

The Integration of Language Arts & History in Grades 5-8

Handout for Waldorf Homeschool Conference

March 2019 in Atlanta

I like to think of this integration as highlighting Language Arts in the early grades 1-4, with “history” woven in – not really true history as we know it but fairy tales, myths, and legends of early history. Then in grades 5-8, history becomes more of the focus with language arts woven in.

Steiner set out a story curriculum based on a chronological progression of history. True history as we know it begins in grade 5 (or you could say in grade 4 with local history). The main lesson blocks are more fluid in grades 5-8.

- Grade 5: Ancient Civilizations (India, Persia, Babylon, Egypt, China)
- Grade 6: Ancient Greece & Ancient Rome
- Grade 7: Middle Ages & Age of Exploration
- Grade 8: The Renaissance & Modern History

Language Arts in these grades:

- Grades 5 & 6: Active & Passive Voice (expressing the differences between what a child does and what happens to him while also becoming aware of others’ opinions & beginning to take responsibility for his/her actions.)
- Grades 7 & 8: Help students express their mood in writing. A standard Waldorf block in grade 7 is called Wish Wonder & Surprise. The idea is to help children come to know the self and begin to learn to express that, right at the age when they are learning who they are in the world and what they believe. Begin developing individual style in writing.

We are still presenting new material through story in these grades. So it’s usually autobiography & biography. Choose stories that speak to you, that really light you up.

Set up learning in main lesson blocks. A period of 3-5 weeks on one topic. There’s so much history in these grades that you’ll be probably doing 2 or even 3 blocks of history per grade with the language arts woven in.

As you progress through grades, you will increase the amount of writing your children do. You can add projects and challenges to the main lesson book work. Perhaps ask your child to choose a book to read independently that’s related to the block you’re on. Or do a small research project on a related topic of their choice. One challenge per block.

During these years, it’s very important for us to help children expand from writing a summary from a single story, to writing summaries from multiple sources. This is a process that takes time. But you might start by having them choose a topic, then go get three books on the subject. They can then come home and read the three books, write some notes from each, and

then combine those notes to write a single summary.

Your child is beginning to grow into his/her own. Be open to their input. We are in a much better position with homeschooling to begin “weaning” them academically off their reliance on us. Invite children to stretch without frustrating them. Dance between rhythm & flexibility. Think of the WOW factor and build in surprise when you can. As children enter grades 7 & 8, they often want to begin learning with friends. And don’t forget to keep the arts going – drawing, painting, verses, drama, maps, stories, music, movement.

Keep expanding literacy through the grades. Keep reading aloud to your children. Encourage them to choose their own books to read for pleasure – anything, even comic books count! And be patient!!! Help them make progress and become more and more independent in their learning. Because that’s the goal – independent lifelong learners.

A LOT happens during these years. The child moves through the graceful balance point of childhood through the awkward tween/teen crucible. There is an amazing amount going on physically of course, as well as a big shift from being heart centered to more head centered. Your student starts to crave an intellectual challenge and more structure and critical thinking in their studies. Practical "hand" centered activity that accomplishes work in the world and inspiring history packed with real life heroes speak to this age group's developing sense of justice and a growing desire to find a unique sense of purpose.

During these years, the ratio of our effort to their effort - **to less us and more them** - should continue to progress. Here are a few **mantras** that will help sustain you through these grades:

- **Collaborate in Creating**
- **Complete Challenges**
- **Expand the Circle**
- **Make it as Lively as Possible** - Academic Club model
- **Change up the Pedagogy and Change up the Schedule**
- **Realistic Expectations** - in other words - they are supposed to rebel and there will be yelling
- **Partner toward Independence; it is a long process**
- **Make your House *the* House**
- **Beware of the "It's Time to Get Serious" Trap**

Just like their parents, your **students have access to information by the truck loads.** The model of the teacher being the primary source and deliverer of information, while strained in earlier grades, definitely fades during this period.

Instead, consider **making your focus the creating and sharing of academic experiences and completing academic challenges.** You create the structure (with their input) and provide guidance while your student will do the research, make the observations, and communicate their reflections and conclusions in some form.