

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY  
LEVEL E: WISDOM TALES 2

Instructor's Guide

Sample

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## Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

*Exploring the World through Story* introduces children to the diversity of human cultures through the study of world literature. Over the course of the elementary years—grades 3–5 or ages 7–11—children study **wisdom tales** from the world’s spiritual traditions, both ancient and modern.

At the elementary levels, EWS has three main educational goals. First, students become familiar with the **most important stories from each spiritual or cultural tradition**. Learning in this area is supported by reading and writing about the stories and by memory work. Second, a clear approach to structure helps students **learn the basics of literary analysis**. Finally, students **practice composition skills** with narrations and other writing activities.

### About Level E

Each of the elementary levels of EWS covers stories from one major Asian tradition, one Abrahamic faith, and one ancient belief system or “mythology.”<sup>1</sup> In *Exploring the World through Story: Level E*, fourth graders read wisdom tales from the **Buddhist, Christian, and ancient Greek traditions**. The stories have been chosen for their cultural or historical importance and for their literary influence. I recommend that students complete Level D before moving on to Level E, as some of the content in this level assumes familiarity with the stories from the previous year’s work.

**EWS is a secular curriculum.** As such, it makes no claims for or against the validity of any religious belief.

*Exploring the World through Story: Level E* is just one component of a complete English Language Arts program for fourth grade. Your child will also need, at minimum, formal [grammar](#) and [writing](#) curricula. Some families may want to include spelling and vocabulary instruction, and I suggest that you introduce [typing](#) midway through the fourth-grade year.

Daily independent reading is another must. Students should read for at least 30 minutes a day from a wide range of classic and contemporary fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. I encourage parents to allow students the freedom to choose their own books for recreational reading.

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<sup>1</sup> “Mythology may, in a real sense, be defined as other people’s religion.” —Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (New World Library, 2001).

## About Wisdom Tales

Wisdom tales are teaching stories that affirm cultural values—often of a religious or moral nature—through the medium of imaginative narratives. The category of wisdom tales encompasses sacred stories from the whole range of the world’s spiritual traditions, ancient and modern. It includes scriptural narratives as well as stories sometimes designated as myths or pious legends. Popular oral narratives (folktales) with a didactic or moral purpose form a significant part of the genre. Students will encounter all of these types of stories in Levels D–F of this program.

Beyond the simple pleasure of reading interesting stories from around the world, there are three main benefits to the study of wisdom tales for today’s students. First, wisdom tales furnish a **repository of images and cultural reference points** that serve as sources for other art forms, including other types of literature. To read world classics with understanding, students must first become familiar with these foundational narratives. In addition, wisdom tales make an **ideal introduction to the basics of literary analysis** because, by design, they function on both a literal and a symbolic level. Wisdom tales invite the listener or reader to look beyond the surface of the narrative and inquire into its deeper meaning. Finally, because wisdom tales articulate and transmit cultural norms, they offer **insight into each culture’s distinctive values**. Students gain crosscultural understanding and appreciation through engagement with world wisdom tales. By becoming familiar with these stories, children will be well prepared, not only to continue their studies of world literature, but also to engage with a diverse world that is increasingly connected across national, cultural, and religious lines.

## About the Lesson Plans

This curriculum provides plans for two lessons for each of the 36 weeks in the standard US school year, for a total of 72 lessons.

Please note that, at this level, EWS is not self-teaching; you will need to work closely with your child to assure that they are understanding the texts and getting the most out of the writing activities. Although there is relatively little preparation required of the parent to teach EWS, it is still important to **read through each lesson plan carefully** before teaching it to make sure you have all necessary materials on hand and understand how to implement the writing activities. A **Teaching Prep checklist** is provided below for your convenience.

The lesson plans follow a standard format that makes it easy for parents and children

to get into a rhythm with their literature studies. Each plan is divided into two parts: Reading and Writing Activities.

The **Reading** section begins with the **Teaching Notes**, a short introduction to the text with background information for you, the instructor. Read through this section before teaching the lesson, and **highlight** any information you want to share with your child. The most important terms, names, and references appear in bold type for your convenience.

You will then **ask your child to read the story aloud**. If you have used previous levels of EWS, you will notice that most of the texts in this level use somewhat simpler language and sentence structure. By fourth grade, many students can read fluently, so the books for this level have been chosen with independent reading in mind. However, as children’s decoding, comprehension, and fluency skills vary widely, you can always continue to read the stories aloud to your child as needed.

As part of the Reading section, I have provided lists of **names and vocabulary words** that may be unfamiliar to your child. The vocabulary lists are made up of “Tier Two” words, “words that are of high utility for mature language users and are found across a wide variety of domains.”<sup>2</sup> The vocabulary lists in EWS are meant as a ready reference so students don’t have to interrupt their reading to look up new words. Rather than listing formal dictionary definitions, I offer what Isabel Beck and her colleagues refer to as “student-friendly explanations” that build on the child’s existing vocabulary and knowledge base. If you like, you can use the lists as a resource for further vocabulary instruction.<sup>3</sup>

### **About the Writing Activities**

The second part of the lesson, **Writing Activities**, includes a variety of scaffolded composition tasks. The narration and dictation activities in EWS-E align with the skills taught in [Writing with Ease: Strong Fundamentals](#) by Susan Wise Bauer. EWS’s writing activities also integrate techniques from [The Writing Revolution](#) by Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler, as well as ideas from the [Core Knowledge Language Arts](#) curriculum.

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<sup>2</sup> Isabel L Beck, et al., *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, 2nd ed. (Guilford Press, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> For instructional ideas, see Beck et al., pp. 183-193.

To get the most out of the writing activities, students at this level should be able to (1) accurately retell a short tale in their own words and (2) comfortably write 3-5 simple sentences without assistance.

The focus of this year's writing work is **paragraph formation**. Students learn the three parts of a paragraph and practice generating each of them before writing paragraphs on their own. This level also reviews sentence-level composition with a variety of exercise types: completing sentence stems; adding appositives and dependent clauses; combining sentences; and more.

Next you'll find sentences for **dictation**. The dictation process is explained fully in the first lesson, and a summary of the process also appears in Appendix A (p. 208) for your convenience. You may wish to use the dictation sentences for grammar analysis, following the process taught in your grammar program. I list some common options in Appendix B (p. 209).

The Writing Activities section concludes with **memory work**. You'll find an **implementation guide** in Appendix C (pp. 210-212) and a **complete list of memory work items** in Appendix D (pp. 213-219). The memory work selections can also be used for **copywork**.

The **Student Worksheet pack** includes student copies of the graphic organizers and other worksheets for the lessons that require them. **Print the student worksheets single-sided and store them in a three-ring binder** rather than having them spiral-bound. This will prevent the need to flip back and forth when the student is referring to graphic organizers during the writing process. At this age, students can use regular wide-ruled notebook paper without a midline for dictation and other writing exercises.

## Scheduling Options

EWS-E consists of 72 lessons, or two per week for a 36-week school year. You can either teach each complete lesson on a single day in a longer block or split the material up, teaching each lesson over two days for a total of four days' work.

### Option A: 2x/week

- **Two lessons per week** plus daily memory work review
- **60-90 minutes per lesson**
- Complete reading, writing, dictation, and memory work for each lesson in one day

### Option B: 4x/week

- **Four lessons per week** plus daily memory work review
- **30-45 minutes per lesson**
- Days 1 and 3: Complete reading, dictation, and introduce new memory work
- Days 2 and 4: Complete writing activity and review memory work

Sample

## **Lesson Prep Checklist**

- Read through the lesson plan carefully.
- Highlight information from the Teaching Notes to share with your child.
- Preview the writing activity.
- Print out the student worksheets.

## **Lesson Presentation Checklist**

- Introduce the reading.
- Listen as the student reads the day's story aloud.
- Present new vocabulary as needed during the reading.
- Introduce and supervise the writing activity.
- Present the dictation.
- Review old memory work.
- Introduce new memory work.

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## ***Required Materials for EWS: Level E***

☐ *Buddha* - Demi  
[Paperback](#)

This short, beautifully illustrated book recounts the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, including several wisdom tales drawn from Buddhist sutras. The book is studied over three weeks and is also used for some writing activities later in the year.

☐ *Great Jataka Tales* - Noor Inayat Khan  
[Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#)

This collection brings together a selection of Jataka tales that reflect Buddhist values. It is used for six weeks.

☐ *DK Illustrated Family Bible* (1997 edition)- Claude-Bernard Costecalde, ed.  
[Hardcover](#)

This copiously illustrated Bible includes numerous explanatory sidebars and commentary to aid understanding. It is used for eleven weeks.

☐ *DK Greek Myths* - Jean Menzies  
[Hardcover](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Audible](#)

This readable volume covers all of the best-known figures and stories in clear language but tones down some of the more violent tales with age-appropriate elisions. Eye-catching illustrations, maps, sidebars, historical notes, and a glossary round out the text. This book is scheduled for fifteen weeks.

## Additional Materials

- Print-out of student worksheets, three-hole punched
- 1” three-ring binder to store worksheets
- Wide-ruled filler paper or notebook
- Pencils, pens, erasers
- [Highlighters](#) (three different colors)
- A supply of [lined index cards](#)
- An [index card file box](#)
- [Tabbed index card dividers numbered 1-31](#), to fit the file box
- Optional: small white board, markers, and eraser (for grammar analysis)

Sample

## Further Reading Suggestions

### *Adult Reference*

[12 Major World Religions](#) provides neutral, fact-based descriptions of major contemporary world religions plus three ancient traditions (Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Norse). Teen/adult reading level.

### *Wisdom Tales for Family Reading*

[Sacred Stories: Wisdom from World Religions](#) offers five stories from each of the following traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Native American, and Sacred Earth (ancient and modern polytheism).

[In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World](#) is an outstanding collection by acclaimed Black children's author Virginia Hamilton that includes many tales from indigenous cultures. Illustrated by Barry Moser.

[Wisdom Tales from Around the World](#) is an award-winning collection of short wisdom tales from master storyteller Heather Forest.

### *Supplemental Reading for Level E*

CKHG Units: [Ancient India](#), [Three World Religions](#), [Ancient Greece](#)  
The Core Knowledge Foundation offers free, high-quality downloadable resources for grades K-8. These early elementary units provide valuable background knowledge for students who have not yet studied these cultures and a good review for those who have. Highly recommended as enrichment reading.

[I Once Was a Monkey](#) - Jeanne M. Lee  
Jataka tales in a gentle, picture book format. A good choice for younger siblings.

[Stories of the Saints](#) - Carey Wallace  
Gracefully illustrated collection recounts stories from the lives of dozens of Christian saints, from the earliest days of the church to the 20th century.

[D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths](#) - Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire  
Heavily illustrated classic introduces the Greek gods and their best-known stories.

[Treasury of Greek Mythology](#) - Donna Jo Napoli  
Lavishly illustrated, large-format introduction.

[Percy Jackson and the Olympians](#) - Rick Riordan  
Popular middle-grade fantasy/adventure series that bring the Greek gods and heroes into the present day. Best enjoyed after students are familiar with the traditional tales. Two other series follow.

Sample

## LESSON E-5

“The Blind Men and the Elephant”

*Buddha*, p. 38

### Reading

#### Teaching Notes

“The Blind Men and the Elephant” is one of the most famous parables in the world. It appeared in writing as early as 500 BCE, and versions of the story are known in the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sufi, and Baha'i traditions. The [1872 poem](#) by American author John Godfrey Saxe is one of the best-known versions in English.

This parable expresses the human tendency to become attached to our own limited views, often without sufficient investigation of alternatives. In science, this tendency appears when conclusions are drawn from insufficient data (e.g., small sample size). In informal logic, it is called the **fallacy of hasty or faulty generalization**, or what is commonly known as *jumping to conclusions*. This logical fallacy lies at the heart of all prejudice; it generalizes by attributing the qualities of one individual or a small number to a whole group.

**Parables**, as a wisdom tale genre, rely on comparisons for their impact. In literary terms, we say they use simile or metaphor to convey their message. A **simile** is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. For example, these famous lines by Scottish poet Robert Burns contain a simile (emphasis mine):

O my luve is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June

A **metaphor** is a direct comparison without *like* or *as*. In a famous soliloquy from Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, the love-sick hero raises his eyes to his beloved's window, and seeing a light, proclaims (emphasis mine):

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Because of the implied comparisons in them, parables invite listeners to ask what the characters or situations in the story symbolize, or stand for. Often a parable will end with an explanation of the symbolism, as this one does

(emphasis mine): “Those who disagree about the nature of life and death are like these blind men....”

### *Vocabulary*

parable: an imaginative story that teaches a moral principle  
plowshare: the sharp part of a plow that cuts into the soil

### **Writing Activities**

➤ Student Worksheet: p. 4

### *Oral Narration*

Your child will be narrating the parable of the blind men and the elephant. Direct your child to use the notes provided on the worksheet to help them remember each man’s position and how he perceived the elephant. Scribe your child’s narration on a piece of lined paper, skipping lines. File this page in your binder; you will be using it again for the next lesson.

Man #1: head/pot  
Man #2: ear/basket  
Man #3: tusk/plowshare  
Man #4: trunk/plow  
Man #5: foot/pillar  
Man #6: back/barrel  
Man #7: tail/broom

A sample narration might sound like this:

**Seven blind men met an elephant, and each one touched a different part of its body. The first man touched the elephant’s head and said the elephant was like a pot. The second man touched its ear and said it was like a basket. The third man touched the tusk and said it was like a plowshare. The fourth man touched the trunk and said it was like a plow. The fifth touched the foot and said it was like a pillar. The sixth touched the back and said it was like a barrel. The seventh touched the tail and said it was like a broom. People who argue about life and death are like these blind men who only understand part of the truth.**

*Dictation*

**Those who disagree about the nature of life and death are like these blind men: each knowing a part of the Truth, but not the whole.**

*Memory Work*

**Q: What is a parable?**

**A: A parable is an imaginative story that teaches a moral principle using comparison.**

Sample

## LESSON E-27

### “The Sower”

DK Illustrated Family Bible, pp. 250–251

## Reading

### Teaching Notes

Like Siddhartha, Jesus made extensive use of parables in his public teaching. As we saw in EWS-D, parables were an established genre within the Jewish scriptural tradition, and we noted how the prophet Nathan remonstrated against King David using a parable (II Samuel 12: 1–15). Jesus built on this foundation, and the parables attributed to him in the gospels continue to influence literature to the present day. For example, the renowned science fiction author Octavia E. Butler titled her acclaimed 1993 novel, *The Parable of the Sower*, after the memorable wisdom tale we’ll be reading in this lesson.

Jesus frequently used the words “whoever has ears, let them hear” to signal that his parables contained a hidden message. In some cases, as here, the gospel writers show Jesus explaining the meaning of the parables to his disciples privately. As mentioned in Lesson E-4, the Parable of the Sower is about the capacity of individuals to receive Jesus’ teaching—referred to here as “the word of the kingdom”—and the obstacles that prevent them from accepting it.

The sidebar at the bottom of page 251 explains why parables make such effective teaching tools.

### Vocabulary

sower: someone who plants grain seeds

scorched: burned

withered: dried up

persecution: ill treatment, hostility from others

deceitfulness: lies, falsehood

disclosed: told or shown openly

concealed: hidden

## Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheet: p. 26

### *Paragraph Formation*

Today your child will arrange sentences to create an informational paragraph about parables. They should identify the best topic and concluding sentences and order the body/supporting sentences logically.

If your child is unsure how to distinguish between the topic and concluding sentences, remind them that the topic sentence tells what the whole paragraph is about. It is often a more general statement, while the concluding sentence summarizes the contents of the paragraph, often mentioning details from the supporting sentences.

If your child is struggling with the order of the supporting sentences, remind them of the roles supporting sentences can play: explanation, elaboration, and example. Prompt them to look for clues provided by transition words: *Also* and *for example* both imply a connection to a preceding statement.

### Parables

**\_6\_** For example, “The Parable of the Sower” is about how different people heard and understood Jesus’ teachings.

**\_2\_** One teacher who used parables was the Buddha.

**\_3\_** He used the parable of “The Wise Men and the Elephant” to teach people not to be attached to their own limited ideas.

**\_1\_** Many ancient religious teachers used parables to share their message.

**\_5\_** Jesus also used many parables to explain his message.

**\_7\_** Parables helped the Buddha and Jesus explain their ideas using simple stories.

**\_4\_ “The Burning House” is another parable the Buddha used to explain his teachings.**

*Dictation*

**With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.**

*Memory Work*

**Q: What are the two parts of the Christian Bible?**

*A: The two parts of the Christian Bible are the Old Testament, or the Hebrew scriptures, and the New Testament, which consists of writings about Jesus and his followers.*

Sample

## LESSON E-52

### “Hermes and the Lyre”

DK Greek Myths, pp. 36-37, 65

## Reading

### Teaching Notes

**Hermes** played many roles in the traditional Greek stories and in ancient religious life. He is best known as the messenger of the gods, but he is also associated with travel, communication, and commerce. (His Roman name, **Mercury**, contains the root *merx*, meaning goods for sale. The English words *merchant*, *merchandise*, and *commerce* all contain this root as well.) The great trickster of the Olympians, Hermes was the patron god of thieves, and today’s story shows him in that role. The ancients also honored him as the god of boundaries and set up apotropaic (evil-averting) boundary markers called *herms*, named after him. Originally heaps of stones, these markers later developed into carved pillars topped with an image of the god. At the end of life, Hermes serves as a psychopomp, one who leads the dead to the underworld.

In literature, Hermes appears in the *Odyssey* as well as numerous folkloric tales. His symbols include the herald’s staff, called the **caduceus**, and the winged sandals known as **talaria**. See page 65 for more details.

### Vocabulary

**Maia** /MY-uh/: ocean nymph, mother of Hermes

**Pleione** /PLEE-oh-nee or PLAY-oh-nee/: a Titaness

**Hermes** /HUR-meez/: mischievous god of communication and travel, messenger of the gods

nymph: nature spirit

intestines: part of the digestive tract

ingenious: clever, creative

guts: intestines

**lyre**: a harp-like stringed instrument

tuneful: capable of making beautiful music

caduceus /ka-DOO-shuss/: herald’s staff

talaria /tah-LAH-ree-uh/: winged sandals

## Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheets: p. 56

### *Paragraph Formation*

Using the graphic organizer provided on today's worksheet, ask your child to take notes for a descriptive paragraph about Hermes based on the information given on page 65. When they have completed the graphic organizer, direct them to write out the paragraph on a separate sheet of wide-ruled paper. You may wish to review lessons E-49 and E-50 to remind your child of the format. The completed paragraph should look like this:

**Hermes was the messenger of the gods. His parents were Zeus and Metis, and he had many children. His sacred symbols were the crocus, the tortoise, the caduceus or herald's staff, and the talaria or winged sandals. The ancient Greeks prayed to Hermes to send them messages from the gods in their dreams. Hermes was also worshipped by merchants and travelers.**

### *Dictation*

**Thinking quickly, Hermes held up the lyre he had made. "I'm sorry, Apollo," Hermes said. "Please take this instrument in return for your cow." [...] Apollo felt this gift was a fair trade for his cow, and he forgave Hermes.**

### *Memory Work*

**Q: Who is Hermes, and what is his Roman name?**

**A: Hermes is the messenger of the gods, and his Roman name is Mercury.**

Sample

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LEVEL E: WISDOM TALES 2

Student Worksheets

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Sample

so · and · although · if · even though · after · since · because

One day, the king's chariot was left out in the rain, \_\_\_\_\_ the royal dogs gnawed on the reins, destroying them. The king was furious, and \_\_\_\_\_ he didn't know which dogs had caused the damage, he ordered all the dogs in the city to be killed.

The chief of the city dogs went to the palace. \_\_\_\_\_ his eyes were so full of love, he was allowed to enter the king's throne room, \_\_\_\_\_ there were men on every side ready to kill him. He asked the king how he knew that the city dogs had ruined his chariot reins. The chief reasoned that, \_\_\_\_\_ the city dogs could not get past the palace gate, the royal dogs must have caused the damage.

The chief told the king to give the royal dogs kusa grass and buttermilk. \_\_\_\_\_ the dogs ate the grass and milk, they brought up scraps of leather, proving their guilt.

The king learned an important lesson about justice, \_\_\_\_\_ he made sure the city dogs had rich food and royal care.