



Classical Makeover

The following excerpt is taken from the soon-to-be released paperback

TRIVIUM MASTERY:

The Intersection of Three Roads



How You can Recover from the Urban Legend that has Hijacked
the Classical Home Schooling Renewal Movement



Diane B. Lockman

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Strategic Semester Plan for Morgan 7 year old girl

A delightful, cheerful little girl, Morgan loves playing imaginative stuffed animal games with her brothers. She is an avid reader finding time every day for Ramona, Ralph, Ribsey, and many other fictional friends. She loves being in the kitchen with Mom or big sister, and her favorite recipes involve cookies and cakes. Although she hasn't begun formal piano lessons yet, she is a good singer and might want to learn how to play guitar one day. Weekly skating provides a fun opportunity for putting her exuberant energy to good use!

MASTERY STATUS

Morgan has a rich grasp of vocabulary as demonstrated in conversation and in reading difficult excerpts. She is an excellent reader, so many of the concepts of the English language that still need to be taught will be familiar to her in context. For instance, the eight parts of speech, if taught in context of daily life and the books that she is currently reading, should be fairly easy to comprehend and apply because she will recognize common sentence structures.

Additionally, organizing thought, solving problems, and recording observations are priorities in this plan as she improves her critical thinking skills. Finally, unstructured playtime is still very important, so any learning that can be achieved informally is best. Therefore, skills one and two of the classical trivium (learning the language and thinking critically, respectively) will be the focus of Morgan's semester plan.

Morgan needs to work on the following skills during the semester:

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE:

How to read
How to spell
How to write
How to punctuate and capitalize
How to use proper grammar

THINKING CRITICALLY:

How to classify, describe, compare, and contrast
How to identify and complete sequences
How to identify and interpret analogies
How to solve problems
How to analyze literature

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY:

How to have conversations
How to give a speech

ACTION STEPS

- 1. Select a chapter book to read out loud to her at least three times a week.**

An adept young reader, Morgan pauses at commas, and her pronunciation is precise and accurate. When she runs across vocabulary that she doesn't recognize, she sounds it out in her head to get the proper syllabication and phonetics. Although she prefers not to read out loud because it takes longer, do continue reading to her and including her in adult conversations. Consistently hearing sophisticated language patterns will naturally improve and increase her vocabulary, comprehension, and pronunciation skills.

She is already reading chapter books on her own, so select one classic to read to her at least three times a week. Select a book that is above her grade level. She likes stories about personified animals and children; here are a few favorites that you might try:

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, Robert C. O'Brien
The Trumpet of the Swan, E. B. White
The Cricket in Times Square, George Selden
Where the Red Fern Grows, Wilson Rawls
Caddie Woodlawn, Carol Ryrie Brink

All five of the above suggested books feature both male and female characters, so you could include older brother in this reading time, too.

Before you begin the book, teach her how to preview a book and make predictions about the story line. Look at the pictures on the front cover and read the comments on the back cover. If it is a hardbound book with a book jacket, read the inside flaps together. Look at the book's title, scan the table of contents, and flip through the pages looking for any little illustrations that might provide clues as to the plot. Casually introduce the elements of fiction (character, setting, plot, climax, themes, etc.) throughout the reading whenever you sense a prime opportunity to teach.

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2. Hold a spelling bee, or dictate a paragraph.

Her vocabulary is advanced for her age which is probably due to the fact that reading is her favorite subject, and you regularly talk and play with her. Well done! She likes games, so make spelling fun by holding a weekly spelling bee by selecting 10 or 15 words from her abridged classics and have her spell them. Provide a goodie for a job well done. Magnetic letters on the refrigerator are another way for fun spelling; just give her a word from the cookbook, and ask her to spell it!

Additionally, you could dictate one quality paragraph a week from her abridged classic. Read slowly while she writes what you are reading. After

she is done, circle the spelling errors and have her correct them. If you see a pattern over time (one particular spelling or punctuation rule being broken), take time to teach her the proper rule and let her practice getting it right. For example, four letter words that have a vowel in the 2nd position and an ‘e’ at the end in the 4th position usually make the vowel have a ‘long’ sound. Give her some words to spell that follow this rule like “cape, fine, and hope.” Don’t forget to quiz her on the exceptions, too.

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3. Let her supply the missing punctuation.

Type a short paragraph from her reading. Make sure that you increase the font and double space so that she has room to edit. Leave out all punctuation marks. Have her find them. The ones that she misses are the ones that you need to teach. In the beginning, expect her to find all the missing periods, question marks, and exclamation points. Commas and semicolons might stump her, but you love grammar, so you will help her identify the proper usage!

Here is a borrowed idea: create a running story that needs punctuation. Think of an exciting or funny opening sentence like “Heaven forbid! I forgot to...” except leave out the punctuation. Tell her how many punctuation marks are missing and have her find them. Each day, add to the story by writing a new sentence or fragment without punctuation. Repeat the procedure so that she is on a mission to find the missing punctuation and capital letters.

As she masters her punctuation, vary the procedure by writing sentences or fragments that are incorrectly punctuated, and let her find the errors. You could also let her come up with the new sentence or fragment and test your skill for fun. By the way, the goofier the story line, the more fun this game will be.

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4. Teach her the grammar concepts in context.

Grammar theory can be very boring to a young child. In fact, she is already learning proper grammar by soaking up the adult conversations and reading quality writing. However, if you want to introduce the basic eight parts of speech, do it in context.

When defining and illustrating, group nouns, pronouns, and adjectives together. Teach her that a noun is a person, place, or thing. Have her find the nouns in the room, while driving in the car, or on the campsite playground. Teach her that pronouns take the place of nouns; her stuffed animal is an “it” instead of a “he” or “she.” (She might disagree for now if she pretends her pals are real with gender and very busy lives!) Teach her that adjectives modify or describe nouns, so have her add a descriptive word to the nouns she sees around her. For example, on the camping trip she could see a “shiny” pebble, a “decayed” log, or a “hungry” raccoon. She will enjoy coming up with creative adjectives.

Group verbs and adverbs together. Teach her that a verb is an action or being word. Let her demonstrate action: while skating, running, hiking, camping, or cooking. Teach her that adverbs modify verbs, so ask her to show you slow skating or fast skating or reckless skating or careful skating.

Prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections can all be taught as well; just remember real-life illustrations followed by her own illustrations will be more meaningful to her and make learning English grammar more fun.

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5. Have her play analogy jeopardy.

Completing analogies will refine Morgan’s ability to infer or transfer a property from one subject to another. There are lots of free analogy games online. Pick one game a week for her to play. *Quia* has several online jeopardy games which she will enjoy. When you land on the home page, find the search tool, and enter “analogies” for a list of all the games.

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6. Start Saxon math lessons.

You have made a great decision to switch to *Saxon*. Math is her least favorite subject because she finds it difficult, so have her do her math lesson before any other academic work. After a good breakfast, her mind will be alert, and she has the added incentive of getting the toughest assignment out of the way early.

Count the number of lessons in the text, and add the number of tests. Take this total and divide it by 34 weeks (allow 2 weeks for sicknesses or interruptions in the schedule). The result will tell you how many lessons or tests a week she needs to complete.

Designate Fridays as “Math Games” day. She loves playing games, and there are tons of math board games (*Hive Alive* by *Aristoplay*), math software games (*Math Detective* by *Critical Thinking Press*), and math puzzles (Sudoku). Older brother will enjoy playing with her. If you want to create your own math games, Peggy Kaye has written *Games for Math*, a good book full of ideas for math games.

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7. Take her on a weekly “discovery” trip.

Intentionally plan a weekly field trip in the neighborhood or surrounding area for the purpose of discovering, classifying, describing, comparing, and contrasting. Before you go, create a chart (5 x 6 grid) on a blank piece of paper where she can record her observations. This chart can be copied for all future trips.

For instance, if you are going to the park where you might see lots of dogs, label the horizontal rows “size, sound, color, fur, and breed.” Put your own dog, Jake, in the first column as an example. Fill in the data for Jake. Have her write “dog one,” “dog two,” through “dog five” at the bottom of each column. Show her how to fill out the categories like you did for Jake.

You can do this discovery exercise anywhere. At the local bookstore, have her classify and describe the covers, sizes, textures, photos, and font of red books. At the botanical garden, she can record all that she sees about the lovely flowers. If the weather prohibits a trip, pull out a life science encyclopedia, and have her select mammals to chart.

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8. Continue assigning abridged classics for her private reading time.

She enjoys the current reading program and comprehension questions, so continue to encourage daily reading. Since she likes the prewritten comprehension questions, you can continue to assign them, but eventually you want to wean her off of the canned questions and have her ask his own questions. As you read the chapter book to her, you can show her how to ask the standard 6 comprehension questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. If you get in the habit of doing this with her, then she will naturally ask the same questions when she is reading alone.

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9. Teach her how to write personal letters.

You may already be doing this, but if not, show her how to write a thank you note when she receives a gift. Find a penpal for her to write; homeschoolers live all over the world, and you may be able to spark an interest in another part of the world in addition to teaching how to write letters. The Yahoo group, "*Homeschool Form Share*," has a group of parents who arrange penpals for their kids; if you join, post a thread asking for a penpal, and see what happens.

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10. Avoid history survey texts; look for history stories.

Decide on a theme or time period that you want to cover with the younger kids. Spend several weeks exploring this theme through library visits. Take the kids every week. Show them how to search the card catalog. Look at all the narratives, biographies, and historical fiction that are available for your particular theme or time period, and choose your favorites to take home that week.

For instance, you might want to learn about the following themes: kings and queens, knights, soldiers, marketplaces, housing, or technology. Start chronologically (oldest first) and read about the theme as it played out in different cultures and at different times. If you want to focus on a particular time period like the Middle Ages, pull all your stories from those years. You should read the history selections out loud to them, and make sure that you ask them to narrate back their understanding by asking the standard “who, what, when, where, how, and why” questions. If they can’t sit still while you read, give them something to do with their hands like playing with some Silly Putty, a rubber ball, or drawing. Don’t assign tests, quizzes, or writing assignments. Make history a pleasant, relaxing experience.

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11. Have her memorize and recite three stories.

She enjoys drama, so find some short picture books with dialogue to have her memorize and recite to the family. Have her read the book out loud in short sections, repeat the dialogue with feeling, and commit it to memory. Discuss characterization with her so that she represents each person or animal in the story uniquely.

She should be able to master three stories during the semester. You can choose Bible stories, adventure stories, animal stories, or any number of themes. Let her bring home several possibilities from the library and practice out loud until she decides which one she wants to tackle.

PROGRESS REPORT

Sometime around the end of the semester, take an inventory of Morgan's progress. Ask her what she has and has not enjoyed about the past few weeks. If there were steps that did not work for Morgan, eliminate them from the next semester and come up with an alternative plan. Also remove any steps that seem redundant or that she has mastered.

Pull all of her work and take a big picture look at whether her skills have improved especially in grammar, observation, and problem-solving. Think of small steps for continued improvement that you could do with her over the next semester. Keep working on those areas that need improvement.