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English

Good reading for a thorough grounding in Charlotte Mason's approach to language arts for all ages: [Considering: Charlotte Mason and Our Approach to Language Arts](#)

Language Arts:

Grammar:

Dictation**, written 2x weekly, providing time to study and a day to write. When a new passage is given, parents should read it over with their students to discuss difficult spelling, vocabulary, and points of grammar and rhetoric. Our own schedule has been to give new passages on Monday and Wednesday, and writing from dictation on Wednesday and Friday (so on Wednesday the student both writes Monday's passage AND receives and begins on Friday's). Of course, this is only one example, and a family may set its own schedule for dictation, to suit its students' needs.

**As at every other level, in high school a student should be given selections that stretch but do not defeat. What this looks like in practice will vary from student to student. Many students are ready to study a longer passage, perhaps even of multiple pages, though they may not be asked to write the entire passage as an exercise. Others, particularly younger high-schoolers, those new to the Charlotte Mason method, or those who struggle with spelling, might still need to do shorter selections of two to three sentences, and work up as they can achieve perfect work at the previous level of challenge.

Helpful Language-Arts Links

[Wildflowers and Marbles: On Dictation](#)

[Ambleside Online: On all aspects of CM language arts, at all ages](#)

[Harmony Fine Arts: On using Simply Charlotte Mason's *Spelling Wisdom* in high school](#)

[Simply Charlotte Mason: On the trajectory from copywork to upper-level dictation](#)
[More about CM language arts from the Archipelago blog](#)

A family desiring more support and guidance in grammar might use a simple resource like Jensen's *Grammar*, or the free public-domain *English Grammar* by Richard Morris. Reading and exercises may be scheduled once a week until the book is finished. Again, concepts highlighted in a grammar program should be part of the weekly focus of dictation exercises.

Composition:

ALL YEARS:

Helpful reading:

[Wildflowers and Marbles: On Charlotte Mason's approach to composition](#)

Written narration, 4x weekly. On the fifth day, the student may choose a narration or series of narrations from the week, or weeks previous, to begin to develop into a more polished paragraph or essay. (more about this process below)

OPTIONS FOR FURTHER FORMAL INSTRUCTION IN COMPOSITION:

Ideally the sequence will cover basic composition in Level 5, advanced composition in Level 6. Much will depend on what the student has done prior to Level 5, and on his general abilities in this area. But generally speaking, Level 5 is a good time to cover nuts and bolts: review paragraphing, introduce basics modes and formats for the kinds of writing a student would expect to encounter in college and other future situations.

Good resources for **basic composition** (a family may choose one or more):

- Frode Jensen's *Format Writing* may be used to guide students as they develop one narration or series of narrations monthly into a more finished 1-paragraph, three-paragraph, or 5-paragraph essay, or other essay form.
- Memoria Press's *Classical Composition* or the Circe Institute's *Lost Tools of Writing* as references to help students develop as flexible writers capable of putting on more and less formal voices to suit a given occasion, following the classical progymnasmata model for writing instruction.

- CK-12's [Commonsense Composition](#) is yet another possibility, which is online and free.
- In our family we are using BraveWriter's *Help for High School*, which has the advantage of being written to the student and self-teaching, and very good. Pricey, but worth it. Teaches less formal modes of writing, but also introduces the five-paragraph-essay format, the research process, and basic structures for exploratory or persuasive writing.
- Classical Academic Press has just added a high-school course to their writing series: [Rhetoric Alive](#). This is a semester- or year-long course for grades 10-12, so could be used at any point in high school, and would be yet another excellent option for a family seeking a formal program for composition.

For **advanced composition** (presumes that the student knows basic forms, formats, and structures, and is ready to work on style and commit to larger projects):

- Brandy Vencel of the *Afterthoughts* blog [recommends and explains how to use William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*](#).
- In a similar vein, *Style* by Richard Eastman. [Plan](#)
- *Office of Assertion: An Art of Rhetoric for the Academic Essay*, Crider
- Classical Academic Press's *Senior Thesis* program. This program would need a large block of time for research, plotting, and writing, and it might be wise to plan ahead, and front-load a student's reading through Level 5 and the first year of Level 6 to make room for such a major independent project.

Whatever a family chooses, at whatever level, the idea is, as much as possible, to use writing *already done in the student's own voice*, i.e. written narrations, to develop into more finished, polished writing. Composition resources are best used as a minimal tool for working on writing a student has done, rather than as an extra layer of writing assignments asked for on top of other work.

Rhetoric:

It's hard to separate rhetoric from composition, for obvious reasons. Here, "rhetoric" refers specifically to sentence-craft, while "composition" deals in larger structures. Clearly, though, both elements are necessary for good writing, and in real life will be much more integrated.

LEVEL 5

YEAR ONE:

The Elements of Style, 4th Edition, Strunk and White 1x weekly (N)

Term 1: Introduction-Elementary Rules of Usage

Term 2: Elementary Principles of Composition-A Few Matters of Form

Term 3: Words and Expressions Commonly Misused-An Approach to Style

As you are reading *Elements of Style*, have the student concentrate on the rules/principles he encounters via this reading in his own writing. For example, choose proper construction of possessives as *the* thing you focus on in revising written narrations, and in dictation, for a day or so.

Because this book is relatively short, a family might opt to alternate it with a formal grammar program like *Jensen's Grammar*, or a set of rhetorical exercises like Einarsson's [*Traditional English Sentence Style*](#). This could be continued over both years of Level 5 if desired or necessary.

YEAR TWO:

Eats, Shoots, and Leaves, Truss 1x weekly (N)

Term 1: Foreword, Preface, Introduction, Intractable Apostrophe

Term 2: That'll Do, Comma-Airs and Graces

Term 3: Cutting a Dash, A Little-Used Punctuation Mark, Merely Conventional Signs

As in Year One, a good approach to putting this book into practice is to have the student apply the concepts in the reading to his own writing, to sharpen his proofreading eye. Choosing dictation passages that illustrate the book's concepts is also a useful practice.

Because this book is relatively short, again, a family might opt to alternate it with a formal grammar program like *Jensen's Grammar*, or a set of rhetorical exercises like Einarsson's [*Traditional English Sentence Style*](#).

LEVEL 6

In Level 6, much depends on what the student has done previously. Perhaps in Level 5 the family pared back in this area to make room for reading; in this case, Level 5's options could be shifted to Level 6.

A family might opt to work through Einarsson's [*Traditional English Sentence Style*](#), once or twice weekly, if the student hasn't done this already, to improve rhetorical style at the sentence level.

Level 6 is also a good time to work intensively on essay preparation for college-entrance tests like the ACT and SAT. For a student who has already done extensive work in composition, assigning essay prompts from these tests (easily found online) may be a good use of time.

OPTIONAL READING

Anguished English, Richard Lederer (some slightly off-color references, but a hilarious way to see what kinds of train wrecks occur when people don't observe the rules of English usage)

The Story of English, McCrum, Cran, & MacNeil (can be scheduled over four years; pp. 51-88 deal with the period of the English language covered in National History and Literature in Year 1; pp. 91-193 cover the emergence of Modern English in the Tudor era and expansion into the New World, plus the development of English in Scotland and Ireland)

[*\(Prep notes for The Story of English\)*](#)

Critical Reading:

LEVEL 5

YEAR ONE:

How to Read a Book, Adler 1x weekly (N) Part 1 (pp. 3-54)

Term 1: pp. 3-15

Term 2: pp. 16-30

Term 3: pp. 31-54

YEAR TWO:

How to Read a Book, Adler 1x weekly (N) Part 2 (pp. 59-182)

Term 1: pp. 59-94

Term 2: pp. 96-136

Term 3: pp. 137-188

LEVEL 6

YEAR ONE:

How to Read a Book, Adler 1x weekly (N) pp. 191-308

Term 1: 191-233

Term 2: 234-269

Term 3: 270-308

YEAR TWO:

How to Read a Book, Adler 1x weekly (N) pp. 309-346

Term 1: 309-322

Term 2: 323-336

Term 3: 337-346

Literature:

Suggested anthologies include Memoria Press's poetry series (scheduled below), Seton's, the Norton Anthology of English literature, etc. I have also included, below, a large document of linked sources -- literary, resource/secondary, and period primary sources -- to supplement OR replace a hard-copy anthology.

I encourage families simply to schedule whatever is included in their chosen anthology, though they may certainly supplement further from this document.

LEVEL 5

YEAR ONE:

Poetry, Prose, and Drama, Book One, Memoria Press 1x weekly (N)

Term 1: poems pp. 16-49

Term 2: poems pp. 56-74

Term 3: poems pp. 110-129

Drama in this anthology may be included in free reading for this year.

YEAR TWO:

Poetry, Book Two: Elizabethan Age to Neo-Classicism, Memoria Press 1x weekly (N)

Term 1: pp. 5-48

Term 2: pp. 49-65

Term 3: pp. 77-103

Milton's *Paradise Lost* will be read separately, as an epic, in Term 2.

If a family prefers, or has need of a free option, the link list below may serve as an alternate text, or as a supplement to syllabus books and materials in both English and history in this level. It is a large and exhaustive list, more than anyone could read in two years, so parents will need to make selections. The list includes historical resources and primary-source material as well as imaginative literature for each period.

[British Literature Reading Link list](#): this may be used as a substitute for a hard-copy anthology, or as a supplement.

[English Poetry Copybook](#): this may also serve as a substitute poetry text, with some accompanying resources

LEVEL 6

YEAR ONE:

Poetry, Book III: The Romantic to Victorian Age, Memoria Press

Term 1: Gray through Shelley

Term 2: Keats through Arnold

Term 3: Rossetti through Masfield

(links for substitutions forthcoming)

YEAR TWO:

Choose an American-literature text. The Memoria Press *American Poetry and Prose* text seems light for this level, but could suffice. We own and use the Glencoe Sixth Edition American Literature text, but any standard US lit text that you can buy cheaply would do. Basically you are looking for a text that will present American literature chronologically, beginning with Native American myths and ending in the twentieth

century, encompassing historical documents, the development of the short story, and poetry.

A year's schedule would follow the trajectory of American history in the following way:

Term 1: Native Americans to Transcendentalists

Term 2: Mid-19th Century/Civil War to 1900

Term 3: 20th Century and Contemporary Writers

[American Literature Reading Link List](#)

*****OPTIONAL SUPPLEMENTS IN LITERATURE*****

[The History of English Literature for Boys and Girls](#), Marshall 1x weekly
(N) Scheduled over three years, roughly 30 chapters per year until finished.

This text MAY be read over three years, as a companion to our study of national history, overlapping into Level 6 Year 1, or even through all four years. Some chapters of this text are problematic from a Catholic perspective; notes will be developed to accompany these chapters. Overall, like other H.E. Marshall texts used in this program, it is an excellent and engagingly told narrative of the development of English literature, really *sui generis* in terms of its literary quality and appeal, which is why it is included in our recommendations.

An alternative to the Marshall text, for those desiring a history of English literature, is [English Literature: Its History and Its Significance for the English-Speaking World](#), by William J. Long. This is a somewhat shorter book, with a perhaps more “adult” tone. His treatment of proto-Reformation figures like the 14th-century John Wyclif may register as more balanced than Marshall’s, though it is worth noting that he does not deal at all with St. Thomas More, despite More’s stature as a literary figure in Tudor England. St. Robert Southwell does not rate a mention, either, though Protestant figures like John Foxe do.

Still, this is an interesting and thorough book, and a good companion to a study of English literature, if a family desires such a thing. It could easily be read in one Level, either 5 or 6.

I also recommend Lawrence Perrine's classic ***Sound and Sense*** as a poetry handbook. This is an older book, widely available, in many editions; use whatever you can find cheaply. If you have room in your schedule in Level 6, that might be a good place to slot this one in. I usually save it for senior year.

OTHER OPTIONAL LITERATURE TEXTS FOR ALL LEVELS AND YEARS:

Prose and Poetry of England, Seton Press, scheduled over two or three years, to encompass all of Level V, plus possibly Level 6 Year 1.

Plus

American Literature, Seton Press, scheduled over one or both years of Level 6.

Foundational Narratives

LEVEL 5

YEAR ONE:

Great Myths of the World, Colum 1x weekly (N) pp. 1-124

Term 1: pp. 1-40

Term 2: pp. 41-80

Term 3: pp. 81-124

YEAR TWO:

Great Myths of the World, Colum 1x weekly (N) pp. 125-284

Term 1: pp. 125-178

Term 2: pp 178-231

Term 3: pp 231-284

LEVEL 6

YEAR ONE:

[The Divine Comedy, Dante](#)

(use this Digital Dante link, or translation of your choice: Dorothy Sayers, John Ciardi, Anthony Esolen, etc.)

Term 1: *Inferno*, Cantos 1-17

Term 2: *Inferno*, Cantos 18-34

Term 3: *Purgatorio*, Cantos 1-17

YEAR TWO:

Term 1: *Purgatorio*, Cantos 18-33

Term 2: *Paradiso*, Cantos 1-17

Term 3: *Paradiso*, Cantos 18-33

Shakespeare:

1x weekly (N)

NB: Really you are free to schedule in any plays your child hasn't read or would do well to revisit. Standard Shakespeare plays studied in high school include *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It*. Increasingly, students in institutional school aren't reading Shakespeare at all; at most, they would be reading one play per year. Because Shakespeare is central to the development of the English we speak, because he so consistently draws on ancient tales to make something new, and because his plays strike at the heart of what it means to be human, we consider him to be irreplaceable and worthy of extensive exposure, thus the goal of three plays per year.

There are notes for Shakespeare study on the MA website, which apply to high-school-level study as well. As always, you should try to expose your students to Shakespeare performed onstage, preferably live. If they themselves can perform Shakespeare, all the better!

LEVEL 5

YEAR ONE:

Term 1: *Cymbeline*

Term 2: *Henry V*

Term 3: *Julius Caesar*

YEAR TWO:

Term 1: *The Winter's Tale*

Term 2: *Richard II*

Term 3: *Macbeth*

LEVEL 6

YEAR ONE:

Term 1: *Richard III*

Term 2: *Richard III* (this play is long and will need two terms!)

Term 3: *The Tempest*

YEAR TWO:

Term 1: *Much Ado About Nothing*

Term 2: *King Lear*

Term 3: *Twelfth Night*

Epics of Western Civilization:

LEVEL 5

YEAR ONE:

Term 1: *The Iliad*

Term 2: *The Odyssey*

Term 3: *The Aeneid*

1-2x weekly (N)

Note: Popular translations include those by Samuel Butler (in prose), Robert Fitzgerald, Robert Fagles, and Richmond Lattimore. Many students seem to prefer Lattimore, but any translation is fine. NB: New translations of Homer by Emily Wilson are getting rave reviews.

YEAR TWO:

Term 1: *The Song of Roland* (tr.: Merwin, Sayers, Moncrieff, or [this free version](#))

Term 2: *Paradise Lost*, Milton

Term 3: *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson

1-2x weekly (N)

LEVEL 6

In this level, the novel replaces the poem as the epic of its culture.

YEAR ONE:

Term 1: *David Copperfield*, Dickens

Term 2: *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain

Term 3: *My Antonia*, Cather

2-4x weekly (David Copperfield particularly is LONG)

YEAR TWO:

Term 1: *Wise Blood*, Flannery O'Connor

Term 2: *The Edge of Sadness*, Edwin O'Connor

Term 3: *The Remains of the Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro

2-3x weekly

For a family desiring a more comprehensive “Great Books” strand of study, it would be possible to substitute Hillsdale Online’s [Great Books 101 \(Ancient to Medieval\)](#) and [Great Books 102 \(Renaissance to Modern\)](#). Readings are excerpts in many cases, not full works, but the lectures are good, and each course comes with study guides and discussion questions that may be used as essay/exam prompts. Everything is provided, and free. The student might watch and then narrate a lecture, narrate readings, and finally write an essay on one or more of the discussion questions provided.

Each course could potentially fill a year; both could fill the “epic” slot in Level 5, preferably, leaving room to read novels in Level 6.

Literature for Free Reading

NB: Scheduling for free reads may vary depending on a family’s needs. Some families find that their children will pick up meaty books and read them voluntarily, while others discover that they need to schedule this reading specifically as part of the school day. Note that other reading -- history, regularly scheduled literature -- does not stop while a given free read is going on; e.g., your student might still be reading *Antigone*, but if history moves on to the Romans, that’s all right.

One suggestion might be to read Classical literature in the first term, Medieval in the second, and General literature in the third -- or a family might simply wish to work down the list, or mix and match.

In our family we typically have more than one free reading going at once, scheduled on alternating days. The student’s pace is not dictated, and free-read books take as long as they need to, but the readings do alternate in the schedule (30 minutes at the end of the school day in our house, but another family might opt to include these readings in a Morning Basket or evening read-aloud for older students).

Please also note that free reads are meant to be read at the student's own pace, and are generally not narrated -- though certainly they're fair game for dinner-table conversation!

Ancient/Classical:

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Antigone, Sophocles

Oedipus Rex, Sophocles

Pygmalion, Shaw

Till We Have Faces, Lewis

Medieval English:

Selected Anglo-Saxon Riddles from *The Exeter Book*

Saint Adelhelm's Riddles, tr. A.M. Juster

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Canterbury Tales (Prologue, Pardoner's Tale)

Everyman

The Once and Future King

Renaissance and Early Modern English:

A Man For All Seasons, Bolt

Pilgrim's Progress, Bunyan

A Modest Proposal, Swift

The Vicar of Wakefield, Goldsmith

Nineteenth Century British and American:

Frankenstein, Shelley

Dracula, Stoker

Pride and Prejudice (or any novel), Austen

Middlemarch, Eliot

Anything by Dickens

The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne

Short Stories, Twain

Short Stories, Sarah Orne Jewett

Kim, Kipling

Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries:

O, Pioneers, Cather

The Waste Land, Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot

The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald

A Farewell to Arms, Hemingway

The Man Who Was Thursday, Chesterton

Complete Father Brown, Chesterton

The Grapes of Wrath, East of Eden, Steinbeck

Short Stories, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Jean Stafford, O. Henry, Shirley Jackson, Flannery O'Connor, etc.

The Habit of Being, letters of Flannery O'Connor

Delta Wedding, Welty

Any novel by Barbara Pym

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, Spark

In This House of Brede, The Greengage Summer, An Episode of Sparrows, Godden
Discworld series, Terry Pratchett

On completion of each year's course, a student may be awarded one credit in English.

