

tendency to teach the way you like to learn rather than the way your children learn best. Then you need to look for resources and methods that best meet the needs of your children, while still being practical for you to use.

When you combine your philosophy of education and ideas about approaches you would like to use with what you have discovered about learning styles, you can fine-tune your curriculum choices. For example, I ended [chapter 3](#) noting that unit study, Charlotte Mason, and classical education ideas should be part of the curriculum for my sons. When I add learning styles to the mix, I know that my Wiggly Willy eldest son still needs some projects and hands-on learning mixed in with the worldview/unit study type education I would like to pursue. I would still like to shift toward classical education, so when I look at the Top Picks charts in [chapter 6](#), I find that *Tapestry of Grace* looks like it fits the situation quite well.

In addition, since math is my eldest son's most challenging subject, I need to be particularly careful about his math program and find one that still has manipulatives at junior high level. In [chapter 6](#), I look for math programs with a 4 or 5 in the first column indicating that it is multisensory/hands-on, then go to the actual reviews in [chapter 8](#) to find those that continue using manipulatives up into junior high and beyond. Either *Moving with Math* or *Math-U-See* might do, although *Math-U-See* looks to be a better bet since I suspect he will need to continue with some manipulative work on into high school.

• • •

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

5

Who Should Learn What and When?

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

Curriculum Standards

On both state and national levels, there has been a push to develop common standards for each subject area that describe what all government school students should be learning. As those standards have been developed, textbooks have been rewritten to reflect them. While there are minor variations from state to state, standards are similar enough across the country to enable a handful of textbook publishers to produce books that can be used in just about every state.

The following examples of standards from California illustrate what I am talking about:

From kindergarten English language arts:

- Identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book.
- Follow words from left to right and from top to bottom on the printed page.

From fourth grade mathematics:

- Solve problems involving multiplication of multidigit numbers by two-digit numbers.
- Solve problems involving division of multidigit numbers by one-digit numbers.

From fifth grade science standards:

- Students know that each element is made of one kind of atom and that the elements are organized in the periodic table by their chemical properties.

From sixth grade English language arts:

- Identify the structural features of popular media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, online information) and use the features to obtain information.
- Clarify an understanding of texts by creating outlines, logical notes, summaries, or reports.
- Follow multiple-step instructions for preparing applications (e.g., for a public library card, bank savings account, sports club, league membership).

From Biology/Life Sciences for high school:

- Students know at each link in a food web some energy is stored in newly made structures but more much energy is dissipated into the environment as heat. This dissipation may be represented in an energy pyramid.

From eighth grade History/Social Science:

- Describe the significance of the Northwest Ordinance in education and in the banning of slavery in new states north of the Ohio River.
- Discuss the importance of the slavery issue as raised by the annexation of Texas and California's admission to the union as a free state under the Compromise of 1850.
- Analyze the significance of the States' Rights Doctrine, the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Wilmot Proviso (1846), the Compromise of 1850, Henry Clay's role in the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision (1857), and the Lincoln-Douglas debates (1858).

Because these standards are so detailed, the compilation of standards for each state could fill an entire book per state! Consequently, I cannot include the standards themselves within this chapter. Instead, here are Web sites where you can access standards for most states.

- http://dir.yahoo.com/Education/K_12/Curriculum_Standards

This is the Yahoo! Directory for Curriculum Standards for various states and organizations. It's a great starting place since it has links to Web sites listing standards for most states and a number of organizations working on developing overarching national standards. Web site addresses might change from time to time, but this directory is likely to stay updated.

- <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci>

This is the site for "Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve." California, being one of the largest states, has some of the most well-developed and widely accepted standards.

- www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml

Like California, Virginia has also been a leader in developing standards. This is the site where you can view the "Standards of Learning Currently in Effect for Virginia Public Schools."

It is important that you notice how detailed and prescriptive these standards are. In years past, schools worked from "Scope and Sequence" documents that outlined goals in more general terms. For example, the previously quoted standards for eighth grade history might have been summarized as a more general directive: "Study the issue of slavery and its connection to the Civil War."

The more general language of "Scope and Sequences" left much to individual schools and teachers to determine as far as teaching each classroom of children. Now, to the contrary, these new standards leave little for schools or teachers to determine because coverage of so many topics is required.

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

A side effect of the standards movement has been that private and homeschools have often adopted those same standards by default rather than on purpose. You might have noticed in advertisements for curricula and resources marketed to homeschoolers, that many mention that they “meet or exceed” national standards. Publishers of these resources have taken into consideration the large government school market and have made sure that they are creating resources that can be sold to those within government school systems. That means many homeschoolers end up teaching the same things as do government schools simply because that is what is in textbooks or other resources.

A Contrarian View

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

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

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

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

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

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

In light of the individuality of each child, parents should view the state's educational standards with skepticism rather than accept them as a foundational directive for

homeschooling.

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

Government management of schools springs from governmental concern to maintain peace and order— a sort of conformity—within society. It has nothing to do with religious beliefs and personal development except as it affects larger “societal” goals. At the present time, societal goals are primarily economic.

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

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

While young people should be prepared to get a job when they get out of school, many parents believe that education is as much or more about personal development, learning to think, developing integrity, and spiritual development. After all, what profits a man if he has all the job skills in the world but he is a spiritual and cultural barbarian? And isn't this what we see with corporate executives who think nothing of using their “job skills” to siphon off money illegally and use their language arts skills to lie and convince others that they were just doing their jobs?

A Higher Goal for Education

Personally, I think one of the most important components of homeschooling is worldview education. This is where we address the most important life questions:

- Is there a God?
- Who is man in relation to God?
- What is the purpose of our life on earth?
- Is there life after death?

The way we answer these questions reveals our foundational philosophic and religious beliefs. Our worldview determines how we think about and shape our lives.

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

A Christian worldview colors everything with the belief in God's existence. Because God is real, we believe He has revealed truth to us. Part of that revelation is the reality of life after death, the fact that we have a soul, the fact that Jesus Christ died for us so that we can have

eternal life with God. This knowledge means there's much more to life than the present physical reality. There is a larger purpose and meaning to most everything. Our lives are not to be lived as if we are accidental entities. Instead, God calls us to live out our lives according to God's plan.

These conflicting worldviews produce some conflicting educational goals. While they share *some* common goals (such as acquiring reading, writing, and computation skills), they differ when it comes to making choices of other subjects to be taught, what is to be taught each year, the amount of time and attention we spend on each subject, and/or details within subject areas.

For example, religion or Bible study might be a major subject in your curriculum even though it is not on any standards list and none of the standardized tests asks any religion questions. It might be so important to you that it is the first subject covered every day of the week.

You might be a musically inclined family, and music education is a much higher priority for you than for most other families.

If you are following a classical education model, you might be teaching your children Greek and Latin in the elementary grades as a foundation for the study of primary sources in high school.

That same preference for a classical education might mean that your high school students study philosophy, logic, and rhetoric in place of, or in addition to, physics or calculus.

Even if you choose to teach the same subjects as do most schools, you might still have different ideas about what should be taught within each subject. One of the thorniest issues is evolution and creation.

Another one of the standards for high school Biology/Life Sciences reads: "Evolution is the result of genetic changes that occur in constantly changing environments. As a basis for understanding this concept: a. Students know how natural selection determines the differential survival of groups of organisms"¹ (emphasis in the original). This science standard requires students to parrot the evolutionary teaching that different species came about by natural selection. Since evidence for evolutionary theory is shaky at best, *requiring* children to learn and believe this is very much a part of a worldview that denies the existence of God. The implied logic is that if man came into existence as an accident through the process of evolution, then God did not make man, and the whole story of Genesis and the fall of man is nothing more than folklore. Logically, there is then no need of a Savior as a consequence of something that never happened.

Other worldview problems crop up in textbooks reflecting state goals. For example, multicultural goals translate into stories about pagan gods and goddesses who are presented as being every bit as credible as the Christian God. Students are taught they can make no value judgments regarding religion and morality because these are simply expressions of personal or cultural belief rather than reflections of any one reality or Truth that exists for everyone. Along the same line, literature is analyzed for whatever personal meaning a student might draw from it rather than to grasp an author's message or any transcendent meaning.

While purporting to be nonreligious, government schools actually have an agenda that turns out to be antireligious. Students learn what schools claim to be the essentials of

education, and God is no part of any of it. This teaches them that God is irrelevant. They learn that all gods are created equal and that it is intolerant to expect others to accept your beliefs about God and His commands about how we should live. A parent who asks that her child not learn witchcraft spells in school is charged with narrow-mindedness. A parent who does not want her child to learn “safe” ways to fornicate is called “unrealistic.”

I realize that much of this happens within government schools themselves and is not required by the standards, but the standards reflect the worldview that teaches and encourages the above (and even worse) classroom practices.

Beyond that, the time required to teach to government-selected standards steals time that could be devoted to other goals that are more important to you.

My point is, homeschooling parents should use state standards as well as the resources built around them with caution. Parents need to have goals for their children's education, but these should not simply be copied from government schools.

Choosing Your Own Goals

The *ideal* way to come up with your goals is to start from scratch and figure out what you think is important for your child to learn, then write it all out. The more *realistic* way to do this is to start by looking at one or more lists of standards, then work from those to come up with your own goals.

With standards readily available on the Internet, you can copy from these the standards you think are appropriate for your own child in each subject area. Look across a range of grade levels to find standards/goals that are appropriate for your child. Change ones that you think need rewriting and add any additional goals of your own.

For example, I agree with most of the California goals or standards for third grade mathematics, but I do not agree that children at this age need to be learning probability and graphing. However, if my children must take a standardized test, this is an item upon which they are likely to be tested. So I then have to decide whether a higher test score or sticking to my conviction is more important. Since I actually live in a state that does not require standardized testing, I would opt to drop probability and graphing from my goals for third grade. I also believe it important that children develop a Christian understanding of math from the earliest years, so I would add a goal that my child understand that mathematics reflects God's order and consistency. (I might illustrate this concept for my child by trying to get him to come up with a sum other than four when he adds two items plus two items. The impossibility helps him understand that the consistency of math reflects the nature of God.) So when it comes to third grade mathematics I copy the third grade standards and then make these deletions and additions.

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

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

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

Now some of you might be considering unit studies at this point and are wondering how on earth you can match up goals with a unit study. Actually, it works well as long as you understand that all of the goals/standards of a year-long unit study are unlikely to be found at only one grade level of a published list of goals/standards.

Unit studies assume that children in the study will be at many different grade levels. Some unit studies try to categorize learning activities by groups of grade levels (e.g., K–2, 3–6, 7–8, 9–12). Some are written for only grades 4–8 or some other limited audience. Still others leave it to you to sort through all the activity choices on your own to identify grade levels. You might find that the study you undertake this year and the activities you choose reflect goals from second, third, fourth, and fifth grade levels. You will not be covering all the “normal” goals for any one of those levels in a single year, but over the course of three or four years you will have done so. Consequently, unit studies require that you have a more longrange view of your goals.

In reality, if you stick with a comprehensive unit study program such as *KONOS*, *Tapestry of Grace*, or *A World of Adventure*, the authors have thought this through so that necessary material is covered over a span of years. Many unit studies will also tell you what subject areas they do and do not cover so you will know what other resources you might need to purchase.

What Do I Do with My Goals Now?

The next step is to use the reproducible form at the end of this chapter to write out your goals. (Be sure to make plenty of copies because you will need one for each subject for each child.) If you are trying to work from a preprinted list of goals or goals downloaded from the Internet, try to add three columns to the right as is done on the reproducible chart for writing out your own goals. In the sample below, I've adopted the California goals for second grade math,² and just added the columns to the right.

School Year 2004-2005

Student Name: Brandon Smith

Goals for Math	Introduction	Review/ Practice	Mastery
1.1 Count, read, and write whole numbers to 1,000 and identify the place value for each digit.			
1.2 Use words, models, and expanded forms (e.g., $45 = 4 \text{ tens} + 5$) to represent numbers (to 1,000).			
1.3 Order and compare whole numbers to 1,000 by using the symbols $<$, $=$, $>$.			
2.1 Understand and use the inverse relationship between addition and subtraction (e.g., an opposite number sentence for $8 + 6 = 14$ is $14 - 6 = 8$) to solve problems and check solutions.			
2.2 Find the sum or difference of two whole numbers up to three digits long.			
2.3 Use mental arithmetic to find the sum or difference of two two-digit numbers.			
3.1 Use repeated addition, arrays, and counting by multiples to do multiplication.			
3.2 Use repeated subtraction, equal sharing, and forming equal groups with remainders to do division.			
3.3 Know the multiplication tables of 2s, 5s, and 10s (to "times 10") and commit them to memory.			

The three additional columns are labeled "Introduction," "Review/Practice," and "Mastery." The reason for these columns is that teaching your child about a concept one time rarely means he or she has learned it. Generally, you'll need to review and/or practice the material, and at some point they will know it. By setting up the three columns, you will remind yourself to go back over these goals to make sure you work toward mastery.

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

1. figuring out what to teach,
2. checking progress through the school year, and
3. assessing year-end accomplishments.

Figuring Out What to Teach First

Sometimes when we start homeschooling, we have no idea where to begin. It really is helpful to have a list of standards or goals at least as a reference point to know what others might be doing. Assuming you are familiar with what your child already knows (through observation, your own experience, testing, or an evaluation by someone else), you can look at these lists and determine at what grade level your child seems to be functioning.

You want to choose goals that are challenging but not frustrating. If there are goals listed at a lower grade level that your child hasn't mastered, you need to consider whether it is important to make them a priority, put them off until later, or skip them altogether. Don't forget that you will be *adding* some of your own goals to whichever goals you choose to adopt.

Your lists of goals will also help you figure out what comes next. If your child has mastered the four punctuation marks for the ends of sentences, what punctuation comes next? Your goals will help you figure this out.

Checking Your Progress

Are you pushing your children too hard? Are you too lax in getting things accomplished?

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

Assessing Year-End Accomplishments

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

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

If you haven't a clue why you are having trouble, it might help to find a veteran homeschooler who will look over what you are doing and give you advice. Sometimes enrollment in a program that provides professional advice is the wisest investment.

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

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

Of course, you never want to become a slave to those goals to the point where you ignore the needs of your children. Even the best of plans need to be modified from time to time. You might even find yourself adjusting your goals on a quarterly basis rather than waiting till the

end of the year. That's great! It means you've taken control of what's going on and are really tuning in to your children's needs.

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

[illegible]

6

Top 100 Picks

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

That's a lot of information, but it doesn't do you much good unless you can match up what you've learned with the many curriculum options available to you. That's the purpose of this chapter.

I'll assume you've read through the first five chapters and have come to some conclusions about how you want to approach education. You've also figured out each of your children's learning styles. Now you're ready to use the chart at the end of this chapter.

The intent of the charts is to help you easily identify key features or characteristics of resources. The following descriptions of the meaning of each column will help you understand the information in the charts.

I have generally used a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 representing the highest correlation with the feature listed in that column. The number 1 usually means that it has none of this feature.

I'll explain the other "codes" below under their column headings.

1. Multisensory/hands-on (WW)

A 5 in this column means this is a particularly good choice for the kinesthetic learner, the one who needs movement and multisensory activity. This resource fits Wiggly Willys, but Sociable Sues often benefit from similar curriculum since it usually involves some sort of personal interaction.

2. Structure/rule-oriented (PP)

This is usually a more traditionally-structured resource that has a consistent format and/or a rules and memorization approach. Perfect Paulas generally prefer this sort of resource because it's predictable.

3. Appeals to logical/analytical learners (CC)

Resources with a 4 or 5 in this column require higher-level thinking and analysis and particularly appeal to Competent Carls.

4. Has social activity (SS)

Items with a 4 or 5 in this column require an interactive setting. Sociable Sues prefer learning in such social settings rather than independently. The interactive setting might be as minimal as a parent working directly with one child.

5. Needs parent/teacher instruction

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

6. Independent study (ind), one-to-one (1 to 1), or group (g)

This very important column helps you plan your time as well as select the best resources for each child. Many resources can be used in a number of ways, so abbreviations for each possible setting are included. However, some are specifically designed for one type of setting. An *independent study* resource allows the student to do most or all of his work on his own. *One-to-one* means a parent works directly with a child as he or she progresses through the lesson. *Group* means the resource works well in a setting with two or more students. Most resources will still have independent assignments or other work to be done in addition to a required group or one-to-one presentation.

7. Amount of writing

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

8. Prep time

This one is fairly obvious. It will give you some idea about how much time you will need to spend preparing lessons or learning to teach the program. 5 means it will take a great deal of time.

9. Grade level specific (s) or multilevel (m)

If you want to teach children at more than one grade level using the same resource, ungraded resources obviously work better. These will generally address the needs of a span of grade levels, such as grades 1 to 5 or maybe even 1 to 12. An "m" indicates one of these multilevel resources. You might also want to use an ungraded resource for a third grade child who is working below grade level in reading and who will be discouraged by a textbook that advertises that fact with a "grade 2" designation. An "s" indicates resources designed to be used only for single grade levels.

10. Ease of use for teacher

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

11. Teacher's manual: e = essential, na = not available, nu = available but not useful, u = useful, a = answer key only

All teacher's manuals are not created equal. Some are essential (e)—the book or program cannot be used properly without them. Some are window dressing (nu)—save your money. Some are useful, but if you don't mind figuring out answers yourself and skipping the extra helps they offer, you can manage without them (u). Some serve only as an answer key (a)—usually you will want these if you are past secondgrade-level material. And, of course, some resources do not have teacher's manuals (na).

12. Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy

A 4 or 5 indicates that this resource is very much based upon or supportive of Charlotte Mason's ideas. Mason's ideas about secondary education are a bit different from those for the elementary grades, so it is difficult or impossible to rate upper level resources in this column. Those have been marked n/a (not applicable).

13. Supports classical education

Resources with a 4 or 5 are based on or supportive of classical education. However, keep in mind that folks have some different ideas about what classical education requires in the elementary grades, so read reviews of these items carefully.

14. Protestant (P), Catholic (C), Nonsectarian (N)

This column reflects the religious or nonreligious perspective presented. Check the full reviews for details or cautions. Some religion-based resources have minimal religious content or it is expressed in such a way that most everyone is able to use the resource. Similarly, many nonsectarian resources will be inoffensive to those wanting to provide their children with a religion-based education.

15. Page # for review

This is where you will go to find the complete review for each resource.

Working through the Chart

Let's consider one example. You've worked through the earlier chapters and you've discovered:

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

You have read through the chart looking for resources that possess these characteristics. You really don't need items with a high rating in the first column. The second column will be more useful as a starting place since it lets you know which resources fit your daughter's Perfect Paula need for structure and order. Then the fifth column deals with direct teaching needed. She really likes to work independently, so you want to look for resources with a low number in this column.

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

Also, you might specifically focus on a composition resource appropriate for a group so you can invite another child or two to join your daughter for a writing class to make that subject more interesting to her. "Amount of writing" is of concern in that she needs more writing practice than she's had, so you might look for at least one or two resources that require at least some writing and one that requires a great deal.

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

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

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

Resources that seem to fit the bill:

- *Horizons Math*—structured math program that has minimal hands-on work and works well for independent learners.
- *Switched-On Schoolhouse*—computerized course for social studies that allows independent study.
- *Progeny Press* study guides and the associated novels for literature/reading—allows student to read real books while providing you, the parent, directions on how to ask appropriate questions and teach from the context of each book. It also includes some writing activity.
- *Wordsmith Apprentice*—for that group writing class you're going to organize. It is easy for you to use to lead an enjoyable, interactive small class.
- *Easy Grammar*—simple-to-use workbook approach for learning grammar independently.
- *BJUP* science or *Switched-On Schoolhouse*—since your daughter wants structure and accountability in her learning, and you like quizzes/tests to help ensure she is actually learning something, either of these programs could work. You might also plan to get together with another family to do science

experiments, using those from the curriculum or experiments from a supplemental book.

- Your own Bible curriculum.

Let's take another example. We'll say you're a harried mom for whom time is the most critical element since you have five children. We'll focus on your eight-year-old son.

You've determined:

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

Given this challenging situation, you might choose the following:

- *Greenleaf Guide* for studying Greece and Rome along with the recommended supplementary books. You can read aloud and discuss these with all your children together. You will appreciate the minimal preparation time required. Susan Wise Bauer's *Story of the World, Volume I* might be another possibility for a read-aloud history resource, but you probably won't have time to use much from the companion Curriculum Guide this year.
- *Stratton House Home Science Adventures' Astronomy, Birds, and Magnetism*—All your children can participate together in these focused studies. The kit provides most everything you need for a full year of science learning and activity.
- *MCP's Comprehension Plus*. Your son reads fine on his own now, but you will use the third grade workbook from this series to develop better comprehension and vocabulary. No prep or presentation time is needed; he can use this on his own. You need only compare his responses to the answer key.

- *Easy Grammar*—Provides grammar basics in preparation for next year when you want to move into a more challenging grammar resource. Again, no prep or presentation required once you are past initial lessons on prepositions.
- Sandra Garant's *Creative Communications*—Great for whole-family writing activities. This one will require your preparation and interaction, but most of your children can participate.
- *MCP Spelling Workout*—Reinforces his phonics knowledge while teaching spelling. He can do this independently.
- *Math-U-See*—Since math is so difficult for him, the hands-on materials for this program make it easier for him to grasp math concepts. (Your six-year-old who grasps math easily can join him for these lessons.) You will need to watch the videos to understand how to present concepts, but once you've been through it, you'll be able to work much more efficiently with your other children. You can also let the children watch with you, stopping the tape and trying out what has been shown.

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

Good question! I suspect that most who read this book will see Bible or religion as an essential part of their curriculum. In [chapter 5](#), I also mentioned teaching worldviews as a possible goal very much related to Bible and religion. The problem here is the huge number of possible options.

Do you want to focus more on Scripture memorization, doctrinal teaching, developing a relationship with Jesus, studying church history, or some other area? Are you ready to get into heavy worldview study? Each of these might be appealing at one time or another to families, but you cannot do it all at once. And the content and methodology might differ based on each family's faith tradition. Consequently, I decided to leave those choices entirely up to you rather than state my own preferences. However, if you want to investigate some of the possibilities, check out the reviews online at www.CathyDuffyReviews.com.

One Last Note Regarding the Charts

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

	Multisensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/rule- oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/teacher instruction	Independent study (ind), one-on-one (1 to 1), or group (g)	Amount of writing: U = up to parent
Phonics, Reading, and Literature							
Alpha-Phonics	2	4	4	3	5	1 to 1	1
At Last! A Reading Method for Every Child	2	4	3	4	5	1 to 1/g	3
Explode the Code	1	5	3	2	2	ind	2
Happy Phonics	5	3	3	5	5	1 to 1/g	1
MCP Plaid Phonics	1	5	3	2	2	ind/1 to 1	2
Noah Webster's Reading Handbook	2	3	3	3	5	1 to 1	1
Phonics Pathways	3	4	4	4	5	1 to 1/g	2
Reading Made Easy	2	3	3	4	5	1 to 1	1
Sing, Spell, Read, and Write	4	3	1	5	3	1 to 1/g	1
Spell to Read and Write	2	5	5	2	5	1 to 1/g	5
Drawn into the Heart of Reading	3	3	4	5	3	ind/1 to 1/g	U
MCP Comprehension Plus	2	4	3	3	2	ind/1 to 1/g	4
Critical Thinking: Reading, Thinking, and Reasoning Skills	2	4	4	3	2	ind	2
Progeny Press Novel Study Guides	2	3	3	3	3	ind/1 to 1/g	U
Total Language Plus Novel Study Guides	2	3	4	4	3	ind/1 to 1/g	U
BJUP Literature Series	2	3	4	3	4	ind/1 to 1/g	U
Learning Language Arts through Literature, Gold Books	1	4	4	2	3	ind/1 to 1/g	4
Stobaugh's Literature Series	2	3	5	3	3	ind/1 to 1/g	5
Mathematics							
Horizons Math	3	5	4	3	4	ind/1 to 1	5
Math-U-See	5	4	5	5	4	1 to 1/g	3
MCP Math	2	4	4	3	2	ind/1 to 1	2
Moving with Math	4	3	4-if you skip most manipulative activities	4-if you use many manipulative activities	4	ind/1 to 1/g	3

Prep time	Grade level specific (s) or multilevel (m)	Ease of use for teacher	Teacher's manual: e = essential, na = not available, nu = not useful, u = useful, a = answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy, (n/a = not applicable)	Supports classical education	Suitability/Content for Protestant (P), Catholic (C), Nonsectarian (N) audience	page # of review
1	m	4	e	3	3	N	81
2	m	3	e	3	2	N	82
1	m	5	a	4	4	N	84
5	m	3	e	4	3	N	85
1-more if you use Teacher Guide	s	5	u	4	4	N	86
1	m	5	e	3	3	P	87
2	m	5	e	3	3	N	88
3	m	3	e	4	3	P	90
0	m	3	e	2	3	N	91
3	m	3	e	4	4	P-but minute Christian content	93
4	m	3	e	5	4	P/C	98
1	s	4	u	2	3	N	100
1	s	5	u	3	3	N	101
1	m	4	e	5	4	P	102
3	m	5	e	5	4	P/C	104
depends on parent's familiarity with readings	s	3	e	3	3	P	106
3	m	4	e	5	4	P/C	113
2	m	3	e	4	4	P	109
2	s	4	e	3	4	P	133
3	m	3	e	4	3	N	137
1	s	5	u	3	2	N	142
3	s/m	2-unless you get the teacher guides	u	4	2	N	143

	Multisensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/rule- oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/teacher instruction	Independent study (ind), one-on-one (1 to 1),	Amount of writing: U = up to parent or group (g)
Progress in Mathematics	4	4	3	5	5	1 to 1/g	K-2:3 Gr. 3-8:4
Singapore Math	2	4	5	3	4	ind/1 to 1/g	3
Algebra Classmate	4	4	4	2	1	ind	2
Chalk Dust	3	4	4	2	1	ind	3
Discovering Geometry	4	3	5	4	4	1 to 1/g	3
Elementary Algebra (Jacobs)	3	4	5	2	2	ind/1 to 1/g	3
Geometry (Jacobs)	2	4	5	2	2	ind/1 to 1/g	3
Keyboard Enterprises Algebra	3	5	4	2	1	ind	3
Saxon Math 54 and up	1	4	4	2	2	ind	3
Videotext Algebra	3	4	4	2	1	ind	3
Language Arts: Grammar and Composition							
A Beka Language Arts	1	4	4	1	2	ind/1 to 1/g	4
Building Christian English	1	5	2	2	3	ind/1 to 1	4
Create-A-Story Game	5	2	4	5	4	g	4
Creative Communications	4	2	3	5	4	1 to 1/g	3
Easy Grammar	2	5	3	1	2	ind	3
English for the Thoughtful Child	3	2	3	4	5	1 to 1/g	4
Fairview's Guide to Composition and Essay Writing	2	3	5	4	4	1 to 1/g	5
First Language Lessons	2	5	2	4	5	1 to 1	2
Format Writing	1	5	5	2	3	ind/1 to 1/g	5
Institute for Excellence in Writing	3	4	4	4	5	1 to 1/g	4
Learning Language Arts through Literature, Elementary Grades	2	3	3	4	3	ind/1 to 1	4
Winston Grammar	4	4	4	2	4	1 to 1/g	2
Wordsmith Series	3	3	4	depends on interaction provided	3	ind/1 to 1/g	4
WriteShop	2	4	3	4	5	1 to 1/g	4
Writing for 100 Days	2	3	3	3	5	1 to 1/g	5
Writing with a Point	2	3	5	4	4	ind/1 to 1/g	4

Prep time	Grade level specific (s) or multilevel (m)	Ease of use for teacher	Teacher's manual: e = essential, na = not available, nu = available but not useful, u = useful, a = answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy, (n/a = not applicable)	Supports classical education	Suitability/Content for Protestant (P), Catholic (C), Nonsectarian (N) audience	page # of review
3	s	4	K-2: u Gr. 3-8: e	4	4	N	147
2	s	3	u	4	4	N	155
1	m	5	na	3	3	N	307
1	m	5	solutions guides instead	4	4	N	122
3	m	2	e	4	4	N	129
2	m	4	a	4	4	N	131
1	m	4	a	4	5	N	132
1	m	5	a	4	4	N	119
1	s	5	a-solutions guides	1	3	N	149
1	m	5	a-plus tests and quizzes in instructor's guide	4	4	N	158
1	s	5	a	2	5	P	161
1	s	4	u, e for upper grades	1	3	P	165
2	m	3	na	4	3	N	167
2	m	4	e	4	2	C	169
1	s/m	5	e	2	2	N	172
2	m	4	e	5	* see review	N	173
2	m	4	e	5	5	N	174
1	s	5	e	2	5	N	175
1	m	4	e	3	5	P	177
3-depends on how the course is used	m	4	e	5	5	N	179
2	s/m	4	e	5	2	P	181
2	m	4	e	3	3	N	184
2	m	4	e	4	3	N-subtle Christian influence	186
2	m	4	e	5	4	P	188
1	m	4	e	4	4	N	190
1	m	5	e	4	4	N	191

	Multisensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/rule- oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/teacher instruction	Independent study (ind), one-on-one (1 to 1),	Amount of writing: U = up to parent or group (g)
Language Arts: Spelling and Vocabulary							
Building Spelling Skills	2	5	4	2	2	ind	3
English from the Roots Up	3	4	4	3	5	1 to 1/g	U
Spelling Power	3	4	4	3	4	ind/1 to 1/g	4
Spelling Workout	2	5	3	2	2	ind	3
Vocabulary from Classical Roots	2	5	5	2	3	ind/1 to 1/g	2
Wordly Wise	2	3	4	1	1	ind	2
History/Social Studies							
A Child's History of the World	2-higher with lesson activities	2	3	5	4	ind/1 to 1/g	1-more with student book
A Child's Story of America	2	3	3	4	5	1 to 1/g	U
Genevieve Foster series	2	2	4	3	2	ind/1 to 1/g	1
Greenleaf Guides	2	2	3	5	2	ind/1 to 1/g	U
Guerber History Series	2	3	3	4	2	ind/1 to 1/g	1
Mystery of History	4	3	3	5	5	ind/1 to 1/g	U
The Old World's Gifts to the New	2	3	3	3	3	ind/1 to 1/g	U
The Story of the World with study guide	4	3	4	5	5	1 to 1/g	U
TruthQuest History	3	3	4	4	4	1 to 1/g	U
Ultimate Geography and Timeline Guide	5	3	5	5	5	ind/1 to 1/g	3
Science							
AIMS Education Foundation	5	4	5	5	5	1 to 1/g	3
Backyard Scientist Series	5	3	5	5	5	1 to 1/g	1
Christian Kids Explore Biology	4	2	4	5	5	1 to 1/g	U
BJUP Science for Christian Schools, 1-6	3	4	3	3	4	1 to 1/g	U
Considering God's Creation	4	4	4	5	5	1 to 1/g	U
Exploring Creation Science Series (Apologia)	3	3	4	2	1	ind/g	3
Great Science Adventures	5	2	2	4	5	1 to 1/g	U
A History of Science	3	2	3	5	4	1 to 1/g	U
Janice VanCleave Science Books	5	4	4	5	5	1 to 1/g	U

Prep time	Grade level specific (s) or multilevel (m)	Ease of use for teacher	Teacher's manual: e = essential, na = not available, nu = available but not useful, u = useful, a = answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy, (n/a = not applicable)	Supports classical education	Suitability/Content for Protestant (P), Catholic (C), Nonsectarian (N) audience	page # of review
1	s	5	a	2	5	P	192
5	m	2	e	4	5	N	194
2	m	3	e	3	4	N	195
1	s	5	u	3	5	N	197
1	m	5	e	3	5	N	198
1	m	5	a	2	5	N	199
1-higher with lesson manual	m	5 or 4 with lesson manual	u	5	5	N	214
1	m	5	a	4	5	P	215
1	m	5	na	4	3	N	216
1	m	5	e	4	4	P	217
1	m	5	na	3	4	P/C	219
4	m	4	e	5	2	P	221
1	m	4	na	3	4	C	223
3	m	3	e	5	5	P/C	224
3	m	2	e	4	4	P	226
4	m	2	e	5	4	N	228
4	m	3	e	5	5	N	235
5	m	4	e	5	3	N-Christian supplement available	236
5	m	2	e	5	3	P/C	241
4	s	4	e	3	3	P	239
4	m	2	e	5	4	P	242
2-except labs	m	4	a	4	4	P/C	252
5	m	1	e	3	2	N	243
2	m	4	e	5	5	N	245
5	m	2	na	5	3		237

	Multisensory/ hands-on (Wiggly Willy)	Structure/rule- oriented (Perfect Paula)	Appeals to logical/analytical learners (Competent Carl)	Has social activity (Sociable Sue)	Needs parent/teacher instruction	Independent study (ind), one-on-one (1 to 1),	Amount of writing: U = up to parent or group (g)
Living Learning Books	4	2	4	5	5	1 to 1/g	U
Media Angels Science	4	4	3	4	5	1 to 1/g	U
Rainbow Science	3	4	4	3	4	1 to 1/ind/g	3
Stratton House Home Science Adventures	5	4	4	5	5	1 to 1/g	2
TOPS Science	5	4	5	4	3	ind/1 to 1/g	2
Unit Studies							
Five in a Row	3	3	1	5	5-except oldest level	1 to 1/g	U
Further Up and Further In	2	3	3	3	4	1 to 1/g/ind	5
History Links	5	3	3	5	5	ind/1 to 1/g	U
KONOS	5	1-unless using Box or Bag	3	5-except high school level	5	g	U
Tapestry of Grace	4	2	3	5	5	g	U
A World of Adventure	3	3	3	3	4	1 to 1/g	U
World Views of the Western World	1	1	4	depends on interaction provided	2	ind/1 to 1/g	5
Foreign Language							
Herle Latin	1	5	4	2	3	ind/1 to 1/g	3
Latina Christiana	2	5	4	3	4	ind/1 to 1/g	3
Learnables	5	1	3	3	1	ind	1
Rosetta Stone	5	2	4	3	1	ind	1
Miscellaneous							
Total Health	1	3	3	2	2	ind/g	3
Critical Thinking Company	3	3	5	3	3	1 to 1/ind	2
The Fallacy Detective	1	3	5	2	2	ind	1
With Good Reason	1	2	5	3	5	1 to 1/g	3
Mark Kistler's Draw Squad	5	4	4	3	2	1 to 1/ind	5-art drawing
Feed My Sheep	5	2	4	4	4	ind/1 to 1/g	5-art drawing
Apex Learning	3	4	3	varies	2	ind/g	varies
The Potter's School	3	4	4	3	1	ind	4
Calvert School	3	4	3	3	3	ind/1 to 1	3
Sonlight	2	3	4	3	4-lots of reading together	1 to 1/g/ind	3
Switched-On Schoolhouse	2	5	2	1	1	ind	3-much on computer

Prep time (na = not applicable)	Grade level specific (s) or multilevel (m)	Ease of use for teacher	Teacher's manual: e = essential, na = not available, nu = available but not useful, u = useful, a = answer key only	Supports Charlotte Mason's philosophy, (n/a = not applicable)	Supports classical education	Suitability/Content for Protestant (P), Catholic (C), Nonsectarian (N) audience	page # of review
4	m	2	e	5	4	P-supplement at end of Level 2	246
3	m	3	e	4	5	P	248
2	s	4	e	3	3	P/C	255
2	m	4	e	5	3	N	249
3	m	4	e	5	3	N	238
2	m	4	e	5	1	N/P with supplement	259
4	m	3	e	5	4	P	261
4	m	2	e	5	3	C	262
5-unless using Box or Bag	m	1-unless using Box or Bag	e	5	3-except high school level-5	P	265
5	m	1	e	5	5	P	269
3	m	4	e	4	3	P	272
2	m	3-depending upon student initiative	na	4	4	P	274
1	m	4	u	3	5	C	284
1	m	4	e	3	5	P/C	285
1	m	5	na	3	2	N	280
1	m	5	na	2	1	N	283
1	m	5	nu	2	2	P	289
1	m	4	e	3	5	N	291
1	m	5	na	5	5	P/C	293
2	m	4	na	5	5	N	294
1	m	5	na	5	4	N	295
3	m	4	e	5	4	P	296
n/a	m	5	na	1	1	N	300
n/a	m	5	na	varies	varies	P	301
1	s	5	e	1	2	N	303
2	m/s	4	e	5	3	P	304
1	s	5	na-except for specific courses	1	1	P	307

Phonics, Reading, and Literature

Phonics comes first. I need not belabor the necessity of a solid phonics foundation for reading since even the public schools are beginning to acknowledge its necessity.

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

I have selected programs that are easily accessible, are appropriate for homeschool use, and ones that approach reading from a variety of educational philosophies. There is certainly something for everyone amidst all the choices.

I have to mention that there are many other excellent phonics programs that I could have included— this was the hardest section to make choices of the “best” programs. Please forgive me if I’ve left out your favorite!

I would be remiss if I didn’t also mention one of the most valuable resources for teaching beginning reading, even though it isn’t a program. Ruth Beechick’s *A Home Start in Reading* is a small book, usually packaged in *The Three R’s* set (Mott Media, 248-685-8773, www.homeschoolingbooks.com) that includes similar books on teaching arithmetic and language arts. *A Home Start in Reading* demystifies the process of teaching a child to read and gives you enough instructional material that you could actually teach your child to read from this twenty-eight-page book. I know that this approach is too “barebones” for most parents, but even if you choose to use a more complete program, this book will help you know what is and is not important so you’re in control of your program rather than the reverse.

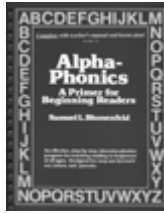
Following the reviews of phonics programs, I’ve listed some beginning readers that you might want to use alongside your program.

Once past the beginning reading/phonics stage, children need to shift their primary focus to comprehension and understanding, so I have included resources that address those needs. Then at the end of this chapter are reviews of resources that continue through junior and senior high school.

Phonics and Beginning Reading

Alpha-Phonics

by Samuel L. Blumenfeld



Paradigm Company
P.O. Box 45161
Boise, ID 83711
(208) 322-4440
www.alphaphonics.com
\$29.95; CD—\$39.95

Alpha-Phonics, Sam Blumenfeld's classic phonics manual, provides comprehensive phonics instruction in a simple, straightforward manner. Rules are presented along with lists of words, syllables, and eventually, sentences. A parent works through lessons with his or her child, working from the book. You can add extra activities, practice readers, or games if you wish.

Alpha-Phonics has heavy-duty plastic covers and a plastic comb binding so it will lie flat while you're working through lessons. Print is very large, making it suitable for young readers.

The methodology is solid phonics. Blending is taught via the vowel-consonant method, with initial consonants added next (e.g., *am* taught first, followed by *Sam* and *ham*). Words are taught in families (e.g., *an*, *ban*, *can*, *Dan*, *fan*, *Jan*). However, many nonsense syllables are included in the early stages to help students develop phonetic fluency. Some of the practice lists of such syllables get quite silly as students read through syllables and words like *gab*, *gac*, *gack*, *gad*, *gaf*, *gag*, *gal*, *gam*, *gan*, *gap*, *gas*, *gat*, *gav*, *gax*, and *gaz*. Students practice with quite a few such lists, but they also move quickly into reading actual sentences.

This program does not use pictures for key words as do many other programs. The print is very large and clear with no illustrations or other distractions. The intent is that students concentrate on the letters themselves so that they immediately recognize the sounds associated with a letter rather than taking an extra mental step to recall a key word associated with a picture.

Alpha-Phonics teaches forty-four different sounds for the letters of the alphabet. It teaches basic phonic rules, but not so many rules as we find in other programs such as *Writing Road to Reading* and *Saxon's Phonics*. You will want to use other reading material for additional practice once students have actually begun to read sentences. The publisher has a set of ten *Little Companion Readers* (\$19.95 for the set) that work well alongside *Alpha Phonics*.

Parents must work with children through this book, but it requires no preparation time and is a very efficient, even if unexciting, way for children to learn phonics.

You can preview sample lessons at the Web site.

Computer fans might be interested in the CD version: *Alpha-Phonics the Book on CD-ROM*. This program mirrors the original book, but with both spoken and written instructions. Students respond with the mouse rather than keyboarding.

In addition, there is an *Alpha-Phonics/How To Tutor Workbook* (\$14.95) that reinforces lessons in *Alpha-Phonics* with fill-in-the-blank and written exercises.

At Last! A Reading Method for EVERY Child!

by Mary Pecci

Pecci Educational Publishing

Order through Intrepid Group, Inc.

1331 Red Cedar Circle



Fort Collins, CO 80524
(970) 493-3793
www.OnlineReadingTeacher.com
\$29.95

Mary Pecci has put together a phonetic reading program that she claims overcomes the problems of both intensive phonics and sight-reading programs. Sight programs fail to teach the “code” of reading, so children try to guess rather than decode. On the other hand, many phonics programs have too many rules and are sometimes complicated, making decoding a frustrating and laborious process for many children.

Mary has created a program with fewer rules than most and that uses a consistent decoding strategy that helps deal with exceptions. She teaches using a consonant-phonogram approach. The way this works is that children first practice reading lists with phonograms such as *ep*, *elt*, *ond*, and *unch*. The parent/teacher then introduces initial consonants that join with these phonograms to form words. For example, *l* combines with *unch* to form *lunch*.

Mary reduces the phonetic code to its simplest terms by dividing the entire English language into four clear-cut phonics groups: 1. Short Vowel Phonograms—such as *at*, *ent*, *ig*, *ock*, *ust*; 2. Long Vowel Phonograms with “e” on the End—such as *ake*, *ete*, *ide*, *ome*, *ute*; 3. Long Vowel Phonograms with Two Vowels Together—such as *ail*, *eat*, *een*, *ied*, *oap*, *ued*; and 4. Sight Phonograms—twenty-five phonograms that need to be memorized rather than sounded out, such as *alk*, *ight*, *ange*, *ought*, *tion*. By grouping phonograms this way, every word is decoded phonetically, syllable by syllable.

Part 1 of this book contrasts phonics and sight methods and the difficulties of both. You can skip this part if you want. Part 2 gets into Mary's actual method for teaching reading. The key to her system is the uniform approach in word decoding. Children learn phonics rules, but not with the fine-tuning you find in a *Writing-Road-to-Reading*-type program. For example, children are not explicitly taught different rules for figuring out the different sounds for *ea* as in *real*, *head*, *great*, *heart*, and *learn*. Mary claims that this only causes confusion, and children are capable of decoding words with the different sounds of *ea* on their own when they have a simplified rule as a focal point. For example, when only one sound for *ea* is taught with the “Two Vowels Together” rule, children automatically decode the word *head* as *heed*. When a word pronunciation comes close but is still not correct, children are told to identify these words as “twisters”—words we twist to fit into the context of the story to pronounce them correctly. For example, in the sentence “Put your hat on your head,” children first sound out the last word as *heed*, but the context obviously requires twisting it to /hed/.

In the few cases when children cannot “twist” a word to get it right, they are taught to look up the phonetic pronunciation in the dictionary. These strategies simplify the number of rules children memorize.

Children work with word lists in the book as well as with flash cards and other visual aids that you, the teacher, will need to construct. Mary also shows you how to use beginning reading material other than phonetic readers that have only carefully contrived sentences such as “The rat sat on the mat.” Using her decoding strategy, children decode and learn to read new words from basal readers. You also should be able to apply the method to other beginning reading storybooks like those by Dr. Seuss. This means children can soon read more natural

sentences in meaningful contexts and enjoyable stories while simultaneously applying phonics skills that lead to independent reading.

Mary includes many ideas for seatwork, games, and other practice activities. However, much of this will not be practical outside a classroom situation since it is too much work for one or two children.

Many parents will appreciate the other extras in this book. For instance, there's a fifteen-minute reading skill diagnosis (for which you will need flash cards). She also addresses strategies for teaching spelling, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and handwriting.

In addition, Mary has written *Super Seatwork* books that many home educators will want to use. These have large, simple activities and exercises, including some cut-and-paste, writing, and drawing. The variety and simplicity are much more appealing to kids than the typical phonics workbooks. Titles include: *Color Words*, *Content Areas*, *Letter Recognition*, *Linguistic Exercises*, *Number Words*, *Phonic Grab Bag* (these six are \$12.95 each), and *Word Skills* (\$18.95). *Letter Recognition* includes alphabet cards and strips, Bingo, follow-the-dots, letter-match games, puzzles, and more. *Linguistic Exercises* includes short-vowel families, long-vowel families, sight families, and 40 phonic review sheets. *Phonic Grab Bag* covers all basic phonic skills: consonants, blends, digraphs, long and short vowels, phonograms, and more. *Word Skills* covers skills related to reading such as contractions, possessives, prefixes and suffixes, alphabetizing, and dictionary skills. All *Super Seatwork* books are reproducible and are in 8½-inch by 11-inch format.

Mary Pecci maintains a message board on her Web site to answer any questions you might have.



Explode the Code

by Nancy M. Hall

Educators Publishing Service

P.O. Box 9031

Cambridge, MA 02139-9031

(800) 225-5750

www.epsbooks.com

Books 1–5—\$6.75 each; books 6–8—\$6.95 each; teacher's key for books 1–5 and 1½–4½—\$2.15; teacher's key for books 6–8—\$2.15

There are fourteen separate workbooks in this series, although you might not want to use them all. Most of the time you will use these for phonics reinforcement, but some families use them as their primary phonics teaching resource. Some families also use them with older children who have a weak phonics foundation.

Typically you would use these alongside something like *Alpha Phonics* or *Happy Phonics* programs that don't have a writing/workbook component.

The books review phonetic concepts individually rather than attempting to review all concepts repeatedly from book to book at increasing levels of difficulty. While phonic decoding skills are the primary focus, reading comprehension and vocabulary also get some attention.

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

limited amounts of writing or who have trouble focusing.

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

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

A single teacher's key covers Books 1 through 5 and 1½ through 5½, while another covers Books 6 through 8, including 6½. Keys include program description, answers, and dictations for the posttests.



Happy Phonics

by Diane Hopkins

Family Resources, Inc.

741 North State Road 198

Salem, UT 84653

(888) 771-1034 order

(801) 423-2009

e-mail: info@lovetolearn.net

www.lovetolearn.net

\$39.95

I repeatedly say that you don't have to buy an expensive program to teach reading, but most parents want more direction and more activity than they get with a minimalist approach like *Alpha Phonics* or *Noah Webster's Reading Handbook*. Diane Hopkins has solved the problem by creating *Happy Phonics*.

A twenty-two-page, stapled teacher's guide directs you through a step-by-step process from learning letters and sounds into reading real books. The rest of *Happy Phonics* is heavy-duty, brightly colored paper stock printed with an alphabet desk strip, flash cards, words, letters, game pieces, and stories. These are cut apart and used for their various duties as explained in the instructions. If you dislike cutting things out and organizing, this might not be the program for you.

The games are manipulative learning materials rather than competitive devices, but young children love matching, flipping cards, and moving things around. The guide contains some of the same elements you find in reading workbooks or texts, but the format is more appealing, and the games are definitely more fun. You might even use these as a supplement to a phonics program like *Alpha Phonics* or *Noah Webster's Reading Handbook*.

While it does take some time to put this together, it's not overwhelming. A simple chart in the instructions shows which parts of *Happy Phonics* are used at which stages of learning. Diane also recommends using *Explode the Code* workbooks as part of your reading program

and mentions other reading tools you might wish to use such as the *Bob Books*. She also encourages you to make your own beginning readers.

Spelling lists are included so children can learn to spell phonetically. *Happy Phonics* will suffice as a beginning spelling program.

The program includes instructions, games, little reading books, flashcards, and *My First Big Book*, which has an easy-to-read story for each phonic sound learned. If you prefer a clearly and thoroughly structured program, this *isn't* it. But if you are looking for a low cost, fun phonics program with games, this *is* it.



MCP Plaid Phonics

Modern Curriculum Press/Pearson Learning Group

P.O. Box 2500

Lebanon, IN 46052

(800) 393-3156

www.pearsonlearning.com

Levels K, A, B, and C (2003 editions)

Student editions: K—\$9.95, A–C—\$10.95 each; teacher's resource guide—\$49.95 each

The *MCP Plaid Phonics* workbooks can be used for phonics instruction or reinforcement, although most homeschoolers use them as workbook supplements to other phonics programs.

The 2003 editions are colorfully illustrated with a combination of photographs and drawings. Some illustrations were commissioned from children's book illustrators. The variety of activities and colorful presentation make these workbooks appealing to children, and large print reduces the intimidation factor.

Their primary use is to help children develop both auditory and visual discrimination of sounds and letters. In the first three books, children do many exercises on recognition of beginning, ending, and middle sounds or phonograms.

Over the years, this series has changed, adding some features from the “whole language approach” to reading. Thus, the newest books (especially Levels B and C) include short stories and comprehension activities, make-it-yourself little storybooks, composition activities, and a “less-controlled” vocabulary. Unit openers are either a nonfiction reading passage related to science or social studies, or a poem. Other whole language activities (e.g., suggestions for related story books to read aloud) are in the teacher's resource guide.

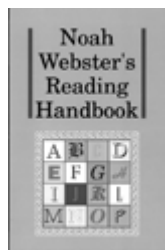
Generally, these are positive improvements because the old editions repeated essentially the same information year after year. Level C reflects these changes the most. It reviews basic phonetic concepts within a variety of exercises, then goes on to extensive work with base words, prefixes, suffixes, plurals, syllables, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, dictionary skills, and a few composition activities.

Level K introduces letters and sounds (both short and long vowels), working on identification and discrimination of individual letters. It includes a set of color flash cards in the back of the student book. Level A reviews, then adds long vowels, blends, digraphs, contractions, and inflectional endings. Level B reviews more rapidly, then adds compound and two-syllable words, r-controlled vowels, vowel pairs and digraphs, diphthongs, and contractions. The final section introduces synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and some prefixes.

In the newest editions, high-frequency words get more attention. There are word cards at the back of student books for levels K, A and B in addition to more work on such words throughout the entire series.

While *Plaid Phonics* could theoretically be used as your primary phonics instruction resource, it might not spend as much time as most children need on the critical blending stage. For example, most intensive phonics programs will have children spend a good deal of time working with word family groups like *at*, *sat*, *pat*, *hat*, *mat* to develop familiarity with the *at* phonogram. In *Plaid Phonics*, some work on blending is taught directly from the teacher resource guides, so if you want to use this as your primary tool, you will definitely need to purchase and use the guides, taking as much time as needed to work through the blending stage.

Teacher resource guides offer this sort of lesson-expanding help as well as lesson presentation instructions and workbook answers. However, if you only want to use *Plaid Phonics* as a supplement, you probably do not need the guides. Workbook activities have clear instructions, and answers are fairly obvious. Also, much of each guide's content is classroom oriented and unlikely to be used by many home educators. I suspect many homeschoolers purchase *Plaid Phonics* workbooks because they are so easy to use without the teacher guides and because their children enjoy them.



Noah Webster's Reading Handbook

Christian Liberty Press

502 W. Euclid Ave.

Arlington Heights, IL 60004

(847) 259-4444

e-mail: custserv@christianlibertypress.com

www.christianlibertypress.com

\$7.00

This must be just about the cheapest resource for teaching phonics/beginning reading! It does a very adequate job, which should not be surprising since it's an updated version of Webster's original *Blue-Backed Speller* that was used to teach thousands (at least!) of children in past centuries.

It follows a fairly standard progression, introducing short vowels first, then using consonant-vowel practice to help beginning readers learn to blend. (This is the same method used by *A Beka* and *Sing, Spell, Read, and Write*.) Practice words and sentences are included on each page as soon as is appropriate. Lengthier reading selections (Bible-based) are at the back of the book. Rules are presented in boxes at the bottom of pages. A few pages of technical information are at the back of the book for parents who want to better understand the functions of the alphabet and sounds.

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

Add this to your list of possibilities if you're looking for a simple, uncluttered approach. This book also suits remedial learners of all ages. If using it with beginning readers, consider using Christian Liberty Press's *Adventures in Phonics* workbooks, levels A, B, and C (and other levels as they become available) for written practice and reinforcement.



***Phonics Pathways* (eighth edition)**

by Dolores G. Hiskes

Dorbooks, Inc.

1331 Red Cedar Circle

Fort Collins, CO 80524

(800) 852-4890 credit card orders

(970) 493-4793 check orders

(925) 449-6983 inquiries

e-mail: info@dorbooks.com

www.dorbooks.com

\$32.95

Phonics Pathways is a complete phonics program, self-contained within one large book. There are extras from Dorbooks that you can use alongside *Phonics Pathways*, but they are not essential.

The program will work for all ages as well as for remedial readers. Sounds of the letters are taught, beginning with short vowels. As each consonant is taught, it is immediately used to begin making blends with the short vowels. Beginning blends are taught consonant-vowel (i.e., *ba, bi, bo*, etc.). Because of the quick movement into blending practice, children are reading three-letter words very soon.

Multisensory learning methods (hearing, saying, tracing, writing) are used with each letter. Dorbooks' supplemental card games add more hands-on activity for those who want it.

Uppercase and lowercase letters are shown from the beginning, although children work primarily with lowercase letters. You might need to take some extra time to work specifically on recognition and writing of uppercase letters, although this could be done late in the program.

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

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

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

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

Phonics Pathways introduces “pyramids” as another reading tool. Dorbooks also publishes an entirely separate book on the pyramid concept. The *Pyramid* book (\$21.95) uses a gradually widening pyramid of words to help students “strengthen eye tracking, develop blending skills, increase eye span, and teach syllabication.” This might also work well alongside other programs that use the same introductory approach (e.g., *Sing, Spell, Read, and Write*) to help students struggling with tracking and blending.

Dorbooks also publishes three other relatively simple supplements you might find useful, although none of these are essential. All three are printed on colorful card stock and must be laminated and cut apart before use.

The Train Game (\$14.95) functions as a movable alphabet to be used as a learning activity rather than as a game. *Blendit!* (\$34.95) has eleven bingo-type games for practice with various phonetic skills. *WordWorks* (\$34.95) has ten sets of cards (thirty-six per set) that are used in games played like Memory, Old Maid, or Go Fish to reinforce phonics. If you have to choose only one of these, I would recommend *Blendit!* Like *Pyramid*, these supplements should also work well with other phonics programs that use the consonant-vowel approach.

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

Phonics Pathways is one of the top products because it does a great job teaching phonics, it is very reasonably priced for such a comprehensive program, it is easy for parents to use, and it has options that can make it more multisensory.



Reading Made Easy: A Guide to Teach Your Child to Read

by Valerie Bendt

Valerie Bendt

333 West Rio Vista Court

Tampa, FL 33604

(813) 758-6793

e-mail: ValerieBendt@earthlink.net

www.valeriebendt.com

\$45.00

Veteran homeschooler and author Valerie Bendt has created a reading program that should be very appealing to even the most inexperienced parent. The program is contained in this single 500+ page book. It is scripted and illustrated so parent and child work together from the book. A little extra work is required: you will need a large quantity of blank index cards upon which each week's phonograms or words are written. Many times these are cut into two parts that are combined as you work through the lesson.

Valerie has created a unique coding system, similar in some ways to *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons*. However, Valerie's system seems simpler and less confusing,

especially since it doesn't use an artificial alphabet as does *100 Easy Lessons*. She uses a gray typeface for short vowels, dotted typeface for silent letters, bold typeface for long vowels, and circling for some digraphs. Children practice reading words, then sentences, then stories directly from this book. Valerie has tried to make the reading material meaningful and interesting. The occasional use of pictures invites the child to respond to both picture and words as they learn to understand context.

Valerie includes tracing, copying, and writing activities, continually cautioning against pushing children whose fine motor skills are too immature for such activities.

Parents will need to read through each lesson in advance to prepare index cards and the game activities used for learning sight words. Beginning with lesson 28, index cards are created while you present the lesson rather than in advance; children might actually help create the cards themselves at this point. Reproducible pages for the sight-word games are at the end of the book. Use of the index cards and games adds a multisensory dimension to lessons. So, although it might seem a bother, preparing the cards is an important part of the program.

The progression is a bit different from other reading programs—Valerie introduces both short and long “a” words before continuing with other short-vowel words, and she continues in this fashion throughout the program. She covers most other phonetic concepts, but there are some important ones that are not included, such as *igh* as in *eight* and *sleigh*. However, on two pages at the end of the book, she lists those not covered along with example words and suggestions for covering them as a child encounters words containing them.

The last twelve lessons in the book incorporate a twelve-chapter story about a young boy named Gideon who wants to learn how to read. Each chapter is first presented as a read aloud by the parent. Then an abridged version is presented for the child to read aloud himself. The content of the book is essentially nonsectarian until the story of Gideon, which is loaded with spiritual content and lessons.

Throughout the book, Valerie has chosen to use the LucidaSansSchool font published by Portland State University. These are the folks who publish the *Italic Handwriting* series, which Valerie also recommends. However, you are not limited to that handwriting style by this book's presentation.

There are a few “rough” places. Only a few capital letters are specifically taught, but there are general instructions for the parent to teach them and keep track of which ones have been taught. I also found myself looking for fuller explanation when children were being introduced to some of the new phonograms/concepts. For example, two lists of *ow* words are presented—those with the long “o” sound then those with the /ou/ as in *ouch* sound. There's no mention that children will have to use familiarity and context to determine which sound is required, especially with words like *bow*.

Similarly, when some suffixes such as *er* and *ed* are introduced, there is no discussion about their grammatical purpose. They are simply presented as a way to make new words. Perhaps this is fine for young readers, but I know I would be adding additional comment as a teacher so that children saw the generalization and its broad application.

This program relies heavily upon parent/child interaction. Some early lessons conclude with the instruction to read a book aloud to your child. Valerie adds lists of suggested read-aloud and easy-reading books you might want to use.

Overall, this course looks to be both enjoyable and relatively easy-to-use, two features I consider very important when it comes to teaching reading. I understand from the publisher that it works well alongside *Five in A Row*. Also, *Learning Language Arts Through Literature Red Book* (second grade level) works well as a transition after *Reading Made Easy* since it reinforces and fills in the few gaps of the program.



Sing, Spell, Read, and Write, Kindergarten/Level 1 Home Kit (second edition)

Pearson Education

P.O. Box 2500

Lebanon, IN 46052

(800) 393-3156

www.pearsonlearning.com

Combo Kit—\$272.50

This multisensory, phonics-based language arts program, appropriate for children ages five through eight, is especially good for active learners such as Wiggly Willys as well as for Sociable Sues. It covers phonics, reading, comprehension, spelling, beginning grammar, and manuscript printing. The *Kindergarten/Level 1 Home Kit* includes twenty-three full-color, phonetic, storybook readers; six cassette tapes with simple, catchy songs that teach the phonograms; a CD presentation of the songs (use either the tapes or the CD); five phonics games (bingo and card deck type games); phonogram “strips” for blending; a cardboard treasure chest with prizes (very inexpensive items); a phonics placemat; raceway chart and raceway car for tracking progress; a teacher's manual; four consumable student workbooks; an assessment book; and a teacher training video. Everything is very colorful and professionally put together. All of this comes packaged in an attractive, sturdy box. The back cover of each student book is a wipe-off writing “slate,” as is the back of the placemat; a wipe-off marker and eraser for these are included.

Sing, Spell, Read, and Write uses the consonant-vowel approach (*ba, be, bi, bo, bu*) to teach reading. It's a fun program that is fairly easy to use. Instruction is provided by the parent with assistance from the cassettes or CD, a two-page folder for Kindergarten level, or the detailed instructor's manual that you use once you start Level 1. Lesson plans in the manual coordinate program elements plus lessons in grammar, reading, comprehension, and writing that are presented from the manual.

The program is truly multisensory as children listen to and sing the songs; practice saying and writing letters, phonograms, and words; manipulate letter cards; play the games; and complete workbook activities. There are thirty-six “steps” in the program, and progress is tracked on the Raceway Chart as children master each step.

The first workbook for Level 1, *Off We Go*, provides readiness activities plus an introduction to letters, their sounds, and their formation. The second workbook, the *Raceway Book*, is far more intensive, beginning with blends and continuing through all phonics instruction, while also working on manuscript handwriting, comprehension, and some grammar and spelling. If your child struggles with the written exercises, save them for later and focus on the oral work and games instead.

The songs are pleasant, child-oriented tunes to which children will sing along. If your children do not like singing, this is not the program for you! The games, raceway chart, and

prizes add extra fun and incentive to both levels of the program. The *Assessment Book* is used after each reader to check on word recognition and comprehension. It also has three achievement tests to be used at different points in the program.

Seventeen of the phonetic readers used with Level 1 save us the trouble of looking elsewhere for practice material. There are more than one thousand pages in these readers. The last few readers in the set are often unnecessary since by that point many children have mastered phonics well enough to begin reading real books on their own. Still, the last few books cover the “oddities” of the English language, such as “ph” making the sound /f/, and these do need to be covered at some time.

Some parents found that the Level 1 kit moved too quickly for their kindergartners, particularly on short vowels, or that there was too much writing for younger children. So the publisher created a kindergarten level that covers the first fifteen of the program's thirty-six steps in a slower fashion with a separate set of two workbooks and six more readers. The two workbooks, *All Aboard* and *On Track*, spend more time on readiness activities and have larger print, more white space, and move at a slower pace than the presentation in Level 1. If you use the kindergarten materials, you can probably skip a good part of the lessons covering these same steps in the Level 1 program. The kindergarten books only cover a portion of what is in Level 1, so you will still need both levels if you start with the kindergarten materials.

Although kindergarten student books and readers are sold separately, you only get the rest of the components when you purchase either the Level 1 Kit or the Combo Kit. You would be missing the music, charts, games, and prizes without Level 1. So, for most families the Combo Kit makes the most sense.

There is also a separate *Pre-kindergarten Kit* with reading readiness activities for preschool level. The *Pre-kindergarten Kit* teaches colors, shapes, categorizing, sequencing, audio discrimination, and sound and letter recognition.

Additional materials for reading and grammar study are available for what are designated Levels 2 and 3. But since Level 1 is the heart of the phonics instruction, I do not include reviews of the higher levels here.



Spell to Write and Read

by Wanda Sanseri

Back Home Industries

P.O. Box 22495

Milwaukie, OR 97269

www.BHIbooks.org

Core Kit—\$90.00; *SWR*—\$35.00; *WISE Guide for Spelling*—\$35.00

Wanda Sanseri wrote this guide for teaching the first four years of language arts—phonics, penmanship, spelling, reading, composition, logic, and introductory grammar—using methods originally presented by Romalda Spalding in *The Writing Road to Reading*. Because *The Writing Road to Reading* has a challenging organizational structure that makes it difficult for parents to use without assistance, Wanda came up with her own improved presentation.

The heart of *Spell to Write and Read* is the phonograms that children practice saying, writing, seeing, and reading. Phonetically taught spelling is the primary tool used for teaching

writing and reading rather than a skill to be picked up later through reading.

The program uses its own system for marking the phonograms to identify sounds and spelling rules. This same system is applied to both spelling and reading.

This program has more rules and fewer sight words than most others. The result is that 99 percent of the one thousand most frequently used English words have rules that apply to them. So there's a trade off here; in most other programs, students memorize more sight words, but learn fewer rules.

Students build their own spelling textbook, so there is quite a bit more writing than in other programs. On first glance, this program seems designed more for Perfect Paula and Competent Carl learners who might like the detailed analysis of words than for Wiggly Willys and Sociable Sues who might be frustrated with the detail and notebook work. However, many teachers who have followed the program's suggestions have been able to keep the variety and pace moving and use it successfully with such children. (Wiggly Willy parents might still have trouble *teaching* the program.)

In addition, some learning disabled children who need a lot of repetition and very complete, specific instruction have benefited greatly from this method. Much depends upon the parent/teacher's ability to make the program enjoyable and to adapt lessons to meet the needs of each child.

Spell to Write and Read (SWR) is to be used with Wanda's *WISE Guide for Spelling*. *WISE Guide* covers two thousand basic words (plus hundreds of derivatives) to teach the foundational principles of English spelling. While *SWR* provides the methodology, *WISE Guide* provides much of the content.

Lesson plans each cover a set of twenty words in *SWR*. Recommended preliminary activities include warm-up drills and motivational comments for introducing the lesson. Sentences are provided to illustrate each word. Selections come from literature, quotes of famous people, or instructive comments. Each word is divided into syllables and highlighted to amplify phonograms and spelling rules. Information to explain the spelling is provided.

Creative ways to reinforce the spelling words are suggested. Rather than uninspiring activities like copying a word five times, students actively use spelling words in a variety of ways. The teacher is given simple instructions, and the student works from the words dictated for him to write into his spelling notebook. No worksheets are needed. Spelling lists actually cover up through twelfth grade level, so many parents have used this program as a spelling resource for older students.

WISE Guide is much more than a spelling resource. Enrichment activities involve a wide variety of topics: literature, grammar, antonyms, synonyms, derivatives, etymology, contractions, compound words, alphabetizing, keyboard instruction, punctuation, alliteration, homonyms, analogies, words of comparison, oxymorons, figures of speech, verb conjugation, poetry, plurals, subject and verb agreement, Greek and Latin roots, possession, and appositives. Assignments utilize art, pantomime, refrigerator magnets, deaf signing, and games. Numerous approaches used to improve composition skills include: creative writing, letter writing, diary work, vivid word selections, descriptive writing, feature writing, and dictation.

Other helps available from Back Home Industries include the *70 Basic Phonogram Cards*, *Phonogram Cassette Tape*, *Primary Learning Logs*, *SWR Charts*, *The Alpha List*, *The New*

England Primer, *Play by the Sea* (a beginning reader), and *The McCall-Crabbs Test Lessons in Reading*. When purchased from the publisher, *SWR*, *WISE Guide*, the *Phonogram Cards*, *Spelling Rule Cards*, and the *Phonogram Tape* are sold as the Core Kit at a lower price than when purchasing individual items.

Wanda and fifteen other teachers she has trained and endorsed offer seminars for interested groups across the country and in Canada. I have received many positive reports from those who have attended Wanda's seminars and have used her materials. They tell me that Wanda gives them practical instruction that really works for homeschoolers while clearly explaining the basics so they have confidence in their knowledge and ability to teach their children.

Beginning Readers

When children are learning phonics, they need lots of practice with simple reading material. Beginning readers are sometimes included in phonics programs, but other times you need to find your own. Those listed below are not included in my 100 Top Picks since they are only representative of what is available.

Basic Phonics Readers

A Beka Book

P.O. Box 18000

Pensacola, FL 32532

(877) 223-5226

www.abeka.org

\$11.50 for all twelve; teacher edition—\$14.50

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

Bob Books

Scholastic, Inc.

(800) 325-6149

www.scholastic.com

\$16.95 per set

Bob Books is actually five different sets of nonsectarian beginning readers. These are phonetically organized with controlled vocabulary, yet the stories are more interesting than many other such readers.

The first set of twelve little books, *Bob Books First* (#914544), concentrates on short-vowel words. The second set of twelve slightly longer books, *Bob Books Fun* (#912198), continues with short-vowel consistent words, while adding double consonants, blends, endings, some sight words and longer stories. The last three sets continue to add more complex phonics. The books get longer, so there are fewer per set. *Bob Books Kids* (#914546) has ten books with

eight stories and two activity books. They continue work on short-vowel words. *Bob Books Pals* and *Bob Books Wow!* each have four books of sixteen pages each and four books of twenty-four pages each. *Pals* adds new blends, more sight words, and longer compound words. *Wow!* introduces long-vowel words.

Illustrations are simple black-and-white line drawings that children can imitate and color. Both the stories and drawings have an appealing childlike character. Teaching instructions are short and simple. These readers will work with any orderly phonics program.

Reading for Fun Enrichment Library

A Beka Book
(877) 223-5226
www.abeka.org
\$36.00

Fifty-five small readers come in a boxed set. While they do not follow as strict a phonetic progression as the MCP readers, they do begin with short vowels and gradually increase the phonetic complexity. For most children you will still need additional practice with short-vowel words beyond these readers. While there are a few Bible stories and some character-building stories, most are about children, fairy tales, nature, and other common subjects. Books are illustrated in full color. The price is very reasonable for so much good quality reading material.

Phonics Practice Readers

Modern Curriculum Press/Pearson Learning
(800) 393-3156
www.pearsonlearning.com
\$19.50 per set

For variety's sake, MCP offers three different series (A, B, and C) of these nonsectarian readers from which you can choose. You need not purchase them all. Within each series are four sets: short vowels, long vowels, blends, and digraphs. Each set consists of ten eight-page books. These are inexpensive and colorfully illustrated. You might need only short and long vowels before children are ready for many easy reading books.

Beyond Phonics

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

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

2. Other goals should focus on children understanding what they are reading. Beginning at lower levels of thinking, ask children to relate back simple data or events from what they have

read. As they progress, you move on to more challenging levels of thinking. Children begin to interpret what they read, draw parallels to their own experience, or make connections to other things they know. Later they begin to compare and contrast, analyze, and otherwise focus more on the content than on the mechanics of reading. Reading programs can help with this, but simply applying Charlotte Mason's narration techniques with real books can accomplish the same thing.

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

4. A reading program might help you stay on track and focus on some of the necessary skills if you are working with a child individually. In other words, they might be more useful for the parent than for the child! The downside is that your child must read someone else's collected anthology of readings, many of which might have little appeal for your child. In addition, your child has to work through the exercises created to go with that particular anthology even if those exercises don't actually target skills your child needs at the time.

Although reading programs are not necessarily bad, I have found that selecting real books for my children to read and using supplemental resources to focus on particular skills has been far more fun and effective for all concerned. Consequently, the resources I've included for reading are ones that I believe work better than reading programs in most homeschool situations.

For those who might be leary of abandoning traditional reading programs, I suggest you pay particular attention to *Drawn into the Heart of Reading*. This "program" provides structure for this sort of "real books" approach, which might give you the confidence to give it a try.

I've included a few other reading skills resources that I think are particularly good. (*Note*: some resources for vocabulary are reviewed in [chapter 9](#), and they might also be part of your reading skills development strategy.) The listed resources are just a sampling of the many other excellent resources you can easily find at teacher supply stores and in catalogs. Some will be broad in their skills coverage while others focus narrowly on comprehension, work with analogies, or other particular aspects.

I've also included some novel study guides for those who want to develop reading skills with real books their children are reading.

Those who still want traditional readers or reading programs might check out one of the following series. Phone numbers and/or Web sites follow each listing.

- A Beka Book has a number of readers with teacher's guides for each grade level. Many readers have a single theme such as nature, heroes, or fables; some are anthologies; and some are novels. (877) 223-5226, www.abeka.org
- *Christian Eclectic Readers* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) is the latest reincarnation of the McGuffey series (and the best, in my opinion). (800) 253-7521, www.eerdmans.com

- Christian Liberty Press Readers (Christian Liberty Press) are an assortment of readers with different themes for different levels. (847) 259-4444, www.christianlibertypress.com
- *Little Angel Readers* (Stone Tablet Press) are a set of beginning readers for Catholic children. (636) 458-1515, www.stonetabletpress.com
- *Nature Readers* (Christian Liberty Press) feature science topics as the content. They are a bit more like “real books” than other readers. (847) 259-4444, www.christianlibertypress.com
- *Pathway Readers* (Pathway Books) are an excellent Amish series that reflect the rural, agricultural Amish community. Content is God-honoring and wholesome. These readers also have companion workbooks. <http://www.anabaptists.org/places/pathway.html>
- *Reading for Christian Schools* series (Bob Jones University Press) combines anthologies and novels in complete reading programs that include workbooks. (800) 845-5731, www.bjup.com
- Rod and Staff's *Bible Nurture and Reader* series has been very popular with homeschoolers looking for biblical content and no fantasy or modern sagas of cultural decadence. This series also includes workbooks. (606) 522-4348

Elementary and/or Upper Level



Drawn into the Heart of Reading

by Carrie Austin
Heart of Dakota Publishing, Inc.
1004 Westview Drive
Dell Rapids, SD 57022
(605) 428-4068
e-mail: carmikeaustin@msn.com

www.heartofdakota.com

Teacher's guide—\$49.95; student books: Level 2/3—\$18.00, Level 4/5—\$23.00, Level 6/7/8—\$28.00

Subtitled, “A Multi-Level Reading Program to Use with Any Books You Choose,” this is a guide that can be used along with your choice of “real books” for children in grades 2 through 8. It consists of a teacher's guide plus student workbooks, available at three levels: grades 2–3, grades 4–5, and grades 6–8. Workbooks can be reproduced for use with all students within your family. You will also want to purchase the appropriate level of *Book Projects to Send Home*, small activity books published by McGraw-Hill and available through Heart of Dakota Publishing for \$6.50 each.

You can use *Drawn into the Heart of Reading* as a core reading program (assuming young students are already able to read independently) or as a supplement. It is arranged into nine sections, each focused upon a different genre: biography, adventure, historical fiction, fantasy, mystery, folk tales, nonfiction, humor, and realistic fiction. You and/or your students select

books representative of each genre. Because the program is structured for different levels of difficulty, you can reuse it for a number of years, even reusing the same level but having your student read different books from each genre.

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

Some broader language arts skills are covered, and students do a good deal of writing, increasingly so as you move up each level. The writing assignments actually bring up one point of concern I have with the student workbooks. Workbook pages are formatted for students to fill in boxes, blanks, and circles in response to questions and instructions. However, occasionally the space allowed seems inadequate, especially in the Level 2/3 workbook. Also, young students may need to dictate some of their longer responses rather than write them themselves.

In addition to writing activities, the program incorporates a good deal of discussion, a little drawing, and lots of project ideas. This can be a strong multisensory program, depending upon which elements you choose to use.

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

Overall, I like the flexibility of a reading program that allows parents and children to select their own reading material. The drawback to this approach is that children might be reading books with which parents are unfamiliar. Unless parents have time to also read the books, they might have trouble determining whether or not their children are identifying characters, actions, motives, plot, etc., correctly. Though children could narrate to a parent about what they are reading, the parent's ability to ask probing questions is limited. The teacher's guide *does* direct students in the first two levels to read some portions of their books aloud to parents, which helps somewhat to overcome this potential problem. Another possible strategy is for parents to provide a list of books as options—books with which they are already familiar.

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

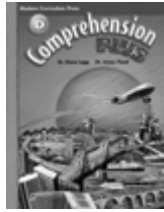
I suspect that after working through a number of books using this program, parents will feel more comfortable allowing children to use unfamiliar books since children will have become accustomed to noticing key information and thinking beyond the surface of the story.

Comprehension Plus series, Levels A–F

by Dr. Diane Lapp and Dr. James Flood

Modern Curriculum Press

P.O. Box 2500



Lebanon, IN 46052

(800) 393-3156

www.pearsonlearning.com

Student workbooks: Level A—\$7.95, B–D—\$8.95 each, E and F—\$9.50 each; teacher's guides—\$11.95 each

If you choose to use real books rather than a reading program with your children, you can soothe your qualms about accountability by using a reading comprehension resource such as this series from Modern Curriculum Press. Books A through F are suggested for grade levels 1 through 6.

Student books are printed in full color. Each lesson begins with a short narrative followed by a variety of comprehension and vocabulary activities as well as some activities that stretch into areas such as grammar, map reading, and research. At the end of each lesson is a writing assignment to be done in a separate notebook. Since there are thirty lessons per book, you would likely use one per week.

Narrative selections in these books are wide ranging. While some fantasy is included, I found none of the narratives in the three books I looked through likely to be offensive to Christian parents.

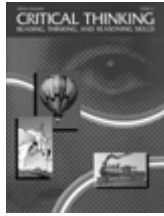
Younger levels begin with concepts such as main idea and details, drawing conclusions, order of events, fantasy and reality, fact and opinion, and character. Each skill is continually developed each year at a more challenging level. At the top end of the series, students add skills in literary analysis (character, plot, theme, setting), comparing and contrasting, paraphrasing, recognizing the author's purpose and point of view, outlining, use of persuasion and propaganda, figurative language, and connotation and denotation. Most levels also work with analogies, synonyms, homonyms, and antonyms. They also cover reading of maps, tables, charts, and graphs plus using dictionaries, encyclopedias, the library, and the Internet.

While some answers are multiple choice, many are open-ended questions. That means they will take a bit longer for parents to check even though possible answers are in the teacher's guide.

Children can complete workbook lessons independently if need be, but lessons are designed to be taught. Teacher's guides have detailed lesson presentations that are very easy to use; however, you might find the presentation and discussion unnecessary. For example, there are new vocabulary words in each lesson. The teacher's guide instructs the teacher to discuss the meaning of these words with students before they tackle the vocabulary exercise, yet the student book has a glossary with definitions of these words that students can use on their own.

There are additional discussions and writing projects in the teacher's guide that are useful but not essential. The teacher's guide also has reproducible tests in a standardized test format and organizational forms for children to use for such activities as charting cause and effect, story sequence, or main ideas and details. I recommend getting a teacher's guide, then using as much as is practical in your situation.

There are other reading comprehension series that use only one-word or multiple-choice answers, but the extra writing and thinking required in this series will be more effective for developing reading skills.



Critical Thinking: Reading, Thinking, and Reasoning Skills

Harcourt Achieve, an imprint of Steck-Vaughn

P.O. Box 690789

Orlando, FL 32819

(800) 531-5015

www.HarcourtAchieve.com

\$14.53 each; teacher's edition—\$13.50 each

Yes, this is a critical thinking series, but it also happens to cover reading skills better than some books that are more narrowly focused. After all, analytical reading is little more than an application of critical thinking.

There are six books in the series, labeled A through F for grades 1 through 6. Books are based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, which identifies six stages in developing thinking skills: comprehension, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The first two books address only the first four stages of Bloom's Taxonomy. Lessons cover five to seven different skills for each of the stages, so the comprehensiveness and variety of this series exceeds most others that typically address a narrower range of skills.

For example, under comprehension (or “knowing”), students work on classification, “real and fanciful,” fact or opinion, definitions and examples, and outlining and summarizing. Under evaluation, they learn how to test generalizations, develop criteria, judge accuracy, make decisions, identify values, and identify the mood of a story. In the other stages they learn skills such as identifying main ideas, comparing and contrasting, inferring, recognizing fallacies, and drawing conclusions. You can see that some of these are typical reading skills, while others are generally relegated to specialized critical thinking classes.

Written for classroom situations, there are occasional lessons that assume a child's familiarity with the ways schools function. For example, children are asked to put four steps for getting ready for school in order. The steps are “leave home, eat and get dressed, board the school bus,” and “get up.” You might take such situations and have your children substitute their own steps in getting ready for school.

These are consumable workbooks, printed in two colors with some illustrations. Teacher's editions have student pages with answers overprinted. They also have a separate section with brief lesson plans. I suspect homeschool parents will not use these lesson plans very often, but some of the enrichment activity ideas found there are practical and worthwhile. In teacher's editions, there are also “School-Home Newsletters” that are intended to go home with students. These have some great activity ideas that are independent of the lessons. You should be able to use the first two levels without teacher's editions because answers are easy enough for you to figure out quickly. As you get into upper levels, however, you will probably need the teacher's editions as answer keys even if you use nothing else in them.

Children in the first two levels will probably need some direction on how to complete lessons, but older students should be able to work independently most of the time.

Progeny Press Study Guides for Literature

Progeny Press

P.O. Box 100

Fall Creek, WI 54742



(877) 776-4369

e-mail: progeny@progenypress.com

www.progenypress.com

Guides for lower elementary level—\$10.99 each, guides for upper elementary and middle school levels—\$14.99 each, guides for high school level—\$16.99 each

Progeny Press study guides are tools for parents who want to use real books rather than reading anthologies with their children at all grade levels or for supplementing study of an anthology. These are less extensive than *Total Language Plus* in coverage of reading, composition, and spelling skills, but you can complete many more of them a year.

Although written by different authors, all come from a Christian perspective. Thus, we find questions that refer to Scripture, such as “Read Proverbs 17:17. ‘A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.’ Tall John was Sarah's friend. At the end of [Chapter 7](#), how did he comfort her?” (from *The Courage of Sarah Noble* study guide). Or another example from *The Hiding Place* study guide: “Read through 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. How does this passage reflect the importance of each individual within a church or family?”

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

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

Students might be able to work through the study guides independently if their reading skills are adequate, although discussion enhances any literature study. Answer keys are found at the back of each book, so each study guide is self-contained aside from the novel itself. All study guides are 8½-inch by 11-inch looseleaf and are reproducible for your family.

Within the Progeny Press series are a number of study guides geared for the primary grades. They are for books such as *Clipper Ship*; *The Courage of Sarah Noble*; *The Drinking Gourd*; *Frog and Toad Together*; *The Josefina Story Quilt*; *Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie*; *The Long Way to a New Land*; *Ox-Cart Man*; *Sam the Minuteman*; and *Wagon Wheels*. Another guide, *The Minstrel in the Tower*, straddles primary and middle grade levels.

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

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

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

Guides for more than eighty books are available. The novels themselves are also available from Progeny Press if you need a source.



Total Language Plus

Total Language Plus, Inc.

P.O. Box 12622

Olympia, WA 98508

(360) 754-3660

e-mail: customer@totallanguageplus.com

www.totallanguageplus.com

\$18.95 each, set of any four guides—\$72.00

Total Language Plus “covers reading, comprehension, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, and analytical and critical thinking with a Christian perspective.” Each volume is a student study guide/workbook that accompanies a novel. Study guides are written for various levels, from fifth grade up through twelfth. For example, the study of *Caddie Woodlawn* is suggested for grades 5 and 6 while *Anne of Green Gables* is suggested for grades 7 through 9.

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

Lessons dealing with grammar, writing, and spelling rules are for application and review rather than instruction. A basic understanding is assumed. For example, since spelling words are selected from the chapter, there are no common patterns or spelling rules being covered.

Students create their own glossary toward the back of the book by entering definitions and parts of speech labels for their vocabulary words each week. At the beginning of each unit are Enrichment/ Writing suggestions. These always include writing activities, but other activities depend upon the book being studied. For example, the guide for *Around the World in Eighty Days* includes map and geography work. Some activities are not tied directly to any one chapter, so you can use them when, if, and how you wish. You can select more activities to

turn your study into an in-depth unit study or choose fewer and stick to the basics. You might use some of these for discussion and some for writing assignments. The activities are presented as suggestions rather than as fully developed plans, so they will require independent research and work beyond what is presented here. *Total Language Plus's* effectiveness in developing broader writing skills is dependent upon your selection of assignments from the Enrichment/Writing section as well as upon your work with your children on the writing process within those assignments.

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

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

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

The number of lessons in the various volumes of *Total Language Plus* ranges from five to eight, so some books are likely to take longer to study than others. Generally, a volume should take from nine to ten weeks to complete, so plan to complete about one per quarter.

If impatient students want to read through the novel quickly rather than spread it out, they can do so covering the comprehension and critical thinking questions as they go and working through the remainder of each week's lessons on a slower schedule.

You need to obtain the novel for each study, so *Total Language Plus* sells inexpensive copies. Books have been selected to meet the needs of various age levels and interests. The catalog features brief descriptions of each novel. There are more than thirty-five guides for novels available at this time. Among the novels for which studies are available are *My Side of the Mountain*; *The Cricket in Times Square*; *The Light in the Forest*; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *A Wrinkle in Time*; *Johnny Tremain*; *The Bronze Bow*; *Caddie Woodlawn*; *The Giver*; *Wheel on the School*; *The Trumpeter of Krakow*; *Where the Red Fern Grows*; *The Call of the Wild*; *The Hiding Place*; *The Swiss Family Robinson*; *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*; *Rifles for Watie*; *Anne of Green Gables*; *The Scarlet Letter*; *Oliver Twist*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*; and *Jane Eyre*.

Three additional “anthology” guides are also available. *American Literature: Poetry* and *American Literature: Short Stories* are intended to be used along with the guides for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Scarlet Letter* to comprise a high-school-level American Literature course. The *American Literature* guides include examples of poetry and short stories, but you

will need to find most of the readings used along with the study guides within anthologies or on the Internet. These guides include planning schedules for completing the modules that might take from six to ten weeks each depending upon the academic needs of students and the time available.

The third anthology guide is *Christmas: Volume 1* (\$15.95). It is a smaller guide covering three short stories: “A Pint of Judgment,” “The Fir Tree,” and “The Gift of the Magi.” It is designed for multilevel use and should take about four weeks to complete. Unlike other guides, the three stories are included in the study guide.

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

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

Junior/Senior High Level

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

Anthologies can be helpful for exposing students to a broad range of literary types without overwhelming them with ones they find less appealing. Some of the programs I review below use full-length books and fewer types of literature, so keep this in mind when making choices for your children. If they need broader exposure or if that better fits your educational goals, then you should use an anthology like the Bob Jones University Press books or extra resources such as the Norton Anthologies. If you would rather go in-depth on a few of the best books, then Stobaugh's or *Learning Language Arts through Literature* courses might better suit your situation.

No matter which way you go, junior and senior high school students should be reading more full-length books than are included within any program. After the reviews I've included lists of recommended reading for high school level (culled from a number of sources) that might help you make selections. Notice that some of these books are covered by study guides in the *Progeny Press* and *Total Language Plus* series reviewed above.



Bob Jones University Press literature series for grades 7–12

Bob Jones University Press
Greenville, SC 29614
(800) 845-5731
www.bjup.com

Literature courses are not all created equal. Some seem to have selected reading material to

meet multicultural or social goals rather than as examples of good literature. Others seem to focus on simple comprehension questions (e.g., identify the protagonist and the antagonist) and never get into “meaty” discussion questions that really engage students.

The BJUP series for grades 7 through 12 does a great job on both ends—good literary selections and meaty questions—especially if you are interested in developing a strong Christian worldview in your students. Book in the series are *Explorations in Literature* (grade 7), *Excursions in Literature* (grade 8), *Fundamentals of Literature* (grade 9), *Elements of Literature* (grade 10), *American Literature* (grade 11), and *British Literature* (grade 12).

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

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

The discussion questions are particularly good in this series, and they might be used for either oral discussion or writing assignments. At junior high level they focus more on recall and comprehension. *Fundamentals* and *Elements* shift toward more literary analysis. *American* and *British Literature* challenge students’ thinking much more broadly. For example, *American Literature* includes the short story “The Minister’s Black Veil” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Among discussion questions are the following: “In your opinion, does Hooper’s self-imposed isolation represent self-denial for the edification of others, or is it symbolic of misdirected religious zeal? Discuss Hawthorne’s theme in light of 1 John 1:8–10” (p. 306).

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

Each course has a hardbound student text and comb-bound teacher edition, with two volumes each for the teacher’s editions for *American* and *British Literature*. Teacher’s editions have reduced student pages printed in full color in the newest editions—*Fundamentals*, *American*, and *Elements of Literature*—and black-and-white in *Excursions*, *Explorations*, and *British Literature*. Below student pages and in side margins there is valuable teaching information. Tests and answer keys are in separate packets. Newest editions of *Elements* and *American Literature* have an extra feature in the teacher editions. Words, sentences, or paragraphs of the student text are highlighted in up to six different colors to match similarly colored notes to the teacher in the margins. They might indicate a point for discussion, a definition, an example of a literary element, or a cross-reference. I expect this helpful feature

will be added to future revisions of other teacher editions. Reproducible supplemental activity pages and some teacher helps are at the back of each teacher's edition.

Reproducible tests and answer keys are available for *Fundamentals*, *Elements*, and *American Literature* (two separate items per course—\$9.50 and \$6.00 each respectively). An alternative, *TestBanks* (\$19.50 per course), is a computer program from which you can select your own questions to create tests. Individual programs are available for *Explorations*, *Excursions*, and *British Literature*, with others in development. *TestBuilder* (\$66.50) contains test questions for all courses for which *TestBanks* have been developed. Purchasers of *TestBuilder* will also have access to new banks of questions that can be downloaded from the BJUP Web site. If you plan to use at least three BJUP *TestBanks*, it makes sense to purchase *TestBuilder* instead. I personally love the flexibility of the *TestBanks/TestBuilder* since it allows me to make tests as long or as short as I desire, to focus on questions that we dwelled upon in lessons, and to easily create another test for retesting when necessary.

Explorations in Literature, second edition

Student text—\$33.50, teacher's edition—\$43.50, *or* set of both items—\$73.50

This seventh-grade-level text covers a wide range of themes while emphasizing character. Content sections are titled Courage, Nature and Man, Generosity, Our Land, Humility, and Family. While some selections are by well-known authors (e.g., Carl Sandburg, O. Henry, Charles Finney, and James Thurber), most authors are not readily recognizable. Nevertheless, I would give a high rating to both literary quality and appeal for young teens. Selections are primarily prose, but there are some poems and one drama (a radio show script).

Excursions in Literature, second edition

Student text—\$33.50, teacher's edition—\$43.50, *or* set of both items—\$73.50

The theme of this eighth grade text is a Christian's journey through life, including choices he must face. Illustrations from Scripture appear at the end of each unit. The text continues the character emphasis of the seventh grade book. Units are titled Choices, Friends, Viewpoints, Adventures, Discoveries, and Heroes and Villains. Some authors and writings (or excerpts) included are Lew Wallace (*Ben Hur*), Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*), Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*), Jack London (*The Banks of the Sacramento*), George MacDonald (*The Princess and Curdie*), and Amy Carmichael (*Make Me Thy Fuel*). A short novel, *In Search of Honor*, is studied in the final unit and included within the textbook. Lessons in the teacher's edition follow a format of overview, objectives, potential problems (e.g., objections to authors portraying animals as having human qualities), introductory discussion, the reading, analysis, application, and additional activities.

Fundamentals of Literature, updated version

Student text—\$33.50, teacher's edition—\$47.00, *or* kit with both books plus reproducible tests and key—\$91.00

Suggested for grade 9, this textbook is the foundation for the study of literature. It studies conflict, character, theme, structure, point of view, and moral tone through both traditional and contemporary selections. Representative authors are Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Lord Tennyson, Shakespeare, Carl Sandburg, Sir Walter Scott, John Donne, and Saki (H. H. Munro). The drama *Cyrano De Bergerac* is also included within the text, with a videocassette also available for \$21.00.

Elements of Literature, updated version

Student text—\$33.50, teacher's edition—\$47.00, *or* kit with both books plus reproducible tests and key—\$91.00, *Great Expectations*—\$11.00, teacher's edition for *Great Expectations*—\$28.50

Suggested for tenth grade, this text teaches students literary analysis at a more challenging level than *Fundamentals of Literature*. It delves into topics such as themes, allusions, symbolism, and irony, as well as teaching more about the forms of literature—fiction, poetry, biography, drama, etc. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is included for study within the text. Study of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens is an optional part of the course. There is a separate teacher's edition for *Great Expectations* that includes reproductions of the student text pages as well as teaching information and helps. Time limitations will probably restrict most users to covering either *Romeo and Juliet* or *Great Expectations*, so plan accordingly.



American Literature, updated second edition

Student text—\$33.50, teacher's edition—\$47.00

Suggested for grade 11, this text covers American literature from the colonial period up through the twentieth century. Representative authors are William Bradford, Benjamin Franklin,

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Samuel Clemens, Thornton Wilder, and Bruce Catton. Selections are organized by historical literary periods, while addressing some of the philosophical movements that influenced literature. There is significant discussion of the worldviews reflected by authors and their works.

British Literature, second edition

Student text—\$33.50, teacher's edition—\$47.00

This twelfth grade course covers eight literary periods from Old English to Modern. Selections are often chosen to illustrate philosophical and cultural issues from various perspectives. Religious developments receive far more attention here than they do in other British literature texts. Representative authors include John Wycliffe, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas More, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, William Wordsworth, and Robert Browning. The play *Macbeth* is also included for study.



Encouraging Thoughtful

***Christians to be World Changers* NOTE:**

series

by Dr. James P. Stobaugh
Broadman & Holman Publishers
127 Ninth Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37234

Stobaugh's
books have
now been
reedited and
enhanced with

(800) 251-3225
www.broadmanholman.com

DVDs that
make these
courses even
better!

Dr. James Stobaugh has done a marvelous job of combining literature studies, composition, speech, vocabulary, and critical thinking, all within a Christian worldview context. Interestingly, Dr. Stobaugh manages to incorporate worldview concepts in the broad manner of C. S. Lewis so that no particular theological or denominational outlook dominates. Aside from only occasional and minor exceptions, lesson two of each book is devoted to the worldview exploration.

These courses should appeal to those trying to implement classical education not limited to the Great Books list, to those wanting to prepare their teens with challenging and rigorous coursework, and to those for whom worldview education is a high priority.

Stobaugh couples thorough development of writing and speaking skills with an analytical approach to literature. The first two books focus on basic skills in these areas that are then applied through all three literature courses. The first two books might be used in junior high or early high school, but each will take at least a year to complete.

Each book has thirty-four or thirty-five week-long lessons. Detailed lesson plans are provided for a year-long schedule for each course, but you might need to take longer to complete some of these lessons, especially if you are beginning in junior high and/or students do not already have fairly good reading and composition skills.

The series consists of the following books: *Skills for Literary Analysis*, *Skills for Rhetoric*, *American Literature*, *British Literature*, and *World Literature*.

All courses have both a teacher and student edition. The student editions of the *Skills* books allow students to work fairly independently through a good deal of their work since lesson plan schedules, background information, and examples are provided. However, these courses *do* require interaction, discussion, evaluation of papers and speeches. Two or more students working together would work best, but if that isn't possible, most of the lesson assignments can still be used with parents serving as audiences and reviewers.

The teacher editions add tests plus summaries or suggested responses for student questions and assignments, which are typically essays. All teacher's editions are essential.

All these courses require a great deal of writing and reading—daily journal writing, daily warm-up essays, analytical essays, biblical application essays, research papers, and tests. Each course can be adapted to the needs of the individual student. Parents can choose to include or omit any particular unit in the literature series.

The reading requirement seems to be a minimum of about two hundred pages per week—and it's often not light reading.

Some of the books suggest the use of a basic English grammar/writing style manual that can be used throughout these courses as well as in further academic pursuits. *Hodge's Harbrace College Handbook*, the *Bedford Handbook for Writers*, *Warriner's Handbook*, *MLA Style Manual*, and *The Gregg Reference Manual* are possibilities you might consider. While a writing style/grammar handbook is optional, I highly recommend that each student have a copy handy for reference.

***Skills for Rhetoric*, \$24.99**

Skills for Rhetoric focuses on developing skill in writing and speaking—the presentation of ideas through language. Stobaugh recommends it for students in grades eight through nine, but it assumes a higher level of learning than is typical of most students in those grades. I would also recommend it for older students.

Like Stobaugh's literature courses, *Rhetoric* stresses the importance of preparing young people for leadership by building a foundation of spiritual and academic strength. You will find worldview ideas throughout this text. Journal writing frequently requires reflection upon specified Scripture verses.

Each week-long lesson teaches a type of essay, beginning with an example of that essay. Warm-up essay topics are provided, and students are encouraged to tackle each of these daily. Students create vocabulary cards to work on learning the new words. A particular style issue, such as correct usage of “can” or “may” is reviewed. Students are required to read thirty-five to fifty pages a day from recommended reading lists. All of this is in addition to the major speeches—both extemporaneous and prepared—and essays assigned each week.

Students write every day. Between journal entries, daily essays, and other assignments, they do far more writing than in any other course that comes to my mind. Among the types of writing assignments: eyewitness account, summary report, character profile, analysis, historical profile, literary analysis, cause/effect, problem/solution, and evaluation. An extensive research paper with bibliography is an assignment through the last eleven lessons.

Stobaugh includes forms for some of the analytical assignments and for evaluation.

The biggest problem with *Rhetoric* is finding the appropriate time to use it if you also want to complete all of Stobaugh's literature courses since each requires a good deal of time and energy.

***Skills for Literary Analysis*, \$24.99**

While the five-year plan for this series suggests beginning with this book in eighth grade then using *Skills for Rhetoric*, you might reverse that order if you wish. Both courses can be used by students eighth grade or above. Some of the assigned reading excerpts are reprinted within the book, but you will have to obtain others. Among literary pieces for this study are *The Call of the Wild*, the Joseph narrative from Genesis, “Idylls of the King,” *Alice in Wonderland*, *Screwtape Letters*, *Silas Marner*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Ivanhoe*, and “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere.”

***American Literature*, \$24.99**

The second lesson in this book (and the second lesson in all other books in this series) helps students develop their own worldview, which is then applied to reading assignments throughout the lessons.

Like most high school literature courses, this one includes many short stories and other short readings, such as “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God” and poems by Edwin Arlington Robinson and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Unlike other courses, however, it also requires students to read a number of complete books. Among them are *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Billy Budd*, *Ethan Frome*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Unvanquished*, and *A Separate Peace*. A few of the short stories and poems are included within these volumes, but you will need to acquire most of the books

yourself, including an anthology such as *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* for other short pieces. However, Stobaugh makes Web site addresses available for parents and students to use for acquiring poems, short stories, and even some books online.

Occasionally one book or reading is studied for two weeks, but generally each book or reading is to be read before each week's lesson. The lesson then focuses on critical thinking and “challenge” questions, with responses taking the form of essays and reports. Lessons vary in format including such things as background on the author or setting, recall questions, vocabulary words, literary analysis, and biblical/ worldview applications. Stobaugh's suggested answers help parents better understand how to discuss philosophical/worldview ideas as well as the literature.

***British Literature*, \$24.99**

Similar in format to Stobaugh's *American Literature*, this is a survey of British literature from the earliest Anglo-Saxon writings through the twentieth century. It also addresses worldview in the second lesson as a context for future lessons.

It begins with the narrative Anglo-Saxon poem “The Seafarer” and continues with ballads, poetry, sonnets, plays, short stories, essays, novels, and nonfiction books. Examples of the range of authors are Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, George Herbert, John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, William Blake, John Henry Newman, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and T. S. Eliot.

Some of the shorter literary pieces are reprinted within the volume, but you should also purchase an anthology such as the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Plan ahead to make sure you have the necessary literary pieces on hand before you begin the pertinent lessons.

Students are encouraged to read complete writings, although they are not always required to do so for each study. Stobaugh stresses composition skills, suggesting that students write for one hour per day. Stobaugh addresses literary elements through brief instruction and analytical questions. Worldview and faith issues come up frequently throughout the lessons, and most lessons also include one or more “Biblical Application” assignments.

***World Literature*, \$24.99**

Classical educators will find the Great Books well represented within this volume that includes study of *The Gilgamesh Epic*, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Plato's *Republic* and *The Death of Socrates*, *Oedipus Rex*, *The Aeneid*, Augustine's *Confessions*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Faust* by Goethe, *War and Peace*, and *Crime and Punishment*. In addition, students study writings of early church fathers, Scripture passages, and works by Chekhov, Camus, Ibsen, Remarque, and Paton. Some of the shorter writings are included in the book, but you will need to obtain copies of other literature. Many of these might be found on the Internet.



***Learning Language Arts through Literature,
Gold Books—American Literature and British
Literature***

Common Sense Press

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

(352) 475-5757