Lightning Literature & Composition

Grade 3

Teacher's Guide

by

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For Toby and Simon

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How to Use This Teacher's Guide

Welcome to the **Grade-3 Lightning Literature** program! With this series I hope to instill a love of great literature in children, to help them expand their ability to read intelligently and deeply and improve their communication abilities, and to prepare them for more advanced language arts concepts. The three key components to this series are literature, grammar and mechanics, and composition.

Even if you've completed previous Lightning Literature programs, I recommend you read this introduction. This year has many differences from the previous years.

Literature

Reading Selections

This year is the first with only chapter books. As such, it has significantly fewer books than previous years, and almost all the books take more than one week to cover. I enjoy and admire all these books, but nothing is to everyone's taste, and I'm sure some children will encounter a book or two that they simply do not like. With picture books, this was less of an issue, because each title was covered in a week. With chapter books, a child could potentially spend a month on a book they do not like. I genuinely regret this, but it is the nature of writing a curriculum. There is no way to please everyone.

I particularly apologize to parents and teachers of reluctant boy readers, as this course begins with two books that may be a challenge with this group. While not "girlie" books, they focus on female protagonists, and I know this is not to every boy's taste. My male readers can take heart though, because after that first month, they get the fun of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (and other books with male protagonists later).

On the positive side, children (and parents) will also discover new books and authors they love. My primary considerations when choosing the titles were literary quality and appropriateness for this age level (at least for read-aloud, if not always read-alone, as children vary widely in how quickly their reading ability develops). All these books demonstrate exemplary writing and contain ideas and topics of import. I also strove to find books that wouldn't be too upsetting at this age-level, though each child is different, and what will upset one will not bother another.

That said, unlike the books in Grades 1 and 2, some of these begin to broach difficult topics, including death. At the beginning of each week I will inform you in the teacher's guide of any tricky topics covered in the week's reading. Only you can best know how to approach these ideas with your students.

This year, there are no non-fiction books. While I consider it important to read nonfiction, it is extremely difficult to find non-fiction books for children that have literary merit. Almost all children's nonfiction is of the *Lizards of the World* type, which is great if you love lizards or need to

write about lizards for a research report, but does very little to teach writing or appreciation of literature. In Grades 1 and 2, I was able to offer some nonfiction picture books, mostly biographies. I considered including some picture books this year, but decided to make a clean break to chapter books instead. If you find time for extra reading, I encourage you to peruse the biographies in the children's section of your local library. And don't limit yourself to people your child (or even you) already know—it's fun to find out about the lives of people new to us as well.

I have partially addressed the problem of including no nonfiction books this year by providing four sections in the grammar pages that introduce the four basic types of nonfiction writing: descriptive, expository (writing to inform or explain), persuasive, and narrative. Students will further practice these types in their composition.

Another area I struggled with in choosing literature this year was providing some multi-cultural experience. This is important, not for political correctness, but to provide students one of the great gifts of literature—a broadened view of the world and greater understanding of other people. It also provides people who are part of those cultures literature with which they can more closely identify. I found some great multi-cultural literature, but judged most of it to be more appropriate for the upper half of elementary school, either because of the writing level or because of the content. I look forward to introducing students to some of these books in the Grades 4 through 6 levels of this course. For this year, I only found two (*Rickshaw Girl* and *The Big Wave*).

I had hoped to include a weekly reading of a multicultural fairy tale with this course, but every book I found that seemed a good fit was out of print, and I don't want to burden parents or teachers with finding difficult books. There are some that are in print, but considering the number that go out of print quickly, I don't have much hope for their longevity. I encourage parents to go to their local library, or look for used copies of a collection of multi-cultural fairy and folk tales on line. They're fun to read and can easily be tied into geography lessons.

Daily Reading

Four days each week, I assign a certain number of chapters (or, in the case of *The Big Wave*, pages, since it has no chapters) until the book is completed. As always, you can read aloud to your students or students can read on their own. You can also do a combination—perhaps reading some books to your child while assigning others as read-alone. Or having the child read the day's chapters alone first, then reading through the book together while discussing the comprehension questions. Some children will be reading at a level beyond these books, but you will find that reading these books with the questions and lessons that go along with them improves your child's literary skills and comprehension.

As in Grades 1 and 2 of this series, there are four weeks devoted to poetry. Grade 3 uses the same poetry compilation as Grade 2—*The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Poems are read three days each week with different questions each day.

Comprehension Questions

Each day of reading includes comprehension questions for the chapters read that day. The questions and their answers are in the teacher's guide. (Note that my answers are not always complete sentences. I do not require students to always answer in complete sentences when having an oral

discussion, as we don't always talk that way.) Depending on your child's comprehension level, you can ask the questions as you read through the text (i.e., immediately after reading the pertinent page), at the end of each chapter, or altogether at the end of the day's reading. If your child is reading to themselves, have them complete the reading then do the questions together. If you wish, for a more advanced child, you can require them to write out the answers on their own rather than using these for discussion.

Questions are of various types. Some questions are literal—the answers can be found directly in the reading. Some questions are inferential. These require the student to understand something not directly stated in the text. Another type of question is evaluative. Here students are asked to provide either a judgment about something that happened in the story ("Do you think this character did the right thing?") or to reflect on some aspect of the story in their own lives ("Have you ever felt the way this character is feeling here?"). Predictive questions ask the student to guess what will happen next in the story. This year, I introduce some questions requiring literary analysis ("What did we learn about the character from what they just did here?").

As with grades 1 and 2, I urge parents to use comprehension questions as a tool to improve reading comprehension rather than a test of it. Children are still learning to attend fully to books, and these questions can help them learn to focus on their reading in a more mature manner. If a child is stressed because they are afraid they will answer the questions wrong, their focus and love of reading will decrease rather than increase.

Different types of questions are asked about the poems each day they're read.

Book Discussion

On the day after the last chapter of the book has been assigned, I provide help in the teacher's guide for leading a discussion of the book. This discussion can be between just a parent and one student or it can be a larger group.

The focus of a book discussion is to answer the question, "What is the author trying to say with this book, and how does he or she say it?*"* A skilled author uses story, characters, setting, and the other literary aspects to impart a message (the theme of the book). Skilled readers learn to uncover these messages.

I give you notes on various aspects of each book—story, characters, setting, etc. Sometimes the information is general (for example, the basic story line). Other times I focus on aspects that underscore the theme. At the end of some sections I also provide questions you can use to prompt students to see certain aspects of the text that help answer the question of what the author is trying to say and how they are saying it.

Your child may well have other ideas about the story, characters, etc. than what I have here, and that's fine. Literature isn't math—I can't give you just a series of black and white answers. This is both exciting and (to some) frustrating. **The bottom line for any assertion about a book is, can the student support what they say with the book?** If a student says a character is friendly, they have to show something in the book that tells us that.

Literature is dynamic. Different people will see different things depending on their outlook, experience, personality, etc. Your child will see some unexpected things in some of these books—

and what they see may tell you more about them than about the books. It's important to honor personal responses to books (authors want personal responses from their readers), but it's also important for children to learn how to analyze a story beyond just their own feelings. These discussions are part of that process.

Theme

The first aspect I cover for every story is **Theme**. Although this is the most abstract aspect, it's what these discussions are aiming for—understanding of theme, or the author's message. The other aspects (story, characters, setting) will often underscore the theme, so it's useful to you to know it first. After theme, the teacher's guide provides details in the following areas: Story, Character, Setting, External details, Internal details, and Conflict. I also sometimes include Symbolism, but that is optional for more advanced students.

Story

Story is the main plot-line. I provide a brief summary for each book.

Character

Character includes a description of the main character(s) (physical and personality).

Setting

Setting is where and when the story happens.

External Details

External Details are any pertinent details of the story that aren't captured in any of the other summaries. For example, minor characters in the story. This may also include cause-effect and order of events.

Internal Details

Internal Details are emotions and other feelings the characters experience that aren't part of their central personality. For example, a character might normally be happy but experience sadness in response to an event in the book.

Conflict

Conflict includes telling what the character wants, what keeps the character from getting it, and what the character does to overcome the obstacle.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of one thing to represent something else. Usually an author uses something concrete (an animal, a piece of clothing, music, etc.) to represent something abstract (loyalty, companionship, happiness, etc.). This is an advanced concept, and rather than asking questions about it (at this stage), it's probably better to simply point it out to your child and discuss it together. As they are taught symbolism in stories they will begin to see it on their own.

Reading Journal

After the book discussion, turn to the appropriate pages in the Student Workbook. Your child will write or dictate four sentences: one sentence summarizing the story ("What this story is about"), a second sentence saying what they think the story's theme is ("The message of this story"), a third sentence expressing something they felt about the book ("What I think of this story"), and finally they choose their favorite sentence from the book to copy.

This Reading Journal is optional. If your student is already overwhelmed by the composition assignments, feel free to drop this.

Grammar and Mechanics

I have grouped grammar, punctuation, capitalization, parts of speech, sentence diagramming, and even occasional literary concepts under the umbrella term "grammar and mechanics." The student work text contains basic instruction and examples. Always read the instructions with your child, and be sure they understand them before having them complete the page. If your student is not writing yet, it's fine for the student to dictate the answers to you. The teacher's guide contains more detailed instruction when needed and answers to the workbook pages.

Grammar and mechanics are reviewed frequently in the student work text. Sometimes multiple concepts are addressed in one review worksheet. As with all aspects of learning, students vary widely in how easily these concepts will stick with them. Remember that your primary goal is for your child to love language arts. Don't risk impeding that to ensure an understanding of periods or pronouns by the end of the year. I will review these concepts in later grades in this series as I build on them, so there is plenty of time. Often something will click easily with a child only a year later that they simply couldn't understand when it was first introduced.

Correspondingly, unless you have a student who wants grades, I recommend avoiding letter or percentage grades on the workbook pages (or any aspect of this course). Do show your child what they missed on the workbook questions, and review the missed questions together so they understand the problem. But use them as tools to reinforce the concepts and check your child's understanding rather than a judgment on their performance.

If your child is not getting a concept, rather than forcing them to do the workbook pages on their own, work on them together as a teaching tool. Some lessons assume a previous exposure to the subject. If your child used the Grade 1 and 2 Lightning Literature courses, they will have had this exposure. They may have also learned the topic from another language arts course. But if your child has not learned the topic previously, some lessons may be too cursory for them. In that case—or if your child struggled previously with this concept—feel free to work closely with them to provide a more thorough understanding. Throughout this guide I give suggestions for helping a struggling student, for providing additional review of concepts, and for providing extra challenge.

I have tried to create exercises that relate to the reading (by using sentences from the reading, that summarize the reading, or that give additional information about the author) whenever possible. Sometimes, I was unable to rise to this challenge, and have instead opted for the more usual generic sentences.

Most weeks, students get a break for a day from the weekly grammar topic. Instead, they complete either a sentence puzzle or additional sentence diagramming. Both help develop sentence structure skills, but they are optional.

A Note About Sentence Diagramming

Once sentence diagramming was always taught in schools; now it is rare. While I don't believe the old ways are always better, in this case I think students have lost something. While word choice, paragraph formation, and logical organization are vital to good writing (as are many other skills), the central unit of written language is the sentence.

Sentence diagramming is not merely drawing lines and repositioning words. It helps teach students the function of words in a sentence. For example, although we give adjectives, articles, and possessive pronouns different names, they are often diagrammed in the same manner because they often function in the same manner—to modify a noun. The reverse is also true—the same word may function as different parts of speech depending on its placement in a sentence. I can illustrate this succinctly with a bit of silliness: Don't allow your horse to horse around on the horse track.

In later years, students can apply sentence diagramming to sentences of authors they admire for a deeper look at why those sentences work—why they inform, delight, and inspire us. When students struggle with a sentence of their own, they can diagram it to see where a problem might lie.

Diagramming can be particularly helpful to students who are visual learners or those who enjoy puzzles. Try the diagramming this year—you might be surprised at how your student does. But if they struggle with it excessively and it continues to frustrate rather than illuminate, feel free to drop those questions, even on the non-optional grammar pages. It may be that your student needs to wait another year or two before benefitting from sentence diagrams.

Composition

The composition portion of this course should, as with all aspects, be tailored to your child's level. Some children will only be writing (or dictating) a few sentences, while others will be ready for a paragraph or a whole story. You may have a child who can dictate a book but barely wants to write a sentence. Come to an agreement about balancing these things—perhaps every third lesson they will write their composition themselves and the others they will dictate. Or you can allow them to dictate everything. This is entirely up to you.

The composition assignments cover a variety of writing aspects—creative writing, essays of all sorts (descriptive, personal, opinion, etc.), research papers, poems, etc. Again, you want to make this an enjoyable experience for your child while also starting to push them towards quality work. Work closely with them on the compositions (unless they specifically ask you not to). At the end, stress what they did well in the composition; then discuss together how it might be improved.

In Grades 1 and 2 of this series, most compositions were finished in a week. This year, some take one week, but more span from two to four weeks. This provides less variety for the student, but allows for greater depth in learning about composition. For example, whereas previously it would have been sufficient for a student to provide a simple description of a friend, this year they will begin to think about things like how to most effectively begin a paper, how to provide smooth transitions,

who the audience for their paper is, what support they're giving to their assertions, and whether a paragraph is properly focused.

This year I'm also providing suggestions for extra challenge in the compositions. These are optional and are meant for the more advanced writing student. While advanced writers can always be challenged simply by making them write longer papers, that can become tedious. Instead, these help deepen writing skills. These are not an all or nothing proposition—choose them for your child (or allow them to choose them) when appropriate. Sometimes a child will be more excited about a certain assignment and want to do more with it. If a child is more adept at fiction but frustrated by research, assign the extra challenge for the short story assignment but not for the research paper. The instructions for the extra challenge are given on the day the student would need to do it.

Composition Book: The student will need lined composition pages. We have provided masters for 5/8- and 1/2-inch ruled lines (to be used according to your student's ability) in the back of this Teacher's Guide, which you can copy and collect in a three-ring binder. You may wish to purchase a composition book. If you are able to find a choice of composition books, your child can pick from the selection, making the book more personal. A couple of other options are ordering online and finding a site that has lined paper of various ruled lines free to print.

Tailoring This Course to Your Needs

These three things—literature, grammar and mechanics, and composition—are the core of this class. Regardless of your child's ability or interest, I urge you to complete, at least in some fashion, all of these.

The following portions are optional. Although I believe all are valuable, and I have reasons for including them, they are not central to the program. Depending on your child's existing skills, strengths, interests, and your time constraints, you may skip any or all of them. You could also do some on only some weeks.

Reading Journal Pages: Pages are in the Student Workbook for the student's response to each book (and poems). I ask the student to summarize the book ("What this story is about"), write a sentence stating the story's theme as determined from the book discussion ("The message of this story"), write a one-sentence opinion of the book ("What I think of this story"), and write a favorite line from the book ("My favorite line"). The summary is an excellent skill to develop, writing the story's theme demonstrates a deeper understanding of the story, and the opinion and favorite line make for a great keepsake.

Dictionary Pages: Once each week I ask students to put five to ten words in their dictionary pages (these are located in the back of the Student Workbook). The aim of this is to increase and reinforce vocabulary.

Sentence Puzzles and Extra Diagramming: Rather than the usual grammar pages, once each week (except poetry weeks) I include a sentence puzzle or extra sentence diagramming. These help to improve students' sentence structure and/or understanding of parts of speech.

Poet Biographies: Once each poetry week, the student guide contains a brief biography of one of the poets read that week.

Extending the Lesson: These are meant for the more advanced student, or for when any student is particularly excited by the reading or any of the extension ideas. They allow students to explore a book, its concepts, or its author in more depth, and can provide ways to extend the lesson into other areas such as science, history, and art.

Preparing for the Week

Before the week begins, read the book (or section of it read that week) if you are unfamiliar with it. Read the questions and mark any that you do not want to ask your child. If you are asking your child questions as you read (rather than at the end of the chapter or the day's reading), note the page numbers where you wish to ask the questions. (I do not include page numbers because there are different editions of these books.)

If you think a certain grammar aspect may be difficult for your child, consider adding this guide's suggestions. You can also find worksheets in other books or on the web. (We hope to add something here this year about our own free worksheets on our own website to supplement your work when needed.) Mark which optional projects you think would most interest your child or that you think would most reinforce the learning.

Gather any materials you need. The basics for this course rarely require extra materials, but if you plan on doing the lesson extensions you will likely need more. If you plan on reading other books by the same author, preview the books beforehand.

Free Days

Once each week I give a free day. You can take a day off language arts, use the day to complete any work from earlier that was missed, add extra projects—whatever you want. This can vary from week to week.

Extending the Lesson

At any time during the week, including weekends, you can extend the lesson. You might choose to extend some lessons and not others, depending on your child's interest in the material. I give some suggestions for extending the lesson at the end of each week, but you don't have to wait until the end of the week to do extra projects. Some of these extra projects relate to languages arts while others extend into other subjects (history, geography, science, art, etc.).