



CURRICULUM GUIDE

This curriculum overview is intended to provide a brief description of the major disciplines in The Wilberforce School. Classical education is very fluid and includes a great deal of continuity from grade to grade. It is not as compartmentalized as modern American education is. For this reason, this overview is not organized by grade level. Specific grade level materials and objectives are available in course syllabi.

Language Arts

Our Language Arts program integrates spelling, reading, written expression, oral expression, vocabulary, and grammar and speech in an authentic, natural way. The programs we use are multi-sensory. As students “see it,” “say it,” and “write it,” they experience greater success and higher retention of the material taught. Sometimes our students even have an opportunity to “taste it!”

During the early Grammar Stage the foci of our language arts study are listening comprehension, speaking well, learning to decode printed text through phonics and sight words, learning to write first individual words and then whole sentences. The later Grammar Stage and the Logic Stage emphasize the maturation of reading comprehension skills, formal grammar instruction, beginning speech, and written composition. With the basic facts, rules, and structure of each discipline mastered, the students are equipped for the Rhetoric Stage, when they are primarily occupied with creating compositions and reading great works.

Prerequisite Skills & Experiences for Becoming Good Readers and Writers

Oral language is the foundation for written expression, and listening comprehension is the foundation for reading comprehension. Various skills comprise a solid oral language foundation. NARRATION is the art in which students “give back” their own account of a passage or event. NARRATION in the early Grammar Stage develops both a student’s listening comprehension and oral language skills.

Each student’s account is unique and shows his or her level of comprehension. Students learn to attend to the details and nuances of the text. They naturally begin to incorporate beautiful vocabulary and sentence structure, echoing what they have learned from the passages that they have narrated.

PICTURE STUDIES are part of all our classes, in Explorers through Class Eight. Students learn to view art with an eye for detail and thoughtful response. Students also develop expressive language skills as they “give back” what they see and think. They apply the specific language that they are gaining in FINE ARTS study to their understandings on artists and their works. The objectives of PICTURE STUDIES differ from those of FINE ARTS study; the latter focuses on the development of artistic knowledge and skill.

Teachers read living books aloud and so develop students’ taste for rich literature, their elevated vocabulary, their listening comprehension, and their familiarity with literary elements. This often reinforces other areas of study such as HISTORY, SCIENCE, NATURE STUDIES, FINE ARTS, and MUSIC. Throughout all their years at The Wilberforce School, students continue to develop oral communication skills, and teachers continue reading aloud to their students.

Beginning Reading

The human brain is pre-wired for language acquisition; however, reading and writing are not “natural” activities. Instead, they require intentional, systematic instruction. Still, when students receive tailored instruction, their reading and writing proficiencies develop with relative ease.



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At TWS, beginning reading (decoding) is taught phonetically. Because English is a phonetic language with 93% of English words following phonetic rules, students need to have all the available phonetic tools to ensure their early reading success. At TWS, students learn to decode words phonetically using intensive phonics instruction and exposure to controlled reading material. Through integrated spelling, reading, grammar, and phonics instruction, students engage as many senses as possible as they “break the code.”

Reading fluency is another key component of successful reading. Early reading instruction focuses on learning “high frequency sight words” which, in turn, aid students in developing fluency and reading comprehension. Fluency development also improves reading rate, tone, pitch, and inflection.

Maturing Reading Skills

Reading, however, is more than “word calling.” The ultimate goal of reading is meaningful comprehension. In the early years, comprehension focuses on the students’ “telling back” in their own words what they read. Naturally, young students focus on relating the concrete facts and details of the story. Beginning students spend a large amount of time learning to determine what information is central to the story and what is non-essential. This skill is foundational for mature comprehension.

During the early Grammar Stage, the role of literature is slightly different than it is in later years. Students first use literature in order to *learn to read*. Texts are chosen first for readability, then for literary value, reinforcement of virtue, and age appropriateness. In later years, students *read to learn*. Now student texts are also chosen for their reinforcement of HISTORY, SCIENCE, and other content areas. In later Grammar and Logic Stages, reading comprehension shifts to in-depth analysis and synthesis of literature, as teachers encourage their students’ growing ability for abstract thought. Students now analyze literature for the author’s central message and evaluate that message against the tenets of biblical truth.

Grammar and Composition

The early stages of English GRAMMAR employ an integrated method that demonstrates the role of grammar in speaking, writing, and reading. Students use and practice GRAMMAR through speaking, writing, dictation, and the memorization of poetic and prose pieces that model beautiful language. Students are informally exposed to conjugating and parsing verbs through good sentence formation and dictation. Once students learn how they already use language, then they receive the academic labels and rules for this usage. Charlotte Mason explained her method of teaching GRAMMAR in this way: “English is rather a logical study dealing with sentences and the positions that words occupy in them rather than with words and what they are in their own right. Therefore it is better that a child should begin with a sentence and not with the parts of speech, that is, he should learn a little of what is called analysis before he learns to parse (*Philosophy of Education*, pp. 209-210).”

An example of this method is as follows. First, students learn that a sentence talks about something (cognitive idea): *The big brown dog chased the stray cat* (The sentence is saying something about a dog and a cat). Then they learn that that something is the “subject.” (Subject is the technical name. The subject of the sentence is a *dog* because something is being said about a dog, and the dog is either doing something or being something.) Later, they learn subjects are comprised of “naming words” called nouns. (*Dog* is a noun.)



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In our educational system, we begin with what students already know, develop in them a keener awareness of their current language practices, and then move to the more abstract aspects of grammar. This movement from usage to analysis follows a student's natural bent. Formal GRAMMAR instruction begins in Class Three and continues through Class Eight. Students formally learn all the parts of speech and of a sentence, as well as the rules that govern mechanics and usage. They also apply their knowledge of grammar in their writing. Through writing conferences with their teachers and peers, students see how their writing needs to improve and how to make these revisions. The art of imitation is used for instruction in both GRAMMAR and COMPOSITION. In the beginning, students learn to reproduce simple, dictated sentences. They refine their work by noticing the details of punctuation and capitalization. As students mature, they learn to take dictation of unfamiliar paragraphs. This task requires students to hear punctuation through emphasis and to make use of their knowledge of GRAMMAR. The art of imitation also helps to develop excellent writing skill, because analyzing and imitating great writers improves both style and structure.

Mathematics

MATHEMATICS is taught in a balanced, practical way. In the early years, concepts are taught and experienced through concrete means such as the use of manipulatives. As students master concepts on a concrete level, they then memorize the basic computation facts. Speed drills help students to make math knowledge automatic, and weekly challenge problems encourage them to think "outside of the box." Mental mastery of both basic math facts and various approaches to problem-solving promotes mathematical fluency in the higher grades.

In later years, students demonstrate mastery of mathematical thinking through applied problems and critical thinking. They also participate in the International Math Olympiad competition. Pre-algebraic concepts are introduced in Class Four, and Algebra studies are completed in Classes Seven and Eight. This advanced pace makes it possible for each student to complete Calculus by the end of the Rhetoric Stage.

History and Geography

HISTORY is "read" and "narrated" rather than studied. Students read aloud rich stories, and they discover beginning biographies about inspirational men and women from the past. Through the use of living books, students learn to be self-educators. Charlotte Mason underscored this essential aspect of the student's studies when she wrote: "[The Teacher] will bear in mind that the child of six has begun the serious business of his education, that . . . it matters a great deal that he should learn to deal directly with books. Whatever a child or grown-up person can tell, that we may be sure he knows, and what he cannot tell, he does not know. Possibly this practice of "telling" was more used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it is now (*Philosophy of Education*, pp. 172-173)."

The HISTORY and GEOGRAPHY curriculum follows a logical progression that parallels the child's natural stages of development. In addition to using living books, students experience history through living history days. For example, students relive the Colonial Era as they play traditional colonial games, spin wool, cross stitch, dip candles, or hear a "revolutionary soldier" tell about his uniform and equipment.

The order in which HISTORY is studied follows a natural progression as well. Children should first learn what is most familiar to them (i.e. the concrete, such as the history of Princeton) and then move on to more abstract learning, such as the study of eras and cultures that are foreign



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to them. In light of this priority, students begin their experience of HISTORY through living books and hands-on activities about early American History. In Class One, they begin with the Age of Exploration and Settlement and with Colonial America. In Class Two, students learn about living history through biographies, while moving through chronologically through American History and into the pioneer era. The concept of the timeline becomes more important in Classes Three and Four. Older students are better able to see key dates and events in chronological relationship. Classes Three and Four complete basic AMERICAN HISTORY employing in-depth study of important events and the memorization of key dates.

In the later Grammar Stage and the Logic Stage, students give history presentations and historical fiction critiques. This developed form of NARRATION allows students to demonstrate their level of understanding and prevents them from merely regurgitating for multiple-choice questions.

HISTORY study in the higher grades is chronological as well. Class Five begins with prehistory, archaeology, and ancient civilizations (particularly Near East, Egypt, and Greece). Class Six studies Ancient Rome through the Middle Ages. Class Seven explores Early Modern History (from the Renaissance through the French Revolution). Class Eight completes Modern World History (From 1800 to the present day). During the Logic Stage, the students' literature study is integrated as much as possible with the HISTORY curriculum. Students read biographies, historical fiction, poetry, epics, plays, and novels either from or about the historical period they are considering.

Science

Charlotte Mason taught, "Education is a life." SCIENCE is one of the primary ways students learn this principle. Young children are naturally inquisitive about their environment. NATURE STUDIES comprise the core of the SCIENCE curriculum in the Grammar Stage. The classroom literally becomes a "living classroom" as students and teachers collect specimens for examination. As the class observes questions, theorizes, and investigates, students not only learn the scientific method but they also make use of it. TWS' education model, values deep investigation and fosters habits of precise and thorough thinking. Through hands-on Nature Study, our students learn to observe closely, collect data, and research carefully. These early NATURE STUDIES cultivate and nourish the seeds of self-education nourished, seeds that will inspire future investigative inquiry within an array of disciplines.

NATURE STUDIES continue through Class Five. In the later Grammar Stage, formal SCIENCE instruction begins. Class Six focuses upon General Science, Class Seven upon Physical Science, and Class Eight upon Life Science. SCIENCE study involves experimentation as well as classroom lessons and outside research. During these years, students apply the knowledge gained through NATURE STUDIES (both methodology and implementation of the scientific method) to a broad assortment of scientific topics. Their in-depth SCIENCE studies through the Logic years prepare our TWS students well for a rigorous high school science program during their Rhetoric years.

Latin

LATIN begins in Class Three. The Grammar Stage and its proclivity for memorization is the prime time for students to acquire the grammatical forms of LATIN through learning chants and stem endings. The students' affinity for memorization also promotes vocabulary acquisition. With advanced English grammar study, Class Five students are better able to compare and contrast Latin and English grammar. At this level, their understanding of the structure of language grows



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exponentially. Students also begin more lengthy translations during Class Five. By the end of Class Eight, students have mastered basic Latin Grammar and Latin reading. At this point, TWS students are ready for high school and advanced studies of such authors as Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Seneca, and Ovid.

Logic

Formal LOGIC STUDY begins in Class Six, with students studying Logic puzzles in Class 5 in preparation for their more structured study the following year. Logic-aged students will naturally argue, but, without good training, they will not argue well. Our LOGIC STUDY is designed to teach our students to reason with clarity, relevance and purpose. Students learn how to craft accurate statements, how to identify, flawed arguments, how to spot logical fallacies, and how to use logical tools to evaluate, assess, and to master other subjects.

Fine Arts

As a classical school, our curriculum highly values the arts. Our FINE ARTS curriculum balances art and music history with the development of technical skills. All of our students, from the Explorers through Class Eight attend classes in art and music. In addition, as part of their classroom activities, TWS students engage in PICTURE AND COMPOSER STUDIES. Both in the studio and in the classroom, students learn from master works and progress through these educational stages: Observation (students make observation of great works); Evaluation (students analyze and evaluate works for various elements of style, form, and technique); Imitation (students imitate those same works).

Charlotte Mason expressed the importance of time spent in systematic art study: “But there must be knowledge and, in the first place, not the technical knowledge of how to produce, but some reverent knowledge of what has been produced; that is, children should learn pictures, line by line, group by group, by reading, not books, but pictures themselves...[Pictures] have a delightful and courageous sense of color, and any child will convince you that he has it in him to be an artist (*Philosophy of Education*, pp. 214, 217).”

Self-expression and creativity do not happen in a vacuum. One must be fluent in the works and techniques of any discipline before a person can innovate and internalize and adapt make these techniques. Self-expression and creativity also do not develop overnight. Through the good habit of imitation, students gradually develop an awareness of their own eyes and perspectives. With a slight modification here or a small addition there, students gradually begin to see how they can put a bit of themselves into each artistic piece.

Beginning in the Grammar Stage the DRAMATIC ARTS are woven throughout the curriculum. Teachers may use in-class skits and presentations drawn from our literature or history readings, and parents are sometimes invited to these presentations. Recitation – reciting works from memory in front of the class and during parent events – provides helpful training for dramatic presentation. Chapel and special events give further opportunities for children to learn to stand and present in front of a group. During the Logic & Rhetoric Stages, DRAMATIC and literary forums, such as a school publication and poetry readings, plays and reader’s theater are introduced more formally through electives and extra-curricular opportunities.



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Educating the Whole Child

Classical Education with a Charlotte Mason influence is an educational road that not many are willing to travel. It requires a great deal from teachers and families because the curriculum of the school encompasses much more than the teaching of subjects and academic skills. It requires that we teach the whole child. This is not a one-size-fits-all education. It is global and tailored to each student and to the dynamics of each unique classroom. No longer can teachers open to “Lesson One” of the Teachers’ Edition and teach one prepackaged lesson per day. Our classes are not textbook-driven. We steer away from boxed curriculums. Because TWS uses a method, not a system, our teachers must be fluent in their subject. Also they must know their students so well that the teachers can pull from a wealth of resources in order to educate their students both in their studies and in personal habits.

The philosophy and the needs of the students guide what our teachers do. To educate means to train the character, habits, and mental faculties. Every year our teachers adjust what they are doing to accord with the needs of the unique group of persons that God has entrusted to them. In all cases, teachers find ways to teach habits as well as content. Charlotte Mason underscores the imperative of complete education when she describes the consequences of a lack of training in good habits. “We have lost sight of the fact that habits are to life what rails are to transport cars. It follows that lines of habit must be laid down towards given ends . . . More, habit is inevitable. If we fail to ease life by laying down habits of right thinking and right acting, habits of wrong thinking and wrong acting fix themselves of their own accord (*Philosophy of Education*, p. 101).”

The model of education which TWS uses may be demanding, but it is well worth the cost. It results in students who have been nurtured, trained, and educated. Moreover, as these students grow in godly knowledge, understanding and wisdom, it results in disciples.