



Teaching Character Through Literature

A Literature Approach *for* Primary and
Intermediate Grades

BY REBECCA MANOR



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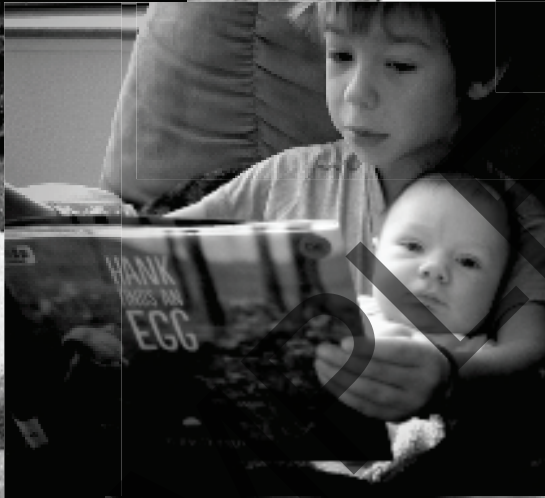


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A special thank you to all the generous families who shared their photos with us to include in this guide, especially the Ash, Ankerich, Bell, Berman, Bradshaw, Brannon, Brownell, Chambers, Cushman, Dautrich, Erickson, Exsted, Franklin, Friedline, Gingerich, Grabill, Houston, Hursh, McCoy, McGowan, Morris, Murphy, Nowell, Pullin, Rick, Riddle, Rosin, Ross, Smith, Spindler, Story, Toledo, Unverferth, Vonderahe, Woodall, and Yauger families.

how to use this guide

There are many wonderful worlds that await you and your child in literature. As a lover of great story I hope that this guide will play a small role in opening up these worlds to you. The free hours of my childhood were spent embarking on adventures only found between the covers of books. Stories provided escape, companions, adventure, and excitement. They also taught me. Characters were either models of character traits I wished to develop or they served to warn me of the dangers of giving in to my fallen nature. The books I read shaped and influenced me, inspired me to improve myself, and encouraged me on my way. It is my hope, that through this guide, your child will discover the joy of reading and become a lifelong lover of story. This new edition contains books I was either not aware of when I wrote the first edition or books that have since been published and I have fallen in love with these new characters—the squishy baby from *So Much*, sweet Tessie from *Come On, Rain!*, and Auggie in *Wonder*. There are so many wonderful stories listed here, and I hope you enjoy discovering them as much as I did.

As a Christ-follower, I believe that our behavior, like our words, reveals our hearts. With that in mind, this guide will always point to Jesus. He is the lover of our souls and therefore all our actions should be guided by the knowledge that He loved us so much, He died to save us. Out of this assurance we can face this beautiful and terrible world with “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). The goal of this guide is not simply good behavior but the cultivation of love for God and others. It is with this in mind that I have written the discussion questions to prompt conversations about God and His nature, Jesus and the sacrifice He made to save us, and our role within the world as people who can bring the love of God to our neighbors.

I have attempted to choose a small sampling of the best of children’s literature for reading aloud. Some of these titles will be familiar to many, while other new titles will quickly become favorites. For ease of use, I have organized the books into the following lists: Primary Readers and Intermediate Readers. These lists, organized by author and title, are provided for those who simply desire some guidance in choosing books to read with your child, or in helping your child choose books to read on her own. It is my opinion that these books should simply be read for pleasure, allowing the wisdom of the text to become a part of your child’s person. For those of you who want to read the books with your child(ren) and desire assistance in drawing out lessons from the text, I have provided Study Notes for the Primary and Intermediate levels that supply comprehension questions and activities to go along with several titles from each list. This is organized in a lesson plan style to be completed at the student and teacher’s chosen pace. The comprehension questions are intended to spark discussion and, therefore, no answers are provided as there is a tendency to rely on them in a way that can stifle creativity and honest discussion. If you are not planning on reading along with your child, simply choose the reading list option. The lessons inherent to these stories require that any discussion of the book be between two people who have both read the text. It is often the case that moral lessons do not show themselves clearly in many wonderful stories and only become apparent as time and experience have worked on a person to give him further wisdom. It is therefore unreasonable to expect your child to understand lessons when you are not guiding her.

Primary and Intermediate are level indicators. Primary books are generally intended for kindergarten through third grade, Intermediate for fourth through sixth grade. These are rough indicators as many books on the Primary list will be enjoyed by older readers and vice versa. Use these categories as a guide, not a strict rule.

Lastly, remember that these lists are only a sampling. They are intended to direct you and your children toward the best in children's literature and are by no means exhaustive. Many more books await discovery! If you come across a title you feel would add to this study, please let us know. I've also included a list of resource books for parents who want to continue reading the best books with their children.

Happy Reading!



explanatory notes

Why are answers not provided to the comprehension and discussion questions?

As noted in How to Use this Guide, the Study Notes are provided for use by parents and students who have both read the book. The ideas inherent to each text must be discussed between two people who have read the book, whether separately or together.

Can I get these books at the library? My library has the same title and author, but the illustrator is different, is that all right?

As many of these titles are classics, they should be available at your library or through interlibrary loan. The titles listed include information on both author and illustrator, unless multiple editions are available. You should be able to locate the titles easily, whether you're ordering them or using your library. If your library does have a title listed under the correct author but different illustrator, that is fine. The editions and illustrators listed are simply the most desirable in regards to aesthetics. Do try to provide your child with editions that are either beautifully illustrated or not illustrated at all. Every classic has been published with illustrations that detract from the story's meaning and significance. Additionally, many classics have been reissued with dreadful cover illustrations, but the beautiful original illustrations are preserved inside. Just be sure to check before dismissing a book with an unattractive cover. And please avoid cartoonish representations as they impede your child's ability to imagine the characters in their own unique way.

How do I find out-of-print titles or editions?

While every effort has been made to include titles and editions that are in print, books can go out of print without advance notice. If this happens to a title you are trying to locate, you have several options. First, try your library. Interlibrary loan connects your local library to virtually any other library, and while you may have to wait a couple of weeks for the book to arrive, at least you'll be able to enjoy it. If you want to purchase a title that is no longer available, try searching for it online at Amazon, eBay, alibris.com, or abebooks.com.

In the Favorite Authors section of each reading list, some books are described and others are not. Why?

The books that are described are special favorites. These books should not be missed. The listed books that are not described are other recommended works by the author. The list is provided for easy reference and I have tried to keep it as concise as possible, choosing not to describe every book in order to conserve space.



STUDY NOTES FOR PRIMARY READERS

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The books read in this section of our study provide excellent opportunities to discuss good behavior and moral lessons, but we know that all actions are rooted in our hearts. Therefore, the first lessons focus on our worth as people who bear the image of God, His deep love for us despite our sin, and the way Jesus' sacrifice makes a way for us to be in relationship with our Creator. This understanding guides how we interact with fellow image-bearers and should prompt our actions to come from a heart of gratitude. I believe the knowledge of this should lead to great joy, an absence of fear, and a shockingly irrational love for those around us. Of course, in the daily grind all of us struggle with our sin nature. Stories are one of the gifts that God has given us to help us understand our actions and their consequences. We will read several books in their entirety, and I have provided discussion points, quotations, Scripture references, and more, to guide these talks. It is my hope that your child will enjoy these books so much that you go back to them again and again and again. This way, the stories (and lessons embedded within them) will influence the way your child sees the world and the people around her; providing a lens by which she can see beauty, the worth of others, and the importance of diligence, courage, kindness, and service.

Well-told stories help to shape the way we see and interact with the world around us, and it ought to be a pleasure getting lost in the pages of these books. The questions that follow are provided to spark discussion with your child. They aren't there to check reading comprehension or make sure your child did her reading. They're provided as a jumping-off point for you and your children to have rich conversations. If you find you or your child are getting bogged down in providing the "right" answers, step back and just discuss the story. This guide has a two-fold purpose; first, to introduce some of the best literature available to your child, and second, to help your family members develop a habit of discussing their reading, leading to conversations that will grow beyond the stories to real life itself.

I have also provided Bible verses, and I suggest memorizing them. You can find cards at the back of this guide (page 55) to help with memorization. The youngest students will not be able to write out the verses or read them, but do try to discuss them and work on memorizing them, if desired. Hebrews 4:12 says "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." No story can transform our hearts like the story of God's pursuit of us. And His word is alive and active, so memorizing it and storing it up in our hearts and in the hearts of our children is the best way to impart the truth of God's word.

There is no set pace for this study. I would **not** suggest trying to complete a book per day as that's going to be overwhelming. Of course, try to read aloud each day, but the majority of reading aloud at this age should just be for pleasure. I suggest reading these books a couple of times before you delve into the questions. Thankfully at this age, children love repetition. It's part of how their minds are growing, forming, and making connections. So, add these books to your regular rotation of read-alouds, one at a time in the order below, every couple of weeks. When the stories are familiar, start introducing the discussion questions.

LESSON 1

1. Read the account of creation in Genesis 1:1-25.
2. Read *Time of Wonder* written and illustrated by Robert McCloskey.
3. God gave the earth to us to care for and enjoy. Go outside and look around. Write down or discuss the things in creation for which you are grateful. Understanding that everything around us is a gift from God is foundational to all character education.

LESSON 2

1. Read Genesis 1:26-31.
2. Read *When God Made You* by Matthew Paul Turner, illustrated by David Catrow.
3. Discuss the line "Cause when God made you / and the world oohed and aahed / in heaven they called you an image of God." How does this make you feel?
4. Now think of every person you have ever met. Did you know they were all created in the image of God too? What does this mean for how we are to treat others?
5. The little girl in this story loves painting. This creativity reflects the Creator who made us. Our desire to create is one of the ways we reflect His image in us. How do you create? Do you paint, build things, bake, explore? There are dozens of ways to be creative, and they are all valuable.
6. Write out Genesis 1:27 and work on memorizing it.

LESSON 3

1. Read Psalm 139, concentrating on verses 7-13, and Romans 8:38-39. Think of what you read in *When God Made You*. What do these verses promise?
2. Will God ever leave you? Is He with you always?
3. Write out and work on memorizing Romans 8:39.

LESSON 4

1. Read Psalm 23. You can find many children's versions of this classic psalm. Choose one you find appealing and easily comprehensible to your child. *Found: Psalm 23* by Sally Lloyd-Jones is a lovely version for youngsters.
2. Read John 10:14-18. Discuss the role of a shepherd. How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus is our good shepherd? What is meant when He says He lays down His life for us?

LESSON 5

1. Read Mark 12: 41-44. In this parable Jesus is speaking of matters of the heart. Despite the large gifts given by the rich people, He values the widow's gift most. Why?
2. Read *The Clown of God*, adapted and illustrated by Tomie dePaola.
3. When Giovanni is young and meets the two monks, they tell him that even his juggling can be a gift to God. How does this relate to 1 Corinthians 10:31? If desired, write out and work on memorizing 1 Corinthians 10:31.
4. How does Giovanni reflect the heart of the widow in the parable?
5. Did Giovanni or the widow give their gifts in order to earn God's approval? Read Romans 5:8. If desired, write out this verse and work on memorizing it.

LESSON 6

1. Read *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox, illustrated by Julie Vivas.
2. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He responded, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-40). Knowing God's great love for us and the sacrifice that Jesus made to save us changes the way we see others and gives us a perfect example for how we should treat those around us. Does Wilfrid provide a good example of how you can "love your neighbor?"