

The Alice, Peter, and Mole Trilogy

A Four-Level Literature
Parent Manual

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Four-Level Literature: General Comments

The purpose of this literature program is to immerse children in great books so that they experience literature as literature and not as a drudgery of tedious school activities. I want children's minds on the books themselves and not on attendant assignments. It is by loving to read that children become literate.

The pedagogy of this program is grown-up and reflective; it is deliberately simple, focusing entirely on the reading of the book and avoiding all traditional worksheet activities in favor of rich discussion and thoughtful writing. Busywork has been eliminated. The activities that are included are flexible options, not a rigid system requiring every step every time. In the end if the child does not love reading, we have failed.

This manual is for the homeschool parent. The homeschool environment is different in many dimensions from the traditional school environment, and these recommendations take full advantage of

the unique flexibility and purity of concentration that occurs in the homeschool setting. In writing a manual for homeschool use, however, I am mindful that the homeschool environment itself exists in many variations. Some children are homeschooled individually, others in small groups or classes. There will be homeschool children using this literature trilogy who are eight or nine years old and others who are of middle school age. There will be homeschool parents who want a grade-free, creative environment and others who want to establish a classical academic rigor that they may feel is lacking in the school system.

My strategy in this manual, therefore, is to provide paths for all of the above. I may refer to the *child*, or I may refer to the *class*, thinking of a small homeschool class. I may provide options for a third grader, and I may provide options for a seventh grader, who is by no means too old to read *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, or *The Wind in the Willows*. Every activity in this manual can be conducted as an ungraded, creative activity, or it can be graded by a parent who wants the child to learn how to navigate a grading system. I do not provide any system for grading.

It is important that the approach to literature be

literary, focused on the texts, and simple. I do not want a noisy panorama of activities, worksheets, and other busywork to be the program. The program is the books. I want our approach to be deft and quiet, rather than loud. I want us to behave with literary grace. I want our activities to cuddle up to the books. We will do some creative and academic work in conjunction with the books, with our hearts turned at all times toward the books.

Accordingly, we can think about the program strategy in terms of four simple levels. The four levels are preparing, reading, creative thinking, and writing.

1. Preparing

Prior to reading the book, we might use an encyclopedia or the internet to look up the author and learn about the author's life and the place of the book in cultural history. This content, however, is secondary to the content of the book itself; it would not be important if the book were not important. An alternative is to do this research after reading the book, when the child may be even more curious about the details.

We might also prestudy the vocabulary by studying the words common to all books in the trilogy and then

Alice, Peter, and Mole
Vocabulary Prestudy

Here are five words that appear in all three novels. Let us examine them before beginning the trilogy.

capital: interj. or adj.

Capital is an interjection or adjective that we see especially in British novels of the nineteenth century. It expresses delight and is a synonym for *excellent*. In Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, a character does a "capital imitation of a sailor's walk."

fancy: n. or v.

As a noun, a fancy is an attraction or an element of imagination. As a verb, to fancy something is to want it or to imagine it. In *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote that the "mutineers were bolder than we fancied."

Alice in Wonderland

A Comment

To read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is to be so transported, so awash in Carroll's waves of nonsense and fantasy that it would be easy to dismiss the book as the product of a disorganized, or frivolous, or hallucinatory mind. You could almost fall unthinkingly into the story, casually assuming that its pointlessness is its point and that its irrationality is its only rationale. You could almost think that there is nothing serious to think about.

Almost.

The problem with a light-minded view of the story is the edge it has, the sharp way it cuts into things we seem to remember. Somehow, for all of its silliness, *Alice* seems to slice not into the isolated nonsense of its own invention but into nonsense that is real. It is not only the story that is absurd; it is the world. We almost cheer at times, though we are laughing, when the story demolishes yet another societal absurdity.

Alice in Wonderland

Language Illustration Questions

The following questions concern the language illustrations that appear in this edition of *Alice in Wonderland*. These questions will promote a thoughtful involvement with what the illustrations reveal about Lewis Carroll's writing.

1. Which two of the language illustrations in Chapters One through Four are your favorites? Why?
 2. Explain, in your own words, the point of the first language illustration in Chapter Three, concerning a sentence about the Dodo.
 3. There are two illustrations in Chapter Four. Which of these three is most important? Why?
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Alice in Wonderland

Character Quotations for Quote Quizzes

Here are quotations that may be used for quote quizzes. I will not provide any certain number per chapter; you may select from them as seems good. I have adjusted capitalization and other details slightly for formatting purposes, but I have not changed any words. Each quotation begins with the number of the chapter in which it is found. I encourage you to use these as models and to enjoy finding more. In practice I did not give quote quizzes every day; when I did give one, I would use three to five quotes, reading each one carefully two times. All the students had to do was to write the name of the character whose words these were.

Notice that the quotations are always the words of a character, never the words of the narrator. If you want to choose some of your own quotations, here are some tips: find quotations that are famous, that have clues in them such as grammar or ways of speaking unique

to a character, that are memorable or repeated, that mention plot details that give them away, or that reveal important aspects of a character's personality. Try to find quotations that should be obvious to any child who really has read the story, not quotations that are subtle, tricky, or overly challenging. We do not want the quote quizzes to be dreaded. Here are some *Alice* quotes that you might like to use:

1. Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late! - Rabbit

 1. After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs! - Alice

 1. What a curious feeling! I must be shutting up like a telescope. - Alice

 2. Oh! the Duchess, the Duchess! Oh! won't she be savage if I've kept her waiting! - Rabbit

 2. London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome. - Alice
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Alice in Wonderland

Creative Questions and Activities

These options are designed to expand the child's creative and imaginative interaction with the literature. I do not expect every option to be undertaken, and I would like for the child to play a part in choosing the creative activities that he or she will do.

1. Imagine: You have just learned that the story of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party is wrong and that something else happened at the party. Tell us what really happened!
2. If you were Alice and were going to give the Queen of Hearts a surprise gift—the perfect gift—what would it be? It cannot be anything mentioned in the story. Explain your choice.

Alice in Wonderland

Academic Writing Practice

Very young readers read *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Wind in the Willows*. These are among the favorite titles of children who are beginning to read classics. Children of lower elementary age may not yet be ready to write actual essays and may just be encouraged to address some of these questions either in a nice discussion or in less structured writing.

If the child is advanced enough in academics, we might follow the reading with more formal academic writing practice. Use the standard conventions of formal style: no contractions, no first person. *Essay Voyage* and the *Advanced Academic Writing* books provide the guidelines. I like to provide four or five study questions in advance, and I give the child several days to prepare for the essays. The actual writing will contain three of the questions, with one being mandatory. The child will chose one of the remaining two to answer. In this

method the child has to prepare for all study questions, requiring a good deal of thought. I do not spring surprise questions on the child. I do believe that some student choice is important.

I have provided you with more than five questions; you can select those that you wish to give to the child. You may also replace any of these questions with questions you would like to include, so long as they are intratextual and not critical in nature.

These are Socratic questions that do not favor one answer over another; the evaluation of the essays will be based on the English, the essay structure, and the force of the case that the child makes by using quotations.

1. Which character in Wonderland upsets Alice the most? Explain?
 2. What is Alice's best quality, in terms of her (good) character, and how does this quality help her survive the adventure through Wonderland?
 3. At what point in the story is Alice in the most danger?
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