GRADE

2

"Flowers are made to bloom in the sun and not to be shut up in an apron." - Johanna Spyri

LITERATURE GUIDE

THE ANGELICUM ACADEMY

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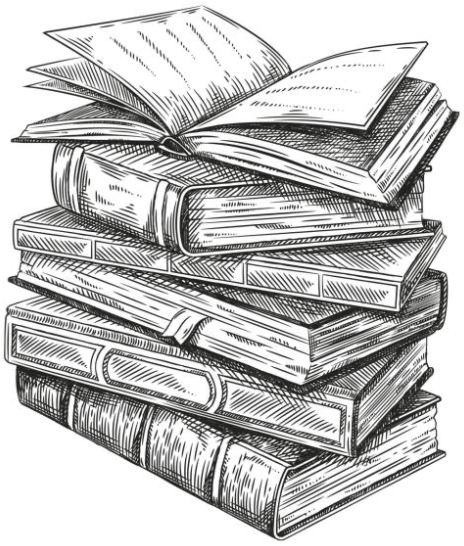
Please note: *The books can be read in any order except for the Little House series, which we recommend reading in order to get the most out of this series. Answer Keys for each may be found at the end of the book.*

Introduction

by Dr. James Taylor

The list of books followed in this collection, and the suggested ages for their reading, is taken from the list of Good Books selected by Dr. John Senior. Dr. Senior was the brilliant professor of classics and humanities at the University of Kansas who with two colleagues taught the influential Integrated Humanities Program ("IHP") for freshmen and sophomores. The IHP produced many teachers, a few farmers, numerous marriages and friendships, a wave of conversions primarily to Catholicism some of whom became priests, monks, religious sisters, and one bishop, so far.



Mr. Senior was reluctant to respond to the many requests to prepare a list of children's books because there were so many good choices (a thousand he estimated) that to name a hundred or so could give the impression that these titles were definitive and superior to all the rest. In fact, at the top of his original typed list was the warning in capital letters not to reprint, for private circulation only. The request was not honored and Senior's list of what he called the *Good Books* (necessary to be read before reading the greatest and loftiest books, collectively referred to – in similar lists of great classics -as the *Great Books*) was later included in one of his own books and has become widely available and regarded as unusually helpful in that it groups the reading levels for these classics according to stages of growth and development by approximate age,

rather than the more restrictive and mechanical grade levels.

Our list departs from Dr. Senior's original, lengthier list by excluding those selections no longer in print. We have also added C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series and J.R.R. Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy for reasons which are articulated in the appended article. Due to persistent parental requests, we have added grade level suggestions simply as rough approximations.
To this we believe it is important for our audience to consider some practical considerations in approaching reading and a reading schedule for the *Good Books*. Parents who want to teach their children to read often seek information about the best way to proceed: phonics or sight-word methods? We recognize that parents and children have found value in both approaches; in fact, when asked we always say to parents simply to follow the way that seems best to achieve literacy for their children.

From an objective, research-based perspective, however, it does appear that phonics programs for reading have an edge on improving skills in learning the sounds of the alphabet and rendering them into words. On the other hand, sight-readers tend to start reading faster but, it is said by its opponents, these early readers lack the skills to learn or "sound out" words outside their controlled vocabulary. And, there are significant examples on both sides of the "reading wars" issue of children who have learned to read successfully with either phonics or with the various whole-word approaches. As if to add to the confusion, there is another class of children who simply learn to read without formal phonics or sight-word methods and neither parents nor teachers nor specialists are exactly sure how this feat was accomplished. There is one constant that runs throughout the success of all reading programs: children who are read to from the earliest years on tend to be early and good readers.

In general, however, the research appears to indicate that phonics-based programs are more effective in teaching skills to understand the sounds of our alphabet and from there to form words. This, in turn, promotes reading confidence and the ability to sound out new words using the phonetic skills. The length of the classic children's books ranges from roughly a hundred to eight hundred pages (*e.g.,* some of Dickens), averaging about two hundred pages. We suggest what we believe is a reasonable goal: to read one book every two weeks, thus averaging twenty pages or so a day, excluding weekends if one chooses. Of course, it is not possible to keep this schedule with frequent television viewing or Internet browsing and chat.

We believe that students can increase their pace of reading by increasing the movement of their eyes over the sentences, but also slowing down when they begin to lose comprehension. In this way all students can increase the pace of their reading at least to some degree; however, this is not necessarily an endorsement of "speed reading" methods, and the measure for increasing one's reading pace will always be when the individual reader begins to lose comprehension, then it is time to stop just short of that increased pace. The *Good Books* are excellent material upon which to conduct these experiments on increasing reading pace because unlike some of the *Great Books* they are not treatises in philosophy, science and theology, being mostly stories and novels. But a more important reason to read the *Good Books* listed here, and to read them preferably when young, is to prepare the imagination and intellect for the more challenging ideas of the *Great Books*. It is not a flippant comment, to say that a person grounded in the rhymes and rhythms of *Mother Goose* has also cultivated the senses and the mind for the reading of Shakespeare.

Since both Mother Goose and William Shakespeare are among the great poets, and incidentally were Renaissance contemporaries, they also remind us that it would be an inexcusable omission not to give special mention to poetry as part of the collection of children's

literature. Poetry or verse is the unique expression of language that reveals truths and mysteries of life. By the poet's ever ranging and focusing vision on life, when he speaks, he celebrates whatever his muse has drawn him to embrace. It has been said that all poetry is about love in some way, seeking it, having it, or losing it. A good deal of the poems of the nursery and early childhood are about having love, even in the so-called nonsense poetry there is a light-hearted delight that comes from a loving, and lively, heart. And there are poems of loss that appear in the nursery poems of *Mother Goose* and Robert Louis Stevenson where the sad times of childhood prepare us for the heartbreaks of adolescence and youth. Love, joy, sorrow, even anger, are all suited to the poet's voice as he celebrates our moods and emotions and most of all our wonder at the wonder of being alive.

Where prose is what we want for the narrative mode of stories, the compression and precision of the language of poetry, its rhythms and its rhymes, make the poem's recreated experience more memorable, more interior, more *ours*. The poet's gaze into the interior of his subject and diligence and inspiration in finding just the right words also helps us see the world, ourselves and others in a new yet familiar way and above all more thoughtfully.

Though reading and memorizing poetry is its own reward, to do so in childhood creates a language-rich foundation that supports not only future literary appreciation but increases reflective abilities toward all the subjects of the curriculum. How so? Because becoming familiar with poetry builds the habit of looking beyond the surface and seeing connections between what first appeared as dissimilar ideas or objects. This is why poetry was always a part of the foundational *Trivium*, the essential three courses of the medieval liberal arts curriculum, rooted in the classical models of ancient Greece and Rome.

Taken together, the poetry and prose of the best of children's literature produce not only superior academic results but a self-satisfying experience of living that much closer to the truth of things, of being more connected with creation and mankind. Such a claim that the *Good Books* are the "best" sometimes gives rise to the question, why are there no contemporary titles in your list? What about *Harry Potter*, for example? Apart from the controversy surrounding the moral ambiguities of the Harry Potter series of books, it is doubtful that such material that depends so heavily on the bizarre and fantastic, with the absence of a dominant theme human virtue is enough to provide the essential quality of a classic: endurance. Characteristically, "fad" best-selling books come and go rather quickly compared to the staying power of, say, *The Wind in the Willows, Robin Hood, The Hunchback of Notre Dame,* that continue in print and in film and stage versions decade after decade, century and century in some cases. So it is not an unusual fact, for example, that in 1955, *Scuffy the Tugboat* by Gertrude Crampton was a national best-selling children's book, a title and author not completely, but virtually forgotten today. It is not easy to say exactly why one book remains popular regardless of cultural changes while many, many others perish in the recycling bin. Whatever that special appeal the classic book possesses, it acts as a universal voice that speaks to each generation, and each generation and another and another, continues to listen and is pleased. Popular poetry and fiction is most often popular for a time, then forgotten. Yet it cannot be denied that modern and contemporary children's literature has created a large presence in schools, bookstores,

libraries and sometimes in the film industry. Since the 1940s, the books of Dr. Seuss have remained in print and in use. For a time titles such as *The Cat in the Hat, Green Eggs and Ham,* and, *Hop on Pop* were used as substitutes for the standard early readers and certainly the playful rhymes and rhythms were a welcome respite from the Dick and Jane type look-say readers. But the Dr. Seuss phenomenon and the explosion of books for children that followed this revolution began to edge out the classics quite literally, on book shelves in stores and school libraries; and ideologically the treasury of books from *Mother Goose* to *The Scarlet Pimpernel* have come to be considered hopelessly old fashioned and no longer relevant. For these reasons alone the list of books here does not include contemporary or "popular" fiction for children. Furthermore, there will always be books that catch the reading public's attention, that come and go, and readers of all ages can always sample these books if they are curious about their contents. But what if we were to lose the classics, which convey the roots of our culture, by neglect or deliberate rejection?

Finally, a reminder: Dr. Senior was the first to say that his list is far from definitive, that on another day he might make a different selection in some cases. Also, he said he certainly could be wrong about the reading age and the selected books for that group; the parent or teacher should remain experimental allowing the child to discover their own level of reading challenge and appreciation. Such was the reasonable spirit that informed all of John Senior's life and teaching; it is the same goodwill we wish to impart to the readers of this book.

The best of children's literature is simply good literature that anyone, child or adult, can enjoy. It is impossible to imagine that *Aesop's Fables, The Household Tales of the Brothers Grimm,* or *Treasure Island*, would not be found delightful by adults as well as children. The poems and stories that were once enjoyed in wonder and delight in youth are now viewed in maturity with their truth and wisdom.

For many contemporary books marketed for children this is not the case; they are often silly and regard the child as a kind of simple toy, or the stories are laced with special interest social agendas, and in some cases the material is inappropriate or simply morally offensive. The illustrations for many contemporary children's books are gaudy while the human and animal figures are grossly distorted. This is not to say there are not authors of children's literature writing serious and significant material today – and talented and traditional illustrators – there are both. But with the exception of specialty stores that carry children's books written in the more traditional mode, the classic books for children occupy a small space on the shelves of the big book stores.

And yet, the best of children's literature is still in print and can be ordered from booksellers or found in libraries; on the Internet new and used copies of classics can be purchased usually for reasonable prices. Perhaps the audience for these good books for children is smaller now but the

poems and stories that nourished children and pleased adults for centuries refuse to go away; their appeal remains irresistible and their imaginative experience is memorable for a lifetime. Why is this so? To ask this question another way, what makes a book a classic?

Because literature is an art, it can never be understood as if it were a science like mathematics. In the end, there will always be an element of a poem or a story's success we will not be able to explain in rational terms as if we were explaining why one engine works better than another. But, we can say the following about classic literature: *the classic poem or story not only says something true and ultimately good about the nature of life and human beings regardless of time or place, race or religion or circumstances; it says it in a way that is delightful and memorable.* The literary work does not only tell a story and impart knowledge in a unique way, the art of the tale or the poem is an *aesthetic* experience. (*Aesthetic* is from a Greek word that has to do with feelings and pleasurable emotions. When we go to the doctor's and receive an *anesthetic* we are being made temporarily *not to feel* so a particular examination or operation can be performed without feeling pain.)

In this realm of beauty found in the pleasure derived from what is read, not all the story's charm is revealed at the first or second or even after several readings. As we know, most children beg to hear the good poems and stories again and again so they can continue to experience their delight and even their surprise. At least, that's one reason why we think children do this though we must repeat that there is also something mysterious and unknowable why poems and stories affect us the way they do. We can profit a great deal by talking about them with friends and family, but in the end we can never explain what it is exactly we continue to admire about them. Some teachers of literature are impatient with students who simply say after reading a story or poem, "*I like it, but I'm not sure why.*" Of course, some discussion of the material is appropriate, but without our undisturbed, first reactions of pleasure and delight with literature there can be no further appreciation.

Even though classics are old, their themes and the delight they give never age. A famous poet once said that poetry is news that stays news. This is true of all classic literature from Aesop to Shakespeare. So, these good books contain something true, unchanging and good about life; and dramatize these truths for us in a pleasing and memorable way. Before elaborating on the definition of a classic book let's look at the historical and cultural environment that in part undermined the dominant themes of the true and good found in the *Good Books*.

The literary, philosophical and religious climate following World War I was not friendly to traditional beliefs about the essential goodness of man. Perhaps this can be understood from a psychological and sociological perspective given the carnage of modern warfare and the disruption of nations. The modern era has also seen the exposure of corporate and political ambition, the corrupt views of teachers in schools and universities, the scandal displayed by public leaders and even some clergy are signs of a world's critical illness still very much with us in the 21st century.

Literary themes that emerged from this era tend to be melancholy and dark; characters are often

despairing, violent, or overwhelmed. Frequently, stories, poems and novels of the modern era lack any objective moral center of gravity and often end either in unrealistic conclusions or tragic absurdity. These times have also seen an alarming increase in escapist and fantasy literature that lead the reader further and further away from reality.

In spite of the discouraging landscape left by this phenomenon called modernism, the classic books of childhood and adolescence, the *Good Books*, continue to refresh the air of life. This imaginative experience is more important now than ever, not only for children who are forming their ideas about the world and their lives, but for adults who can rediscover and in a way relearn essential truths once seen clearly in childhood.

To say these classic books are true and good does not mean they do not contain evil; the stories of Grimm and Anderson for example would be nothing without the presence of cruel adults and disobedient children. Sometimes it appears the evil characters triumph over the good when we have a sad or tragic ending. But we would never recognize such characters and endings as sad if it weren't for the story's central sympathy with the good. In fact, it is only a life centered in the good and the beautiful and the true that recognizes and mourns the presence of their opposites. In this way, the presence of cruel stepmothers, witches and ogres, giants and monsters are true in that they are representative of evil present in the world. In an early version of *Little Red Riding Road* the little girl, after dallying on her way to visit her sick grandmother and talking to a particular stranger on the way, is devoured by the disguised wolf. The end!

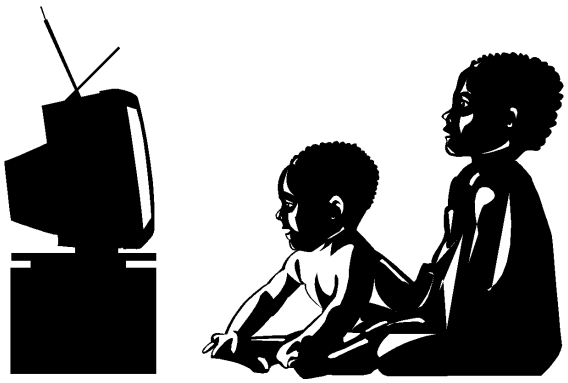
So one thing we can say about classic stories is that they arouse our sentiments, in the case of the *Little Red Riding Hood*, fear and pity; but they are not sentimental in the way the Walt Disney version of some of these classics are. The famous Hollywood cartoonist's version of *Pinocchio*, for example, presents a mischievous little puppet who yearns to be a real boy. The original story by Carlo Collidi reveals a wooden puppet that is cruel and violent between short-lived lapses into self-pitying remorse. In one of the early chapters, Pinocchio picks up a large mallet and smashes the Cricket. Nor is he sorry. He continually betrays the love and trust of Gepetto to the point of nearly breaking his heart. The real story of Pinocchio is one of conversion, a replacing of a wooden heart with a human one that has learned to love. It is this element of virtue, or the noticeable lack of it, that is characteristic of a classic book though the best of these books never moralize or preach life's lessons to us. They *show* them. It is this moral depth of the story, more mature than the thinned out popular versions, that elevates the original tale above the realm of mere entertainment and places it with the great stories that are both true and good.

The second element of a classic story or poem, that the work is delightful and pleasing and can be experienced over and over, is not separate from the fact that it is true and good. A work of art can never be systematized, analyzed, taken apart, named and labeled and put back together again – neither could Humpty Dumpty! Rather, we say a classic work of art, be it a painting, sculpture, musical composition, or literature, is experienced as an integrated whole. It is difficult to say exactly why a piece of literature possesses the quality of lasting pleasure, but it has something to do with this unity where the characters, the plot, the dialogue, beginning, middle and the end, combine in such a way as to proclaim that the story or the poem could not have

been written in any other way. There is nothing we would change. Just as Goldilocks found one bowl of porridge "just right" without defining exactly what that means, so too we know when we finish a good story such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* or Jack London's *Call of the Wild,* Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, or Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, that we experienced a delight in the telling that we would desire others to experience again and again. This ongoing popularity of the classics is the long view afforded by the *Good Books* – these titles and perhaps a thousand more stay in print year after year, in some cases century after century, whereas it is likely the best seller of today will be recycled paper for tomorrow.

The reason for the persistent presence of the classics of children's literature is not the result of marketing techniques and expensive advertising campaigns. These books continue to be read because children and adults discover that what they reveal about our lives and our world is not just true at a certain period of time or in a certain location for a particular group of people, but are always true, everywhere for everyone. Another reason for their appeal rests on the intuitive knowledge of the true and good everyone who encounters them share, who discover it is a better and higher thing to enjoy a work of art than to analyze it. Since the themes of the stories reveal timeless truths about the human condition, from the humorous to the tragic, we see that one of the marks of a classic is its universal appeal. We experience a sense of unity with nature and human nature when we give ourselves to the classic stories and poems of the *Good Books*.

But we must admit our modern times have not been encouraging for reading and conversing about what we have read. Conversing is an aspect of leisure that accompanies the act of reading that has been terribly undermined by the visual and to some extent the audio stimulants of contemporary culture. It has become commonplace for reading enthusiasts to recognize and blame television for luring children and their parents away from reading books and instead spending their free time staring into the bright and flashy electronic frames of movement and color accompanied by high fidelity and stereo sound from the TV set.

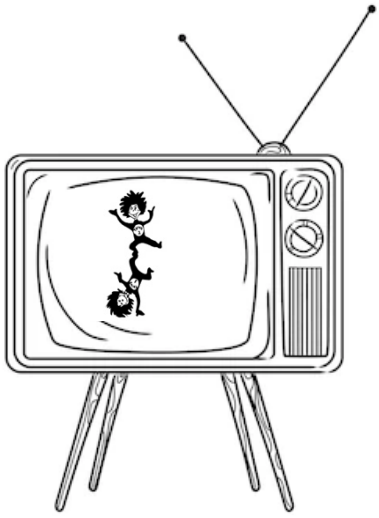


Individual reactions will vary to television viewing and the varieties of video experiences: computer screens, DVDs, and movies in theaters. It seems that the less frequent the video experience, children are able to take or leave the electronic stimulation of the eyes and continue to cultivate their imagination and intellect through reading good books. But the more children who watch electronic images with sound in place of reading, the more they not only lose the ability to enjoy stories, histories, and poetry, but they lose interest in conversing about much more than the latest news in the world of popular culture – music, sports, movie and television stars.

Marie Winn in her book, *The Plug-In Drug*, published in 1977 appeals not only to common sense about the decline in reading in America, but includes data from controlled studies that reveal what occurs in the eyes and in the brain of a child watching television. It amounts to a virtual disconnect with reality. Her thesis was revolutionary when the book first appeared: she said that arguments over content on television are irrelevant compared to the real danger. Eye movement resembles a hypnotic state and the brain reacts in some respects as if it were asleep when viewing television. It was not simply a discussion about the "bad" programs versus the "good" ones, she said, or the superiority of so called "educational" commercial-free and clever

children's shows that appeared on PBS Television. Winn said that the viewing experience itself was harmful regardless of what was on the screen. The posture, facial expression and the subdued brain activity on one hand, and brain agitation on the other, indicated that television viewing especially for the younger viewer looked more like a drug induced state than a learning experience regardless of the quality of the content. Marshall McLuhan warned of the same danger, summarized in aphorisms such as "*The medium is the message*," and "*With telephone and TV it is not so much the message as the sender that is 'sent'*."

The implications for social life and reading were obvious. With extensive viewing healthy family life deteriorated where the children became remote from the family circle. Deprived of essential real-life experiences when it came to reading either informational or imaginative material the child lacked sensory and intellectual memories of reality to form images and ideas from what they were reading. Winn also cites studies that strongly suggest links between the video experience and forms of dyslexia and so-called ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

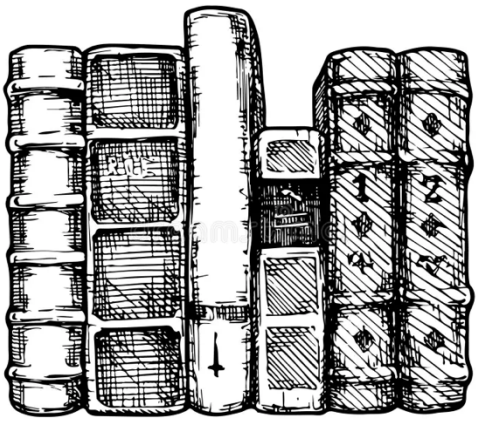


Book publishers and authors continue to produce more materials for children, but since the television and video screen revolution many of these books are written in language far below age level and illustrated with garish colors and distorted figures (such as those used by Theodor Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Suess) to compete with the flashy visual displays on the electronic screen.

This technological distraction to reading used to be confined to the home where there was one television set for the family. Now there are often several sets throughout the house, stereo players, Walkmans, iPods, computers, telephones and cell phones so that each home has become an electronic village. At most schools, the video and electronic experience continues with computers and televisions in the classrooms and in the library. Every moment spent with these devices at home or school is lost time the student could have been reading good books and talking about them with their classmates and teacher and preparing to write about the book's themes and characters.

Students, parents and teachers sometimes ask what the difference is between reading books onscreen, such as, *Robinson Crusoe*, certainly one of the Good Books, and reading the same story on the printed page between the covers of a book. The answer requires that we remind ourselves of who we are: human beings, the philosophical or religious definition of which states we are a composite of a body and a soul. That means we react to the world and things that come our way with both our external senses and or internal senses. We use our eyes that focus on three dimensional reality, our ears that receive sounds either heard aloud or in the silence of our minds, and the sense of touch that feels the heft and surfaces, edges and width of objects (such as books). Each of these external senses working together inform our ideas of things: are they pleasant or unpleasant, bright or dark, warm or cold? Finally, in the mysterious integration of body and soul a conclusion is reached sometimes quickly, sometimes after repeated experiences, that a particular thing, person or place is either

good or bad for us. In this way all our judgments about things become ethical or moral because value is assigned to life's experiences based on whether they are good or bad. But it all begins in the realm of the senses - all of it.



Consequently, the sensory experience of reading or listening to a story involves not only more of the powers of the human being but as a result engages our sense of moral evaluation more keenly. When the sensory and mental powers are focused on the content of the *Good Books* then our sense of the good, the true and the beautiful are increased even more since the culture of these stories and poems are saturated in either the ethical perception of the modern world or the ancient world or the Judeo-Christian revelation of Western civilization. The flat surface of a computer screen where text floats, suspended in cyber space, has an impression of non-reality, of not quite existing as well as giving rise to the debate: is such protracted (average of 5+ hours per day) onscreen reading, as well as television viewing, detrimental to good vision?

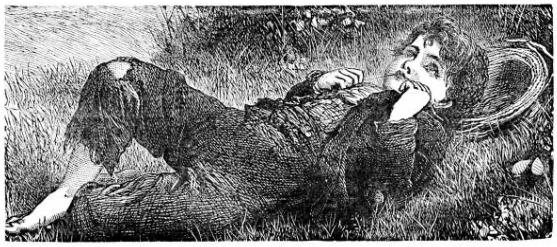
To read the *Good Books* is to participate in the great tradition of learning through delight and wonder that leads to wisdom which is to discover and do the good which is the heart's deepest longing, to be united to the good, the true and the beautiful which is happiness on earth. Without pedantic "teaching or preaching", every *Aesop Fable* is a dramatized story of the virtues, prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, often instructing by the defect or excess of the virtue. We really do not need the "moral lessons" at the end of these perfect stories – attentive readers see their meaning integrated within all the elements of the story, not as a simplified afterthought.

The books read when students are older, for example, those by Louisa May Alcott, or Robert Louis Stevenson, or Mark Twain, portray characters memorable for their bravery or cowardice, compassion or bitterness, prudence or bad judgment, impatience or long suffering. And yet for all the positive things we can say about the *Good Books* as instruments of cultivating the imagination upon truth and forming the character upon goodness there is another appeal to the reader that resides in the experience of beauty that is characteristic of all art, a mysterious dimension of wonder and pleasure that is impossible rationally to explain. It is real and certain and draws our attention to itself, but we are at a loss to describe it. The ancients attributed this allure to the presence of the Muse, a mysterious source of inspiration for the author and the reader. The invisible reality of the Muse has continued to be acknowledged from the classical Greek dramatists to the modern American poet Robert Frost.

All these things, delight, wonder, virtue, and inspiration simply are not present in the majority of the so-called children's literature of today. Social themes such as divorce and alternative life styles; political relevance topics such as concerns over the rain forest, global warming, and racial and gender equality dominate children's literature often used in social studies classes. These may indeed be relevant socially and politically but they have no Muse, that is, there is nothing to admire and love about the characters since they appear in the story merely as figures to act out whatever agenda is being promoted. Furthermore, such stories will not achieve a universal theme, a victory or failure based on the unity of all human beings, but whose action and outcome is confined to one particular

circumstance that could or could not apply to others.

There are also other modern themes that have entered juvenile fiction: loneliness, alienation, failed friendships, themes directed toward early adolescent girls in particular. Popular fiction for adolescent boys is dominated by fantasy and the fantastic, and violence, exploiting boys' natural inclination for action and adventure. The stories and novels for this age group are written and illustrated almost entirely for visual excitement that creates a state of stimulation much like the viewing of video games and "action-adventure" movies. In this literature there is no depth of character upon which to reflect and very little moral distinction between the hero's use of force to win the day and the villain's shear barbarianism.



Again, it is very important to repeat that this overview of the current state of children's literature is by necessity a generalization because these features and trends are *generally* true; however, there are writers and illustrators of children's books today who are innovative and place their stories in modern settings, yet compose their themes and illustrations within an artistic and ethical tradition of literature for younger readers.

Even though reading the *Good Books* are their own reward, that is, their worth is found in the delight and knowledge they give, not in material reward; it is also true that a grounding in this literature cultivates our emotional and mental life to receive the ideas and questions presented by the *Great Books* of Western civilization that begin with such authors as Homer, Euclid, Plato, Aeschylus, and Aristotle. In other words, if a child has been well nourished on *Mother Goose* and Robert Louis Stevenson, he or she is ready to read Shakespeare.

A student thus nourished passes from reading the *Good Books* to the first *Great Books* generally somewhere between the end of the elementary experience and the beginning college years. However, firmly assigning a *Good* or *Great Book* to a grade level fails to observe the emotional and mental "ages" that can vary quite a bit. Flexibility based on the ability of the student should determine at what time a particular book is read. Unlike empirical science, teaching the *Good Books* is experimental, like an art, where the rational faculty of the child is not the main focus, but the intuitive, the emotional, and the sensory dimensions of his being are brought into play.

Education by the *Good Books* that leads to the *Great Books* enriching the soil for all higher and specialized studies achieves something greater than cultivating literate and literary-minded students – it passes on our culture. And what has been that culture? It is the best of what man can achieve, it is excellence of character by which we measure our goodness and our faults, it is the *civil* of civilization which requires a life based on principles rather than whim in relationships of the family, government, economy, labor and leisure, and religion. It is freedom to enjoy the life of the mind as well as the good of the body; it is the hope to build society upon moral principles whose very atmosphere encourages its citizens to excel as individuals within a community of like-minded men and women regardless of ethnicity, race or cultural differences.

Think of an education without the traditional nursery poems, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, or *Treasure Island, Little Women,* and *The Secret Garden*, and how much exposure to humanity in all its variety would be missed. Without the literary mode that as Aristotle said not only instructs but delights, education would not be worthy of the name. Note well that all totalitarian regimes in the past and in our time remove first

from education all books of poetry and fiction, books that portray the breadth of the human spirit. By reading these books that portray us at our best and sometimes at our worst, we are united in a common bond of understanding of what it means to be human and thereby create in us a sympathy and a tolerance for all the foibles of mankind and an abiding admiration for our ability to be loving, courageous and kind. In the end, this is education's purpose, this maturing of our humanity, and the children's classics – the *Good Books* - are certainly an essential means of conveying this noble work.

The GOOD BOOKS Literature Program

by Elisabeth Carmack

John Senior (1923-99), the late classicist professor at the University of Kansas (KU), was a student of the poet, author, teacher, and great books advocate Mark Van Doren at Columbia University in the 1940′s. Van Doren was co-moderator of many great books groups at Columbia in the 1920′s with Dr. Adler, and both were students of John Erskine. Senior's great books credentials go straight back to the beginning of the movement at Columbia. Dr. Adler was invited to lecture at KU in the 1970′s by Senior.

Senior was a very personable, renowned and really beloved figure at KU (along with fellow professors Dennis Quinn and the late Frank Nelick), and all around eastern Kansas, as well as beyond. Unpretentious, he humbly preferred not to be called professor, so we will honor that wish here. My family had the honor of his presence for visits and dinner on occasion in the 1980′s. Unusually well-read and a sagacious judge of literature, he compiled a list of books, broken into four age groups (2-7, 7-12, 12-16, 16-20) he called the "good books," which he said "everyone should have read." His son, Andrew, said that his father regarded the compilation of the list as one of the most important works of his life. In his book, *The Death of Christian Culture*, Senior explained his terminology and selections:

"The Great Books movement of the last generation has not failed as much as fizzled, not because of any defect in the books – 'the best that has been thought and said,' in Matthew Arnold's

phrase – but like good champagne in plastic bottles, they went flat.

To change the figure, the seeds are good but the cultural soil has been depleted; the seminal ideas of Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and St. Thomas thrive only in an imaginative ground saturated with fables, fairy tales, stories, rhymes, and adventures: the thousand books of Grimm, Anderson, Stevenson, Dickens, Scott, Dumas and the rest.

Taking all that was best of the Greco-Roman world into itself, Western tradition has given us the thousand good books as a preparation for the great ones – and for all studies in the arts and sciences. Without them all studies are inhumane. The brutal athlete and the foppish aesthete suffer vices opposed to the virtue of Newman's gentleman. Anyone working at college, whether in the pure arts and sciences or the practical ones, will discover he has made a quantum leap when he gets even a small amount of cultural ground under him: he will grow up like an undernourished plant suddenly fertilized and watered.

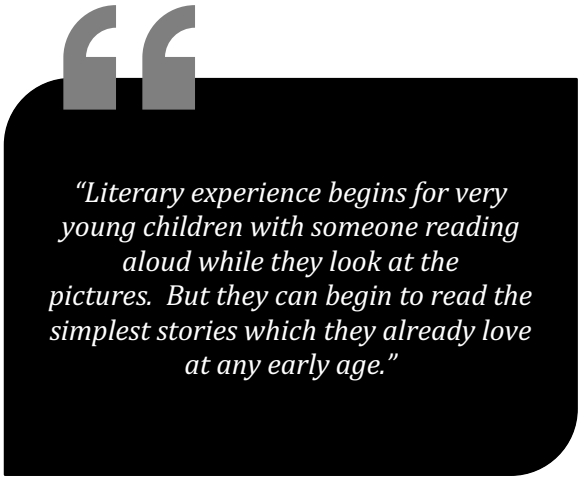
Of course, the distinction between great and good is not absolute. Great implies a certain magnitude; one might say War and Peace *and* Les Miserables *are great because of their length or* The Critique of Pure Reason *because of its difficulty. Great books call for philosophical reflection; good books are popular, appealing especially to the imagination. But obviously some authors are both great and good, and their works may be read more than once from the different points of view – this is true of Shakespeare and Cervantes, for example.*

It is commonly agreed also that both great and good can be judged only from a distance. Contemporary works can be appreciated and enjoyed but not very properly judged; and just as a principle must stand outside what follows from it (as a point to the line), so a cultural standard must be established from some time at least as distant as our grandparents'. For us today the cutoff point is World War I, before which cars and the electric light had not yet come to dominate our lives and the experience of nature had not been distorted by speed and the destruction of shadows. There is a serious question – with arguments on both sides, surely – as to whether there can be any culture at all in a mechanized society. Whichever side one takes in that dispute, it is certainly true that we cannot understand the point at issue without an imaginative grasp of the world we have lost.

Everyone will find more than enough that he hasn't read in our Good Books list; and everything on this list is by common consent part of the ordinary cultural matter essential for an English-speaking person to grow in. Remember that the point of view throughout a course of studies such as this is that of the amateur – the ordinary person who loves, and enjoys what he loves not, of the expert in critical, historical or textual technology.

The books have been divided (sometimes dubiously because some bridge two categories) into stages of life corresponding to the classical ages of man, and in general agreement with the divisions of modern child psychology, because sight is the first of the senses and especially

powerful in the early years, it is very important to secure books illustrated by artists working in the cultural tradition we are studying, both as an introduction to art and as part of the imaginative experience of the book. This is not to disparage contemporary artists, any more than the tradition itself disparages contemporary experiment – quite the contrary, one of the fruits of such a course should be the encouragement of good writing and drawing. The good work of the past is a standard, not a straight-jacket. Book illustration reached its perfection in the nineteenth century in the work of Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane, Gustav Dore, George Cruikshank, "Phiz," Gordon Browne, Beatrix Potter, Sir John Tenniel, Arthur Rackham, Howard Pyle, N. C. Wyeth, and many others. The rule of thumb is to find a nineteenth-century edition or one of the facsimiles which (though not as sharp in printing) are currently available at moderate prices.



We have researched John Senior's list of Good Books, to age twelve, to find all that are in print, at reasonable prices. At present, this totals to roughly 140 books. We have further sub-divided them into grades, and in each grade put them in a rough order of difficulty, while avoiding too much repetition of sets in one year – merely as a suggestion for parents lacking the time to do so. Those "good books" no longer in-print may often be found at libraries or used book stores. Whatever the merits of other such elementary reader lists, John Senior's is an enchanting and rapturous tour through an imaginary and romantic world of beauty, truth, goodness, and love which "*everyone should have read."*

Reading Skills

As Dr. Mortimer J. Adler has noted, reading is a kind of learning. In reading a book one goes from a state of understanding less, to one of understanding more, concerning the thoughts of the author. Dr. Adler distinguishes four widely accepted, more or less clearly distinguishable stages in the child's progress towards mature reading. These are the four stages of:

The Elementary Reading Level

1. The first stage is known by the term "reading readiness". This begins at birth, and continues normally until the age of about 6 or 7. The elements of this stage (including physical, intellectual, language and personal readiness) are set forth on page 23 of *How to Read a Book,* the classic in this area, by Dr. Adler. The important thing to remember is that jumping the gun is usually self-defeating. The child who is not ready to read is frustrated if attempts are made to teach him, and he may carry over his dislike for the experience into his later school career and even into adult life. Delaying the beginning of reading instruction beyond the reading readiness stage is not nearly so serious, despite the feelings of parents who may fear that their child is "backward" or is not "keeping up" with his peers. This stage normally corresponds to about pre-school and kindergarten.

In his book, *The Death of Christian Culture*, Prof. John Senior wrote that: "Literary experience begins [for children] with someone reading to them while they look at pictures. But they can begin to read the simplest books that they already love at any early age."

Tests have demonstrated that, in general, the use of **phonics**, especially with reading basic children's books, particularly with some that rhyme and are set to music (vocal, tapes or CDs), enhances reading progress [the Academy utilizes such phonics programs in pre-school and through 3rd grade].

2. In the second stage, children learn to read very simple materials. They usually begin, at least in the United States, by learning a few sight words, and typically manage to master perhaps three to four hundred words by the end of the first year. Basic skills are introduced at this time, such as the use of context or meaning clues and the beginning sounds of words. By the end of this period pupils are expected to be reading simple books independently and with enthusiasm. It is incidentally worth observing that something quite mysterious, almost magical, occurs during this stage. At one moment the child, when faced with a series of symbols on a page, finds them quite meaningless. Not much later - perhaps only two or three weeks later – he has discovered meaning in them; he knows that they say, "The cat sat on the hat." This stage normally corresponds to about first grade.

3. The third stage is characterized by rapid progress in vocabulary building and by increasing skill in "unlocking" the meaning of unfamiliar words through context clues. In addition, children at this stage learn to read for different purposes and in different areas of content, such as science, social studies, language arts, and the like. They learn that reading, besides being something one does at school, is also some-thing one can do on one's own, for fun, to satisfy curiosity, or even to: "expand one's horizons". This stage normally corresponds to about the end of fourth grade.

4. The fourth stage is characterized by a refinement and enhancement of the skills previously acquired. Above all, the student begins to be able to assimilate his reading experiences – that is, to carry over concepts from one piece of writing to another, and to compare the views of different writers on the same subject. This, the mature stage of reading should be reached by young persons in their early teens. Ideally, they should continue to build on it for the rest of their lives. This stage normally corresponds to about eighth to tenth grade. It should prepare for high school work, so in our program, with our readings, it should be reached by about the end of eighth grade. Only when he has mastered all of the four stages of elementary reading is the child prepared to move on to the higher levels of reading, described below.

The Four Levels of Reading

1. The first level of reading, described in four stages above, we called **Elementary Reading**. Other names might be rudimentary reading, basic reading or initial reading; any one of these terms serves to suggest that as one masters this level one passes from nonliteracy to

at least beginning literacy. This level is learned in elementary school, in four stages, detailed above. The question asked at this level of reading is typically "What does the sentence say?"

2. The second level of reading we will call **Inspectional Reading**. It is characterized by its special emphasis on time; it is the art of skimming systematically, or pre-reading, to learn everything that the surface alone can teach you. The questions asked at this stage are typically "What is the book about?" also, "What is the structure of the book?" or "What are its parts?" and "What kind of book is it – a novel, a history, a scientific treatise?"

3. The third level we will call **Analytical Reading**. It is both a more complex and a more systematic activity than either of the two levels of reading discussed so far. It is thorough reading, complete reading, or good reading – the best reading you can do. Reading a book analytically is chewing and digesting it. It is preeminently for the sake of understanding.

4. The fourth and highest level of reading we will call **Syntopical Reading**. Another name might be comparative reading – reading many books and placing them in relation to one another and to a subject about which they revolve. The reader by this means is able to construct an analysis of the subject under consideration that may not be in any of the books read.

A good elementary school program ought to produce readers who are competent elementary readers, through the fourth stage of elementary reading. A good liberal arts high school, if it does nothing else, ought to produce graduates who are competent analytical readers. A good college, if it does nothing else, ought to produce competent synoptical readers. A college degree ought to represent general competence in reading such that the graduate could read any kind of material for general readers and be able to undertake independent research on almost any subject. All of these levels of reading are described in detail in Dr. Adler's book. On pages 363 –419 of *How to Read a Book*, Dr. Adler provides reading exercises to teach, test for and explain the four levels of reading.

Dr. Peter A. Redpath's book, *How to Read a Difficult Book*, should be read at the end of 8th grade, or the summer before beginning the Great Books in the high school (9th-12th grade) reading program, in order to prepare students for entering into philosophical conversation with, and learning under the direction of, the greatest discoverers of all time – the authors of the Great Books. It compliments and completes Dr. Adler's book. The specific books in the Academy elementary reading program (grades nursery through 8th), called the "Good Books" were selected by the late, classicist professor, John Senior, and are described on our web site and in the summer 2000 issue of *Classical Homeschooling (www.classicalhomeschooling.com)*, as is the high school *Great Books* reading program.

Second Grade GOOD BOOKS Bookshelf

Smoky the Cowhorse
by Will James

Little Lord Fauntleroy
by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Heidi
by Johanna Spyri

Arabian Nights Entertainments
by Andrew Lang

Little House in the Big Woods
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Little House on the Prairie
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Farmer Boy
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

On the Banks of Plum Creek
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

By the Shores of Silver Lake
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

The Long Winter
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Little Town on the Prairie
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

These Happy Golden Years
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

The First Four Years
by Laura Ingalls Wilder

True/False Questions – Color in your answer:

1. Ⓣ Ⓕ Clint gave Smoky his name.

2. Ⓣ Ⓕ Smoky had a little brother.

3. Ⓣ Ⓕ Smoky had a white star on his back.

4. Ⓣ Ⓕ Smoky was nicknamed “The Cougar” because he was gentle.

5. Ⓣ Ⓕ Smoky was once chased by wolves.

Essay Questions (these short essays will help strengthen your child’s writing abilities):

1. Why did Smoky grow to hate humans so much?

True/False Questions – Color in your answer:

1. Ⓣ Ⓕ Lord Fauntleroy misses Mr. Hobbes when he leaves America.

2. Ⓣ Ⓕ Lord Fauntleroy calls his mother "Dearest."

3. Ⓣ Ⓕ Lord Dorincourt was lonely before Lord Fauntleroy came to live with him.

4. Ⓣ Ⓕ Lord Fauntleroy was scared, at first, to ride a pony.

5. Ⓣ Ⓕ Lord Fauntleroy turns seven at the end of the book.

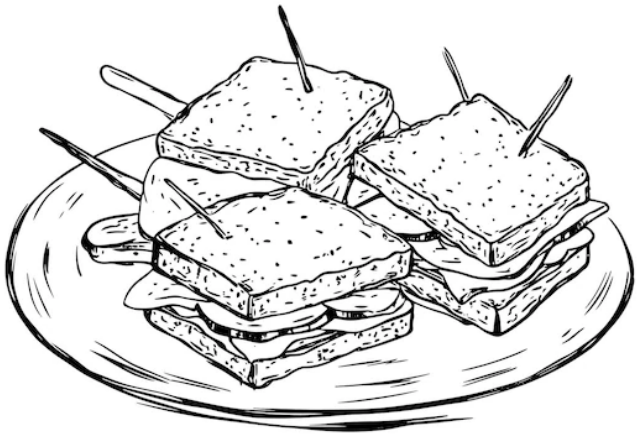
Essay Questions (these short essays will help strengthen your child's writing abilities)**:**

1. Why is Little Lord Fauntleroy's mother not allowed to come live with him in England?

Extra!

Without a doubt, one of the best ways to experience English culture (without having to fly across the pond) is an English high tea service. Below are some recommendations for having one at home. Enjoy!

Cucumber Sandwiches



Cucumber sandwiches are one of the classic tea sandwiches. By adding a little bit of cream cheese, these usually delicate sandwiches have extra substance.

Ingredients:

2 small slices white bread, ends trimmed
2 teaspoons unsalted butter, softened
2 tablespoons whipped cream cheese
4 1/4-inch slices of English cucumber Pinch of salt

Directions:

Spread one teaspoon of butter on each slice of bread. Spread one tablespoon of cream cheese on top of each buttered slice. Place cucumber slices on one slice of bread. Add a pinch of salt. Top with the other bread slice and press together. Make a diagonal cut across sandwich to make two triangle tea sandwiches.

Earl Grey Tea Cookies

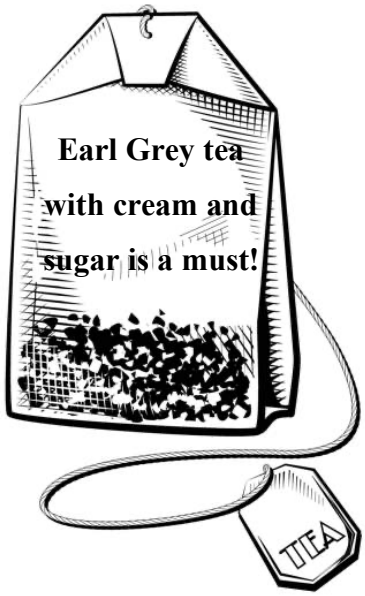
Makes two dozen cookies.

Ingredients:

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup confectioners' sugar
1 tablespoon Earl Grey tea leaves from a tea bag
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon water
1/2 cup unsalted butter

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375°F. Pulse together all the dry ingredients in a food processor until the tea leaves are pulverized. Add vanilla, water, and butter. Pulse together until a dough is formed. Form the dough into a log onto a piece of wax or parchment paper. Wrap the paper around and roll the log smooth. Freeze now, or chill for at least 30 minutes. When chilled, slice the log into 1/3 inch thick pieces. Place on baking sheets and bake until the edges are just brown, about 12 minutes. Let cool on sheets for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire racks.



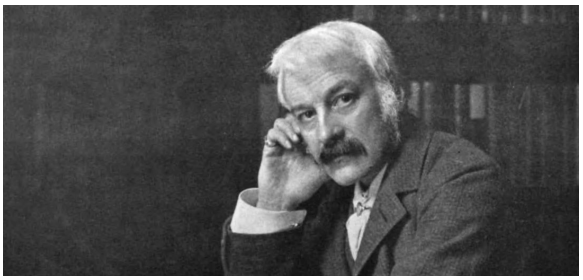
Heidi

Author: Johanna Spyri (1827-1901) was a Swiss writer, best known for her classic children's book, *Heidi*. In 1884, her husband and her only child both died. She remained alone the rest of her life, devoting herself to charity and writing. Heidi, the character whose story she wrote in four weeks, has become a personification of the Swiss Alps thanks to Spyri's gifted portrayal of the mountains.

Setting: Five-year-old orphaned Heidi is brought to live in the Swiss Alps with her grandfather, a grouchy old hermit. At first, her grandfather resents having to take care of her; but as time goes on, he learns to love the lively sweet-hearted little girl. He is heartbroken when Dete returns three years later to bring Heidi to go to school and care for an invalid girl, Clara Sesemann, in Frankfurt.

Themes: There are many noteworthy themes in Heidi. Among them are the importance of family and home, and the value of prayer. The healing power of being close to God in nature is also an underlying theme of the story. Rural life versus city life is the central conflict in *Heidi*. In the story, the city is associated with sickness of both soul and body, and rural life in the Swiss Alps is associated with healing and closeness to God. Heidi, the main character, prefers the peace and quiet of nature, even in poverty, to the hustle and bustle of rich city life. The climax of story is when the real power of the mountains is revealed, and Clara, a cripple, regains the use of her legs.

The Arabian Nights Entertainment



Authors: The Arabian Nights Entertainments is a compilation of stories collected from many authors, scholars, and translators over the centuries. These are the tales that have been passed around since ancient and medieval times, and carried from country to country by travelers and traders. Andrew Lang (1844 – 1912), the famous collector of folk and fairy stories, edited this version of the beloved tales.

Setting: The story goes that it was the custom of the King Shahrizar to have one of his wives tell him a story every night, at the end of which, he would cut off her head. One evening, it was the turn of his beautiful wife, Shahrazad, to tell the story. So, she began to tell him a fascinating tale, but stopped right in the middle of a particularly good part. He decided to let her live so that he could hear the end of the story the next night. This went on for one thousand and one nights, until the king finally decided that such a wonderful storyteller as Shahrazad deserved to live. This is the framework for the stories told in The Arabian Nights Entertainments.

Symbolism and Themes: The frame story of The Arabians Nights Entertainments is loaded with powerful allegories. The way Shahrazad uses stories, to prevent her death, is a symbol of the immortality of storytelling. The interlocking and interwoven texture of her stories is a symbol of the world, in which we all have our own story to tell. Among the themes in The Arabians Nights Entertainments, the power of art to overcome evil and death, as is evident in the story of King Shahrizar and his wife, Shahrazad, holds a high place. Themes of forgiveness, power, justice, humanity, and the ultimate victory of the good are also explored in the stories. Beautiful and rich, these stories are particular good for children because they speak to the subconscious.

True/False Questions – Color in your answer:

1. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura's baby sister is named Mary.

2. Ⓣ Ⓕ Ma slaps a bear because she thinks it is the cow, Sukey.

3. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura and Mary have been to town many times during their lives.

4. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura does not share her new doll with her cousins at Christmas.

5. Ⓣ Ⓕ Pa plays his fiddle in the evening during the winter.

Essay Questions (these short essays will help strengthen your child's writing abilities)**:**

1. Compare the way in which the Ingalls family obtains necessary items such as food and clothing to the way we get them today.

Extra!

Corn Husk Dolls

Next time you're shucking corn for dinner, don't throw away the husks -- dry them in the sun for one to three days, and you'll have the makings for a corn-husk doll.

Materials:

Dried corn husks or tamale wrappers (available at grocery stores)
Twine or string
Scissors
Pipe cleaners

Instructions:

1. Start by soaking the husks in water for 10 minutes, and then blot excess water with a paper towel. Lay four or six husks (always an even number) in a stack.

2. Using thin twine, tie husks together, about 1 inch from the top.

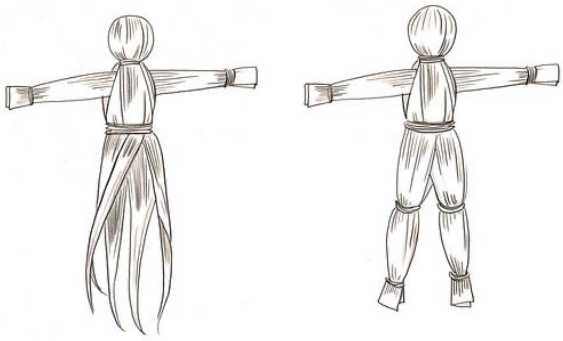
3. Separate husks into equal portions (2 and 2, or 3 and 3), and fold halves down, covering twine.

4. Using thin twine, tie husks about 1 inch down, creating the head.

5. Roll a single husk and tie at the ends to make arms.

6. Position arms below the knot at neck, between equal portions of husks.

7. Tie waist. For a female doll, trim husks to an even length. For a male doll, separate legs into equal portions. Tie at knees and ankles. Trim evenly.



8. To make the hair, glue the yarn or raffia to the heads. Fashion clothes from pieces of felt: Cut rectangles, and snip slits or X's in the center; then slide over the doll's head, and secure around the waist with a strip of felt or yarn. (Glue on buttons, and use scissors to make fringe as desired.) Create hats and bonnets by cutting felt to fit, and then gluing in place.

True/False Questions – Color in your answer:

1. ⓉⒻ Pa decides to leave the Big Woods because there are not enough people in them.

2. ⓉⒻ Jack the bulldog is swept away in the creek and is never seen again.

3. ⓉⒻ Mr. Scott does not send a candle down into the well on the day Pa has to rescue him.

4. ⓉⒻ Laura and Mary make a necklace for Carrie with the beads they find in the Indian camp.

5. ⓉⒻ Ma's china shepherdess is broken during the wagon journey.

Essay Questions (these short essays will help strengthen your child's writing abilities)**:**

1. Although the prairie seems to be a huge, empty grassland, Laura finds it to be a very interesting place. Why?

Extra!

Cast Iron Skillet Cornbread

Ingredients:

2 cups of cornmeal (yellow or white)
1⁄2 cup sifted flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 egg lightly beaten
2 cups buttermilk
2 tablespoons bacon drippings or vegetable oil

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Put the drippings or oil in a cast iron skillet and place it in the oven for a few minutes until it's sizzling. Mix together dry ingredients. Set aside. Whisk egg and buttermilk. Mix with dry ingredients. Take cast iron skillet out of oven, and pour hot oil into batter, and mix. Pour batter into cast iron skillet, bake in oven for 20 minutes. Cornbread should be brown on top and pulling away from the sides of the skillet.

Farmer Boy

Author: Laura Ingalls Wilder (1876-1957) was born in a cabin near Pepin, Wisconsin. She married Almanzo Wilder in 1885 and the couple had one daughter, Rose, who was born in 1886. Laura wrote the nine classic "Little House" books on Wilder's Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield , Missouri . After sixty-three years of marriage, Almanzo died in 1949. Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932, almost forty years after the events of her pioneer childhood that Laura describes in her popular series.

Setting: Farmer Boy follows the life of nine-year-old Almanzo Wilder, Laura's future husband, as he grows up on a big farm in New York State. In the story, readers are introduced to bossy Eliza Jane, brave Mr. Corse, responsible Royal, and many other memorable characters. Readers are also familiarized with many of the elements of farm life, such as wood hauling, sheep-shearing, shoe- making, etc.

Themes: Laura Ingalls saw that the way of life she had known as a little pioneer girl was rapidly vanishing, and, though she was not against change, she still wanted to preserve the memory and heritage of life in the old West for future generations. Strong morals and family values were huge components of the Pioneer spirit and experience, and these principles are firmly present in the Little House series, as well as detailed descriptions of everyday life on late 1800s farms and towns.

On the Banks of Plum Creek

Author: Laura Ingalls Wilder (1876-1957) was born in a cabin near Pepin, Wisconsin. She married Almanzo Wilder in 1885 and the couple had one daughter, Rose, who was born in 1886. Laura wrote the nine classic "Little House" books on Wilder's Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield , Missouri . After sixty-three years of marriage, Almanzo died in 1949. Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932, almost forty years after the events of her pioneer childhood that Laura describes in her popular series.

Setting: *On the Banks of Plum Creek* picks up from where *Little House on the Prairie* left off. The Ingalls family is travelling to Minnesota after being forced to leave Kansas. They settle down on Plum Creek where Pa must build them a new house and Laura and Mary must go to school.

Themes: Laura Ingalls saw that the way of life she had known as a little pioneer girl was rapidly vanishing, and, though she was not against change, she still wanted to preserve the memory and heritage of life in the old West for future generations. Strong morals and family values were huge components of the Pioneer spirit and experience, and these principles are firmly present in the *Little House* series, as well as detailed descriptions of everyday life on late 1800s farms and towns.

Extra!

Green Apple Pie

Ingredients:

4 cups green apples cored, peeled and sliced
1 cup sugar
1/4 tsp. lemon juice
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
2 store bought or homemade pie crusts
butter

Preparation:

Combine sliced green apples, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg and lemon juice. Place all ingredients in an unbaked pie shell. Add a few dabs of butter. Top with unbaked pie crust. (Be sure to cut slits in top crust to let steam escape.) Bake in preheated 375 degree oven until top crust is a golden brown.

The Long Winter

Author: Laura Ingalls Wilder (1876-1957) was born in a cabin near Pepin, Wisconsin. She married Almanzo Wilder in 1885 and the couple had one daughter, Rose, who was born in 1886. Laura wrote the nine classic "Little House" books on Wilder's Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield , Missouri . After sixty-three years of marriage, Almanzo died in 1949. Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932, almost forty years after the events of her pioneer childhood that Laura describes in her popular series.

Setting: The Ingalls family is happy settled in Dakota Territory. Having already experienced one Dakota winter safely, they think they have seen it all and are prepared for the next. But one day, an old Indian comes to warn the townspeople of De Smet that a hard winter is coming, one that will last seven months with terrible blizzards. To their dismay, the Indian's warning proves true, and the townspeople find themselves desperately short on food and firewood in one of the worst winters of Dakota history.

Themes: Laura Ingalls saw that the way of life she had known as a little pioneer girl was rapidly vanishing, and, though she was not against change, she still wanted to preserve the memory and heritage of life in the old West for future generations. Strong morals and family values were huge components of the Pioneer spirit and experience, and these principles are firmly present in the *Little House* series, as well as detailed descriptions of everyday life on late 1800s farms and towns.

These Happy Golden Years

Author: Laura Ingalls Wilder (1876-1957) was born in a cabin near Pepin, Wisconsin. She married Almanzo Wilder in 1885 and the couple had one daughter, Rose, who was born in 1886. Laura wrote the nine classic "Little House" books on Wilder's Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield , Missouri . After sixty-three years of marriage, Almanzo died in 1949. Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932, almost forty years after the events of her pioneer childhood that Laura describes in her popular series.

Laura Ingalls and Almanzo Wilder

Setting: Laura has begun teaching school at fifteen to a little school of five. The Brewsters, the family she is boarding with, seem to hate her. She is miserable. The only thing that gets her through the endless weeks is the anticipation of Almanzo Wilder coming to take her home to her family on the weekends. One day, after the semester is over, Laura realizes that Nellie Oleson has her heart set on Almanzo, and is ready to do anything to draw him away from Laura. Laura is forced to reevaluate her feeling for Almanzo. Could she be in love?

Themes: Laura Ingalls saw that the way of life she had known as a little pioneer girl was rapidly vanishing, and, though she was not against change, she still wanted to preserve the memory and heritage of life in the old West for future generations. Strong morals and family values were huge components of the Pioneer spirit and experience, and these principles are firmly present in the *Little House* series, as well as detailed descriptions of everyday life on late 1800s farms and towns.

The First Four Years

Author: Laura Ingalls Wilder (1876-1957) was born in a cabin near Pepin, Wisconsin. She married Almanzo Wilder in 1885 and the couple had one daughter, Rose, who was born in 1886. Laura wrote the nine classic "Little House" books on Wilder's Rocky Ridge Farm near Mansfield , Missouri . After sixty-three years of marriage, Almanzo died in 1949. Little House in the Big Woods was published in 1932, almost forty years after the events of her pioneer childhood that Laura describes in her popular series.

Setting: Laura and Almanzo Wilder are married now, and are starting their new life together on a small prairie homestead with the best of hopes, and it is not long before they have their first child, Rose. But tragedy strikes again and again, in the form of fire, death, huge debts, and disastrous weather. It takes all of Laura and Almanzo's determination and strength to endure and stick to their farm despite these conditions.

Themes: Laura Ingalls saw that the way of life she had known as a little pioneer girl was rapidly vanishing, and, though she was not against change, she still wanted to preserve the memory and heritage of life in the old West for future generations. Strong morals and family values were huge components of the Pioneer spirit and experience, and these principles are firmly present in the *Little House* series, as well as detailed descriptions of everyday life on late 1800s farms and towns.

True/False Questions – Color in your answer:

1. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura and Almanzo's second child, a little boy, dies soon after birth.

2. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura is a flawless cook.

3. Ⓣ Ⓕ Almanzo is a hard worker.

4. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura does not understand Almanzo's love of the land.

5. Ⓣ Ⓕ Laura's nickname for Almanzo is "Manly".

Essay Questions (these short essays will help strengthen your child's writing abilities)**:**

1. What does Mr. Boast ask for in return for the best horse out of his stable?

Answer Key