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REQUIRED BOOKS FOR THIS COURSE

You need unabridged copies of the following books:

Can You Drink the Cup? by Henri Nouwen

A Circle of Quiet by Madeleine L'Engle

Godric by Frederick Buechner

No Graven Image by Elisabeth Elliot

**‘Tis the good reader that
makes the good book.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Introduction

THE STUDENT’S GUIDE

Although the Student’s Guide is written to the student, the parent or teacher should be familiar with it. Please take some time to at least skim the contents.

The Introduction provides information on why reading and writing are important, basic writing suggestions and instructions, and ideas for expanding language arts studies (for example, a family reading/writing night). Encourage your students to refer to the Introduction throughout the year, especially the writing guidelines.

Each of the eight lessons is divided into different sections:

- **INTRODUCTION:** This includes a short biography of the author, a description of the reading selection, and things for the student to think about while reading the selection.
- **COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:** These can be used as tests if you wish but you need not do so.
- **LITERARY LESSON:** Each lesson teaches an aspect of the craft of writing through the study of a specific piece of literature.
- **WRITING EXERCISES:** The exercises give the student an opportunity to practice and learn the writing skills that have been taught.

Shorter reading selections, such as poems, essays, and short stories, are included in the Student’s Guide. Scattered throughout are additional informative articles called “Perspectives,” which provide additional historical background and literary information.

An Important Note on the Subject Matter of This Course

The works students will read for this course address several very difficult subjects. In particular:

- Frederick Buechner’s novel (Chapter 6), deals with incest, rape, and murder while painting a beautiful picture of God’s grace.
- Flannery O’Connor (Chapter 7) depicts blatant racism and physical violence in a short story about sin and grace.
- Elisabeth Elliot’s novel (Chapter 8) explores how failure and death challenge our too-small ideas about God before bringing us back to the bedrock of who He is.

Lightning Literature and Composition: American Christian Authors

As the Lesson for Chapter 6 addresses in detail, we feel these subjects are important for high school students to approach now, while they are still in their home environment, surrounded by people who love them and will help them deal with these topics. We also feel that the junior and senior years are the best time to address these subjects because most of these students are about to go out into the world. It's a good time to develop a strong and thoughtful understanding of human sin and brokenness in the light of God's power and love.

The Student Guide encourages students to keep a reading journal, and discuss the things they're reading with people they trust. We think this is particularly important with these more challenging topics. These methods of processing what they're reading provide a way for students to confront the pain, sorrow, and sin of the world and come to terms with it, rather than internalizing it and becoming cynical or depressed.

We suggest that you review the literature and lessons ahead of time, so that you can engage with your student(s) from a place of understanding as you help them process this heavy subject matter. Particularly important are:

- Chapter 6: Literary Lesson and Frederick Buechner's novel *Godric*.
- Chapter 7: Literary Lesson and Flannery O'Connor's short story "Everything That Rises Must Converge."
- Chapter 8: Literary Lesson and Elisabeth Elliot's novel *No Graven Image*.
- Perspectives: "Racism and Flannery O'Connor,"
- Epilogue: "How I Chose Eight American Christian Authors."

THE TEACHER'S GUIDE

This Teacher's Guide contains the answers to the Comprehension Questions. To make your job easier, we've also included the Schedules, Writing Exercises, Discussion Questions, and Project Suggestions from the Student's Guide. If you are not enrolled with Hewitt, we hope you will find the grading tips and templates useful.

Grading Tips

Grading English papers can seem confusing and overwhelming. Especially if you feel insecure about your own writing, you may not feel qualified to judge someone else's, even your own child's. Grading papers is certainly more challenging than grading a math test. There are many aspects to judge (content, flow, organization, style, grammar, etc.), and you have no answer key by your side.

If you asked a hundred English teachers how to grade an English paper, you'd probably get a hundred different answers. Nevertheless, most of those answers would have some commonalities. Here is my take on these common factors. (I first address nonfiction papers; afterwards I provide some special considerations for poetry.)

NONFICTION

Content and Focus

The paper should address the topic the assignment details, no more or less. For example, if an assignment asks the student to write a paper on one of Benjamin Franklin's pursuits, a paper that discusses his roles as inventor, statesman, and writer is unacceptable.

When you've finished the paper, you should either be able to choose one sentence from the paper that summarizes its topic, or you should be able to summarize the topic in your own words in one sentence. Look for sentences or even whole paragraphs that stray from the point.

Organization and Flow

Not only should the paper have a clear focus: each paragraph, and indeed each sentence, should have its own focus. Each sentence of the paper should flow naturally to the next. And each paragraph should establish one point in an orderly chain of reasoning that leads the reader to the paper's conclusion. If you do not see how one leads to the next, if you feel jarred back and forth as if you're riding a bucking bronco, there is a problem. A paper can be organized along any number of lines—most general to most specific, most specific to most general, chronological, etc. There are too many possibilities to list here, but the point is that you should be able to identify an order that makes sense.

One special case of organization is the comparison/contrast paper. Here there are two standard methods. The first is to provide all information about the first subject (using however many paragraphs are necessary), then to move on to the second subject and give it full due (and roughly as much coverage as the first subject). The second possibility is to focus each paragraph on a particular topic of comparison between the two subjects, discussing the subjects fully then moving on to the next thing.

Lightning Literature and Composition: American Christian Authors

For example, in a paper comparing dogs and cats as pets, I could spend two paragraphs discussing various aspects of dogs then two paragraphs discussing those same aspects in cats.

Alternatively, I could spend a paragraph discussing how expensive dogs and cats are to acquire and maintain, then write a paragraph on common problems with dogs and cats, then a paragraph on their advantages as pets, etc.

Another special case is the literary essay. Rather than moving in a linear fashion from an introduction through body paragraphs to a conclusion, a literary essay tends to spiral: moving forward but also returning to touch repeatedly on the same themes in slightly different ways. This is covered in more detail in the section on structure in the Literary Lesson for Lesson 4.

Introduction and Conclusion

All papers should begin with an introduction. This introduction needs to introduce the paper's topic and tone. It also should make you want to read the paper. All papers should end with a conclusion. The conclusion should not just restate what the paper just said (unless the paper is quite long—at least 7 pages); instead, it should wrap things up with a bang. Ideally the conclusion should make one final, interesting point, while sticking to the topic.

Grammar and Mechanics

Hopefully, this is what you will feel most comfortable grading. If you are unclear about the rules for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, etc., there is no easy fix. Don't feel you need to be able to diagram a sentence or know what a gerund is, though. If you are familiar with correct sentence structure, know (at least most of) the rules for commas, and can tell your homophones apart, you'll probably do well. If you're feeling rusty, there are many websites (or many books in your local library) that can help you brush up on these topics.

Style

This is one of the trickiest parts of grading. Sometimes you will encounter sentences that are, strictly speaking, grammatically correct but that are awkward or unwieldy. The most common culprit here is verbiage. When you find yourself stumbling over a sentence, see if there is a way to rewrite the same thought with fewer words. Sometimes you'll see words that can simply be struck to leave a cleaner result. Other times you'll have to reword the whole sentence.

Citation of Sources

This is only an issue with a paper involving research. (Note that sometimes papers that aren't strictly "research papers" also involve research, and these considerations apply to them as well.)

Grading Tips

Determine ahead of time what sort of citations you expect from your student (parenthetical citations, footnotes, endnotes), and review the requirements together. When grading the paper, be sure all the citations that need to be there are, and that they are properly formatted. Also be sure the bibliography is correctly formatted.

POETRY

The Assignment

Be sure all aspects of the assignment have been correctly addressed in the paper (unless you have a previous agreement that the student need not do this). For example, if an assignment requires a poem that includes examples of alliteration, assonance, metaphor and simile, be sure all these aspects are present.

Content

Just as with prose, a poem should be about something, and the poem should consistently address whatever its topic is. Sometimes students will veer from the poem's topic in order to satisfy the demands of rhyme. Gently correct this and encourage the student to rewrite that section, satisfying both rhyme pattern and content.

Grammar and Mechanics

Here we encounter the phrase “poetic license”—poems can be much freer with grammar and mechanics. However, that freedom should always be with a reason. Unconventional grammar, capitalization, and punctuation alone cannot make a poem.

Style

In some ways the considerations for style are the same as for prose. There should be no excess words, no flabby writing. But the syntax of poetry is quite different from that of prose, so phrases that would be awkward in prose can be fine, even admirable, in poetry. This is not always the case though. Trust your ear and discuss with your student any sections that seem off.

Checklists

CHECKLIST FOR NONFICTION PAPERS

Content

- Does the paper correctly address all aspects of the assignment and nothing more?
- Can you summarize the paper's theme in a single sentence?
- Is the content accurate?

Organization

- Is there a discernible and logical method of organization?
- Does each sentence flow to the next?
- Does each paragraph flow to the next (are there transition sentences)?
- If this is a comparison/contrast paper, is each subject given roughly equal coverage?
- If this is a literary essay, does the theme appear repeatedly through the paper?

Introduction

- Does the introduction clearly state the topic (without saying something blatant like, "I am going to write about _____")?
- Does the introduction make the tone of the paper clear?
- Does the introduction make you want to read the rest of the paper?

Conclusion

- Does the conclusion wrap everything up? Do you feel like the paper has ended or has it simply stopped?
- Does the conclusion frame the ideas expressed in the paper in new language?
- Does the conclusion stick to the topic?
- Does the conclusion end with a bang? That is, does it leave a good taste in your mouth and make you want to read another paper by this author?

Grammar and Mechanics

- Are all capitalizations correct?
- Are commas where they need to be (and not where they have no place)?
- Are all apostrophes present and accounted for?
- Are all homophones used correctly?
- Are all sentences framed correctly, avoiding sentence fragments, run-on sentences, or comma splices?
- Are all sentences clear, concise, and to the point?

Grading Tips

- Is everything spelled properly?
- Are all words used correctly (regarding definition and connotation)? 7

Style

- Are all sentences written as concisely as possible without sacrificing meaning or tone?
- Is there a variety of short, medium-length, and long sentences?
- Are all paragraphs at least three sentences long?

Citations

- Are facts gleaned through research (beyond basic encyclopedia data) cited?
- Are other people's opinions and analyses cited?
- Is every book, article, website, etc., listed in the bibliography?

Format

- If required, is there a title page?
- Does the student's name appear on either the title page or header of the paper? Is all other header information present?
- Does each page have a page number (other than any title page)?
- Is the paper double-spaced?
- Are citations properly formatted?
- Is the bibliography properly formatted?
- Are any quotes in the paper properly formatted?

CHECKLIST FOR POEMS

Content

- Does the poem correctly address all aspects of the assignment?
- Can you identify what the poem is about?

Grammar and Mechanics

- Is all the grammar and punctuation correct, just as it would be for a prose piece? If it isn't, can you tell why? That is, does it add something to the poem? Are all words used correctly (regarding definition and connotation)?

Style

- Is the poem written as concisely as possible without sacrificing meaning or tone?
- Are all the words chosen as vivid and dynamic as possible?
- If the assignment requires the student to write a particular type of poem (e.g., sonnet, haiku, etc.) does the poem follow the rules of the form?

FINAL WORDS

In grading any paper, it's important not to discourage your fledgling author. You know your child best, and some children are more easily hurt by criticism than others. Take your child's personality in this regard into account. But here are some general guidelines about helpful constructive criticism:

- Don't necessarily mark everything that is wrong. A struggling writer especially can feel overwhelmed by too much correction. If your student's writing has ten basic things that need improvement, start by choosing the three that are most important to you. And try to make one of those three things something that is relatively easy to fix. (For example, it's pretty easy to learn the rules for using apostrophes, but much harder to learn all the comma rules.) As these start getting better, move on to other things. Once most of those ten basic problems have been fixed, you can start moving on to the more complex difficulties.
- Make your positive comments enthusiastic and your criticisms unemotional. Avoid expressing sarcasm, impatience, or irritation, no matter how much you may feel it.
- Avoid rewriting the paper yourself. It's fine to occasionally give an example of how to rewrite a sentence (for example, to make an awkward sentence less wordy), but remember this is not your paper, and the only way children learn to write well is by writing it themselves.
- Don't make comparisons between siblings' papers and writing skills.
- Above all, find good things to say about the paper. It's easy to only comment on the problems we see with a paper; so make it a habit to look for and mention the good things too—strong organization, an interesting topic choice, an enjoyable style, progress with a previous problem, etc. Students can learn at least as much from what they do right as what they do wrong.

Grading Templates

The following grading templates are suggestions for one way to assign a grade to your student's work using the Lightning Lit program. There are certainly many other ways of coming to a quarterly grade. Whether you need something like this or not will probably depend on how qualified you feel to grade your students' writing. Our teachers don't use templates for grading, but they have graded thousands of papers written by homeschoolers. You have read the preceding tips, which give you ideas of important points to consider when grading. Students should be challenged in their writing, but also successful in the outcome. You will want to offer constructive criticism where they haven't succeeded, but also concrete praise for where they have done good work. In other words, it's better to write, "You need to stagger your sentence length more, and have more of a punch in your topic sentences and your conclusion, but your ideas were well-organized and your content good," than to write, "Great paper! A." The first will provide a learning experience, the latter a momentary thrill. Give your students something to work on, something they can improve in the next assignment.

- The first template provides possible areas for grading various types of writing. You can adjust these as appropriate to the type of paper that has been written. Don't feel obligated to use this or any form. Do something that works for both you and your student.
- The second form provides a way to track comprehension scores. Again, this is optional, but if you are using the comprehension questions, this will give you a way to track success.
- Since we require our students to do vocabulary, we encourage you to include this in your students' study. This third form tracks the scores using any vocabulary program.
- Lastly, there's a synopsis template for assigning a quarter-end grade combining each of these three elements of your language-arts program. As with all the others, it's optional or can be adjusted as you see fit. The writing assignments are the core of the Lightning Lit program. That's why we've made them 80% of the student's grade, whereas vocabulary and comprehension sections are worth only 10% each. You may certainly decide to vary the importance of the sections as you see fit.

Make the grading process something that both you and your student can enjoy rather than dread. Our program starts with a Twain quote, so let's end here with another:

**To get the full value of joy you must have someone to divide it with.
— Mark Twain**

Use your grading as a way to divide your joy for your student's ability to share his or her thoughts on paper.