

Lightning Literature & Composition

Level Flash

Teacher's Guide

by

Elizabeth Kamath



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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 the Lightning Literature Level Flash! 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.

Even if you have completed previous Lightning Literature programs, I recommend you read this introduction. This year has many differences from previous years.

Literature

This year is the first with only chapter books. As such, it has significantly fewer books than previous years, and almost all the books span multiple weeks. I enjoy and admire all these books, but nothing is to everyone's taste, and I'm sure some students will encounter a book or two that they simply do not like. With picture books, this was less of an issue because each title was covered in a week. With chapter books, a student could potentially spend a month on a book they do not like. I genuinely regret this, but it is the nature of writing a curriculum. There is no way to please everyone.

On the positive side, students (and teachers) may also discover new books and authors they love. My primary considerations when choosing the titles were literary quality and appropriateness for this age level (at least for read-aloud, if not always read-alone, as children vary widely in how quickly their reading ability develops). All these books demonstrate exemplary writing and contain ideas and topics of import. I also strove to find books that wouldn't be too upsetting at this age-level, though each student is different, and what will upset one will not bother another.

That said, unlike the books in Levels Cloud and Spark, some of these begin to broach difficult topics, including death. At the beginning of each week I inform you in the teacher's guide of any tricky topics covered in the week's reading. Only you can best know how to approach these ideas with your students.

This year, there are no nonfiction books. While I consider it important to read nonfiction, it is difficult to find nonfiction books for students that have literary merit. Almost all children's nonfiction is of the *Lizards of the World* type, which is great if you love lizards or need to write about lizards for a research report, but does very little to teach writing or appreciation of literature. In Levels Cloud and Spark, I was able to offer some nonfiction picture books, mostly biographies. I considered including some picture books this year, but decided to make a clean break to chapter books instead. If you find time for extra reading, I encourage you to peruse the biographies in the children's section of your local library. And don't limit yourself to people your students (or even you) already know – it's fun to find out about the lives of people new to us as well.

I have partially addressed the problem of including no nonfiction books this year by providing four sections in the grammar pages that introduce the four basic types of nonfiction writing: descriptive, expository (writing to inform or explain), persuasive, and narrative. Students will further practice these types in their composition.

I had hoped to include a weekly reading of a multicultural fairy tale with this course, but every book I found that seemed a good fit was out of print, and I don't want to burden you with finding difficult books. There are some that are in print, but considering the number that go out of print quickly, I don't have much hope for their longevity. I encourage you to go to your local library, or look for used copies of a collection of multicultural fairy and folktales online. They're fun to read and can easily be tied into geography lessons.

Daily Reading

Four days each week, I assign a certain number of chapters until the book is completed. As always, you can read aloud to your students, or students can read on their own. You can also do a combination – perhaps reading some books to your students while assigning others as read-alone. Or having the students read the day's chapters alone first, then reading through the book together while discussing the comprehension questions. Some students will be reading at a level beyond these books, but you will find that reading these books with the questions and lessons that go along with them improves your students' literary skills and comprehension.

As in Levels Cloud and Spark, I devote four weeks to poetry. Level Flash uses the same poetry compilation as Level Spark – *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*. Poems are read three days each week with different questions each day.

Comprehension Questions

Each day of reading includes comprehension questions for the chapters read that day. The questions and their answers are in the teacher's guide. (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), at the end of each chapter, or altogether at the end of the day's reading. If your students are reading to themselves, have them complete the reading then do the questions together. If you wish, for more advanced students, you can require them to write out the answers on their own rather than using these for discussion.

Questions are of various types. Some questions are literal – the answers can be found directly in the reading. Some questions are inferential. These require the student to understand something not directly stated in the text. Another type of question is evaluative. Here students are asked to provide either a judgment about something that happened in the story (“Do you think this character did the right thing?”) or to reflect on some aspect of the story in their own lives (“Have you ever felt the way this character is feeling here?”). Predictive questions ask the student to guess what will happen next in the story. This year, I introduce some questions requiring literary analysis (“What did we learn about the character from this action?”).

As with Levels Cloud and Spark, I urge you to use comprehension questions as a tool to improve reading comprehension rather than a test of it. Students 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.

Different types of questions are asked about the poems each day they're read.

Book Discussion

On the day after the last chapter of the book has been assigned, I provide help in the teacher's guide for leading a discussion of the book. This discussion can be between a teacher and one student or it can be a larger group.

The focus of a book discussion is to answer the question, "What is the author trying to say with this book, and how do they say it?" A skilled author uses story, characters, setting, and the other literary aspects to impart a message or messages (the theme(s) of the book). Skilled readers learn to uncover these messages.

I give you notes on various aspects of each book – story, characters, setting, etc. Sometimes the information is general (for example, the basic story line). Other times I focus on aspects that underscore the theme. At the end of some sections I also provide questions you can use to prompt students to see certain aspects of the text that help answer the question of what the author is trying to say and how they are saying it.

Your students may well have other ideas about the story, characters, etc. than what I have here, and that's fine. Literature isn't math – I can't give you black and white answers. This is both exciting and (to some) frustrating. **The bottom line for any assertion about a book is, can the student support what they say with the book?** For example, if a student says a character is friendly, they have to show something in the book that tells us that.

Literature is dynamic. Different people will see different things depending on their outlook, experience, personality, etc. Your students will see some unexpected things in some of these books – and what they see may tell you more about them than about the books. It's important to honor personal responses to books (authors want personal responses from their readers), but it's also important for students to learn how to analyze a story beyond just their own feelings. These discussions are part of that process.

The first aspect I cover for every story is **Theme**. Although this is the most abstract aspect, it's what these discussions are aiming for – understanding of the theme, or the author's message. The other aspects (story, characters, setting) will often underscore the theme, so it's useful to you to know it first. After theme, the teacher's guide provides details in the following areas: Story, Character, Setting, External details, Internal details, and Conflict. I also sometimes include Symbolism, but that is optional and is usually best reserved for more advanced students.

Story is the main plot-line. I provide a brief summary for each book.

Character includes a description of the main character(s) (physical and personality).

Setting is where and when the story happens.

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

Internal details are emotions and other feelings the characters experience that aren't part of their central personality. For example, a character might normally be happy but experience sadness in response to an event in the book.

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

Symbolism is the use of one thing to represent something else. Usually an author uses something concrete (an animal, a piece of clothing, music, etc.) to represent something abstract (loyalty, companionship, happiness, etc.). This is an advanced concept, and rather than asking questions about it (at this stage), it’s probably better to simply point it out to your students and discuss it together. As they are taught symbolism in stories they will begin to see it on their own.

Reading Journal

After the book discussion, turn to the appropriate pages in the Student Workbook. Students will write or dictate four sentences: one sentence summarizing the story (“What this story is about”), a second sentence saying what they think the story’s theme is (“The message of this story”), a third sentence expressing something they felt about the book (“What I think of this story”), and finally they choose their favorite sentence from the book to copy.

This Reading Journal is optional. Students who are already overwhelmed by the composition assignments can feel free to drop this.

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. Always read the instructions with your students, and be sure they understand them before having them complete the page. 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 your 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 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 child only a year later that they simply 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 your 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 your students are not getting a concept, rather than forcing them to do the workbook pages on their own, work on them together as a teaching tool. Some lessons assume a previous exposure to the subject. If your students used Levels Cloud and Spark Lightning Literature courses, they will have had this exposure. They may have also learned the topic from another language arts course. But if your students have not learned the topic previously, some lessons may be too cursory for them. In that case – or if your students struggled previously 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.

Most weeks, students get a break for a day from the weekly grammar topic. Instead, they complete either a sentence puzzle or additional sentence diagramming. Both help develop sentence structure skills, but they are optional.

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 are vital to good writing (as are many other skills), 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 a sentence. 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. The reverse is also true – the same word may function as different parts of speech depending on its placement in a sentence. I can illustrate this succinctly with a bit of silliness: *Don't allow your horse to horse around on the horse track.*

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. When students struggle with a sentence of their own, they can diagram it to see where a problem might lie.

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 perform. 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. It may be that your students need to wait another year or two before benefitting from sentence diagrams.

Composition

The composition portion of this course should, as with all aspects, be tailored to your students' level. Some students will only be writing (or dictating) a few sentences, 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. This is entirely up to you.

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 your students while also starting to push them towards quality work. Work closely with them on the compositions (unless they specifically ask you not to). At the end, stress what they did well in the composition; then discuss together how it might be improved.

In Levels Cloud and Spark of this series, most compositions were finished in a week. This year, some take one week, but more span from two to four weeks. This provides less variety for the student, but allows for greater depth in learning about composition. For example, whereas previously it would have been sufficient for a student to provide a simple description of a friend, this year they will begin to think about things like how to most effectively begin a paper, how to provide smooth transitions, who the audience for their paper is, what support they’re giving to their assertions, and whether a paragraph is properly focused.

This year I’m also providing suggestions for extra challenges in the compositions. These are optional and are meant for the more advanced writing student. While advanced writers can always be challenged simply by making them write longer papers, that can become tedious. Instead, these help deepen writing skills. These are not an all or nothing proposition – choose them for your students (or allow them to choose them) when appropriate. Sometimes a student will be more excited about a certain assignment and want to do more with it. If a student is more adept at fiction but frustrated by research, assign the extra challenge for the short story assignment but not for the research paper. The instructions for the extra challenge are given on the day the student would need to do it.

COMPOSITION NOTEBOOK: The student will need lined composition pages. We have provided masters for 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 each book (and poems). Students are to summarize the book (“What this story is about”), write a sentence stating the story’s theme as determined from the book discussion (“The message of this story”), write a one-sentence opinion of the book (“What I think of this story”), and write a favorite line from the book (“My favorite line”). The summary is an excellent skill to develop, writing the story’s theme demonstrates a deeper understanding of the story, 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: Once 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). 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, once each week (except poetry weeks) I include a sentence puzzle or extra sentence diagramming.

These help to improve students' sentence structure and/or understanding of parts of speech.

POET BIOGRAPHIES: Once each poetry week, the student guide contains a brief biography of one of the poets read that week.

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 (or section of it read that week) 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.)

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 beforehand.

Free Days

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, 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.).