famous Men of the Middle Ages*, *Pompeii: Buried Alive*, *The Great Heresies*, and *Augustus Caesar's World*.

There are only seven units in *Volume 2*, but they will each take longer to complete than those in *Volume 1*. Downloadable files for Illustrated Report Pages (\$9.95) and Timeline Cards (\$10.95) are also available for *Volume 2*.

Volume 3: World History Through Catholic Principles

by Sonya Romens

This volume covers the 11th through 17th centuries of world history, reserving United States history for *Volumes 4A* and *4B*. There are eight units that should take from three to four weeks each to complete. *Volume 3* focuses more on Western civilization, the source of our Christian culture. It takes side trips to other cultures, primarily through stories of explorers and saints.

Core books for this volume for the beginner level are *Founders of Freedom*, *Once Upon a Time Saints* and *More Once Upon a Time Saints*. For the grammar level students use *The Old World and America*. Logic level students read *57 Stories of Saints* and *Seven Lies About Catholic History*, plus your choice of either *The Old World and America* or *Light to the Nations*. The rhetoric level uses *One Hundred Saints*, the *New Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*, *Seven Lies About Catholic History*, and *The History of the Church: A Complete Course* (from the Didache series).

Volume 4A: American History and Volume 4B: Modern World

Volume 4 will be published in two parts in two separate books, so these are the fourth and fifth volumes of the series. CWH *Volume 4A: American History*, covering Columbus through the American Revolution, is currently being

released in groups of units in 2014, and *Volume 4B: Modern World* should be out in 2015. While *American History* easily adapts over all grade levels, *Modern World* should probably be saved for students at grammar level or higher. Use only *American History* with beginners the first time you use this course. Among core books used at different levels with CWH *Volume 4A: American History* are *How Our Nation Began*, *From Sea to Shining Sea*, *Keys to American History*, *Lands of Hope and Promise*, and *American Saints*. Although the final list of books for *Modern World* is not yet available, *Light to the Nations Vol. II* will be one of the core books.

Summary

Each volume is likely to take most of a school year, depending upon how many of the suggestions you use. Younger students will almost certainly spend less time than older on both reading and projects. Some of the activities require extensive research or are projects that will take a while to complete. For those unable to use all of the recommended resources, CWH has put together “Economy Packages” that include the most essential books.

Connecting With History might require a significant amount of teacher preparation and presentation time, especially with younger students. However, the methodology is excellent if you have the time to implement it. The narrower you keep the study, the fewer resources you will need and the less preparation time it will require. However, you are likely to best meet the needs of your children and their various learning styles by using some of the more time-consuming projects and assignments.

The publisher’s website features articles and sample pages from CWH. They also sell almost all of the resources required for CWH.

RC History has been developing resources for CWH co-op groups. *Building Your Connecting With History Co-op* covers all of the nuts and bolts for starting a co-op. *Co-op Lesson Plans for Volume 1* provides lesson plans, plus

overviews, discussion prompts, and notebook-
ing ideas for each unit. *Co-op Lesson Plan*
books for the other units should follow

Purchasers of the program also gain free
access to online updates and additional
resources that will enhance the program.

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Easy Peasy

by Lee Giles

All in One Homeschool

www.allinonehomeschool.com

Easy Peasy is a free online homeschool cur-
riculum for preschool through tenth grade,
generously shared by a homeschooling mom
named Lee Giles. More is added to the curricu-
lum as she completes additional grade levels
and gets the time to post lesson plans. It is well
on its way to eventually being a college prep
program covering all of the way through high
school. The methodology is an eclectic mix of
traditional and "Charlotte Mason" methods
with lapbooking and online resources. It uses
real books, picture studies, copy work, and
narration techniques, but it also has activity
sheets and incorporates other online courses
that are more traditionally designed. (I placed
"Charlotte Mason" in quotes because there
was no purposeful intent to employ Charlotte
Mason methods even though some of the
methods such as narration and picture studies
look like Charlotte Mason.)

All of the resources you need are linked
online. You will need to print out pages for
some activities, but basic requirements other
than a computer with an internet connection
are paper, pencils, scissors, glue, crayons or
colored pencils.

"Getting Ready" levels 1 and 2 are complete
readiness courses for preschool and kinder-
garten levels. Daily lesson plans include links
to everything you need to teach math, read-
ing, and language arts. Reading readiness and
beginning reading and writing get a lot of
attention at these levels.

Giles' approach to reading is a little unusual
and worth mentioning. She describes it:

"Phonics is a tool for reading words you don't
recognize. I teach my children the letter names
and sounds. Then I teach them to read by sight
words. Then I teach them phonics. Phonics is
simple at that point because they can already
read. All of this takes two years. I do this before
they start 'school' so that they can do 'school'
more independently and more effectively"
(<http://allinonehomeschool.com/about/>).

She draws heavily on the phonics presenta-
tion of *Phonics Pathways* in the first few years
for the phonics. However, because she also
teaches sight reading, she expects that children
should be able to read *McGuffey's First Reader*
as they start first grade.

After kindergarten level, you can either
select a grade level program that includes
math, reading, and language arts in the lesson
plans or you can select all courses individually.

Until recently, English courses in Easy Peasy
included reading, spelling, vocabulary, gram-
mar, and composition, but these have now been
separated into separate reading and language
arts courses to allow for greater customization.

The lesson plans include instructions within
each lesson plan (with questions and answers
if appropriate). For example, students look at
a picture then tell what they see in the man-
ner of a Charlotte Mason picture study. Math
questions and answers are likewise included
directly in the lesson plans at younger levels.
Older students often have literature compre-
hension or grammar questions. The intent at
all levels is that students will work through the
lesson plans themselves, with or without assis-
tance depending upon their age level.

Note that Easy Peasy arranges middle school
math lessons for grades five through seven in
three Steps that are equivalent to grade levels.
Step 1 uses quite a bit of material from Khan
Academy while Steps 2 and 3 use material
from many other sites. Easy Peasy has links to
specific lesson material for each day with clear

instructions as to where to go and what to do. These websites provide practice problems and some quizzes for middle school math. Students completing the middle school math Steps should then be ready for Algebra 1.

In addition to math and language arts lessons, "Programs of Study" round out the curriculum with history, science, Bible study, music, art, computer, and critical thinking. Designed for the entire family to study the same topics together, the Programs of Study listed on the website indicate four "Years" of core themes. Year 1 covers biology, ancient through medieval history, the gospel of Matthew and the historical books of the Bible. Year 2 covers early American history and animals, and for Bible, students study the Gospel of Mark, the Acts of the Apostles, and many of the epistles. In Year 3, students study earth science, geography, world cultures, and world history (between the Middle Ages and modern times) plus the biblical books of Job, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs, and Luke. Year 4 covers physics and chemistry (elementary level) and twentieth century history, plus the gospel of John and the prophets for Bible study. These four core themes will be repeated at high school level.

If you select the grade level program for any of grades one through eight, you immediately see the daily lesson plans for math and language arts (including reading and literature). Within those lesson plans are links to assignments in the Programs of Study. You click on which year you are using to go straight to the assignments for history, Bible, science, music, art, computer, or critical thinking for that day's lesson. (I can just imagine the work it took to create all of these links!) Separate Programs of Study are provided for grades one through four and grades five through eight so that assignments are more age appropriate. If a student is working with seventh grade level math and language arts and clicks on the Year 1 assignment, the upper level Program of Study assignment will be displayed. Likewise, a younger

student would get connected to a lower level Program of Study assignment. Remember that you can always select individual courses rather than a program.

The elective course material (music, art, computer, and thinking) for elementary grades is supplemental—much less than a complete course in any one of those subjects for one year. Computer learning covers basic operations and the use of various programs and applications at the elementary level. "Thinking" (as Giles labels it) primarily consists of links to logic games. In addition to the core curricula, there are links to review activities and games for the different subjects. Introductory Spanish is included in the lesson plans for grades six and seven. Those who want to introduce a different language can use other links provided to find alternative lesson material. Links to sites for foreign languages include options for both younger and older learners. Eighth grade lesson plans include Spanish 1 lessons that can be used for high school credit.

Questions are generally in the lesson plans rather than on the activity sheets. Answers are often printed in white; highlighting with a browser makes them appear. Some answers are on password-protected pages. Also, many of the links serve as drill and practice sites. There are no tests that I could find unless they appear in a linked site. Every forty days, children are told to give parents things to add to their portfolio, so parents build a physical record of student work rather than a list of grades from tests. Sometimes a lesson plan will tell the student to take a screen shot of a completed activity that should be put into the portfolio. Of course parents are welcome to grade student work as they go. A daily progress chart provided as a PDF file is a simple chart with one small box for each day—essentially room to check off that a day's lesson was completed.

Real books are built into the curriculum with recommendations mostly coming from the Robinson (www.robinsoncurriculum.com) and

Ambleside (www.amblesideonline.org) curricula. Required books are available online.

Giles rarely interjects her own text into the lesson plans for history and science. However, Year 1 history and science both begin with one of these rare interjections as she explains a Christian (young earth) view of early man and of creation and the age of the earth. Year 3's Earth Science course also supports a literal interpretation of scripture and a young earth. The curriculum is Christian, but non-Christians might still use it and skip the Bible lessons since the Christian perspective is generally lacking in most internet links.

Students who are independent readers should be able to do much of their work independently, but not all. Younger students will, of course, need much more parental assistance. Even so, this program is very easy for the parent and student to use. It could be great for a family with a number of children as long as you have enough computers or tablets with internet connections. (Note that some websites use Adobe Flash and won't run on tablets.)

Giles has also created a separate site for high school level at www.allinonehighschool.com. There are enough courses for about two years of study and then some, but the course selection is limited. While Giles has created some of the high school lessons, Easy Peasy fans have contributed others. High school options are continually expanding.

Summary

The entire Easy Peasy website is created on a blog platform and it's quite impressive. While it isn't a full-service program with record keeping and personal assistance, you should be able get help with your questions in a number of ways. First, read the FAQs on the website. Then you might try the very-active Facebook Easy Peasy group. If neither of those avenues is productive, you can contact Giles via email. Think of Easy Peasy more as a co-op where everyone helps each other.

Sure the curriculum is sometimes uneven,

depending upon which sources are being used, but you can always supplement or adapt as needed. Remember that the entire curriculum is free! If you find the Easy Peasy curriculum useful, donation links are on the website.

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Five in a Row

by Jane Claire Lambert

Five in a Row Publishing

(Sold only through Rainbow Resource Center)

www.fiveinarow.com

www.rainbowresource.com

\$35-\$75 each



Five in a Row (FIAR) volumes have been written for preschool through eighth grade levels. They are best known for use in the early grades since that was the target of the original FIAR volumes. These study guides are available for

three levels—*Before Five in a Row*, *Five in a Row*, and *Beyond Five in a Row*—but level designations are very flexible. This is a less intense approach to unit study than others in this chapter that are designed to cover all grade levels and numerous subject areas.

Let's first look at the original FIAR volumes written for children ages four through eight. The first three volumes available in this series follow the same format. For each volume, author Jane Claire Lambert has selected a number of outstanding books for children and built a "mini" unit study around each one. *Volume 1* has 19 units, *Volume 2* has 21 units, and *Volume 3* has 15.

Each unit study should take one week, with more or less time spent each day depending upon which lesson elements you choose to use. While there are no biblical references in the these volumes, *FIAR* teaches positive character

qualities such as forgiveness, compassion, and honesty that tie easily to scripture. Likewise, the selected stories are not overtly Christian, but reflect Godly principles. For those who want more explicit Christian connections, a separate *Five in a Row Bible Supplement* (\$35) contains 175 Bible lessons relating to the 55 studies in *Volumes 1* through 3.

While *Volume 4* is very similar to the first three volumes, its 15 units will likely take up to two weeks each to complete. Also, Christian content is built directly into the lessons. Laminated story disks and FIAR cookbooks lessons also come with the guide. All of this makes *Volume 4* more self-contained and more expensive than *Volumes 1* through 3.

Examples of selected books for these four volumes are *The Story About Ping*, *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel*, *Katy and the Big Snow*, *Wee Gillis*, *Make Way for Ducklings*, *All Those Secrets of the World*, and *Gramma's Walk*. You will need to purchase or borrow the required storybooks for each volume. However, Rainbow Resource Center sells packages of these books if you prefer to buy them all at once.

Each story is to be read aloud every day for one week (five days). Lessons derived from the story have activities for language arts, math, science, art, and social studies—the term loosely used to cover character qualities and relationships in addition to geography, history, and cultures.

There are numerous hands-on activities and projects, although much of each detailed lesson plan is presented as “talk about this” type activities. An example is the story disk for each unit. Story disks are to be cut out and laminated, then used by students to locate where stories take place on a world map. (These story disks are also available as a ready-to-use set covering the first three volumes, printed in color and laminated - \$20 for the set of 55.)

You can choose to select only one subject area per day or select a variety of activities from among the subject areas. Activities range

from those appropriate for non-writers and non-readers to those for children who have mastered these skills. Thus, you can use the lessons to meet the academic needs of preschoolers up through about third grade level.

FIAR is not intended to be a complete curriculum for math and language arts. It does not teach phonics, writing, or math in any sequential progression. In fact, you are encouraged to use stories in whatever order you please. (A calendar linking stories to calendar events suggests a possible progression you might follow.) For four- and five-year olds, the material might be more than adequate to meet their learning needs. For six- and seven-year-old children, the instruction in social studies, science, and art is likely to be much better than that in traditional textbooks, so you might want to add only basic phonics and math, and possibly other language skill development for the oldest children. Coverage might be light for eight-year olds, in which case you can still use FIAR as a supplement.

An index lists what is covered under each subject area, sometimes broken down further under subheadings. This helps you if you have specific goals of your own. A reproducible planning sheet helps you with weekly lesson plans. Instructions for activities are quite detailed. Lambert includes valuable tips on questions to ask your children to prompt discussions. *Five in a Row* is very user-friendly, especially for the inexperienced homeschooler.

Other FIAR volumes are available for older and younger children. Those with preschoolers might want to use *Before Five in a Row*. This volume was developed for children ages two through four. Plenty of activities center around 23 picture books. The format is similar to that of the volumes described above.

Those with older children—approximately grades three through eight—should check out *Beyond Five in a Row*. These three volumes were authored by Becky Jane Lambert, daughter of the original series author, Jane Lambert.

These are excellent, one-semester courses. Four "chapter books" for each volume are the foundation for each unit study. For example, *Volume 1* includes *The Boxcar Children*, *Thomas Edison: Young Inventor*, *Homer Price*, and *Betsy Ross: Designer of Our Flag*. Subject areas covered include literature, some language arts, history, composition, science, and fine arts.

Lessons are set up so that you read a chapter from the book, then work through your choice of the suggested activities. These vary greatly from day to day.

Quite a bit of historical and scientific information is included within each *Beyond Five in a Row* guide, but you need to use outside resources for additional research. Many such resources are suggested in the lessons. Lessons often include internet activities where students research particular websites on topics related to the studies.

About half of the lessons include an essay question; you will need to tailor requirements on these to suit the age of each student. Occasional "Career Paths" sections help students consider career possibilities and offer suggestions for further research or experience in the field. Timelines are recommended as a means of helping students understand chronological relationships between people and events. Numerous hands-on activities are included: art projects, cooking, science experiments, learning sign language, etc.

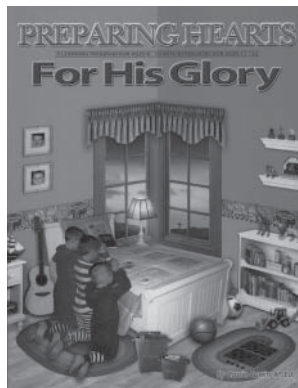
A list of all topics covered is located at the back of each book; this will help you for both planning and tracking your accomplishments.

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Heart of Dakota

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See the publisher's website for package prices

The Heart of Dakota program is a comprehensive, Charlotte Mason oriented curriculum in 13 volumes that can be used for preschool through high school. Many of the courses can be extended to cover older students by using additional resources; schedules



for those resources are in an appendix in the main book. Titles and grade levels covered are:

- *Little Hands to Heaven*, ages 2-5
- *Little Hearts for His Glory*, ages 5-7
- *Beyond Little Hearts for His Glory*, ages 6-8
- *Bigger Hearts for His Glory*, ages 7-9 (extending to ages 10-11)
- *Preparing Hearts for His Glory*, ages 8-10 (extending to ages 11-12)
- *Hearts for Him Through Time: Creation to Christ*, ages 9-11 (extending to ages 12-13)
- *Hearts for Him Through Time: Resurrection to Reformation*, ages 10-12 (extending to ages 13-14)
- *Hearts for Him Through Time: Revival to Revolution*, ages 11-13 (extending to ages 14-15)
- *Hearts for Him Through Time: Missions to Modern Marvels*, ages 12-14 (extending to ages 15-16)
- *Hearts for Him Through High School: World Geography*, ages 13-15 (extending to ages 16-18)
- *Hearts for Him Through High School: World History*, ages 14-16 (extending to ages 17-18)

Two additional volumes are planned that will cover the rest of high school.

The courses are biblically based from a Protestant point of view. While this is obvious in the bible lessons, it also underlies history, science, and other subjects.

Each volume is a one-year curriculum,

divided into 33 to 35 units, each of which will take one week to complete. The large book for each course is your primary resource. It lays out daily lesson plans that really cover everything that you need for that level! Subject areas covered and the amount of emphasis upon each vary from volume to volume. Instructions for learning activities are written out in each manual.

While *some* of the activities at lower levels for math and grammar direct you in the use of other resources, at upper levels *most* of math and grammar is learned through other resources. Read-aloud assignments also rely upon other books.

In every volume, each daily lesson plan is divided into two parts: Learning the Basics and Learning through History. Each subject area is presented in a box with between nine and twelve boxes per daily lesson plan. This makes it very easy to see what needs to be done for each area. Lessons begin with history each day. The Learning through History parts of the lesson on the left-hand page are designed like a unit study. Daily assignments for history tell you which pages to read in the history book or Bible storybook (or your own Bible) and the key idea upon which to focus. That key idea is also incorporated in Bible, art, thinking skills, science, or some of the other lessons for that day. Learning the Basics activities on the right-hand page don't necessarily relate to the theme, but they cover language arts, math, and other needed subjects. For all subject areas, specific pages (tracks in the case of audio CDs) are assigned in each day's lesson plans for the other required resources. This is a huge time saver.

The four *Hearts for Him Through Time* volumes (upper elementary levels) have sets of student notebook pages. These are printed in full color and are not reproducible, so a set will be needed for each student.

Beginning with *Bigger Hearts*, extension resources and activities are listed so that you

can accommodate older learners and teach more than one child the same subject matter at least part of the time. Reading schedules are included in an appendix in each volume rather than within the lessons.

Author Carrie Austin says that completing all of the activities should take about 1½ hours a day for *Little Hearts*, 2 to 2½ hours per day for *Beyond Little Hearts*, and about 3½ hours per day for *Bigger Hearts*. It becomes much more difficult to predict time requirements for upper level volumes since students do more independent work and you will be making a number of choices depending upon the needs of each student. Although the assumption is that you will complete all subject areas each day, you will find that skipping a subject now and then won't cause lasting harm, particularly in the first three volumes.

Science experiments and activities are included in all volumes, and you are referred to other books for additional science reading at each level. Science notebooking assignments are added beginning with *Bigger Hearts*, while recording data and observations with lab work are added at upper levels. High school science courses include options for hands-on lab work. In the elementary grades, science focuses on fewer topics per year than we typically find in textbooks, but science lessons do a great job of covering those topics interestingly and in-depth with plenty of observation and experimentation.

For the youngest levels, hands-on math activities are given in the manuals, then assignments are made from *Singapore Math* books at the appropriate level. Upper elementary through junior high levels drop the hands-on activities for math but continue to provide *Singapore Math* schedules. Math assignments are very specific with alternative page assignments at the back of the book for the different levels of *Singapore Math* books that you might be using. (You can substitute another math program if you prefer.)

Little Hands to Heaven

Little Hands to Heaven serves as a preschool program teaching letters, sounds, numbers, pre-reading and pre-math skills, music, art, and Bible, all with lots of physical movement and hands-on activity.

Little Hearts for His Glory

In *Little Hearts for His Glory*, the subjects and skills covered are history, Bible, story time, science, phonics, math, art, dramatic play, music, thinking skills, and both fine and gross motor skills. History readings come from the Christian Liberty Press (CLP) books *History for Little Pilgrims* and *History Stories for Children* as well as a Bible storybook. Children learn a great deal of Bible history and U.S. history with brief introductions to a few other people and events.

Minimal instruction is given for phonics within *Little Hearts*. Instead, suggestions are made for the number of pages or lessons per day to complete in either *Reading Made Easy* or *The Reading Lesson*. You may also use another phonics program of your choice.

Appendices in *Little Hearts* include a list of optional literature supplements for each of the 34 units and a “Rhymes in Motion” section with rhyming songs that incorporate large muscle movements. Math specifies assignments made from either *Essentials Kindergarten Math A & B* or *Primary Mathematics 1A & 1B* (both from Singapore Math). Among the other resources that you need are some storybooks, Rod and Staff preschool workbooks, either *Italic Handwriting* or *A Reason for Handwriting*, and the appropriate Christian Liberty Press science text for kindergarten, first or second grade.

Beyond Little Hearts

Beyond Little Hearts covers history, Bible, devotions, geography, timeline, art, science, poetry from classic poets, narration lessons, copywork, grammar lessons, spelling, daily literature study with read alouds, math, and music. The overall plan is very similar to *Little*

Hearts, but the level of difficulty and time required for each subject are greater.

Required history resources include three CLP titles with an early American history theme. “Poetry and Rhymes” appendices in both this and the *Bigger Hearts* volumes present one poem for each unit.

Beyond Little Hearts offers reading plan options depending upon whether a child is a beginning, emerging, or independent reader. For beginners, either *Reading Made Easy* or *The Reading Lesson* is recommended. For emerging readers, there is a substantial appendix with a very detailed, annotated list of books that gradually increase in difficulty, plus a schedule suggesting exactly which pages to read on which days. For independent readers, you are directed to use *Drawn into the Heart of Reading*. Spelling lists (two for each unit) are found at the back of the book along with an annotated bibliography of storytime read-aloud books that correlate with each unit. Copywork and beginning grammar are also included within language arts coverage.

Bigger Hearts for His Glory

Bigger Hearts for His Glory again advances in difficulty and skill levels as well as in time required for lessons. While each day’s lesson is still presented on two pages, there are now ten boxes per day with a smaller font size used to fit more information. *Bigger Hearts* covers history, biblical character trait study, history notebooking, timeline activities, art, geography, math activities, hymns, English (with a Rod and Staff text), spelling and dictation, vocabulary, and classic poetry. It has literature study plans for read alouds. For science, students learn from real books and experiments, responding with narrations and the creation of a science notebook. Options for teaching cursive handwriting are included.

The study of American history continues up through the 1970s using more of a biographical approach.

As with *Beyond Little Hearts*, there is a

detailed schedule of reading for emerging readers that gradually increases in difficulty. For independent readers you are directed to use *Drawn into the Heart of Reading: Level 2/3*. Other resources are referenced, but they are not absolutely essential.

Dictation passages, spelling lists, and suggested read-aloud titles are found in the appendices. The read alouds are much more than supplemental bedtime stories. These are carefully correlated with the rest of the program to cover different genres of literature and to teach story elements, character traits, and narration.

Preparing Hearts for His Glory

Preparing Hearts for His Glory adds beginning research skills and guided written narrations. For Bible, students study and memorize the Psalms with the aid of musical selections from a CD. History and geography stretch from creation to the end of the twentieth century using *A Child's History of the World* along with other resources. Science studies correspond loosely with history studies. For example, study of the stars correlates with reading about the Magi as well as with study of ancient civilizations where astronomy played an important role. For science, student read biographies of Columbus, da Vinci, and Einstein. Students are expected to do more independent study at this level than at younger levels. Reflecting increased emphasis on academics, *Preparing Hearts for His Glory* has weekly science experiments with notebooking, questions, and narration activities.

Hearts for Him Through Time: Creation to Christ

Hearts for Him Through Time: Creation to Christ follows the same layout, expanding student research skills and building independent reading and self-study into lessons for all students. Self-study assignments include reading, listening to audio CDs, written assignments, projects, timeline activities, copywork, map work, drawing, and more. Science continues with weekly experiments and notebooking

while adding written lab sheets that help students comprehend the scientific process. Science addresses living things with *Exploring Creation with Zoology 3*, *Exploring the History of Medicine*, *Plant Life in Field and Garden*, and other resources. *Creation to Christ* covers both ancient and biblical history using resources such as *Genesis: Finding Our Roots*, *The Story of the Ancient World*, *Ancient Rome: Streams of History*, and *A Child's Geography Vol. II*.

Hearts for Him Through Time:

Resurrection to Reformation

Hearts for Him Through Time: Resurrection to Reformation continues to move students toward more independent learning. This level also turns attention toward becoming a Godly young man or woman with a biblical Christian worldview. To that end, it leads students in a study of Philippians along with either *Boyhood and Beyond* or *Beautiful Girlhood*. History study uses a distinctly Christian approach to cover the period from the Resurrection through the Reformation. Earth science is the theme for science studies with different options available depending upon which books have been used in previous years.

Hearts for Him Through Time:

Revival to Revolution

Hearts for Him Through Time: Revival to Revolution begins with the mid-1700s and continues through the 1900s. While it covers some world history, U.S. and church history dominate. Optional study of the 50 states is included. Science highlights inventors and physical science, and an advanced option for science is offered. Some of the key resources are *George Washington's World*, *The Story of the Great Republic*, *The Growth of the British Empire*, *Who Is God? And Can I Really Know Him?*, *What in the World? Vol. 3*, *The Story of Inventions*, and *Four American Inventors*.

Hearts for Him Through Time:

Missions to Modern Marvels

Hearts for Him Through Time: Missions to Modern Marvels covers the 1890s through

modern times. In this volume, U.S. history is interwoven with world history along with stories of Christian heroes and modern missions. A President Study and an optional Individual State Study are included. Science topics focus on an introduction to chemistry as well as on creation versus evolution from a Christian viewpoint. Additional math options with schedules are provided for students who have already completed *Primary Mathematics's* sixth level.

**Hearts for Him Through High School:
World Geography**

World geography replaces the history strand in this high school level course, but its chronological study of geography inevitably includes quite a bit of history. The course is designed to provide up to 6½ credits: 1 credit each for English, Math, World Geography, and Science; 1 credit for Bible; and ½ credit each for World Religion and Cultures, Logic, and Foreign Language. Science uses *Integrated Physics and Chemistry* (Paradigm) with an optional lab manual and kit. Three options for Algebra I resources are suggested. Foreign language credit is earned if students use the optional *Getting Started with Spanish*.

**Hearts for Him Through High School:
World History**

Students can earn up to seven high school credits with this course. Lesson plans for four days per week cover Old Testament Bible survey, world history, English (literature, composition, and grammar), biology with lab, and geometry for a full credit each. Health and Spanish coverage provide ½ credit each, and fine arts lessons might earn from ½ credit to a full credit.

Summary

I like the way Carrie Austin has combined elements of unit study, living books, and textbooks in a format that makes it very easy for the parent or teacher to know exactly what to do each day. Art and math lessons might take a little more preparation time than other

subjects, but other than that, lesson prep time is very minimal. The variety of learning methods should appeal to children of various learning styles.

While courses follow a historical chronology, you can begin at any level. For each course, you can purchase the main lesson plan book by itself and gather the other resources on your own, or you might want to purchase one of the economy, basic, extension, or deluxe packages. Package options become increasingly complex as you move up to higher grade levels. See the publisher's website for all of the options.

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My Father's World

by Marie Hazell and the MFW Staff

My Father's World

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basic packages for K-8 range from \$129 to \$299, deluxe packages for K-8 range from \$216 to \$394

My Father's World (MFW) offers complete or almost complete grade-level programs for preschool through twelfth grade. MFW embodies methodologies from unit study, Charlotte Mason, and classical approaches with a strong biblical base (Protestant) and missionary emphasis throughout all levels. Each program centers around a single guide and uses a mixture of real books and hands-on activities along with a few textbooks. Basic or deluxe packages are available for each level. Basic packages provide essential elements. Deluxe packages include additional resources for art, music, read aloud, etc. A Bible (not included) is required for every level.

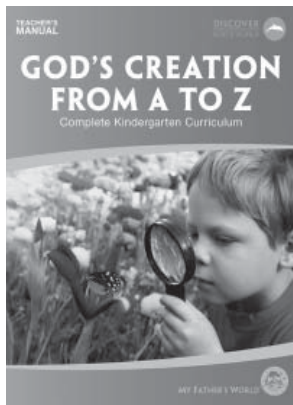
MFW courses are clearly structured with easy-to-understand instructions. Lesson preparation time will be required primarily for gathering necessary materials, so planning ahead is

essential.

MFW also sells many of the recommended books which might be helpful for those without easy access to a library. Interestingly, MFW has been able to keep a few of the core resource books in print by working out agreements with the original publishers for MFW to publish their own editions. These often are edited regarding issues such as evolution to make them more appropriate for MFW's audience.

Samples of each level are available on the publisher's website. Because of space limitations, my review of their preschool program is only on my website, and I include only a brief summary of the high school courses.

God's Creation from A to Z: Complete Kindergarten Curriculum



kindergartners who are already reading.) Many activities in the book—especially those not targeting beginning number and letter skills—easily adapt for use with younger or older children.

Charlotte Mason's influence is strong with the incorporation of real books and hands-on learning throughout the program. Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's book about Mason's methodology, *For the Children's Sake*, is referred to a number of times in the kindergarten guide and is included in the deluxe package.

The introductory unit, which should take about ten days to complete, covers creation and introduces the names of the letters of the alphabet. The next 26 units (centered around themes such as the sun, leaves, or water)

integrate lessons on sounds of the letters and beginning blending (short-vowel words only) with the unit themes. All learning is multi-sensory, combining worksheets, oral work, listening, movable alphabet, flashcards, and lots of hands-on activities.

For example, Unit 11 teaches about insects, emphasizing the biblical concept of working hard (diligence). Ants, bees, and ladybugs are used as examples. Students learn the "A-a-Apple" song, and they learn the /i/ sound for insect. You are to read aloud about insects from any appropriate book—nine possible titles are suggested. Children either set up the ant farm from the deluxe kit or assist you in following the instructions for creating your own ant farm so they can watch insects at work.

Many learning activities use textured letters (these come in the basic package), tactile activities (e.g., finger jello cut into letter shapes, pancakes formed as letters), and verbal responses.

Simple science experiments, craft projects, and literature are built into the lessons.

Day six in each unit features a "book time" for reading a real book and engaging in related activities plus an "outdoor time" activity. Math is often integrated in lessons; for example, sorting leaves by color and size or cutting an apple in half. Skills covered include shapes, comparing and sequencing, measuring, calendar, money, graphs, fractions, time, counting, writing numbers, and an introduction to addition and subtraction.

Lessons should take 60 to 90 minutes a day, and there are sufficient lessons here for a full school year. Lessons for each unit are presented in a two-page grid so you can quickly get an overview of what you will be doing. Additional notes follow for each day, but there is minimal teacher manual information that you need to read before jumping into the lessons.

A variety of pages are provided in the large packet of Kindergarten Student Sheets—cut-and-paste activities, teaching charts, game

cards, short-vowel song cards, monthly calendars, math activities, and patterns for badges.

The basic program includes a beautiful full-color set of A to Z Alphabet Flashcards. In addition to the textured letter set mentioned above, you need access to children's fiction and non-fiction books. Extensive, annotated lists of recommended books should make it easy to find suitable books at your local library.

To make things easier, MFW offers the deluxe package that includes the basic program (with alphabet cards and A-Z Textured Letters), Butterfly Garden, an ant farm, an inflatable globe, *Say Hello to Classical Music* CD, Cuisenaire Rods, *Cuisenaire Rods Alphabet Book*, and the books *What Really Happened to the Dinosaurs?* and *For the Children's Sake*. These items and a few others are also offered individually on the publisher's website. A separate, optional Kindergarten Literature Collection includes a set of classic picture books for "book time" reading.

Some inexpensive art supplies such as clay, watercolor paints, and paintbrushes will be required; a few more such as tempera paints and colored pencils are optional. You will also need an extra set of Kindergarten Student Sheets for each additional student.

Learning God's Story: Complete First Grade Curriculum

This first grade program very quickly reviews letters and sounds then introduces short-vowel words. All basic phonics concepts are presented this year. Spelling and writing both receive much more emphasis this year than in kindergarten. In keeping with author Marie Hazell's incorporation of Charlotte Mason's ideas for teaching science using real books and activities, science in the first grade program relies heavily upon three Usborne books—*Things Outdoors*, *Science With Water*, and *Science With Plants*. Hands-on math activities plus math resources from the First Grade Basic Package, including a colorful supplementary math workbook, provide a developmentally-appropriate

foundation in math principles.

The First Grade Basic Package includes the teacher's manual, student workbook, student sheets (which include timeline figures), *Bible Notebook*, *Bible Reader*, three Usborne science books, a devotions book, a math workbook, math flashcards, and math manipulatives.

This course builds a very strong familiarity with the Bible since it uses chronological Bible readings as well as the *Bible Reader and the Bible Notebook*. Children learn memory verses and complete written work in relation to their Bible lessons.

Minimal lesson preparation is required. Daily lesson plans provide detailed instruction and are easy to follow. Some cut-and-paste activities are used from time to time, and there are numerous optional projects such as a celebration of the Jewish feast of Purim.

Children are asked to draw in many of the lessons, and Hazell suggests using the book *Drawing with Children* for developing drawing skills. The First Grade Deluxe Package includes that book along with *Honey for a Child's Heart*, *Enjoying Art Together*, and *Peter and the Wolf* CD—in addition to all items in the basic package.

Adventures in U.S. History (2nd or 3rd Grade)

NOTE: This program is designed for a second or third grader who is an oldest child. Families with older siblings should instead purchase one of the 2nd-8th programs so that all students are working on the same topics.

Adventures in U.S. History provides complete curriculum for Bible, history, geography, science, art, and music, with United States history being the primary theme for the year. There is some language arts instruction, but it is not comprehensive. Math is not included. You need to add your own math and language arts resources. MFW recommends *Primary Mathematics* (Singapore Math), MFW's *Language Lessons for Today*, and *Spelling by Sound and Structure* (Rod and Staff). Study

of a foreign language is recommended but not required.

Students do increasing amounts of reading and writing at this level. Each student will need two three-ring binders—one for U.S. history and geography, the second for all other subjects.

Moderately detailed lesson plans are provided for each day. You need minimal prep work before teaching the program: gathering or buying general school supplies and art supplies for *I Can Do All Things*, gathering library books, planning nature walks, and reading the first sections of the teacher's manual.

You may purchase either the basic or deluxe package. The basic package includes the teacher's manual, a two-sided U.S./world map, student sheets (which also include state sheets/cards/stickers), *Patriotic Songs of the U.S.A.* CD, and books such as *NIV Discoverer's Bible for Young Readers*, *The Story of the U.S.*, *American Pioneers and Patriots*, *North American Indians*, *The Fourth of July Story*, *First Encyclopedia of Science*, *Science with Air*, and *Birds, Nests, and Eggs*.

The deluxe package includes all of the above plus an art program, science and fine art resources, and seven additional read-aloud books.

At the back of the teacher's manual are pages of still more book and video recommendations (annotated with short descriptions) that are arranged very helpfully week by week so you can easily browse through possibilities for alternatives or additions to the curriculum.

2nd - 8th Grade Multi-Age Curriculum

While the preceding programs all have narrower age or grade level designations, the next sequence in the MFW curriculum consists of five volumes, all of which can be used for students in grades two through eight. Ideally, you would use them in sequence, no matter at what grade level you begin. You might complete all five volumes in grades two through six then repeat the first two volumes at a more

advanced level for seventh and eighth grades.

The first year of the five-year cycle is dedicated to concentrated study of geography and cultures in *Exploring Countries and Cultures*. The next four volumes follow a chronological order:

- *Creation to the Greeks*
- *Rome to the Reformation*
- *Exploration to 1850* (U.S./World History)
- *1850 to Modern Times* (U.S./World History)

As with the other MFW volumes, these five levels use real books and lots of hands-on activities to cover Bible, social studies, science, art, and music.

You might consider these as unit studies although study in all subjects is not as tightly linked to unit themes as in other unit studies. For example, music study might be about a composer from the time period studied in history, or students might study Greek and Latin word roots while working through the volumes that include study of the Greek and Roman empires. However, textbooks and other resources are also incorporated to cover specific topics that might not fit with the main themes. For example, children learn the music of Bach, Vivaldi, and Handel during their study of *Creation to the Greeks*.

Language arts are covered with your choice of other resources, although children will be working on some language arts activities within the curriculum itself. MFW suggests resources such as *Spelling Power*, *Writing Strands*, *Language Lessons for Today*, and *Intermediate Language Lessons* for language arts.

Math is not included in these volumes, although *Primary Mathematics* (Singapore Math) is recommended. *Rosetta Stone* is MFW's preferred resource for the study of a foreign language. Seventh and eighth graders also need to add an appropriate science course.

Teacher's manuals feature daily lesson plans with additional notes and explanations alongside each week's chart. Charts show specific pages and activities within the core resources.

Some of the books included in the schedules are not included in the basic packages; generally these are read-aloud books that you might find at the library. However, all resources listed in the schedule charts *are* included in MFW's deluxe packages. Along with extra read alouds, deluxe packages for this group of courses always include resources for the fine arts and sometimes resources for science.

Student sheets included with each year's package are pages for creating a timeline, plus many others for activities such as mapwork, crafts, and written work. As with *Adventures in My Father's World*, students will need to maintain two three-ring binders for their work for each volume of this course.

Exploring Countries and Cultures



As the title suggests, this volume teaches about other countries and cultures. It is selective rather than comprehensive in coverage, an approach entirely suitable for a young audience. While all continents are vis-

ited, only a few representative countries are actually studied. Protestant missionary biographies, stories from *Hero Tales* (heroes of Protestantism), and information from *Window on the World* (missionary efforts and status worldwide) are assigned for reading within the lesson plans, often coordinating with the country being studied that week. For example, the biography of Gladys Aylward, missionary to China, begins during the study of China (and continues through study of Japan).

Of course other resources are also used along with *Exploring Countries and Cultures*. The basic package includes the teacher's manual, Parent/Teacher Supplement, and student sheets. There are also other items such as an imitation passport, *God Speaks Numanggang*, *Hero*

Tales, *Window on the World*, *Children's Atlas of God's World*, *Maps and Globes*, *Geography from A to Z*, *Properties of Ecosystems*, *Living World Encyclopedia* (Usborne), and *Global Art*. In this volume, there is also a list of optional recommended books to enrich topics addressed within each week's lesson.

Seventh and eighth graders have additional coursework scheduled in the lesson plans. You will need to purchase the *7th-8th Grade Supplement* if you are teaching older students.

Creation to the Greeks

MFW strongly recommends that children complete *Exploring Countries and Cultures* before beginning this volume so that they have foundational knowledge of countries and geographic terms that will be used in *Creation to the Greeks*.

The outline for this study follows the Old Testament, beginning with Creation and continuing through the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile. Students also learn about ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Babylonian kingdom, early North American cultures, Assyria, Greece, India (including a brief study of Hinduism and Buddhism), early Russians, the Phoenicians, the Persian empire, and Alexander the Great. *Celebrating Biblical Feasts* is used to incorporate study and celebration of the Old Testament biblical feasts.

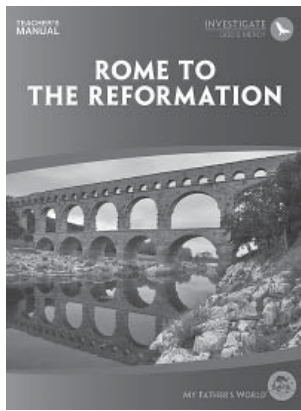
Some of the core books, such as *Streams of Civilization Vol. 1*, are significantly more challenging than those used for *Exploring Countries*. The lesson plans help you navigate through the resources, specifying some readings for all ages and others only for older students.

Examples of resources in the basic package are *Journey through the Bible*, *Ancient World*, *The Trojan Horse: How the Greeks Won the War*, *Genesis for Kids*, *Dinosaurs of Eden*, *Pyramids*, *Archimedes and the Door of Science*, and *English from the Roots Up*.

This volume also includes a list of optional recommended books to enrich topics addressed within each week's lesson.

Rome to the Reformation

The layout and methodology for this volume is essentially the same as for *Creation to the Greeks*. This volume again includes many pages of optional book and video recommendations for each week of study. The assumption is that you have just completed *Creation to the Greeks* and already have some of the resources used with that volume. Examples of resources in this year's basic package are *How the Bible Came to Us*, *The Roman Empire*, *Augustus Caesar's World*, *The Story of the World Vol. 2*, *Medieval World* (Usborne), *Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History*, *The Human Body for Every Kid*, *The Wonderful Way Babies Are Made*, and *Exploring Creation with Astronomy*.



The human body and astronomy are the primary science themes for this year. There is a lot of reading material included, but you will not be reading every page in every book, so it is not as overwhelming as it might seem.

Note that history coverage is not restricted to Western Civilization but includes Japan, India, Australia, and other far flung places.

Exploration to 1850, (U.S./World History)

Exploration to 1850 is appropriate for students in grades four through eight. (You will need to add the *2nd-3rd Grade Supplement* if you are teaching younger students.) *Exploration* combines both world history and early U.S. history. It uses core resources such as *The Story of the World, Volume 3* and *George Washington's World* that take a story-telling approach to history along with texts such as *Exploring American History* and *Building a City on a Hill*. The last four to six weeks of the year are used for students to write a report on their own state while learning simultaneously how to write

a research paper. Science this year is a study of plants and animals. Seventh and eighth graders should use either *Exploring Creation with General Science* or *Exploring Creation with Physical Science*. Resource recommendations for math and language arts vary by the student's grade level.

1850 to Modern Times (U.S./World History)

1850 to Modern Times continues to intermix U.S. and world history, covering events in chronological sequence, but with an underlying theme of heroic Christian virtue in response to God's call. You will need the *2nd-3rd Grade Supplement* if you are teaching a student younger than fourth grade level.

The course continues with a few books begun in *Exploration to 1850*. Science introduces students to physics and chemistry.

Among resources included in the basic package are *Tales of Persia*; *Witnesses to All the World*; *States & Capitals Songs*; *The Story of the World, Vol. 4*; *Children's Encyclopedia of American History*; *The World of Science* (MFW edition); and *100 Science Experiments*.

High School Level

My Father's World also has a four-year program for high school level that covers history, literature, language arts, Bible, economics, and government. The Bible component is particularly strong as it includes serious Bible study, apologetics, worldview, comparative religions, prayer, and Christian living. In addition, over the course of the four years, students will read quite a few books such as *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Silas Marner*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Animal Farm*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Hiding Place*.

These courses are designed for independent study under parental guidance. Weekly parent-student meetings are required to discuss and review the week's work. Parents will almost certainly need to have additional discussions about some of the reading material in addition to the weekly meeting. Grading is based primarily upon parent evaluation of the student's

written work, discussions, vocabulary quizzes, and essays with some use of traditional tests. Science, math, foreign language, and other electives are available separately from My Father's World.

Titles of the four high school courses are:

- *Ancient History and Literature*
- *World History and Literature*
- *U.S. History to 1877 with Government, American Literature, and Biblical Worldview*
- *U.S. History 1877 to the Present with Economics, English/Speech, and Bible*

See complete reviews of the high school level courses at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

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Sonlight



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Sonlight Curriculum was started by a homeschooling family that wanted to provide the best materials at a reasonable cost for families living as overseas missionaries. They based their programs on the educational philosophy of Dr. Ruth Beechick—structured, yet flexible enough to maximize real-life learning. Influenced by Charlotte Mason's ideas, they also wanted to include real books. In addition, they wanted to create a program that doesn't require too much time from busy parents.

These ideas reflected the needs of many homeschooling families, both on and off the

mission fields. As a result, Sonlight has grown to become one of the largest curriculum suppliers in the homeschool market.

Sonlight has designed comprehensive grade/age level programs with carefully selected resources. "Open and teach" instructor's guides outline lessons for each day using specific pages within the materials provided. All guides, whether for Core Packages or individual subject areas, include week-by-week lesson plans with record-keeping calendars, thorough instructions, student activity sheets, answer keys, and much more. The easy-to-use guides are one of the best and most important features of Sonlight Curriculum.

Although Sonlight does not oversee your homeschooling efforts, the Sonlight website offers a number of free resources (webinars, podcasts and more), and experienced curriculum advisors are available at no cost for one-on-one consultation.

Sonlight sells build-your-own packages (see Option 1) and complete curriculum packages that include every subject (see Option 2) for preschool through high school, but you may also purchase any of the individual items found in the Sonlight packages.

Option 1: Customizable Core Packages

Sonlight's preschool to college prep program is literature-based and integrated around historical themes. Each of the 16 available Core Packages (covering history, geography, Bible, language arts, and literature) is designated as appropriate for a range of two to five grade levels. Cores also include read-aloud books (which parents read to children) and readers (real books rather than textbooks, which children read on their own).

Read-aloud books are excellent choices that you might enjoy having in your family library, even if you weren't using Sonlight. Bible instruction uses scripture and other resources, including biographies of missionaries and Christian heroes. This is essentially a Protestant program, although the "History of

God’s Kingdom” Core presents a very even-handed study of church history and doctrinal issues comparing Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox positions.

Most Core Packages focus on an area of history, such as world, U.S., or eastern hemisphere. Core A, for example, is an introduction to world cultures. The two preschool Core themes are “Fiction, Fairy Tales, and Fun” and “Exploring God’s World.” At the upper level, Core themes are Church History, British Literature, 20th Century World History, American Government/Economics, and World History and Worldview Studies.

All Core instructor’s guides have geography and timeline activities and study guides for all history, reader and read-aloud books.

Core Packages give you the ability to customize the educational experience to fit your student’s skills, interests and goals. Sonlight will help you put together the package that meets your needs, at no additional cost.

Language Arts

In kindergarten through third grade, when reading and writing abilities vary widely, you may choose the level of the Language Arts/Readers package that best matches each child’s skill level. In upper-elementary through high school, the language arts component is integrated into each Core-level package.

Language arts material in the Core guides incorporates all of the instruction for phonics, grammar, composition, and most other language skills. I am particularly impressed with the weekly writing assignments built into the curriculum. Additional books in the packages might be for handwriting or spelling. Sonlight has created some of their own phonetic readers for the early stages of reading, but after that they use real books from other sources.

Language Arts Guides are included with the Core and refer to some of the books that come in the corresponding Core Package, so if a child needs a particular level of language arts, that might dictate which Core you choose.

Math, Science and Electives

Math and science function independent of the Core such that separate packages can be combined with your choice of a Core to customize the curriculum.

For math, Sonlight offers three or more choices for most levels. Answer keys or solution manuals are part of each program, but there are no Sonlight instructor’s guides; they are not needed.

Science packages include an instructor’s guide, an assortment of books, and supplies for experiments and activities.

Elective packages or resources are also available for critical thinking, foreign language, art, music, geography, Bible study, typing, church history, driver’s education, worldview, physical education, health and nutrition, public speaking, and computer programming.

Option 2: Full-Grade Packages

If you don’t have the time or inclination to customize a Core Package, you can order a Full-Grade Package that contains everything you need to teach one child for an entire year covering all subjects. Preschool through high school Full-Grade Packages—14 in all—are generally the most convenient way to order, and they offer the deepest Sonlight discount.

All Core Guides for Full-Grade Packages include geography and timeline activities and study guides for all history, reader and read-aloud books.

Package costs vary from \$285 for preschool to about \$900-\$1000 for high school levels.

Summary

Sonlight offers a one-year money-back guarantee, and returning Sonlight customers receive additional discounts. Though prices for the Core and Full-Grade Packages might seem to be on the upper end, note the number of books you get—no need to visit the library or search online. Also, most of the books you receive are non-consumable, so you can use them through the years with your other children, all the while building a quality library.

You can save even more by teaching multiple children with the same course material whenever practical, adding different grade levels for math and language arts.

While Sonlight's hallmark is the use of real books—literature, historical fiction, and topical fiction rather than texts, they occasionally use textbooks and workbooks such as *Saxon Math*, *Miquon Math*, *Teaching Textbooks*, *Primary Mathematics*, *All About Spelling*, Apologia science texts, and *Handwriting Without Tears*.

Sonlight emphasizes activities that have clear educational purposes, with optional hands-on activities for elementary-level Core programs. Though parent-child interaction is required at times, little time is required for lesson preparation. Some homeschooling parents report that the hardest thing is finding time to get through the many read-aloud books.

Sonlight has proven to be an excellent option for families that want something different than traditional curriculum but may lack the experience to put it together on their own.

To assess whether Sonlight is a good fit for your family (or not), read the two “27 Reasons” articles on their site at www.sonlight.com/to-buy.html and www.sonlight.com/not-to-buy.html.

I also strongly recommend reading through Sonlight's information (online catalog available at www.sonlight.com/request-catalog.html) or chatting for free with one of their curriculum advisors before determining which program, levels, or resources to use.

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Switched-On Schoolhouse and Monarch

Alpha Omega Publications

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800-622-3070

www.aophomeschooling.com

SOS or Monarch: \$99.95 per subject; SOS complete 5 subject set - \$449.95; Monarch

1-year plans: individual - \$399.95, family - \$699.95; Monarch monthly plans: individual - \$39.95, family - \$69.95



Switched-On
SCHOOLHOUSE®

monarch
Release the Wonder of Learning™

Alpha Omega Publications (AOP) first developed their *LIFEPAC* curriculum, a self-instructional learning system using a number of worktext booklets for each subject. Years later, AOP responded to the proliferation of computers and improvements in technology by using their *LIFEPAC* curriculum as the foundation for their computer-based curriculum, *Switched-On Schoolhouse* (SOS). Most recently, they created *Monarch*, an online version of SOS.

Because both programs share most features in common, I will address those first.

Both SOS and *Monarch* are available for grades three through twelve in a completely computerized format that includes full-color graphics, videos, sound, a text-to-speech option, internet excursions, and many other features.

Many parents love SOS and *Monarch* because they allow students to work independently—a tremendous help for parents with little time to oversee schoolwork. Parents only need to set up the initial program (with SOS) or sign in to their account (with *Monarch*), customize lesson plans if necessary, check student progress which can be viewed in teacher mode on the computer, and review writing assignments. Parents can also build supplemental lessons if they wish with SOS.

For both SOS and *Monarch*, individual courses for Bible, math, language arts, science, and history/geography can be purchased, or you can purchase complete grade level sets. Numerous elective courses are also available.

The programs follow the same general format for each subject. A topic is introduced then students are given pertinent vocabulary words to learn. Activities and games help students to quickly master the vocabulary words. (Vocabulary words with definitions can also be printed for practice offline.) A number of games for reinforcing concepts and material are also built into the lessons for math, geography, and vocabulary drill. However, games are a proportionately small part of the program. Students may skip these games if they wish.

Students read through each section of instructional material on the screen, then click “Show problems” at the bottom of the screen to work through comprehension activities. Questions are presented mostly in multiple-choice, sorting, and matching formats. Incorrect answers are immediately identified, and students have an opportunity to correct them, but with a limited number of attempts available in each lesson.

In all subjects other than math, these section questions allow students to scan the text material to figure out what the correct answer should be most of the time. However, sometimes students must make inferences, read maps, or interpret data to arrive at correct answers. Math programs require students to solve problems. If students miss questions, those that were answered incorrectly are presented again.

Once students have answered all questions correctly for a set number of lessons, they take a quiz. It is possible to set the program such that students cannot scan material when taking a quiz, so this is when you will really know whether or not they’ve learned anything. (Be aware that the “open book” option allows students to exit and enter the quiz as many times as they wish, allowing them to check the lesson for information they don’t know.) Some written responses are required in the exercises and quizzes. Exercises, quizzes, and tests are scored by the computer although parent or teacher

override is permitted if you choose to accept an answer as correct that the computer rejects as incorrect.

Both SOS and *Monarch* are professionally produced, and AOP continually works at improving the courses. Courses allow parents control over which lessons are to be assigned in which order, grade format, access to the internet, and how lenient or tough to be with the spelling of answers. In both SOS and *Monarch*, “At-a-Glance Assignment Indicators” highlight past-due lessons making them easy to spot, and a message center makes it easy for parents and students to send notes to each other.

Parents also set up a school calendar that allows the computer to schedule each student’s rate of progress. The computer then alerts students if they get behind schedule.

The programs move at a fairly good pace for the most part, so there’s not a lot of wasted time as there is in software that tries to offer equal part of education and entertainment. While in SOS answers are each followed by a verbal affirmation (which can be turned off if students prefer), there are no cute animations wasting time between answers and subsequent questions in either program within the coursework.

The content is non-denominationally Protestant throughout all subjects. Biblical concepts appear throughout all subjects, although less so in math than others.

The Bible programs offer solid content, including some scripture memorization. You can choose either the King James Version or the New American Standard Bible for Bible content. Biblical map identification is added to the typical questions and answers.

Language courses cover reading skills, grammar, composition, spelling, and vocabulary. Periodic writing projects stretch skills beyond the short answers students write within the lessons themselves. Book reports are included for grades three through eight.

History and geography are combined, with

map work intermixed throughout lessons. A historical timeline is available to students if they choose to click on “linked” data in their history studies. (The timeline also can be accessed from within other subjects besides history and geography.) Essays, reports, and special projects expand learning beyond the computer. Science programs also include a few experiments, essays, observations, and other non-computer activities.

More than forty-five elective courses—some for elementary grades but most for high school level—can either be added to an SOS or *Monarch* core curriculum or used on their own. Just a few examples of the electives are Spanish and French courses for elementary grades or for high school, plus Consumer Math, State History, Physical Fitness, Personal Financial Literacy, Health, GED Preparatory Math, Introduction to Information Technology, and College Planner.

Both SOS and *Monarch* now have “text-to-speech”—students highlight text they want to hear, choose from various electronic voices, and hear the passage read aloud.

SOS and *Monarch* are very sophisticated systems, so in the teacher mode they have a context-sensitive Help file as well as links to specific tutorials. In addition, free technical support is available for current subscribers to *Monarch* and for SOS users for two years after the purchase of the newest version.

With each new edition, SOS and *Monarch* continue to improve. Graphics, games, web-links, and attendance tracking and reporting as well as a template and report for creating transcripts in SOS have been among the more visible improvements. Note that you can add other courses than those in SOS or *Monarch* to the transcript and otherwise customize it so that you can create a complete transcript.

SOS and *Monarch* make life easy for parents, but they are not perfect. As I have encountered in many other computerized programs, requested answers sometimes seem highly

debatable. Teacher overrides are helpful in dealing with such situations, but that requires more immediate oversight. To reduce the number of computer-graded errors that might be debatable, SOS and *Monarch* have added additional variations of possible answers to numerous questions.

In the language program, students frequently work with reading selections, answering questions regarding the content. Unfortunately, some of the questions are too nit-picky. For example, one question asks students how many trees were in the backyard (13) in a story about family members being friendly to birds and animals. The number of trees was irrelevant unless you really want children to memorize that sort of detail when reading.

I encountered another potential issue in math courses with the presentation of addition and subtraction problems with regrouping. Given three-digit numbers, students will generally work from right to left to solve each problem, yet the cursor begins on the left, and it is a bother to get it to enter numbers in the logical order.

There are free *Monarch* math and language arts placement tests at www.aophomeschooling.com/diagnostic-tests (results apply to both SOS and *Monarch*), or you can purchase optional printed SOS placement tests for the five main subject areas.

Differences Between SOS and Monarch

SOS runs only on Windows systems. Computer equipment should be fairly current for the program to run at a decent pace, for smooth viewing of video clips, and for the use of sound. Web excursions are not essential to the curriculum, so, for students using SOS, an internet connection is not absolutely necessary. However, web links in the courses add extra interest and additional learning opportunities. Also, an internet connection allows for automatic updating of the SOS curriculum.

Monarch is web-based, accessible at any time from computers with a consistent, high-speed

internet connection. *Monarch* will run on computers with either Windows or Mac systems.

SOS offers more features than *Monarch* although these may or may not be important to you. In SOS, once you've got one student and his or her courses set up, it is easy to add additional courses and students. There is so much customization available to parents that most novices will stick with the basics until they get comfortable with the program. But once you've used it for a while, you should experiment with all of the fine-tuning features such as the ability to customize your calendar, create assignment options for students, customize subject reports, and even edit and create subjects. It is important to know that parents can zero out (reset) a lesson if a student needs to redo it completely. Parents can also print out lessons, problems, assignments, and records.

Other newer features in SOS are:

- Bible lookup tool accessible from within any subject
- Past Due Report form that lets parents know if any student assignments are late
- Enhanced assignment editor that allows you to include picture files, weblinks, and videos within customized assignments

Parents should also take time to familiarize students with the dictionary and calculator available through the "resource center" in SOS.

Monarch is not quite as sophisticated, but AOP is continually adding and improving its features. Curriculum updates to *Monarch* are able to be released in real time all year round, rather than in an annual release like SOS. For instance, *Monarch* was updated to include Osama bin Laden's demise and the switch to My Plate rather than the traditional food pyramid shortly after each event occurred. In addition, in *Monarch*, a virtual keyboard for foreign languages makes it easy for students to type the proper symbols and characters. And there's no worry with *Monarch* about backing up data since it's stored at a secure location

and is maintained for seven years after your subscription ends.

Another major difference between *Monarch* and SOS is the ownership. Customers purchase SOS for up to five students to use on one installation at a given time. Their curriculum is reusable. On the other hand, *Monarch* is available on a subscription basis by the month or the "year." One student may use a subscription for 12 months (with leeway given for up to 18 months) with a year subscription. *Monarch's* family plan accommodates up to three students, providing you with up to 50 courses (from the five core subject areas) for a year so that you can customize with course content across more than one grade level if needed.

It seems to me that the number of potential students in your family who might use the curriculum, the computer platform, and your internet connection would be the biggest factors for determining which option best suits your needs.

Summary

In spite of the computer-delivery platform, SOS and *Monarch* are not a creative approach to learning since course content must be very structured and controlled to be able to work within the computer format. Nevertheless, many parents will find that these programs make homeschooling possible for them, and some students will appreciate being able to work independently.

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Tapestry of Grace

by Marcia Somerville

Lampstand Press

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800-705-7487

www.tapestryofgrace.com

digital edition - \$170 per Year-Plan, print-only edition - \$295 per Year-Plan, both digital & print editions - \$315 per Year-Plan, individual units are \$45 each for digital

edition and \$80 each for print

Tapestry of Grace (TOG) is a unit study curriculum that covers most of the major subject areas for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Some features that make it especially appealing are:

- Christian worldview studies incorporated throughout the curriculum
- a chronological approach to history as the basic organizing theme
- a classical education approach based on the grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric stages of learning that allow all of your children to learn the same subjects at the same time but at their own level.



Subject areas covered include history, writing, literature, fine arts, geography, church history including missions, and Bible. You will need to find other resources for pho-

nic, English grammar, math, foreign languages, and science.

Like many other unit studies, while *TOG* uses many books, it also includes multi-sensory learning options to address different learning styles and interests. These range from reading, writing, and simple art projects through costumed reenactments.

TOG covers the same general topics for all students simultaneously, but instruction and activities are divided into four levels of learning reflecting the classical Trivium (with the grammar stage divided into two sections). There is purposeful overlap to address the reality that students at the same grade level might not necessarily be at the same developmental level. The divisions are: lower grammar (grades K-3), upper grammar (grades 3-6), dialectic (grades 6-9), and rhetoric (grades 9-12). If you

are unfamiliar with these terms, you should read up on classical education in books such as those I mention in the classical education section of Chapter Three or search for one of the many internet sites on the subject.

While the *TOG* volumes include *World Book Encyclopedia* information on many topics as background information for the teacher, for the most part students will read information from recommended books that you purchase or borrow for them. You will use some books over a long period of time, so you should purchase those, particularly history resources, literature anthologies, and some literary and reference books. Many others will be used for only a week or two and might be borrowed. While some titles are strongly recommended, in most cases there are a number of choices listed, which helps families with limited resources or who need flexibility. If you don't have a big budget, having easy access to a library will be a real asset if you use *TOG*.

In order to access the resource list of books needed for each volume of *TOG* (referred to as Year-Plans), you can go to their companion website at www.bookshelfcentral.com and use their search feature. Bookshelf Central provides helpful descriptions and information so that you can decide which titles you need to purchase versus those you might access at the library.

There are four Year-Plans in *TOG*, and the idea is that you will progress through each Year-Plan at one level of difficulty for each child (lower grammar, upper grammar, etc.) then begin to cycle through each Year-Plan again in the fifth year, advancing children to the next level. You can see that the youngest children might go through each Year-Plan three times. A possible alternative is to take two years to cover a Year-Plan of *TOG* if you are starting with younger children. (The flexibility of this program is one of its major assets!)

Year One: The History of Redemption covers Creation through the fall of Rome. *Year Two:*

The Medieval World to the Modern studies the time period of the medieval world through the signing of the U.S. Constitution. *Year Three: The 1800s* addresses both American and European history for that century. *Year Four: The Twentieth Century* covers world history, although U.S. history is a major component.

TOG is available in either digital editions or print editions. Whichever edition they choose, customers may print or reproduce all of the pages they wish for their family. Co-ops can reproduce pages if every family has purchased that Year-Plan of TOG. Classroom licenses are available for those co-op or class members who do not own a year-plan. (Note that digital editions can be updated for free annually. Keep in mind that digital resources cannot be resold or transferred, but the print-only versions can be.)

Lessons are presented in full color in both print and digital editions, although you might choose to print digital edition pages in black-and-white for practical reasons. Each Year-Plan in the print edition comes three-hole-punched and ready to place in your own binder.

Whether you purchase the digital or print edition, there is a hefty amount of material that might seem overwhelming. However, it is very logically organized, and there are free videos on the publisher's site that will help you understand the structure and organization.

Each Year-Plan of TOG consists of four units, with each unit covering nine weeks. Using tabbed separator pages for each week (\$12.50 per set from Lampstand Press) will make it even easier to locate things.

Overview charts work as general lesson plans. The overview charts are followed by student pages for each level that should be printed for each student. These pages include questions, activity instructions, charts to be completed, etc. Reading assignment charts for each week provide all of the reading lesson plans.

The Loom, which is accessed via either a

CD-ROM that comes with print-only editions or online for digital editions, is a crucial component of TOG. It has scheduling suggestions, sample lesson plans, planning charts, project instructions, grammar helps, high school planning information, course descriptions, a time line template, and more. While anyone can access The Loom for free online, additional helps that are part of The Loom for each Year-Plan are accessible only once you have purchased the program. These include book updates, supporting links, and corrections.

Supplements

TOG also offers a few optional items that are very helpful.

Evaluations 1 through *Evaluations 4* provide you with assessments and tests for the program, year by year. This should be a great help to busy parents. *Evaluations* for each Year-Plan are available as either downloadable files or on CD-ROMs for \$15 for each learning level or \$50 for one Year-Plan's evaluations for all learning levels.

Pop Quiz is a supplement intended to help dads participate in the learning process in a practical fashion. Audio CDs, recorded by Scott Somerville, give dads an overview of each week's studies. CDs come with cards that have questions for leading discussions. A set is available for each unit for \$15, and sets for an entire Year-Plan are \$50.

Another supplement, *Writing Aids*, is available as either a book and CD-ROM combo product or as a completely digital product. The *Writing Aids* book serves as a teacher's guide with student pages and supplements to be printed from your computer. *Writing Aids* is also a writing handbook that interfaces with all TOG volumes. This will be a one-time purchase since it will cover all genres and assignments in all four TOG Year-Plans. Purchasing *Writing Aids* as a completely digital product costs \$40, with extra cost for print or CD-ROM versions.

Yet another valuable supplement, available

on CD-ROM or as a digital download, is *Map Aids*. These are specially-designed sets of maps and map activities for each year of the program. Teacher's maps that serve as your answer keys are included. *Map Aids* are \$25 per Year-Plan.

Summary

A free, three-week TOG sample is available at the publisher's website so you can try it out before you buy—and with their digital delivery system, you can wait until you finish the first three weeks before you pay for and download the rest of your unit. The weekly topics covered by each Year-Plan and the resources used are listed on the TOG website along with other information about the curriculum.

Like most extensive unit study programs, TOG requires a significant amount of parent or teacher preparation and presentation, and large blocks of time should be dedicated over the summer to plan and prepare for each school year. Also, parents or teachers really need to familiarize themselves with the background material and discussion threads in advance of each week's lessons. Most parents and teachers will be getting a great deal of education of their own as they work through TOG!

Overall, I think TOG's use of classical education methods combined with the chronological approach helps overcome one of the weaknesses of some unit studies—that children read good books and participate in fun activities but sometimes fail to make connections between topics studied and their chronological relationships. In addition, the worldview threads provide themes for discussions (ideally, directed by parents using Socratic methods) and activities that help children make important connections and understand the significance of what they are learning. TOG comes from a Reformed Protestant viewpoint, but it respectfully tries to include Orthodox and Catholic views as it explores church history. Consequently, *Tapestry of Grace* should be easier for those of the latter religious persuasions to adapt than some other unit studies might be.

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Time4Learning

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Time4Learning (T4L) is a website for home-schoolers for preK through high school that covers math, language arts, social studies, and science. It is built around CompassLearning Odyssey®, an online, interactive



educational system that has been in existence for many years. While CompassLearning Odyssey has been used by public and private schools through other interfaces, T4L provides the interface that works for homeschoolers. T4L can also be used on mobile devices using Puffin Academy, a free educational mobile app. The Puffin Academy app provides anytime and anywhere access to T4L lessons with most internet-connected smart phones and tablets.

Students pay a monthly membership fee to access T4L lessons. The cost is \$19.95 a month for preK through eighth grade. Additional students from the same family in these grade levels are \$14.95 each per month. Discounts are available if you pay annually or semi-annually. High school students are \$30 a month for high school (four core courses) plus \$5 a month for additional high school courses such as Economics or Health. There is a discount for a younger sibling (in grades preK through eight) of a high school student but no discounts for additional high school students.

Parents have their own login where they can set up student lesson plans and assignments as well as access records of student work. Student schedules and records can be printed out.

Parents can select default grade-level courses, select particular courses, and customize lessons and assignments within courses.

T4L has students sign in to one of three levels: lower (preK through grade three), upper (grades four through eight), and high school. While T4L registers children by grade level and offers courses based on the parent-provided grade-level designation, they will set up special configurations if needed. For example, you might have a child working at third grade level in most subjects but fourth grade level for math. I was able to set up a student with some courses for the "upper" level plus a few high school courses.

While T4L concentrates on core curricula for the four main areas right now, their website says that they intend to gradually "broaden [their] product offering over time with some advanced math programs, art education, music education, foreign languages, and increased choices in the writing areas."

The design of courses varies by grade level. Graphics and teaching methods are generally age appropriate at each level, generally fast-moving with a lot of variety. However, in the lower level, it seems to me that there's a bit of wasted time. While the courses teach the necessary content, lessons are slowed by cartoons and transitions. Concepts are taught, practiced and repeated, which is an appropriate teaching strategy. However, sometimes there's too much repetition at the lower level. For example, students answer math questions, and even if they answer correctly, the answer is restated by the computer and the explanation of why the answer is correct is given. It seems to me that the child who answers correctly should be able to move on without the reteaching. The redundancy might be helpful to some students and boring to others. On the other hand, students can review prior topics or retake lessons whenever necessary—a very helpful feature.

While lower level courses vary in design from course to course and even from lesson

to lesson, upper level courses tend to follow a similar pattern. They begin with a lesson presentation by a real person, usually aided by computer graphics, images, diagrams, and white-board problem-solving. Short lesson segments are followed by a one-screen summary of key points. Then students are presented with one or more practice questions to answer. A quiz usually wraps up each lesson.

High school courses have more traditional teaching than do lower level courses since there is an actual teacher presenting some of the lesson material.

Math coverage aligns with national standards for preK through eighth grade. As the math starts to get more difficult, students will need to use paper and pencil to do some of their work offline then enter their answers on the computer. For high school, students can choose to study Algebra I or II, Geometry, Trigonometry, or Pre-Calculus.

Language arts courses includes phonics and reading skills, comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary in the lower level. They stress reading comprehension and fluency rather than phonics in the upper elementary grades and above, while also adding grammar, study of word roots, literary analysis, and critical thinking. T4L has a built in writing component called Odyssey Writer for students in third grade and above. When students click on an icon to access it, writing prompts appear, and students can then write within the program. Since the program is not able to evaluate student writing, it includes a simple scoring rubric for parents to use for grading. In the high school English courses, there are detailed scoring guides that parents can use to help them evaluate writing assignments. Writing is one of the weaker areas of the curriculum since students often need more guidance than is provided for some writing assignments. Because of this, T4L offers eight-week long, teacher-led writing courses through their "sister site" www.time4writing.com.

High school courses for language arts combine literary analysis with composition, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and communication skills. Students begin writing research papers in English I. Again, parents need to evaluate high school students' compositions.

The social studies courses cover different topics at each grade level. In the younger grades, social studies content is not intended to provide complete coverage for year-long courses. At any one grade level (except seventh), a hodgepodge of topics is covered rather than a logical progression of topics as in a chronological study. While content is a little light in the primary grades, at fifth grade level and above there seems to be plenty of content for a year-long course even though T4L has a disclaimer that says the courses do not cover all state standards. Topics remain very eclectic in fifth and sixth grade levels, but seventh grade offers a chronological study of U.S. history. You can use these levels as complete courses as long as they are covering topics your child needs to learn. There is no social studies content for eighth grade; instead, students are given access to the seventh grade course material or they might choose a high school level history course. High school students can choose from five courses: U.S. History I, U.S. History II, World History, U.S. Government/Civics, and Geography. Go to www.time4learning.com/social-study.shtml for detailed information about what is taught in each grade.

Science courses up through fifth grade are considered supplemental rather than complete courses. As with social studies, younger students are presented lessons on an assortment of topics. At sixth grade level, middle school science is presented in three complete courses that align with state standards: Earth and Space Science, Life Science, and Physical Science. These courses combine animated lessons with instructional videos, worksheets, quizzes, and tests. They include some online and offline projects for students to complete.

The "Nature of Science Supplement" that covers foundational science concepts should be used along with the first of the middle school science courses. At high school level, students can choose Biology, Earth and Space Science, Physical Science, Chemistry, or Physics.

Quizzes and tests are built into each course to assess comprehension. The program shows when students have completed activities, quizzes, and tests. T4L has an automated reporting system that tracks test and lesson scores as well as the time spent on each activity. (The latter feature might be important for those who have to log hours.) Parents can easily print weekly reports, customizing them by date, subject, or type of activity—a big help for record keeping and portfolio documentation. There are also tests that simulate standardized tests, although scores on those tests are not factored into the student's achievement in T4L.

Some of the material for preK through eighth grade seems rather easy for the designated grade level, with quizzes that students can pass with little effort. But this isn't true all of the time. For example, math lessons for middle school are probably as demanding as most textbook-based courses.

Some activities have printable worksheets. If the screen shows "Resource" under the title of the activity, you can click to access a worksheet. Worksheets are also accessible through the Parent Administration section.

T4L also has an "online playground" for students up through eighth grade and a "Game Room" for high school students. The lower level includes a timer that allows children to play these games for up to a time limit set by the parent. Playtime can be set to zero if parents don't want children playing games at all. (There is no timer for the upper level.) Games are actually ones that children will enjoy, and they might well be used as rewards to motivate children to learn.

The curriculum is secular and is tied to national and state standards, so you will

encounter some of the same issues you would with any public school curriculum such as conflicts with their treatment of evolution. For example, the middle school Life Science course has a unit on evolution that is totally one-sided in favor of evolution. A secular outlook shows up elsewhere in subtler ways, such as in one history lesson that teaches that religion arose out of societies, reflecting societal needs (rather than through divine revelation).

The T4L website has many pages with screen shots, demo lessons, course outlines, and other information that you can investigate to learn more. T4L will run on most computers with internet access, although a fast internet connection will surely be helpful. Because it uses Adobe Flash, it will not work on iPads. T4L might seem a little confusing because it is such a complex program, but there is plenty of help on the Getting Started page as well as within the courses. I could always find pertinent help somewhere when I needed it. Also, T4L provides support by phone and by email.

Time4Learning is one of the most thoroughly developed educational websites I have seen. While it is possible to use it for a substantial part of your curriculum, you will generally need to be using other resources alongside it for a complete program.

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Trail Guide to Learning

by Debbie Strayer and Linda Fowler

Geography Matters

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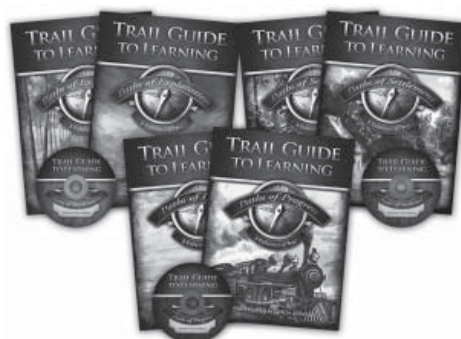
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Trail Guide to Learning is projected to be a complete program for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, although only three years of the program are available thus far with the fourth coming soon. The methodology is a combination of both Dr. Ruth Beechick's and Charlotte Mason's ideas, which overlap and

complement each other very well. It uses a unit study approach built around geography within the context of historical events. Science, art, and language arts are also covered, with language arts receiving a great deal of attention in a manner somewhat like that used in *Learning Language Arts Through Literature* (www.common sensepress.com).



The first three volumes cover American history. The second three volumes will cover world history. The plan is that a separate series will eventually be published for high school.

The first year, titled *Paths of Exploration*, targets grades three through five, although it can be easily adapted for use with second and sixth graders. The second year course, *Paths of Settlement*, aims for a slightly older audience in grades four through six. *Paths of Progress*, the third course, shifts up to grades five through seven. Supplements that will allow you to simultaneously teach children in kindergarten through second grade are also in the works. The world history courses, the first of which will be available in 2015, target middle school.

While the layout of the courses remains the same, the level of difficulty gradually increases from course to course.

Each course is divided into six units, with each unit focused on a single theme that reflects a tight integration of geography and history. This approach covers fewer topics but in greater depth than does the traditional textbook approach. The six themes in *Paths of Exploration* are Columbus, Jamestown, Pilgrims, Daniel Boone, Lewis and Clark, and

Trails West. In *Paths of Settlement*, the themes are Growing Pains, Freedom Decided, Nation Building, House Divided, Unity Restored, and Sea to Shining Sea. *Paths of Progress* covers from the Industrial Revolution into the beginning of the twentieth century with units titled: Great Leaps, Making Connections, Perseverance Pays Off, Cultivating Greatness, Success Takes Flight, and Reach for the Stars.

You can discern the natural thread of the study of U.S. history reflected in these themes. *Paths of Settlement* includes study of the individual states as well as a “home state project” which should satisfy any requirement for state study.

As mentioned at the beginning, geography is also a thematic component, so each lesson features map work and other geographical activities that tie to the books and theme of that lesson. For example, colonists coming to Jamestown started from London. So students locate London on a map, expand to tracing a map of the United Kingdom and identifying its countries, then expand further to neighboring countries across bodies of water.

For each course, lessons are laid out in detail for each day in two large hard-cover volumes (sold as a set). Each volume should take a semester to complete.

Rather than having a separate student workbook that you have to buy, the first editions have come with a Student Resources CD-ROM with PDF files—more than 3000 printable pages for three levels! Instead of the CD-ROM, new editions are including online access for the original purchaser of a course to download these pages for free. (Note that if you sell the course to someone else or share it, other users need to pay a license fee for access to these pages.)

These pages are primarily forms that students will use as they create their own notebooks, but they also include games, puzzles, and maps that students use for assignments. Student worksheets include daily check boxes at the

bottom for students to check off as they complete other assignments for which there are no student notebook pages. This helps children take on personal responsibility for completing all assignments.

I first found it curious that at the beginning of each lesson there is a boxed list of “Steps for Thinking” where you would normally find the lesson objectives. The Steps for Thinking are more abstract and general than objectives. For example, In Unit 1, Lesson 3, Part 1 in *Paths of Exploration*, the Steps are:

1. When you learn about people, it helps you learn about things.
2. Observation is a key skill needed for learning about things in our world. It is the basis for success in science.
3. The goal of reading is to gain understanding. Hopefully it is also a source of enjoyment.

The book explains that these Steps are the main ideas in the topics presented in the lessons. Parents are to introduce these “big ideas” at the beginning of each lesson, then make connections to them as they work through the various lesson activities. The Steps for Thinking are revisited at the end of the lesson, at which point children should have a better understanding and ability to discuss what they mean.

The objectives one normally finds at the beginning are located in “Lesson at a Glance” in the Appendix at the back of the book. This is actually a record-keeping chart where you can see and check off objectives as they are completed. Viewing all course objectives in one place and being able to keep track of it there certainly has its advantages, and I suspect it works better than simply having a list of objectives at the beginning of each lesson.

In the newest editions, unit summaries are included in the Appendix. These summaries provide a glimpse of what is covered for each six weeks, including materials and resources needed. New teacher sections, bookmarked on the digital files, have also been added to the

newest editions to aid in preparation. These teacher sections include Lesson at a Glance charts, challenge spelling words, vocabulary lists, and more.

Notes to the parent or teacher are in the margins of the books. These are frequently valuable tips or insights regarding teaching methods. The layout of the manuals actually makes them very easy to use. You work through each lesson, selecting your choice of activities for the appropriate levels. Some advance prep work is required to acquire books, print out student notebook pages, and obtain materials needed (shown on a list at the beginning of each week). Answer keys are provided at the end of each lesson for those questions where it is appropriate.

Copywork and dictation are important techniques used in this program. Some student pages with copywork models as well as lined space to do the copying are found on the CD-ROM or website, but most copywork is done from assigned literature. Parents should adjust the amount of copywork as needed for each child.

Student Notebook Pages are provided for word studies, dictation, drawing, writing assignments, word searches, map work, scientific observation, spelling, etc. The CD-ROM and digital download group the pages by grade level so you can print out worksheets that are appropriate for each level.

Hands-on learning methods are built into lessons as drawing assignments, games (e.g., Bingo, Newcomers Game, Mechanics Tool Kit Game), art projects, experiments, demonstrations, cooking, and organizing student-made cards. Frequent discussions are a required element of all lessons. Students create a notebook of their work that does double duty by providing a means of documenting what they have learned. In addition to creating their notebooks, students also do presentations that demonstrate what they have learned.

Instructions in the main textbooks are

written to the student such as, “Carefully read and then copy, or write as your teacher dictates....” This seems a little odd since a parent might be teaching more than one child from the same book, but it actually is quite useful as students become self-instructors. A parent or teacher can work directly from the book, telling children what to do, reading to them, and leading discussions—adapting the language as needed. As children become more independent, they can check on their next assignments and move ahead without requiring direction from parents except for those activities where it is necessary. A significant amount of course content is included within the main books.

Many assignments are marked with icons for third, fourth, or fifth grade in the first volume, for fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in the second volume, and for fifth, sixth, and seventh grades in the third. Parents or teachers will assign the appropriate level to each child or show them how to select those with their icon. For all courses presently available, there are optional Middle School Supplements (available either on CD-ROM or as downloadable files) with more-challenging assignments on the same topics. These are terrific resources for keeping a broader span of children working in the same course.

Real books are used throughout the courses. A list of required resources is at the front of the first book, divided into lists for Volume 1 and Volume 2 so you can purchase what you need a semester at a time. Examples of some of the required resources for the first volume of *Paths of Exploration* are *Meet Christopher Columbus*, *Stories of the Pilgrims*, *Profiles from History Volume 1*, *Handbook of Nature Study*, *1911 Boy Scout Handbook*, *North American Wildlife Guide*, *Eat Your Way Around the World*, and *United States History Atlas*. A similar assortment of resources is used for each of the other levels.

Students are assigned independent reading time each day and are encouraged to read something they enjoy. They keep track of

their reading in a reading log in the student notebook. Biographies are prominent among the selected resources, and there is a strong emphasis on character building through study of exemplary characters. Narration—children retelling to you in their own words what they have read or heard—is another method commonly used by *Trail Guide to Learning* that provides parents with feedback as to how well children comprehend both their own reading or books read aloud to them.

There is a good amount of both reading and writing in the program, but parents are instructed to adjust the amount and methods to suit the child. Both reading and writing are often taught in relation to the lesson theme or a meaningful context to help children understand why they need those skills. Also, these assignments are interspersed with discussion, narration, and other interactive activities to keep children engaged.

Language arts coverage is quite comprehensive including spelling, vocabulary, composition, grammar, public speaking, and reading comprehension. Some of these assignments focus on skill coverage, but as often as possible they tie to the lesson theme.

In *Paths of Exploration*, science takes a naturalist approach as children learn to observe and record nature through drawing and writing. *The North American Wildlife Guide* and *Handbook of Nature Study* are the primary science resources for this course. Art lessons are often (but not always) connected to science as children sketch what they observe. Basic drawing lessons by Barry Stebbing and Sharon Jeffus are at the back of the first book. Additional art lessons are in *Lewis and Clark Hands On*, one of the required resources for the second half of this first course.

The second course, *Paths of Settlement*, teaches earth science. *Weather: A Golden Guide* and a Rock Study Kit are used with the *Handbook of Nature Study* (also used with *Paths of Exploration*). Students do more

reading, research, and discussion—more challenging work than for the first course. During the second course students learn watercolor techniques which are then applied as they paint features of regions or states they are studying.

Science in *Paths of Progress* teaches the scientific process and broadens out to both life and physical sciences, teaching about friction, machines, tools, and anatomy. Art activities connect with other topics studied in *Paths of Progress* as students learn sculpting and model creation. Under fine arts, children also learn about musicians and different types of music, orchestras, and musical instruments, along with learning to play a recorder.

While the core guides for *Trail Guide to Learning* are not overtly Christian, they are premised on a Christian worldview and many of the required reading books are definitely Christian, usually with a Protestant outlook. Those who want to incorporate an overtly Christian worldview should purchase the *Light for the Trail Bible Study Supplement* CD-ROM for each course. In this supplement, lessons tie directly to the lesson themes of each course with suggestions for prayer and worship time, weekly memory verses, and ideas for making connections between faith and the topics being studied.

In all courses, enrichment activities are included for students who complete their work very quickly or are more advanced. These activities might reading recommended books or working on more elaborate projects.

While the student notebook is the best way to document student accomplishments, you might need or prefer more traditional assessments. The optional Assessments CD-ROM for each course might prove helpful in such situations

Optional lapbooks for all three courses are available in either print or CD-ROM versions. Lapbook activities can sometimes replace other activities. Lapbook icons are located

next to activities when this is the case.

The *Trail Guide to Learning* series is a promising solution for families seeking book-based unit study that is easy to use.

Note: Geography Matters also sells pre-printed packages of student pages if you do not want to print them yourself from the CD-ROM. They also sell packages of all of the required resources. Check their website for prices.

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TRISMS



by Linda
Thornhill
TRISMS
Curriculum
1203 S.
Delaware Place
Tulsa, OK
74104-4129
918-585-2778
www.trisms.com

Discovering the Ancient World - \$159, all other courses - \$279 each (except *Age of Revolution* - \$259 per semester or \$450 for both semesters)

TRISMS (*Time Related Integrated Studies for Mastering Skills*) differs from most unit study programs, both because it is research-based rather than tied to a particular spine or core book, and because it is designed for seventh grade through high school. The five TRISMS courses are:

- *History's Masterminds*
- *Discovering the Ancient World*
- *Expansion of Civilization*
- *Rise of Nations*
- *Age of Revolution*

History's Masterminds' target audience is grades seven and eight. It might be used for students as young as fifth grade level, but it should then be used as a two-year course. It covers the beginning of recorded history through A.D. 2012.

Discovering the Ancient World is a one-year course for grades eight or nine. It goes back to the beginning, covering pre-history through 500 B.C.

Expansion of Civilization and *Rise of Nations* are each one-year courses for high school level. The first covers 500 B.C. through A.D. 1500, while the second slightly overlaps, beginning at A.D. 1440 and continuing through 1860.

Age of Revolution might be used as either a one- or two-year high school course. It covers 1850 through 2012. Those concerned about coverage of U.S. history will be pleased to note that *Age of Revolution* focuses primarily on the United States. However, U.S. history does not receive thorough coverage in TRISMS, so you might need to supplement or use another course to meet requirements if you need a full year devoted only to U.S. history.

"Time Related," represented by the *T* and *R* in the TRISMS curriculum acronym, refers to the chronological approach of the study, which covers the history of the world from early civilizations to the present. I appreciate the chronological approach for upper levels, since most students still need to learn how events and ideas interact and influence each other over time. Biblical history plays a major role in *Discovering the Ancient World*, but biblical and religious history is also incorporated throughout the other volumes to a lesser extent. The other four volumes can fairly easily be adapted by those who prefer a more secular approach since the Bible and religion coverage is not a major focus. "Integrated" refers to the integration of language arts, writing, history, science, geography, art, music, architecture, rhetoric, philosophy, economics, and culture-studies. Writing is taught with a *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* component that you can use or not as you wish.

High school students using the program earn full course credits for history/social studies and language arts. Science studies are historical in nature, and are adequate for junior

high students if they complete all assignments at more than a superficial level. High school students might receive a credit for either a survey or general science course in all but the *Rise of Nations* and *Age of Revolution* volumes, but they will need to complete separate lab courses for other science credits.

Students might also earn partial or full credits for electives such as bible history, music or art history, critical thinking, philosophy, government, economics, or historical architecture. Any of the last four volumes might be supplemented to develop a credit for economics, but the last three volumes would likely be best for this purpose. (Suggestions for expanding the study of economics are included in each volume.) TRISMS provides detailed information on appropriate subject credits that might be given for each course.

As I mentioned, TRISMS is a research-based curriculum. For each time period or region studied, students are given questionnaire forms, each with a standard list of questions (the same questions for each time period). Each time period or unit also includes a unique worksheet that addresses that particular civilization or time period. Students use reference works, biographies, historical fiction, and nonfiction books as their primary sources of learning rather than textbooks. Similar questionnaires are used for scientists, inventions, and explorers in *History's Masterminds* and for art history, music history, and architecture in the other volumes. *Age of Revolution* uniquely presents U.S. and world history side-by-side and includes questionnaires for Major Powers, Wars, Nobel Prize Winners, and U.S. Presidents. While the questionnaires focus on specific content, other student assignments require interviews, book reports, map work, drawing, research, and lengthy compositions. On top of these assignments, students will tackle one or more in-depth projects each year.

TRISMS presents an interesting combination of both structured and discovery

learning—especially through research. The questionnaires at first glance seem highly structured, but these are really recording and accountability devices for study that might be accomplished in a number of ways. TRISMS recommends resources but doesn't restrict users to those resources. Students need not do every assignment in TRISMS, but parents or teachers can select more or fewer structured learning activities depending upon the learning style and needs of each student.

As students move up through the levels, there is definitely a gradual shift in TRISMS that reflects a classical approach to education. The first level leans more toward informational learning (grammar stage). Other volumes shift toward more challenging thinking and philosophical ideas (dialectic stage) as well as research and writing (rhetoric stage).

Students at all levels read and respond to literature, especially as they develop composition skills through activities centered around the literature. Literature readings draw from writings of the civilizations or time periods studied. Many actual readings—especially poetry and excerpts from classical literature—are included in the curriculum, although you still need to borrow or buy other resource books. (TRISMS offers resource packages at discounted prices that should appeal to those who would rather not search out their own resources.)

Other language arts activities include developing composition skills and vocabulary. Grammar receives some attention in the first volume, but not in the others. You might use another resource if a student needs additional work on grammar.

For composition, language arts assignments incorporate lessons and activities from *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* (TWSS). This makes TRISMS a great tool for applying lessons learned through TWSS, but literature and writing assignments can be completed without using it. TWSS does not normally come with TRISMS but is available from TRISMS

as a stand-alone product or in a discounted resource package.

Math is not included in any of the volumes, although some references are made to mathematical discoveries and accomplishments in history.

In each *TRISMS* volume, an overview of each unit is shown in chart form as a “Unit Plan.” Charts show events in chronological order, then correlate (in other columns) topics or events in art, music, architecture, science, and literature. A rhetoric column is added to *Expansion of Civilization* and *Age of Revolution*, and the science column is dropped from *Rise of Nations* and *Age of Revolution*. Vocabulary words, map details, “Compare Questions” for writing assignments, and other assignments that might be used for each unit are included in the unit plan charts. Expanded explanations of assignments follow under different subject area headings. There are 18 units per course, and it should take about two weeks to complete each unit for one-year courses.

While *History's Masterminds* does have daily lesson plans for middle school, the rest of the *TRISMS* courses do not specify daily assignments.

Student work output is to be put into one or more “coursebook” binders. The student package pages that come with each course might be divided into their unit sections within the binders to get set up. Other work such as drawings or compositions should also be inserted into the binders. Students will also be creating a timeline. You can make your own, purchase one from another publisher or purchase *TRISMS'* version, *It's About Time* (\$10). *It's About Time* is a spiral-bound 28-page book of lined pages to be used for recording timeline information. Each page is sectioned into seven different areas with double lines. This is useful for written information, but the lines really preclude using it for illustrations.

The five *TRISMS* courses are ultimately similar in the way they work, but they are

packaged differently. One consistent item for all courses is a large packet of student worksheets, activity pages, quizzes, and tests. Permission is given to reproduce these for family members but not for a co-op or other group class. Extra packets are sold separately for \$30 each for printed pages or \$20 each for digital downloads.

Map Keys (with blank maps, bonus maps and map answer keys) are available for all courses except *Age of Revolution* as downloads (\$24.95 each).

The other components for each course vary. *History's Masterminds* has four parts: a teacher's manual and answer key, student assignment book, student pack/test packet, and *Map Keys*. *Discovering the Ancient World*, *Expansion of Civilization*, and *Rise of Nations* each have a student manual that includes all of the literature selections plus a teacher key, a student pack (questionnaires, maps, and worksheets), and a test packet. *Age of Revolution* has four volumes: two teacher's manuals, two student books, and two student packs that include tests. (You can purchase *Age of Revolution* one semester at a time if you wish.)

Age of Revolution is about double the size of the other courses, including about twice as many work and activity sheets per unit. Each unit is also more extensive than in the other volumes. Some of this is because of the inclusion of more (and lengthier) literary works. Some space is taken up by studies of movies—at least one each of a historical movie and a literature-based movie per unit. Students also work on a 12 to 15 page research paper, producing it as a series of three research essays that they work on throughout the year. The paper's theme will be drawn from one of seven different types of “revolutions” that are studied: revolutions in economics, the arts, science, society, race, politics, and faith. This course, even more than the others, raises many philosophical and belief questions for students to consider, but it avoids promoting

particular viewpoints.

Each TRISMS course except for *Age of Revolution* includes instructions for adaptation for a wider span of grade levels, including using the high school volumes with students as young as sixth grade level. *Age of Revolution* definitely targets a high school audience with a heavy emphasis on the humanities, rhetoric, and higher level thinking skills, so it would be more difficult than the other courses to adapt.

In addition to the TRISMS components for each course, there are a number of other essential resources: an atlas, globe, world map, encyclopedia, thesaurus, dictionary, one or more three-ring notebooks, colored pencils, and coil-bound index cards (for vocabulary words). Students also need library and internet access.

Supplements

Catholic families might want to supplement any volume of TRISMS with *An Overview of Catholic History* by Katie Torrey (from TRISMS: \$14.95 print, \$7.50 download). This specialized guide adds questions, topics, timeline activities, and recommended resources for an expanded study of Catholic history.

Another TRISMS publication, *Reading through the Ages* (\$29 print or \$19.95 download), serves as a supplement alongside all of the TRISMS volumes or can be used on its own. It contains lists of briefly-annotated recommended reading books which are arranged chronologically. A key is used to indicate reading level, page count, and whether the book is historical fiction or biography.

Summary

Parents or teachers need to put some effort into planning and overseeing student work, but TRISMS offers a stimulating alternative to traditional curriculum, especially for less-than-enthusiastic students. (Bear in mind that students with poor writing skills might have trouble with the many written assignments in the program.) TRISMS might be a comfortable form of unit study for parents shifting

from traditional textbook and workbook type curricula to unit studies since it has the built-in structure and accountability tools that are lacking in many other unit studies. It might also appeal to parents who like unit studies but worry about accountability for high school students. College prep students who have completed TRISMS courses should be well prepared with the skills necessary for college level work, and they should have excellent documentation of their work in TRISMS. In addition, the curriculum is fully accredited by the North Atlantic Regional High School diploma program (www.narhs.org).

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WinterPromise

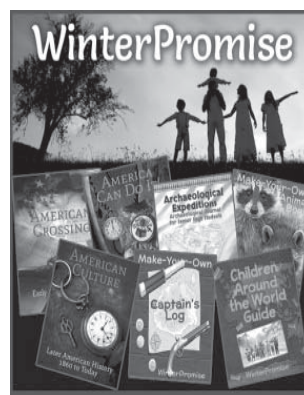
by Kaeryn Brooks

WinterPromise

802-372-9200

email: promise@gci.net

www.winterpromise.com



WinterPromise (WP) has developed a surprisingly broad curriculum for pre-school through high school levels over the past few years. It's a themed curriculum, similar to a unit study but with a few differences.

WP predominantly uses the Charlotte Mason approach to education, but much of the learning occurs around themes as in unit studies. Along with real books, WP courses use ebooks published by WinterPromise, the occasional text or workbook from another publisher, and your choice of math programs from other publishers. WP incorporates technology such as interactive computer programs, DVDs, CDs, and website links. Like unit studies, WP incorporates lots of hands-on activities and projects. It is also a multi-level program

to some extent so that you can often teach students working at more than one level from the same course.

Core Packages

Similar to Sonlight and BookShark in one way, with WP you select your core curriculum package called a “themed program,” which might be themed around either history or science. Listed below are the themed programs, a brief description when appropriate, and their grade levels. (Note: The first two programs might be used simultaneously over one or two years.)

- *Journeys of Imagination* - an introduction to children's literature (preK)
- *I'm Ready to Learn* - readiness for math, language, science, etc. (preK-K)
- *Hideaways in History* (K-1)
- *Animals and Their Worlds* - animals and science (1-4)
- *Children Around the World* - culture and geography (2-6)
- *The American Story 1* - early American history (1-3)
- *The American Story 2* - Civil War through the 20th century (2-4)
- *American Crossing* (4-7)
- *American Culture* (5-8)
- *Adventures in the Sea & Sky* - history of sea, air, and space travel that incorporates the science for each area (4-6)
- *Quest for the Ancient World* - ancient history (4-8)
- *Quest for the Middle Ages* - history and science themes (4-8)
- *Quest for the Ancient World* (9-12)
- *Quest for the Middle Ages* (9-12)
- *Quest for Royals & Revolution* - the period of exploration and colonization (9-12)
- *American History & Government in a Year* (9-12)
- (*Quest for Modern Times* will eventually be the final program in the cycle.)

After choosing your core theme package, you also select language arts and a science

curriculum—if the themed program isn't already focused primarily upon science—from coordinating packages published by WP. They also sell *Horizons Math*, the *Life of Fred* math series, and *Saxon Math*, although none of the math programs are incorporated into the rest of the curriculum as essential items.

History follows chronological themes in all of the themed guides except for *Journeys of Imagination*, *I'm Ready to Learn*, *Animals and Their Worlds*, and *Children Around the World*. Timelines are used in most of the programs to help children understand the flow of history and relationships between events.

Guidebooks

The key item in each curriculum package is a guidebook. Each guidebook provides basic instruction on how to use the materials in the package, detailed daily lesson plans, a supply list, and additional lesson plans/schedules for older students who will complete some of their work independently when appropriate. Guidebook pages are three-hole punched for insertion in a binder for use for both planning and record keeping. Simply check off assignments as completed.

Guidebooks are very easy to use. They are designed to make WP a curriculum with minimal teacher preparation work. Each guidebook directs you in the use of quite a number of books and resources. You can purchase various packages—choose print or ebook versions of guides and some of the other books, and choose either basic or more comprehensive packages. Packages do not include the adventure reading books although all of the books are available from WinterPromise by special order. Required novels and biographies are easily available through the library and other sources.

As an example, *The American Story 1* Guide and Exclusives Set for the early grades includes the guidebook and two WinterPromise exclusive items: *A New Land* (Early American stories) and *Make-Your-Own American History*

Book (for creating timeline pages). The complete set includes 18 more history-related books that are biographies or brief topical history books written for children. There are two Bible study books, four activity resource books, and seven more books on Native Americans (the focus theme). On your own you need to obtain the ten adventure reading books that tie into the historical theme—books such as *Ben and Me* and *Little House on the Prairie*. In addition, you will need timeline creation items which WP also offers, or you can use your own. You might also want the optional Early American Trades & Crafts Kit. A few of the items are consumable, so you will need extras for additional students, but most items are non-consumable.

Activity Books and Notebooks

I mentioned WinterPromise's *Make-Your-Own American History* book for *The American Story 1*. A similar *Make-Your-Own* book is included in each history-themed package. These unique publications have a variety of activity sheets for students to use for creating their own notebooks. A separate *Timelines in History* book consists of heavy cardstock pages, punched for a binder. Students use these pages to create their own timelines using figures sold by WP, Homeschool in the Woods, or another source. Notebook pages from *Make-Your-Own* books correlate with their respective courses and can be inserted between timeline pages if you so choose.

WP has started creating premiere versions of their interactive notebooks for some of their courses. I reviewed the *Make-Your-Own World Travels Diary* notebook for *Children Around the World*. This 286-page ebook is in full-color, but pages can be printed in either color or black and white for children to add to their notebooks. (A print version is available in black and white with selected color pages in the back.) *Make-Your-Own World Travels Diary* includes country maps to be colored and/or labeled; Flags and Facts pages to complete;

Native Costume pages that have children add details to drawings of costumes; Folks to Know pages and Things to See pages with a variety of drawing, writing, and arts-and-crafts activities; Culture and Traditions pages, again with a variety of activities; and Postcard pages that have illustrated postcards on which children can write (writing prompts included). Some activities are recommended for older or younger students and some for all students.

Interactive notebooks that are similar in concept are available for *Adventures in the Sea and Sky*, *Animals and Their Worlds*, and *Quest for the Ancient World Senior High*. WP will release the same premiere notebooks for both early and later American history in 2015; these can be used either with WP's curriculum or alongside other curricula.

Christian Worldview

Bible study is included in all themed programs, usually, but not always, coordinating with the program theme. Resources and perspective are Protestant. The Christian (Protestant) worldview carries through the entire WP curriculum even though some of the books used are secular. The publisher notes in the lesson plans when there might be potential problems for Christians such as evolutionary assumptions. *Children Around the World* is a good example of how the Christian worldview is incorporated. It has wonderful sections that help children understand the poverty and danger in which many children live, then it encourages children to pray for other countries and cultures.

Language Arts

WP language arts programs are comprehensive, covering phonics, readings, vocabulary, spelling, handwriting, grammar, composition, and communication, each at the appropriate levels. These programs include some workbooks like *Explode the Code*, *SpellWell*, *Wordly Wise*, and *Easy Grammar*. But they also include activity books and sets of real books to be used as readers. Reader packages are

selected to coordinate with the themed programs. Language arts programs are available for preK through high school, but only three programs for high school level are available at this time. Guidebooks for language arts have the same type of four-day lesson plan schedules that make it easy to use and coordinate all of the resources. Language arts programs for beginning readers require quite a bit of one-on-one instruction as you would expect, but once children are independent readers, the language arts programs require minimal instruction.

Science

The ten WP science programs are intended to supplement the core programs that already have varying amounts of science included. Science program titles are followed by a brief description and the appropriate grade levels.

- *The World Around Me* - introduces children to basic science topics such as nature, water, light, color, and the night sky (K-2)
- *Hoot & Chirp, Buzz & Bite* - a study of birds, plants, and bugs (1-4)
- *Dinosaur Days* - teaches about dinosaurs from a creationist perspective (2-6)
- *Foam, Stir, Fizz & Fizzle* - beginning chemistry (should be available in 2015) (2-5)
- *Rock Around the Earth* - geology and earth science (3-6)
- *Equine Science* - specializes in the study of horses (3-7)
- *Human Body and Forensics 4/6* - body systems and forensic science (4-6)
- *Jiggle, Jostle & Jolt* - introduces energy, electricity, magnetism, and heat (4-7)
- *Slimy, Grimy and Scummy No More* - conservation science (7-9)
- *Human Body and Forensics Jr/Sr* - advanced version of this course (7-12)

These programs should take only two to five hours per week to complete. All science programs include guidebooks plus a number of other books, always including some with

hands-on activities.

By now, you might be envisioning quite a stack of books for each year, and that is certainly an accurate picture of this curriculum—lots of books and lots of reading to do. But the selected books, especially for younger levels, are often colorful and appealing, and most are real books rather than texts or workbooks. Many of these books are ones you would love to have in your family library.

Scheduling and Accountability

WP is designed for a 36-week school year. Schedules are set up for four days per week. The fifth day might be used for field trips, extended activities, reading, or tackling some of the ideas in the curriculum that you don't have time for the rest of the week. It doesn't seem likely that families could actually get through all of the read-aloud books and activities that come in each package, so you will sometimes have to be selective. While there is lot of reading since this is a literature-based program, WP also incorporates plenty of hands-on and active learning activities. More hands-on and arts-and-crafts type activities are included for younger students while older students are given more research and writing projects. Older students still have plenty of hands-on work such as experiments, active investigations, and practical applications. WP has made it a bit easier to select among the numerous activities by coding them as to how easy or difficult they are and how much prep time is needed.

While preparation time is minimal aside from some of the more challenging projects, parents/teachers spend a great deal of time actually using the program with their children, especially at younger levels. Most of the books for younger students are read alouds, while only a few are read alouds at upper levels. In keeping with Charlotte Mason methods, children do narrations, create notebooks, and participate in activities with varying amounts of parental assistance.

You might have also noticed that there's no mention of tests and answer keys. While answer keys come with the *SpellWell* books used in the language arts programs and are optional for a few other workbooks, there are no tests and answer keys for the core programs. Instead, children write, narrate, and create notebooks—demonstrating their knowledge through their activities. Parents work closely with their children and can easily spot when a child does or does not understand a concept. Nevertheless, WP guides suggest using games (directions included) if you want to quiz children on retention of information as well as other methods of evaluation.

Summary

WP has gradually been writing and producing many of their own books. These coordinate much better with the themed guides

than trying to use books from other publishers. They also help create a consistent Christian worldview. In addition, since most of the WP books are published as either print or ebooks, the ebook versions present an opportunity to lower the cost of your curriculum.

The curriculum intentionally does not align with state or Common Core standards. Like most unit studies, topics are studied fewer times but at greater depth than occurs in standard textbooks. Ultimately, children are likely to cover all of the required topics, but they are also likely to retain more since learning methods are much more appealing.

The publisher's website has explanations, free sample pages, a discussion board and other information that will help you better understand the curriculum before purchasing.

CHAPTER 14

Selected Electives

After creating my initial list of Top Picks for core subjects, I discovered I already had close to 100 items before even touching electives. I could not bring myself to totally eliminate any electives, since you might get the impression that they don't matter! Some electives such as foreign language and government are required. Yet, I don't have space to give you a sampling of recommendations for all subject areas.

So I have arbitrarily included just a few electives in this final chapter. I actually consider some of these electives to be as important as core subjects, but it is up to you to decide what is most important for your children to learn. You can check my website at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com for reviews of many more electives.

Critical Thinking and Logic

Logic beat out other electives for inclusion in this chapter because I am convinced that a grasp of logic—at a minimum, what is called informal logic—is essential to a good education. If you can't think straight and then express your ideas logically, if you can't spot the shysters and the propaganda and sort through it to the truth, then your education is incomplete.

In addition, many logic books on the market are fun to use. My eldest son says that one of the best books we used in all of our homeschooling years was a small paperback titled *How to Lie with Statistics* (W.W. Norton and Company). This little gem has been reprinted numerous times since it was written in the 1950s. It will have you in stitches with some of its examples. It's a terrific way to inoculate your older teens against marketers, politicians, and media manipulation. However, it is not in my Top Picks list is because it really serves as a supplement to logic studies rather than a primary resource and because it does require “parental editing”—read it yourself first before using it with your older teens since there are sections you will probably want to skip.

I have included *The Fallacy Detective* and *The Art of Argument*, two great resources for younger and older teens respectively to introduce them to informal logic—a required course for all students if it were up to me. I fudged a little by also including The Critical Thinking Co., a publisher with hundreds of items.

For more resources for teaching logic and critical thinking, check out reviews at my website or investigate the articles, reviews, and helps at www.fallacydetective.com/articles/.

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The Critical Thinking Co.™

1991 Sherman Ave., Suite 200

North Bend, OR 97459

800-458-4849

www.criticalthinking.com

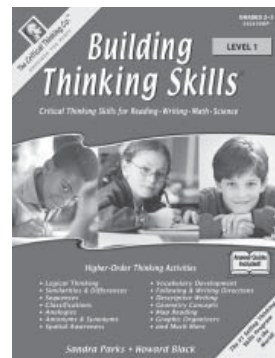
As I mentioned above, I fudged by selecting an entire product line for this Top Pick. The Critical Thinking Co. is not the only publisher of critical thinking resources, but they have what I consider to be by far the broadest and best selection. Their line includes pre-logic books for young children; books relating to different subject areas—math, language arts, science, and social studies—that appeal to children of different learning styles; books for teens that address informal and formal logic; and software programs. Most of their products are supplementary, but some such as their *Mathematical Reasoning* series might be your core curriculum. Many of their resources are self-contained workbooks (with answer keys included) or computer programs that children can use on their own. All of them are great for challenging your children to stretch their thinking skills as well as helping them learn to function in other thinking and learning modes. Most of them are very easy to use and rarely require lesson preparation.

In this review I highlight some of my favorites series as well as a critical thinking course for older students.

Building Thinking Skills® series

student books - \$29.99-\$32.99 each,
Primary teacher's manual - \$24.99

The *Building Thinking Skills* series is probably the most comprehensive resource for thinking skills for younger students. Each reproducible student book (except for *Primary*) includes an answer key. While students will be able to complete some lessons independently, others will require teacher interaction—more so with younger students. Each lesson should take about ten to twenty minutes to complete and requires minimal preparation.



The first four books in the series are written for preK through sixth grade. The books are quite large, ranging from 224 to 416 pages, increasing in size from the youngest level. (There are two additional books in the

series, both for grades seven through twelve, but I have not reviewed them.)

The first book, *Building Thinking Skills Beginning* is suggested for ages three to four. This colorful book helps children develop pre-reading and math skills, auditory processing, and logic and spatial concepts. Attribute blocks might be used along with some of the lessons, but they are not required.

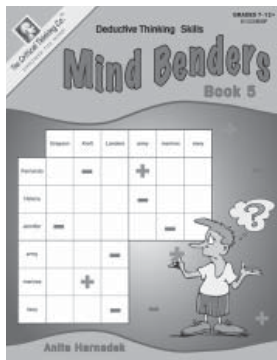
In *Building Thinking Skills Primary* for kindergarten through first grade, children deal with similarities and differences, sequences, classifications, and analogies. Visual-figural skills get a workout in these lessons, too. Attribute blocks and interlocking cubes are required for some lessons—these are used both prior to and while students complete the worksheets. *Primary* is the only book in this series that has a separate teacher's manual which you need as an answer key as well as for instructional information.

Building Thinking Skills Level 1, suggested for grades two and three, begins with visual-figural

skills then shifts to more abstract verbal work. For example, children work with figural analogies then with verbal analogies. Many of the lessons require children to analyze relationships between objects and words. Among other topics and skills addressed are deductive reasoning, classifying, describing, figural sequences, parts of a whole, spelling, vocabulary building, Venn diagrams, mental manipulation of two-dimensional objects, and sorting words into classes. This level is also available on CD-ROM.

Level 2, suggested for grades four through six, does all of the above, expands to additional types of analogies, and adds map skills and directionality, branching diagrams, “if-then” statements, overlapping classes, and more. Some activities require students to write out their answers or explanations. Activities vary in difficulty, so select those that seem most appropriate for each child. This level is also available on CD-ROM.

Mind Benders® and Crypto Mind Benders®



\$9.99-\$12.99 each

Mind Benders is a series of 32- to 48-page books. Each book is self-contained with teaching suggestions and instructions in the front and detailed solutions in the back.

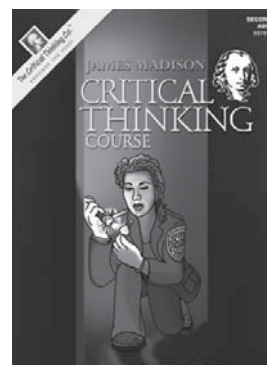
In all but the introductory *Warm Up* level, children organize clues in grids to derive logical conclusions. For example, in one lesson, students are told, “Edmund, Ida, Joanne, and Tony are two sets of twins. Tony is a month younger than Edmund. Joanne is a month older than Ida.” Students must then answer two questions, “Which pair is the younger set of twins?” and “Which pair is the older set of twins?” These activities are like detective work as students try to match clues with identities.

Books 1 through 8 cover spans of grade levels from preschool through adults! For example,

Book 1 is for preK through kindergarten, *Book 2* is for grades one and two, and *Book 8* is for grade seven through adult level. The first two levels are also available on CD-ROM for \$25.99 each for a family license—you can install the program on one computer but set up individual users for all family members. The CD-ROM version adds hints at the click of a mouse and reward games after each puzzle.

Adding another dimension to *Mind Benders'* clues and grids, the new *Crypto Mind Benders* series presents clues and information as mathematical/logical statements such as this group of three: “ $i > k > e$,” “ $m > k$,” and “ $m \neq 9$.” Students have to determine which letters (e , i , k , and m) correspond on the grid to the numbers 1, 2, 9, and 10. After solving three grids, students can use the results to solve a cryptogram at the bottom of the page. Two *Crypto Mind Benders* are available in either print or ebook versions; *Crypto Mind Benders Famous Quotations* and *Crypto Mind Benders Classic Jokes*. The solution to each cryptogram will be either a famous quotation or a classic joke, depending which book you are using. *Crypto Mind Benders* are recommended for grades three and up.

James Madison Critical Thinking Course



student worktext - \$42.99, instruction guide - \$10.99

Students in high school and beyond—even adults—might want to tackle the *James Madison Critical Thinking Course*. This huge, 534-page worktext is more challenging than *The Fallacy Detective* but it seems more approachable than most other formal logic courses. This is probably because most lessons are presented as cases being investigated by a police detective. Other situations and subject matter are also used, but almost everything is taught within

a practical context. Instruction on each new topic is relatively brief and includes examples.

The book begins with an introduction to critical thinking and continues with topics such as distinguishing between fact and opinion and hazards such as ambiguity or vagueness. At first, students spend most of their time working through exercises which are mostly multiple-choice questions—but these questions are not easy!

In the fourth chapter, students begin to analyze and construct arguments and conclusions using letters to stand in the place of statements. In the next two chapters, students frame arguments and conclusions using symbols.

From there it takes a plunge into propositional logic and categorical syllogisms, devoting about 250 pages to these topics in two very long chapters. It wraps up with a brief investigation of inductive arguments and informal fallacies.

A quiz concludes each chapter. The instruction guide is vital since it has all the answers plus explanations which will help when both student and teacher are stumped.

And Other Resources

The Critical Thinking Co. also publishes books that help develop thinking skills within various subject areas such as math, language arts, science, and history. (Reviews of *Developing Critical Thinking through Science*, *Sciencewise*, *Cranium Crackers*, and *Quick Thinks Math* can be found on my website at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.) Check out The Critical Thinking Co.'s website for more options. Sample pages are available for most books. (Note: this is a secular publisher, and you might find occasional, minor content problems.)

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The Fallacy Detective

by Nathaniel Bluedorn and Hans Bluedorn
Christian Logic
PO Box 46

Muscatine, Iowa 52761
309-537-3641
www.christianlogic.com
\$22

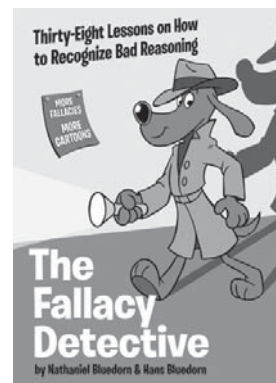
The Bluedorn family, longtime promoters of Christian classical education, encountered content problems in most critical thinking and logic resources. So the Bluedorn brothers, Nathaniel and Hans, put their heads together and came up with this excellent introduction to practical logic from their conservative Christian homeschoolers' perspective.

Subtitled *Thirty-Eight Lessons on How to Recognize Bad Reasoning*, it uses humor, historical references, and real life situations to help teens learn to think and express themselves clearly. Comic strips from *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Dilbert*, *Peanuts*, and *Nuna and Toodles* (the Bluedorn brothers' own creation) are a nice touch that was added to the second edition.

The authors often construct dialogues to illustrate errors in thinking. For example, to demonstrate a weak analogy, they use this dialogue: "Clyde: 'Our new car is a blue Ford. It has a fifteen-gallon gas tank, five cup holders, and a sun roof. It sure drives fast!' Bert: 'Hey! Our car has all of those things. I'll bet it drives fast too.'" (p. 126).

The humor and creativity makes this book fun to read.

The Fallacy Detective will likely appeal to many families for another reason: it doesn't need to be taught. Students in junior high and above can read and work through it independently. However, it might be enjoyable for both parent and student for the teen to read the lesson on his or her own, summarize the main idea to a parent, then go through the exercises out loud together. Some exercises require simple identification answers, but others might



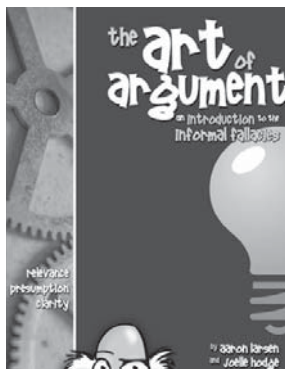
prompt some great discussion. The authors' answers are in the back of the book.

Instructions for a *Fallacy Detective Game* in which players make up their own fallacies are also at the back of the book. This would make great family fun for those with two or more teens.

You might also be interested in following *The Fallacy Detective* with *The Thinking Toolbox*, another excellent book by the same authors.

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The Art of Argument



by Aaron Larsen
and Joelle Hodge
Classical Academic
Press
3920 Market St.
Camp Hill, PA 17011
866-730-0711
www.classical
academicpress.com
student book -
\$22.95, teacher's

edition - \$24.95, DVD set - \$54.95, bundle
of all three items - \$88.95

The Art of Argument introduces students to informal fallacies, but at a slightly more challenging level than the *The Fallacy Detective*. The content and style of delivery make this most suitable for high school level, although some students in junior high might be ready for it.

This course incorporates humor with examples drawn from current events, popular culture, advertising, religion, politics, and history. The course seems to have been written for Christian students since it draws on examples familiar to and of interest to them, but that shouldn't preclude secular homeschoolers from using it.

There are loads of photos and illustrations, many of them humorous. These include many phony print advertisements created by the authors that look authentic but which embody

one or another of the fallacies. The authors also sometimes create dialogues between two students, Nate and Tiffany, and the philosopher Socrates.

The text begins with an introduction to logic then divides the rest of the text into two units. The first unit deals with fallacies of relevance (e.g., *ad hominem*, snob appeal) and the second with fallacies of presumption (e.g., begging the question) and clarity (e.g., distinction without a difference).

Lessons don't follow a consistent format, which keeps things interesting. Review questions, review exercises, worksheets, and "dialectic exercises" show up unpredictably. Some writing is required and some review exercises direct students to do research such as "Look for examples of print advertisements that make use of the *argumentum ad verecundiam*" (p. 86).

The text has a glossary at the end and a chart of the fallacies printed on the inside front and back covers. Two appendices include some extras you might want to use. One is a script for "Bill and Ted's Excellent Election," that can be read or acted out. The other is a dated but apropos short story, "Love is a Fallacy" by Max Shulman.

The course can easily be used for independent study, but it would be fun to have a group class meet once a week for discussion.

The teacher's edition has the entire student text with answers overprinted. It also has quizzes, tests and answer keys.

Busy parents might appreciate the new *Art of Argument* DVD set that includes five DVDs with 28 presentations—one for each fallacy that is taught. On the DVDs, four experienced logic teachers and a small group of students model discussions for each lesson.

You might want to follow up with two other books from Classical Academic Press, *The Argument Builder* and *The Discovery of Deduction*.

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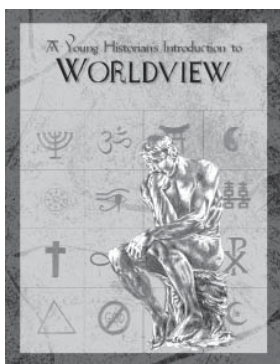
Worldview

In my opinion, logic goes hand in hand with studying worldviews. We have to teach our children to think and reason clearly before we can expect them to seriously address the big questions of life such as, "Who is Man?," "What is his purpose?," "Does God exist?," and "What happens when we die?" Answers to questions such as these inform our worldview and influence the way we think about almost everything.

While I do not review religious education courses in this book because there are so many denominational differences, I make an exception here for two worldview courses that are definitely religious. Worldview studies used to be reserved for the teen and adult years, but I've selected these two resources because they can be used with a broader age span that includes the elementary grades. Also, the first review highlights a program that should work for Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox, while the second should appeal across a broad expanse of Protestant denominations.

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A Young Historian's Introduction to Worldview



by Marcia Harris Brim
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brimwoodpress.com
www.brimwoodpress.
com

Young Historian's

Guide - \$35

A Young Historian's Introduction to Worldview might well be the most practical and creative tool for teaching the concept of worldview to students in grades five through eight. While

there are other products targeting this audience, this one is presented in only four lessons that are engagingly taught through stories, hands-on activities, and discussion.

In addition, the course is written without any particular denominational perspective, and without even an overt pitch for Christianity in general. However, the key questions raised and the general presentation gently lead toward Christianity even though the lessons open the door for discussion of worldviews other than Christianity as part of the search for truth.

While the course might work in a classroom, it really is designed for family use.

It includes an 86-page book plus a zip-lock bag with instructions and materials for a number of hands-on activities used in the course.

The first lesson begins with a brief introduction of the concept of worldview as "the lens through which people see and understand the world in which they live." To reinforce the concept of seeing through different lenses, students are directed to the computer to view a geodesic picture on the publisher's website. They complete an observation sheet viewing the geodesic picture with the naked eye, through sunglasses, and through 3-D glasses (provided in the bag).

Next, students either read or listen to the story of Lensland that demonstrates how conflicting perceptions can have significant consequences. Lensland's citizens divide into three groups: Twoeyes, Multieyes, and Thickeyes. As one might guess from their names, each group has different eyes and, consequently, views things differently. Their conflicting visual perceptions lead toward a clash that threatens the peace and tranquility of Lensland.

The lesson then transitions back to the real world using the example of two actual authors who both write about DNA. Each of their articles demonstrates how different "lenses" influence how people might interpret the same information.

The rest of the lessons follow similarly

creative formats. The second lesson teaches what all worldviews have in common—the important questions about the meaning of life and existence of God. The third lesson introduces a simple way to divide worldviews into four categories, using some very creative hands-on activities. The fourth lesson primarily uses stories and discussion to demonstrate the impact of beliefs in selected historical settings.

Discussion questions are interspersed throughout the lessons, and lessons conclude with "Table Talk: Family Discussions Facilitated by Parents." These sections review key ideas from each lesson and raise questions for family discussion. Table Talk sections might be used by the entire family even if everyone is not involved in the rest of the lesson.

I particularly like the discovery approach this course uses to lead students into worldview concepts. By raising questions and working through activities, students are led to explore their own beliefs and recognize the important questions they need to ponder.

Because younger students are particularly susceptible to the influence of teachers, it makes the most sense to use this course within the family rather than in a classroom so that there is opportunity to discuss the family's religious beliefs. Each family can then decide how far they wish to go in exploring alternative worldviews.

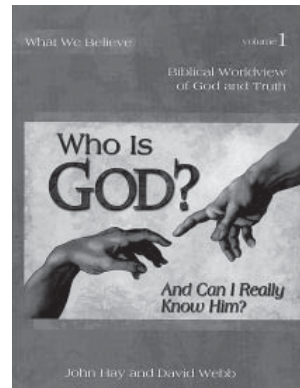
Brimwood Press also publishes a number of other items for teaching worldview. Their series of four historical novels can be used as springboards for worldview discussions. They also have published the first guide of what should eventually be a series of guides for the four novels. The guide turns study of the novel into what could well become another full-year course. You should also check out *Conversations from the Garden*, their guide for Socratic discussions for the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. Full reviews of these items are at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com/

worldview/young-historians-introduction.htm.

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What We Believe Series

by John Hay and David Webb
 Apologia Educational Ministries
 1106 Meridian Plaza, Suite 220
 Anderson, IN 46016
 888-524-4724
 email: mailbag@apologia.com
www.apologia.com



books - \$39 each,
 Notebooking
 Journal or Junior
 Notebooking
 Journal - \$24 each,
 coloring book - \$8
 each, audio books -
 \$29 each

The What We Believe series of four books helps children in the elementary grades construct a biblical Christian worldview from a Protestant perspective.

Who is God?, *Who Am I?*, *Who Is My Neighbor?*, and *What on Earth Can I Do?* are the titles of the four books. These beautiful, hardcover books feature plenty of full-color illustrations. Children will want to see the pictures even if you use the books as read alouds. The combination of stories, activities, and discussion makes what could be heady content more accessible and interesting to younger children.

The authors suggest using the books with children ages six through fourteen, although I think children beyond age twelve might find parts too young, and younger children might find some of the vocabulary and concepts difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, I recommend trying to use these with the entire family, adapting as necessary to your children's ages.

Four optional items are available as companions for each volume: a Notebooking Journal, a coloring book, a Junior Notebooking Journal,

and a full audio version of the book.

The Notebooking Journals do not duplicate material in the core books. Instead they offer note-taking pages, thought-provoking questions with space for students to write lengthy responses, puzzles, drawing activities, vocabulary words with space to write definitions, and a few other activities. The journals are great tools for engaging older students, especially those in junior high. They might work independently in their journals while you have a discussion with younger children on concepts already familiar to your junior high student.

Younger children might enjoy using the coloring books as you read aloud since the coloring pages correlate with the lessons. Junior Notebooking Journals are for ages six through nine. The Junior Notebooking Journals incorporate about one third of the pages from the coloring books plus simple crossword and word search puzzles, some fill-in-the-blank questions, scripture verses to write and memorize, suggestions for songs and books, and suggestions for hands-on activities. The Junior Notebooking Journals fill the gap between the coloring book and the journals for older students.

While it's best for family members to read aloud from the books then discuss the material, sometimes the audio versions of the books might be used for the first reading or for review. Children might even want to re-listen to some of the stories.

Each lesson in the textbooks has a number of components. First, an introduction briefly reviews previous topics then presents the "big idea" of the upcoming lesson. Following that is a list of lesson objectives.

Many of the lessons feature fictional stories about children representing various worldviews. The stories are especially helpful for making the abstract worldview ideas more concrete for younger learners. Discussion questions following the stories help children grasp the ideas as well as implications for their own

lives.

Children who can write might want to keep a notebook as they cover the lessons. Older students might maintain both a notebook and the Notebooking Journal. They should also write each lesson's vocabulary words and definitions in their notebook.

While older students might complete more work independently, I think the layout of the lessons lends itself best to family read-aloud and discussion for at least part of each lesson. The entire family can work together on the two Bible verses to memorize for each lesson.

About twice per lesson, a box titled Make a Note of It provides a list of student questions, an extended Scripture reading with a reflection question, or something similar. These are not simple comprehension questions; they are thought provoking questions to which older students should write responses in their notebooks. The questions are probably too challenging for children in the primary grades, so for them you should either simplify the questions or use them for discussion rather than for written assignments.

Lessons also include brief articles that integrate other topics such as the arts, science, and history. For example, an article on the eruption of Mount St. Helens helps children make sense of natural disasters in the context of a fallen world.

Some lessons include hands-on activities such as creating a Mobius strip or making s'mores clusters to eat. Some of these relate directly to lesson concepts, while others seem only marginally connected.

"What Should I Do?" sections teach godly character traits. Children learn appropriate responses, given what they have just learned about God and their relationship to Him. Prayers conclude the main part of each lesson.

Two final sections in the first volume develop deeper level worldview concepts and should help older children begin to develop some understanding and skill with apologetics. The

final section in the first volume and selected lessons in the other volumes show a worldview model constructed like a building that has been adapted from Summit Ministries' *Building on the Rock* curriculum. (The What We Believe series was created in partnership with Summit Ministries.) The model construction begins with the first book and is completed as you work through the other three books.

The first book, *Who Is God?: And Can I Really Know Him?* introduces foundational ideas about the existence of God, our ability to recognize truth, the nature of God, the Trinity, God as creator, the Fall, the purpose of our existence, our relationship to God, the problem of sin and separation from God, and the necessity of Jesus for salvation.

The second book, *Who Am I?: And What Am I Doing Here?* helps children understand what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. They consider what this means in regard to decision making and the use of their personal gifts and talents. Along with stories of children from other cultures and religious beliefs, this volume features a series of stories about Brandon, a young page who will eventually become a knight. It draws parallels between service to earthly kings and the King of Kings. A Worldviews in Focus story at the end of each lesson uses modern-day stories to introduce competing worldviews as they play out in the lives of people from around the world.

The third book, *Who Is My Neighbor?: And Why Does He Need Me?* helps children grasp the concept of servanthood. It teaches primarily through stories of Christian service in both ordinary life and extraordinary situations. It challenges children to consider what they ought to do on all levels—from within their families out to the broader world stage. "Encounters with Jesus" at the end of each lesson build on biblical stories of people who interacted with Jesus, fleshing out characters and creating a fuller backstory than we find in Scripture. These stories are then compared to

the actual stories in the Bible and followed by questions that help tie together the stories with concepts of servanthood.

The fourth volume, *What on Earth Can I Do?*, teaches a biblical view of stewardship—the handling of our possessions, time, and talents, as well as our care for the environment and the health of our own bodies. At the end of each lesson, "Parables of Jesus" stories are expanded versions of Bible stories that illustrate stewardship. Questions at the end of each "parable" help students grasp what Jesus has to say about stewardship. The fourth book actually seems like much of it is targeted for an older audience. I would recommend it for children no younger than fourth grade level since it deals with war, the evacuation of children from London in WWII, and other difficult subjects. Stewardship topics throughout the book also sometimes assume a familiarity with life issues such as work and finances, a familiarity that most young children do not have. While the Junior Notebooking Journal for this text provides age-appropriate activities for younger students, some of the stories and content of the main book still make the entire course more appropriate for older students.

The six-page introduction in each book explains how to use the series, although it does not fully describe the extensive teaching material available on the website. Apologia provides free, password-protected teaching resources on their website. While the teaching material is helpful, it is possible to work directly from the books without using the online teaching material at all. However, the online teaching material is especially useful if you have younger children since it provides discussion questions appropriate for them.

The ideas presented in the What We Believe series are actually quite challenging even though they are presented in a way that younger students can begin to think about them. While younger children might still find some ideas too abstract, they are likely to stay tuned

in for the stories about children and some of the activities, and they are likely to pick up at least some of the concepts.

The What We Believe series should work very well for homeschooling families. It combines the convenience of using one resource for most or all of the family with a great introduction to worldviews in a format that children are likely to enjoy.

Art and Music

I have selected only three Top Picks to represent the fine arts. The two art resources both cover art skills, art appreciation, and projects. While *Artistic Pursuits* offers a dozen courses, each designed to be completed in one year, *Feed My Sheep* is a single volume that might be used over a number of years. *Beethoven Who?* is a broad introduction to the world of music.

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Artistic Pursuits

by Brenda Ellis

Artistic Pursuits, Inc.

2626 E. 109th Avenue

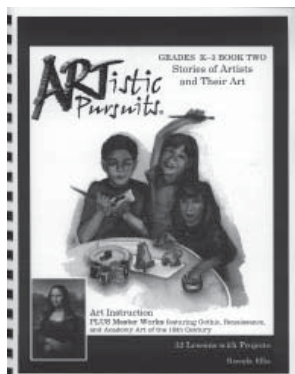
Northglenn, CO 80233

303-467-0504

email: alltheanswers@artisticpursuits.com

www.artisticpursuits.com

\$47.95 each



projects with various art media. While there is an underlying Christian worldview, it isn't overtly presented until the junior and senior high level in articles about artists and the

cultures of their times.

Written for students in preschool through twelfth grade, there are twelve books in the series. Designed to work in either homeschools or classrooms, the books are labeled for a range of grade levels, so you might even be able to use one course for most of your children. You can most easily use a younger-level book with older students since many skills and activities are challenging enough or offer scope for an older student to develop greater skill. For example, on page 49 of *Elements of Art and Composition, Grades 4-5 Book 1*, a lesson about "How to best show the subject" illustrates and discusses drawing animals at different angles. While a younger student might do a rough drawing with less detail, an older student might provide a much more detailed and complex drawing.

All books have a plastic comb-binding so they will lie flat. This is very helpful when you are trying to follow instructions while working on an art activity. Books are printed in full color with illustrated instructions and examples of student artwork. Each book has a list of required art supplies both at the beginning of the book and within each lesson. Students work with a variety of art media, shifting to more difficult art techniques at upper levels.

Each book should take about one school year to complete. The books for kindergarten through third grade each have 36 projects which works out to about one project per week. For grades four through twelve, there are 68 projects per book. Following are descriptions of the courses that are available.

The Way They SEE It, for ages three to five, differs somewhat from the other books since it has more background instruction for parents. It helps parents understand the early stages in the development of artistic perception and skills. However, it also teaches art appreciation and skills through a variety of projects and activities.

An Introduction to the Visual Arts, K-3 Book 1 has three sections: What Artists Do, What

Artists See, and Where We Find Art. The first section deals with observation, imagination, composition, and subject matter. The second section gets into line, color, shapes, and other elements of art as students study some works by the masters and other illustrations. The third section emphasizes art appreciation and history as students study topics such as cave art, Greek pottery, Byzantine mosaics, and medieval illumination. (This volume might fit particularly well alongside the study of ancient history, although it does touch on types of art up through the Middle Ages.)

Stories of Artists and Their Art, K-3 Book 2 continues the art appreciation and history emphasis of *Book 1*, picking up in the Middle Ages and continuing into the nineteenth century. Each lesson concentrates on a particular artist and one of his or her works of art.

Modern Painting and Sculpture, K-3 Book 3 continues to follow the historical timeline, covering from the nineteenth century to the present. This time, each lesson focuses on an artist or artistic movement, emphasizing positive and creative art. Children explore sculpture along with other art media.

In *Elements of Art and Composition, Grades 4-5 Book 1*, art elements and principles such as shadows, source of light, shading, texture, and balance are taught as students develop observation and application skills.

Color and Composition, Grades 4-6 Book 2 introduces students to color theory with an exploration of American art and artists. Students learn to work with colored pencils and watercolor pencils (with a brush).

Although titled the same as *Elements of Art and Composition, Grades 4-5 Book 1*, *Elements of Art and Composition, Middle School Book 1* definitely stretches students to a higher level as they work on elements and composition. For example, as they learn about balance, they also learn about asymmetry. There are some very challenging lessons such as one on how to “contain movement” within a picture and

two entire units on depth. This course might be very challenging for students with little to no prior work with various media and art techniques.

In *Color and Composition, Middle School Book 2*, students explore color, working with hard pastels and oil pastels. Artists and their works are from around the world.

With *Elements of Art and Composition, High School, Book 1* the level jumps in difficulty as students apply the elements of art to learn about balance, rhythm, depth, perspective, and proportion. Most work in this course is done with drawing pencils and charcoal.

Color and Composition, High School Book 2 teaches topics such as hue, value, balance, rhythm, intensity, and emphasis as students learn to work with various art media and study principles related to color. Watercolors are the primary media.

Two new books, *Sculpture Technique, Construct* and *Sculpture Technique, Model* are both for grades five through twelve. Students should really complete *Construct* before *Model*. The first course teaches students how to work with paper, cardboard, papier-mâché, and wire to construct their own pieces of art. In the second course, students work with putty, clay, and wool to create their own unique sculptures.

The books in this series really don't repeat themselves even though they sometimes treat the same topics. Each level approaches an element of art at a different level and with different examples and applications. There is a real synergy that builds from book to book, so it would be ideal if you could work through the entire series.

Students are exposed to many different art media over the years. While a greater variety of media are used in the *K-3 Books*, the upper level books use fewer media each year but help students develop real expertise with those selected. I also appreciate that from the *Grades 4-5 Book* and up the author has students use real art supplies most of the time rather than

tempera paints, crayons, and other media often used in schools. While preschoolers through third graders *do* use inexpensive water colors and tempera paints, they also learn to work with more sophisticated media.

Even though books are written to students, parents will need to work with students in the *K-3 Books*, reading aloud, leading discussions, explaining the instructions, demonstrating techniques, and assisting as needed. For *Grades 4-5* and *Grades 4-6 Books*, students might be able to work more independently. Even if students are able to work independently, they are likely to benefit greatly from working alongside at least one other student so that they can inspire each other and share their work.

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Feed My Sheep

by Barry Stebbing

How Great Thou ART

PO Box 48

McFarlan, NC 28102

800-982-3729

email: sales@howgreatthouart.com

www.howgreatthouart.com

\$39.95, bundle pack - \$59.95, DVDs - \$59.95



This is a combined art text and workbook for teaching drawing, color theory, art appreciation, perspective, portraiture, anatomy, lettering, painting, and more to students ages ten through adult. Older students and adults

without art experience should find this a valuable course. It contains more than 250 lessons plus a packet of 17 paint cards. (The cards are 8 1/2" x 11" in size and are a heavy, 110 lb. stock.) For many of the lessons, students need only drawing pencils, a set of colored pencils,

a kneaded eraser, a ruler, an extra-fine marker, and a sketchbook. (Most of these items come in the bundle pack.) Later lessons on painting use pure pigment paints and brushes.

Depending upon the age and ability of the student, this can be a three- to four-year curriculum using one lesson per week. One of the primary goals for the course is that students learn to draw realistic images. However, work with other media and skill development, including cartooning, are also taught. You need to select lessons that are appropriate for each student. If you purchase the bundle pack that includes the book plus a set of pure pigment paints, brushes, Prismacolor pencils, drawing pencils, and drawing pen, you will have what you need on hand whenever you choose to work with the various media.

Author Barry Stebbing's Christian perspective is evident throughout the course in Bible verses, lesson explanations, art appreciation lessons, and even the choices of examples. The book is written to the student so he or she can work independently. However, younger students will probably need some assistance. Instructions are fairly thorough so even parents with little art background should be able to help students through all of the lessons.

Art appreciation is incorporated into many of the lessons, and more focused lessons direct students to the library to locate and copy artists' works or examples from particular periods. Students also research answers to questions posed about art history, styles, artists, etc.

Overall, this is a very comprehensive course. For parents who wish to maintain academic accountability, there are occasional quizzes on art theory and appreciation with an answer key at the back of the book. This single volume offers a tremendous amount of art instruction. Since students actually work in the book, it is best to purchase one for each student. However, for parents who would rather copy the lessons for multiple children, this is allowed for in-the-home use only.

Parents short on time or who prefer that someone else does the teaching might want to purchase the set of seven *Feed My Sheep* DVDs on which Stebbing walks through every lesson in the book. In addition to covering all of the instructional information in the book, he sometimes adds extra comments. He also shows examples of student artwork for some of the lessons. The DVDs makes it very easy to understand what is expected in each lesson. Students still need the book since they work directly in the book for all except the painting activities.

How Great Thou ART also publishes two small volumes for ages eight and up that cover some content similar to that in *Feed My Sheep*. These are called the *Lamb's Book of ART, Book I* and *Book II*. For ages six to ten, check out *I Can Do All things: A Beginning Book of Drawing and Painting*, and for ages twelve and up, consider the company's flagship book titled *How Great Thou ART*.

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Beethoven Who? Family Fun with Music



Marcia Washburn
Building Tomorrow's
Generation
email: marcia@marciawashburn.com
www.marciawashburn.com
CD-ROM - \$34.99,

download - \$29.99

Beethoven Who? Family Fun with Music presents a great introductory music education for all ages, and it's not just about Beethoven. It comes as a PDF book via digital download or on a CD-ROM. You need to read the file on a device with an internet connection since the book is heavily reliant on internet links. It has loads of YouTube video links and other internet sites as well as links to other locations within the book itself. Be sure to note what

page you are on before clicking a link that takes you elsewhere in the book itself since you might have trouble finding your place again in this giant 334-page book! This isn't an issue with the internet links since those open in your browser without losing your place.

The book has an introduction and four sections: Listening to Music, Reading Music, Making Music, and Appendices.

The first section, Listening to Music, begins with a chapter titled "The Elements of Music." This chapter and chapter eight are dryer than the rest of the course. The purpose of the first chapter is to teach some basic musical vocabulary words such as *melody*, *harmony*, *rondo*, *sonata*, *concerto*, *prelude*, and *percussion*. Words are linked to definitions or examples within the book, but they are not linked to the internet. It seems to me that you would do just as well to start into chapter two with the "Getting Started" listening activities on page 30, then jump into the third chapter. The vocabulary terms come up frequently with hot links to the glossary. (Again, make sure you don't lose your place if you jump to these links.) Some terms are explained as they are used, and you won't need to go to the glossary. Probably most important is that children will be listening and watching musical performances that give them experiential ways of understanding many of the terms.

Chapters three through seven introduce students to classical music in a huge variety of formats, many of which will delight even reluctant listeners. The presentation works chronologically through musical periods from the Baroque period through the twentieth century. In these chapters about musical periods, brief biographical information leads directly into discussion of each of the composer's works. These discussions link to examples to view and hear as various techniques or musical pieces are highlighted. The text sometimes refers to specific time markers on videos to watch for particular movements or events in a

performance. This helps focus students' attention much more than just listening. The integration of the information with the experience of listening and viewing musical performances makes this a very effective way to teach music appreciation. Both parents and children will likely appreciate seeing and hearing examples immediately when they are discussed. And parents should appreciate not having to search out musical works on their own.

It is impossible with this type of project to keep all of the links current all of the time since they are controlled by others. I found some broken links as I worked through some of the lessons. But there are so many links that I didn't feel like I was missing anything critical with the occasional broken link. Parents should check out all links just before using a lesson if possible. Pre-select links you think will be most interesting to your children.

The second section, Reading Music, begins in chapter eight with a lesson on how to read music. You can skip this chapter if you are not concerned that your children learn to read music at this point. But if you choose to teach it, be sure to use the companion games and activities in chapter nine that make it much more fun to learn musical notation. Chapter ten teaches children to recognize pitch. Chapter eleven teaches rhythm, and chapter twelve teaches dynamics. Each of these chapters includes multi-sensory games and/or activities for learning. You might teach these three chapters even if you skip chapters eight and nine.

Section three, Making Music, is all about songs. First are traditional American folk songs with a list of songs with which the author believes children should become familiar. Links are included to sites with some songs and related activities as well as to *Wee Sing* that sells

CDs with many of these songs. Second, are action songs, with directions for the actions for many of the standard songs such as "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" along with the lyrics. Next is a chapter on "Love and Friendship" songs such as "Down in the Valley." The book continues with songs about animals, work songs, patriotic songs, and sacred songs. Background explanations and weblinks are occasionally included.

Chapter 21 presents creative ideas for "Sharing Your Music with Others." Examples of the ideas are presenting a music report and serving high tea while listening to Handel's "Water Music."

You can skip around in the book to some extent. In fact, on page 14, author Marcia Washburn encourages you to "mix in listening lessons from Sections I and III with the hands-on activities in Section II." She also explains on that same page that "Chapters 1 and 8 are more instructional in nature and are designed to support other chapters."

Be sure to read the introduction before starting the course, especially the section of the introduction titled "How to Use This Book." Once you've got a sense of what is included within the course, you should feel free to work through it however works best for you. For example, if you have young children, you might want to start with action and rhythm songs from the third section. If you have older children, you might want to start with the classical composers and their works. You could complete the first section in a year, working through lessons in chronological order, but other sections of the book give you so much musical material to work with that you could spend years working through various sections as you and your children learn to enjoy and make music together.

• • ● END NOTES ● • •

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2. *Ibid.*, 188.
3. *Ibid.*, 177.
4. *Ibid.*, 141.
5. *Ibid.*, 232.
6. *Ibid.*, 173.
7. Gene Edward Veith Jr. and Andrew Kern, *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America* (Washington, D.C.: Capital Research Center, 2001), p. x.
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10. "The Logger's New Math," accessed October 27, 2014; available at <http://www.oocities.org/geminilaz1/newmath.html>.

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