

Drawn Into the Heart of Reading, Teacher's Guide, Levels 2-8

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Drawn into the Heart of Reading is an outstanding guide for studying literature in grades 2-8. Students study nine different genres over the course of nine four-week units: biography, adventure, historical fiction, fantasy, mystery, folk tales, nonfiction, humor, and realistic fiction.



What sets this curriculum apart is its flexibility:

- One Teacher's Guide covering all levels of instruction, with tips for multi-level teaching
- Three workbooks, each geared to specific levels of ability (Grades 2-3, 4-5, and 6-8)
- The ability to choose your own literature; every student's booklist can be individualized to reflect personal taste and ability. This is an especial boon if you have a reluctant reader!
- Units can be studied in any order

One of the things I like about this program is that Biblical character studies are incorporated into the literary analysis. As we strive to "grow" a Biblical worldview, it helps to have this concept "built-in" to a curriculum!

Lessons are provided for three five-day weeks. Another five days is to be devoted to a "culminating project", making each unit twenty "study days" long, or approximately one month per unit. The nine units can be completed in 180 days, a common measure of a "school year". The program can be re-used each year as students progress in their reading and understanding.

The lessons are geared to the three levels of ability; on some days, students work together, on others there are separate lesson plans for each level. The daily lesson plans are clearly marked as to whether the students are working independently or teacher-directed, or a mixture. The lessons are scripted, and each includes a focus, preparation for the lesson, and the lesson itself presented step-by-step.

You follow the same general format for each unit, comprising pre-reading activities, story discussions, phonics (for younger students), vocabulary building (for older students), study of story elements (different for each genre: character, setting, conflict, mood, prediction and inference, main idea or theme, cause and effect, perspective and point of view, and "compare and contrast"), and lessons on Godly Character. Each unit ends in a one-week "culminating project".

The culminating project is designed to demonstrate what was learned in the unit, with choices suited to visual, auditory or kinesthetic learning modalities.

Every unit begins with an introduction to the genre, comprising a definition, common characteristics found in books belonging to the category, one or more "Story Element Emphasis" definitions (for example, in biography the story element emphasized is character; in Nonfiction the elements are main idea or theme), and finally a "Godly Character Trait Emphasis" (for example, while studying humor, the students will examine the traits of joy, thankfulness, enthusiasm, and creativity, as well as touching on traits studied in other units, such as responsibility, diligence, and initiative).

A "Genre Kickoff" before the first day of each unit uses creative activities to whet the students' appetite for reading. For example, before reading biographies, the students might choose and talk about family photographs that show an important time in their lives, or they might sit in a circle and answer open-ended questions, such as "I'll always remember when..." or "I worked very hard at..." Before reading humorous stories, the students might play and sing silly songs together, or watch an "appropriate funny video" (teacher pre-screens and decides on appropriateness of the humor and subject matter).

The teacher selects the books to be used and assigns the daily page count for each student. Three options are presented: three books, divided into five days each; two books, one read over ten days and one read over five days; or one book, divided into fifteen days of reading.

Student workbooks are available in three levels (Grades 2-3, Grades 4-5, and Grades 6-8), and are necessary for the program. Additional resources are needed for book-based projects (*Book Projects to Send Home* by Linda Kimble and Lori Sanders, published by McGraw-Hill). Instructions for character-based or group projects are included in the Teacher's Guide. Project books are available from Heart of Dakota for levels 2-3, 4-5, and 6-7-8, for \$6.50, and a "Suggested Book List" is \$5.00.

Workbooks contain, for each unit, an "Assigned Reading Calendar" that allows students and teacher to keep track of pages read, and to get reading done in a timely manner. In addition, there are worksheets that explore different characteristics of literature, depending on the genre studied. Levels 4-5 and 6-7-8 have vocabulary-building worksheets, used on days when Level 2-3 students are doing phonics work. All units have "Godly Character Traits" worksheets in addition to the academic work. Some worksheets look like mind maps, with interconnecting shapes to be filled in as prompted, some have questions to answer (and for the student to generate!) and/or Bible verses to look up, and many are designed for use with a group ("Write down four questions to ask someone else about their book," for example). The way the questions are worded, every student can be reading a different book, and yet thoughtful discussion, rather than chaos, results in the group discussions.

As a part of the daily lesson plans, the Teacher's Guide contains discussion questions, integration of all levels together, and guidance for the "culminating project" to which the fourth week of every unit is devoted. Project information is not included in the Student Book. (In my opinion, you cannot do without the Teacher's Guide for Student Book Level 2-3, but that's a different review.)

The Appendix in the student workbook (for every level) contains "Emergency Options" that allow the students to work independently when the teacher is unable to direct discussion for that day. Activities are suggested for most of the days when there is no worksheet to fill out.

The Appendix in the Teacher's Guide contains glossaries of genres, major Godly character traits, and story elements; a "Genre Log" to keep track of book titles, a copy of the "Assigned Reading Calendar," two lists of "Reading Strategies," one for the teacher and one for the student and intended for tackling unfamiliar words, teacher's and students' lists of "Qualities of Good Reading" with techniques for effective reading aloud; and vocabulary-building exercises.

Tips for reluctant readers: Find a subject matter that your student finds interesting. There is such a wealth of books available today! I remember how one of my brothers hated reading, until he was introduced to Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. With *Drawn into the Heart of Reading* you can assign books that appeal to a reluctant reader, and you can tailor the amount of reading as well. Assignments are relatively short and some involve drawing or talking as well as reading and writing.

Drawn into the Heart of Reading is an ambitious yet simple-to-use program, beautifully laid out and flexible enough to use when you are homeschooling several children, all at different levels, all with different interests, all reading different books! It is amazing to me to be able to teach literary analysis as early as second grade, and yet, with this program, our second grader is able to talk over **her** books with her older sisters. Just remember that second and third graders may well need a lot of help to make this curriculum work, fourth and fifth grades can work more independently, and sixth through eighth grade students can work quite independently, although they benefit from group interaction as scheduled. This is a program we're likely to be using for the next few years, at least.

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