# Lightning Literature & Composition

## Grade 5

## Teacher's Guide

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Welcome to the ***Grade-5 Lightning Literature*** program! With this series I hope to instill a love of great literature in students, 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. Each year brings new changes and challenges.

If you have students who struggle in language arts for any reason, please feel free to adjust my instructions here to meet their needs. For example, you may choose to have your students dictate the answers to comprehension questions or grammar exercises rather than writing them. Or you can skip some compositions if you feel the number I have here would overwhelm your students. While I like students to be challenged, I think it's important not to overwhelm them and turn reading and writing into a painful task.

## Literature

### Reading Selections

We've now entered the last two years of the elementary series of Lightning Literature. Students are getting older and more capable of understanding greater depth and nuance in story and character. Accordingly, I've chosen some books that address some more serious subjects such as bigotry, pressure to conform, and oppression. Some of these address these topics in a straight-forward nonfiction way (*I Am Malala*), some take a story-telling but realistic approach (*The Mighty Miss Malone, Number the Stars*), and others disguise things a bit with a more fantastical approach (*The Tripods*).

There's always room for pleasantness though, and I end the year with one of the most upbeat of students' books, *Anne of Green Gables.*

As always, I reviewed far more books than I included here, and I strove to include only quality literature while attempting to balance male and female perspectives and a variety of cultural points of view. Of course our world is rich in cultures, and I cannot possibly represent them all here. I have tried, over the entirety of the Lightning Literature curriculum, to bring a variety of voices to students.

I also strive for a variety of genres. This year I've managed three works of nonfiction (one is unusual in that it is written as poetry), two works of historical fiction, one fantastical romp, and our first true work of science fiction. There is also the Newbery winning *Holes* and the classic *Anne of Green Gables*. Of course, not every student will love every book, and for that I'm truly sorry. But my hope is people will find new loves as well.

## Daily Reading

Four days each week, I assign a certain number of 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 aloud to your student while assigning others as read-alone. Or having the student read the day's chapters alone first, then reading through the book together while discussing the comprehension questions. Some students 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 student's literary skills and comprehension.

I devoted four weeks to poetry, spread throughout the year. I could not find a poetry book I wanted to use for this year, so instead I've included the poems in the guide. As with the books, you can choose how you want to approach the reading of these.

## Comprehension Questions

Each day of reading includes comprehension questions for the chapters read that day. The questions are in the student guide, the 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, but you can if you wish.)

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. Some questions require literary analysis ("What did we learn about the character from what they just did here?").

I always prefer comprehension questions as a tool to improve reading comprehension rather than a test of it. Students 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 student is stressed because they are afraid they will answer the questions wrong, their focus and love of reading will decrease rather than increase.

## Book Discussion

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

The student guide includes a list of discussion questions for the student to think about (parents or teachers may want to look at these too). Some of these questions address emotional, ethical, moral, and similar considerations of the book. They help the student bring the ideas of the book into their own life. Other questions are more purely literary—helping students to better see such things as character motivation, how an author creates tone, and how an author develops a theme.

The teacher guide has 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.

Your student 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 student 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 students 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.). Not all books contain symbolism.

## Reading Journal

After the book discussion, turn to the appropriate pages in the Student Workbook. Your student will write two sentences: their favorite sentence from the book and a sentence (or more) stating their thoughts and feelings about the book.

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, poetry instruction, and even occasional composition and literary concepts under the umbrella term "grammar and mechanics." The student work text contains basic instruction and examples. Always read the instructions with your students, and be sure they understand them before having them complete the page. The teacher's guide contains the answers to the workbook pages.

Throughout the year in grammar, I recommend that students take a notebook (any type will do) and make notes about grammar they struggle with. For example, if they have trouble with certain irregular plurals they would record them in their notebook and study them regularly. While I can present the range of grammar skills expected of students each year, I cannot know where your students excel and where they struggle. If they haven't already, grade 5 is an excellent time for students to start taking a more active part in their learning. I will make notes in this guide about particular things students might wish to put in their notebook, but don't limit yourself to my suggestions.

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 student to love language arts. Don't risk impeding that to ensure an understanding of commas or adverbs by the end of the year. Often something will click easily with a student 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 students 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 student's understanding rather than a judgment on their performance.

If your student 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 student used the previous Lightning Literature courses, they will have had this exposure. They may have also learned the topic from another language arts course. But if your student has not learned the topic previously, some lessons may be too cursory for them. In that case—or if your student struggled previously with this concept—feel free to work closely with them to provide a more thorough understanding.

## 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 (noun) to horse (verb) around on the horse (adjective) track.

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. My focus with diagramming is not just to learn diagramming, Rather, I find it can be a useful tool to help students better understand sentence formation and word functions. If it is not helping your student do that, it's not worth the trouble.

## Composition

The composition portion of this course should, as with all aspects, be tailored to your student's level. The best way to do this is usually paper length. While an average student in language arts can be expected to write a one- to two-page paper for most assignments, if this will overly stress your student, feel free to require less. You could also assign longer papers for those types of assignments your student is more motivated by. The same student who can barely produce three paragraphs of a research paper might happily hand you a 30-page short story (after which you would be perfectly within your rights to assign not just a minimum but a maximum paper length).

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 student 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.

**Composition Book:** Unless students will be typing their papers, they will need lined composition pages. We have provided masters for 1/2" and 3/8" 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 student 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 student'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 student'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. I ask the student to write a favorite sentence from the book and give their opinion of the book.

**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, complete the reading if you are unfamiliar with it. This will be especially important when you do the book discussion at the end of each book. Preview the grammar and composition assignments.

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. Please note that I have not read all of the books by all of these authors. 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 student'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.).