

believed that young children should develop powers of observation and analysis. Some lessons tie in with nature, science, geography—enough so that you will probably need to use the recommended reference book or Web sites from time to time for your child to be able to answer the questions, especially with the second volume. There is plenty of room and encouragement to adapt either volume to suit your own needs. For example, you might find that you end up sidetracking into some of the nature lessons further than originally intended, but that's the beauty of this type of learning.

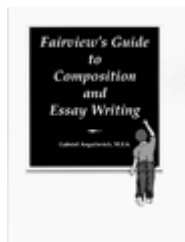
*Volume One* covers basic grammar skills necessary for beginning writing—complete sentences, types of sentences, capitalization, and punctuation. Children are actually writing compositions by the end of the book. Literary excerpts used throughout the book are from fables, mythology, and poetry.

*Volume Two* reviews sentences and moves on to paragraph writing. It also teaches nouns and their usage—common, proper, plural, and possessive; contractions; use of quotation marks; synonyms; homonyms; and letter writing. This does not reflect the typical list of state standards that would at least include more coverage on different parts of speech. The goal of this book is much more on developing a child's familiarity and facility with language, both written and spoken, than with his or her knowledge of language category terms such as “adverb” and “conjunction.” Although there are some fill-in-the-blank type exercises, children are also learning to write conversational dialogue and the proper use of words in different situations. In some ways (e.g., thinking, memorizing, writing) it is more challenging, and in other ways (coverage of parts of speech) less challenging than other resources for this level.

*English for the Thoughtful Child* will work best for those who truly want to implement Charlotte Mason's ideas and are not worried about what everyone else might be covering at the same time. It is a different, yet very effective, approach to language arts.

Classical educators might be divided over this book. While it requires memorization and recitation, it is much more open-ended than some classicists prefer. However, those who value development of thinking skills at early levels might see it as a perfect classical education component.

There are no answer keys—answers should be obvious to parents. Brief teacher information is at the front of each book.



***Fairview's Guide to Composition and Essay Writing***

by Gabriel Arquilevich

Fairview Publishing

P.O. Box 746

Oak View, CA 93022

(805) 640-1924

e-mail: [garquilevich@sbcglobal.net](mailto:garquilevich@sbcglobal.net)

\$20.00

*Fairview's Guide to Composition and Essay Writing* is a natural follow-up to use after *Writing for 100 Days* by the same author. Although lessons cover basic essay structure, they go far beyond the minimal boring essay. Students create a reading journal in which they analyze many types of professional essays. Think of this as you would an artist who learns to paint by

studying and analyzing great artists. Students begin to grasp the creative possibilities available to them as they identify effective techniques in these essays.

While Arquilevich covers some of the same territory as do others teaching essay-writing skills, he often uses unusual approaches. For example, in a lesson on paragraphs, he instructs students to “Find an on-line essay.... After duplicating the essay, have someone eliminate all paragraphs so that it reads as a block. Now, locate the best places for paragraph breaks and compare your choices to the writer's” (p. 15).

You might have noticed that the parent/teacher will likely be the one reformatting the online essay into a solid block. Other lessons require either two or more students or else a parent/tutor who will interact with the student on assignments. For example, there is a two-part assignment that requires a writing partner. It says, “First, each person writes one page (any subject) using a lot of qualifiers, intensifiers, informal transitions, and slang. When you’re done, exchange papers and rewrite each other's pieces, eliminating the excess. You be the wordsmith and decide what's appropriate” (p. 29).

*Fairview's Guide* is ideal for small group classes, but it can work with an individual student if a parent or tutor is willing to participate. While some research (i.e., locating professional essays on the Internet or in magazines) is required, the lessons are very well explained and easy to follow. Students who meet periodically as a group should be able to work through lessons independently for the most part, bringing their work to exchange or share at class times.

The first half of the book works on preparatory skills such as those mentioned above, plus tone of voice, audience, word choice, use of quotations, and sentence structures. The second half shifts into actual essay writing, tackling four types of essays: argumentative, comparison and contrast, personal, and mock. For the mock essay, students either imitate an established writer's style or pretend to be someone else and create a style reflecting that personality. Each type is thoroughly developed, including a full-length sample essay of each type.

An answer key at the back of the book has suggested answers for the applicable exercises. While there are a number of such short exercises, students primarily learn by doing lots of their own writing.

*Fairview's Guide* might be completed in a year, but it is more important to work through each of the skills, taking as long as necessary. It might be used with advanced junior high students, but it is best for high school level.



### ***First Language Lessons***

by Jessie Wise

Peace Hill Press

18101 The Glebe Lane

Charles City, VA 23030

(877) 322-3445

e-mail: [info@peacehillpress.net](mailto:info@peacehillpress.net)

[www.peacehillpress.com](http://www.peacehillpress.com)

Paperback—\$18.95, spiral-bound—\$20.95, hardcover—\$24.95

Jessie Wise, coauthor of *The Well-Trained Mind (TWTM)*, has written a language text that supports classical education as described in *TWTM*. *First Language Lessons* actually combines

Charlotte Mason's ideas with classical education elements.

This book mimics many elements found in *English for the Thoughtful Child (EFTTC)*, a book originally written in 1903 and republished in 1990 for use by Charlotte Mason advocates.

*EFTTC* uses interesting old pictures as prompts for discussion, narration, and writing. Scripted grammar lessons and exercises intermix with the pictures, poems, fables, and other short writings.

*First Language Lessons* implements all of these ideas from *EFTTC* but with a much stronger emphasis on recitation, repetition, and memorization. This represents the “Dorothy Sayers” line of thought in classical education that young children in the first (or grammar) stage of learning should be learning in this way.

There is much more content in this book than in *EFTTC*. It has one hundred lessons each for grades 1 and 2. Grammar rules, usage, beginning writing skills, and proper oral usage are all covered using four techniques: memory work, copying and dictation, narration, and grammar lessons. Lessons follow a developmental sequence. For example, students do a minimal amount of copying for the first half of first grade, such as copying their own name or a short list of pronouns. They continue with increasingly difficult copywork until second grade when they begin taking dictation.

Let's look at each of the techniques. Children memorize poems, rules, definitions, and short lists. Poetry memorization helps children develop a familiarity with the rhythm and style of good language. Memorization of rules, definitions, and lists helps children acquire the “grammar” of English language.

Copying develops writing skills, familiarity with spelling, and usage. As Jessie Wise says, “Copying allows the student to store in his mind (and muscle memory) the look and feel of properly written language” (p. 15). After students have developed sufficient fluency in handwriting, spelling, and mechanics (lesson 122), they can begin taking dictation. Dictation exercises are never longer than a sentence for this level.

Narration practice prepares children for their own original writing. The parent reads a short fable or story to her child, or the child examines a drawing in the book. Then the child relates key elements of the story or picture. Parents can use the scripted questions to help their children recall or elicit elements of the story or drawing. Drawings are typically used more as a springboard for grammar. For example, one drawing is used to discuss prepositions and the placement of objects in the drawing.

The largest amount of attention seems dedicated to grammar lessons. These are scripted dialogues that call for repetition of rules and oral responses. Sometimes children are prompted to come up with their own examples for categories such as proper and common nouns.

Repetition is used much more than in other programs. For example, the third lesson on pronouns (lesson 48) begins with the student reciting the definition of a pronoun three times. Then the lesson continues with the child continually repeating lists or sentences through the end of the lesson. I imagine you could take the lesson idea and use your own style of presentation if this sounds as boring to you as it does to me. (While the repetition seems excessive to me, I don't think it's as overdone as it is in *Shurley Grammar*.)

Grammar coverage focuses heavily upon parts of speech, covering all eight by the end of the book. *First Language Lessons* covers other elements of grammar, but it doesn't seem as

comprehensive as programs such as *A Beka's*. For example, I could not find anything on plurals, prefixes, or suffixes. However, when children are copying and taking dictation, they learn much of this automatically, so this is not really an issue.

Children are not required to do much writing, but there are occasional enrichment activities for those able to do more than is required. Some of these include hands-on activities that I think would really appeal to all children. For example, one enrichment activity has a child use his body, furniture, toys, and a box to “act out” prepositions.

The book is nonconsumable. Children should have a separate binder where they keep all their work.

I know that some parents greatly appreciate the detailed lesson presentation, the script that tells them what to say, when to have children repeat things, etc. Other parents will find this approach much too structured and controlled. The elements that make it so structured (i.e., memorization of parts of speech, excessive repetition) almost overwhelm the elements reflecting Charlotte Mason's ideas. More narration activity and free-flowing discussion would better reflect Mason's philosophy.

The book is available in paperback, spiral, and hardcover editions.



***Format Writing***

by Frode Jensen

Wordsmiths

1355 Ferry Road

Grants Pass, OR 97526

(541) 476-3080

e-mail: [frodej@jsgrammar.com](mailto:frodej@jsgrammar.com)

[www.jsgrammar.com](http://www.jsgrammar.com)

\$22.00

In this outstanding book, Frode Jensen passes on the wisdom and skill he has gained from years of experience teaching writing. His focus is expository writing. I appreciate his strategy of beginning with paragraph writing rather than assuming that students have mastered this skill by junior high—which is rarely the case.

The content covers four major areas of writing that need to be learned consecutively: paragraph writing, essay writing, the principle of condensation, and major papers. Jensen also includes lessons on business writing, including how to write a resumé, which could probably be used anytime after the paragraph lessons. These are the major writing skills that should be developed in junior and senior high school, Jensen's targeted levels for this book.

Students tackle paragraph writing by working with a seven-sentence format that begins with a topic sentence and ends with a conclusion. They write seven different types of paragraphs: example, classification, definition, process, analogy, cause-and-effect, and comparison. The number of each type of paragraph that students produce will depend upon the time available to the teacher.

Sufficient practice at this stage prepares students for the next section—the five-paragraph essay. Students follow the format described in the book, writing seven different types of essays just as they do with paragraphs. In this and other sections, Jensen includes examples.

The section on the principle of condensation teaches students to sort through research information to identify the essentials. They can then transfer the crucial points into their own papers without wasting both their own time and their readers'. Students practice precise writing (condensing and summarizing) with samples within *Format Writing* as well as others the teacher assigns. This is an important skill, largely neglected or treated very briefly in most high school courses.

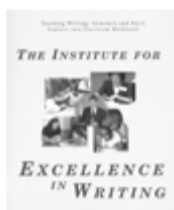
The final section deals with major papers—reports or research papers of at least 1,000 to 1,200 words. Jensen teaches the traditional note-card organizational method, supplemented with detailed instructions for title pages, citation methods (including CD-ROM or Internet citations), abbreviations, bibliographies, and appendices. Instructions for the various assignments are all quite detailed, and there is an index at the back of the book—both are valuable features for student and teacher.

Jensen includes reproducible check-off forms at the end of the book for evaluating writing assignments. These are extremely useful since Jensen includes a point system and detailed instructions for evaluation that will teach parents with little writing background how to evaluate their teens' work. Sample schedules and scheduling tips also help the inexperienced teacher judge how many assignments to use and how long each should take.

Some exercises are included in lessons as a means of helping students work through some aspects of writing critical to success with the particular format targeted in that lesson. An answer key for the few exercises with predictable answers is included.

*Format Writing* has Christian content, primarily in some examples and exercises. For instance, students are instructed to write thesis statements for ten different ideas, one of which has to do with explaining the meaning of "faith," and another, comparing two Christian hymns. In the section on book reports, he urges students to write about whether or not the central idea of the book "squares with Scripture."

This book should be suitable for junior high through college level, so you can use it across a wide span of age/skill levels. Also, while Jensen employs a formula approach to writing, it is not as strictly structured as are some other formatted approaches. Jensen's approach should be very helpful for parents who need the structure for themselves as much as for their students. Students can do most of their work independently. However, discussion of some of the lessons would be helpful, and parents need to evaluate student work, so parents should at least read through the lessons.



### ***Structure and Style in Writing Seminar***

Institute for Excellence in Writing

P.O. Box 6065

Atascadero, CA 93423

(800) 856-5815

e-mail: [info@writing-edu.com](mailto:info@writing-edu.com)

[www.writing-edu.com](http://www.writing-edu.com)

Teaching Writing seminar—\$159.00, seminar workbook alone—\$22.00, Student Writing Intensive courses—\$99.00 for the set, Student Workshops—\$60.00 for set of three, Continuation Course—\$240.00

A few homeschoolers were so impressed with Andrew Pudewa's *Structure and Style* writing seminar that they went out of their way to make sure I reviewed it. My impression is 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've yet to see. And his Institute for Excellence in Writing resources give parents easy-to-use tools that work for a wide range of students.

Since attending Andrew'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. Revised and expanded in 2000, the video course consists of six disks (eleven hours of viewing), a seminar workbook, and three *Student Workshop* disks.

The course teaches both structure and style such that students acquire a repertoire of techniques. Parents/teachers learn how to teach both creative and expository writing. In addition, selected grammar skills are taught and applied periodically throughout the course, so students better understand the relationship between grammar and good writing. Students continue to develop and apply the 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 this really is focused on teacher training.

Pudewa does not try to cover all types of creative and expository writing but focuses on basic structures and approaches. However, 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 is then used for various types of writing assignments.

The course as presented to students consists of nine units: Note Making and Outlines, Summarizing from Notes, Summarizing from Narrative Stories, Summarizing References and Library Reports (two units), Writing from Pictures, Creative Writing, Essay Writing, and Critiques. Once past the first few lessons, you can use the lessons in whatever order seems best for your students. The syllabus 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 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" audience. This means you are more likely to end up with a solid grasp of the course content.

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 (grades 2–4), intermediate (grades 5–7), and high school (grades 8–12). These serve as demonstration classes. You might have students work alongside the “video” class to introduce them to some of the methods of this course.

Even more help is available through *Student Writing Intensive (SWI)* DVDs. These are four disks of actual classes, running about 7½ hours total. Students in the classroom settings reflect the same age-group breakdowns as in the *Student Workshops*. Video classes focus on selected lessons from the syllabus. A binder and a set of reproducible papers (models, checklists, reference sheets, worksheets) come with the set of disks. As with the *Student Workshop* videos, students may work through these along with the “on-tape” classes.

Once you have worked through the basic seminar and *SWI*, the *Student Writing Intensive Continuation Course* picks up where *SWI* ends. It features ten lessons on nine DVDs plus a CD-ROM with all the printable material for you to reproduce as needed. Each lesson is actually a full class, approximately an hour and a half long. Each lesson has an assignment that will take four to five days to complete.

Older high school students (as well as college students) might benefit from the *IEW Advanced Communication Series*. The series consists of three videotapes of classes; tapes are available individually or as a set. Each tape comes with a comprehensive booklet containing the models, exercises, and samples presented in each class. The three titles are *Persuasive Writing and Speaking*, *Advanced Note Taking: A Dynamic Key Word Approach*, and *Power Tips for Planning and Writing a College Level Paper*.

IEW also offers other related resources in their catalog or through their Web site. Among them are some actual lesson books that will help you implement what is taught in the original seminar. There is a series of four lesson-plan books written by Matt Whitling based upon fairy tales, Aesop's fables, Greek heroes, and Greek myths. These add a classical education element to the *IEW* program. Another book, *Bible-Based Writing Lessons in Structure and Style*, has lessons that you can begin using from the very beginning of the program, while the other books need to wait until a little later. The *IEW* materials are all nonsectarian, with the exception of the *Bible-Based* lessons.

If you want to do a group class, you need to check out the group package options at *IEW*'s Web site.



### ***Learning Language Arts through Literature (LLATL)***

Common Sense Press

Publisher sells only through distributors. Contact them for resellers in your area.

(352) 475-5757

e-mail: [info@commonsensepress.com](mailto:info@commonsensepress.com)

[www.commonsensepress.com](http://www.commonsensepress.com)

Teacher books—\$25.00 each, student books—\$20.00 each, Red Book package— \$85.00

This comprehensive language arts curriculum is based upon Dr. Ruth Beechick's ideas about how to best teach young children—ideas that have much in common with Charlotte Mason's. The program actually begins with the *Blue Book*, a beginning phonics program that I

do not include in this review. However, I've chosen *LLATL* as a Top Pick for its comprehensive coverage of language art skills as reflected in the *Red Book* and above.

One of the key features of *LLATL* is literature—in the form of both short excerpts and complete novels—used as a springboard into other areas of language arts. The literature motivates greater interest in both the lessons and the books themselves. In addition, student activity books have lots of variety, and this helps stimulate and maintain students' interest.

Focus shifts from emphasis on developing reading skills in the early grades to more work with composition and literature at upper levels. A Skills Index at the back of each teacher's book shows which skills are covered on which pages.

Following recommendations by Dr. Beechick, once children are able to write independently, they copy short passages from prose and poetry and also take them by dictation. Parts of the ensuing lessons refer back to the literary passage (e.g., identify personal pronouns in the passage). Grammar, spelling, handwriting, vocabulary, and other skills all receive extensive attention.

Student activity books for each level are essential since they contain numerous workbook-type assignments, periodic reviews and assessments, and some pages that need to be cut out for activities. You will also need to buy or borrow novels that are used for most of the levels.

Each book should take about one school year to complete if you use them daily. Although books are suggested for particular grade levels, once past the first year or two, you should be able to use the same level with children over a two to three year grade level span.

The program was designed for home educators and provides plenty of detailed instruction on lesson presentation. However, in the books that include studies of novels, it is not clearly specified when you are actually to be reading the novels. It makes the most sense to me to read the novel and do the book study lessons that focus narrowly on the book first, then tackle the broader lessons that include grammar. (This is also the order in which lessons are presented.) Minimal lesson preparation is required, but lessons do need to be presented by the parent/teacher. Answers are in the teacher's book.

This is a great program for new homeschoolers who want to use something other than traditional textbooks but are stymied as to how to do it.

The *LLATL* books are written by Christians and reflect Christian attitudes, but religious perspectives are not dealt with in most lessons. A few excerpts from the Bible are used for reading.

I have one negative observation: dictation passages sometimes have unusual or unorthodox punctuation that a student would be unlikely to predict just from hearing the passage. Some such instances are neither pointed out in advance nor explained afterward.

### ***The Red Book package—second grade level***

The program for this level comes in a boxed set containing the teacher manual, student activity book, and readers, although you can also purchase books individually. Although six illustrated readers come with the program, you will need to borrow or purchase ten additional children's books.

While lessons are multisensory and interactive, students will occasionally work on assignments in the student activity book on their own. Phonics is reviewed at this level, but instruction also covers beginning composition skills, handwriting (printing), grammar, reading



comprehension, spelling, critical thinking, and beginning research and study skills. If a child has already mastered phonics, you might skip those parts of the lessons and focus on new material instead. Periodic assessments help parents/teachers determine how well students are progressing.

Printing instruction is a bit strange. Students are asked to write full sentences from the very first lesson in the book. But at lesson five, they seem to be moving backward since the lesson requires students to trace and print letters and two-letter words. In addition, the style of letter presented for tracing and emulation is more like calligraphy than ball-and-stick or slant-print, but it is presented without explanation. I find this confusing and suggest using another tool for teaching handwriting, either manuscript or cursive.

One other minor complaint: bingo charts and flip books that are to be cut out and put together should have cutting lines clearly marked as well as some explanation of how flip books are to be put together.

The *Red Book* provides a great alternative to traditional workbooks and programs that isolate subjects and skills. In spite of the above observations, it should be fairly easy for even beginning homeschoolers to use.

#### ***Yellow Book—third grade level***

The broad range of language arts skills covered at this level include grammar, composition, cursive handwriting, spelling, listening, oral presentation, dictionary skills, and critical thinking.

Four “Literature Link” units interspersed throughout the book offer two options: read the recommended book and work with questions and activities that refer to the book, or read the lengthy alternate passage included within the text and use the appropriate questions. The four recommended books for these units are *The White Stallion*, *Madeline*, *Meet George Washington*, and *The Courage of Sarah Noble*.

Extra enrichment activities found in the student activity book (e.g., word puzzles, projects, critical thinking and grammar activities, analogies) can be used for challenge or enrichment.

#### ***Orange Book—fourth grade level***

Four books are used as literature sources for lesson material at this level: *The Boxcar Children*, *Wilbur and Orville Wright*, *Benjamin Franklin*, and *The Sign of the Beaver*. A book study of each is followed by additional lessons that integrate literature, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and composition skills.

Periodically, students copy short literary excerpts or write them from dictation, depending on their abilities. Units on research, journal writing, poetry, newspaper writing, and story writing/book making are interspersed between the book studies.

#### ***Purple Book—fifth grade level***

The four books studied this year are *Farmer Boy*, *Trumpet of the Swan*, *Meet Addy*, and *Caddie Woodlawn*. Students focus particularly on oral presentations, poetry, tall tales, folk tales, and speech making. As is appropriate for this level, the student activity book requires more writing and fewer cut-and-paste activities. Enrichment activities found only in the student book stretch into research, analogies, and logic.

#### ***Tan Book—sixth grade level***

The four books studied this year are *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*; *The Bronze Bow*; *Big Red*; and *The Horse and His Boy*. There are special units on research and writing the research essay. Lessons are increasingly challenging as students work through activities for reading, grammar, composition, vocabulary, spelling, library skills, and thinking/logic.

### ***Green Book*—seventh grade level**

The *Green Book* covers grammar (including diagramming), poetry, book study, creative writing (including a short story), topic studies, speech making, and research papers. Literary passages from books such as *Black Beauty*, *The Borrowers*, and *Eight Cousins* are the foundation for study in many lessons. Other books and a play will be required for book studies that last a few weeks or more. These are *Star of Light*, *Adam and His Kin*, and Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Composition and grammar skills receive the most attention in the *Green Book* although all concepts typically taught in seventh-grade language arts are covered. Writing skill lessons are well developed. Reading skills (comprehension, recognition and use of literary devices, structures, etc.) are taught explicitly, while vocabulary work is integrated throughout the lessons. Spelling receives some attention, with an emphasis on rules and generalizations. Study and research skills are both incorporated into lessons.

The content in this book is more obviously Christian than in other books in this series, with the inclusion of some psalms and the book *Adam and His Kin*, a retelling of the first part of the book of Genesis.

The integration of literature with other language arts activities as well as the interactive nature of the program makes this approach more interesting than most traditional courses for junior high.

### ***The Gray Book*—eighth grade level**

This book definitely shifts students to a more challenging level of work, especially in the areas of writing and critical thinking. Similar in format to other books in the series, this course includes dictation, grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and brief composition activities plus four book studies and four significant writing assignments.

In many of the lessons, students are given passages from well-known literature by dictation. (If this is too challenging, have them copy passages first, then take them by dictation.) In addition, students work on spelling from a list of the most commonly misspelled words coupled with their own list of troublesome words they encounter. Grammar activities and exercises in each lesson often tie in with the dictated passage. Frequent writing assignments develop composition skills, but a special unit on writing teaches students to write four lengthier papers: a narrative, a persuasive essay, a comparison/contrast essay, and a research paper. Four book units are interspersed between other lessons. The four novels students will read are *Across Five Aprils*, *A Lantern in Her Hand*, *Eric Liddell*, and *God's Smuggler*.

The student activity book includes an appendix with basic spelling, capitalization, and comma rules; commonly misspelled words list; and space for creating their personal spelling list.

A Christian viewpoint is evident throughout the book, both in the choice of literature and treatment within lessons.

(Also see the *LLATL American* and *British Literature* courses for high school level, reviewed in [chapter 7](#).)



### ***Winston Grammar***

Precious Memories Educational Resources

18403 N.E. 111<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Battle Ground, WA 98604

(360) 687-0282

e-mail: [winstongrammar@attbi.com](mailto:winstongrammar@attbi.com)

[www.winstongrammar.com](http://www.winstongrammar.com)

\$40.00 per level, extra student packet—\$15.00, supplemental workbook and answer key—\$17.50

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. The *Advanced* set does some review, but 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 multisensory approach than most others.

The *Basic Winston Grammar* set teaches parts of speech, noun functions, prepositional phrases, and modifiers. It might be used with students about fourth grade level and above. It includes a teacher manual, student workbook, and the cards in a heavy-duty vinyl case. Four quizzes, a pretest, and a posttest 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.

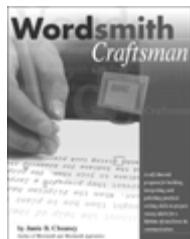
In addition to the above, there is also a supplemental workbook for extra practice. This workbook corresponds exactly with the original in content and difficulty, offering “more of the same” for those students who need it. It comes with an answer key, but workbooks without answer keys can be purchased for additional students (\$11.00 each).

Once students have mastered the basic course, they should continue with *Advanced Winston Grammar*, but it should probably wait until students are at least junior high level. The components are similar, but there is an additional quiz in the student book.

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* (\$26.50). 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. This course builds upon the basic *Winston Grammar* procedures for identifying sentence elements. It will be most useful after completing both *Basic* and *Advanced* programs.

Online help is available on the FAQ page at the publisher's Web site, and e-mail questions are welcome.



### ***Wordsmith series***

by Janie B. Cheaney

Common Sense Press

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(352) 475-5757

e-mail: [info@commonsensepress.com](mailto:info@commonsensepress.com)

[www.commonsensepress.com](http://www.commonsensepress.com)

*Wordsmith* is a series of three books for developing writing skills. 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)***

Student book—\$16.00, teacher's guide—\$7.00

Many students at upper elementary and junior high level 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 most any writing situation. Lessons work on skills such as describing people, narrowing the topic, and writing dialogue. At the end, students write their own short story. Helps on 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, primarily in the form of discussion and evaluation, is required, although students will do much of the work on their own. The author's humorous touches scattered throughout the book add special appeal.

Parents 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 most everything else at this level.

***Wordsmith Apprentice*, \$16.00**

*Wordsmith Apprentice* is a “prequel” to *Wordsmith: A Creative Writing Course for Young People*. Janie Cheaney translates the same enthusiasm, humor, and energy that so impressed me in the older-level book into 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 4 through 6, and it can be used by students working independently (with parents reading and responding to exercises and assignments) or by a mixed age and ability group.

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*, \$16.00**

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 *A Creative Writing Course* before jumping into *Wordsmith Craftsman*.

This book is divided into three parts that 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, such as 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/teacher as needed. 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.



***WriteShop: An Incremental Writing Program***

by Kim Kautzer and Debra Oldar

WriteShop

5753 Klusman Avenue

Alta Loma, CA 91737

(909) 989-5576

e-mail: [info@writeshop.com](mailto:info@writeshop.com)

[www.writeshop.com](http://www.writeshop.com)

Basic set (teacher's manual and *WriteShop I*)—\$87.95, *WriteShop I* student workbook—\$39.95, *WriteShop II* student workbook—\$39.95, teacher's manual—\$49.95, *Handbook for Teaching in a Group Setting*—\$14.95

*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. *WriteShop* provides detailed daily lesson plans and instructions for teachers, plus student workbooks with worksheets and forms that walk you all the way through activities, evaluation, and grading. Examples, checklists, and evaluation forms show students the objectives and show teachers what to look for in completed work.

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 those who have done minimal writing instruction with their children. *WriteShop I* targets students in grades 7 through 10, though it might actually be used with students as young as fifth grade. *WriteShop II* is written for students in grades 8 through 12. 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.

*WriteShop* needs to be taught. It is not designed for independent study even though students do much of the 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 primary 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 mind maps, topic sentences, metaphors and similes, and concluding sentences. In addition, students are working through the editing and rewriting process on the original assignment. They 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.

I think the authors have actually resolved a critical problem some of us have encountered with copying/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 presented in a single teacher's volume and two student volumes, *I* and *II*. The teacher's manual offers more than lesson plans. It also has instructions on how to edit, how to make comments, descriptions of typical student errors, and probable solutions. Student sample writings are accompanied by sample 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.

The first student volume focuses primarily on description and narration, although it includes lessons on writing short reports, concise (five-sentence) biographies, and news articles. Skills covered are typical of those covered up through junior high.

The second volume gets into high school level, with advanced narrative and descriptive writing plus heavy emphasis on essay writing.

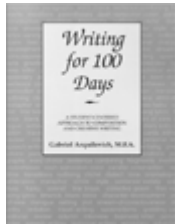
None of the writing assignments are lengthy. High schoolers will still need to practice writing lengthier papers and research reports than what is required by *WriteShop*. (Keep in mind, the program is not intended to cover all types of writing assignments. For example, there are no lessons on poetry or writing business letters.)

If you start the 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 is written by Christians; you will find occasional biblical references, primarily in the teacher's manual. However, the author's Christian perspective also appears

indirectly 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.

Overall, this is one of the best resources I've seen for group classes and for parents who need lots of help to teach writing.



***Writing for 100 Days: A Student-Centered Approach to Composition and Creative Writing***

by Gabriel Arquilevich

Fairview Publishing

P.O. Box 746

Oak View, CA 93022

(805) 640-1924

e-mail: [garquilevich@sbcglobal.net](mailto:garquilevich@sbcglobal.net)

\$20.00

Individual lessons for one hundred days address four areas: composition, fiction, poetry, and writing in action. Assuming the student has a foundation in basic grammar and composition, this book goes on to tackle elements that produce excellent writing. It should work best for high-school-level students, but many of the lessons could also be used with junior high students. I would begin using some of the lessons for seventh and eighth graders, then go back through many of those same lessons again a year or two later as I use the entire book with older students.

Composition lessons work on both style and grammar by focusing on skills such as word economy, word choice, use of dialect and slang, transitions, sentence variety, use of parentheses and dashes, tone, and organization. The strategy is often humorous; sometimes students are instructed to produce a negative example, then a positive example.

In each lesson, instruction is followed by an exercise. Answers to the exercises are provided at the back of the book when appropriate. You need not use all the lessons in order; you can select those that best meet the needs of your student(s).

The fiction section walks students through the actual writing of a story. Poetry addresses selected forms such as haiku, limericks, sonnets, and free verse. "Writing in action" lessons tackle a variety of real-life applications such as business letters, writing news reports, conducting an interview, writing a television commercial, technical writing, and travel writing. For fun, a few "word games" are added.

A list of additional assignments is provided at the end of the book, but I think students will find some of the lesson activities worthwhile enough to tackle more than once. This means that even though the book is only 103 pages in length, it is packed with so many ideas that it can be used well beyond 100 days. Also, you are free to expand, skip, or repeat lessons as you choose.

Ideally, these lessons should be done in a group. Even two students will do! However, most lessons can be used by a single student working independently as long as there is a parent/tutor to interact and evaluate the work. Interaction between two or more students in many of the lessons ranges from helpful to essential, so *do* try to have at least two students work through the lessons if possible.

This book offers a well-balanced combination of skills instruction, motivation, and practice. I often compare it with Janie Cheaney's *Wordsmith: A Creative Writing Course for*



*Young People* because it has a similar playful but effective approach to writing for this age level.



***Writing with a Point***

by Jeanne B. Stephens and Ann Harper  
Educators Publishing Service  
P.O. Box 9031  
Cambridge, MA 02139-9031  
(800) 435-7728  
[www.epsbooks.com](http://www.epsbooks.com)  
\$12.95

This was my favorite resource for developing essay-writing skills when my sons were at this stage. I might have also considered using *Fairview's Guide to Composition and Essay Writing* or Janie Cheaney's *Wordsmith Craftsman* if either had been available at that time. Nevertheless, both my students and I really enjoyed using this book in small group classes.

It covers gathering and organizing ideas as do other books, but it stresses the importance of communicating in such a way that people want to read it. It teaches writers how to grab the reader with the first sentence, then use description and other tools to maintain interest throughout the piece.

This is a self-contained workbook with instruction supported by examples, then followed by a variety of writing exercises. That means that students can work independently through the lessons. However, they will need feedback and occasional interaction with a parent/teacher. Also, some of the exercises could be done aloud to cut down on the amount of writing.

This book best lends itself to a small group class where students might toss ideas back and forth. Even inexperienced parent/teachers should find it easy to use. Lessons build upon one another, so you should use this book from cover to cover.

## Spelling and Vocabulary



***Building Spelling Skills***

Christian Liberty Press  
502 West Euclid Avenue  
Arlington Heights, IL 60004  
(847) 259-4444  
e-mail: [custserv@homeschools.org](mailto:custserv@homeschools.org)  
[www.christianlibertypress.com](http://www.christianlibertypress.com)  
Student books—\$8.00 each, answer keys—\$3.00

each

It doesn't get any more affordable for solid spelling coverage than this series. However, you can't describe these books as "fun" or "colorful." Instead, I would use words like "comprehensive," "thorough," and "businesslike."

They 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 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 but the first book. There are no separate teacher guides. These last features coupled with cost effectiveness make these very appealing for busy families with limited budgets.

### ***Book 1***

This first-grade worktext serves as much for phonics reinforcement as it does for spelling. All but the last two lessons are each designed around a phonics rule. (The last two lessons work on syllables.) The first five lessons cover the short vowels, working only on words with the designated short vowel sound. Almost all of the phonograms are covered in *Book 1*. A variety of exercises induce 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. No answer key is available or needed.

### ***Book 2***

This book accelerates the emphasis on phonics rules with some intense phonics vocabulary. Weekly word lists are introduced with definitions of the phonetic concept, such as consonant digraphs and voiced/voiceless consonants, or rules of syllabication. Some of the lessons deal with root words, prefixes, and suffixes. There are plenty of practice opportunities, but as in *Book 1*, the word lists are 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. (Phonics background information does 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. 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***

This book continues in the same vein but moves on to accents, more complicated prefix and suffix work, contractions, and possessives, plus calendar and measurement words.

### ***Book 5***

*Book 5* is subtitled *The World of Words*. The first nine units deal with geography-related words. Remaining units feature individual topics such as birds, sports, anatomy, and economics. 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. An example of the latter type of lesson is one on titles for civil officers. Throughout most of this lesson, students learn job descriptions for mayor, notary, auditor, magistrate, constable, assessor, etc. *Book 5* strikes me as one that can be used whenever this type of study seems appropriate for a student rather than at a particular grade level.

### **Book 6**

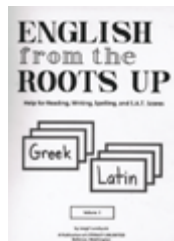
*Book 6* reviews the basic spelling rules students most likely encountered in the early elementary years. This is a good time to review because most students have forgotten that there are patterns to help them figure out the spelling of unfamiliar words, even if they use that knowledge without realizing 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 *The Writing Road to Reading* or other resources dedicated specifically to 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 *infringement*, *ingenious*, *befriend*, *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 doesn't mean studying only Greek and Latin roots. Instead, lessons explore words from many languages and cultures, including French, Celtic, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Spanish, Scandinavian and African languages, Italian, and more. Students need an unabridged dictionary to use alongside the lessons. The lessons are both fascinating and challenging— maybe too challenging for some eighth graders. I would also consider using this book with high school students.



### ***English from the Roots Up: Help for Reading, Writing, Spelling and S.A.T. Scores***

by Joegil Lundquist

Literacy Unlimited

P.O. Box 278

Medina, WA 98039-0278

(425) 454-5830

e-mail: joegilk1@aol.com

[www.literacyunlimited.com](http://www.literacyunlimited.com)

\$29.95 each, word cards—\$18.00

Greek and Latin words are the foundation for vocabulary study in the broader sense of word derivations. Children are unlikely to find many 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 in being able to figure out their meaning.

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 10 introduces the Greek word *kinesis* meaning “movement.” The lesson then teaches five words derived from *kinesis*: *kinetic*, *kinesiology*, *kinescope*, *cinema*, and *cinematographer*. The word *photos* was introduced in the first lesson, so children are connecting the last word to two Greek words they have learned. Children each need a set of one hundred 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 side are the derived words and their meanings. You can purchase sets of premade cards or make them along with your students.

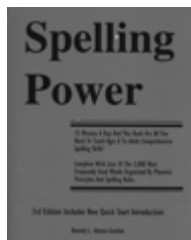
The goal is similar to that of *Vocabulary from Classical Roots* (from Educators Publishing Service), although the vocabulary words here are less commonly used than those in *Vocabulary from Classical Roots*. This program requires teacher presentation and interaction. There is no workbook. Instead, index 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 is 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.” or “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 will be 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 one hundred Greek and Latin root words with new activities and teaching notes.

Sample pages of these books are available on the publisher's Web site. Both volumes can now be purchased together as a set for \$49.90.



### ***Spelling Power***

by Beverly L. Adams-Gordon

Castlemoyle Books

P.O. Box 520

Pomeroy, WA 99347

(509) 843-5009

[www.castlemoyle.com](http://www.castlemoyle.com)

Book—\$49.95, cards—\$29.95

*Spelling Power* can be the only spelling book you use with all of your children through all of their schooling. The basic program is designed for students third grade to adult, but there are also instructions for modifying lessons for children between the ages of five and eight. In order to use this program, the student should be able to write easily and copy words correctly. The “Quick Start Introduction” at the beginning of the book walks you through placement and instructions for using the program.

This very comprehensive spelling program uses a base list of about five thousand frequently used words. A list of the twelve thousand most frequently used and most frequently misspelled words is included as a separate section. These twelve thousand words are coded to show when each should be taught by grade level and in correlation with *Spelling Power*. These words can be used to supplement the basic five thousand already in the program.

The five thousand words are broken down into groups with common elements. Diagnostic tests place students at the proper beginning point in the list. Then each student progresses at his or her own rate, studying only those words with which he or she is having trouble. Frequently used words are reviewed periodically to insure retention. A ten-step study process is used for each word to be learned. This ten-step process should help even poor spellers improve their skills.

Students do all their work in a separate notebook. Castlemoyle sells *Student Record Books* (\$5.95 each) that are designed with lines appropriately spaced for different ability levels. However, students can use a spiral notebook or binder instead.

Parental/teacher involvement is essential, although we can note daily activities on the study sheet for older students to do on their own. As children mature and become familiar with the program, they should be able to do much of their work independently. The interaction required between teacher and child in the early grades actually makes this program more ideal for homeschoolers than for the regular classroom. Reproducible study, test, dictionary, and record-keeping forms, plus a whole section of game and activity ideas, are included.

Castlemoyle Books also offers *Spelling Power Activity Task Cards* to facilitate use of games and activities in the program. This is a set of 365 color-coded, four-by-six-inch cards that can be used along with *Spelling Power* or any other phonics-based spelling program. The brightly colored cards are filed in a sturdy box for easy use.

Cards are divided into five categories: drill activities, skill builders, writing prompters, dictionary skills, and homonyms and more. Within each category, cards are further color coded into four categories corresponding to age/skill level groupings covering all grade levels.

Activities designed for auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile learning modalities address learning style needs of all children. Among the activities are games, dot-to-dots, painting, and puzzle making, as well as a variety of writing activities. Most activities can be completed by a student working alone, although a few require a partner.

The *Activity Task Cards* come with a very helpful teacher's manual. The manual tells you how to use the cards, offers suggestions for making your own letter tiles, cross references to *Spelling Power* lessons, and includes answers for the appropriate cards. Cards can be used as supplements to lessons or sometimes in place of lessons. If you are using *Spelling Power*, I highly recommend this set as both a time saver and lesson enhancer. For those using other programs, the *Task Cards* will help supplement lessons through all grade levels.

### ***Spelling Workout, Levels A–G***

Modern Curriculum Press/Pearson Learning Group

P.O. Box 2500

Lebanon, IN 46052

(800) 526-9907

[www.pearsonlearning.com](http://www.pearsonlearning.com)



Student books—\$8.95 each, teacher's edition—\$9.50 each

The *Spelling Workout* series, books A through G for grades 1 through 8 respectively, correlates fairly well with MCP's *Plaid Phonics* series. However, *Spelling Workout* may be used on its own. Although books are printed in only two colors, the layout and illustrations make them fairly

attractive.

Spelling is taught from a phonics perspective, gradually shifting emphasis to vocabulary and word origins at the upper levels. Lessons for the first six books follow the same format. They begin with a narrative that uses some of that week's spelling words. Then students take a pretest, correcting their own work. The next activity generally focuses on a phonic concept common to the list words. Activities on the third page of the lesson vary; they might be analogies, scrambled words, synonyms, antonyms, definitions, crossword puzzles, dictionary work (in student dictionaries at the back of each book), alphabetizing, or similar activities. The final page of each lesson includes proofreading, a writing activity, and a list of a few bonus words to challenge bright students.

Books *F* and *G* are slightly different. They forego the opening narrative and jump right into very brief instruction or review on a topic that might deal with phonics, suffixes, word origins, or anything else relating to how words are spelled. This is followed by vocabulary and dictionary activity, then word analysis and word application activities that might deal with synonyms, parts of speech, analogies, or common word elements.

Every lesson includes a puzzle, most of them crossword puzzles. The final page of each lesson, like those in books *A* through *E*, has proofreading, a writing activity, and bonus words.

All levels have reviews every five lessons plus review tests in a standardized (fill-in-the-bubble) test format. Books *C* and up have a few pages at the back for students to write troublesome words for continued review.

Teacher's editions have answers overprinted on smaller-sized copies of student pages, surrounded by succinct teaching information. Most useful will be the sample sentences to be used for pre- and posttests. Some spelling enrichment suggestions at the back of the teacher's editions might be useful, although most are for classroom groups.

One caution: some children, especially those who are dyslexic, are really confused by misspelled words such as those they encounter in proofreading exercises, or they have trouble unscrambling letters to make words. Their brains absorb the images of the incorrect words, so these children build up a confused memory of what the words should look like. In such cases, skip these activities.

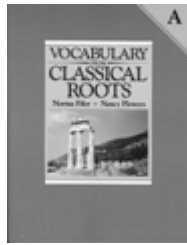
*Spelling Workout* books require no lesson preparation, and students past the first level or two can work through most of their lessons independently.

### ***Vocabulary from Classical Roots Books A–E***

by Norma Fifer and Nancy Flowers

Educators Publishing Service

P.O. Box 9031



Cambridge, MA 02139-9031

(800) 435-7728

[www.epsbooks.com](http://www.epsbooks.com)

Student books A–C—\$9.35 each, D–E—\$9.95 each; teacher's guides—\$7.10 each

General vocabulary study makes sense for the younger grades, but this type of more specialized study becomes even 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 this vocabulary series of *Books A* through *E* for grades 7 through 11, although the letter designations 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, so lesson 4 introduces the Greek word *pan* and the Latin word *omnis*, both meaning “all,” plus the Greek word *holos* and the Latin word *totus*, both meaning “whole.”

Students with some exposure to Greek and/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. Two unusual extras are included: (1) literary, historical, and geographic references help develop cultural literacy, and (2) suggestions for extended writing activities help students to apply new vocabulary. *Books D* and *E* add exercises for testing vocabulary within the context of short articles. One student, who has used earlier levels of this series, pointed out that *Book E* contains creeping elements of political correctness, even though they are subtle and sporadic rather than obvious and pervasive.

While students can work independently through most of the lessons, group or teacher discussion really helps most students.

A teacher's guide and answer key for each level has teaching suggestions, exercise answers, and glossaries of some of the literary and historical references.



***Wordly Wise, Books 1–9 (original series)***

Educators Publishing Service

P.O. Box 9031

Cambridge, MA 02139-9031

(800) 435-7728

[www.epsbooks.com](http://www.epsbooks.com)

Student books 1–5—\$8.70 each, 6–9—\$9.65 each; teacher's key—\$6.35 each

I've seen many vocabulary resources over the years, but my favorite for general use remains the original *Wordly Wise* series, *Books 1-9*. (*Books A* through *C* are also available, but I think other academic priorities preclude their use in the early grades.)

In this series, students use one list of words through four or five different types of exercises to become familiar with each word's usage in different contexts as well as their 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.

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 1-9* are intended for grades 4 through 12. 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*. One drawback of this series occurs in *Books 4-9*. While *Books 1-3* include glossaries in the back listing all vocabulary words and their definitions, from *Book 4* on, students must use a separate dictionary.

There is also a newer *Wordly Wise 3000* series, but it requires more subjective answers, making it more difficult to use. Nevertheless, it too is an excellent vocabulary resource. Eventually, it will replace the original series.

• • •

Although they are not one of my Top 100, you might have noticed my mention of *Write Source* handbooks in some of the resource reviews. The *Write Source* actually is a line of products that includes composition and grammar instruction worktexts. But the best thing in the *Write Source* line is their handbooks. They have a number of editions for different levels—all of them colorful with “cartoonish” illustrations and easy-to-understand language. I recommend using them for third grade level through high school.

Titles and corresponding levels are:

- *Write on Track* (grade 3) \$13.75
- *Writers Express* (grade 4) \$14.75
- *All Write* (grade 5) \$14.75
- *Write Source 2000* (grades 6-8) \$14.75
- *Write Ahead* (grades 9-10) \$15.75
- *Writers, Inc.* (grades 9-12) \$15.75

These are far more than grammar handbooks; they also include guidelines for various forms of writing (including research papers), student models of writing, and reference tools. The *Write Source* goal is to produce better writers, so grammar is presented as a tool for better writing rather than something students learn for its own sake.

Handbooks can be used for instruction, but they actually work best as a reference and review tool. They include grammar and usage rules coded by number.



Here's how I like to use them: When correcting your child's writing, you mark the *Write Source* code number next to an error. Students look up the rule and figure out how they violated it, then make their correction. This forces them to process grammar rules in a way that workbook exercises never do. These handbooks can be used alongside any other grammar/composition resources you might use.

A separate teacher's guide (\$21.95 each) is available for each handbook, but they are strictly optional. Although written for classroom use, they do have some useful start-up activities, minilessons, and reviews that you might find helpful.

You might run into occasional content problems, particularly in the examples, since these are written for public school students. (Published by Great Source, [www.greatsource.com](http://www.greatsource.com) or [www.write source.com](http://www.write source.com), 800-289-4490.)

# History, Geography, and Cultural Studies

*Social studies* is a comprehensive term that includes history, geography, and cultural studies. Some of us cringe at the term *social studies*, equating it with the watered down mush that passes for history education in some current textbooks. But the “social studies” label is not the culprit. The problem lies in emphasis and philosophy. The public school system (in general) has overemphasized cultural studies—and politically correct cultural studies at that—at the expense of history and geography. Social studies has often been used as a tool for social engineering rather than to provide an 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 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 periods (history). The third question is answered by describing the location (geography). The last question deals with the background of the event 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.

## Choosing Appropriate Resources

A few history/social studies textbooks manage to pull all the above 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 simply in the choices of what is or is not included. Textbooks that cover all of world history while paying little or no attention to the impact of Judaism and Christianity reflect a huge bias that paints a false picture of a world that has developed without any interaction with the living God.

If you are a Christian and want to help your child develop a Christian worldview, then you will probably want to use resources that help rather than hinder that goal. In regard to

resources, there are three approaches to social studies. You might use any of these approaches exclusively or mix two or more of them. The three approaches are

1. History textbooks
2. Real books (and I would include Internet research in this category)
3. History through unit studies (which might use texts or real books)

## ***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 twenty-one-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. Often children learn 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 turnoff. 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 beauty or human interest. I rarely encourage parents of children in the elementary grades to use history textbooks, especially since we have many better options available to us.

Junior-high-level history books generally are a 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 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've 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, nothing else comes close.

## ***History through Unit Studies***

Most unit studies have a strong historical component. Sometimes history is the primary theme, with other subjects branching off from the study of history. This is a great way to make history interesting.

Unit studies generally recommend real books as the source 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 and activities.

Some unit studies are structured in chronological order, so if you follow the publisher's sequence of study, you are studying 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 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 the reviews of unit studies in [chapter 12](#) to see if you might want to use one of these for coverage of history. One history program reviewed in this chapter, *The Mystery of History*, is designed like a unit study, but I include it here because it is more narrowly focused than most unit studies in that its goal is to cover only history and geography.

## **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 nonfiction. He surprised even himself when he discovered that through his reading he actually knew more history than his classmates who had been through ten or more history textbooks each. 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 first, followed by reviews of my Top Picks. Real books in the following lists are a mixture of historical fiction, biography, and even some legend.

I've also included some “fact” books, such as David Macaulay's intriguingly illustrated books and a number of colorfully-illustrated information books such as those from Usborne, Peter Bedrick, DK Publishing, Facts on File, and Random House/Knopf. See the boxed review of Usborne's *World History* books on the next page to get a general sense of what these “fact” type books are like.

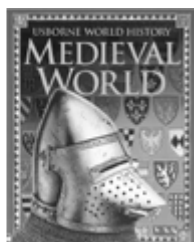
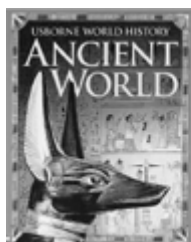
I suggest using these fact books along with other books that give more complete coverage of at least some topics. Fact books often do a great job on the introductory or supplemental level. But keep in mind that they generally strive for religious neutrality, and religious neutrality often means omission of important religious information and ideas as well as the occasional inclusion of problematic content such as nudity, praise for pagan gods, and distortion of religious positions.

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.

## Real Books by Time Periods/Topics

Listed here are historical biographies and novels as well as a few informational books that read like stories. You can choose an assortment of such books as the core of your curriculum, adding discussion, writing, and activities to accomplish your educational goals. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but it should be enough to get you started exploring history through real books.

I've included some titles that are written for adults but might be read aloud to older children or read independently by mature teens. When I know grade-level information for certain, I've used (y) to indicate books written for children up through about fourth grade level and (o) to indicate books written for at least sixth grade level and older. (If there is no "y" or "o," I'm not certain of the reading level.) I've also used some notations for books that are part of well-known series: (Landmark) = Landmark Books, (CFA) = Childhood of Famous Americans, and (Sower) = Sower series. I've used (FB) by the appropriate titles to indicate a fact book.



### *Usborne Internet-Linked Ancient World and Medieval World*

Educational Development Corporation

P.O. Box 470663

Tulsa, OK 74147-0663

(800) 475-4522

e-mail: [edc@edcpub.com](mailto:edc@edcpub.com)

[www.edcpub.com](http://www.edcpub.com)

\$14.95 each

These two beautifully illustrated history books can be used to cover world history from ancient times up through the Middle Ages for students in grades 4 through 6. History and culture are combined as is appropriate for these grade levels. Although the text is broken up by illustrations, it flows in columns, making it fairly easy to read. Illustrations all have helpful descriptions—children are likely to browse through these books just “reading” illustrations and their descriptions. Timelines running across the bottom of every page are helpful. The selective coverage of history enhanced by the use of the provided Web links should give children a good introduction to world history.

Interestingly, *Ancient World* skips cave men and begins with the first farming communities. It briefly touches on a few examples of ancient towns, then moves on to the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations. Hittites, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Hebrews, and other ancient civilizations also get brief coverage. Coverage of ancient Greece and Rome is given more space, and China, Japan, Africa, India, and the Americas also get attention.

*Medieval World* picks up where *Ancient World* leaves off, around A.D. 500. It begins with the Byzantine Empire, skipping over barbarian invasions to discuss the barbarian kingdoms that arose. Arabs and Islam, Vikings, Anglo-Saxon England, Charlemagne, and the Holy Roman Empire typify the range of topics covered next. Castles, towns, trade, and the church all receive attention as significant historical factors. Coverage expands beyond Western civilization to the entire world, including the rise of the Russians, conquest of North Africa, East Africa, Southern India, Southeast Asia, Pacific Islanders, the Americas, and other civilizations up through about A.D. 1400.

I have also added specific dates or time periods by many titles so you can choose books in a chronological sequence if you so desire. In addition, I have sometimes noted the geographical area where a story takes place when I think it might be helpful.

## ***Ancient Egypt***

*Ancient Egyptians at a Glance* by Rupert Matthews (Peter Bedrick Books) (FB)

*The Cat of Bubastes* G. A. Henty (o)

*Pyramid* by David Macaulay (FB)

*Tales of Ancient Egypt* by Roger Lancelyn Green

*Golden Goblet* and other titles by Eloise Jarvis McGraw

*Moses* by Leonard Fisher

*Motel of the Mysteries* by David Macaulay (FB)

*The Riddle of the Rosetta Stone* by James Cross Givlin

*Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt* by Payne (Landmark)

*Into the Mummy's Tomb* by Nicholas Reeves

*Shadow Hawk* by Andre Norton

*The Usborne Time Traveler: Pharaohs and Pyramids* (FB) (y)

## ***Ancient Greece***

*The Great Alexander the Great* by Joe Lasker (y)

*Classic Myths to Read Aloud: The Great Stories of Greek and Roman Mythology* by William F. Russell

*Tales of the Greek Heroes* by Roger Lancelyn Green (o)

*The Illiad* translated by Lattimore (o)

*The Odyssey* translated by Lattimore and another translation by Robert Fitzgerald (o)

*Adventures of Ulysses* translated by Gottlieb

*The Wanderings of Odysseus* by Rosemary Sutcliff

*Black Ships before Troy* by Rosemary Sutcliff

*The Children's Homer* by Padric Colum (o)  
*Alexander and His Times* by Frederic Theule (o)  
*The Trojan Horse* by Emily Little (y)  
*D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths* by Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (y)  
*Archimedes and the Door of Science* by Jeanne Bendick  
*The Librarian Who Measured the Earth* (Ptolemy) by Lasky  
*Discovering the World of the Ancient Greeks* by Zofia Archibald (Facts on File) (FB) (o)  
*The Visual Dictionary of Ancient Civilizations* (DK Publishing) (FB)

## ***Bible Times and Ancient Rome***

*Ancient Romans at a Glance* by Dr. Sarah McNeill (Peter Bedrick Books) (FB)  
*Eyewitness Books: Ancient Rome* (Knopf) (FB)  
*Cultural Atlas for Young People: Ancient Rome* by Mike Corbishley (Facts on File) (FB)  
*Hittite Warrior* by Joanne Williamson (1200 B.C., Judea)  
*Classic Myths to Read Aloud: The Great Stories of Greek and Roman Mythology* by William F. Russell  
*Augustus Caesar's World* by Genevieve Foster (63 B.C. to A.D. 14, world) (o)  
*The Eagle of the Ninth* by Rosemary Sutcliff (A.D. 119, Rome)  
*The Aeneid of Virgil* translated by Robert Fitzgerald  
*Runaway* by Patricia St. John (first century, Judea)  
*Pearl Maiden* by H. Rider Haggard (first century, Judea)  
*Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth Speare (32 B.C., Judea)  
*For the Temple* by G. A. Henty (A.D. 70, Judea) (o)  
*Festival of Lights* by Maida Silverman (165 B.C., Judea) (y)  
*Beric the Briton: A Story of the Roman Invasion* by G. A. Henty (A.D. 61, Britain and Rome) (o)  
*Young Carthaginian* by G. A. Henty (220 B.C., North Africa) (o)  
*Cleopatra* by Diane Stanley and Peter Vennema (first century B.C., Egypt)  
*Saint Valentine* retold by Robert Sabuda (third century A.D., Rome)  
*The Ides of April* by Mary Ray (A.D. 60, Rome)  
*The Lantern Bearers* (Britain at the end of the Roman occupation) by Rosemary Sutcliff (A.D. 450, Britain)  
*Ben Hur, a Tale of the Christ* by Lew Wallace (first century A.D., Rome, Judea) (o-read aloud)  
*The Robe* by Lloyd C. Douglas (first century A.D., Rome and Judea) (o-read aloud)

*Quo Vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz (A.D. 60, Rome) (o-read aloud)

*The White Stag* (Attila the Hun) by Kate Seredy (A.D. 400s, Asia and Europe)

## ***World History from the Fall of Rome through the Middle Ages***

*Beowulf the Warrior* by Ian Serraillier (1100, England)

*Dragon Slayer* (Beowulf) by Rosemary Sutcliff (1100, England)

*Augustine Came to Kent* by Barbara Willard (600, England)

*Son of Charlemagne* by Barbara Willard (780, Europe)

*Beorn the Proud* by Madeleine Pollard (800s, Ireland and Denmark)

*Norse Gods and Giants* by the D'Aulaires (Norse mythology)

*The Dragon and the Raven or the Days of King Alfred* by G. A. Henty (800s, England) (o)

*Tristan and Iseult* (Ireland and Britain) by Rosemary Sutcliff (legend, England)

*The Story of King Arthur and His Knights and other Arthurian Tales* by Howard Pyle (legend, England)

*Leif the Lucky* by the D'Aulaires (1000, exploration of America)

*The Usborne Time Traveler: The Viking Age* (FB) (y)

*The Story of Rolf and the Viking Bow* by Allen French (1000, Iceland)

*Vikings* by Elizabeth Janeway—(Landmark) (1000, exploration)

*The King's Shadow* by Elizabeth Alden (1000s, England)

*The Lances of Lynwood* by Charlotte M. Yonge (1000s, Europe)

*Wulf the Saxon: A Story of the Norman Conquest* by G. A. Henty (1066, England) (o)

*The Red Keep* by Allen French (1165, Europe)

*If All the Swords in England* (Thomas Becket) by Barbara Willard (1100s, England)

*The Hidden Treasure of Glaston* by Eleanore M. Jewett (1171, England)

*The Minstrel in the Tower* by Gloria Skurzynski (1195, Europe)

*The Door in the Wall* by Marguerite DeAngeli (1200s, England)

*The Lost Baron* by Allen French (1200, England)

*Winning His Spurs* by G. A. Henty (1190, the Crusades) (o)

*The Crusades* by Child, Kelly, and Whittock (Peter Bedrick Books) (FB)

*Magna Charta* by James Daugherty (1200s, England)

*Cathedral* by David Macaulay (1200s, Europe)

*Genghis Khan and the Mongol Hordes* by Harold Lamb (1200, Central Asia)

*The Road to Damietta* (St. Francis of Assisi) by Scott O'Dell (1200, Italy)

*Adam of the Road* by Elizabeth Gray (1294, England)



*What Do We Know About the Middle Ages?* by Sarah Howarth (Peter Bedrick Books) (FB)

*St. George and the Dragon* by Margaret Hodges (legend, England)

*The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* by Howard Pyle (1200, England)

*Men of Iron* by Howard Pyle (1300s, England)

*In Freedom's Cause* (William Wallace and Robert the Bruce and the battle for Scottish independence) by G. A. Henty (1300, Scotland) (o)

*Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott (1300s, Europe)

*The Talisman* by Sir Walter Scott (1300s, the Crusades)

*William Tell* retold by Margaret Early (1300s, Switzerland)

*Otto of the Silver Hand* by Howard Pyle (1400s, Europe)

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by J. R. R. Tolkien (1400, England)

*Joan of Arc* by Josephine Poole (1400s, France)

*The Trumpeter of Krakow* by Eric P. Kelly (1400s, Poland)

*The Black Arrow* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1400s, England)

*A Knight of the White Cross* by G. A. Henty (1480, Europe) (o)

## ***Renaissance to Modern Day (other than U.S. history)***

*Ink on His Fingers* (Gutenberg) by Louise Vernon (1400s, Germany)

*The Hawk that Dare Not Hunt by Day* (Tyndale) by Scott O'Dell (1494–1536, England)

*Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus?* by Jean Fritz (1492, exploration) (y)

*Columbus* by the D'Aulaires (1492, exploration) (y)

*The World of Columbus and Sons* by Genevieve Foster (1400s–1500s, world)

*Lysbeth: A Tale of the Dutch* by H. Rider Haggard (1500s, Netherlands)

*Under Drake's Flag: A Tale of the Spanish Main* by G. A. Henty (1500s, England and exploration) (o)

*By Right of Conquest or With Cortez in Mexico* by G. A. Henty (1500s, Mexico) (o)

*The World of Captain John Smith* by Genevieve Foster (1580–1631, world)

*With Pipe, Paddle and Song* by Elizabeth Yates (1750, Canada)

*Leonardo da Vinci* by Diane Stanley (1400–1500, Europe)

*By Pike and Dike* by G. A. Henty (1500s, Europe) (o)

*St. Bartholomew's Eve: A Tale of the Huguenot Wars* by G. A. Henty (1500s, France) (o)

*Edmund Campion* by Harold Gardiner, S. J. (1500s, England)

*Red Hugh: Prince of Donegal* by Robert T. Reilly (1500s, Ireland)

*Martin Luther, The Great Reformer* by J. A. Morrison (1483–1546, Germany)  
*This Was John Calvin* by Thea B. Van Halsema (1509–1564, Europe)  
*Johannes Kepler* by John Hudson Tiner (Sower) (1600s, Germany)  
*Isaac Newton* by John Hudson Tiner (Sower) (1642–1727, England)  
*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens (1700s, Europe) (o)  
*The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orezy (1700s, France) (o)  
*Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes retold by Michael Harrison (fiction, Spain)

## **U.S. History**

*Pocahontas* by the D'Aulaires (y)  
*Diary of an Early American Boy* by Eric Sloan  
*The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper (o)  
*Witchcraft of Salem Village* by Shirley Jackson (Landmark)  
*Amos Fortune: Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates  
*Can't You Get Them to Behave, King George?* by Jean Fritz  
*And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?* by Jean Fritz  
*America's Paul Revere* by Esther Forbes  
*Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams?* By Jean Fritz  
*Sam the Minuteman* by Nathaniel Benchley  
*Crispus Attucks: Black Leader of Colonial Patriots* by Gray Morrow (CFA) (y)  
*Ben and Me* by Robert Lawson  
*Mr. Revere and I* by Robert Lawson  
*Ben Franklin of Old Philadelphia* by Margaret Cousins (Landmark)  
*The World of Captain John Smith* by Genevieve Foster (o)  
*George Washington's World* by Genevieve Foster (o)  
*The Cabin Faced West* by Jean Fritz  
*Fourth of July Story* by Alice Dagliesh  
*The Reb and the Redcoats* by Constance Savery  
*Benjamin Franklin* by the D'Aulaires  
*Johnny Tremain* by Esther Forbes  
*By the Great Hornspoon* by Sid Fleischman  
*Pioneers Go West* by Steward (Landmark)  
*Patty Reed's Doll* by Rachel Laurgaard

*The California Gold Rush* by May McNeer  
*Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell  
*Streams to the River, River to the Sea* (Sacagawea) by Scott O'Dell  
*Paddle to the Sea* by Holling C. Holling  
*Tree in the Trail* by Holling C. Holling  
*Minn of the Mississippi* by Holling C. Holling  
*Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink  
*The Courage of Sarah Noble* by Alice Dagliesh  
*The Matchlock Gun* by Walter D. Edmonds  
*Mother Cabrini* by Frances Parkinson Keyes  
*Carry on, Mr. Bowditch* by Jean Lee Latham  
*The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth Speare  
*Samuel F.B. Morse* by John Hudson Tiner (Sower)  
*Sitting Bull: Dakota Boy* by Augusta Stevenson (CFA) (y)  
*Carlota* (Mexican War) by Scott O'Dell  
*Will Clark: Boy Adventurer* by Katharine Wilkie (CFA) (y)  
*Meriwether Lewis: Boy Explorer* by Charlotta Bebenroth (CFA) (y)  
*Booker T. Washington* by Jan Gleiter  
*A Pocketful of Goobers: A Story of George Washington Carver* by Barbara Mitchell  
*Alamo* by George Sullivan  
*Make Way for Sam Houston* by Jean Fritz  
*Flatboats on the Ohio* by Catherine Chambers  
*Johnny Appleseed* by David R. Collins (Sower)  
*American Girls* series  
*If You Traveled West in a Covered Wagon* by Ellen Levine  
*Daniel Boone and the Wilderness Road* by Catherine Chambers  
*Iron Dragon Never Sleeps* by Stephen Krensky  
*Dragon's Gate* (Chinese immigrants and the railroads) by Laurence Yep  
*Sing Down the Moon* (Navaho Indians) by Scott O'Dell  
*Clara Barton: Founder of the American Red Cross* by Augusta Stevenson (CFA) (y)  
*Jed Smith: Trailblazer of the West* by Frank Latham

## ***Civil War Period and Slavery***

*The Life of Stonewall Jackson* by Mary L. Williamson  
*The Life of J.E.B. Stuart* by Mary L. Williamson  
*Abraham Lincoln* by the D'Aulaires (y)  
*Abe Lincoln: Log Cabin to the White House* by Sterling North (Landmark)  
*Robert E. Lee, The Christian* by William J. Johnson  
*Robert E. Lee* by Lee Roddy (Sower)  
*Stonewall* by Jean Fritz  
*With Lee in Virginia: A Story of the American Civil War* by G. A. Henty (o)  
*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (o)  
*Across Five Aprils* by Irene Hunt  
*Gettysburg* by MacKinlay Kantor (o)  
*Virginia's General: Robert E. Lee and the Civil War* by Albert Marrin (o)  
*The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox (o-read aloud)  
*Perilous Road* by William O. Steele, Jean Fritz  
*Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons: The Story of Phillis Wheatley* by Ann Rinaldi  
*Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (o-read aloud)  
*Rifles for Watie* by Harold Keith  
*The Story of Harriet Tubman: Conductor of the Underground Railroad* by Kate McMullan  
*Tales from the Underground Railroad* by Kate Connell  
*Walking the Road to Freedom: Sojourner Truth* by Jeri Ferris  
*Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco  
*Charley Skedaddle* by Patricia Beatty  
*Iron Scouts of the Confederacy* by McGriffon  
*The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane (o)  
*Booker T. Washington* by Jan Gleiter  
*Freedom Train* by Dorothy Sterling  
*Go Free or Die: A Story about Harriet Tubman* by Jeri Ferris  
*Freedom's Sons: The True Story of the Amistad Mutiny* by Suzanne Jurmain  
*Up from Slavery* by Booker T. Washington (o)  
*If You Traveled on the Underground Railroad* by Ellen Levine  
*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet A. Jacobs  
*Sojourner Truth; Ain't I a Woman?* by Pat and Patricia McKissack  
*Frederick Douglass Fights for Freedom* by Margaret Davidson

*Black Frontiers: A History of African-American Heroes in the Old West* by Lillian Schlissel

*Mary McLeod Bethune* by Eloise Greenfield (y)

*George Washington Carver: In His Own Words* by George Washington Carver

*The Negro Cowboys* by Philip Durham (o)

*The Drinking Gourd* by F. N. Monjo

## **Modern U.S. History**

*American Girls* series

*Danger at the Breaker* (Industrial Revolution) by Catherine A. Welch

*The Story of the Wright Brothers and Their Sister* by Lois Mills (y)

*Andrew Carnegie: Steel King and Friend to Libraries* by Zachary Kent (o)

*Henry Ford: Young Man with Ideas* by Hazel Aird and Catherine Ruddiman

*Dear America: So Far from Home—The Diary of Mary Driscoll, An Irish Mill Girl, Lowell, MA 1847* by Barry Denenberg

*Children of the Dust Bowl: The True Story of the School at Weedpatch Camp* by Jerry Stanley

*The Bracelet* (Japanese internment in WWII) by Joanna Yardley and Yoshiko Uchida

*Farewell to Manzanar* (Japanese internment in WWII) by Houston and Houston (o-read aloud)

*Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in WWII* by Penny Colman

*Understood Betsy* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher

*The Yearling* by Marjorie Rawlings

*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor (o-read aloud)

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (o-read aloud)

*Amelia Earhart* by Beatrice Gormley

*Rocket! How a Toy Launched the Space Age* by Richard Maurer

*Ronald Reagan* by Montrew Dunham

## **Modern World History**

*Number the Stars* (Danish resistance) by Lois Lowry

*The House of Sixty Fathers* (China) by Meindert de Jong

*The Wheel on the School* (Netherlands) by Meindert de Jong

*The Winged Watchman* (Netherlands) by Hilda Van Stockum

*Twenty and Ten* (WWII refugee children in France) by Claire Huchet Bishop

*The Crystal Snowstorm, Following the Phoenix, Angel and the Dragon, and The Rose and Crown* (nineteenth-century European politics) by Meriol Trevor

*When Jessie Came across the Sea* (Jewish immigrant) by Amy Hett (y)

*Teresa of Calcutta* by D. Jeanene Watson (Sower)

*Stalin: Russia's Man of Steel* by Albert Marrin (o)

*The Yanks Are Coming* (WWI) by Albert Marrin (o)

*Hitler* by Albert Marrin (o)

*America and Vietnam: The Elephant and the Tiger* by Albert Marrin (o)

*Sweet Dried Apples: A Vietnamese Wartime Childhood* by Rosemary Breckler

*The Land I Lost: Adventures of a Boy in Vietnam* by Huynh Quang Nhuong

## ***Help for Figuring Out Which Books to Use When***

Many homeschool distributors sell such books as these for various historical periods. Some homeschool catalogs even list books under time period headings so you can easily find those you want to use for history studies. In addition to catalogs, there are other resource books you can buy or borrow that will help you select your own books for historical studies. Three of the best are:

### ***All through the Ages: History through Literature Guide***

by Christine Miller

Nothing New Press

1015-M South Taft Hill Road #263

Fort Collins, CO 80521

e-mail: [info@nothingnewpress.com](mailto:info@nothingnewpress.com)

[www.nothingnewpress.com](http://www.nothingnewpress.com)

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 1 through 12. 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 and the Christian Tradition."

### ***Lessons from History***

by Gail Schultz

Hillside Academy

1804 Melody Lane

Burnsville, MN 55337

[www.lessonsfromhistory.com](http://www.lessonsfromhistory.com)

\$19.95 each

Gail has written five volumes that are essentially unit study outlines for different periods of history. As a major part of these outlines, she recommends real books for covering not only history but also science, geography, Bible, and the arts. She includes background information,

suggested books to read, projects, and discussion questions. These guides will work for students in grades K through 8.

***Let the Authors Speak: A Guide to Worthy Books Based on Historical Setting***

by Carolyn Hatcher

Old Pinnacle Publishing

1048 Old Pinnacle Rd.

Joelton, TN 37080

(615) 746-3342

Hatcher uses the first half of the book to explain the rationale for using real books for learning and for literature. The second half lists books, first by historical setting (time period, location), then by author. A supplemental section lists myths/legends, fantasy, folk tales, fables, and allegories by time period. Hatcher works from a Judeo-Christian worldview and leans toward a Western civilization background, which is reflected in the lists. However, all books listed are not necessarily Christian.

## ***Internet Resources***

I also found three Web sites that list historical literature by time periods. You might want to explore the following:

[www.fcps.k12.va.us/FranklinMS/research/hisfic.htm](http://www.fcps.k12.va.us/FranklinMS/research/hisfic.htm)

Nonsectarian list by date, author, title

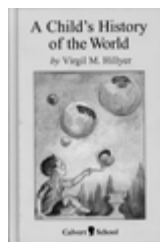
<http://lexicon.ci.anchorage.ak.us/guides/kids>

Nonsectarian, annotated list by time periods

[www.love2learn.net/history/histindx.htm](http://www.love2learn.net/history/histindx.htm)

Catholic lists with helpful reviews by time period

## **Reviews of History Resources**



***A Child's History of the World***

by Virgil M. Hillyer

Calvert School

10713 Gilroy Road, Suite B

Hunt Valley, MD 21031

(888) 487-4652

[www.calvertschool.org](http://www.calvertschool.org)

Book—\$25.00, CD-ROM—\$35.00, complete

course with textbook—\$50.00,

course without text—\$35.00

Hillyer's elementary-level world history is a classic that will grow in popularity with the beautiful, new, hardbound edition and an electronic edition. 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 School republished it in an updated edition as well as a CD-ROM version. The update includes the addition of events from the nineteenth century as well as some minor content changes to update 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?)

In spite of these "limitations," Hillyer's book is far better than most of its modern counterparts in my estimation. It offers depth and interest that are lacking in most textbooks. History coverage reaches beyond Europe, the Middle East, and North America by including 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 whomever 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 new 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: word scrambles, crosswords, projects, recipes, map work, and more.

The CD-ROM multimedia version of this book includes the complete text plus "original art, music, review questions, and computer-scored games."



### ***A Child's Story of America* (second edition)**

Christian Liberty Press

502 West Euclid Avenue

Arlington Heights, IL 60004

(847) 259-4444

[www.christianlibertypress.com](http://www.christianlibertypress.com)

\$8.95, test booklet and answer key—\$2.00 each

This is one of the most delightful history books I have ever come across. It reads like Hillyer's *A Child's History of the World* (discussed previously). It, too, reads more like a story than like a history text, giving the reader a sense that the author is conversing directly with him or her. Unlike Hillyer's book, however, *A Child's Story of America* includes Christianity in its coverage. The revised second edition markedly expands that coverage with information on the Great Awakening, revivals, and sketches of influential Protestant ministers. This edition now has a strong Protestant flavor that



was lacking in the first edition. Information has been updated through the Clinton administration, including his impeachment.

It is important to know that this book had its origins in a much earlier version, written closer to the turn of the last century. The original book reflected attitudes toward Indians that were quite different from today. This second edition reprint has taken pains to update the language and correct inaccurate and incomplete information, but it still reflects some of the original attitude. Keep this context in mind as you read the book.

The second edition features numerous illustrations and maps, printed in two colors. Sidebars add extra biographical sketches or vignettes that enhance topic coverage. Chapter review questions are in the book. A separate test booklet and answer key is available.



### **Genevieve Foster books**

Beautiful Feet Books

139 Main St.

Sandwich, MA 02563

(800) 889-1978

[www.bfbooks.com](http://www.bfbooks.com)

\$15.95 each

Beautiful Feet Books is bringing back some of my favorite world history books for upper elementary grades through high school. This is a series of books by Genevieve Foster that were written around the 1940s. Titles in print thus far are *Augustus Caesar's World*, *The World of Columbus and Sons*, *The World of Captain John Smith*, *George Washington's World*, and *Abraham Lincoln's World*. They reflect a Christian culture although they don't have 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 books in chronological sequence, you cover world history fairly well for the time periods they reflect.

These are great for read aloud time, but only with older students, probably at least fifth grade. Younger children will be overwhelmed with the information and will not have enough background to make the necessary connections. Often the information comes “rapid fire,” and even older children will need you to stop from time to time and spend more time discussing or explaining what you have read.

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 ideas, or discussion questions in these books, you could easily come up with some of your own for independent reading and research. Note that the books *do* have indexes that are very helpful when you want to locate information.

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. 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 some other books. Their *Ancient History* guide uses *Augustus Caesar's World*.



**Greenleaf Press: *Famous Men and Greenleaf Guides***

by Rob and Cyndy Shearer

Greenleaf Press

3761 Highway 109 North, Unit D

Lebanon, TN 37087

(800) 311-1508 (for orders only)

(615) 449-1617

e-mail: [orders@greenleafpress.com](mailto:orders@greenleafpress.com)

[www.greenleafpress.com](http://www.greenleafpress.com)

***Greenleaf Guide to Old Testament History***

by Rob and Cyndy Shearer

\$11.95

The Old Testament is the perfect place to start teaching history since it truly starts at the beginning. Many of us shy away from such a study because of the difficulties we might encounter, but the Shearers have made it much easier with this guide. It covers Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and most of Judges.

This guide differs from the other *Greenleaf Guides* in that it is based upon Bible reading and discussion rather than readings from an assortment of books. (Either *The Children's Bible Atlas* or *The Cultural Atlas of the Bible* is recommended as a visual tool, but nothing else is necessary.)

We read through sections of Scripture with our children, then use the guide's questions to lead a discussion. The Shearers suggest using Charlotte Mason's narration technique, where children relate back in their own words what has just been read. The questions generally focus on "who, what, where, when, why, and how" for historical understanding rather than as theology lessons.

Background information is included whenever it is useful. The Shearers also offer practical tips for dealing with the difficult passages, such as Tamar and Judah. You can tell from the suggestions that they have used all of this with their own family of seven children.

This is not like typical Bible study material that uses stories or incidents to teach spiritual truths or doctrine. But even though that is not the primary focus, children will learn foundational spiritual truths. Young children can easily answer most of the questions if they learn to listen carefully, but there are a few questions that will challenge older children to think more deeply. It should take a full school year to complete this book.

***Famous Men of Greece, Famous Men of Rome, and Famous Men of the Middle Ages***

Edited and updated by Rob and Cyndy Shearer

\$16.95 each

Instead of reading dry textbooks, children can learn about ancient history through biographical sketches of influential figures in the *Famous Men* books. Stories often build one upon another in chronological order. The effect is like reading a storybook, although not quite as interesting.

To accompany each *Famous Men* book, we also have *The Greenleaf Guide to Famous Men of Greece*, *The Greenleaf Guide to Famous Men of Rome*, and *The Greenleaf Guide to Famous Men of the Middle Ages* (\$8.95 each).

These guides turn the reading into limited unit studies with activities, discussion questions, geography (including map-building projects), and vocabulary for each chapter of each book. Biblical standards are used as the measuring rod when discussing the lives of the famous men. Chronological summaries of people and events are at the end of each book. Project work is optional for the most part, with more emphasis on reading and discussion. Frequently, lessons refer to supplemental resources for further research and readings on Greece, Rome, or the Middle Ages (resources available individually or in Greenleaf “packages”).

Of particular note in the *Greenleaf Guide to Famous Men of the Middle Ages* are the “worldview” comparison charts. On one chart we compare creation and end-of-the-world stories from Teutonic mythology and the Bible. Greek myths are compared against the other two belief systems as we consider characteristics of God and the gods, what they value, whom they honor, what they honor, and man's purpose for living. Another chart compares beliefs of Islam with Christianity. Discussion questions in all of the guides cover names, dates, and events, but they go much further than textbooks in dealing with character issues and biblical principles.

Greenleaf also publishes *Famous Men of the Renaissance and Reformation* by Rob Shearer. This book also has a companion guide. These two books are best suited to older students at junior and senior high level. I appreciate the unusual selection of biographies in this *Famous Men* book. We meet such famous men as Petrarch, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, and some of the standard Reformation leaders, including Wycliffe, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. But we also encounter characters such as Lorenzo d’ Medici, Cesare Borgia, Niccolo Machiavelli, Albrecht Durer, and representatives of the Anabaptist movement. The result is a richer picture of the period than we typically encounter. The perspective is strongly Protestant.

Greenleaf makes all of this even easier to use with their study packages. *The Ancient Greece Study Package* includes *Famous Men*, *The Greenleaf Guide*, *The Greeks* (an Usborne book), *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, and *Children's Homer*. *The Ancient Rome Study Package* includes *Famous Men*, *The Greenleaf Guide*, *City*, and *The Romans* (an Usborne book). *The Middle Ages Study Package* includes *Famous Men*, *The Greenleaf Guide*, *Castle*, *Cathedral*, and *The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*.

The Greenleaf materials more than adequately replace textbook material. The *Famous Men* books can be read to children at very young ages, but the actual studies are more suitable for middle to upper elementary grades. Even though the reading level is a little young, junior and senior high students can read the stories. Guide activities can be stretched to meet the needs of most learning levels, although the *Middle Ages* guide seems the easiest to use with older students.

### ***The Greenleaf Guide to Ancient Egypt***

by Cyndy Shearer

\$7.95

This *Greenleaf Guide* differs from the guides on Rome and Greece in that there is no *Famous Men* book to accompany it. Instead, it uses six other books and the Bible as resources.

The books are *Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt*, *Usborne Time-Traveller: Pharaohs & Pyramids*, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt Deserts*, *Pyramid*, *Tut's Mummy ... Lost and Found*, and *Mummies Made in Egypt*. There are many hands-on activities along with vocabulary and discussion questions. The general tone of this guide is slightly younger than that of guides for Rome and Greece. Since Egypt figures in chronological order before the others, it makes sense to use this book and the *Greenleaf Guide to Old Testament History* as your starting points, then follow with Greece, then Rome and the Middle Ages. Study can be adapted for children as young as second grade level, although it should be perfect for the middle elementary grades.



### ***Guerber History Series***

edited by Christine Miller

Nothing New Press

1015-M South Taft Hill Rd. #263

Fort Collins, CO 80521

e-mail: [info@nothingnewpress.com](mailto:info@nothingnewpress.com)

[www.nothingnewpress.com](http://www.nothingnewpress.com)

Christine Miller authored *All through the Ages: History through Literature Guide*, which I described briefly earlier in this chapter. Christine recommends using at least one overview-type book for each historical era in addition to titles that might focus on particular people and events. (An overview book functions like a history text in covering the broad range of events in chronological order.) Because it can be difficult to find appealing overview 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 six books in this series all begin *The Story of ....* The titles continue: ... *the Greeks*, ... *the Romans*, ... *the Middle Ages*, ... *the Renaissance and Reformation*, ... *the Thirteen Colonies*, and ... *the 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 Story of the Middle Ages*, Miller also drew upon some historical works by Charlotte Yonge.

Guerber writes with a lively style that reminds me of Joy Hakim (author of *The Story of U.S.* from Oxford University Press). 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. That means we also get some of Guerber's original thoughts and attitudes, and there might be a few of these with which you disagree. However, Christine Miller has added explanations in each book's forward regarding topics most likely to be problematic.

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 twenty-first-century perspective. Because the book 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 likely use something else instead of this last volume.

The reading level would make these 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, we read about the good and bad from both sides.



***The Mystery of History***

by Linda Lacour Hobar

Bright Ideas Press

P.O. Box 333

Cheswold, DE 19936

(877) 492-8081

E-mail: [info@brightideaspres.com](mailto:info@brightideaspres.com)

[www.BrightIdeasPress.com](http://www.BrightIdeasPress.com)

\$44.95 each

*Volumes I and II* of a projected five-volume series hold great promise as history resources for homeschoolers. They are designed so that even inexperienced parents can break free from traditional textbooks. They combine read aloud information with age appropriate activities to create a multisensory curriculum for history and geography with a very strong biblical base. They are designed to be used with children in grades K through 8, although the reading level is about sixth grade.

Titles for the five 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 and Growth of Empires (1461–1707)*

*Volume IV: Revolutions and Rising Nations (1708–1914)*

*Volume V: The World at War and the Present Day (1915–present day)*

***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, other books and videos that expand upon subjects are listed in the appendix, lesson by lesson.

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.

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 lesson begins with “Around the world” background and introductory information that you will want to read aloud with your children. A pretest follows. Pretests are meant to spark interest, so you want to present these in a light-hearted fashion (à la a Trivial Pursuit-type 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 suggests that young children play a concentration-type 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 “memory cards.” These are three-by-five-inch 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.

Field trip suggestions are sometimes included at the end of the three lessons, but review activities are always included. This includes work on timelines, maps, and a review quiz. Ten reproducible map masters are at the back of the book. Author Linda Hobar recommends that you have both a Bible atlas and a historical atlas for reference for map work.

Linda also shares creative and inexpensive ideas for making timelines, with detailed instructions for using folding sewing boards as the base for portable timelines.

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 Linda'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 work more one-to-one with the parent. They have more arts-and-crafts-type activities that are not graded. Older students do more independent research and writing that is graded.

While this is essentially a study of history, it is also a Bible study of sorts with an apologetic flavor in spots. The appendix includes an adaptation of Campus Crusade's booklet used for people to accept Christ. Letters to students at the beginning of the book (different letters for different age groups) direct students to that section of the appendix if they don't already have a relationship with God.

***Volume II: The Early Church and the Middle Ages*** follows the same layout as the first volume, although it is no longer following a biblical chronology. There are fewer lessons, but each lesson has more content information than do lessons in *Volume I*. 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. Linda'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 also get the big picture.

This combination of self-contained history and multisensory activities should really appeal to many homeschooling families.



***The Old World's Gifts to the New***

by Sister Mary Celeste

Neumann Press

21892 County 11

Long Prairie, MN 56347

(800) 746-2521

e-mail: [sales@neumannpress.com](mailto:sales@neumannpress.com)

[www.neumannpress.com](http://www.neumannpress.com)

\$26.00

Originally published (and reprinted) in eight printings from 1932 to 1939, this is a delightful Catholic presentation of world history, similar in some ways to Hillyer's *A Child's History of the World*. It is probably best for students in the upper elementary grades. This hardcover book is almost five hundred pages in length, but it has fairly large print, a number of black-and-white illustrations, and a lively writing style that actually make it read rather quickly.

Refreshingly, it begins with Adam and Eve rather than “millions of years ago.” It continues up through exploration and settlement of the Americas, including the early colonial period.

As with most history books of the era, this one focuses on the roots of Western civilization with little attention to Africa and Asia. However, it does an exceptional job of connecting people, places, and events in a meaningful way, explaining why things happened as they did, so that it reads like a story rather than a collection of information. I found the illustrations—particularly the photos—quite interesting, but occasionally an illustration had little to no reference within the text—a curious situation.

There are many questions and activities, but they are presented in a somewhat random fashion. Sometimes they are presented as “test yourself,” sometimes as recall-type questions, and sometimes as discussion questions. Some activities ask students to retell events in their own words. Among other exercises/activities are drawing or cutting projects and acting out historical scenes. You need at least a small group for the latter. Comprehension questions range from matching to writing a few sentences. These questions/activities appear with no predictability—sometimes in the middle of a unit, sometimes at the end. No teacher guide or answer key is available, but this isn't a significant problem.

I really enjoyed reading this book and found myself reading more than skimming as I frequently do when reviewing such books.

***The Story of the World: History for the Classical Child***

by Susan Wise Bauer

Peace Hill Press

18101 The Glebe Lane

Charles City, VA 23030



(877) 322-3445

e-mail: [info@peacehillpress.com](mailto:info@peacehillpress.com)

[www.peacehillpress.com](http://www.peacehillpress.com)

Texts: for Volumes 1–3—paperback \$16.95, spiral \$18.95, or hardcover \$21.95; volume 4 is \$1.00 more for each edition. Curriculum guides for volumes 1–3—\$29.95 each, volume 4—\$32.95. Activity page packets: volume 1—\$7.95, volume 2

—\$9.95; test packets—\$12.95 each

*The Story of the World* by Susan Wise Bauer presents world history through narration and storytelling in this four-volume series. While these books are written to be read aloud to children in grades 1 through 4, they may also be used for independent reading by fifth and sixth graders. The *Story of the World* books are available in your choice of hardcover, lay-flat perfect binding (softcover), or sturdier spiral-bound editions.

Many will recognize Bauer as one of the authors of *The Well-Trained Mind*—an exceptionally good 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.

**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! The book's size of 334 pages means there's actually quite a bit of material in comparison to many world history texts for the early 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.

As in *The Well-Trained Mind*, the presentation is not overtly Christian, although it recognizes and includes Christianity. For example, 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.

Although there are a few black-and-white illustrations and maps, this is not a colorful history picture book for “browsing” but a basic history resource from which you can build a complete study for the early grades.

To help you do just that, Susan Wise Bauer has also created a companion study guide called a *Curriculum Guide and Activity Book*. This 275-page “book” is a compilation of questions, narration exercises, reading lists (both history and literature), map work, and activities to accompany each section. “Book” is in quotes because you have two options: a softbound book version, or 275 pages with holes pre-punched for insertion into your own three-inch or five-inch three-ring binder. The price is the same for either format.

Reproducible pages in this and other guides are segregated from lesson plans into their own section, which makes copying easier. Parents have permission to photocopy student pages for



their family's use. However, Peace Hill Press sells separate packets of only these reproducible pages. Separate packets of tests with answer keys are also available.

You will find some very unusual project ideas in the *Curriculum Guide and Activity Book*: for example, mummifying a chicken and making Greek tattoos with pure henna. Reproducible blackline masters 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 four illustrated blocks of information per page. These can be cut and pasted on three-by-five-inch cards and 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.

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 to supply the colorful illustrations lacking in the core history book as well as more complete historical information. Other recommended books should be available through the library.

***Volume 2: The Middle Ages—From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of the Renaissance*** is very much like the first volume. 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.

*Volume 2* also has a companion *Curriculum Guide and Activity Book*. This large volume has 236 lesson plan pages *plus* another 176 single-sided student activity pages as compared to the 275 total pages of the guide for *Volume 1*. Like the first volume's activity book, it is available in either bound or loose-leaf format.

***Volume 3: Early Modern Times—From Elizabeth the First to the Forty-Niners*** continues in the same fashion. However, it seems a little “scattered” because it ambitiously tries to cover a huge swathe of worldwide history in fewer than four hundred 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. 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*** covers from 1850 to the present day. This volume is still in production as I write but should be available by the time you read this book. The curriculum guide and activity books for these last two volumes should also be available by that time.

Both the history “texts” on their own and the study guides are valuable contributions that fill a need for Christian-friendly but classically-oriented history study.

The publisher's Web site has helpful information on choosing and using different versions of the books as well as information about ancillary products.



### ***TruthQuest History***

by Michelle Miller

TruthQuest History

P.O. Box 2128

Traverse City, MI 49685-2128

e-mail: [info@TruthQuestHistory.com](mailto:info@TruthQuestHistory.com) or

[TruthQuestHist@aol.com](mailto:TruthQuestHist@aol.com)

[www.TruthQuestHistory.com](http://www.TruthQuestHistory.com)

\$22.95 to \$33.95 each

I was talking with a group of parents about curriculum choices one evening, and there was a broad consensus in favor of using real books for history among them. However, many parents were insecure about using real books without some sort of guidance. One mom spoke up to recommend *TruthQuest* as the solution. That piqued my interest enough to check it out.

*TruthQuest History* is a series of ten volumes that serve as guides for a “real books” approach to history. Each guide is divided into many 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 children 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 Hillyer's *A Child's History of the World*. Then she lists many other books that cover specific topics. You can use spine (or overview) books, topical books, or both; however, using at least some spine books will save you time.

Michelle 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.

A unique aspect of *TruthQuest* 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 Michelle Miller writes as she introduces each topic of study.

*TruthQuest* very much reflects a Francis Schaeffer approach to history. (In his book *How Should We Then Live?* Schaeffer examines religious beliefs and philosophies, showing how historical events, scientific discoveries, artistic endeavors, literary pursuits, etc., were all shaped by beliefs and philosophies.) In addition, Michelle supports a limited government perspective along the lines Richard Maybury presents in his Uncle Eric series (e.g., *Whatever Happened to Justice?*) from Bluestocking Press. Although Michelle writes from her own Protestant perspective, 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 Michelle'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. For example, *The Light and the Glory for Children* (providential view of history) and *How Should We Then Live?* (described above) are recommended spine books with a strong philosophical orientation. On the other hand, some of Guerber's history books and *Famous Men of Rome* 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.

Enough on the philosophy of *TruthQuest*. Let's get back to how they are structured. Topical sections are further divided into subsections that address important people or events within a time period. For example, the section “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, gangsters; women's suffrage; baseball and Babe Ruth; Charles Lindbergh; Bessie Coleman; literary authors; scientists; music; and sports. 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 many topics.

Scattered throughout the books are a number of “ThinkWrite” exercises. These are writing assignments that require students to analyze the historical information they have learned from a worldview perspective. For example, ThinkWrite 5 in *American History for Young Students* 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 6 in the Renaissance volume asks: “What do you think Henry VIII's actions reveal about his *Big 2 Beliefs*? What would it have been like to live under a king who held those beliefs?”

These questions are not intended to solicit only objective information. They require children to make spiritual and practical connections. However, they also 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 questions.

You will have to watch the level of difficulty in these guides. The three *American History* books are suggested as starting places for children in the primary grades. That does not mean they are only good for the primary grades, since recommended books within these guides are for all levels up through grade 12. My impression is that these and other guides will all work across the entire span of grade levels 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.

Titles of the guides are:

- *American History for Young Students, Volumes I, II, and III* (suggested as guides to begin with for those with younger children)
- *Ancient 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)



***The Ultimate Geography and Timeline Guide***

by Maggie Hogan and Cindy Wiggers

Bright Ideas Press

P.O. Box 333

Cheswold, DE 19936

(877) 492-8081

e-mail: [geocreations@brightideaspress.com](mailto:geocreations@brightideaspress.com)

[www.brightideaspress.com](http://www.brightideaspress.com)

Geography Matters

P.O. Box 92

Nancy, KY 42544

(606) 636-4678

[www.geomatters.com](http://www.geomatters.com)

\$34.95

Maggie Hogan, author of *Hands-On Geography*, and Cindy Wiggers of Geography Matters, have combined their wisdom and experience to put together this resource book for teaching geography to children in grades K through 12.

It takes a little time to explore the wealth of options found here. The first section, “Planning Your Destination,” suggests basic teaching methods, describes notebooks that students might create, and recommends basic supplies. [Chapter 2](#) is a sort of 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 us how to incorporate the five themes into our studies. Next is a section on maps: different types, how to use them, map games, and more. All this is in just the first of six units!

The second unit focuses on fun, games, and food as tools for teaching and enjoying geography. Unit three teaches us 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 us 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*. At the end of this section are tips on teaching geography through the Internet, including a list of great sites.

Unit four presents what most people think of as the nuts and bolts of geography: lesson directions and data on geographical features, climate, vegetation, 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 sections. The final unit is all about creating a timeline and includes hundreds of reproducible figures for your own timeline.

A fun feature of this book is a “Who Am I?” game that uses the reproducible pages of game cards. In addition to all this, the book includes an answer key, a glossary, an index (very useful with a book such as this), and lists of additional resources you might want to use.

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.

Also check out their new *Hands-On Geography* for grades K through 4 and their new *Trail Guide* books for short daily geography lessons.

# 11

## Science

**L**et me ask you a few questions about your own experience 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 was 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 subjects, but none of them with enough depth to engage a student's interest. At high school level, it switches to another extreme: vocabulary and memorization ad nauseum. High school texts stay focused on one subject but provide the 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 teacher/s 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 we develop a proper perspective. Science, in terms of education, means the study of God's creation, its purposes, its functioning, and its beauty. We often limit our definition 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 is more useful for children in the early elementary grades to develop an appreciation for God's creation—our bodies, the earth, plants, animals, the weather, and so on—than it is for them to begin memorizing details (although classical educators might argue to the contrary that this is the ideal time to work on memorization). Field trips, experiments, observations, and nature collections will all stimulate interest in children. These should continue to be a major part of your science curriculum for all ages.

In my opinion, attention to vocabulary and acquisition of facts become more important around eight to ten years of age. For those trying to use a classical approach to education, think of this as all being 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 easily acquire the knowledge and skills.

I propose the following four goals in teaching science for elementary levels (kindergarten through sixth grades):

1. To turn children on to science so they develop inquiring minds
2. To expose children to many topics in science
3. To teach children the foundations of scientific method—orderly thinking and forming, testing, and evaluating hypotheses
4. To help children acquire *basic* knowledge and vocabulary for science.

I believe the best way to meet these goals is not by using science textbooks. 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 the textbook's scope and sequence. It is far better to respond to an area of interest by an immediate trip to the library or a field trip that gives them information they are personally seeking.

If you limit science to a textbook, you will be missing much. 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 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 the chapters!

However, when you choose your own topics, allowing more time to cover fewer topics, you will be able to follow 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 rabbit trails, learning what did not work, ultimately contributed to his amazing successes.

When you use the methods I have described, your children are likely to pick up the vocabulary and basic information painlessly because they are interested.