

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL A: FABLES AND POURQUOI TALES

DREW CAMPBELL

Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

Exploring the World through Story introduces children to the wonder of words and the diversity of human cultures through the study of world literature. In the primary grades—K-2 or ages 4-8—students enjoy folktales from around the world, gaining both cultural literacy and an understanding of basic narrative forms. Simple geography readings, map/globe work, and memory work round out the program, helping students put the stories in context. Detailed teaching notes and schedules make it easy for parents to teach literature and geography to their children, even if they have never taught these subjects before.

The elementary and middle school levels build on the foundation laid in the primary levels, preparing students to study world literature in high school and beyond.

About Level A

Exploring the World through Story: Level A provides a gentle introduction to world literature for students ages 4-6 (Kindergarten). You'll share classic fables from Aesop and pourquoi ("how and why") tales from around the world with your child. Detailed lesson plans explain how to introduce the tales and list new vocabulary and comprehension questions for you. You'll also find suggestions for optional leveled readers and picture books that help children build the background knowledge that is so crucial to reading comprehension. Short geography readings, map/globe explorations, and foundational memory work are included. By the end of the year, students will have explored stories from more than a dozen different cultures, and they will be able to name and locate all of the continents and world oceans.

The program presents one folktale per week for the 36 weeks of the standard US school year. Because most young children have limited attention spans, lessons are kept short and to the point. You should be able to complete each lesson in 20-30 minutes. This program assumes that you are reading aloud to your child or using audiobooks, where these are available. All of the student work at this level can and should be completed orally.

Exploring the World through Story: Level A is just one component of a complete English Language Arts program for Kindergartners. You will also need to teach reading with a systematic, phonics-based program. A good handwriting curriculum is also a must. I recommend that you read aloud to your child for at least 30 minutes a day from high-quality fiction and nonfiction books in a wide range of genres and styles. I have

suggested some titles in the Connections section that will help your child build the background knowledge they need for strong reading comprehension.

About the Lesson Plans

Each lesson plan is numbered by level (A, B, or C) and week (1, 2, 3, etc.) to help you keep track of where you are in the program.

At the top of the page, you will find the title of the week's story, the book it appears in with the page number, and the country or people the story originates from. You will use some of this information to introduce each story to your child.

The Teaching Notes contain background information for you, the teacher. It is not meant to be read verbatim to your child. In the first few lessons, the Teaching Notes give scripts that show you how to introduce the tales and geography information to your child. The instructions become more streamlined as you gain experience and confidence with the program.

Next you will find a list of vocabulary words that may be unfamiliar to your child. (Some stories are simple enough that this section is blank.) Rather than giving formal dictionary definitions, which are often at least as complicated as the words they explain, I suggest simplified language you can add to clarify the readings for your child. Simply read the text and add the substitution afterward as an aside: "When we hear the bell ringing, we will know *immediately*—that means *right away*—that our enemy is coming." There is no need for children to memorize definitions at this stage.

Following the vocabulary words you will see a list of comprehension questions. Most of these are simple, factual questions to help children track the action in the stories. In a few cases, I've included some broader discussion topics that help children make personal connections with the stories. As you progress through the curriculum and your child gets used to the rhythm of lessons, you may find you don't need to rely on the comprehension questions as much. If you discover that your child is launching into observations or questions about the story, follow their lead, only returning to the questions if the conversation flags or you sense that the child isn't following the narrative.

You will find suggestions for further reading, discussion, or activities under the *Connections* subheading. These additional books and crafts are entirely optional, but they will enrich the program for your child. Feel free to pick and choose readings and activities you think your child will enjoy.

The Geography section consists of memory and map work, plus a short reading from a colorful reference book. After you have read and discussed the story, you will mark your world map according to the instructions in the Map Work and Reading section. I recommend using stars to mark countries and dots to mark US states. Next, you will explore the country's entry in the geography reference book. Read the short country description in the box aloud, and use the captions on the photos to describe them to your child. If you find the child's attention flagging, it's fine just to read the short description and let them look at the pictures. You can also take a break and come back to the book later in the day. This reference book is used for all three primary levels of *Exploring the World through Story*, so your child will have plenty of time to get familiar with its contents. Note that when a country has already been introduced, this section will be blank. You can always go back and refresh your child's memory about the location of the country and review the information in the geography text, if you like.

The Memory Work subsection lists information for memorization in question-and-answer format. To teach new memory work, read the question and answer aloud to your child, and, if applicable, provide the explanation or demonstration described in the lesson plan. Ask the child to repeat the answer back to you three times. **Memory work should be reviewed daily, not just during your weekly literature and geography lessons.** Some of the memory work requires the use of the reproducible maps at the end of this book, and this is noted in the lesson plans.

Required Materials for EWS: Level A

Core Literature Texts

- Aesop's Fables for Children* - Milo Winter
([paperback/free online](#))

This classic collection of fables has memorable illustrations and uses a richer vocabulary than many other children's versions. The paperback edition includes a link for MP3 audio downloads, but the text, including illustrations, is also available free online.

- How and Why Stories* - Martha Hamilton & Mitch Weiss
([paperback/hardcover/ebook/audiobook](#))

This collection includes stories from around the world, retold in accessible language (Lexile level 830L) by award-winning storytellers Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss.

The stories in both books are short enough for young children with limited attention spans; all can be read in under five minutes.

Geography Reference Text

- DK Countries of the World: Our World in Pictures* - Andrea Mills
([hardcover/ebook](#))

This colorful reference book gives students basic information for each country in the world. It serves as the geography text for all three of the primary-grade levels of this program.

Additional Materials

- A large, current world map you can mark, such as [Rand-McNally's Signature Edition World Wall Map](#)
- Small star and dot stickers in bright colors
- A current globe

LESSON A-1

“Belling the Cat”

Aesop’s Fables for Children, p. 15¹

Ancient Greece

Literature

Teaching Notes

Folktales are stories that originate in popular (“folk”) culture and were traditionally passed on by word of mouth. As part of an oral tradition, they do not have authors *per se*. Instead, we identify the people or country that the story originated from, if known, with the understanding that there are as many variations of the tale as there are storytellers. The core literature texts for this program list that information, and I’ve provided it in the lesson plans for each tale.

In some cases, we can identify the *collector(s)* of the tale. For example, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Joseph Jacobs, Alexander Afanasyev, Charlotte Guest, Jane Wilde, Andrew Lang, and Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe are all well-known 19th-century collectors of European folktales.

We can identify the authors of certain versions of tales that have become especially well known. Charles Perrault, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, Hans Christian Andersen, and many others adapted traditional tales for literary audiences, and some of them wrote original *literary fairy tales* as well. Today many of these stories have entered the European literary canon while persisting in the oral tradition. The version of “Cinderella” that most of us know comes from Perrault’s literary adaptation, but folklorists have collected hundreds of variants of the story worldwide. Students will explore these stories in Level C.

Yet other tales have been ascribed to authors who are more likely legendary figures. Half of the stories in this year’s curriculum, including the one you will be reading today, are attributed to the ancient Greek fabulist Aesop (EE-sop). Ancient authors described him as a Thracian slave, born around 620 BCE, but modern researchers dispute his historicity. The fables attributed to him were not written down and collected until centuries after his supposed date of death, and stories were still being added to the corpus until the late European Middle Ages. Some of the stories attributed to him are recorded in the Sanskrit *Panchatantra*, and may in fact have

¹ Page numbers refer to the paperback editions of the story books and to the hardcover edition of the geography text.

originated in India. For all these reasons, it is perhaps best to speak of Aesop as a *legendary* compiler and teller of fables rather than as their author.

You will introduce each story you read by telling your child the tale's genre, origin, and title. "Today we are reading a [genre] from [place or people group]. The title is "[title]." Getting familiar with words like "title" and with simple definitions for different types of stories represent the first steps in your child's study of literature.

Introduce this week's story using words like these: **"Today we're going to read a story from ancient Greece. The title is "Belling the Cat." This story is a fable. Fables are short stories that teach us lessons about how to behave. The lesson is called the moral, and it comes at the end of the story."**

Read the story aloud to your child, or listen to the audio. If you're reading aloud, try using gestures or varying your voice to convey meaning. For example, when the story says "they lived in such constant fear of her claws," you can mime the mice shrinking back in fear, or you can make your hand into a claw shape to show that the cat is trying to catch the mice.

Vocabulary

immediately: right away

midst: middle

Comprehension Questions

Q: Why were the mice afraid of the cat?

A: The cat was their enemy. She tried to catch and eat them.

Q: What did the young mouse suggest?

A: That they put a bell around the cat's neck so they could hear her coming and run away.

Q: Why did the old mouse ask who would bell the cat?

A: Because it would be very dangerous. The cat might catch and eat the brave mouse who tried to do it.

Q: Can you think of a time when you had an idea that didn't work out?

Connections

Pet owners still put bells on their outdoor cats to protect wildlife. Other animals, like squirrels and birds, will hear the bell and run or fly away before the cat can catch them. [National Geographic Kids: Cats](#) is all about these mighty hunters.

Geography

Map Work and Reading

Locate **Greece** on your world map and mark it with a sticker (star, dot). Since fully half of the stories in this year's program are attributed to Aesop, you will only mark Greece this one time, so feel free to use a fancy sticker!

Tell your child that the fables you'll be studying this year are ancient Greek versions of folktales known around the world.

Point out **India** on the map as well, since it's likely that the fables attributed to Aesop may have come from there. You'll mark India on the map later.

Read the short country description of Greece at the bottom of page 122-123 in [DK Countries of the World: Our World in Pictures](#) (hereafter "the geography text") to your child and use the captions to explain the pictures. You will do this for each new country.

Memory Work

Show the child the world map and the globe, pointing out the difference between them: the map is a flat drawing, while the globe shows the Earth in space.

Read memory work in the question-and-answer format, as below, and ask your child to repeat the answer three times.

Q: What is a world map?

A: A world map is a flat drawing of the Earth.

Q: What is a globe?

A: The Earth is shaped like a sphere (a ball), and the globe shows what the Earth looks like from outer space.

LESSON A-2

“Thunder and Lightning”

How and Why Stories, p. 15

Ibibio People (Nigeria)

Literature

Teaching Notes

Introduce this week’s story as follows:

Today we’re going to read a story from the Ibibio people of Nigeria, in Africa, called “Thunder and Lightning.” This is a different kind of story from the one we read last week. Do you remember what kind of story that was?

A fable.

This story is a *pourquoi* (poor-KWAH) tale. *Pourquoi* is the French word for ‘why,’ and *pourquoi* tales explain why things are the way they are. Sometimes we call these stories ‘how and why stories’ or ‘origin stories,’ because they explain where something came from.

Many of these stories come from long ago. The people who first told them observed the world around them and then used their imaginations to come up with interesting ideas about why things are the way they are and how they got that way.

Different stories are told by different groups of people, and scholars and storytellers who collect stories always try to identify the group the story came from. This story comes from the Ibibio people.

Read the story aloud to your child, or listen to the audio. If you’re reading aloud, try using gestures or varying your voice to convey meaning. For example, when the story says, “Babies cried. Dogs howled,” you can imitate the sounds (“Waaah, waaah! Bow Wow!”). See also “Tips for Telling” on pages 16 and 17 of the book. Since the authors of *How and Why Stories* include tips for every story in their book, I won’t repeat them in the lesson plans, but do check them out. They will make your readings more memorable and enjoyable.

Vocabulary

bush: a thickly wooded wild area

Comprehension Questions

Q: What does this story say that Thunder and Lightning were?

A: A sheep and a ram.

Q: What happened when Lightning got angry?

A: He would start fires.

Q: How did Thunder try to stop Lightning from starting fires?

A: She yelled at him in a loud, booming voice.

Q: What did the king do when the people complained?

A: First he sent Thunder and Lightning away into the bush, and then he sent them to live in the sky.

Q: Did the king's plan work?

A: Not really.

Q: How do the Ibibio people explain thunderstorms with this story?

A: They say that Lightning the ram gets angry and causes fires on earth and that thunder is the sound of the mother sheep yelling at her son.

Connections

Read the scientific explanation of thunder and lightning on page 16 of *How and Why Stories* and explain it to your child in terms they will understand. For example, you might say, “**Science tells us that lightning is electricity gathered in clouds. It is much, much stronger than the electricity that we use in our homes. Thunder is the sound that happens when the air around a lightning bolt expands rapidly. Because light travels faster than sound, we see lightning before we hear thunder.**” For more information, and to learn how to calculate the distance to a lightning strike by counting, visit [Understanding Lightning: Thunder](#) from the National Weather Service.

Geography

Map Work and Reading

Locate and mark **Nigeria** on your world map and read pages 58-59 in the geography text.

Memory Work

Review the following memory work items:

Q: What is a world map?

A: A world map is a flat drawing of the Earth.

Q: What is a globe?

A: The Earth is shaped like a sphere (a ball), and the globe shows what the Earth looks like from outer space.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL B: TRICKSTER TALES

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Quidnam Press
quidnampress.com

Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

Exploring the World through Story introduces children to the wonder of words and the diversity of human cultures through the study of world literature. In the primary grades—K-2 or ages 4-8—students enjoy folktales from around the world, gaining both cultural literacy and an understanding of basic narrative forms. Simple geography readings, map/globe work, and memory work round out the program, helping students put the stories in context. Detailed teaching notes and schedules make it easy for parents to teach literature and geography to their children, even if they have never taught these subjects before.

The elementary and middle school levels build on the foundation laid in the primary levels, preparing students to study world literature in high school and beyond.

ABOUT LEVEL B

Exploring the World through Story: Level B provides a gentle introduction to world literature for students ages 5-7 (first grade). Children meet famous trickster characters from around the globe while expanding their knowledge of world geography. African and African-American tales take center stage this year. Students learn the art of oral narration, a foundational skill for writing, and practice writing mechanics with copywork. They review the previous year's geography work and then expand on it, learning about latitude and longitude as well as neighboring countries.

The program presents one folktale per week for the 36 weeks of the standard US school year. Each lesson takes about 30 minutes, including read-aloud time. Narrations are completed orally, and students practice handwriting and writing mechanics with short copywork exercises.

Exploring the World through Story: Level B is just one component of a complete English Language Arts program for first graders. Your child also needs, at minimum, a phonics-based reading program, a handwriting program, and a wide range of fiction and nonfiction picture books, graded readers, and read-alouds. Aim for at least 30 minutes of read-alouds a day. Books you read to your child as part of this and other homeschooling curricula—history, science, art, and so on—count toward this total, as do audiobooks, bedtime stories, and other leisure reading.

Some homeschoolers begin teaching grammar and composition in first grade. While they are not required for EWS at this level, I recommend [First Language Lessons 1](#) and

[Writing with Ease 1](#), both from Well-Trained Mind Press, for parents who want to give their children a solid grounding in the English language arts.

About the Lesson Plans

Each lesson plan is numbered by level (A, B, or C) and week (1, 2, 3, etc.) to help families who are using multiple levels of the program with different children.

At the top of the page, you will find the title of the week's story, the book it appears in with the page number, and the country or people group the story originates from. You will use some of this information to introduce each story to your child.

The **Teaching Notes** contain background information for you, the teacher, and are not meant to be read verbatim to children. In the first few lessons, the Teaching Notes include scripts that show how to introduce the tales to your child. The instructions become more streamlined as you gain experience and confidence with the program. You will also find a **printables checklist** here, showing which printables you will need for that lesson.

Next you will find a list of **vocabulary words** that may be unfamiliar to your child. (Some stories are simple enough that this section is blank.) In place of complex formal dictionary definitions, you'll find student-friendly language you can use to clarify the readings for your child. There is no need to introduce the words before reading the story, nor do students need to memorize definitions at this stage. Simply read the text and add the substitution afterward as an aside: "When we hear the bell ringing, we will know *immediately*—that means *right away*—that our enemy is coming."

Following the vocabulary words you will see the **Narration** section. Here you will use the printable **Story Summary graphic organizer (page 10)** and **Narration sheet (page 11)**. The notes and prompts in this section, along with the graphic organizer, will help you teach oral narration and the basic elements of story structure to your child.² As you progress through the curriculum and your child gets used to the narration process, you may find you don't need to rely on the prompts or the graphic organizer. Use them as scaffolding only if your child is struggling to narrate.

It's fine to let children narrate in other ways on occasion. They can draw a scene from the story, for example, or act out the story with stuffed animals. I have suggested alternative narration methods for certain stories.

² For an explanation of oral narration as a foundational pre-writing skill, see Susan Wise Bauer's [Writing with Ease: Strong Fundamentals](#).

The Literature section ends with **copywork**. The copywork sentences emphasize mechanics: capitalization and punctuation. You will find a reproducible **copywork sheet on page 12**.

Your child may enjoy combining copywork with drawing to create a folktale journal, and there are [inexpensive notebooks](#) that provide both drawing and lined writing space on the same page. Search for “primary journal” at online retailers or office supply stores. The handwriting programs that most children use at this age call for 5/8” ruling, so look for that when selecting a copywork notebook. If you choose this option for copywork, you will not need the copywork printable.

The **Geography** section consists of map work, a short reading from a geography reference book, and memory work.

After you have read the story and your child has narrated it back to you, you will **identify the country** that the week’s story comes from on your world map and place a sticker on it, following the instructions in the “Map Work and Reading” subsection. I recommend using a **star for countries** and a **colored dot for states and cities**. Next, you will explore the country’s entry in the **geography reference book**. Read the short country description aloud, and use the captions on the photos to describe them to your child. If you find the child’s attention flagging, it’s fine just to read the short description and let them look at the pictures. You can also take a break and come back to the book later in the day. This book is used for all three primary levels of *Exploring the World through Story*, so your child will have plenty of time to get familiar with its contents.

Then you will prompt your child to **recite previous memory work** and **teach them any new memory work items** listed. (Level B includes a review of the memory work material from Level A for newcomers to the program.) **Memory work should be reviewed daily, not just during the weekly literature and geography lesson**. Some of the memory work requires the use of the **reproducible maps** at the end of this book, and this is noted in the lesson plans. You may wish to **print out these maps in advance** and **have them laminated**.

Required Materials For EWS: Level B

Core Literature Texts

- Trickster Tales: Forty Folk Stories from Around the World* – Josepha Sherman
([paperback](#))

The main text this year collects trickster stories from all corners of the globe. Josepha Sherman (1946–2012) was a prolific children’s author, fantasy writer, and folklorist.

- The Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Friends* – Karima Amin
([paperback](#))

This volume includes some of the best-known Brer Rabbit stories, based on the collection by Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908). The language in this edition is modernized but rich, and the lavish illustrations capture the energy and humor of the tales.

- African–American Folktales for Young Readers* – Richard & Judy Dockery Young (eds.)
([paperback](#))

This collection features stories from Africa and the African diaspora, retold by contemporary Black storytellers.

Geography Reference Text

- DK Countries of the World: Our World in Pictures* – Andrea Mills
([hardcover/ebook](#))

This reference book is used in all three levels of this curriculum. You’ll see it referred to in the lesson plans as “the geography text.”

Additional Materials

- A [large, current world map](#) you can mark³
- Small star and dot stickers in bright colors
- A current globe
- Multiples copies of the printable worksheets on pages 10-12
- Print-outs of maps M-1, M-3, M-4 (lamination recommended)

³ If you used Level A of this curriculum, you can use the same map for this level and the next.

LESSON B-1

“Why Anansi Owns Every Story”

Trickster Tales, p. 15

Ashanti (Ghana)

Literature

Teaching Notes

► **Printables Needed for this Lesson:** Story Summary Narration Copywork

Folktales are stories that originate in popular (“folk”) culture and were traditionally passed on by word of mouth. As part of an oral tradition, they do not have authors per se. Instead, we name the people or country that the story originated from, if known, with the understanding that there are as many variations of the tale as there are storytellers. The core literature texts for this program list that information, and I’ve provided it in the lesson plans for each tale.

There are many folktale genres, including fables, pourquoi (“how and why”) tales, wonder tales, wisdom tales, and so on. This year we will be focusing on trickster tales. **Tricksters are literary characters whose craftiness delights and edifies listeners.** Despite their sly ways and moral ambiguity, they often function as **culture heroes**, bringing gifts, skills, and knowledge to the people.

Anansi is one of the best-known trickster characters in the world. His tales are told in Africa and throughout the African diaspora, especially in North America and the Caribbean. We’ll be reading a number of his stories this year. This story usually has four tasks for Anansi to complete, but in this version, there are only three.

Introduce today’s story to your child with words like these:

Today we are reading a trickster tale from the Ashanti people of Ghana, in Africa. The title of the story is “Why Anansi Owns Every Story.” Tricksters are characters who like to play pranks on people.

Vocabulary

dejected: disappointed and sad

python: a large snake

gourd: a fruit with a hard skin

calabash: a kind of gourd often hollowed out, dried, and used as a container

perilous: dangerous

Narration

In Level A of this program, comprehension questions helped your child understand the content of stories and relate those stories to their own lives. In Level B, we will help them tell the story in their own words. This is called **oral narration**. The goal at this stage is to elicit a **brief summary of the story**, with all of the action in the correct order.

Some children will need little or no prompting to narrate at length and may echo the language of the story verbatim. In that case, simply **scribe (write down) your child's narration** on a copy of the sheet provided on page 11. If the narration is too long for you to write down, you can record it with your computer or phone. It isn't necessary to scribe or record every single narration, especially if they are long; record one every 6–8 lessons to track student progress.

Other children—perhaps the majority—will benefit from more explicit structure. The **Story Summary graphic organizer** on page 10 provides the student with helpful scaffolding to narrate the main points of a story. Here is how the parts of the graphic organizer correspond to the aspects of story structure.

Somebody	Character (usually the main character)
Wanted	Goal, orientation
But	Conflict, complication
So	Plot, action, episodes
Then	Resolution, conclusion, outcome

If your child needs help narrating today's story, ask them the following questions, and write down their answers on the Story Summary sheet as indicated.

Instructor: This story is about somebody. Who is it about?

Student: Anansi.

Instructor: Yes! Anansi is the *main character*. He's the person the story is about. Let's write his name in this box, next to the word *Somebody*. And what did Anansi want at the beginning of the story?

Student: To own all the stories in the world.

Instructor: That's right. That goes next to the word *Wanted*. Anansi wanted to own all the stories. But why wasn't he able to do that right away?

Student: He had to buy them from the Sky God, Nyame.

(Your child may not remember the name of the Sky God. That's fine; just supply it.)

Instructor: What did Anansi have to do to buy the stories from Nyame?

Student: He had to bring three animals to Nyame.

Again, you may need to supply the answer for your child. They may also give a partial answer or one that is out of order, such as "Anansi had to trap a snake." Encourage any correct answers the child provides and help fill in the blanks for them: "That's right! How many animals did Anansi have to catch altogether?"

Instructor: Correct. Let's write that in the box next to *But*: "he had to buy them from Nyame by bringing him three animals." How did Anansi go about catching these animals? They were pretty dangerous, weren't they?

Student: He tricked them.

Instructor: Yes. Let's write that here, next to the word *So*: "Anansi tricked the animals and brought them to Nyame." What happened at the end? Did Anansi get what he wanted?

Student: Yes, after Anansi brought him all the animals, Nyame gave him the stories.

Instructor: Great. We'll write that down here, after *Then*. Now we have a summary of the whole story. Let's use that to make an oral narration.

Here is how the graphic organizer will look when completed for today's story:

Somebody	Anansi
Wanted	To own all the stories
But	He had to buy the stories from Nyame, the Sky God, by bringing him three dangerous animals.
So	Anansi tricked the animals and brought them to Nyame.
Then	Nyame gave him the stories.

Now ask your child to tell the story back to you, using the information you've written on the graphic organizer and prompting them as necessary. Write down the narration on the sheet provided and date it for your records.

A narration based on this outline might sound like this (keywords from the graphic organizer are underlined for emphasis):

Anansi wanted to own all the stories in the world, but he had to buy them from Nyame, the Sky God, by bringing him three dangerous animals. So Anansi tricked the animals and brought them to Nyame. Then Nyame gave Anansi all the stories.

If your child can answer the narration prompts but balks at giving a complete narration, you can also ask them to draw a picture of Anansi or of an episode from the story. Sometimes children will hesitate to narrate during lesson time but will happily retell the story to a family member or friend later. This is a perfectly acceptable way to ease into narration.

Copywork

Using **My Copywork sheet on page 12**, write the following sentence as a model at the top, including the quotation marks. **Highlight the features** of the sentence to your child: capital letters, punctuation, and any challenging spelling words. Then ask your child to copy the sentence in their best handwriting.

“From now on, all stories belong to you.”

Geography

Map Work and Reading

Locate and mark **Ghana** on your world map, and read page 56 of the geography text.

If you completed EWS Level A, some countries will already be marked on your map. Review the appropriate pages of the geography text.

Memory Work

At the beginning of this year, your student will review the geography memory work taught in Level A. This gives newcomers to the program a chance to establish a good foundation for Level B knowledge and reinforces the memory work for children who completed Level A.

➤ **Review the following memory work items:**

Q: What is a world map?

A: A world map is a flat drawing of the Earth.

Q: What is a globe?

A: The Earth is shaped like a sphere (a ball), and the globe shows what the Earth looks like from outer space.

Q: What are the cardinal directions?

A: The cardinal directions are North, East, South, and West.

If you are teaching this material to your child for the first time, use the following explanations and demonstrations. Then read the questions and answers above to your child and **ask them to repeat the answers to you three times.**

To teach the world map and globe definitions, show the child both, and explain the difference between them: the map is a drawing of the Earth's surface, while the globe shows it in space.

To teach the cardinal directions, explain to your child that **the sun rises in the eastern part of the sky every morning.** Show your child where that is in real

life. If possible, go outdoors and show them a stable physical landmark to the east; otherwise, show them which wall in your home is (roughly) in the east.

Show them that, if they stand with the east at their right hand, they will be facing north, south will be behind them, and west to their left.

Now look at your world map, and point out the **compass rose** to your child. Show them how the four cardinal directions are labeled (usually N, E, S, and W) and what those abbreviations stand for. Explain that, on most maps, **North is toward the top, East toward the right, South toward the bottom, and West toward the left.**

During the coming week, have your child **practice locating the cardinal directions** both indoors and outdoors. If your child has trouble remembering the clockwise order of the directions, you can teach them the mnemonic device **“Never Eat Slimy Worms.”**

LESSON B-2

“Hare and Tortoise”

Trickster Tales, p. 19

Thonga People (Mozambique)

Literature

Teaching Notes

► **Printables Needed for this Lesson:** Story Summary Narration Copywork

Despite the similarity of the title, this story is not a version of the famous race between the speedy hare and the plodding tortoise. Instead, it introduces us to another famous African trickster character, Hare, whom North Americans will recognize as the progenitor of Brer Rabbit. In this tale, the wily Hare gets outsmarted by yet another trickster, Tortoise!

Introduce this story with words like these:

Today we’re going to be reading another trickster tale. This one is told by the Thonga people in the country of Mozambique in southeastern Africa. The title of the story is “Hare and Tortoise.”

Vocabulary

None

Narration

Ask your child to tell the story back to you. A simple narration might sound like this:

One time it was very hot and dry, and Hare was thirsty. He tricked some animals and drank the water they were guarding. But he couldn’t trick Tortoise, so he suggested they steal sweet potatoes from Boar. When Hare tried to trick Tortoise again, she climbed into the bag and ate up all the sweet potatoes.

If your child is narrating readily, ask them to **identify the animals** that Hare successfully tricks (Lizard and Antelope) **and the trick he plays** (tying them to a

hoe and sticking the hoe fast in the ground so they can't move).

If the child is not yet able to narrate independently—and many won't—it's fine to stick with the bare outline of the story. Use the following questions to help your student understand the narrative. (I do not suggest using the graphic organizer for this lesson, due to multiple complications and resolutions in the tale.)

Q: Who is the story about?

A: Hare.

Q: What does Hare want at the beginning of the story?

A: Water.

Q: But why can't Hare get the water?

A: Because there are animals guarding it.

Q: So what does he do?

A: He tricks the animals guarding the water.

Q: Then what happens?

A: Hare tried to trick Tortoise, but Tortoise won't be fooled.

Q: So what does Hare suggest?

A: That they steal Boar's sweet potatoes.

Q: How did Hare try to get Tortoise away from the stolen food?

A: He pretended to hear Boar coming.

Q: How did Tortoise trick Hare?

A: She climbed into the bag and ate the sweet potatoes herself!

If your child finds narration challenging, take heart. Narration is a complex skill that taxes the working memory, so it's expected that young children will take time to develop it.

Copywork

“Just right,” she said.

Geography

Map Work and Reading

Locate and mark **Mozambique** on your world map, then read page 73 in the geography text.

Memory Work

➤ **Review** the following memory work items:

Q: What is a world map?

A: A world map is a flat drawing of the Earth.

Q: What is a globe?

A: The Earth is shaped like a sphere (a ball), and the globe shows what the Earth looks like from outer space.

Q: What are the cardinal directions?

A: The cardinal directions are North, East, South, and West.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL C: WONDER TALES

DREW CAMPBELL

Quidnam Press
quidnampress.com

Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

Exploring the World through Story introduces children to the wonder of words and the diversity of human cultures through the study of world literature. In the primary grades—K-2 or ages 4-8—students enjoy folktales from around the world, gaining both cultural literacy and an understanding of basic narrative forms. Simple geography readings, map/globe work, and memory work round out the program, helping students put the stories in context. Detailed teaching notes and schedules make it easy for parents to teach literature and geography to their children, even if they have never taught these subjects before.

The elementary and middle school levels build on the foundation laid in the primary levels, preparing students to study world literature in high school and beyond.

About Level C

Exploring the World through Story: Level C provides a gentle introduction to world literature for students ages 6-8 (second grade). This year, students dive deep into the world of wonder tales with a mix of classic stories from the European fairy tale canon and tales of imagination from every corner of the globe. They develop their oral narration skills with a combination of prompts and comprehension questions as they learn to identify narrative structures and compare literary themes across cultures. Copywork gradually increases in length and complexity as students become more adept at handwriting, mechanics, and usage, and dictation is introduced in the second trimester. After a review of key memory work items from previous levels, students identify geographical regions within the inhabited continents and memorize one key country in each region.

The program presents one folktale per week for the 36 weeks of the standard US school year. **Each lesson takes 45-60 minutes, including read-aloud time.** Narrations are completed orally and recorded by the instructor; students practice handwriting and writing mechanics with copywork and dictation. Map coloring is included as part of the geography memory work.

Exploring the World through Story: Level C is just one component of a complete English Language Arts program for second graders. Your child also needs a phonics-based [reading program](#) and instruction in [grammar](#), [writing](#) (composition), and handwriting. Read aloud to your child for at least 30 minutes a day from high-quality fiction and nonfiction books in a wide range of genres and styles. Books you read to your child as part of this and other homeschooling programs—history, science, art,

and so on—count toward this total, as do audiobooks, bedtime stories, and other leisure reading.

About the Lesson Plans

Each lesson plan is numbered by level (A, B, or C) and week (1, 2, 3, etc.) to help families who are using multiple levels of the program with different children.

At the top of the page, you will find the title of the week's story, the book it appears in with the page number, and the country or people group the story originates from. You will use some of this information to introduce each story to your child.

The **Teaching Notes** contain background information for you, the teacher, and are not meant to be read verbatim to students. In the first few lessons, the Teaching Notes include scripts that show how to introduce the tales to your child. The instructions become more streamlined as you gain experience and confidence with the program. You will also find a **printables checklist** here, showing which printables you will need for that lesson.

Next you will find a list of **vocabulary words** that may be unfamiliar to your child. In place of complex formal dictionary definitions, you'll find student-friendly language you can use to clarify the readings for your child. There is no need to introduce the words before reading the story, nor do students need to memorize definitions at this stage. Simply read the text and add the substitution afterward as an aside: "When we hear the bell ringing, we will know *immediately*—that means *right away*—that our enemy is coming."

Following the vocabulary words you will see the **Narration** section. The notes and prompts in this section, along with various graphic organizers, will help you teach oral narration and the basic elements of story structure to your child.⁴ This section also includes occasional comprehension questions and discussion topics. As you progress through the curriculum and your child gets used to the narration process, you may find that you don't need to rely on the prompts or the graphic organizers. Use the Narration printable to record your child's narrations.

It's fine to let children narrate in other ways on occasion. They can draw a scene from the story, for example, or act out the story with stuffed animals. I have suggested alternative narration methods for certain stories.

⁴ For an explanation of oral narration as a foundational pre-writing skill, see Susan Wise Bauer's [Writing with Ease: Strong Fundamentals](#).

The Literature section ends with **copywork and/or dictation**. Dictation is introduced at the beginning of the second trimester. Copywork and dictation sentences emphasize capitalization and punctuation, plus some spelling. You will find a reproducible **copywork sheet on page 16** and the **dictation sheet on page 17**. Instructions for implementing copywork and dictation are given in the lesson plans, and you will also find a reference guide in Appendix A on page 132.

The **Geography** section consists of map work, a short reading from a colorful reference book, and memory work. As this year's stories are somewhat longer than those in previous levels, you may want to **schedule geography and the related memory work as a separate lesson**.

You and your child will **identify the country** or area that the week's story comes from on your world map and place a sticker on it. Next, you will explore the country's entry in the **geography reference book**; the pages to read are listed in the *Map Work and Reading* section. Note that many of the European fairy tales read this year come from Germany, France, or England, so there will be some weeks when you will not need to mark the map or read anything new in the geography text. You may review the relevant pages or supplement with other print or video resources.

Then you will prompt your child to **recite previous memory work** and **teach them any new memory work items** listed. Instructions for introducing memory work are given in the lesson plans, and the material for review appears in each lesson.

During the first nine weeks of Level C, your child will review the memory work from the two previous levels of EWS. If your child has not completed these levels, they may need extra time to master this material. If so, introduce items one at a time, and be sure your child has mastered the definitions before moving on. There is no rush; the new memory work slows down considerably after the review, so there is time for your child to work on both the review and the new material.

For the rest of the year, students will be learning twenty world regions and one key country located in each. **Memory work should be reviewed daily, not just during the weekly lesson**. Some of the memory work requires the use of the **reproducible maps** at the end of this book, and this is noted in the lesson plans.

A Note about Intense Stories

The reading lists for Level C include a number of important fairy tales from the European canon and beyond. I have left out some of the more gruesome cautionary tales and stuck to classic stories that are widely recommended for this age group. However, some children find stories that feature witches or wicked parental figures frightening. Although psychologists suggest that fairy tales provide children with a safe way to explore their fears and to develop their moral imaginations,⁵ you should not force your child to listen to stories they find genuinely upsetting.

I've noted potentially intense themes in the Teaching Notes, and I urge you to pre-read any stories you're unfamiliar with before introducing them to your child. If a story seems too intense, substitute a tale from the same region as the assigned one, if possible. Between the two core literature texts, you have many options. The curriculum will still work with an occasional modification of this sort.

To learn more about these tales, I highly recommend *A Children's Guide to Folklore and Wonder Tales* by professor and professional storyteller Hannah B. Harvey (Great Courses, 2017). It's an accessible audio/video course for parents who want to know more about the history of these stories and how best to approach them with their children. You can find it at [Wondrium](#), on Amazon, or on Audible. For more in-depth study, see *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 2nd ed., ed. Maria Tartar (Norton, 2016), which contains texts, criticism, and an extensive bibliography.

⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Vintage Books, 2010). For counterpoints to Bettelheim, see Maria Tatar, *Off with Their Heads: Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (Princeton UP, 1993) and Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, rev. ed. (UP of Kentucky, 2002).

Required Materials for EWS: Level C

Core Literature Texts

- Best-Loved Folktales of the World* - Joanna Cole (ed.)
([paperback](#))

This classic collection of global folktales belongs on every homeschooler's shelf. This year's selections come from the European fairy tale canon, and you can substitute picture book versions of them if you prefer. If you do, look for the same kind of rich, literary language that Cole uses.

- Wonder Tales from Around the World* - Heather Forest
([paperback/audiobook](#))

This book offers retellings of world folktales from an award-winning storyteller. Some stories appear in both this book and *Best-Loved Folktales of the World*, and you can read whichever version you prefer to your child. I've noted this option in the lesson plans.

Geography Reference Text

- DK Countries of the World: Our World in Pictures* - Andrea Mills
([hardcover/ebook](#))

This colorful reference book is used in all three levels of this curriculum. You'll see it referred to in the lesson plans as "the geography text."

Additional Materials

- A [large, current world map](#) you can mark⁶
- Small star and dot stickers in bright colors
- A current globe
- Multiple copies of the printables on pages 12-17
- Multiple copies of the printable maps (see lesson plans)
- Pencils for copywork and dictation
- Colored pencils or crayons for map work

⁶ If you used a previous level of this curriculum, you can use the same map for this level.

Optional Supplements, References, and Bridge Texts

- Draw the World* - Kristin J. Draeger ([paperback](#))

This book takes you step-by-step through drawing a simple world map. Use it at the end of the year or over the summer before the beginning of third grade as a review of the information in this curriculum.

- Evan Moor Beginning Geography* ([paperback/ebook](#))

This workbook covers geography information for the primary grades. It makes a good review book to use in the summer between second and third grades.

- Geography from A to Z: A Picture Glossary* - Jack Knowlton ([paperback/ebook](#))

Use this as a reference guide for geography-related vocabulary that your student may encounter in their reading. The drawings are colorful, and the descriptions are accurate but clear enough for younger children to understand. It's perfect for curious kids who want to know how a knoll relates to a hill, or what the difference is between a stream, a brook, and a creek. Older students will find it useful too.

LESSON C-1

“The Magic Brocade”

Wonder Tales, p. 11 or *Best-Loved Folktales*, p. 539

Zhuang people (China)

Literature

Teaching Notes

► **Printables:** Story Summary Triples Three Acts Narration

Copywork

Folktales are stories that originate in popular (“folk”) culture and are passed on by word of mouth. As part of an **oral tradition**, they do not have authors per se. Instead, we identify the people or country that the story originated from, if known, with the understanding that there are as many variations of the tale as there are storytellers.

EWS Level C introduces children to the class of folktales known as **wonder tales**. The terms **fairy tale** and wonder tale are often used interchangeably; another term in common use by scholars is the German *Märchen*. Folklorist Stith Thompson defined this last term as “a tale [...] that moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and is filled with the marvellous.”⁷ It is this **sense of the marvelous** that defines the wonder tale and sets it apart from other types of folktales, like fables or wisdom tales.

Some scholars distinguish between the fairy tale, in which the main character lives “happily ever after,” and the **cautionary tale**, in which the main character comes to a bad end. Even in fairy tales, not every character lives “happily ever after” even in fairy tales. It’s very common for characters who have behaved badly to be punished at the end of the story.

Tales can fall into more than one category. In Level B, we saw a number of tales that could be classed as **trickster tales**, **myths**, or **pourquoi tales** (“**how and why**” or **origin stories**). Often the **genre** assigned depends on the aspect of the story being analyzed: Are we looking at the main character’s behavior (trickster)? Whether the character is divine (myth)? The purpose of the tale (pourquoi tale, fable)?

⁷ Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (Dryden Press, 1946), p. 8.

“The Magic Brocade” appears in both of the core literature texts. The version in *Wonder Tales* is written for independent reading by upper-elementary students, grades 4-6. The style and vocabulary are therefore appropriate for reading aloud to younger children. The version in *Best-Loved Folktales* is essentially the same, although with slightly more challenging vocabulary, more complex sentence structure, and a few additional descriptive details. Choose the version you think will be most accessible to your child. The vocabulary below is from the *Wonder Tales* version.

The **Zhuang or Chuang people** are the largest ethnic minority group in China. Most of them live in the Guangxi Autonomous Region in southern China, near the border with Vietnam.

➤ When introducing this year’s stories to your child, use words like the following:

Today we are going to be reading a wonder tale told by the Zhuang people in China. The title is “The Magic Brocade.”

Vocabulary

brocade: rich fabric woven with a raised pattern
thatched: with a roof made of straw or similar material
exquisite: extremely beautiful
shuddered: shook, trembled
squandered: wasted

Narration

This year, your child will be **orally narrating, or telling back**, the stories you read aloud. Your initial goal is to elicit a **brief summary of the story**, with all of the action in the correct order.

Some children will need little or no prompting to narrate at length and may echo the language of the story verbatim. In that case, simply **scribe (write down) your child’s narration** for them on a copy of the sheet provided on page 15. If the narration is too long for you to write down, you can record it with your computer or phone. It isn’t necessary to scribe or record every single narration, especially if they are long; record one every 6-8 lessons to track student progress.

Other children will benefit from more explicit structure. The **Story Summary graphic organizer** on page 12 provides the student with helpful scaffolding to narrate the main points of a story. Here is how the parts of the graphic organizer correspond to the aspects of story structure.

Somebody	Character (usually the main character)
Wanted	Goal, Orientation
But	Conflict, Complication
So	Plot, action, episodes
Then	Conclusion, Resolution , outcome

If your child needs help narrating today's story—and most will— begin by modeling narration. Read the following summary of the first part of the story aloud:

A weaver bought a painting and made a beautiful brocade of it, but it blew away. The weaver was so sad that she got very sick. Two of her sons went to find the brocade, but they didn't want to do what they had to to get it back.

Then ask the child the following questions. The numbers and underlined words indicate where to place the information in the Story Summary graphic organizer.

1. Who is the story about?
2. What did they want?
3. But what was the problem?
4. So what did they do?
5. Then what happened? How did it turn out?

Somebody	The weaver's youngest son
Wanted	to get his mother's brocade back
But	he had to knock out his two front teeth first.
So	he did, and an old woman gave him a magic horse that took him to Sun Mountain where fairies were making a copy of the brocade.
Then	the fairies gave him the brocade, and when he got home, it turned into a real place where he and his mother lived happily ever after.

You will notice that this narration leaves out certain details, such as the fairy in red and the fate of the two older brothers. Experienced narrators may include them, but it is perfectly acceptable for beginners to stick to the bare bones of the story.

Narration is a complex skill that children develop over time, and a beginner's narration will not resemble what an adult would produce. Meet your child where they are with narration and look for progress, not perfection. As students progress through the curriculum, their narrations will become longer and more detailed.

Copywork

To implement copywork with your child, follow these steps:

1. Write the copywork sentence at the top of the copywork sheet or on a separate piece of lined paper.
2. Highlight capital letters, punctuation, and challenging spelling words.
3. Read the sentence aloud, and ask your child to repeat it back to you.
4. Ask the child to copy the sentence carefully.
5. Check the finished copywork to see that it is complete and correct.

At last, they came to Sun Mountain, where warmth and light drenched the sky.

Geography

Map Work and Reading

If you have completed Level A and/or B of this curriculum with your child, you will already have **China** marked on your world map. If not, locate and mark it now. I suggest using stars to mark countries and dots to mark states. Read or review the entry for China on pages 160–161 of the geography text.

Memory Work

At the beginning of this year, your student will review the geography memory work taught in Levels A and B. This gives newcomers to the program a chance to establish a good foundation for Level C knowledge and reinforces the memory work for children who completed Levels A and/or B.

➤ If you are teaching this material to your child for the first time, use the explanations and demonstrations in the “Introduce” section below. Then read the questions and answers above to your child and **ask them to repeat the answers to you three times.**

➤ Review:

Q: What is a world map?

A: A world map is a flat drawing of the Earth.

Q: What is a globe?

A: The Earth is shaped like a sphere (a ball), and the globe shows what the Earth looks like from outer space.

Q: What are the cardinal directions?

A: The cardinal directions are North, East, South, and West.

➤ Introduce:

To teach the world map and globe definitions, show the child both objects, and explain the difference between them: the map is a drawing of the Earth’s surface, while the globe shows it in space.

To teach the cardinal directions, explain to your child that **the sun rises in the eastern part of the sky every morning**. Show your child where that is in real life. If possible, go outdoors and show them a stable physical landmark to the east; otherwise, show them which wall in your home is (roughly) in the east.

Show them that, if they stand with the east at their right hand, they will be facing north, south will be behind them, and west to their left.

Now look at your world map, and point out the **compass rose** to your child. Show them how the four cardinal directions are labeled (usually N, E, S, and W) and what those abbreviations stand for. Explain that, on most maps, **North is toward the top, East toward the right, South toward the bottom, and West toward the left**.

During the coming week, have your child **practice locating the cardinal directions** both indoors and outdoors. If your child has trouble remembering the clockwise order of the directions, you can teach them the mnemonic device **“Never Eat Slimy Worms.”**

LESSON C-2

“Snow White”

Best-Loved Folktales, p. 53

Germany

Literature

Teaching Notes

► **Printables:** Story Summary Triples Three Acts Narration

Copywork

With “Snow White,” we begin our exploration of European wonder tales. This story and many of the others we’ll read this year were collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and first published in Germany in 1812. Their original collection, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Nursery and Household Tales*) was later expanded to include many more tales, which we now know collectively as “Grimms’ fairy tales.”

Your child may already be familiar with this story, either from bedtime read-alouds or from the famous Disney animated film. If so, ask them to listen carefully to the version you’ll be reading, which is a translation of the Grimms’ tale. Some adaptations change or leave out details that appear in the original. For example, when the seven dwarfs arrive home and discover Snow White, their dialog may remind your child of the story “Goldilocks and the Three Bears.” Some adaptations leave this section out, but catching these types of resonances between stories is an important part of literary analysis, and we want to encourage it.

This story contains themes that some children may find upsetting. Snow White’s birth mother dies, and the wicked queen repeatedly tries to kill Snow White, first through an intermediary and eventually by her own sorcery. In the end, the wicked queen is punished by being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes until she dies. If you suspect that your child is sensitive to these types of stories, try reading the tale in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone. Assuring the child that “this is a fairy tale, and fairy tales always end with ‘happily ever after’” may also help. You can also substitute a less intense story from Cole’s anthology.

Vocabulary

ebony: a black wood from a tropical tree
overbearing: domineering, bossy
surpassed: was better or more than
looking glass: mirror
fairest: most beautiful
contented: happy and satisfied
token: sign
consented: agreed
devour: eat up
committed herself to heaven: said her prayers
astonishment: wonder
comrades: companions, friends
lace: ribbon, cord
variegated: multicolored
hastened: hurried
paragon: example, model
refrain: resist
morsel: small piece, bite
glance: look
bier: a movable frame for carrying a coffin
lamented: grieved
beseech: beg
brethren: brothers
pomp: ceremony

Narration

Because this story is so well-known, your child may be able to give a pretty complete narration of it despite its considerable length. In this lesson, however, we will focus on one of the common structural aspects of wonder tales: triples. **Triples are any set of three parallel characters or actions.** In “The Magic Brocade,” the three brothers form a triple, and in many stories we’ll see this year, the main character must perform three tasks to achieve their goal. While triples are not a universal feature of world folktales—some cultures prefer a fourfold structure—they are extremely common.

The **Wonder Tale Triples graphic organizer** (p. 13) shows that the triple structure expands the part of the story where the character tries to achieve their goal: “So the character does *this* and *this* and *this*.”

Today we will look at a series of episodes in the middle of “Snow White” as an example of how the triple structure works.

Begin by reading the following narration of the beginning of the story aloud to your child as a model.

A queen wished for a beautiful baby girl. She gave birth to Snow White but then died.

The king remarried a beautiful but vain lady who wanted to be the most beautiful woman in all the world. The new queen was envious of Snow White’s beauty, so she ordered a huntsman to kill her, but the huntsman secretly let Snow White go and tricked the queen into believing she was dead.

Snow White wandered through the woods until she came to a cottage that belonged to seven dwarfs. They offered to let her stay and keep house for them. They warned Snow White to beware of her stepmother.

Next, use the following questions and the Wonder Tales Triples graphic organizer to help your child narrate the next part of the text.

- 1. What did the wicked queen want?**
- 2. But why couldn’t she get what she wanted?**
- 3. She tried three things to get what she wanted. What was the first thing?**
- 4. What was the second thing she tried?**
- 5. What was the third thing?**
- 6. What happened then?**

Write your child’s answers in the graphic organizer. When it is complete, it should look like this:

Somebody wanted	The wicked queen wanted to be the most beautiful woman in the world.
But	Snow White was more beautiful than the queen.
So 1. 2. 3.	The queen disguised herself and tried to do away with Snow White with 1. a corset lace 2. a poisoned comb 3. a poisoned apple
Then	The dwarfs saved Snow White the first two times, but they could save her the last time, so they put Snow White in a glass coffin.

Now read the following narration of the end of the tale to your child as a further model.

A prince rode by and fell in love with Snow White. The dwarfs agreed to give him the coffin, but as it was being moved, the piece of poisoned apple popped out of Snow White's mouth. The prince asked to marry her, and she agreed.

The wicked queen heard from her magic mirror that a new bride was more lovely than she. When she went to the wedding, she saw that it was Snow White. The wicked queen was punished by dancing in red-hot iron shoes.

Copywork

“Oh, that I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the embroidery frame!”

Geography

Map Work and Reading

Locate and mark **Germany** on your world map, if you have not done so already, and read pages 94-95 in the geography text. Many of this year's stories come from Germany, so it is not necessary to re-read the geography text every time.

Memory Work

> Review:

Q: What is a world map?

A: A world map is a flat drawing of the Earth.

Q: What is a globe?

A: The Earth is shaped like a sphere (a ball), and the globe shows what the Earth looks like from outer space.

Q: What are the cardinal directions?

A: The cardinal directions are North, East, South, and West.

> Introduce or review:

Q: What country do you live in?

A: I live in...

Q: What is the capital of _____ [home country]?

A: _____ [city] is the capital of _____ [home country].

Q: What state [province] do you live in?

A: I live in the state [province] of _____.

Q: What is the capital of _____ [state/province]?

A: The capital of _____ [state/province] is _____ [city].

Q: What is your street address?

A: My street address is...

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL D: WISDOM TALES 1

Instructor's Guide

DREW CAMPBELL

Quidnam Press
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Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

Exploring the World through Story introduces children to the wonder of words and the diversity of human cultures through the study of world literature. Over the course of the elementary grades—3-5 or ages 7-11—children study **wisdom tales** from the world’s spiritual traditions, both ancient and modern, with a focus on cultural literacy and literary analysis.

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, discussing, and writing about the stories and by memory work. Second, comprehension questions and a clear approach to structure help students **learn the basics of literary analysis**. Finally, students **practice composition skills** with narrations and other writing activities.

Although the elementary levels build on the foundation laid in the primary levels, the program is structured to allow students to begin at any point.

About Level D

Each of the elementary levels of EWS covers stories from one major Asian tradition, one ancient belief system (“mythology”), and one Abrahamic faith.⁸ In *Exploring the World through Story: Level D*, third graders read wisdom tales from the **Hindu, ancient Egyptian, and Jewish traditions**. The stories have been chosen for their cultural or historical importance and for their literary influence. (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 D is just one component of a complete English Language Arts program for third grade. Your child will also need dedicated [grammar](#) and [writing](#) curricula, and you may also want to continue with phonics-based [reading instruction](#), handwriting practice, and spelling as needed. Students should read independently for at least 30 minutes a day from a wide range of fiction —children’s classics, contemporary middle-grade novels, and historical novels—and poetry as well as biographies and other nonfiction works. I also encourage parents to allow students the freedom to choose their own books for recreational reading.

⁸ “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. It also includes popular oral narratives (folktales) with a didactic or moral purpose. 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 ask “What does it mean?” Finally, because wisdom tales articulate and transmit cultural norms, they offer **insight into each culture’s distinctive values**. Students gain cross-cultural 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. Longer stories have been broken up into segments to keep lessons to a manageable length and to facilitate narration.

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 a short introduction to the text or a pointer to background information that appears in the book itself. Read through this section before teaching the lesson, and highlight any information you want to share with your child.

The stories are meant to be **read aloud to your child**. While some of the texts are written at a level accessible to advancing readers, children’s decoding, comprehension, and fluency skills vary widely. If your child is able to read the texts independently with ease and understanding, ask them to read aloud to you, or switch off reading to each other.

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.”⁹ The vocabulary lists in EWS are meant as a ready reference so you don’t have to interrupt your 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.¹⁰

The second part of the lesson, **Writing Activities**, includes a variety of tasks, including oral and written narration; comprehension questions that call for oral and/or written responses; copywork and dictation; and more.

This section concludes with **memory work**, and you’ll find an **implementation guide** in Appendix C (pp. 223–225).

About the Writing Activities

The oral narration, copywork, and dictation activities in EWS 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

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

¹⁰ For instructional ideas, see Beck et al., pp. 183–193.

and Natalie Wexler as well as ideas from the [Core Knowledge Language Arts](#) curriculum.

The focus of this year's writing work is **sentence-level composition**. To help reinforce what your student is learning in their writing curriculum, lessons include a variety of exercise types: completing sentence stems; adding appositives and dependent clauses; combining sentences; and more. This level also begins modeling paragraph formation, a skill that will take center stage in Levels E and F.

The **Student Worksheet pack** contains all the pages necessary to complete the writing activities, including blank copywork and dictation sheets. **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.

Scheduling Options

EWS-D consists of 72 lessons, or two per week for a 36-week school year. You can either teach each complete lesson in a single day or split the material up to teach each lesson over two days.

Option A: 2x/week

- **Two lessons per week** plus daily memory work review
- **60-90 minutes per lesson**
- Complete reading, writing, copywork/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, copywork/dictation, and introduce new memory work
- Days 2 and 4: Complete writing activity and review memory work

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.
- Review the previous lesson's narration if indicated.
- Read the day's passage aloud.
- Introduce new vocabulary as needed during the reading.
- Introduce and supervise the writing activity.
- Introduce and supervise copywork/dictation.
- Review old memory work.
- Introduce new memory work.

Required Materials for EWS: Level D

❑ *Classic Tales from India* – Vatsala Sperling and Harish Johari
[Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#)

Dr. Sperling retells the best-known stories of several major Hindu deities as well as the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, in a clear and engaging style. The illustrations were created with a traditional process used in Hindu devotional art. The book includes many helpful features, including character lists, pronunciation guides, background information about the stories, and interpretive notes addressed to parents and teachers.

❑ *Treasury of Egyptian Mythology* – Donna Jo Napoli
[Hardcover](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Audible](#)

Professor Napoli weaves together tales of the Egyptian gods, including both prominent and lesser-known figures from ancient Egyptian religion. The book includes informational chapters on the Nile and funeral rites, plus maps, character guides, a timeline, and an extensive bibliography.

❑ *Treasury of Bible Stories* – Donna Jo Napoli
[Hardcover](#) | [Kindle](#)

Professor Napoli retells the most influential stories from the Hebrew scriptures in lyrical prose. Her text, written in consultation with professor of Biblical Hebrew Helen Plotkin, covers all of the stories that the Core Knowledge Foundation lists as the most important for elementary-school students to know as part of cultural literacy. Like her Egyptian mythology book, Napoli's story Bible includes interpretive notes and a section at the end of the volume with maps, a timeline, and a list of characters. Christina Balit's stunning art accurately reflects the ethnic diversity of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, which some popular story Bibles unfortunately do not.

Additional Materials

- Print-out of student worksheets, three-hole punched
- 1" three-ring binder to store worksheets
- Pencils, pens, erasers
- Highlighter
- A small white board, markers, and eraser (optional: for presenting copywork models or doing grammar analysis)
- A supply of [lined index cards](#)
- An [index card file box](#)
- [Tabbed index card dividers numbered 1-31](#), to fit the file

LESSON D-1

“How Ganesh Got His Elephant Head” (Part 1)

Classic Tales from India, pp. 15-23

Reading

Teaching Notes

Our first book for this year, *Classic Tales from India*, brings together some of the most important figures and stories from **ancient Sanskrit literature**. These tales come from the sacred writings of **Hinduism**.

Hinduism has two basic classes of sacred literature, *shruti* and *smriti*. *Shruti* texts, which include the Vedas and Upanishads, are believed to be divinely revealed, while *smriti* texts are those based on human memory that may have named authors or compilers. The *shruti* texts deal with an older generation of divine beings that share much in common with the gods of the ancient Greek and Norse pantheons. The stories in *Classic Tales of India* derive from the *smriti* canon, which includes both the Puranas—compilations of myths, legends, and history—and the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.¹¹

Our first story, from the *Shiva Purana*, recounts how Shiva’s son Ganesh¹² got his elephant head. Our authors provide some information about Ganesh on page 16, and you may wish to read this to your child by way of introduction to the character. You may also want to look ahead to the “Note to Parents and Teachers” on page 42, which discusses some of the themes and cultural values expressed in the story. (Each story in this book ends with a similar note.)

The story also introduces several other key figures from this tradition. Central among them are **Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva**, who together make up the Hindu *trimurti* (lit. “three forms”). These are the three gods, or aspects of the divine, in charge of the creation, preservation, and destruction of the world, respectively. We also meet several manifestations of **Shakti**, the divine feminine or mother goddess, as well as other characters who reappear in later stories, such as the storm god Indra and the sage Narada.

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Smriti>

¹² Many Sanskrit names end in -a, which is pronounced as /ah/ or /aah/. Speakers of some modern Indian languages, such as Hindi, may drop the final /ah/ sound when saying these names. Consequently, you will hear people say either Ganesh or Ganesha. Here I have followed our author’s choice in using *Ganesh*.

In addition to reading the notes on page 16 to your child, try to **connect the story to their existing knowledge**.

- Have they studied India before? If so, what do they remember about it?
- Do they already know stories from the Hindu tradition? Students who have completed EWS-C may remember “The Tiger, the Brahman, and the Jackal.”

If this is your child’s first exposure to Indian literature and culture, **show them where India is located on a world map or globe**, and help them look up the country in a geography reference book or children’s history encyclopedia.¹³ You can also download the free Core Knowledge History and Geography [student reader on Ancient India](#).

This story, like some of the others in this book, does include depictions of violence and armed conflict. These are facts of literature as of life, and the stories treat them as necessary evils. If you have a sensitive child, it may help to remind them that these stories are meant to teach deeper messages about justice, self-sacrifice, and balance. No actual elephants were harmed in the making of this story!

➤ Now introduce the story itself to your child as follows:

Today we’re going to start reading a story from India called “How Ganesh Got His Elephant Head.”

Next, **read the passage aloud**. It’s best if you can sit right next to the child so they can see the pictures and follow along with the story. Refer to the pronunciation guide and vocabulary list below as necessary. Today’s passage ends at the section break two-thirds of the way down page 23.

¹³ I recommend [Countries of the World: Our World in Pictures](#) and [First History Encyclopedia](#), both by Dorling Kindersley (DK), as basic references for this age group.

Vocabulary

Ganesh /gah-NAYSH/ - god who removes obstacles
Shiva /SHEE-vuh/ - god of destruction or transformation
Parvati /PAR-vuh-tee/- mother goddess, wife of Shiva
Nandi /NAHN-dee/ - Shiva's vehicle or mount, a bull
Shivaganas /shee-vuh-GAH-nuhs/ - Shiva's rough band of followers
Narada /NAH-ruh-duh/ - a sage
Brahma /BRAH-muh/ - god of creation
Vishnu /VISH-noo/ - god of preservation

passionately: with strong feelings

clad: dressed

matted: tangled

unruly: not following rules

protested: complained about

barging in: walking in suddenly

sandalwood paste: a perfume made from the sandalwood tree

sturdy: strongly built

slender: thin

ruffians: tough bullies

cohorts: groups, bands

mortified: deeply ashamed, embarrassed

sage: wise person

netherworlds: underworld

battalion: group of soldiers

invincible: unbeatable

not to mince words: to speak bluntly, to be honest to the point of being rude

turmoil: confused situation, mess

consult: check in with, discuss with

Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheets: pp. 1-3

Guided Written Narration

In previous levels of EWS, students practiced oral narration, a fundamental pre-writing skill that helps students learn to formulate ideas, order information, and compose complete sentences. In EWS-D, you will help your child transition to written narration by using graphic organizers and prompts.

Graphic organizers help students understand the basic structure of stories and summarize plots. For your reference, here is how the sections of the Story Summary graphic organizer correspond to the basic parts of a story:

Somebody	Character (usually the main character)
Wanted	Goal, orientation
But	Conflict, complication
So	Plot, action, episodes
Then	Conclusion, resolution , outcome

The student worksheets for today's lesson include a blank Story Summary graphic organizer. Give this sheet to your child and ask them to fill in the blanks¹⁴ in response to the following prompts:

Instructor: Now that you've heard this part of the story, we're going to summarize part of it together. At the beginning of the story, we met two *characters*. (Characters are the people who do things in the story.) Who were they?

Student: Shiva and Parvati.

Instructor: Right. Shiva is the god of destruction, and Parvati is his wife and a mother goddess.

¹⁴ Most 3rd graders have developed the writing stamina to complete these worksheets themselves. If your child has a disability or other condition that impacts their ability to write by hand, scribe their oral responses for them.

Now let's think about the *plot*, or what happened in the story. Usually a story starts with some kind of problem that makes one of the characters take action to change things. In other words, the character has a *goal*, something they want or need. In our passage, what did Parvati want? What did Shiva do that annoyed her?

Student: She wanted privacy when she was bathing, but Shiva kept barging in on her.

[Direct student's attention to the graphic organizer. Have them fill in the first three boxes as follows:]

Somebody	Parvati
Wanted	privacy when she was bathing
But	Shiva kept barging in.
So	
Then	

Instructor: So Parvati's goal was to have privacy when she was bathing. What did Parvati do to achieve that goal?

Student: She made a boy to guard the door for her.

[Have the child write this information in the "So" box of the graphic organizer:]

Somebody	Parvati
Wanted	privacy when she was bathing
But	Shiva kept barging in.
So	she made a boy to guard the door for her.
Then	

Instructor: Then what happened when Shiva came home?

Student: He tried to come in, but the boy wouldn't let him.

[Direct your child to add this information to the graphic organizer:]

Somebody	Parvati
Wanted	privacy when she was bathing
But	Shiva kept barging in.
So	she made a boy to guard the door for her.
Then	Shiva tried to come in, but the boy wouldn't let him.

Instructor: Now we can write a narration, or plot summary, using these notes. [Give your child to the My Narration sheet and direct them to write a summary based on the graphic organizer. The completed summary should look like this:]

Parvati wanted privacy when she was bathing, but Shiva kept barging in. So she made a boy to guard the door for her. Then Shiva tried to come in, but the boy wouldn't let him.

Once the child has completed their written narration, conclude this part of the lesson by narrating the last part of the story.

Instructor: There's a little bit more in our story today. Here's what a narration or plot summary of the last part would sound like:

Shiva sent his followers, Nandi and the Shivaganas, to investigate, but the boy defeated them. The sage Narada saw what was happening and became very worried. He went to tell Brahma and Vishnu about it. They decided to talk to Shiva.

Copywork

In the primary levels of EWS, we used copywork to help children practice handwriting and mechanics, or the conventions of written language. This year we will use copywork and dictation to familiarize students with **varied sentence structures and new vocabulary**. Over time, narration, copywork, and dictation build the skills students need for independent writing about literature.¹⁵

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the role of copywork and dictation in writing instruction, see Susan Wise Bauer, *Writing with Ease: Strong Fundamentals* (Well-Trained Mind Press, 2015), pp. 3-10.

The copywork sentences can also be used for grammar analysis, if you are using a grammar curriculum that teaches this skill. See Appendix B on page 222 for some grammar analysis ideas.

The process for using copywork in Level D is as follows:

1. Write the copywork sentence on a white board or a piece of lined paper in the handwriting style your child is learning.
2. Highlight capital letters, punctuation, and challenging spelling words.
3. Read the sentence aloud, and ask your child to repeat it back to you.
4. Direct your child to copy the sentence carefully.
5. Check the finished copywork to see that it is complete and correct.

A summary of how to implement copywork and dictation appears in Appendix A on page 221. You may wish to **bookmark or print this page** and keep it handy as a reference.

Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, was married to the beautiful mother goddess Parvati.

Memory Work

Before beginning memory work, **read through the implementation guide** in Appendix C (pp. 223-225). A complete list of the year's memory work appears in Appendix D (pp. 226-230).

Most of this year's memory work will be information about the characters and cultures we'll be studying, but for the first few weeks, we'll establish a foundation for literary analysis by learning some key vocabulary words.

Q: What are *characters* in literature?

A: Characters *in literature* are the people, animals, or other beings that do things in the story.

LESSON D-27

“Ra” (Part 1)

Treasury of Egyptian Mythology, pp. 10-17

Reading

Teaching Notes

Today we begin our study of stories about the ancient Egyptian gods. In addition to providing knowledge about this important ancient civilization, these tales offer some important background for understanding parts of the Hebrew scriptures, which we will study next. The figure of Aset, or Isis, plays a key role in Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*, the only Roman novel that survives in its entirety and an early entry in the picaresque genre. The Egyptians also wrote some of the oldest short stories we know; students will read these in a later level of EWS.

By third grade, many students will have acquired some basic knowledge of ancient Egypt from their history studies. Core Knowledge’s [Ancient Egypt reader](#) provides a solid review and can also serve as an introduction for newcomers. In addition, our text includes three sections with background information: The Great Nile (pp. 95-99), studied in Week 19; Funeral Rites (pp. 157-161), read in Week 22; and a more extensive section at the end of the book with a map, a timeline, a list of the various gods, and a postscript about the sources of the stories (pp. 170-185). Be sure that your child can **locate Egypt on a modern world map** as well.

Napoli’s text uses the Egyptian names for the gods, not the more familiar Greek versions. A table showing the correspondences between the two appears on page 9 of our text, and the title page for each story lists the Greek name under the Egyptian one. The memory work in this section will include both names when the Greek one is better known than the Egyptian one (e.g., Isis vs. Aset).

Today’s reading introduces the sun god Ra (associated with the Greek Helios) and a primal creation story. Napoli’s style is more poetic than that of our previous authors. Reading slowly and expressively will help students follow the narrative. (An [audio version](#) of the text is also available.) The passage runs from the top of page 12 to the middle of page 17 (“...as he waited and waited some more”). Be sure to read the text box on page 13 as well.

Vocabulary

Ra /RAH/ - god of radiance (light) and the sun

Tefnut /TEF-noot/ - goddess of moisture

Shu /SHOO/ - god of wind, air

radiance: light

Nun: primal waters

cosmos: universe, all that exists

chaos: disorder

entity: being

perforce: necessarily, out of necessity

tolerated: put up with

temporarily: for a while

unutterably: not able to be described or spoken

tsunamis: tidal waves

enunciate: pronounce, speak out loud

molten: melted

firmament: sky, heavens

Benben: primal mound (a benben stone is also the top stone on a pyramid)

propelled: pushed forward

wallow: sunken area

triad: group of three

invincible: not able to be overcome or conquered

three dimensions: right and left, forward and backward, up and down

simultaneously: at the same time

yielded: given up, produced

bereft: sad because of a loss

wretchedness: deep distress, discomfort, or unhappiness

Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheet: p. 52

Guided Oral Narration

In addition to making sure that your child has understood the flow of the narrative, you will be asking them to think about what some parts of the story mean, or what they **symbolize**.

Q: In today's story, what existed in the beginning?

A: Water.

Q: That water made a sound that was also its name. What was that sound?

A: Nun.

Q: Then another sound emerged; what was that?

A: A thumping.

Q: And what formed around the thumping?

A: A heart.

Q: What was inside the heart?

A: A thought.

Q: Who emerged from this thought?

A: The god Ra.

Q: How did Ra create *benben*, the first firmament?

A: He shouted the first word over and over.

Q: How did Ra create his children?

A: He spat.

Q: Which goddess did he create from the moisture within him?

A: Tefnut.

Q: And which god came from his breath itself?

A: Shu.

Q: What happened to Tefnut and Shu one night?

A: They wandered off and got lost.

Q: How did Ra feel and what did he do?

A: Ra was bereft, and he sent his eye out to search for them.

Q: What did Ra do so he could see again while his eye was out searching?

A: He made a new eye for himself.

Q: Now we're going to think about what the characters in this story might mean to the ancient people who originally told it. What do you know about the environment in Egypt? What kind of place is it?

A: Hot and dry, with a large river, the Nile.

Q: So why might an Egyptian creation story make radiance (light), the first god?

A: Because the sun was the most important (powerful) thing where they lived. [You may need to prompt your child a bit to help them see this connection. For example, you can use an analogy: If someone grew up on a small island, what might they think was the most powerful thing? The sea. So what kind of god might they imagine to be the creator? A sea god.]

Q: What other natural forces are important in a desert climate? Think about Ra's children.

A: Moisture (water) and wind.

Q: If Ra is the god of radiance, or light, what do you think the eye of Ra might symbolize (stand for), then?

A: The physical sun itself.

[Again, you may have to prompt your child by asking questions like, "What would the ancient Egyptians have been able to see in their environment that was connected to radiance, or light?"]

Q: What would it mean to people living in a desert climate if water and wind "got lost"?

A: People can't live without water, and wind helps cool you down in the heat. It would be terrible if those two things weren't around.

Copywork

Ra shouted the first word, over and over, and those shouts rose in a molten mass.

Memory Work

Q: Who is Ra, and what is his Greek name?

A: Ra is the ancient Egyptian god of the sun, and his Greek name is Helios.

LESSON D-45

Genesis 1:1-2:4

“Creation”

Treasury of Bible Stories, pp. 10–15

Reading

Teaching Notes

Today we begin reading stories from the **Hebrew scriptures**. These texts cover a period from the Bronze Age through the reign of Cyrus the Great of Persia in the 6th century BCE, although many were written or compiled centuries after the events they portray.¹⁶ The twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh*,¹⁷ fall into a variety of literary genres and include sacred history, legal codes, genealogies, liturgical poetry, proverbs, pious legends, and more.

Students should understand that the Bible is not a single text but a **collection of books**—*biblia* is the Greek word for “books”—written by different authors over a period of a thousand years. Therefore, they show a variety of styles and perspectives (points of view). See Professor Napoli’s introduction on pages 6–8 for more information on her approach to retelling these stories and her understanding of them as literature.

More than half of the stories students will be reading this year are drawn from the books of **Genesis** and **Exodus**. These are the first two of the five books that make up the *Torah* or *Pentateuch*. This portion of the Hebrew Bible was traditionally attributed to the prophet Moses, but [scholars have determined](#) that it was pieced together from the writings of different anonymous authors. It recounts the origins of the Jewish people and their covenant with God. The remaining stories span the rest of the Hebrew scriptures.

Just as we have read stories from the ancient Indian and Egyptian traditions for their cultural and literary importance, so too will we approach biblical narratives from a literary perspective. In this context, we are concerned with the characters in the Bible—including the one often designated simply as “God” or “the Lord”—as literary figures only. The teaching notes will provide

¹⁶ For more details and to help you understand the relationship of the biblical narratives to secular history, see [“A Short Introduction to the Bible and the History of Ancient Israel”](#) by Andrew Tobolowsky, assistant professor of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary.

¹⁷ The word *Tanakh* is an abbreviation derived from the Hebrew names of its three sections: **Torah** (“Teaching, Law”), **Nevi'im** (“Prophets”), and **Ketuvim** (“Writings”).

some pointers to information about the historicity of certain biblical figures and stories as well as their appearance in later literature.

As before, try to **connect these readings to your child's existing knowledge.**

- **Have they heard any stories from the Hebrew scriptures before?**
- **What do they know about contemporary Judaism?**
- **Do they know which other faiths draw on these scriptural traditions (Christianity, Islam)?**

Show your child the map on pages 192-193 and compare it to a modern world map. What **modern nations** exist today in the area shown on the detail map on page 192? (*Israel, Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon.*)

Today's reading is Napoli's retelling of the Hebrew **creation story** from the first chapter of Genesis. Her note in the box on page 15 explains how the story links time to physical nature.

Vocabulary

vast: huge, boundless, spread out

potential: possibility

inevitable: unavoidable, bound to happen

crystalline: like crystals

clarity: clearness

innumerable: countless

fecundity: fertility, fruitfulness

utterly: completely, totally

paltry: poor, inferior

dominion: power and authority

crucial: vital, very important

sustain: support, uphold

docile: teachable, mild and gentle

decorum: proper behavior

toils: works, activities

perpetual: eternal, going on forever

Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheet: p. 97

Guided Oral Narration

After guiding your child through the narrative with the following comprehension questions, you will discuss with them the similarities and differences between this creation story and the Egyptian one you read in Lessons D-27 and D-28.

Q: In our story, what three things existed in the beginning?

A: Darkness, God, and the waters.

Q: What started then and where did it come from?

A: A wind.

Q: What did God say to start the process of creation?

A: "Let there be light."

Q: What did God create next?

A: The heavens.

Q: What did God create after that?

A: Land and plants.

Continue to question your child about the order of events in the text. Here are the remaining acts of creation. Refer back to the text as necessary to help your child remember them.

Day Four: Sun and Moon

Day Five: Fish in the waters, birds in the sky

Day Six: Land animals and human beings

Next, ask your child to think of **three things that are similar** in this story and the Egyptian creation story, and **three things that are different**. Here are some possible answers:

Similarities	Differences
Creation is started by only one deity (god).	Ra creates other deities, while God does not. Ra emerges from Nun; God is shown existing at the same time as the waters.
Both stories start with water.	-
Both gods create through words, by speaking or shouting.	The primal waters of Nun make a sound; the first sound in Genesis comes from God.
Both gods create land.	The land Ra creates comes out of the primal waters; the Earth itself is the body of the god Geb. The land God makes emerges from waters below heaven and does not involve another deity.
Both gods create animals that can reproduce.	Ra creates snakes; God creates many different kinds of animals in the sky, in water, and on land.
Both gods create human beings.	Humans emerge from Ra's tears, while God creates humans deliberately, in God's own image.
Both stories relate time to creation.	Ra undergoes a daily cycle as the Sun; God creates the seven-day week.

Copywork

God gave them a charge: to take care of the earth, to be the masters of all, to make what God had created work.

Memory Work

Q: What is the Tanakh?

A: The Tanakh is the name for the Hebrew scriptures or Bible.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL D: WISDOM TALES 1

Student Worksheets

DREW CAMPBELL

Quidnam Press
quidnampress.com

Brahma disguised himself as a teacher. He thought this disguise would persuade the boy because _____

_____.

The plan failed; the boy remained obedient only to his mother. Next, Shiva suggested that they call on Indra's army to defeat the boy. This plan also failed because _____

_____.

Now the gods were really worried. Vishnu attacked the boy with his chakra, but _____

_____.

Finally, Shiva had had enough. _____

_____.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL E: WISDOM TALES 2

Instructor's Guide

DREW CAMPBELL

Quidnam Press
quidnampress.com

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.”¹⁸ 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.

¹⁸ “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.”¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.

¹⁹ Isabel L Beck, et al., *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, 2nd ed. (Guilford Press, 2013), p. 9.

²⁰ 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

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.

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)

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.

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.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL E: WISDOM TALES 2

Student Worksheets

DREW CAMPBELL

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.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
LEVEL F: WISDOM TALES 3

DREW CAMPBELL

Quidnam Press
quidnampress.com

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 F

Each of the elementary levels of EWS covers stories from one major Asian tradition, one Abrahamic faith, and one ancient belief system or “mythology.”²¹ In *Exploring the World through Story: Level F*, fifth graders read wisdom tales from the **Islamic, Norse, and Chinese traditions**. The stories have been chosen for their cultural or historical importance and for their literary influence.

➤ I recommend that students complete EWS Levels D and E before moving on to Level F, as some of the content in this level assumes familiarity with the stories and writing exercises from the previous levels.

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 F is just one component of a complete English Language Arts program for fifth grade. Your child will also need, at minimum, formal [grammar and writing curricula](#). Some families may want to include spelling and vocabulary instruction, and if you have not already introduced [typing](#), I suggest you do so this year. Typing instruction should continue until the student can type 30 words per minute with good accuracy.

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

²¹ “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).

nonfiction. I encourage parents to allow students the freedom to choose their own books for recreational reading.

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. 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 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**. By fifth grade, most 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.”²² 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.²³

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-F 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.

²² Isabel L Beck, et al., *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*, 2nd ed. (Guilford Press, 2013), p. 9.

²³ 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 5–8 sentences without assistance. They should also understand the basics of paragraph structure, including the use of a topic sentence, supporting (body) sentences, and a concluding sentence.

The focus of this year’s writing work is **paragraph expansion**. After an eight-week review of skills taught in previous levels, students practice expanding paragraphs through the use of examples, evidence, explanation, and elaboration. In this level, students work with the types of paragraphs most relevant to the study of literature: narrative (plot summaries); informational (e.g., character descriptions, nonfiction); and expository (explanation and analysis).

Next you’ll find sentences for **dictation**. The dictation process is explained fully in Appendix A (p. 229). 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. 230).

The Writing Activities section concludes with **memory work**. You’ll find an **implementation guide** in Appendix C (pp. 231–233) and a **complete list of memory work items** in Appendix D (pp. 234–238). 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-F consists of 72 lessons—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

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.

Required Materials for EWS: Level F

☐ *Muhammad* - Demi

[Hardcover](#)

This modern telling of the life of Prophet Muhammad, based on traditional *sīrah* (prophetic biography), provides historical background for understanding the origins of Islam. This book is read over two weeks and is also used over three additional lessons for a writing project.

☐ *Tales from the Quran and Hadith* - Rana Safvi

[Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#)

Safvi's text features clear, graceful retellings of key stories from the Quran and *hadith* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad). This book usually ships from outside North America, so order well in advance, or consider the Kindle version. This book is used for five weeks.²⁴

☐ *DK Norse Myths* - Matt Ralphs

[Hardcover](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Audible](#)

Readable text and eye-catching illustrations make this collection of stories based on the Eddas ideal for students of this age. This book is used for twelve weeks.

☐ *Tales of a Chinese Grandmother* - Frances Carpenter

[Hardcover](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#)

With its charming frame story of a Qing dynasty family, this collection imparts historical details as well as a core set of well-known Chinese folktales. This text is used over the final trimester of the year.

☐ *Chinese Myths and Legends* - Shelley Fu

[Hardcover](#) | [Kindle](#)

This collection includes extended retellings of some of the best-known origin tales and literary masterworks of Chinese culture. Selections from this text are interspersed with Carpenter's stories over the last trimester of the year.

²⁴ Two additional online resources round out the Islam unit. Links are provided in the schedule and on the lesson plan pages.

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)

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 F

CKHG Units: [Medieval Islamic Empires](#), [The Vikings](#), [Ancient China](#), [Dynasties of China](#)

The Core Knowledge Foundation offers free, high-quality downloadable resources for grades K-8. The student readers from these units provide valuable background knowledge for students who have not yet studied these cultures or a good review for those who have. The Medieval Islamic Empires unit (4th grade level) covers the life of Muhammad and the basics of Islamic belief in historical context. The Vikings reader (3rd grade level) describes Viking seafaring and raiding; chapter 6 includes a brief introduction to Norse religious belief. The Ancient China unit discusses various facets of Chinese culture in simple language (2nd grade level), while the Dynasties of China unit (4th grade level) focuses on history, art, and inventions. Highly recommended as enrichment reading.

[*The Islamic Year: Surahs, Stories, and Celebrations*](#) - Noorah Al-Gailani & Chris Smith

Traces the life of Prophet Muhammad through the Islamic religious calendar; includes recipe and craft ideas along with multicultural folktales that exemplify Muslim values like generosity, equality, and justice.

[*Ayat Jamilah: Beautiful Signs*](#) - Sarah Conover & Freda Crane

Lovely collection of Quranic stories, folktales, legends, and biographical sketches from a variety of Muslim-majority nations and cultures. One story from this book, from an online resource, appears in Lesson F-16.

[*The Wise Fool: Fables from the Islamic World*](#) - Shahrukh Husain & Micha Archer

Humorous and thought-provoking wisdom tales featuring Mulla Nasruddin, the legendary character known under different names throughout the Islamic world. One story about him appears in Lesson F-15 (online resource).

[*D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths*](#) - Ingri d'Aulaire & Edgar Parin d'Aulaire

Classic illustrated volume of stories based on the Eddas.

[*Treasury of Norse Myths*](#) - Donna Jo Napoli

Lavishly illustrated, large-format collection. Middle-school reading level.

[*Confucius*](#) and [*The Legend of Lao Tzu*](#) - Demi

Beautifully illustrated picture books introduce these important Chinese figures.

[*Chinese Fables: The Dragon Slayer and Other Timeless Tales of Wisdom*](#) - Shiho S.

Nunes

Modern retellings that emphasize traditional Chinese cultural values.

[*Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*](#), [*When the Sea Turned to Silver*](#), and [*Starry River of the Sky*](#) - Grace Lin

Award-winning contemporary novels that draw on Chinese folklore. Lower middle-grade reading level.

LESSON F-5

“The Creation of Man”

Tales from the Quran and Hadith, pp. 1-10

Reading

Teaching Notes

Unlike the previous Abrahamic scriptures studied in EWS Levels D and E, the Quran is not arranged as a chronological narrative. It is a single, cohesive text compiled within a single lifetime, rather than a collection of disparate books like the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

The Quran references many stories from these previous scriptures, as well as stories from outside the scriptural canons of Judaism and Christianity. For example, the Quran includes stories about the childhood of Mary, the mother of Jesus, that do not appear in the canonical gospels but that are accepted as pious legends by some Christians. Likewise, it references childhood stories about Jesus that were known to certain early Christian communities²⁵ but are considered non-canonical by most Christians. However, the Quran does not narrate many of these stories in full but makes passing reference to them as illustrations or historical examples while discussing other matters. In some cases, the stories are told more fully in the **Hadith**—collections of sayings and acts of the Prophet Muhammad as narrated by his companions—or in later commentaries. Our text pieces these narratives together into connected stories, and I have arranged them in rough chronological order.

Today’s reading tells the story of the creation of humans and their subsequent banishment from paradise. The story broadly parallels the narrative in the first three chapters of Genesis, studied in EWS-D. As in many other creation stories from around the world, including some we’ll read later this year, humans are made from mud or clay. They gain a soul when God breathes his spirit into them. The first human woman is formed to be a companion to the first man, made of the same form and substance. The pair succumb to the temptation by an antagonist figure—the Serpent in the Torah, the djinn Iblis in the Quran—and are punished by being banished from their garden home.

The Quranic narrative has some distinct differences from the biblical one, however. The angels—created beings of light—assist God by carrying the

²⁵ See The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infancy_Gospel_of_Thomas

materials needed for the creation of humans. Several angels and their functions are named, including Jibreel (Gabriel), whom we have already met in the story of the Night of Power. The Islamic story includes more details on the tempter figure, here named Azazil and also called Iblis or Shaitaan (the Arabic for Satan). Unlike the Jewish and Christian lore that portrays Satan as a fallen angel, Iblis belongs to the race of djinn, intelligent beings made from smokeless fire.²⁶ As our text explains, angels are incapable of sin, while djinn and humans exercise free will.

In literary terms, Iblis functions as a classic antagonist, paralleling the biblical serpent as tempter. Motivated by the sin of pride, he is unwilling to bow down to humans as the angels do. Although punished by God for his disobedience, Iblis is granted time to make his case against humanity. As in the book of Job in the Hebrew scriptures, God permits Iblis to tempt humans to wrongdoing. Iblis's primary means of attack is "whispering," that is, putting disobedient thoughts into the minds of humans. This sets up an ongoing conflict between good and evil, on both a cosmic and a personal scale.

As a result of Iblis's meddling, humans succumb to sin and are banished from the garden. Unlike the Genesis narrative, the Quranic garden is not imagined as existing on the earthly plane but in a heavenly realm. Both this original garden and the paradise awaiting righteous believers after death are called *Jannah* in Arabic, and the two are sometimes considered to be one and the same.²⁷

Vocabulary

ashraf-ul-makhluqat /ah-SHRAF-ool-MAKH-loo-kaht/: (Arabic) Human beings are the noblest creation.

Alhamdulillah /ahl-HAHM-doo-lee-LAH/: (Arabic) Praise be to God

Qayamat /kuh-YAH-mut/: (Arabic) the Day of Judgment

Hawwa /HAW-wah/: (Arabic) Eve, Chavah

fashioning: making, designing

prostrating: bowing down with one's face to the floor

displayed: showed

tasked with: given the job of

Resurrection: rising from the dead

²⁶ Djinn is sometimes anglicized as "jinn" or "genie," as in the famous wish-granting being from the story of Aladdin.

²⁷ The English word *paradise* comes from the Persian word *pardis*, meaning garden or park.

sustenance: nourishment, food
djinn: being made of fire
malleable: able to be formed or molded
forbearance: patience, self-restraint
capacity: ability, possibility of containing
perilous: dangerous
exquisite: extremely beautiful
fragrant: good-smelling
tranquility: peace and quiet²⁸
transgression: sin, breaking a law
recesses: deep, hidden places
lures: traps, snares, temptations
avowed: sworn
enmity: conflict, hatred
diadem: royal headband, crown
respite: a break (in time), a rest

Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheets: pp. 4-5

Sentence Completion

Over the next few lessons, we will review sentence-level composition techniques from previous levels of EWS that will be used this year to help students expand paragraphs and revise their writing.

In today's activity, your child is asked to complete sets of sentences that end with *but*, *because*, and *so*.²⁹ Remind the student that these words show the different directions a sentence can take. *But* shows contrast or reversal; *because* shows cause; and *so* shows result.

Responses will vary, but possible answers appear here in italics. The worksheet also asks the student to indicate the page number on which the information in their answer appears. This trains students in close attention to the text and will be helpful later, when students are asked to provide textual citations for the claims they make in essays and research papers.

²⁸ Our text uses British spellings; I have given the equivalent US American spelling here.

²⁹ See *The Writing Revolution*, pp. 40-43 for a further explanation of this type of exercise.

The angels saw God working with clay, but they did not display any curiosity about what he was doing. (p. 1)

The angels saw God working with clay because God was fashioning something. (p. 1)

The angels saw God working with clay, so they helped by carrying clay, mud, and water. (p. 2)

Azazil lived among the angels, but he was a djinn. (pp. 2-3)

Azazil lived among the angels because he had shown great piety and obedience. (p. 2)

Azazil lived among the angels, so he was always to be found with them, engrossed in worshipping God. (p. 3) [Other answers are possible.]

Azazil refused to bow down to Adam, but God did not send him to Hell immediately. (p. 6)

Azazil refused to bow down to Adam because Azazil was jealous of Adam. (p. 5)

Azazil refused to bow down to Adam, so God banished Azazil from the Garden. (pp. 5-6)

Adam was lonely in the Garden of Eden, but God created a woman for him while he slept. (p. 7)

Adam was lonely in the Garden of Eden because he had no one to share the beauties and comforts of the Garden with. (p. 7)

Adam was lonely in the Garden of Eden, so God created Hawwa to be his companion. (pp. 7-8)

Azazil tempted Adam and Hawwa, but they repented and asked God's forgiveness. (p. 10)

Azazil tempted Adam and Hawwa because he wanted to prove that humans were prone to weakness. (p. 6) OR because he wanted to avenge himself. (p. 8)

Azazil tempted Adam and Hawwa, so the humans were banished from the Garden of Eden to Earth. (p. 10)

Dictation

The angels could not disobey the Lord, but he could and he would. A creature of fire bow down to a creature of mud? Unthinkable! Until this moment, Azazel was God's favored creature, full of wisdom and beauty, recipient of God's bounty and mercy in the Garden of Eden. But no more.³⁰

Memory Work

Review memory work items 1-4 with your child. You may also wish to review the memory work about paragraph structure on page 17.

³⁰ This text has been slightly modified from the original.

LESSON F-26

“Thor Goes Fishing”

DK Norse Myths, pp. 42-43

Reading

Teaching Notes

We have met **Thor** in passing in previous stories, but here we get a better picture of this popular character. The Norse god of thunder is a larger-than-life figure, known more for his brawn than for his brain. Like the Greek Heracles, he is legendary for his prodigious appetite. In the Eddas, we often find Thor battling giants and trolls or getting caught up in some scheme of Loki's.

Historically, Thor was the god of the common folk, especially farmers; as we've seen, his wife, Sif, is the goddess of the grain. Hints of Thor appear in American folklore characters like Paul Bunyan and Stormalong, whose battle with the Kraken mirrors Thor's fishing for Jörmungandr in today's story. The figure remains extremely popular in modern times, as evidenced by the success of the Marvel comics and films that feature him.

Today's story also reflects details of Norse host-guest etiquette, when Thor's greed puts his host, Hymir, in an awkward position.

A greedy man, if he be not mindful,
eats to his own life's hurt:
oft the belly of the fool will bring him to scorn
when he seeks the circle of the wise. –Hávamál 20

Jörmungandr, a child of Loki, is a gigantic serpent that encircles the earth, biting its own tail. It plays a role in Ragnarok, the end of the world. [Scholars have noted](#) the similarity between Thor's fishing for Jörmungandr and several other Indo-European myths, especially the Vedic storm god [Indra](#)'s slaying of [Vritra](#). For more details about Jörmungandr, see pages 78-79 of the text.

Vocabulary

Jotunheim /YOH-tun-hime/: land of the giants

Hymir /HI-meer/: a friendly giant

Jörmungandr /YOR-mun-gan-der/: the World Serpent, child of Loki

ungracious: rude
pantry: room for storing food
bait: item used to lure fish or animals
minnow: small fish
heaved: pulled, tugged

Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheet: p. 34

Paragraph Expansion with Examples

Today your child will again practice expanding a paragraph by adding specific examples to support general statements. The completed paragraph might look like this:

Thor was an extremely ungracious guest. He was gluttonous. Hymir slaughtered three of his best bulls to feed Thor, but the god gobbled them up in one sitting. He did not respect Hymir's property. He used the head of the biggest of Hymir's remaining bulls as fishing bait. In the end, he did not even respect Hymir's life. When Hymir cut his fishing line, Thor pushed the giant overboard. Hymir certainly made a big mistake when he invited Thor in for dinner!

Dictation

Hymir was a generous host, and he slaughtered three of his best bulls to feed Thor. The god, however, was such an ungracious guest that he gobbled them up in one sitting. Hymir stared at his bone-strewn table. "We'll have to go fishing tomorrow to restock my pantry," he said at last.

Memory Work

Review memory work items 12-17.

LESSON F-56

“How the Eight Old Ones Crossed the Sea”

Tales of a Chinese Grandmother, pp. 147-154

Reading

Teaching Notes

The **Eight Immortals** or [Bāxiān](#) are figures from Chinese folklore and popular religion as well as the subject of numerous legends and humorous folktales. Collectively, they represent the range of human experience: male and female (and other—[Lán Cǎihé](#)’s gender is ambiguous), rich and poor, young and old, martial and scholarly, honored and humble, physically strong and disabled. Many of them are associated with historical persons, but as literary characters, they have taken on a life of their own. Today’s reading gives a very brief description of each of them on page 151, and you can learn more from the “[Bygone China](#)” channel and from an episode of “[Legends of Ancient China](#),” both on YouTube.

In Daoism, and in Chinese culture generally, an “[immortal](#)” (PY: *xiān*) is not a god per se, but a human being who has, usually through intense spiritual cultivation, achieved supernatural powers and great longevity. The Eight Immortals play a role that is somewhat analogous to medieval saints in the Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions: They are figures of spiritual power who come to the aid of those in need and are therefore venerated and loved by the common people. They also act as patrons of those in various professions or life circumstances. In keeping with the Daoist emphasis on naturalness and spontaneity, the Eight Immortals often appear as tricksters of sorts, upsetting the status quo.

Today’s reading dates from the Ming dynasty and is the origin of a popular Chinese saying, “The Eight Immortals cross the sea, each reveals their divine powers,” used to refer to a situation where people use their individual skills to achieve a common goal. The tale features the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea, Áo Guāng, as the frame story is set at the time of the summer [Dragon Boat Festival](#), which will be the subject of this lesson’s writing activity.

In addition to a corpus of folktales,³¹ the Eight Immortals appear in several longer works, notably the Ming dynasty novel *Journey to the East* by Wu Yuntai.³² Historically, the *Bāxiān* have been a popular subject for [paintings](#) and in the [decorative arts](#), as today's story mentions, as well as [Chinese opera](#). They still appear regularly in contemporary popular culture, including martial arts films, comics, and fantasy novels.

Vocabulary

[Chu \(Qu\) Yuan](#): ancient Chinese poet (ca. 339-278 BCE)

[junks](#): traditional Chinese ships

surly: irritable, sullen

Writing Activities

➤ Student Worksheets: p. 69-70

Paragraph Composition

Today your child will use the information from their reading and from [this webpage](#) to compose a simple informational paragraph about the Dragon Boat Festival. The student worksheets provide questions as scaffolding to help the child organize the information. You may want to print out the web article so the child can highlight the information they want to include.

➤ Note that the child will be expanding this paragraph with an additional narrative summary and other details in the next lesson, so they should only briefly mention the origin of the festival and the reason for eating *zòngzi*, sticky rice dumplings.

A completed simple paragraph might look like this:

The Dragon Boat Festival is an important traditional festival and public holiday in China. It is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. The festival commemorates the death of Qu Yuan, a famous

³¹ See, for example, Kwok Man Ho and Joanne O'Brien, trans., *The Eight Immortals of Taoism: Legends and Fables of Popular Taoism* (Meridian, 1990) or the open source collection [Stories and Myths of Eight Immortals](#).

³² Not to be confused with the even more famous Ming novel, *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en.

poet and court official who lived from around 339 to 278 BCE. During the festival, people race dragon boats. They also eat special sticky rice dumplings called *zongzi*. People used to hang mugwort and calamus on their doors to drive away disease and to bring good luck, but this custom is more common in rural areas than in cities nowadays. The Dragon Boat Festival is so important that it has even been recognized as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Dictation

Upon the vases in the family hall, on some of the teapots and the eating bowls, on fans, and on scroll paintings they had seen likenesses of these eight famous persons who possessed the gift of living forever, and who usually traveled together.

Memory Work

Q: Who are the Eight Immortals?

A: The Eight Immortals are figures from Daoist folklore and popular religion.

Using the information from today's reading and from [this webpage](#), answer the questions to compose an informational paragraph about the Dragon Boat Festival.

Celebrating the Dragon Boat Festival

[T. S.] What is the Dragon Boat Festival and where is it celebrated?

When is the festival celebrated?

What is the origin of the festival? What does it commemorate?

What popular sport is practiced during the festival?

What special food do people eat?

What is another traditional custom? Is it still common?

[C. S.] How has the Dragon Boat Festival been recognized as significant?

SAMPLE

Expand the paragraph you wrote about the Dragon Boat Festival by adding a narrative summary of the story of Qu Yuan. Use the following questions to guide your writing.

Who was Qu Yuan?

Why did the king change his ways?

How did Qu Yuan try to change the king's mind?

What did Qu Yuan do then?

Why do people go out in boats on the fifth day of the fifth month?

Next, expand the section about the traditional food for the festival, [zongzi](#) or sticky rice dumplings. Answer these questions:

Why do people eat zongzi?

Why are the zongzi wrapped up? What did the official dream?

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Level G: Heroic Tales

Unit 1:
The Epic of Gilgamesh
and
The Mwindo Epic

DREW CAMPBELL

Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

Exploring the World through Story introduces students to the diversity of human cultures through the study of world literature. Over the course of the middle school years—grades 6–8 or ages 11–14—students read retellings and adaptations of classics from around the world to prepare them for the study of world literature in high school and beyond.

At the middle school level, EWS has three main educational goals. First, EWS **introduces students to masterworks of world literature** that inform and influence later literary and artistic creations. Learning in this area is supported by background reading, informational videos, and memory work. Second, students **learn how to analyze literature** as they read and think critically about the texts. Finally, students **extend their composition skills** as they learn to expand simple paragraphs into essays of increasing length.

EWS is a secular curriculum. As such, it treats religion as part of human culture and makes no claims for or against the validity of any religious belief.

About EWS Level G

The middle school levels of EWS consist of three units per grade level. The units are written to the student, with parent-instructors supervising and supporting student work.

Over the course of each 10-week unit, students read and write about two thematically related works, one from the Western canon and one from another culture. The theme of Level G is **Heroic Tales**. In Unit G-1, students read and write about modern retellings of **The Epic of Gilgamesh** (Mesopotamia) and the **Mwindo Epic** (Central Africa).

Teaching EWS

EWS-G consists of a Student Worktext and an Instructor's Guide. The Student Worktext is written directly to the student to allow them to work more independently. It includes checklists, study notes, vocabulary lists, writing assignments, and memory work. The Instructor's Guide contains checklists, an answer key for the writing assignments, and memory work. In Appendix A, you will find a guide to getting started with memory work; a list of all the memory work items taught in this unit

appears in Appendix B. Appendix C shows the format of the three-paragraph essay taught in this level.

Although many homeschooling parents need their children to work more independently at this age, it is vital that you **check your student's work daily and help them practice their memory work** to assure that they stay on track. Middle school students often struggle with focus, as they are still developing executive function and good work habits. If your child is neurodivergent or has a learning disability, they will likely need extra support.

EWS Lesson Structure

Each lesson follows a standard format, making it easy for students to establish a rhythm in their learning.

Checklist

Each lesson begins with a checklist that shows the tasks to be accomplished during the lesson. The checklist gives the page numbers for readings and live links to any videos for students to watch. These checklists also appear in the Instructor's Guide for your convenience.

Study Notes

Usually, the first task on the list is to read the Study Notes for that lesson. These brief comments share background information or hints about what to look for in the day's reading, viewing, or listening.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary section contains a list of names and challenging words that students will encounter in the day's reading. Extra space is left for students to add their own words to the list.

Assigned Reading/Viewing

The next task is to read the assigned pages in the book being studied. On occasion, videos or background reading may appear in this section as well. During the weeks when students are drafting and revising their essays, there is no additional reading.

Writing Assignments

Each lesson includes some type of writing activity, such as answering comprehension questions; completing a graphic organizer; drafting a paragraph or essay; or expanding or revising previous work.

Memory Work

Each lesson introduces or reviews memory work. Memory work is a fundamental part of the EWS methodology, providing students with spaced retrieval practice to help them retain the information they've learned. **Memory work should be reviewed every school day.** This is normally a quick process and can be integrated with memory work from other subjects your child is studying.

If you're new to memory work, see the **implementation guide** in Appendix A (pages 88–90) for how to set up a Leitner box for your child's flashcards. A **complete list of memory work items** for this unit appears in Appendix B (pages 91–93).

Middle School English Language Arts: Where EWS Fits In

As an instructional area, English Language Arts (ELA) consists of seven related subjects: reading and its inverse, spelling; handwriting; vocabulary; grammar; composition (“writing”); and literature. The first six are **skills subjects** in which students learn how to do things with language, like decoding the word *c-a-t*, forming a capital W, or punctuating an interrogative sentence. Literature, on the other hand, is a **content area**, like social studies or science, where the goal of instruction is for students to understand and remember the material presented.

By middle school, most children are reading and spelling well and can write fluently, both by hand and using a keyboard. They can compose a straightforward paragraph of 5–8 sentences on a topic with which they are familiar, including academic content from their schoolwork. ELA instruction in middle school therefore focuses on **building vocabulary, grammar, and writing skills through the study of literature, both fiction and nonfiction.**

The middle school levels of EWS will teach your child literature (the content part of ELA), vocabulary, and expository writing. You will want to round out your child's ELA work with grammar instruction and daily recreational reading opportunities. Some students may also benefit from additional formal writing instruction.

Grammar Instruction

In addition to their literature studies with EWS, students should work through a formal grammar curriculum such as *Hake Grammar and Writing 6*. If you use Hake, you will need only the Student Grammar Textbook, *not* the Writing Textbook. For grade 6, you may use either the School Edition or the 2nd Edition; the latter is designed for homeschoolers and is available as a less expensive paperback. The grade 6 text has 107 lessons, so if your student does three lessons per week, they will complete the entire text over the course of a 36-week school year.

Writing Instruction

EWS provides instruction and substantial practice in expository writing. Students who have had several years of consistent formal writing instruction or have successfully completed the writing activities in EWS D-F will be well prepared for the writing assignments in Level G. Each unit in this level briefly reviews both simple and elaborated paragraphs, taught in Levels E and F, respectively, before turning to this year's instructional focus: expanding simple paragraphs into three-paragraph essays.

If your student has not had much formal writing instruction or if they need additional practice with sentence-level composition and paragraph structure, I recommend *Write by Number*, a K-12 mastery-based program created by Laurena Townsend. Students beginning WBN in sixth grade can use the Fast Track exercises up to Stage 6, then work through the exercises in that and the following two stages for the rest of the year. Focus on the nineteen Sentence Pattern exercises in Stages 6-8. Students can do two such exercises a week, alongside EWS and their grammar program, until they have mastered the patterns. Parents may also find *The Writing Revolution* by Judith C. Hochman and Natalie Wexler and *Sentence Composing for Middle School* by Don Killgallon useful as sources for sentence-level composition exercises. Evan-Moor's *Writing Fabulous Sentences & Paragraphs* by Jill Norris is another helpful resource. For an excellent overview of evidence-based writing instruction, see *The Writing Rope* by Joan Sedita.

The following chart shows the progression of writing skills taught and practiced in EWS. The current level is highlighted. For an overview of the three-paragraph essay format taught in this level, see Appendix C (page 94).

Grade	EWS Level	Writing Instructional Focus
K	A	Oral responses to comprehension questions
1	B	Oral narrations, with and without prompts
2	C	Transition from oral narrations to brief written narrative summaries
3	D	Sentence variation
4	E	Paragraph formation (topic sentence, body/supporting sentences, concluding sentence)
5	F	Paragraph expansion with examples, explanation, elaboration, and evidence
6	G	Three-paragraph essay (introduction/body/conclusion)
7	H	Four-paragraph essay
8	I	Five-paragraph essay

Recreational Reading

Daily independent reading completes your ELA program. Give your child the opportunity to read from a wide range of classic and contemporary fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. Audiobooks count, as do graphic novels. I encourage parents to allow students the freedom to choose their own books for recreational reading.

Scheduling EWS

Each of the three units in EWS-G contains 30 lessons to be taught over ten weeks. If you follow the standard 36-week US school year and complete all three units within Level G, you will have six weeks left over for another ELA unit of your choosing, such as poetry or creative writing.

An average student, reading at grade level, should be able to complete each lesson in 30-45 minutes, leaving time in their ELA schedule for grammar or composition work.

Sample Weekly ELA Schedule

Exploring the World through Story/Hake Grammar/Write by Number

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
EWS Hake	WBN	EWS Hake	WBN	EWS Hake

SAMPLE

EWS G-1 Planner

Use this planner to schedule and track your student's progress through the unit.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 1 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 3
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 2 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 4	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 6
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 3 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 7	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 8	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 9
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 4 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 10	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 11	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 12
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 5 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 13	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 14	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 15

<input type="checkbox"/> Week 6 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 16	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 17	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 18
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 7 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 19	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 20	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 21
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 8 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 22	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 23	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 24
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 9 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 25	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 26	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 27
<input type="checkbox"/> Week 10 Dates: _____- _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 28	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 29	<input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 30

Instructor Checklists

Before the Lesson

- Read through the lesson in both the Student Worktext and the Instructor's Guide.
- Preread the text and preview the writing activity.
- Make sure your student has all the necessary supplies for the lesson: Student Worktext, both printed and in PDF; texts; laptop or tablet with internet access; headphones; paper and pen; dictionary; index cards and Leitner box.

During the Lesson

- Answer student questions.

After the Lesson

- Verify that the student has completed all the tasks for the day.
- Check that all written work is complete and correct.
- Review memory work with student.

Tips for Printing the Files

Print the Student Worktext single-sided and store it in a three-ring binder rather than having it spiral-bound. This will prevent the need to flip back and forth when the student is referring to graphic organizers during the writing process and will allow students to file additional papers in the right place. **Make sure that the student also has access to the PDF version of the file**, however, as it contains live links to assigned videos and other online resources.

Printing this Instructor's Guide is optional.

Required Materials for EWS: Level G, Unit 1

- ❑ *Gilgamesh the Hero* - Geraldine McCaughrean
[Hardcover](#)

McCaughrean's retelling of the Epic of Gilgamesh is a modern classic in its own right. This edition features illustrations by David Parkins.

- ❑ *The Magic Flyswatter* - Aaron Shepard
[Hardcover](#) | [Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Online](#) (free)

Shepard captures the flavor of oral storytelling with this short but rich retelling of the Mwindo Epic of the Nyanga people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in central Africa.

Additional Materials

- ❑ Print-out of Student Worktext, three-hole punched
- ❑ PDF of Student Worktext (for live links)
- ❑ College-ruled filler paper or notebook
- ❑ 1/2" three-ring binder
- ❑ Pencils, pens, erasers
- ❑ Device with internet access (laptop, tablet, phone)
- ❑ A supply of [lined index cards](#)
- ❑ An [index card file box](#)
- ❑ [Tabbed index card dividers numbered 1-31](#), to fit the file box

EWS Level G, Unit 1

Lesson 1

Week 1, Day 1

Text: *Gilgamesh the Hero* by Geraldine McCaughrean³³

I encourage you to read through *Gilgamesh the Hero* yourself, especially if you are not familiar with the story. However, if you don't have time to read the whole text, you can watch this [5-minute TED-Ed](#) animated plot summary. This [13-minute video from Crash Course Mythology](#) expands on the themes of the epic and how it fits into the Hero's Journey, a narrative framework outlined by scholar Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) in his 1949 book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.³⁴ Students will learn about the Hero's Journey in the latter part of this unit.

Checklist

- Read the information on page 2 of *Gilgamesh the Hero*.
- Read the Study Notes.
- Watch the video "[Ancient Mesopotamia 101](#)."
- Read chapter 1, pages 4-11.
- Add any new vocabulary words and their definitions to the list below.
- Complete the writing assignment.
- Do today's memory work.

Writing Assignment Key

Story Notes Graphic Organizer
Gilgamesh the Hero by Geraldine McCaughrean

Bold text: Additions to the chart for the current lesson

Characters (Who?) ★ <i>Gilgamesh - King of Uruk</i>	Setting (When? Where?) <i>Ancient times, Uruk, Mesopotamia</i>
--	---

³³ The author's name is pronounced "mik-KAW-krin." You can hear her say her name at the beginning of [this video](#).

³⁴ These videos briefly reference more adult aspects of the original epic that do not appear in McCaughrean's retelling. For this reason, these videos are not assigned to students.

<i>Ninsun - Gilgamesh's mother</i> <i>Hawawa - a monstrous giant</i> <i>Enlil - Mesopotamian creator god</i>	
--	--

Plot (What happens?)

Chapter 1 Gilgamesh has a dream, and his mother interprets it to mean that the gods are sending him a friend. Hunter encounters a wild man who keeps destroying his traps. He visits Gilgamesh to ask for help, and Gilgamesh tells him to get a woman to tame the wild man.

Memory Work

➤ See Appendix A on pages 88-90 for a guide to setting up your student's memory work system.

Q: What is an epic?

A: An epic is a long narrative poem recounting the deeds of a hero.

EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH STORY
STUDENT WORKTEXT

Level G: Heroic Tales

Unit 1:
The Epic of Gilgamesh
and
The Mwindo Epic

DREW CAMPBELL

Hi! Read this introduction before doing the first lesson! ~Dr. Campbell

Welcome to *Exploring the World through Story!*

My name is Dr. Campbell, and I will be your guide through this course.

Over the next ten weeks, we'll be reading two famous stories from world literature, the **Epic of Gilgamesh** from ancient Mesopotamia and the **Mwindo Epic** from Central Africa. I'm excited to introduce you to these stories, and I hope you'll love them as much as I do.

Why Study World Literature?

Do you have a favorite book, show, movie, game, or music group? Do you talk with your family or friends about it? Maybe you're even part of a fandom related to it. Perhaps you talk about your special interest with other fans online, or maybe you go to conventions where you can meet other people who love the same things you do.

People who study literature are like a huge fandom. We love to talk about our favorite stories. We dig deep into what they mean, why the characters act the way they do, and how the author managed to make the story so exciting that we want to read it again and again.

Some of us love these conversations so much that we decided to make them our job! It's true: Literature teachers are pretty much all just big nerds who like to talk about books. We want you to join our fandom so we'll have more people to talk to about our favorite stories.

You can think of *Exploring the World through Story* (or EWS, as I call it) as my invitation to you to join the World Literature fandom.

One of the best things about knowing these stories is that they connect you to people all over the world, in both the past and the present. Some of those people were or are writers themselves, and they wrote stories based on their favorite characters or storylines. Today, we call that *fanfiction*. I'll let you in on a little secret: Most of the classics of World Literature are just really old, really popular fanfiction.

Let me give you an example. Maybe you've heard of the ancient Greek poet **Homer**. We don't know if such a person actually existed, but we use the name *Homer* as shorthand for the storytellers—poet-singers called *oidoi* in Greek—who composed the *Iliad* and

the **Odyssey**. You will read versions of these stories in EWS Level H. Homer's works inspired playwrights and poets during the Golden Age of Greece, several hundred years after the Iliad and the Odyssey were written down. We still read these plays today, and in Level G-3, you'll get to read one of them yourself!

Hundreds of years after that, a Roman poet named **Virgil** used Homer's works as the inspiration for a story about the founding of Rome. It's called the **Aeneid**, after the main character, Aeneas. You'll meet Virgil's Aeneas in EWS Level H.

Thirteen hundred years after *that*, another poet from Italy, **Dante**, wrote a work called the **Divine Comedy**, in which Virgil is an important character. Dante's work also features lots of characters from his own life and from—you guessed it—Homer.

In the early 20th century, an Irish writer named James Joyce wrote a novel called *Ulysses* based on Homer's Odyssey.

Almost a hundred years later, an American author named Madeline Miller published two award-winning novels based on characters from the Iliad and Odyssey. You may also know the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan, which features many of the gods and heroes that Homer wrote about.

People sometimes refer to these chains of literary creation as “the Great Conversation.” It's like the authors are on a giant interdimensional Discord server, chatting with each other across time and space. That's not a bad way to think about how literature works. But it also wouldn't be wrong to say that the Aeneid, the Divine Comedy, *Ulysses*, Miller's novels *Circe* and *The Song of Achilles*, and the Percy Jackson books are Homeric fanfiction.

If you know the original stories, you'll understand and enjoy other stories based on them. As my friend Nicole says, “You'll get more jokes.” The more Marvel movies you've seen, the more of the in-jokes and references you'll get in each new film release, right? It's the same with literature.

That's why it's important for you to know the stories we'll be reading together. If you are familiar with the original sources, you'll be able to recognize when a character in a book is based on an older character, and you'll appreciate how the author has made that character their own. You'll notice patterns in how authors use settings (locations), symbols, colors, and even the weather in their stories to make you think of other stories. It's like the author is nudging you: “Get it? See what I did there?”

You'll start to see the common features in whole classes of stories, or what we call *genres*. Dragons and magic? Probably fantasy, right? Robots and spaceships? Likely science fiction. (Unless it's Star Wars, which is fantasy. Fight me.) Rich lady found dead under suspicious circumstances? Murder mystery. The stories we'll be reading in this unit are *epics*. More on epics very soon!

In short, the more you know, the more fun you'll have with your reading.

How the Lessons Work

At the beginning of each lesson, you'll find a checklist showing everything you need to do that day. **When you complete a task, check it off the list.** You should be able to finish a lesson in 30-45 minutes, depending on how fast you read and write.

The checklist will ask you to **read, watch, or listen to something and to do a little writing.** Mostly you'll be reading a chapter from the current book, but sometimes I'll assign some background reading or a video for you to watch online.

Next you'll find **Study Notes**, which contain background information and some pointers about what to look for while you read. Read these carefully.

After the checklist and Study Notes, you'll see **vocabulary lists** that include names and unusual words. The lists are there so you don't have to interrupt your reading to look up new words, so keep them handy while you read. Some words you may already know, but there may be other words that I didn't list but that you need to look up. Sometimes you'll be able to figure out the meaning from the context, but if not, you can look the word up at merriam-webster.com or in a paper dictionary. Add the word and its definition to the vocabulary list (I left extra spaces for that).

Once you've finished the reading, do the day's **writing assignment.** These assignments include things like filling in graphic organizers or answering some short questions. Sometimes I'll ask you to **write a short paragraph.** These paragraphs are important because they're designed to help you prepare for writing your essays. If you're not sure how to write a good paragraph, don't worry. We'll review that in the first few weeks of the unit.

Finally, you'll see **memory work.** These are question-and-answer sets for you to, well, *memorize*. If you've never done memory work before, don't worry. It's short and easy, and at the end of the year, you'll know dozens of facts about world literature. Impress your friends and future literature teachers! Win at trivia games! Become a

memory athlete! (Memory athletes are a real thing. Google “memory sport” to learn more!)

Your instructor will help you get set up for memory work. Speaking of your instructor, always check with them if you have any questions. They’ll be checking your work every day, too. Now let’s get started!

SAMPLE

EWS Level G, Unit 1

Lesson 1

Week 1, Day 1

Text: *Gilgamesh the Hero* by Geraldine McCaughrean³⁵

Checklist

- Read the information on page 2 of *Gilgamesh the Hero*.
- Read the Study Notes.
- Watch the video "[Ancient Mesopotamia 101](#)."
- Read chapter 1, pages 4-11.
- Add any new vocabulary words and their definitions to the list below.
- Complete the writing assignment.
- Do today's memory work.

Study Notes

The story of Gilgamesh is set in [ancient Mesopotamia](#), a region in what is today the country of Iraq. Mesopotamia means "between the rivers" in Greek and is so called because it lies between two major rivers, the Tigris /TY-gris/ and the Euphrates /you-FRAY-teez/.

Gilgamesh was the legendary king of Uruk /OO-rook/, a city on the east bank of the Euphrates, not far from the Persian Gulf. We say Gilgamesh was a *legendary* king because historians are not sure whether he actually lived or not. If he did live, it would have been some time between 2900 and 2350 BCE (Before the Common Era), or well over 4000 years ago.

The stories told about Gilgamesh are the oldest written ones in the world.

³⁵ The author's family name is pronounced "mik-KAW-krin." You can hear her say her name at the beginning of [this video](#).

Vocabulary

Names

Gilgamesh /GILL-guh-mesh/: King of Uruk in Mesopotamia
Ninsun /NIN-soon/: goddess and mother of Gilgamesh
Uruk /OO-rook/: ancient Sumerian city located in what is now Iraq
Hawawa /hah-WAH-wah/: a monstrous giant³⁶
Enlil /EN-leel/: Mesopotamian creator god

Other Words

prospect: vision, mental picture of something to come
footling: trivial, insignificant
loped: moved with long, loose strides
[teak](#): a hard, yellowish-brown wood
despot: a ruler with absolute authority
tyrant: a harsh or cruel ruler
perpetual: continual, never-ending
incessantly: without stopping
tissue: fabric, cloth
[lapis lazuli](#): a blue gemstone
clambered: went awkwardly

Add any other vocabulary words here:

Writing Assignment

Today you will begin filling in a graphic organizer to help you keep track of the details in *Gilgamesh the Hero*. The graphic organizer appears below and has the following sections:

Characters: *Who* are the people in the story?

³⁶ *Hawawa* is the creature's name in Sumerian. You may also see him called *Humbaba*, which is the Assyrian version of his name.

Setting: *When and where* does the story take place?

Plot: *What events* happen in the story?

We're going to be filling in the graphic organizer a little bit at a time as we read through the text, so be sure to file it in your binder so you can find it easily later. (There's a second part to the organizer that we'll get to when we've finished reading the whole book.)

➤ First, in the box marked *Characters*, write down the following names:

- Gilgamesh
- Ninsun
- Hawawa
- Enlil

➤ Add a short description of each character. For example, for Ninsun, you would write "Gilgamesh's mother." (If you're not sure what to write, look in the Vocabulary section above.)

➤ Put a star ★ next to the name of the main character. The main character is the most important person in the story. They usually do most of the action or are most influenced by what happens. (Hint: If a character's name is in the title of a story, they are almost always the main character!)

➤ Next, in the box marked *Setting*, write down when and where the story takes place. Because this story takes place a long time ago but not at a specific point in history, you can be very general and write "ancient times." Be sure to list the name of the city mentioned in this chapter as well as the general region. (Reread page 2 of the text or the Study Notes for this lesson if you're unsure about these details.)

➤ In the box marked *Plot*, write "Chapter 1," underline it, and then **very briefly** tell what happened in the chapter.

For example, to summarize the first part of the chapter, you might write: "Gilgamesh had a dream, and his mother told him it meant the gods were sending him a friend."

You don't have to write down the contents of Gilgamesh's dream or his

whole conversation with his mother. Just write a short sentence to remind you of what happened in each chapter. This will be very helpful when you need to find a passage in your text but can't remember exactly where it is in the book. Your notes will guide you!

➤ Now see if you can write a sentence to summarize what happened when Hunter saw the wild man at the watering hole and when Hunter visited Gilgamesh. Keep it short!

That's it for today's writing assignment! Simple, right?

SAMPLE

Story Notes Graphic Organizer
Gilgamesh the Hero by Geraldine McCaughrean

Part I: Complete this part as you read the text.

Characters (Who?)	Setting (When? Where?)
Plot (What happens?)	

Continue onto another piece of paper if necessary!

Memory Work

When we talk about *memory work* in this course, we mean memorizing a set of questions and answers written on flashcards. Every lesson of this unit will either introduce or review memory work.

Your instructor will help you set up a **Leitner box**, which is a file box to hold your flashcards, arranged so that you can review them on a regular schedule. ([This very short video](#) explains the science behind “spaced repetition.” Check it out!)

- Every time there is new memory work in a lesson, **neatly write the question on one side of a flashcard and the answer on the other.**
- Then read the question and answer **aloud three times**. Reading, writing, speaking, and hearing the information will help you remember it better than doing just one or two of those things.
- Finally, **file the flashcard in your Leitner box** behind the number for tomorrow’s date. Your instructor will work with you to review your memory work every school day.

Here is today’s memory work. Make your flashcard, practice, and then file the card in your Leitner box.

Q: What is an epic?

A: An epic is a long narrative poem recounting the deeds of a hero.

Congratulations! You’ve finished your first lesson! Most lessons won’t be this long because you’ll already know how to summarize a chapter or make memory work flashcards. ~Dr. C.

Required Materials for EWS: Level G, Unit 2

☐ *Beowulf* - Michael Morpurgo

[Paperback](#) | [Kindle](#)

Michael Morpurgo is a former British Children's Laureate with more than 100 books to his name. His readable retelling of *Beowulf* retains some of the poetic characteristics of the original.

☐ *Popol Vuh: A Retelling* - Ilan Stavans

[Hardcover](#) | [Kindle](#)

This new modern retelling captures the strange and wonderful flavor of this text without overwhelming the reader with academic footnotes, as most English-language editions do. Stavans is a Mexican-American author and professor at Amherst College, specializing in American, Hispanic, and Jewish cultures.

Additional Materials

- ☐ Print-out of Student Worktext, three-hole punched
- ☐ PDF of Student Worktext (for live links)
- ☐ College-ruled filler paper or notebook
- ☐ 1/2" three-ring binder
- ☐ Pencils, pens, erasers
- ☐ Device with internet access (laptop, tablet, phone)
- ☐ A supply of [lined index cards](#)
- ☐ An [index card file box](#)
- ☐ [Tabbed index card dividers numbered 1-31](#), to fit the file box

EWS Level G, Unit 2

Lesson 1

Week 1, Day 1

Text: *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo

I encourage you to read through *Beowulf* yourself, especially if you are not familiar with the story. However, if you don't have time to read the whole text, you can watch a [five-minute video summary](#). You can find a handy pronunciation guide to the main names in the text [here](#). (Not all of these names appear in Morpurgo's retelling.)

Checklist

- Read the Study Notes.
- Read pages 3-12 (through "by this fearful monster").
- Locate the modern nations of England, Denmark, and Sweden on a [world map](#).
- Add any new vocabulary words and their definitions to the list below.
- Complete the writing assignment.
- Do today's memory work.

Writing Assignment Key

Story Notes Graphic Organizer

Beowulf by Michael Morpurgo

Bold text: Additions to the chart for the current lesson

Characters (Who?) <i>Danes - people from Denmark</i> <i>Geats - ancient Germanic tribe from southern Sweden</i> <i>Hrothgar - Danish king</i> <i>Grendel - a man-eating monster</i>	Setting (When? Where?) <i>Fifth century CE, Denmark</i>
--	---

Plot (What happens?)

Pages 3-12: Hrothgar, a Danish king, builds a great mead-hall called Heoreot, but a man-eating monster, Grendel, keeps attacking and killing his people.

Memory Work

➤ See Appendix A on pages 71-73 for a guide to setting up your student's memory work system.

The first memory work item is a review from Unit G-1. If your child has forgotten the definition, direct them to move the card back into regular rotation. If they have not done unit G-1, they can memorize the definition now.

Q: What is an epic?

A: An epic is a long narrative poem recounting the deeds of a hero.

Q: What is *Beowulf*?

A: Beowulf is an epic poem written in Old English around 1000 CE.

EWS Level G, Unit 2

Lesson 1

Week 1, Day 1

Text: *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo

Checklist

- Read the Study Notes.
- Read pages 3-12 (through “by this fearful monster”).
- Locate the modern nations of England, Denmark, and Sweden on a [world map](#).
- Add any new vocabulary words and their definitions to the list below.
- Complete the writing assignment.
- Do today’s memory work.

Study Notes

Beowulf is an epic poem originally written in Old English; scholars believe it was written down, probably by Christian monks, around the year 1000 CE (Common Era) in what is now England. The work is anonymous—that is, the author is unknown. In fact, the original manuscript doesn’t even have a title! It has come to be called “Beowulf” after the main character. The version we are reading is a retelling by contemporary British writer Michael Morpurgo.

Sometimes people think **Old English** just means *older* English, but that’s incorrect. Take a look at these examples:

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” -Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

“Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorr’d in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it.” -William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1600)³⁷

³⁷ The abbreviation “ca.” stands for the Latin word *circa*, meaning “around.” Scholars believe that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* between 1599 and 1601 and the play was first published in 1603, so we can say it is from “around 1600.”

“Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertú engendred is the flour;...”
-Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (late 13th century)

Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcýninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon. -Anonymous, *Beowulf* (ca. 1000)

You can probably understand Jane Austen’s English without much trouble; after all, she wrote only a little more than 200 years ago. She’s saying that people think wealthy single men will want to get married. Shakespeare’s **Early Modern English** may be more of a stretch, but if you look up some of the less common words, like *gorge*, you can probably figure out what the passage means. Hamlet is talking about someone he knew as a child, a funny man who used to give him piggy-back rides but who is now dead. (In the play, Hamlet is holding up Yorick’s skull. Yikes!) Chaucer wrote in **Middle English**, and reading *The Canterbury Tales* in the original is much harder due to spelling changes (flour=flower) and shifts in the meaning of words. This passage describes the spring rains that help flowers grow.

By the time we reach *Beowulf*, it’s clear that Old English (also called Anglo-Saxon) is a completely different language that no modern English speaker will be able to read without special training. Not only are there odd letters like æ, þ, and ð, but the words themselves are indecipherable. Here’s what those lines look like in modern English:

“Lo! the glory of the kings of the people of the Spear-Danes in days of old we have heard tell, how those princes did deeds of valour.” -trans. J.R.R. Tolkien³⁸

That’s how much the English language has changed in about 1000 years! We’ll talk more about the language of *Beowulf* and its influence on other writers as we read Morpurgo’s retelling.

³⁸ Yes, the same Tolkien who wrote *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*. He was a scholar of Old English and his writings were profoundly influenced by *Beowulf* and the other Old English and Norse works he studied and taught at Oxford University. If you want to read a full translation of *Beowulf*, his is the one to get.

There is one additional point to note in today's reading. It relates to the setting. Toward the end, on pages 11-12, we see the following line:

No plan Hrothgar and the council thanes devised could protect them from his [the monster Grendel's] fury, no prayers to the Almighty, no sacrifices to ancient heathen gods.

The fact that the Hrothgar and his people have tried praying both to the Christian god and to their old ancestral gods—that is, Norse gods like Odin and Thor—tells us that the story is set when people still remembered the old polytheistic religion that existed in Scandinavia before the introduction of Christianity (and for a long time afterward as well).³⁹ Hrothgar and his people were so desperate that they were willing to pray to any and every god that might help them. This detail suggests that the tale is much older than the version written down by Christian monks and that it reflects the heroic traditions of the Norse.

Vocabulary

Names

Danes /DAYNZ/: people from Denmark

Geats /GAY-ahts/: an ancient Germanic tribe from southern Sweden⁴⁰

Angles: one of the northern Germanic tribes that settled in England

Jutes: one of the northern Germanic tribes that settled in England

Scyld /SHILD/: ancestor of the Danish kings

Hrothgar /HROTH-gahr/: Danish king

Healfdene /HALLF-day-nuh/: Danish king, great-grandson of Scyld and father of Hrothgar

Heoreot /HAY-oh-roht/: Hrothgar's mead-hall

Grendel /GREN-duhl/: a man-eating monster

Other Words

confront: face

grapple: wrestle

content: happiness, satisfaction

³⁹ *Polytheism* means the worship of many gods.

⁴⁰ You will also hear this name pronounced GEETS (rhymes with BEETS), YAY-ahts, or YAYTS. That last one is closest to the Old English pronunciation. Want to know more? Check out [this 2-minute video](#) from a teacher of Old English.

prosperity: wealth, riches
mead-hall: a large building for eating and drinking⁴¹
timbers: pieces of wood for building; lumber
mead-horn: a drinking cup or vessel made of animal horn
bloodlust: desire to kill
lair: hiding place; an animal's den
holocaust: mass killing⁴²
moors: rolling grassland, often boggy
barricaded: blocked off with a barrier
gorging: eating greedily, stuffing
unceasingly: without stopping
council: group who advise a leader
thanes: free men in service to an Anglo-Saxon lord
the Almighty: the Christian God
farmstead: a farm with its buildings

Add any other vocabulary words here:

Writing Assignment

Today you will begin filling in a graphic organizer to help you keep track of the details in *Beowulf*. The graphic organizer appears below and has the following sections:

Characters: *Who* are the people in the story?

Setting: *When* and *where* does the story take place?

Plot: *What* events happen in the story?

We're going to be filling in the graphic organizer a little bit at a time as we read through the text, so be sure to file it in your binder so you can find it easily later.

⁴¹ *Mead* is a fermented alcoholic beverage like beer, made with water, honey, malt, and yeast. It was a common beverage at the time.

⁴² The word "holocaust" originally meant a burnt offering made to a god, but it can also refer to any kind of mass killing. *The Holocaust*, written with a capital letter, refers specifically to the mass killing of Jews and other civilians by the Nazis during World War II.

➤ First, in the box marked *Characters*, write down the following names:

- Danes
- Geats
- Hrothgar
- Grendel

➤ Add a short description of each group or individual character. For example, for Geats you would write “ancient Germanic tribe from southern Sweden” and for Hrothgar, you would write “Danish king.” (If you’re not sure what to write, look in the Vocabulary section above.)

➤ Next, in the box marked *Setting*, write down when and where the story takes place. If you’re unsure of the details, re-read pages 2 and 3 of the text. The first two parts of the story take place in the same time and location; the third part happens elsewhere and some years later. We’ll add that information when we get to it.

➤ In the box marked *Plot*, write “Pages 3-12,” underline those words, and then **very briefly summarize today’s reading.**

This reading is all background information, some of which isn’t very important, so you don’t have to write down every detail. To write a simple summary, try using this format:

Who does what but then what happens?

For example, you could start your summary like this:

Hrothgar, a Danish king, builds a great mead-hall called Heoreot, but...

Then what happens? Complete the sentence, and you’ve got a simple summary of today’s reading. Good work!

Story Notes Graphic Organizer
Beowulf by Michael Morpurgo

Part I: Complete this part as you read the text.

Characters (Who?)	Setting (When? Where?)
Plot (What happens?)	

Continue onto another piece of paper if necessary!

Memory Work

When we talk about *memory work* in this course, we mean memorizing a set of questions and answers written on flashcards. Every lesson of this unit will either introduce or review memory work.

If you have done unit G-1, you will already have your memory work set up. Otherwise, your instructor will help you set up a **Leitner box**, which is a file box to hold your flashcards, arranged so that you can review them on a regular schedule. ([This very short video](#) explains the science behind “spaced repetition.” Check it out!)

- Every time there is new memory work in a lesson, **neatly write the question on one side of a flashcard and the answer on the other.**
- Then **read the question and answer aloud three times.** Reading, writing, speaking, and hearing the information will help you remember it better than doing just one or two of those things.
- Finally, **file the flashcard in your Leitner box** behind the number for tomorrow’s date. Your instructor will work with you to review your memory work every school day.

Here is today’s memory work. Make your flashcards, practice, and then file the cards in your Leitner box.

Q: What is an epic?

A: An epic is a long narrative poem recounting the deeds of a hero.⁴³

Q: What is Beowulf?

A: Beowulf is an epic poem written in Old English around 1000 CE.

Congratulations! You’ve finished your first lesson! Most lessons won’t be this long because you’ll already know how to summarize a chapter or make memory work flashcards. ~Dr. C.

⁴³ If you’ve done Unit G-1, you should already have a card for this memory work item. ☺

Forthcoming Units and Levels

2023-2024 school year

Level G: Heroic Tales

Unit 3: Mulan/Antigone

Writing: Summarizing, paragraph expansion, three-paragraph essays

2024-2025 school year

Level H: Classical Epics

Unit 1: Iliad/Mahabharata

Unit 2: Odyssey/Ramayana

Unit 3: Aeneid/Shakuntala

Writing: Text annotation, note-taking, outlining, four-paragraph essays

2025-2026 school year

Level I: Rascalry & Romance

Unit 1: Robin Hood/Water Margin

Unit 2: Romeo & Juliet/The Butterfly Lovers

Unit 3: King Arthur/Don Quixote/Monkey King

Writing: Developing theses, five-paragraph essays