

Pilgrim Christian Grade School Language Arts

Philosophy Statement

June 9, 2014

God communicates with us through language and has given us language to likewise communicate with Him and others. This gift of language reveals the creativity and order with which all humans are endowed, as bearers of God's image. In worshipful response, we teach language arts as an integrated study of all forms of communication, focusing on the intake and expression of spoken and written ideas.

Purpose Statement

In the intake of ideas, we seek to equip students to

- comprehend these ideas
- discern the author or speaker's purpose and perspective
- process and evaluate these ideas with a Biblical worldview

In the expression of ideas, we seek to equip students to

- form their ideas consistent with a Biblical worldview
- articulate their ideas through well-crafted, artful composition and lecture
- present their ideas according to the conventions of grammar, spelling, and usage

We seek to guide students, through example and practice, to dialogue respectfully, coherently, and thoughtfully in all of our communication.

Implementation Guidelines

1. The most basic activities in language arts are understanding material, incorporating material into one's personal "reference bank" and conveying material in a way that makes it understandable to others. To get these bases covered as efficiently as possible, a large part of the time devoted to language arts in school will be spent in reading or listening and writing or speaking. Other activities will occur to facilitate these primary emphases.
2. Since words are the basic currency of language arts, studies of word structure (root words, prefixes and suffixes) will start early.
3. Since sentences are the basic format for organizing words, basic sentence structure study will also begin early.
4. "Telling" to a listener or "speaking" in front of an audience will occur throughout all the grades.
5. To facilitate easy communication about written work between teacher and student, a common "evaluation" vocabulary will be introduced early and will be utilized throughout all grades.
6. In the early years, spelling and vocabulary learning will take place mostly in the context of language intake and expression rather than in formal lessons in those subjects.
7. Since being able to think abstractly greatly enhances the ability to absorb the study of grammar, concentrated study of grammar will wait until after sixth grade.

8. Requiring creative writing will wait also until after sixth grade, although “retelling” or “recording” kinds of writing will occur throughout all the grades.
9. Two kinds of handwriting will be taught: manuscript writing and cursive writing. Keyboarding instruction will also be offered as an elective for advanced students and for students whose disabilities hinder their writing.
10. A daily time slot of at least an hour will be devoted to language arts during the school year.
11. The following goals will guide our instruction in reading. We will seek to develop students who...
 - a) read fluently and comprehend a variety of genres
 - b) understand grade-appropriate vocabulary when reading, and use context to determine meaning for unfamiliar words
 - c) understand the use of literary devices, including figurative language
 - d) use text structure to analyze and interpret text, including both literature and other content areas (e.g., science and social studies)
 - e) identify author's perspective/point of view
 - f) evaluate literature through the lens of Scripture
 - g) respond to the reading by participating in class discussions and in writing, asking questions and (digging) to find answers

The above guidelines are derived from our language arts purpose statement, and as such transcend specific curriculum decisions. The following section outlines our choice of specific materials, along with the rationale for our decision. These choices are subject to regular evaluation; if we discover materials that better meet our language arts objectives as outlined above, we will consider replacing what we are using.

Curriculum Choices

- Grades 1-2: CLE Learning-to-Read, Language Arts, and Reading

Rationale: Children need a good grasp of reading before they will be able to write. CLE offers a tightly integrated package that moves at a reasonable pace and introduces sounds and concepts in a logical sequence. Using CLE for this offers the additional benefit of providing CLE's kindergarten materials to parents who feel ill-equipped to prepare their child for learning to read.

- Grades 3-8:

1. Writing: Excellence in Writing

Rationale: From our exposure to Excellence in Writing (The high school has used elements of it for a number of years, and Betty experimented with some of the material this past year.) and our interactions with local home schoolers who have used it, we believe it is the curriculum that best puts writing at the core, and that best guides students to good writing with a systematic, incremental approach. Our focus on writing eliminates CLE and Rod and Staff, who both offering excellent curriculum that uses the more conventional approach of focus on grammar and other technical details of language.

2. Grammar, usage, and mechanics: Fix It! Grammar, Easy Grammar, Winston Grammar

Rationale: To support the instruction in writing, we will devote a smaller slot (10-15 minutes a day) to grammar, usage and mechanics. For this, we will use a combination of Fix It! Grammar and Easy Grammar in Grades 3-8. Both of these move at a pace that should allow even struggling students to master the basics, but both of them provide sufficient background for more in-depth grammatical analysis at higher level. Fix It! Grammar is a newer offering from the Institute for Excellence in Writing (the company behind Excellence in Writing); Easy Grammar has been around much longer, and has been used by numerous home schooling families in the community. For advanced upper grade students, we may offer an elective of Winston Grammar, Level 1, a concentrated, one-year course that teaches more complex grammar concepts than either of the others.

3. Spelling: Sequential Spelling

Rationale: To build spelling skills, we have chosen Sequential Spelling. We view it as also moving in small enough increments that struggling students can find success. It focuses exclusively on spelling (without dwelling on vocabulary or usage), which reduces the amount of time required for this part of the program. Because of its narrow focus and its approach (sound- or word-family-based: start with at, then spell bat, then batter, then battery, etc.), students end up being able to spell words that may not even be in their vocabulary.

4. Reading: Chapter books with teacher-developed materials, CLE, Mosdos Press (Purposeful Design)

Rationale: What appears to be an unlikely 'hodge-podge' for a reading program is our attempt to capture the best of several worlds in the reading program. Reading whole books with literary value seems to be a dying art; we want to encourage that in our students. To this end, we will continue to promote reading of high-quality books with a reading incentive program and recommended reading lists. However, we recognize that a good anthology (reader) can give exposure to a much wider variety of genres, styles, content, etc., than a whole-book curriculum can. Hence, we have chosen to continue using whole-book literature guides where they have been developed by our teachers (Grades 3-4 and 7-8) for now. In future years, we will consider alternating whole books with anthologies on these levels. For Grades 5-6, we will begin with the CLE 5th grade reader, alternating with the 6th grade reader and possibly whole book literature guides adapted from Progeny Press. If we add an anthology to Grades 7-8, we will use Mosdos Press 7th grade reader (Mosdos is distributed by ACSI's Purposeful Design) as the anthology component for that room. While CLE and Mosdos employ a very different design philosophy, they both do very well what they do, and we see value in incorporating both in our program.

5. Vocabulary: English from the Roots Up

Rationale: To address vocabulary, we have chosen to give a short slot each day to learning (mostly memorizing) Latin and Greek roots with English from the Roots Up. This is also a program that has been around a long time, and seems to give students the tools to learn new words as they encounter them in their reading. We will supplement this program in Grades 5-8 with more advanced work in word origins, including covering Latin/Greek prefixes and suffixes. We will also consider Rod and Staff Spelling for Grades 7 and 8; among other benefits, it gives a more thorough history of the development of the English language.

Although this was not a driving factor in our decisions, another advantage to all of these materials except CLE is that we don't need to buy consumable workbooks annually. We may still opt to buy the grammar workbooks for the lower grades (many loose sheets of paper present problematic clutter issues), but we are able to reproduce all student materials in-house if desired.

A Note About Anabaptist Publishers

In our research, we spent considerable time reviewing the materials of two prominent and excellent publishers in the conservative Anabaptist tradition: Christian Light Publications and Rod and Staff. We also had some valuable time to discuss their offerings with representatives of these publishers. We came away from this with a renewed respect for the work of both of these. We were very interested in incorporating them in our program where possible for these reasons:

- Both programs are grammatically sound.
- Both programs are generally in line with our religious and cultural values. Although not unerringly representative of who we are, the Anabaptist/Christian/Family Values/Rural Lifestyle slant is more significantly helpful than hindering to us.
- These publishers have undertaken a herculean task, as a service to others, and I hope they stay in business. Perhaps we can help them do that, even if it happens only in a small way.

With an eye toward future adoption, we want to stay abreast with these publishers as they (particularly CLE) continue to develop new products and refine existing ones.