

Lightning Literature & Composition

Level Spark

Teacher's Guide

**by
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Lightning Literature Level Names & Grade Recommendations

To make it easier to select the right fit for your student, Lightning Literature levels now use descriptive names instead of grade numbers. Use this chart to find the recommended ages and grades for each level.

Original Name	New Name	Recommended grades	Recommended Ages
Grade 1	Cloud	K–2	5–8 years old
Grade 2	Spark	1–3	6–9 years old
Grade 3	Flash	2–4	7–10 years old
Grade 4	Bolt	3–5	8–11 years old
Grade 5	Thunder	4–6	9–12 years old
Grade 6	Strike	5–7	10–13 years old
Grade 7	Storm	6–8	11–14 years old
Grade 8	Tempest	7–9	12–15 years old

How to use this Teacher's Guide

Welcome to Lightning Literature Level Spark! With this series I hope to instill a love of great literature in children, to improve their writing abilities, and to prepare them for more advanced language arts concepts. The three key components to this series are literature, grammar and mechanics, and composition.

Literature

The literature in Level Spark consists of a variety of classic children's books and newer ones. The first several weeks are picture books. The last few weeks are chapter books, most covering more than one week. There are many great children's books available, and I'm sure I missed some of your favorites. Nor will your students like all these books equally. With luck, you will find some books and authors you didn't know before but are happy to meet. Of course, don't limit your students' reading this year to these books, but always continue to read whatever books they love for pleasure.

Children's abilities vary widely. Some students doing this guide won't be reading yet, or perhaps not reading at the level of all these books, and reading aloud to your students is always permissible in this series. Some students will have moved beyond these books, but you may still find that reading these books with the questions and lessons that go along with them improves students' literary skills and comprehension.

Books that are covered in one week (for example, all the picture books), you will read at least twice with your students – on Day One and Day Three. Day Two is an optional reading day (and of course you can always reread a book as much as you want.) You can read the book to your students or they can read it to themselves or aloud – this depends on their reading level, their interest, your choice, etc. You can also take different approaches to this on different days.

You will read the chapter books in sections, Day One through Day Three or Day Four, rather than rereading sections. This guide also includes four chapters on poetry, and those weeks the poems are read three times, Day One through Day Three.

All readings include comprehension questions in the teacher's guide. I provide the answers in the teacher's guide after each question. (Note that my answers are not always complete sentences. I do not require students to always answer in complete sentences when having an oral discussion, as we don't always talk that way.) Depending on your students' comprehension levels, you can ask the questions as you read through the text (i.e., immediately after reading the pertinent page) or altogether at the end of the reading. If students are reading to themselves, have them complete the reading then do the questions together.

Throughout this series, but especially in the early years, I urge teachers and parents to use comprehension questions as a tool to improve reading comprehension rather than a test of it. Children are still learning to attend fully to books, and these questions can help them learn to focus on their reading in a more mature manner. If a student is stressed because they are afraid they will answer the questions wrong, their focus and love of reading will decrease rather than increase.

Grammar and Mechanics

I have grouped grammar, punctuation, capitalization, parts of speech, sentence diagramming, and even occasional literary concepts under the umbrella term “grammar and mechanics.” The student work text contains basic instruction and examples. But I have written the instructions higher than second-grade reading level, so always read the instructions with your students, and be sure they understand them before having them complete the page. If your student is not writing yet or struggles with handwriting, it's fine for the student to dictate the answers to you. The teacher's guide contains more detailed instruction when needed and answers to the workbook pages.

Grammar and mechanics are reviewed frequently in the student work text. Sometimes multiple concepts are addressed in one review worksheet. As with all aspects of learning, students vary widely in how easily these concepts will stick with them. Remember that your primary goal is for students to love language arts. Don't risk impeding that to ensure an understanding of periods or pronouns by the end of the year. I will review these concepts in later levels in this series as I build on them, so there is plenty of time. Often something will click easily with a student only a year later that they couldn't understand when it was first introduced.

Correspondingly, unless you have a student who wants grades, I recommend avoiding letter or percentage grades on the workbook pages (or any aspect of this course). Do show students what they missed on the workbook questions and review the missed questions together so they understand the problem. But use them as tools to reinforce the concepts and check your students' understanding, rather than a judgment on their performance.

If a student is not understanding a concept, rather than forcing them to do the workbook pages on their own, work on them together as a teaching tool. Some lessons (for example, the lesson on common and proper nouns) assume a previous exposure to the subject. If your students used the Lightning Literature Level Cloud course, they will have had this exposure. But if students have not had this exposure, the lesson may be too cursory for them on their own. In that case – or if a student has previously struggled with this concept – feel free to work closely with them to provide a more thorough understanding. Throughout this guide I give suggestions for helping a struggling student, for providing additional review of concepts, and for providing extra challenge.

I have tried to create exercises that relate to the reading (by using sentences from the reading, that summarize the reading, or that give additional information about the author) whenever possible. Sometimes, I was unable to rise to this challenge and have instead opted for the more usual generic sentences.

Composition

The composition portion of this course should, as with all aspects, be tailored to your students' levels. Some students will only be writing (or dictating) a sentence, while others will be ready for a paragraph or a whole story. You may have a student who can dictate a book but barely wants to write a sentence. Come to an agreement about balancing these things – perhaps every third lesson they will write their composition themselves and the others they will dictate. Or you can allow them to dictate everything. The choice is yours.

The composition assignments cover a variety of writing aspects – creative writing, essays of all sorts (descriptive, personal, opinion, etc.), research papers, poems, etc. Again, you want to make this an enjoyable experience for students while also starting to push them towards quality work. Work closely with them on the compositions (unless they ask you not to). At the end, stress what they did well in the composition then discuss together how it might be improved.

COMPOSITION NOTEBOOK: The student will need lined composition pages. We have provided masters for 7/8-, 5/8-, and 1/2-inch ruled lines (to be used according to each student's ability) in the back of this Teacher's Guide which you can copy and collect in a three-ring binder. You may wish to purchase composition books. Another option is finding a website that has lined paper of various ruled lines free to print.

Tailoring This Course to Your Needs

These three things – literature, grammar and mechanics, and composition – are the core of this class. Regardless of your students' ability or interest, I urge you to complete, at least in some fashion, all those portions of the class.

The following portions are optional.

READING JOURNAL PAGES: Pages are in the Student Workbook each week for the student's response to the book. Students are to summarize the book ("What this story is about"), write a one-sentence opinion of the book ("What I think of this story"), and write a favorite line from the book ("My favorite sentence"). The summary is an excellent skill to develop, and the opinion and favorite line make for a great keep-sake. This can also be some printing practice for students who aren't yet ready to handwrite an entire composition. But these pages are not central to the program, so you can skip them if you wish.

DICTIONARY PAGES/WORD COLLECTION: On Day Three of each week, I ask students to put five to ten words in their dictionary pages (these are located in the back of the Student Workbook) or their word collection (this is explained in Lesson 1). The aim of this is to increase and reinforce vocabulary. These words can come from their reading for this class, for other classes, outside reading, or their daily life. However, this can be optional, especially if you're working with a systematic vocabulary program and don't want to overwhelm your students.

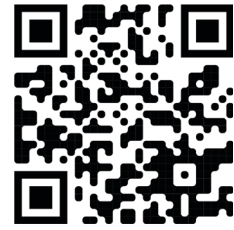
SENTENCE PUZZLES AND EXTRA DIAGRAMMING: Rather than the usual grammar pages, Day Three of each week has a sentence puzzle or extra sentence diagramming. These help to improve students' sentence structure.

WINNIE-THE-POOH AND JUST SO STORIES: For the first twenty weeks the literary lesson on Day Four is to read half a chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. I also provide a few questions about the reading each week, including predictive questions for the first halves of the chapters. After that I assign a chapter most weeks from *Just So Stories*. The second book is much more challenging reading than the first – the sentence structure and vocabulary are at a much higher level – but it's valuable to provide students with literature that stretches them.

EXTENDING THE LESSON: These are meant for the more advanced student or for when any student is particularly excited by the reading or any of the extension ideas. They allow students to explore a book or its concepts in more depth, and can provide ways to extend the lesson into other areas such as science, history, and art.

SPELLING: Weekly spelling lists and worksheets are available at hewittresources.org.

WORKSHEETS: Additional worksheets relating to grammar and composition are available, for free, at hewittresources.org. You can filter by categories “Lightning Lit” and the appropriate grade level on the left-hand side of the page.



COMPOSITION: If the amount of composition is too much for your students, it is fine to pick and choose those you prefer.

Preparing for the Week

Before the week begins, read the book if you are unfamiliar with it. Read the questions and mark any that you do not want to ask your students. If you are asking your students questions as you read (rather than at the end of the reading), note the page numbers where you wish to ask the questions. (I did not include page numbers because there are different editions of these books, and some are found in compilations.)

If you think a certain grammar aspect may be difficult for your students, consider adding this guide’s suggestions for further work. You can also find worksheets in other books or on the web. Mark which optional projects you think would most interest your students or that you think would most reinforce the learning.

Gather any materials you need. The basics for this course rarely require extra materials, but if you plan on doing the lesson extensions you will likely need more. If you plan on reading other books by the same author, preview the books before reading them to your students.

Below are additional notes for each day.

Day One

Literature

For the picture books (the first 21 weeks of this class) on Day One of each week, you will ask literal and inferential comprehension questions about the reading. Literal questions are those that can be answered with information taken directly from the book. Inferential questions are those that require students to understand something not directly stated in the text, and they tend to be more difficult.

Because chapter books are read only once, questions pertain to those chapters read on Day One, and can be of any type (literal, inferential, evaluative, or predictive). The types of questions asked about the poems will vary depending on the lesson. More detail on these is in each poetry lesson.

Grammar and Mechanics

When a new grammar and mechanics topic is introduced, the first exercises are usually multiple choice, “fill in the blank,” or matching. This gives students a gentle introduction to the new ideas. In some cases a more rudimentary idea is introduced on Day One then built on throughout the week. For example, on Day One, I introduce alphabetizing by the first letter of words, then on Day Two students learn what to do when words begin with the same letter.

Composition

The first composition assignment for each paper is usually to brainstorm a topic for the paper and sometimes subtopics as well. For example, if the assignment is to write a paper about a friend, the student would need to choose which friend to write about (topic) and perhaps three things to say about that friend (subtopics).

Day Two

Literature

For the first 21 weeks, on Day Two you can choose whether to read the book again.

From Week 22 on, chapter books are read in portions on Day One through Day Three until the book is finished. Poems are also read every day on Day One through Day Three.

For picture books, Day Two is **Narration Day** (whether you choose to read the book today or not). Have students retell as much of the book as they can remember. (If you are going to read the book again today, do this before reading it again.) Once they have done that, discuss the book together. Chapter books also have a Narration Day after the book is finished. There is no Narration Day for poems.

There are two goals to this step. The first is to recall as many details of the book as possible. For each book, the teacher's guide provides details in the following areas: **Story, Character, Setting, External Details, Internal Details, and Conflict**. For chapters book, the teacher's guide also discusses **Theme**.

Story is what happens in the story. This should not include every detail of what happens, just a one- or two-line summary is fine. For example, the story of Cinderella could be summarized as “A young woman is mistreated by her step-mother and step-sisters because she is more beautiful than they are. But with the help of her fairy godmother she ends up marrying the Prince.”

Character includes a description of the main character(s) (physical and personality). When a student names some aspect of a character's

Story

Character

personality, a terrific next question often is, “How do you know the character is _____?” This prompts the student to tell you what detail from the book tells us the character is friendly, funny, smart, etc. This both allows you to better evaluate the student’s understanding of the reading and develops the habit in students of supporting their opinions with evidence from the material (a crucial, life-long reading skill). Also, character sometimes (though not always in books at this level) includes how the character changes over the course of the story.

.....
Setting is where and when the story happens.

Setting

.....
External Details are any pertinent details of the story that aren’t captured in any of the other summaries. For example, minor characters, cause-effect, and order of events.

External Details

.....
Internal Details are emotions and other feelings the main character experiences that aren’t permanent parts of their personality. For example, the character might be a normally happy person who is sad for some reason during the story.

Internal Details

.....
Conflict includes telling what the character wants, what keeps the character from getting it, and what the character does to overcome the obstacle.

Conflict

.....
Theme is the author’s message, the underlying meaning or moral of the story.

Theme

.....
 At this point, the goal is **not** to introduce various technical terms to students (conflict, setting, etc.). If students are ready for it, and you want to drop those words casually in your discussions, that’s fine. But the goal with this section is simply to start directing students’ attention towards these aspects of the books they’re reading. Here’s how a dialogue about *Max’s Words* might profitably proceed:

Teacher: Pretend I’ve never read the book and tell me the story.

Students: It’s about a boy who collects words.

Teacher: Why does he collect words?

Students: His brothers collect coins and stamps, but they won’t share with him.

Teacher: Does he like doing it?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: How do you know?

Students: He collects a lot of them and puts them into groups. And he has fun making sentences.

Teacher: What groups does he make?

Students: He has a group of small words and a group of words that make him happy.

[Don't worry that this is an incomplete answer. Even a few details are a success at this age.]

Teacher: You said he makes sentences too. Does he do anything with those sentences?

Students: He makes a story.

Teacher: Does he tell the story to anyone?

Students: His brothers. And they like it so much they even help him.

The conversation would go on from here, but even this small example shows how easy it is to elicit information on all the categories mentioned without turning things into a quiz. The more practice a child has at conversing about books on this level, the more they will notice these details when reading and eventually bring them forth on their own when asked about a book.

The second goal for this step is almost the opposite – to come up with a single-sentence summary of the book. But, this summary should be a strong one that addresses all the central questions (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How) without extraneous detail.

The student's first summary (It's about a boy who collects words) is insufficient. Here is a better summary: "A boy named Max discovers how fun words are when he begins a collection of them because his brothers won't share their collections." There is no one right summary for any book, just work with students towards the goal of a summary that addresses the central questions. (Not all questions will apply to all stories. For example, "Where?" is not a pertinent question to *Max's Words*.) A brief summary of a book – even simple books like these – is a difficult skill. Do not expect your students to master it this year. But make a habit of modeling it and shaping their summaries towards this end.

Grammar and Mechanics

On Day Two, grammar and mechanics may introduce a further step in the topic (for example, regular plurals might be introduced on Day One and one set of irregular plurals on Day Two). Some weeks, the same topic is covered on Day Two but with more challenging exercises like editing. For example, if the week's topic is capitalizing proper nouns, the assignment might be to find all the proper nouns in a passage and capitalize them.

Composition

Day Two's composition assignment is usually further brainstorming, ordering of ideas, or both. In some cases, Day Two is used for doing research or conducting an interview.

Reading Journal

Turn to the appropriate pages in the Student Workbook for the week's book. Students will write or dictate three sentences: one sentence summarizing the story, a second sentence expressing something they felt or thought about the book, and their favorite sentence from the book. For the second of these, any personal response is fine (they liked or didn't like it, the story made

them happy or sad, it made them laugh, their favorite part was such and such, they would love to meet a certain character, etc.). You can discuss the best way to form the sentences before writing them down, if you wish. Again, this reading journal is optional, and if you prefer that students focus only on the main composition, that is fine.

I've assigned this earlier in the week, trying to keep time free later in the week for composition work. You could have your student do it any time during the week. For chapter-books, wait until the book is completed.

Day Three

Literature

For the first 21 weeks, today you read the book with your students again (whether or not you read it together yesterday) and ask additional comprehension questions. As always, you can read the book aloud, students can read it aloud, or they can read it to themselves.

Today's questions, for the picture books, are more inferential questions and evaluative questions. Evaluative questions ask the child to give opinions. Sometimes these are opinions about things that happen in the story, the characters, etc. Other times they ask students to offer opinions from their own lives that relate to something in the book. For example, if a character is worried about something, the question might ask the student if they have ever worried about something and how it ended up. Because these ask for students' opinions and experiences, answers aren't given in the teacher's guide.

Please preview the evaluative questions, and don't ask any you think might upset one of your students. Every child is different, has had different experiences, etc., and a question that is innocuous to one student can be distressing to another. As there is no way for me (or any writer) to predict for this, you will have to.

Grammar and Mechanics

On Day Three, students take a break from the weekly grammar topic. Instead, they enter words in their dictionary pages or word collection and complete either a sentence puzzle or additional sentence diagramming. All these can be considered optional if the program is overwhelming for your student or if you are doing a separate vocabulary program. But neither are they busy-work, as they are particularly directed at improving vocabulary and sentence structure.

Composition

Usually, students will write their rough draft today. This need not be written in the composition book. As always, you decide whether your students handwrite, type, or dictate to you. You know what they're ready for, and what is an appropriate challenge.

Day Four

Literature

For the first twenty weeks, the literature assignment on Day Four is half a chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Each time the first half of the chapter is assigned, I give some predictive questions to ask. (Predictive questions are also included in the questions for the chapter books.) After that, I assign chapters from *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling. (There are actually 13 stories, but most editions do not publish the last one.) These books are optional, but they are a valuable addition to any child's classic literature experience.

Grammar and Mechanics

Today's grammar sometimes adds another aspect to the week's topic or provides greater challenge by assigning composition using the grammar learned that week. Some weeks I review grammar from previous lessons.

Composition

Today your students write the final draft of their paper (unless something else is specifically assigned). Students should write the final draft in the composition book. They can also add illustrations. If there is a composition a student is particularly fond of, you can also do something special with it (frame it, put covers on it to make it into its own book, etc.).

Day Five

The last day of each week is a free day. You can take a day off language arts, use the day to complete any work from earlier that was missed, add extra projects – whatever you want. This can vary from week to week.

Extending the Lesson

At any time during the week, including weekends, you can extend the lesson. You might choose to extend some lessons and not others, depending on your students' interest in the material. I give some suggestions for extending the lesson at the end of each week, but you don't have to wait until the end of the week to do extra projects. Some of these extra projects relate to language arts while others extend into other subjects (history, geography, science, art, etc.).

A Note About Sentence Diagramming

Once sentence diagramming was always taught in schools; now it is rare. While I don't believe the old ways are always better, in this case I think students have lost something. While word

choice, paragraph formation, and logical organization (to name just a few skills) are vital to good writing, the central unit of written language is the sentence.

Sentence diagramming is not merely drawing lines and repositioning words. It helps teach students the function of words in sentences. For example, although we give adjectives, articles, and possessive pronouns different names, they are often diagrammed in the same manner because they often function in the same manner – to modify a noun. In later years, students can apply sentence diagramming to sentences of authors they admire for a deeper look at why those sentences work – why they inform, delight, and inspire us.

Diagramming can be particularly helpful to students who are visual learners or those who enjoy puzzles. Try the diagramming this year – you might be surprised at how your students respond. But if they struggle with it excessively and it continues to frustrate rather than illuminate, feel free to drop those questions, even on the non-optional grammar pages.