

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS *THE TAPESTRY*?

The Tapestry: Literature and Language is a mastery-based language arts program that uses literature to teach your students foundational language skills while cultivating their linguistic sensibilities. The teaching approach is mimetic and poetic.

Through the exercises in *The Tapestry*, your students encounter and imitate models of excellent expression, which cultivate an ear and eye for what they experience. From this sensibility arises a love and respect for well-formed language. That love and respect give birth to a desire and capacity to understand what makes it excellent and to reproduce it in their own writing and speaking.

Mimetic means having to do with imitation, which is a core principle of this course. In particular, your students regularly imitate excellent verbal expressions in three modes: narration, dictation, and copy work, each of which they practice at least once a week.

Poetic teaching, as we use it here, speaks of a kind of teaching that is experiential, pre-analytical, and pre-rational. It is a direct, sensory, whole-person encounter with an object in the real world. It is a kind of knowledge or experience that every human has but that has been neglected by many educators for the past few centuries. The problem with that neglect is that poetic knowledge underlies all other forms of knowledge, so to neglect it is to cut one of the roots of knowledge.

In *The Tapestry: Level One*, you will find exercises for narration and dictation written for you, the teacher. In the companion volume, you will find copy work for your students. In addition, they will need to secure separately a lined journal or notebook in which to write.

The Tapestry's Unique Approach

*Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.
Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.*

William Wordsworth wrote “The Tables Turned” (of which this excerpt constitutes the last two stanzas) around 1800 to protest the rapid spread of reductionist ideas about what it meant to be a human. It’s a sort of early rage against the machine. He saw that Enlightenment thinkers had put the mind in conflict with nature, while nature itself was a master teacher.

While we do not echo Wordsworth’s appeal to reject science and art, we do echo his conviction that conventional approaches to learning bury our students in dry pages and “murder to dissect.” Wordsworth’s warning reveals precisely where conventional education has failed: It murders language in order to dissect it. That is, it breaks language—a living, miraculous gift of God, the very thing He used to create the world, a marvel that sets mankind apart from the animal—into parts (nouns, predicates, prepositional phrases), and then teaches those parts as dead things rotting on the page.

For too long we’ve desecrated the sacred word while simultaneously appealing to our students to “love learning,” a love that can only develop through encounters with ideas, usually embodied in words. *The Tapestry* offers a different, more ancient approach. Using classical, humane, intuitive, and simple writing practices, we share the beauty of language with our students and invite them to enter into that beauty through imitation and contemplation.

We are guided by what may be the greatest lesson ever taught: Genesis 2 and the story of Adam naming the animals. There we learn that God brought the animals to Adam “to see what he would name them.” There is a divine wisdom in that order: first the animal, then the name. In *The Tapestry* you repeatedly

present the animal to your students (i.e., grammar concepts, ideas, forms, etc.) as living ideas, let them play with the animals, and then, after they have gained some degree of familiarity with the thing itself, they learn the name. Over and over again you will hear us appeal to this simple principle: thing before name!

After students have played with a thing, experienced it in its natural habitat, and come to know it both in its unique identity and its relations to other things, we tell them the name. Like Adam, our students come to feel the need for a name *because they want to think and talk about that thing—and maybe even call upon it*. It is in this conversational, relational context that the name becomes meaningful to the student.

In *The Tapestry*, we read living texts, honor the life of the text, and invite our students to participate in it. When they learn this way, a vast array of skills are nourished, habits ingrained, and sensibilities fostered. Let us consider a mere eight of these briefly:

- attentiveness (to others and to a text)
- active listening
- habits of speaking
- memory
- handwriting
- attention to detail
- good judgement regarding language and expression, and
- an ear for excellent language.

Attention needs to be cultivated from the earliest years, especially today. On the one hand, attention demands practice reaching for an object (ultimately, “attention” comes from the Latin *ad tendere*, which means “to reach toward”). On the other hand, it requires self-control to resist distraction (“distraction” comes from the Latin words *trahere*, which means “to drag,” and *dis*, which means “apart or away from”). Charlotte Mason wisely said, “The highest intellectual gifts depend for their value upon the measure in which their owner has cultivated the habit of attention.”*

* Charlotte Mason, *Home Education*, vol. 1, *Home Education* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., 1906; Project Gutenberg, 2023), part 4, sec. 1, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/71087/pg71087-images.html>.

Active listening is cultivated through the three modes of imitation and the various approaches to the exercises. Habits of active listening are ever more obviously necessary for success in virtually any human activity.

Through frequent interaction, narration, and discussion, *The Tapestry* cultivates **habits of speaking** that your students will carry with them into higher-level language studies and into their dinner table conversations.

Memory, which is fundamentally a creative act rather than a work of regurgitation, is often demanded of our students even when we fail to give them tools for memory. Yet, as George Orwell reminds us, our communal memory serves as a bastion for our culture. In *The Tapestry*, you will find not only exercises to strengthen memory but also tools to aid our students in memorizing.

Handwriting and **attention to detail** will serve your student throughout their lives, granting their own words a sense of dignity and purpose.

Excellent writing requires excellent **judgement**, the ability to distinguish the good and fitting from the bad and unfit. Students may know all the rules of grammar and style but still be incapable of expressing themselves appropriately. By fostering good judgment first and learning the rules next, you cultivate the judgment that enables your students to write with grace, clarity, and life.

Finally, an essential goal of education is to cultivate your students' God-given sensibilities on which the judgment above depends. When our senses are refined, we flourish in the subjects we have refined them in (which could be anything from apples and wine to cars and music). When they are not, we lose the ability to perceive good and bad, and we undercut our own growth. Therefore, through *The Tapestry* we are committed to fostering, taming, and strengthening our students' linguistic senses in order to help them attain their own humanity. In other words, we nourish **an ear for excellent language**.

On Imitation (Mimesis)

One of the glories of the classical tradition is its sophisticated way of understanding imitation. For a while imitation fell out of fashion, but now it is widely recognized that the most creative artists are those who best imitate the best.

However, to apply the idea of imitation wisely, we need to note that there are levels of imitation. For example, when we say, “monkey see, monkey do,” we describe a level of imitation so basic that intelligent animals can do it. *This is imitation of a simple action or even posture.*

We engage a higher level of imitation when, for example, a child imitates his favorite athlete, dancer, or musician. *This is a formal imitation.*

Sometimes we see a person’s character and admire it. In this case, it would be a mistake to be overly specific in our imitation. It wasn’t where C. S. Lewis sat in his church that made him a great writer. Instead, if we want to imitate Lewis, we ought to do it by living by the principles he embodies. *We can call this imitation of principles.*

The Lord Jesus took imitation to the highest possible level when He said He did only what He saw His Father do. Such an imitation goes beyond our ability to define and name it. The greatest artists and saints are those who strive to imitate these unseen wonders and make them visible to the rest of us. For lack of a better expression, *we can call this an imitation of a mystery.*

Imitation comes in at least four layers. What is true in every case is that there is an idea that somehow enters the mind of an observer and that observer then embodies that idea in an action, activity, or artifact. In a deep sense, therefore, every imitation is an incarnation of a *logos* (a Greek word meaning “idea”), and that means in turn that when we imitate anything we always imitate Christ the Logos. It is more true than we can imagine that the heavens declare the glory of God.

Imitation is a great and rich concept and a very useful idea. It is by imitating others that we learn to speak, walk, swim, sing, raise children, and write. It is never a matter of whether we will imitate but rather of what we will imitate. Therefore, we need to imitate the best.

We do well to note how much pleasure we take when we see good imitations. Consider, for example, how readily we enrich and worship actors for doing nothing other than imitating other people, most of whom don't even exist. We are fascinated by mirrors, paintings, stories, dolls and action figures, songs, and scale models. This love of imitation seems to arise from our nature: We are images—that is, imitations—of God. As images, we love images. This is our glory. We should not apologize for it. But we have to take care not to make any image a god.

The Greek word for “imitation” is *mimesis*, the source of our name for mimetic teaching, the very essence of the soul's journey to wisdom. Through *The Tapestry* you will practice three specific modes of mimetic teaching: dictation, narration, and copy work. More on that below!

THE STRUCTURE OF *THE TAPESTRY*

The basic unit in *The Tapestry* is **the exercise**, each of which consists of two parts: an imitation and a grammar discussion. The exercises are simple and bite sized, but they are the steps by which the goals of this program are realized. They activate the senses, engage the mind, and attract the will by providing challenges suited to the readiness of your students.

The **imitation** includes the three modes of imitation: dictation, narration, and copy work, during which your students either see a text or hear you read it and then either write or speak it in response.

The **grammar discussion** selects a part of speech from the text you read and shows your students how to identify and produce it, first by a simple description (e.g., *action word*) and then by name (e.g., *verb*).

These exercises are, truly, *exercises*: mental workouts that strengthen and stretch the mind. Each is simple and powerful, accomplishing much without consuming inordinate time or energy. They cultivate the disciplines that all learning depends on. Your students must perform the exercises to benefit from them, just as musicians or athletes cannot rely on others to do their work for them but must practice themselves. If they do, they grow.

In a typical week, you engage one activity each for dictation, narration, and

copy work. Then you discuss one of the parts of speech drawn from the text. However, you will experience atypical weeks. For example, some weeks you may complete two dictations, spend two days completing copy work, or take an extra day for a discussion. Exercise your judgment. *The Tapestry* is a tool for your use that you should adapt as needed.

Using the chapter on nouns as an example, the typical schedule looks like this:

- Day one: narration, followed by discussion about nouns
- Day two: dictation, followed by discussion about nouns
- Day three: independent copy work

You will find **eight chapters**, each of which focuses on one part of speech encountered through the three modes. Each chapter is divided into exercises. You will find enough exercises in each chapter to complete approximately one chapter per month, but do not feel bound to that pace if it isn't appropriate to your students. *The Tapestry* is flexible.

The Tapestry is designed for a variety of ages and abilities, and each exercise is taught to mastery and according to readiness. You do not need to complete the course in any predetermined amount of time. Nor are you bound to a class period or any other time frame for each exercise. Some dictations, for example, might take multiple days for younger students. Tortoises don't gaze at the clock; they just keep moving forward, learning what they are ready to learn and patiently proceeding to the next log.

While *The Tapestry* is flexible and can be altered as needed, the basic framework is a **two-year cycle** (see below). Each exercise has elements for both new students (those in the first year of the cycle) and for students who have already completed the first year. Each student in each year of the cycle learns those elements he is ready for. By design, most students will complete each level twice: once focusing on the beginning prompts and a second time on the advanced prompts. Repetition makes a gentle guide.

We have distributed specific suggestions for you, the teacher, throughout the exercises. No doubt you will have thought of many of them already. In that case, treat them as permission to follow your intuitions. If any of them are new to you, do not feel enslaved to them and don't let them add stress. Treat them like useful ornaments and use them when they please you. If you find a

suggestion that seems to work better in a different lesson than the one in which you find it, feel free to use it elsewhere. And by all means develop your own additional tips and alterations.

The Three Mimetic Modes Closely Considered

As mentioned earlier, one of the glories of the classical tradition is its sophisticated way of understanding imitation. Another is the mimetic teaching modes it has developed in light of that understanding. As mentioned above, you use three of them when you use *The Tapestry*, each of which will be described in detail below. Each has both a long and rich story and a lasting power that equips your students for the work before them.

We call them *modes* to distinguish them from techniques. As we use the terms, a *mode* is a way of doing something; it is more of an art than mechanics. A *technique* is a repeated pattern of action that produces the same measurable result. Techniques work in factories but have limited value in schools. They are counterproductive when they replace modes.

We call them modes of imitation or *mimetic writing modes* because each imitates a text in a different manner, thereby activating various thought processes and approaches to the text. They implicitly teach students how to read and interpret a text while simultaneously cultivating their attentiveness, memory, and sensibilities.

As we discussed above, the three modes are dictation, narration, and copy work.

- During a **dictation**, you read a suitable passage to your students and they imitate it by writing it.
- During a **narration**, you read a suitable passage to your students and they imitate it by narrating it in turn.
- During **copy work**, you present a written text to your students and they imitate it by writing it word for word.

We'll develop each in more detail below.

We trust our earlier discussion of the power of imitation and the various levels by which we imitate helps explain why the mimetic element of these modes is so valuable. (An aside: we find it ironic that this rich and ancient tradition of imitation is so often dismissed while what replaces it tends to be busywork oriented to tests and quizzes.)

Each dictation and narration exercise includes a model dialogue. Use it as a starting point—or maybe a reference point if you lose your bearings. Don't follow it too precisely, like you would a script. If you do, you run the risk of reducing the mode to a technique. Follow a fitting form, but don't repeat words exactly.

You may on occasion be tempted to skip the mimetic modes and proceed straight to the grammar discussions. Resist! Things are more important than names, and sensibility is more formative than understanding. Students value the names of animals when they have a relationship with them. In that relationship, the names find meaning. **So don't prioritize the grammar in the second part of the exercise over the imitation of great texts in the first. If you do, you will undercut the very thing you prioritize.**

Benefits of the Three Mimetic Modes

The mimetic modes seem to be underappreciated, perhaps for reasons unique to our age. For one, each is relatively simple for the teacher and demanding for the student. Our age tends to want the teacher to do the work while the student is kept happily passive. For another, you don't need a teaching certificate to use the modes (though it wouldn't get in the way), so some experts resist them.

Then there's the matter of assessment. Since the modes are more synthetic than analytical, more concerned with the whole than with isolated facts, they can be harder to assess numerically. The teacher's personal judgment becomes more important than impersonal standardization. For all these reasons and more, both teachers and the modes have been neglected for the last century or so. Yet these modes offer long-recognized benefits that may not be achievable by any other means.

You use the modes of imitation to cultivate your students' linguistic

sensibilities. Imitation is natural and intuitive to children and opens up pathways to insight and appreciation. Furthermore, the sensibility for language is more fundamental and essential than the ability to analyze it. That is why the modes of imitation precede the grammar discussions and why the grammar discussions are ordered as they are. If you engage in grammatical analysis first, you run the risk of unraveling the whole tapestry. **If you do have to choose, choose the mimetic writing modes above the grammar discussions.**

A distorted emphasis on grammar and naming—one that undervalues sensibility and things—is especially counterproductive for younger students because they approach reality so concretely, through the senses. Things are more important to them than rules and names. Analysis without experience is too abstract and nominal. Give your student experiences of the living language by imitating excellent expressions of it.

These modes of imitation go beyond recalling a text from short-term memory. They allow the multilayered reality of the text to penetrate the soul of the receptive student, nourishing it with what it receives. That is why we choose great texts characterized by propriety, sound judgment, order, beauty, truthfulness, creativity, and insight—in other words, those that imitate the Good.

For the student, imitation is more like play, even though it can appear tedious to us as adults. It is true that even play can become difficult for students when they are asked to imitate something beyond their ability, and this applies to an art such as writing as much as sports or music. Don't ask your students to write passages that are so long that they distract your students from the passage and direct their attention to the physical challenges of writing, such as the pain of holding a pencil for a long time. The suitable length for a passage to imitate varies between the modes. A dictation will be much shorter than copy work, and copy work will be shorter than narration since the latter is oral rather than written.

Perhaps the fundamental benefit of the three mimetic writing modes is that they work. Through them your students learn both skills and sensibility. They encounter more advanced writing than they can read independently, yet they still engage with the text at their level of readiness. They fill the treasury of their minds with good things. And they cultivate habits that give them access to higher thinking and greater insight, especially in a world that has laid siege to their attention.

In addition, you, the teacher, will discover that walking with the tortoise makes you more efficient and very possibly less distracted by outside pressures. Your home or school will be blessed while your students develop habits of attention and learn things that transfer to other subjects (all require attention, memory, and writing) and grow in later years (you never stop needing and refining attention, memory, writing, etc.).

The mimetic writing modes occupy a long and honored place in the classical tradition, each of them offering records that go back well into the ancient world and even fairly detailed guides to how to perform them. For example, St. John Chrysostom wrote to parents a detailed explanation of how to perform a narration.*

Ancient practices survive because they work across cultures and ages, gathering wisdom as they go. These modes are every bit as necessary today as they were in the Pythagorean Brotherhood, the Greek and Roman schools, the medieval cathedrals and universities, and the Renaissance apprenticeships. They are always taught where the Divine Image, the mind and soul of the student, humane skills, culture, and learning are held precious.

HOW IT'S TAUGHT

How *The Tapestry* is taught is unique in two ways:

1. We take a mimetic approach.
2. We age-integrate.

The Mimetic Approach

You may be aware that at CiRCE we make much of what we call mimetic teaching. It is also possible that calling the writing modes *mimetic* has confused you. Therefore, both for those who are new to the term *mimetic* and for those who

* John Chrysostom, "Address on Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring Up Their Children," in *The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What It Means to Be an Educated Human Being*, ed. Richard M. Gamble (ISI Books, 2007), 207.

have heard it applied to teaching, it may be worth taking a moment to explain the term.

Mimetic simply means having to do with imitation. Mimetic writing imitates written texts. Your students do this using the three mimetic writing modes. Mimetic teaching is more complex. Rather than imitating a concrete object, when you teach you imitate an idea so that your students have a concrete object (a type) to look at. How does one imitate an idea? By embodying it in an action or artifact. Thus, there are two essential elements of every mimetic lesson: the idea and the types in which you embody it. The idea may be an eternal and unchanging truth or principle. The type is an example or illustration of the idea.

As we mentioned earlier, one word the classical tradition uses to name an idea comes from the Greek word *logos*. A word for “embodying” comes from the Latin word *incarnate*. Thus, when you teach mimetically, you are incarnating a (not the!) *logos*. When your students encounter a *logos* incarnated in types, you give them the opportunity to rise from the types to the *logos* through contemplation and comparison of the types.

As an elementary teacher, you have mastered this mode of teaching, perhaps without knowing you have done so. When you want to teach your students the truth or *logos* that $4+5=9$, you know very well how effective it is—and how much they need it—when you show them four of something and five of something so they can see nine of something. The *logos* is $4+5=9$. The incarnation, or type, is when you embody the *logos*: four objects, five objects, and nine objects.

The teacher’s task, then, is first, to know the *logos* the students will learn; second, to secure types of that *logos*; third, to guide students as they compare the types, determine or ensure that the students are ready to see the types and through them the *logos*, and wait for the moment when each student individually “gets it” and “the light bulb turns on”; and fourth, to secure the ground the students have gained by honoring their achievement and integrating it into what they already know, sometimes by applying it, sometimes by making something, and sometimes by firmly connecting it with previous knowledge. When you teach mimetically, your goal is for your students to learn the *logos* incarnated, which is the only way to cultivate a love of learning.

The Tapestry is mimetic in at least two ways:

1. Each chosen text for the mimetic writing modes is a type (in this case, an example) of great writing. Through them, students will encounter and engage type after type of admirable writing that is worth imitating.
2. Each grammar discussion takes you through the mimetic sequence described above. You ensure your students are ready for the discussion, present types, contemplate them in the discussion, wait for the moment of insight or illumination, honor your students when they conquer new ground, and secure what they have learned.

Age-Integration

The Tapestry is laid out in four levels. Level one corresponds approximately to grades 1 and 2, level two to grades 3 and 4, level three to grades 5 and 6, and level four to grades 7 and 8. The Tapestry is designed for age integration within both small and large classes. One class might consist of first- and second-grade students, while another might gather together every elementary-aged student in the school.

Skill Levels

In level one, this book, your student encounters texts and concepts in introductory, experiential, and concrete ways. In later levels, the activities become gradually more abstract. Always begin your student at her level of readiness. If (in an extreme case) a student who is old enough to be on level four has never heard that persons, places, and things can be grouped together under the name *noun*, he should start at level one, exercise one, tier one. To adapt the tier one exercises for an older student, you should add longer sentences and demand more from her. Such a student would move very quickly through the tiers and exercises and would often catch up to his peers. In too many situations using other teaching models, that student spends the rest of her academic career bewildered by the parts of speech and all the learning that depends on them.

Age-Integrated Setting

Your level one students learn together in an age-integrated setting. Each is taught based on her readiness. For example, some students are able to handle longer sentences or to provide more examples of a given idea, such as a part of speech, while others may be unfamiliar with the part of speech or dictation exercises. You will teach them together.

The layout of the exercises makes this much easier than it might sound, partly because we format it for you in the exercise guides. There we show specifically how to address your students regardless of their level of readiness. Finally, we provide guidance on how to determine your students' readiness, and it is quite simple.

You can age-integrate your students because of two forms built into *The Tapestry*: a two-year cycle and the four tiers. First, each level of *The Tapestry* lays out a two-year cycle. Every student should complete both years, even if they seem to have mastered the skills. Sensibility takes time, and we believe sensibility is more important than skills. Furthermore, in an age-integrated setting, both ages benefit when they interact with older and younger students. First- and second- grade teachers know well that even if the students are all technically considered “the same age,” the gap between a student whose birthday falls in October and another whose birthday falls in May often represents a chasm in maturity. Since these classes are age-integrated anyway, we offer you *The Tapestry* to honor that fact.

The second way *The Tapestry* enables age-integrated teaching is through the four tiers the grammar discussions are divided into. While we explain these in detail in the section on how to lead a grammar discussion, it is worth noting here that the tiers enable you to simultaneously lead each student at his own pace and teach a wide range of students together.

Each exercise has elements for both new students and students who have already encountered the given exercise. Each student learns those elements she is ready for. By design, most students will complete each level twice. As we said above, it is easier than it sounds on paper.

You might ask why we have built a language arts curriculum on the principle

of age-integration. In addition to the simple fact that every class is already age-integrated to some degree, we believe the early twentieth-century move to segregate students by age undercuts the humane goals of classical education. More positively, we believe that age-integration is natural to humans, more conducive to teaching, and a better way to organize learning.

This approach offers many benefits, including:

- You can teach newer and more experienced students alongside each other and more experienced students can teach newer ones with no confusion.
- Students find this approach motivating because they learn in a pattern that is natural to them, and it leads to the frequent moments of illumination or insight that are the joy of learning.
- Younger students look up to older students, and older students tend to be more mature around younger students.
- Year one students benefit from hearing what year two students discuss even though they don't need to learn it yet. Homeschoolers are well aware of this phenomenon.
- The two-year cycle allows for a more contemplative pace, one that pleases the tortoise. Such a pace allows for better comprehension of ideas while cultivating the skills and sensibilities that are the goals of the exercises.
- Students of different ages learn better when they learn together.
- It is more cost effective for the school and thus families.

There are certain markers of readiness that your students will need to meet before you initiate them into *The Tapestry*.

Prerequisites:

Handwriting

For *The Tapestry*, your students need to be able to form letters. If they are not able, we recommend you secure a complete cursive or print handwriting program. We provide copy work exercises in both print and cursive for level one,

but these assume your students can already form the letters. We recommend cursive over printing but leave the choice to schools and parents.

Spelling

Your students should be able to spell simple words before starting *The Tapestry*. While you can and should spell words for them aloud, students who need too many or most words spelled for them will be unduly frustrated. See our recommendations for spelling programs below.

Recommended Supplementary Materials:

Journal

In order to keep track of your students' dictation exercises, vocabulary lists, and spelling words, we recommend your students use their own journals. Any blank, lined notebook will do.

Spelling program

Your students will learn a great deal of spelling through the exercises in *The Tapestry*. However, we do not provide spelling lists or a systematic approach to spelling. Instead, the students learn spelling in context (you can find more details on how that works in the dictation and copy work directions below). We recommend pairing *The Tapestry* with a spelling program that teaches phonics and the rules of spelling, such as Denise Eide's or Romalda Spalding's. We are committed to phonics, but *The Tapestry* is not itself a phonics program. Instead, it draws from living texts the phonemes connected to words in context. Students learn the conventions of spelling, which are very complex in English, by seeing them in real words contained in real texts. For most students, additional explicit instruction in spelling is required and should be provided along with *The Tapestry*.

How to Assess

Students practice each exercise until they master the concept it teaches. As a result, assessment is built into each exercise organically. You will see below that the tiers contain ongoing practical assessments of your students' readiness and progress.

Remember that your students rotate through the same lessons in a two year cycle. During the first year, minimize formal assessments. Instead, assess your students through the conversations described in the exercises.

There is one particularly valuable kind of assessment that we do recommend because it measures actual learning and provides actionable feedback: marking beginnings and endings. When you present the first dictation exercise, time your students. Then repeat the exercise later and time them again. This will reveal improvements in memory, handwriting, spelling, and punctuation. Copy work and narration provide their own organic feedback because students can see their handwriting improve with copy work and they can feel how much better they are remembering things during narration. Build on that organic feedback by tactfully noting the progress you see.

After your students complete the second year of the level one cycle, they will have spent two years cultivating their linguistic sensibilities and practicing their writing skills to mastery. They are now ready to move on. In the grammar discussions, this means they can complete the four tiers for each part of speech. You will know from class discussions whether they can do this, but so you can formally assess and they can demonstrate what they have learned, we have included copy work pages labeled "Assessment Exercise." When your students reach this exercise, they should underline the part of speech the chapter focused on. We've included an answer key in the back of this book for those exercises.

What and How of Narration

Skills:

- memory

- verbal expression
- attention
- visualization

Sensibilities:

- an ear for beautiful syntax
- an ear for schemes (rhyme, parallelism, etc.), meter, and harmony
- a mind for tropes (metaphors, similes, etc.), forms, and proportion
- sound judgment

Narration is an ancient practice going back to preliterate societies, developed intensely by Pythagoras, imitated by Plato, spread through Greek and Roman schools, supported by Quintilian and Aelius Theon, described by St. John Chrysostom in the fifth century AD, adopted by John Locke, developed in detail by Charlotte Mason, and assumed intuitively by every great teacher. So what is it?

On the surface, narration is an embarrassingly simple activity: The teacher reads a text to the student, and the student narrates it back to the teacher. The simplicity is deceiving, however. The reason it looks so simple on the outside is because so many things happen inside the student's mind when they narrate.

Narration has been called a "poetic" mode because it involves the senses and the active mind of the student but resists premature analysis. In many conventional school lessons, recollection of discrete facts is valued more highly than a synthesis of the whole. Narration values synthesis over discrete facts. It values participation over observation. And it values storytelling over analysis. Do not fear or be hesitant about narration because of its simplicity and the pleasure it brings to the reader.

There are two essential forms of narration. In the first, the student tries to repeat the original source as exactly and in as much detail as possible. In the second, the student repeats what he has heard in his own words. Both are valuable.

Narration can be written or spoken. Do not instruct your students to write a narration until they have mastered handwriting well enough that they do not

have to concentrate on forming letters and can think about the words they write. For most students, that will occur closer to eight or nine years old than six. Narration differs from dictation in that the source language can be more complex, the excerpts are longer, and your students respond verbally and creatively.

- Narration cultivates two categories of skills, both of which your students will learn progressively: memory and expression. This program focuses on memory first and expression second (though each grade learns both all year).

How to Do Narration

When you lead a narration exercise, you lead your students through three stages: preparation, narration, and grammar discussion. Since the grammar discussion is common to all three modes of imitation, we will focus here on stages one and two.

1. Preparation

Preparing your students involves two repeated activities: summary and orientation. First, students summarize the previous session's narration. For example, if you are reading a story, they should summarize the narration from the chapter or section you read in the previous session. Second, you ask them orientation or context questions about what you are going to read to them. For example, if you are going to read a fable about ants and grasshoppers, you might ask them if they have ever seen an ant or a grasshopper, what they know about them, which they think themselves more like and why, whether they have had to work hard on anything, and so on. You might also ask about previous fables you've read with them.

2. Narration

The narration itself is straightforward: You read a portion of a selected text to your students, and your students tell it back to you as well as they are able. You

read additional portions, and they reply to each by narrating it in turn. While there are variations for different class sizes, ages, and so on, you want to stay as close to this basic idea as you possibly can.

When you read and instruct your students to narrate the text back to you, it is important that you not repeat the reading. Among the benefits of narration is that it trains the memory by cultivating attention and focus. If students know the text will be repeated, they tend to tune out until they need to focus. It's best to nip that habit in the bud. No rewinds! They will quickly catch on to the fact that they will only hear it once and necessity will become the mother of their creativity.

After you complete the narration, do not jump too quickly into an analytical discussion, whether of the parts of the story or of the parts of speech. Instead, transition by discussing the story as a whole. Asking questions about where the story took place, who was there, what they did, what they were hoping for, and so on will draw students' attention into the story. Asking whether a given character should have done what he did, if he was wise, and similar questions will raise their thinking to an altogether higher level. While we focus on grammar in the grammar discussion (the next part of the exercise), the primary focus of each narration is engagement with the text.

While every narration exercise follows the form described above, there are multiple ways to approach that form. Here are three ways you will find in this program:

1. Whole group: After reading the passage aloud to your students, ask each student to narrate it back in her own words.
2. In pairs: After reading the passage aloud, put your students in pairs and ask them to narrate it to each other. One student listens while the other narrates the story. After the first student has completed his narration, the listening student fills in any gaps with her own.
3. Around the room: After reading the passage aloud, the teacher asks students to narrate portions back. The first student narrates the beginning, the second narrates the next event, the third the next, and so on. They should try to narrate the story in the correct order, though some students may find it helpful to jump into some other memorable spot and to let the story bloom from wherever they start. This approach is also acceptable.

Apart from time, there is no limit to the number of students you can call on to narrate. If you have a larger class, ensure that every student has frequent opportunities.

The most valuable assessment you can give to your students when they narrate is to acknowledge and even celebrate the things they get right while asking questions that draw out things they might have missed. The second part of that assessment should be done if those details are important for some other reason than the narration itself. For example, they might need to know about some details to make sense of the story or for the grammar discussion that follows.

As for the difference between first and second year students and what you should expect from each, second year students will almost certainly be better at narrating because they have been practicing longer than first years. However, some first years will be older than some second years because of the rotation. Not every first year student will be in first grade. Sometimes students are better at narrating just because they are older, especially in the early years when students change so fast.

Memory Techniques

You may want to teach your student ancient memory tools to help them narrate the story. We recommend you try them! We think the best memory tool for this age is the quipu, an ancient Incan memory device that uses ropes, knots, and beads to remember information. To use one, layout beads and string for your students to use while you read. One piece of string is one whole story (so it will sometimes cover a whole chapter in this program). When an event happens in the story, pause so the child can put a bead or a knot on the string. The bead should remind them of the event. For instance, if Tiny is trapped in the rain, they may choose a blue bead for their string. Then when she takes shelter under a flower petal, they may choose a pink bead. The more interesting and odd the beads are, the better they will work for this. So you might have a bead that looks like a flower or water. When they narrate the story back, they can feel each bead and it will remind them of the event in the story. You can find more guidance on using and making a quipu on Youtube.

Another way to help your students remember what you read is asking them to act out the actions or draw scenes as they listen. Just make sure you pause so they can draw or act without missing the next thing you read.

Why Narration?

Among other things, narration serves as a foundation for almost all higher-order learning. Synthetic reading is a good example of this—when preschoolers listen to their parents read, they are participating in a synthetic, whole-work experience. They don't need to be taught how to do it, but they do have to be coached and encouraged to keep doing it.

After a few years of school, many students think reading is a detached, impersonal activity used to cut up (i.e., analyze) boring texts in boring ways. Some even come to think they don't like reading. Narration restores the synthetic approach and allows the analytical to grow out of it, maintaining the health and effectiveness of both activities. It is the synthetic whole that makes analysis valuable.

Students who narrate become comfortable with storytelling, public speaking, listening to others speak, rhetoric, weaving their thoughts together with those of others, holding together a train of thought, dialectics, and responding to questions in an impromptu but informed manner.* Indeed, for students, narration is self-validating because it gives them natural, intrinsic feedback when they remember what they need to remember to interpret a text or when they find themselves able to string a series of thoughts in a meaningful way or relate one text to another or use it in a discussion. Thinking well generally achieves this self-validation and produces a gentleness of spirit that one still occasionally finds among the thoughtful.

Narration cultivates the linguistic sense by training students' sentiments not by imposing values on students but by using their senses to experience artistic expressions in language. They are made receptive to the language arts because, for them, those arts are living ideas found in living texts. Because the

* For an excellent description of some of the intellectual benefits derived from narration, see Jason Barney, *A Classical Guide to Narration* (CiRCE Institute, 2020). See especially chapter 6.

texts narrated are among the best, narration cultivates a literary sensibility and a general sense for language.

Narration weaves together the subskills that conventional educators have analyzed apart. It causes them to reinforce each other like notes in an orchestra by restoring the nature of reading—a person encountering an idea in written form—and the purpose of reading instruction: to learn how to interpret texts and the realities they name. Narration, Jason Barney reminds us, makes reading active and puts the student in an “attentive posture.”* Narration nurtures memory, which builds on and cultivates attention and focus. When students are ready to add handwriting, it benefits manual dexterity as well.

There are few things with so much power, so long a witness in the tradition, so much value—and so much neglect. Narration is simple, powerful, and effective. And very respectful of the student. Perhaps this is why, when he described how to conduct a narration with children, St. John Chrysostom said, “I am not speaking of trifles, we are discussing the governance of the world.”**

What and How of Dictation

Skills:

- memory
- attention
- handwriting
- spelling
- punctuation

Sensibilities:

- an ear for beautiful syntax
- an ear for schemes
- an imagination for tropes

* Barney, *Classical Guide*, 90.

** Chrysostom, “Address on Vainglory,” 218.

Dictation exercises are oral: The teacher reads a sentence aloud as many times as necessary and the students write it. The teacher does not write the sentence and ask the students to copy it as that would make the exercise copy work. The magic of dictation happens when the language is communicated aloud.

As the teacher, you read the sentence as many times as necessary for the students to write it accurately. First, you read the whole sentence while your students listen, and then they write. You do not slow down or read portions and then pause for them to write as you read. You read. They listen. When you follow this pattern, your students must first understand what is being spoken, then hold it in their minds, and then write it accurately. This is a very complex undertaking!

They may remember only one or two words each time you read it, especially at first. This is to be expected; be encouraging and remind your students that you will read it as many times as necessary. The exercise is complete when they have written it whole and error free (the spelling and punctuation are correct, no words are missing, etc.). At first, you will need to state the punctuation aloud as you read, but as the students progress (most likely in level two), your students should be able to write the punctuation without hearing it stated.

While a grammar discussion follows each dictation exercise, you can use the grammar terms during the dictation discussion as well, especially when you respond to your students' questions. (Nota bene: Do not ask your students to use the terminology during the dictation portion of the exercise; just use it yourself.)

For instance, let's say you read a sentence with a prepositional phrase. Your student might ask, "Which word came after *the*?" You could respond, "The noun—the word that came after *the*—is *hat*." You share with your student a term for a concept some brilliant grammarian identified and named, and a rather technical one at that.

The vital principle—and this is so important that we will repeat and emphasize it over and over—is that the thing or idea is more important than its name. Indeed, the name gets its meaning from the thing, and your student must know how the name is connected to the thing named. Therefore, you will continually ensure two things: first, that your students encounter things before they learn their names, and second, that the name is presented in context, usually

in response to your students' questions, and through gentle and frequent repetition.

In this case, the thing is the grammar concept and the name is the term applied to it. We use grammar terminology to talk about parts and elements of speech, but we do so after repeatedly encountering the thing named. In short, we learn the names of things so we can talk about the things, which means we must first encounter the thing named. Your student might not have ever heard of, for example, an object of the preposition, but they do not need to remember the term. You are simply introducing it in context and stating both the term and its meaning. Eventually, through exposure in context, the students will remember the term. Eventually, the time will come for them to learn it formally, and their familiarity with the name will make it much easier to learn. The principle is that formal instruction should follow informal encounters.

If you have time, we recommend you try a dictation exercise yourself. Choose something challenging for you, such as Homer or Virgil, so you can experience the challenge you set for your students. Read a sentence aloud. Put down the text and try to write it word for word and mark for mark. Then show yourself the same patience you show your students! You will find it somewhat mentally taxing and deeply satisfying. You might even find yourself wishing you'd been taught this way all along.

Your students should write their dictation sentences in a notebook or journal where they can view them all together.

Vocabulary

During the dictation exercises (as well as narration and copy work), your students will hear new and unfamiliar words. When this happens, instruct them to record those words in the back of their journal. This list will be unique to each student and should not be assessed. Think of it as a personal collection of interesting things.

Spelling

Spelling is similar to punctuation. You follow the pattern you followed to help with punctuation: Spell words when students don't know the correct spelling, and they will gradually improve as spellers. In addition, your students will make a list of their own spelling words in the back of their journal.

Again, you should not treat *The Tapestry* as a complete spelling program nor as a supplement to spelling. Instead, use it to practice spelling as follows. At first, just tell them the correct spelling. Watch for patterns of misspelling for each student. Celebrate hard words spelled correctly and use them as an occasion to show the “rule” or pattern they recognized and used correctly.

When your students write their dictated texts, observe how they spell. The most important thing they need is to see and imitate correct spelling. If you see a misspelled word, simply and gently tell the student the correct spelling and instruct them to correct it and then add it to her spelling list in the back of her journal. If a student misses a given word repeatedly or struggles with a pattern or phoneme, instruct him to add the word or phoneme to his list. This way your students generate their own spelling lists based on their own needs. (You will find copy work particularly valuable for gentle spelling practice. They write by imitation and compare what they write with the original. What they misspell, they can see.)

What and How of Copywork

Skills:

- attention
- reading
- visualization
- manual dexterity
- conscientiousness
- spelling
- grammar
- punctuation

Sensibilities:

- sound judgment
- experiential knowledge of great sentence structure
- a feel for sounds
- creative forms
- rhythm, rhyme, and other schemes (arrangements that appeal to the ear and eye)
- comparisons, similes, metaphors, and other tropes (expressions that appeal to the imagination)

Copy work is one of the glories of the classical tradition and an everyday activity that virtually every successful writer engages in. It involves a direct written imitation of a passage from a worthy text. Your students copy by hand, word for word and punctuation mark by punctuation mark, exactly what the text contains.

Copy work has long been recognized as one of the most effective ways to improve one's writing. Nor is its value restricted to children. Joan Didion copied Ernest Hemingway, Billy Collins copied Wallace Stephens, Dante copied Virgil, William Shakespeare copied Ovid, I copy Evelyn Waugh (wink wink), and on and on.

Students should develop a habit of frequent copying while they are young. That way, when they are older it will be a habit they can refine without having to start from scratch. They should also copy for immediate benefits, such as improved reading, better focus and attention to detail, and, perhaps obviously, improved writing. It also helps with spelling and grammar, including punctuation. Copy work even develops manual dexterity, requiring and thereby refining fine motor skills. On top of all that, when students spend about fifteen minutes a day copying, they learn the value of practicing anything a little bit every day. They easily see how much they improve when they compare their writing at the beginning of the year with what they write at the end.

Copy work also cultivates your students' sense for language. Attentively copying good writing arouses the mind to perceive things that can't be seen through any other lens. Copying beautiful writing nourishes a sensitivity to verbal patterns, rhythms, and sounds while adding to students' vocabulary through frequent encounters with living words in context. They can and should be

encouraged to create their own vocabulary lists from the copy work, as that is more effective than giving them a prescribed list of words out of context.

If you aren't persuaded about the value of copy work, give it a try! Choose an author whose writing you admire, and copy a selected passage 1–5 times per week. It only takes a few minutes and significantly strengthens your core. You'll see with your inner eye how copying great authors is more than rote. Indeed, you'll see how much your soul benefits when you copy excerpts of great texts—when you roll them around in your mind.

Along with this main guide to *The Tapestry*, you secured a separate copy work notebook that contains texts worth imitating and space for your students to write. Ensure your students have a calm, quiet, organized space where they can write and sharpened pencils or fitting pens (calligraphy pens are wonderful for students who are ready for them).

Your students should read the text aloud, or, if they are not able, you can read it to them. Then give them time to copy independently. They should slowly and carefully copy the text, attempting to make theirs look identical to the original. Once they have finished, correct any errors by making the correct marks over their work in a different color. If time and energy allow, tell your students to redo their copy work on the extra sheets provided (you can download them from our website).

As with dictation and narration, copy work should be done to mastery, but mastery may look different for different students. Require only what each individual student is able to do with attention, discipline, and practice.

If you have a wide range of readiness levels in your classroom, we recommend alternating copy work with dictation. Copy work makes this easy because your students practice it independently. For instance, if you are reading the more challenging dictation sentence to the class, and five of your fifteen students are not ready, have those five complete the copy work on that day. Then, the next day, have the ten more advanced students do copy work while you do the shorter dictation with the five.

We think it is inconsiderate to withhold from aspiring writers the copy work that offers so many benefits. Perhaps some students aspire to write only because they will be required to do so for the next ten or fifteen years. They

deserve the benefits too, even though other students may want to write so they can enrich their worlds with beautiful, fitting, and insightful expressions.

Nevertheless, not every student takes to copy work with the same enthusiasm, so here are some tips for making copy work a pleasant experience:

- First, accept that they won't all enjoy it to the same degree and that some will come to appreciate it only gradually. Then, even more importantly, let them improve so they can see their own improvement.
- A pleasant environment at a fitting time can be helpful. Fifteen minutes after recess with Bach playing softly in the background associates copy work with peace and rest.
- Your personal interest in their work will encourage many of your students. Observe their writing and show genuine interest in their progress and efforts. Be prepared to discuss anything they find noteworthy in the text. The text was chosen because it was valuable, so a discussion like this reinforces that fact and often helps your students discover that value with their own eyes.
- Praise virtuous actions, not gifts. Correct mistakes without demeaning the person. The best way to do this is to praise small accomplishments as specifically as possible (e.g., "You formed the top of that *e* with a perfect curve!") and offer suggestions and corrections just as specifically (e.g., "Every small *i* needs a dot directly over the stem.").

By copying great works regularly, you students will frequently encounter masters of the English language, imitate their rhythms and thoughts, absorb their imaginative expressions, and participate as members in a long and glorious tradition that invites. Gradually they will find their own voice and style, and it will be informed by the norms that make for noble writing, speaking, thinking, and living.

A Guide to the Grammar Discussions

The Tapestry teaches grammar in two stages: in its living context and through discussion. First, you present a living text to your students, one drawn from great English literature. Then you draw out and discuss a part of speech.

In the first stage, you give your students a taste of the glory of living grammar by hearing, seeing, saying, and writing words and ideas in their natural habitat: real sentences from real texts. This is described in detail in the section called “The Three Mimetic Modes Closely Considered.” In the second stage, you teach your students formal grammar by remembering where it came from.

To understand why both are important, let’s consider the nature of grammar. Like so many things, the classical tradition has a rich grammatical heritage that has been systematically reduced in conventional education. The most common use of the word today refers to the formal rules, forms, and elements of language. This is sometimes called *formal grammar*.

Grammar includes, but is a great deal more than, its elements and rules. The classical understanding of grammar possesses a glory that we fail to see when we reduce it to its elements and forms. It possesses a power and a purpose that students can only experience when they encounter it alive and whole.

“Grammar” comes from the Greek word *grammatika*, which can be literally translated to “letters.” The Latin translation was *literae*, from which we get “literature.” One of the most essential things we do when we encounter letters or literature is try to understand them. Jason Barney prudently summarizes the historical understanding of the essence of grammar as “the [complex skill] of reading and interpretation.”*

Grammar is innate to us as human beings; we start interpreting signs around us before we are born. That is one reason the second meaning (interpretation) is more important than the first (formal grammar). We are all always interpreting, even before we can read (e.g., body language, road signs, etc.). You might put it this way: Grammar as reading and interpretation is innate to every student in your classroom. Formal grammar is the discovery of geniuses over generations.

It seems important to stress that we are not diminishing the importance of formal grammar when we say it is less important than a more comprehensive understanding. Rather, far from diminishing its importance, we restore it. Formal grammar is important precisely because it enables us to do the more important thing. We learn the rules, forms, and elements of language *so that*

* Barney, *Classical Guide*, 93.

we can more readily understand what we read. Therefore, we must avoid the common error of treating formal grammar as a standalone subject that can exist without the broader understanding of grammar as interpretation. If we do, grammar becomes a subject learned to pass tests rather than a liberal art that cultivates the humane skills we discuss below. Grammar as an art serves as the foundation for all later learning regardless of the subject.

Since it is so practically important and innately wonderful, you will show your students the glory of grammar by presenting well-written texts that make it vivid and by guiding them to imitate what you present using the three modes. This is the first stage of each exercise. Then, in the second stage, you will lead an age-appropriate grammar discussion on one of the eight parts of speech. When they follow this sequence, your students gradually internalize a sound sense of how the English language works by attending to it in its natural habitat. Then, like doctors, they remove parts of it, analyze it, and restore it. They do not “murder to dissect.” Instead, they attend to a particular element to note that it is used by a skillful author, to better understand its nature, and then to restore it to its habitat, where it can flourish in its relations to the other parts.

As you will see below, the chapters are organized by the grammatical parts of speech, of which you teach eight: nouns, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, interjections, and conjunctions. If you are uncomfortable with the parts of speech, we have two solutions: First, we will explain them below, and second, the exercises we have laid out for you will help you understand them while you teach them.

Example Grammar Discussions

The following types show how a grammar discussion might unfold (keep in mind that you precede the grammar discussion with either a narration or a dictation, followed by a brief discussion of the story). For this example, we’ll assume you have read the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare. Most students will only engage in a discussion in one tier on any given day. Some students will move from tier one to tier three or four. Likewise, other students may jump in at tier three and complete tier four. So, you will find below four different possible discussions that could happen based on the student’s readiness.

Tier One: Meeting the Idea

Teacher: Do you have any pets?

Student A: Yes, I have a dog.

Student B: I have a cat!

Student C: I have a lizard!

Teacher: Wow, those sound like lovely pets! That's a lot of things you just named. Have you ever been on vacation? Where did you go?

Student A: I went to Canada!

Student B: I went to the beach!

Teacher: Where was the beach?

Student B: In Florida.

Student C: I went to Colorado!

Teacher: Wow, you've been to so many places! Who did you visit there?

Student A: I visited my Grandma.

Student B: I saw my uncle!

Student C: I saw my friend!

Teacher: That's a lot of people! You all listed a lot of different people, places, and things. Write some people, places, and things that you remember that we just talked about in your notebook on a new sheet of paper. I'll tell you what to call that page later.

Tier Two: Seeing the Idea

Teacher: Did you hear the names of any animals mentioned in the story?

Student A: I heard a tortoise and a hare.

Teachers: Right, those are animals, and in this story, they are acting like people, aren't they? In fact, you couldn't see how the words *Tortoise* and *Hare* are spelled, but they have capital letters. Why do you think that is?

Student B: They are the animals' names.

Teacher: Yes, so we have the Tortoise and the Hare. Did you hear the names of any things?

Student C: I heard *race* and *sun*.

Teacher: Yes, those are things. Did you hear any places?

Student A: I heard *the finish line*.

Teacher: Do you remember where the Hare lay down?

Student B: He lay down on the wayside.

Teacher: Excellent! You listened so well. We have remembered the names of the animals and some things and some places. We call words that name people—in this story, animals—and places and things *nouns*. That is probably a new word for you. A noun names a person, a place, or a thing. Write the nouns from today's story in your notebook and then title that page "Nouns." Can you say "noun"?

Tier Three: Naming the Idea

Teacher: Let's review. What nouns did you hear in the story?

Student A: I heard the Hare, the Tortoise, the sun, the wayside, and the finish line.

Student B: I heard *ran*.

Teacher: Let's look at the nouns we've found so far: the sun, the hare, the tortoise, the wayside, and the finish line. What do they all have in common?

Student B: I don't know. I guess they are all things in the story.

Teacher: Yes! They are all things in the story. What kind of things?

Student B: Maybe they are all hot?

Teacher: Oh, that's interesting. I imagine the finish line could feel hot to the touch. So all the things have a temperature?

Student B: Yeah.

Teacher: OK, that makes sense. Let's think about the word you mentioned. You said *ran*. Can *ran* have a temperature?

Student B: No.

Teacher: So *ran* seems to be a different kind of thing, then.

Student C: What kind of thing is *ran*, then?

Teacher: Well, let's think about other words like it. What about *walk*, *run*, and *eat*—what do all three words have in common?

Student A: We do them at lunch time.

Teacher: Yes! They are all things you do, or actions.

Student B: Oh, yeah, *ran* is a verb!

Teacher: That's right. *Ran* is a verb and not a noun. It is a different kind

of thing than a noun. Nouns name people (animals), places, and things, while verbs tell what the noun is doing.

Tier Four: Generating the Idea

Teacher: What nouns did you hear in the story?

Student A: hare, sun, and tortoise.

Teacher: Excellent! Let's think about other nouns that are not in the story. Look around the room and out the window. Let's go around the room, and everyone will say the name of a noun that you see. Don't repeat what someone else said.

Student A: clouds.

Student B: A fence.

Teacher: Write as many nouns as you can think of in your notebook and title the page "Nouns."

What Just Happened?

The first thing you noted was probably that the teacher spoke with her students in four tiers. These are the formal key to the grammar discussion, so let's take a close look at them.

The Four Tiers from the Students' Perspective:

Tier One: Meeting the Idea:

The student becomes aware of the idea and plays with it but is not yet aware that he is doing so. He thinks about nouns and with nouns and intuitively

knows what makes words within that category alike, but he could not yet tell you what unites them. He simply intuits the likeness of the things in the category. At the end, the teacher describes the likeness but does not expect the student to show understanding of the likeness yet.

Tier Two: Seeing the Idea:

The student comes to see why the things are alike in kind. She understands that her grandmother, the post office, and a tree belong to the same category because they are all people, places, or things. Thus, when the teacher asked, “Did you hear the names of any things?” the student replied, “I heard *race* and *sun*.” At the end of this tier, the teacher names the kind.

Tier Three: Naming the Idea:

The student knows the name for the idea he has encountered. He can not only intuit that the things are alike and understand what makes them alike but also correctly name that category. You’ll note that the latter step is the easiest one in the process for the student and be tempted to skip tier one and two and simply name the part of speech, but doing so will lead to errors down the road. If you do not skip tiers one and two, then a student who misnames a noun will have only forgotten the word *noun*, not misunderstood what a noun is.

Thus, when the teacher asked, “What *nouns* did you hear in the story?” the student replied, “I heard the Hare, the Tortoise, the sun, the wayside, and the finish line.” In this tier, the student should also be able to say that the thing is a noun when given the type. For instance, the teacher might ask, “What part of speech is *hare*?” and the student should be able to say “Noun.” The student should be able to identify both ways before proceeding to tier four.

Tier Four: Generating the Types:

The student now understands what the thing is to such a degree that she can name other things in that category without being told them.

When the teacher said, “Everyone will say the name of a noun that you see,”

each student responded with a noun that wasn't in the text. This is a middle stage, moving from identifying a noun in the text to drawing one from one's mind. Thus, those students who had mastered the lesson were able to draw nouns from their memories or imaginations when the teacher asked, "Can you tell me the names of any nouns that you can remember or imagine?"

The Four Tiers from the Teacher's Perspective:

Tier One: Gathering types

In order for the student to meet the idea, the teacher gathers types for the student to encounter. She does this by asking questions to which the answer is an example of the kind of thing. This invites the student to say the words that the teacher wants him to encounter. For example, if the teacher wants the student to understand nouns, she will first ask questions that prompt the students to say people, places, or things. At the end of tier one, the teacher describes the likeness but does not expect the student to understand it yet. Having prepared the students for the discussion, the teacher presents the part of speech in its natural habitat.

The teacher asked preparatory questions and read the fable. Your primary goal in tier one is to determine whether your students are ready for the fable. For example, if they don't know what a tortoise or a hare is, you do them a service by discussing them ahead of time to avoid confusion while you read.

Tier Two: Leading toward Naming

Once the student's attention has been drawn to the idea, the teacher leads the student toward awareness of the idea. The teacher helps the student see what all the things have in common— why they belong to the group, not only that they belong. So in the case of nouns, the student should see that all members of the group are people, places, or things. Students show that they understand by identifying the part of speech when they hear it described. Once your students show that they understand it, you name the part of speech. By doing so you connect the name to the thing. This ends tier two.

Instruct your student to identify and generate the part of speech based on its description. Then name the part of speech.

At the beginning of tier two, the teacher asked, “Did you hear the names of any animals in the story?” At the end, she said, “A noun names a person, a place, or a thing.”

Tier Three: Leading toward identifying by name

Instruct your students to identify the part of speech based on its name.

To risk redundancy: When the teacher asked, “What *nouns* did you hear in the story?” the student replied, “I heard the Hare, the Tortoise, the sun, the wayside, and the finish line.”

Tier Four: Leading toward generating by name

Instruct your students to generate the part of speech based on its name.

To risk redundancy: When the teacher said, “Everyone say the name of a noun that you see,” each student responded with a noun that wasn’t in the text. Thus, those students who had mastered the lesson were able to draw nouns from their memories or imaginations when the teacher asked, “Can you tell me the names of any nouns that you can remember or imagine?”

Some key words

While this might seem a little persnickety, we are using a few words very precisely in order to simplify. We hope it doesn’t create confusion.

- Your students *identify* when they find an example of a part of speech in the sentences.
- Your students *generate* when they draw an example of a part of speech out of their memory or imagination. When you ask your students to produce examples outside the text, they can do so.

- As the teacher, you *describe* when you indicate the part of speech by telling what it does or is made of (e.g., person, place, or thing; action word; replacement word for a noun; etc.). Each part of speech has a specific and sensory description, which we provide to ensure that a common language is used consistently. If you know other ways to describe the parts of speech, do not let our descriptions limit you.
- As the teacher, you *name* when you indicate the part of speech by the name assigned to it (e.g., noun, verb, pronoun, etc.).

Some Things to Keep in Mind

The tiers are not stages of a lesson. You'll want to remember this because in a sense they do reveal a *learning sequence* for the student but not necessarily a *lesson sequence* for you.

Things Before Names

We mentioned above how the thing must precede its name. For this reason, ensure that frequent encounters and repeated descriptions of the parts of speech precede their names. The descriptions are more specific, vivid, and memorable to your students and they connect directly to their experience. Encounters and descriptions make the term meaningful to your students and remove it from a checklist to be learned, quizzed, and forgotten. It also increases your students' linguistic sensibility.

If your students have not yet heard of a part of speech by name, they have nevertheless heard and used it many times. This gives them what we have called a *poetic knowledge* of the part of speech, which is far more important than knowing the name.

“The Readiness is All!”*

Each tier represents what we call a level of readiness. *The Tapestry* is a mastery-based program, and your students can only master what they are ready

* William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.2.

to master. Throughout what follows, we continually highlight the importance of your students' readiness to master the next skill. A tier one student is ready for the tier one skills and so on for all four tiers.

For tier one students, the part of speech is a new idea. While they will have heard nouns and verbs and pronouns in normal everyday use, they may never have had their attention drawn to them as a distinct kind of word. They will have used them, but they may be unaware that they have done so. They do not know that we have names for these things, and they are not able to identify one if it is described. Such students are ready to encounter the part of speech. Your role as teacher is to present the part of speech in its natural habitat.

When your students encounter the part of speech attentively, they are ready for tier two. Tier two students have encountered the part of speech. They are ready to hear it described meaningfully and thus to identify or generate examples. When they can do that, they are ready to hear the name of the part of speech.

When they hear the name, they are ready for tier three. Tier three students will have heard the part of speech named, so they are ready to practice identifying it by name. For instance, they have heard that animals are nouns, so they can tell you that a cat is a noun. They can also accomplish the reverse: If you ask for examples of nouns, they can provide examples. When they can provide examples of the part of speech when asked by name and they can identify a specific example as a member of that part of speech, they are ready for tier four.

Tier four students will have been asked to identify examples of the part of speech by name and are ready to generate it under the name. For instance, they might identify their dog at home as a noun or the running of their friends at recess as a verb. When they can generate the part of speech by name, they have attained a mastery of the part of speech suited to level one (first or second grade) students.

Keep in mind that the changes between the tiers can seem quite simple to us as adults, but to the level one student, they are much larger.

The Sequence of Presentation

Mode of Imitation

Having completed a narration or dictation, you transition from the text to the grammar discussion by engaging your students in a normative discussion about the story.

Normative Discussion

A normative discussion turns on questions at the heart of the story and precedes analysis. Every story centers on a main character who has to make a decision. A normative question asks students what they would do in that situation or what they think the main character ought to do. Each character in a story will have significant decisions to make. Asking your students for their opinions draws them into the heart of the character and thus of the story.

Grammar Discussion in Tiers

After the normative discussion, which should be brief, you proceed to the grammar discussion itself by asking tiered questions about that chapter's part of speech as it appears in the text. Your students attend to your questions, respond, and, when they are ready, identify or generate parts of speech. In addition to the hypothetical discussion above, you will find example questions in each exercise in the main body of this text. Those examples are not meant to be exhaustive, and they are not intended as a script.

After your students respond, you evaluate their responses. When they are correct, you affirm them. The correct response indicates that your student is ready for the next specified piece of information: usually a description of or a name for the part of speech (e.g., “word that replaces a noun” is a description; “pronoun” is a name).

You should repeat these descriptions and names frequently as you proceed

through the tiers since they are the two chambers of the heart of the lesson. For example, at the beginning of tier two you describe the part of speech concretely but do not name them. Instead, you call nouns “persons, places, or things” and verbs “action words.” At the end of tier two, you present the name of the part of speech. From that point on, you should freely move back and forth between descriptions and names (repetition is good and pleasant when it is suited to students’ needs). Every exercise follows this pattern regardless of which mode of imitation it uses.

Three Challenges That the Tiers Resolve

Teaching can be tidier with only one student, but the magic of the tiers becomes even more vivid when you have multiple students. Though three challenges inevitably arise from teaching multiple students, the tiers handle them all:

1. Not all of your students will learn at the same pace, no matter how much we might try to force them. The tiers enable students to learn at their own pace.
2. Your students won’t all begin each exercise at the same level of readiness. The tiers enable you to teach your students at their level of readiness.
3. You teach all of your students at the same time even though they vary widely in their levels of mastery (this is perhaps the most difficult challenge). The tiers enable you to teach a wide range of students at the same time using the same materials.

How can this be? Let’s look at each challenge individually.

How Do the Tiers Enable Students to Learn at Their Own Pace?

The key to each of these solutions is that you can and frequently will teach all four tiers in each exercise. Not every student is ready to move to tier three or four at the same time; one student might reach tier four in the second or third week while another might reach it in the second year. This is one of the main reasons for the tiers—they give your students a place to locate themselves. Students can learn at their own pace because they slide naturally into the tier they are ready for simply by answering the questions they are ready to answer.

For example, students who can identify a noun when they hear it described will sit next to students who can identify one by name. One will answer to the description and the other to the name. Each of them will self-pace by answering the questions they know the answers to. Furthermore, as the teacher you will repeat the descriptions frequently before you name the part of speech. We have deliberately emphasized the encounter and the description while slowing down the naming of the part of speech. This creates a space for reflection and receptivity, allowing them to absorb the name when they are ready.

If any students are not ready to respond to any of your questions, they can either focus on the portion of the lesson they are able to complete or they can listen in on the rest of the exercise. Either of these options works, largely because the exercises are short (and, of course, involve a lot of repetition in context). Even when students are not ready for the next tier, they can benefit from hearing what teachers and other students say. This is one of the great lessons homeschool parents have learned!

You may find that you have students ready for all four tiers—some for tier one, some for tier two, and so on. If that happens, give each tier equal weight. Each student will proceed as far as he is able. It is important to note that students do not need to know which tier they have mastered. They don't even need to know that there are tiers. Their attention should be on the exercise itself: your questions, the text, and their responses. There is no gong that announces the move from one tier to another, nor do students wear different colored jerseys or ties based on the tier they've reached. You simply ask questions to each student based on your best assessment of their readiness.

How Do the Tiers Enable You to Teach to Their Level of Readiness?

- 1. The tiers offer you four entry points to begin any exercise.*

Since students learn at their own pace, you might anticipate another problem: Where do I begin each lesson if I intend to teach all of them at their level of

readiness? But that is precisely the purpose and nature of the tiers! Since your students can't be outside the four tiers, you will determine which one is the best to start with by noting what your students were able to accomplish in the previous exercise (i.e., which tier were they able to master?).

If you are unsure where to begin, begin with tier one. If you know your students have all mastered one or two tiers, begin with the tier they are ready for. You do not need to begin every grammar discussion with the first tier. Your students will guide you by how they reply to your questions. If you determine that it is best to begin at tier one, you can provide an example (e.g., write a sentence that includes the part of speech) or an illustration (e.g., act out the part of speech, provide a model, etc.; you'll see ways to do this in the exercises provided). If you judge that your students are ready to begin at tier two, ask your students to identify the part of speech based on its description. To begin at tier three, you can ask them to identify the part of speech by name, and to begin at tier four, you can call upon them to generate the part of speech based on its name.

2. The tiers also guide your responses to your students in the middle of the discussion.

To put it briefly, you can tier up if they're ready and tier down if they're not. This approach is very forgiving. If you find your students aren't as ready as you had anticipated, you can simply move back a tier or even two. You won't cause any harm as long as you adapt to what your students reveal to you. That is one reason each exercise guide includes all four tiers. You have them if you need them, but you do not necessarily need to go through all of them every time.

If you begin at too high a tier or if your students are not ready to proceed to the next tier (e.g., if they cannot identify or generate a part of speech when called upon), return to the tier they are ready for. Can they hear action words when you read to them but not identify them when you describe them? Present more types and remind them that they are called action words. Do this as many times as necessary. Can they identify a verb when you call it an action word, but not if you call it a verb? Go back to tier two, present additional verbs, and repeat the description. Can they identify a verb by name but not generate one? Go back one tier and ask them to identify more verbs. Sometimes you

may want to take an intermediate step: Ask them to identify verbs that are not in the text and not yet in their minds but can be seen around them. In short, if they are unable to accomplish what the tier asks of them, let them dwell in the previous tier as long as needed.

On the other hand, whenever a given tier is easy for your students, tier up with joy. Can they easily identify a pronoun by its description? Tell them its name. Can they easily identify a conjunction by name? Ask them to give you examples. And rejoice at their growth!

3. The tiers offer you exit points to end any exercise.

If you find that the whole group has reached the limit of their readiness, are too young, or you run out of time, stop where you are. The tiers provide options for when to stop. Remember that they are not laws or techniques that you have to follow regardless of circumstances and that they are not stages students need to be forced through.

As you become increasingly skilled in your application of the tiers, you will find you can play around with the format to benefit your students. For example, you can ask one student to identify a noun by description and another to do so by name. The students wouldn't know that you are asking them questions from different tier levels. To add spice, you could add some more types or examples, which takes you back to tier one, thus joining students from three different levels (at least) into the conversation.

How Do the Tiers Enable You to Teach a Wide Range of Students at the Same Time?

Because your students learn at their own pace, you teach based on their readiness, and the four tiers are always available to you, you are able to teach a wide range of readiness levels at the same time.

Teaching students with a wide range of readiness is normally a problem when you can't discuss the concepts with all of them together. However, the presence

of the tiers converts that problem into an opportunity. Because of the tiers, it does not matter whether the students are learning the same specific thing at the same time.

The content is the same for all your students, but the questions you ask will vary slightly. That enables you to talk with them all at the same time while frequently repeating essential points, reviewing, and asking students who are ready for them questions from higher tiers.

As indicated above, if any students are not ready to respond to any of your questions, they listen to the rest of the exercise or attend to the portion they are learning. Students who reach tier two but are not ready for tier three or four will listen to the discussion but will not yet need to participate.

Benefits

The exercises look far more rigid on paper than they are in experience. The grammar discussions will vary in length, but they are short, sometimes as little as five minutes. This secures a number of significant benefits:

- You recognize students' level of readiness easily because of your questions and their responses.
- If necessary, you adapt your instruction to each student, but the repetition minimizes the need for such adaptations.
- The short, integrated nature of the discussions reduces distractions caused by grades and social stigmas and enables students to attend to the exercise knowing it will all come around again.
- You judge the students' readiness (i.e., which tier they have reached) by the questions they are able to answer. You'll have a general sense based on which chapters and exercises they've completed. Then you find out what they are able to do in each lesson by directly asking questions as outlined in the exercises. If it's easy for them, tier up. If they get stuck, tier down.

With prayer, and with fear and trembling, we offer *The Tapestry* for the fostering of your students' divine participation in language. May it lead them to blessing and manifest the glory of God through them.

***Narration
and
Dictation Exercises***

CHAPTER 1

Nouns

EXERCISE 1

— *Narration* —

Grammar Concept: nouns

Skills: attention, memory, creative expression

Invitation: Have you ever seen a hare? What is a tortoise? Do you know any facts about hares and tortoises?

Read the following passage aloud to your students.

The Tortoise and the Hare

A Hare, one day, made fun of the short legs and slow pace of the Tortoise, who replied, laughing, “You might be swift as the wind, but I will beat you in a race.” The Hare, believing the Tortoise to be speaking nonsense, agreed to the plan to race against each other. They asked the Fox to set the race course and mark the finish line.

Stop here and instruct one student to express this part of the story in his own words.

Ask another student if any parts or details of the story were left out.

Ask another student or multiple students to tell back the story.

Ask optional questions such as: Who do you think will win the race? Will the race be fair?

Read the rest of the story.

On the day of the race, the two started together. The Tortoise did not stop, even for a moment, but went on at a steady pace to the finish line. The Hare, thinking he had lots of time because he was so fast a runner, lay down by the wayside and fell asleep. Waking up, he set off at a fast pace, but when he reached the finish line, he was surprised to see that the Tortoise was already there, napping comfortably in the sun.

Ask a student to express this part of the story in her own words.

Ask another student if any parts or details of the story were left out.


Ask another student or multiple students to tell back the story.

Divide the group into pairs and ask the students to tell each other the entire story.

Optional activity: Choose Three students to act out the story.

Discuss: Were you surprised that the tortoise won? Should the hare have taken a nap? How do you think the hare felt when he saw the tortoise had won the race?

GRAMMAR

 **Note to teacher:** When the questions below require answers from the story, it is more important that the students say a correct word for the part of speech than that they say the exact word in the passage. Thus, if students say “swimming” instead of “swim” or “swam,” that is acceptable.

Discussion

For those students who are new to the concept of a noun:

Tier One:

Questions: Have you ever seen animals race? Can you imagine other animals racing? What animals?

Teacher Response: [Repeat the animals students name] all have something in common. They are all things.

For those students who heard you say “thing”:

Tier Two:

Question: What are the things in this story?

Possible Student Responses: hare, day, fun, legs, pace, tortoise, wind, race, nonsense, plan, other, fox, race course, finish line, moment, time, wayside, sun

Teacher Response: Yes, *x*, *y*, and *z* are all called nouns. Nouns name things.

For those students who have been made aware of the name *noun*:

Tier Three:

Question: What nouns did you hear in the story?

Teacher Response: Yes, *x*, *y*, and *z* are nouns. Words that name a thing are called nouns.

For those students who have identified names of things when prompted to identify a noun or are able to identify a word as a noun:

Tier Four:

Questions: What nouns are in this story? Can you tell me some other nouns? (maybe things in the classroom, out the window, etc.)

Teacher Response: Yes, *x* and *y* are nouns. Great job listing other nouns!

NOUNS: hare, day, fun, legs, pace, tortoise, wind, race, nonsense, plan, other, fox, race course, finish line, moment, time, runner, wayside, sun

EXERCISE 2

— Dictation —

Grammar Concept: nouns

Skills: attention, memorization, handwriting, spelling, vocabulary

Read the following sentence aloud to your students:

The attic was lovely.

For those who are ready, read this sentence aloud to your students:

The attic was a lovely place to play.



Note to teacher: If you choose to use the first sentence for dictation, you can still use the longer sentence for the grammar discussion.

1. Read the whole sentence once at a slow but steady pace. Do not pause after each word.
2. Ask questions about the sentence such as: What was a lovely place to play? What about an attic might be lovely? Would you want to play in an attic?
3. Read the whole sentence again.
4. Instruct your students to write what you read.
5. Instruct them to share what they have written.
6. Read the sentence again.
7. Instruct them to read what they wrote.
8. Read the entire passage again.
9. Instruct them to read what they wrote.
10. Continue repeating this process until they have written it entirely and

correctly. Check your students' work to ensure they have written it correctly. Correct errors verbally.

GRAMMAR

Discussion

For those students who are new to the concept of a noun:

Tier One:

Questions: Where do you like to play? Who do you like to play with? What do you like to play with?

Teacher Response: *X, y, and z* are all places. Circle places in the sentence you wrote.

For those students who heard “places and things”:

Tier Two:

Question: What place is in the sentence you wrote?

Possible Student Response: the attic (Students may recognize this sentence and the others in this chapter on nouns from *Little House in the Big Woods*.)

Teacher Response: Yes, *attic* is a place. We call that a noun.

For those students who have been made aware of the name *noun*:

Tier Three:

Questions: What other places are in a house? Where else might you play? What other nouns can be found in a home? Can you tell me what we call all those words?

Possible Student Response: nouns

Teacher Response: Yes, *x* and *y* are nouns. Circle the nouns in the sentence.

For those students who have identified names of persons, places, and things when prompted to identify a noun or are able to name a word as a noun:

Tier Four:

Questions: Can you tell me any nouns that are in our classroom? In your house? What nouns are in the sentence?

Possible Student Responses: attic, place

Teacher Response: Good! *X*, *y*, and *z* are nouns. All the words naming places and things are called nouns. Circle the nouns in the sentence.

NOUNS: attic, place

 **Note to teacher:** Your students may know that people, places, and things are all nouns. If they do, allow them to list people as well as places and things.