LANGUAGE ARTS
CURRICULUM DESIGN

The Elementary Tier

MICHAEL CLAY THOMPSON
This implementation model applies to the elementary tier of the MCT curriculum, including the Island series, the Town series, the Voyage series, and the poetry texts.
All MCT language arts texts are based on the belief that children need challenging, classical academics, and that academics are inherently thrilling.
These grade-level suggestions can only be approximate guidelines. Individual student readiness is the guide.
What are the principles of a powerful academic program of language arts?

How do the MCT texts fit together?

What is the sequence of instruction?
For teachers, school systems, and home-school parents who wish to implement an MCT-based program, here are some fundamental principles and strategies. They can be modified for optimum fit.
Launch grammar first.
Academic writing depends upon a prior knowledge of grammar concepts and standards.

Punctuation rules are grammar-intensive.

Vocabulary usage instruction depends upon a comprehension of the parts of speech.
All MCT texts use the MCT 4-Level analysis strategy for comprehensive grammar instruction.

From Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859

Madame Defarge looked **superciliously** at the client.

**Parts of Speech**
- n. n. v. adv. prep. adj. n.

**Parts of Sentence**
- subj. AVP

**Phrases**
- prep. phrase

**Clauses**
- independent clause
  - a simple declarative sentence

**Grammar:** We see the two sides of a correct sentence. The complete subject is *Madame Defarge*, and the complete predicate is *looked superciliously at the client*. The heart of the predicate is the action verb *looked* (AVP stands for *action verb* *predicate*), which is modified by an adverbial prepositional phrase *at the client*.

**Vocabulary:** The adjective *supercilious* means condescending, arrogant. The Latin stem *super* means over; *cil* means hair; the word shows the raised eyebrow of the arrogant person. Dickens used the adverb form *superciliously* to modify the verb *looked*. Cl

**Poetics:** Notice the hissy *s* sounds in *SuperCilious*. Notice the repetition of sounds in *LooKeD CLiEnT*.

**Punctuation:** We must not put a comma after the subject *Defarge*; that would split the subject from its verb and damage the sentence.

**Writing:** This sentence is a complete thought; we are not waiting for the idea to conclude. Every word counts; it has only the words it needs.
Start with grammar. It is the foundation for punctuation, writing, and vocabulary usage. Use the grammar book in the first quarter, and follow up with application and the practice book throughout the year.

Use the language of grammar continuously in discussing vocabulary usage, punctuation, and writing.
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Use the language of grammar continuously in discussing vocabulary usage, punctuation, and writing.
Latin-based English vocabulary.
Once the grammar instruction has taken hold, you can begin to work in the vocabulary text.

The elementary texts are designed so as not to overwhelm the curriculum.

They can be completed either in the second quarter or distributed over quarters two through four.
Once students know their parts of speech, begin the vocabulary book.

Discuss the parts of speech of the vocabulary words.

These texts contain Classic Words, so students will benefit from learning the vocabulary before they read their classic novels.
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Continuous Four-Level Practice.
The grammar text can be extensively supplemented by the practice text, which provides 100 4-level sentences (three per week for a year) for continuous reinforcement.
The practice books are designed to be used flexibly, after the grammar book is completed.

Each page gives a four-level analysis problem. The problems are organized into four 25-page sections, each section focusing on one of the four levels of grammar. Study in sequence, or pick and choose.

The practice books also reinforce the vocabulary of the companion vocabulary book.
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The four-level analyses in the practice series combine and reinforce the grammar and vocabulary contents. Each grammar sentence contains words or stems from the vocabulary series.
Sentence 3

Then the low clouds descended toward the tiled rooftops.

- adv.  adj.  adj.  n.  v.  prep.  adj.  adj.  n.

------- subj.  AVP -------

------------prep. phrase------------

-------------------------------one independent clause-------------------------------

a simple declarative sentence

Comment: In the past tense action verb *descended*, the stem *de* means down. We see that *descended* is an action verb, but it does not pass the action to a direct object; the noun *rooftops* cannot be a direct object because it is the object of a preposition. Notice how often we see the pattern of preposition, then adjective, then noun. Prepositional phrases always begin with prepositions.
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Academic writing.
Formal, standard, academic writing is the essential genre of writing for all students who intend to advance through challenging high school classes and on to college.

College papers are rarely submitted as journals or as short stories.
The elementary writing series provides a sequenced, classical instruction: first, the sentence; second, the paragraph, and third, the essay.
The elementary texts use the power of graphics to present accelerated instruction in a creative context of pictures and characters that children love.
Following the grammar foundation established by Grammar Island, Sentence Island emphasizes the two sides of the sentence, action v. linking verbs, subject/verb agreement, placement of words and phrases, a complete thought, and sound in sentences.
Paragraph Town follows Grammar Town, and provides a review of sentence grammar, an exploration of structure, clarity in paragraphs, kinds of paragraphs, the order of paragraphs, and sound in paragraphs.
Essay Voyage follows Grammar Voyage. It provides a review of sentence grammar, and paragraph elements, followed by a rigorous array of the properties of academic essays.
Every chapter of Essay Voyage examines a key writing concept, and every chapter also reinforces that concept at every language level: the word, sentence, punctuation, paragraph, and essay structure. Every chapter also contains short passages of famous paragraphs and essays that students read to become accustomed to classic academic writing. This highly structured program is framed in a story that takes students around the world.

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| Vocabulary    | ✔️     | ✔️    | ✔️   | ✔️   | ✔️    | ✔️      | ✔️       | ✔️        | ✔️      | ✔️     |
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| Sentence      | ✔️     | ✔️    | ✔️   | ✔️   | ✔️    | ✔️      | ✔️       | ✔️        | ✔️      | ✔️     |
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| Punctuation   | ✔️     | ✔️    | ✔️   | ✔️   | ✔️    | ✔️      | ✔️       | ✔️        | ✔️      | ✔️     |
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| Editing       | ✔️     | ✔️    | ✔️   | ✔️   | ✔️    | ✔️      | ✔️       | ✔️        | ✔️      | ✔️     |
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| Famous Paragraph | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ |
| Essay Structure | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ | ✔️ |
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CE2 These sections reinforce words and Latin stems from Caesar’s English 2.
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FOUR-LEVEL GRAMMAR

| LATIN-BASED VOCABULARY |

The writing book should not be taught until the grammar book has been completed. Lessons from the writing book can be alternated with lessons from the vocabulary and practice book.

The positive stories and characters of the writing books cast life and value on the rigorous academic writing knowledge, showing that writing mechanics are not just tedious, difficult, and cognitive, but learnable and meaningful.
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Continuous, rigorous literature.
One or two classics per year are not sufficient to change students’ reading comprehension.

Low-vocabulary books or dumbed-down books do not create growth in comprehension.

A rigorous program of classical reading is required. Students need choice on some titles.
Students should be reading every month of every year.
Students should read an extensive list of classic works that are the common experience of educated individuals in the world.

The in-class titles are great books that are assigned, and that are evaluated with quizzes and essay tests.

The student should perceive most books as being hard to read, i.e., challenging.
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We tend to assign everything, but students need choice. The outside classics are chosen by the student with guidance.

They are designed to double the reading quantity and to give students a reader's--rather than a student's--experience.

They are therefore best evaluated with amiable conversations, book talks.
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Serious poetics.
Poetic devices are common in great prose, as in classic novels.

Poetic devices are also an important element of all outstanding writing.

These elements are not learned from prose; they are learned from a serious study of poetry and poetics.

Poetry is an academic training ground for great reading and great writing.
The poetry texts can be inserted into the curriculum flexibly, keeping in mind that students’ writing will benefit from an awareness of the sound of words.
The poetry books can be woven into the assignment matrix as is convenient, with the proviso that student writing will benefit from an alert sense of sound.

Poetry is crucial core content because it is the training ground not only for itself but for advanced prose, and therefore for advanced reading and writing.
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SUMMARY
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Latin-based Vocabulary

Academic Writing

Academic Poetics

Rigorous Literature.