

# Your Child Is More Than a Grade Level

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CHRISTINE GURZLER

# Your Child Is More Than a Grade Level

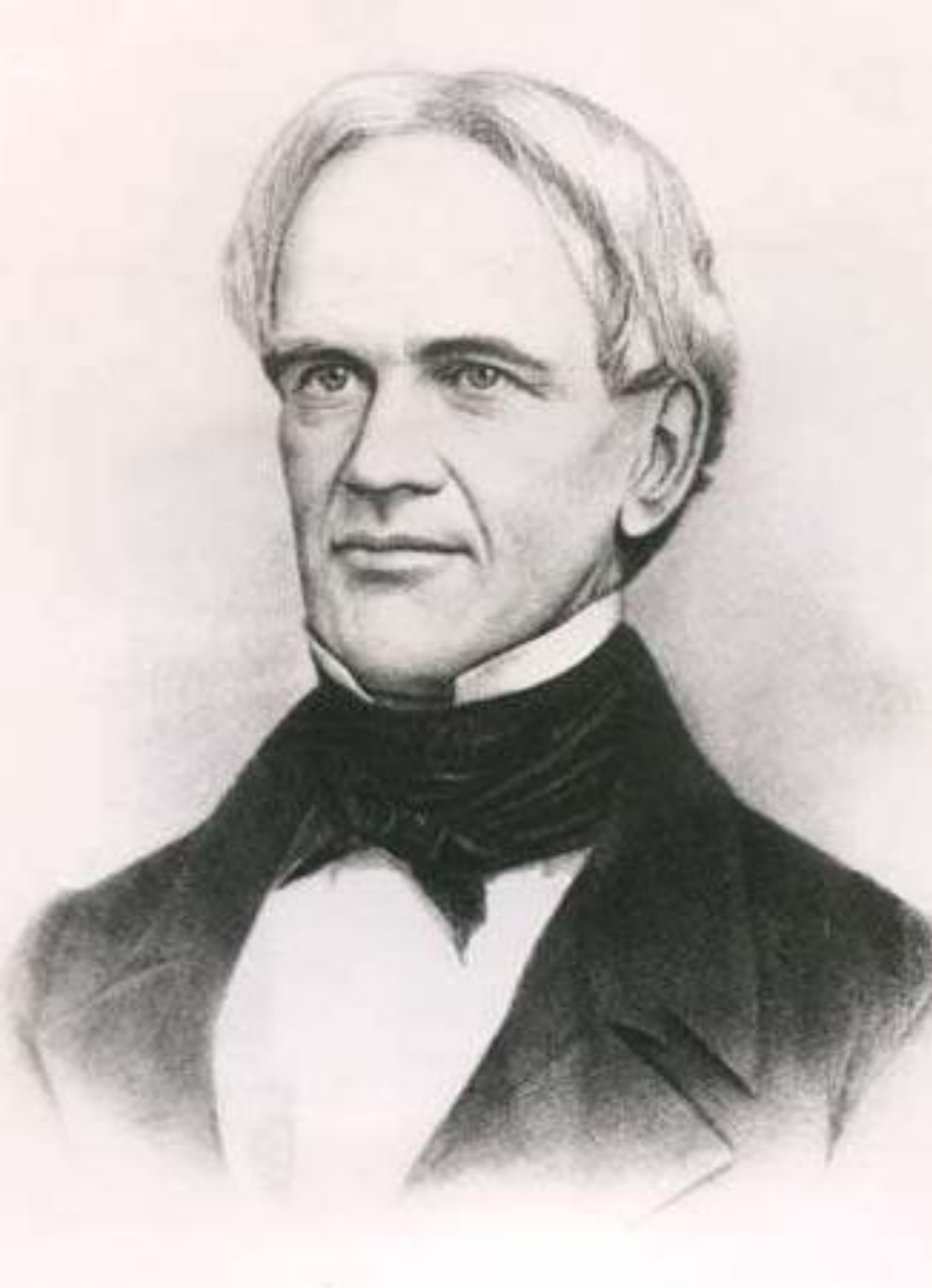
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Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Why do grade levels exist at all?	Grade Levels vs. Learning Stages – which is more effective?	When might Grade Levels be useful?	What about being “behind”?
History of Education	Statistical Averages	Range of Normal	How testing works and what it means
Grade levels have little to no bearing on what actually happens in the home school	Classical Education’s Stages	Linear vs Spiral	Learning Differences

# Grade Levels are a Relatively New Idea

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UP UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, THEY DID NOT EXIST



# Horace Mann

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In the 1850s, he got interested in the “problems” in Massachusetts’ schools, traveled to Prussia, came home, and campaigned for publicly funded schools. Because of this, schools today are based on the theory that learners of the same age at the same level of social and intellectual maturity should be taught at the same pace.

# Grade Levels Needed in this NEW System ...

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- Mostly due to logistics
- A way to sort the kids
- Based on the idea that kids of the same age would be at similar stages of development
- Grade Levels are really more about “crowd control” than anything else
- The REASONING behind them has little to no bearing on what happens in the home school
  - Most parents do not need “crowd control”
  - Grade Levels do not take into account the range of normal
  - They do not take into account the uniqueness of each individual

# Workbooks

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Workbooks (indeed the whole idea behind textbooks and workbooks) comes from a place that has nothing to do with homeschooling. I'm not saying that you can't ever use a workbook—in fact, for some things, you just might WANT a workbook to make your life easier. It is, however, important to know their origins and their ultimate purpose.

- “Did you know workbooks were created for five reasons? Four of them dealt with the public school's need for mass education and unions. The fifth dealt with the ease of communicating how much was learned to the parent. In other words, none of the reasons for workbooks are applicable to the homeschool” (Avery, 15).



# Grade Level

# Learning Stages

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## ASSUMES YEARLY CHANGES K-12

- Grade levels are a lot like the actuary tables of the insurance realm
- They take statistical averages to create a composite profile that helps present a range of normal
- It is a way to group and compare people
- In any given classroom, there is usually a 3- to 5-year range of grade levels when abilities are taken into account

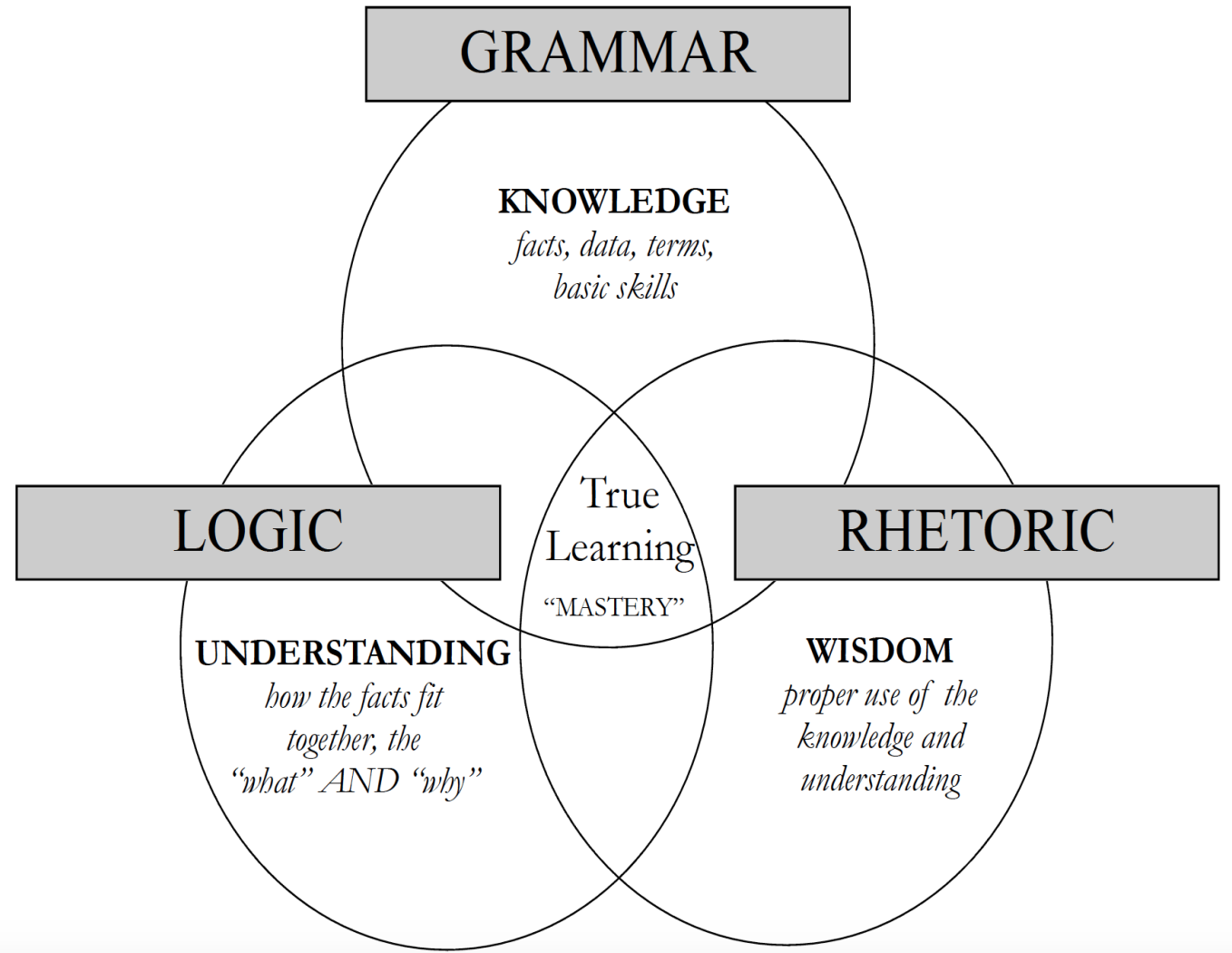
## LOOKS TO PHYSIOLOGY FOR CHANGES

- Teach a child where he or she IS rather than some arbitrary idea of where they ought to be
- Tutorial teaching is much more effective; therefore, utilizing a few levels is a more efficient way of figuring out where a student IS and teaching what they need to know when they are ready to receive it



# Classical Stages

- Useful even if you are not a classical educator
- Consider the physiology of the student rather than a composite from the range of normal or a particular age group





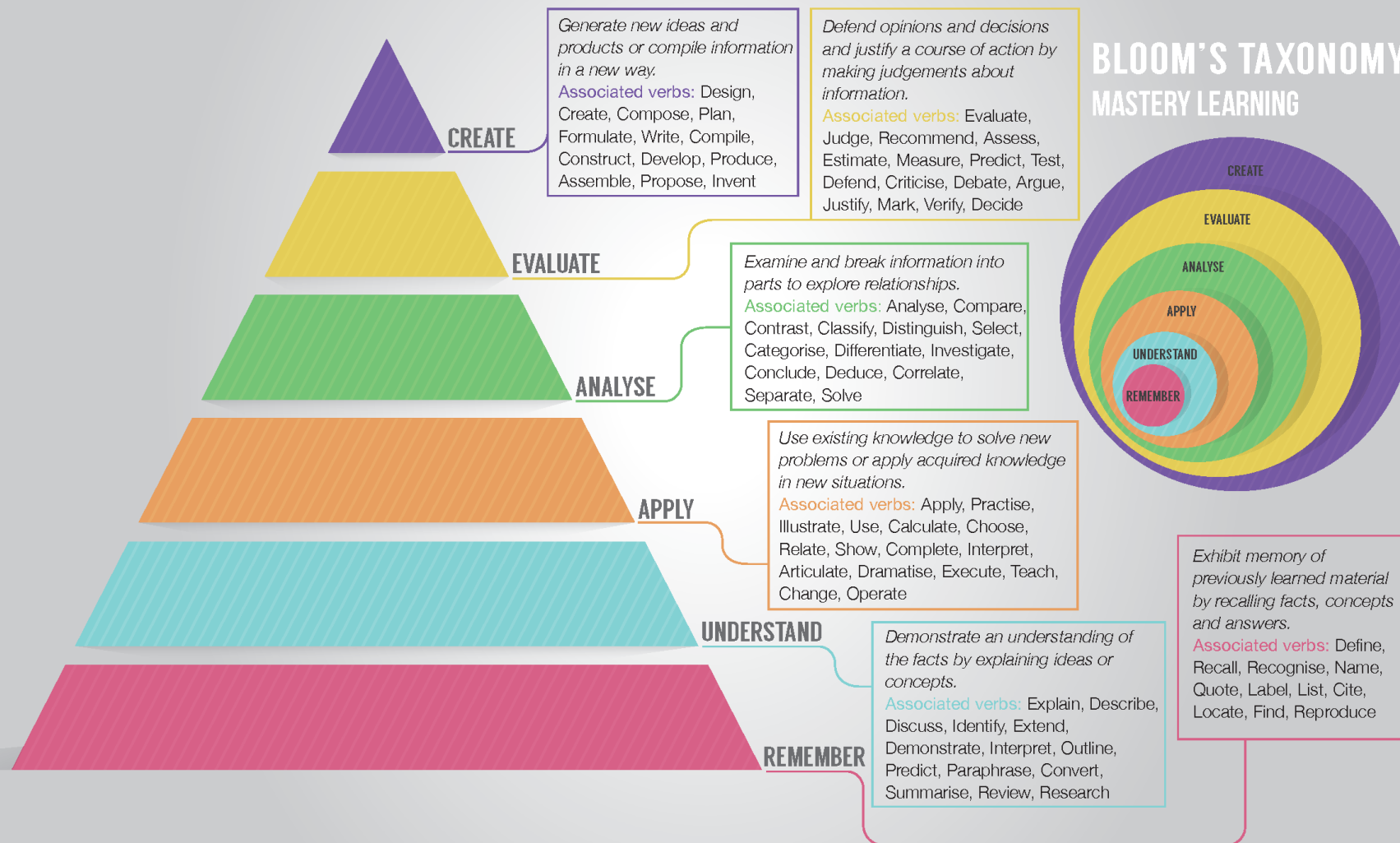


# Neuroscience

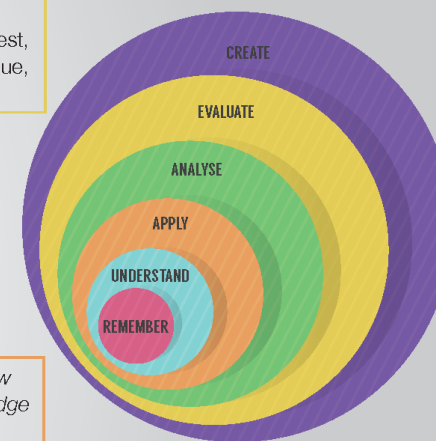
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There's so much good information to be found in the world of brain science these days. For now, think of the left side of the brain being the rigid, reflective, analytic, and sequential side; whereas, the right side of the brain has more to do with creativity, impulse control, social skills, and the ability to see the 'whole' of something.

# BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY: RELATED VERBS

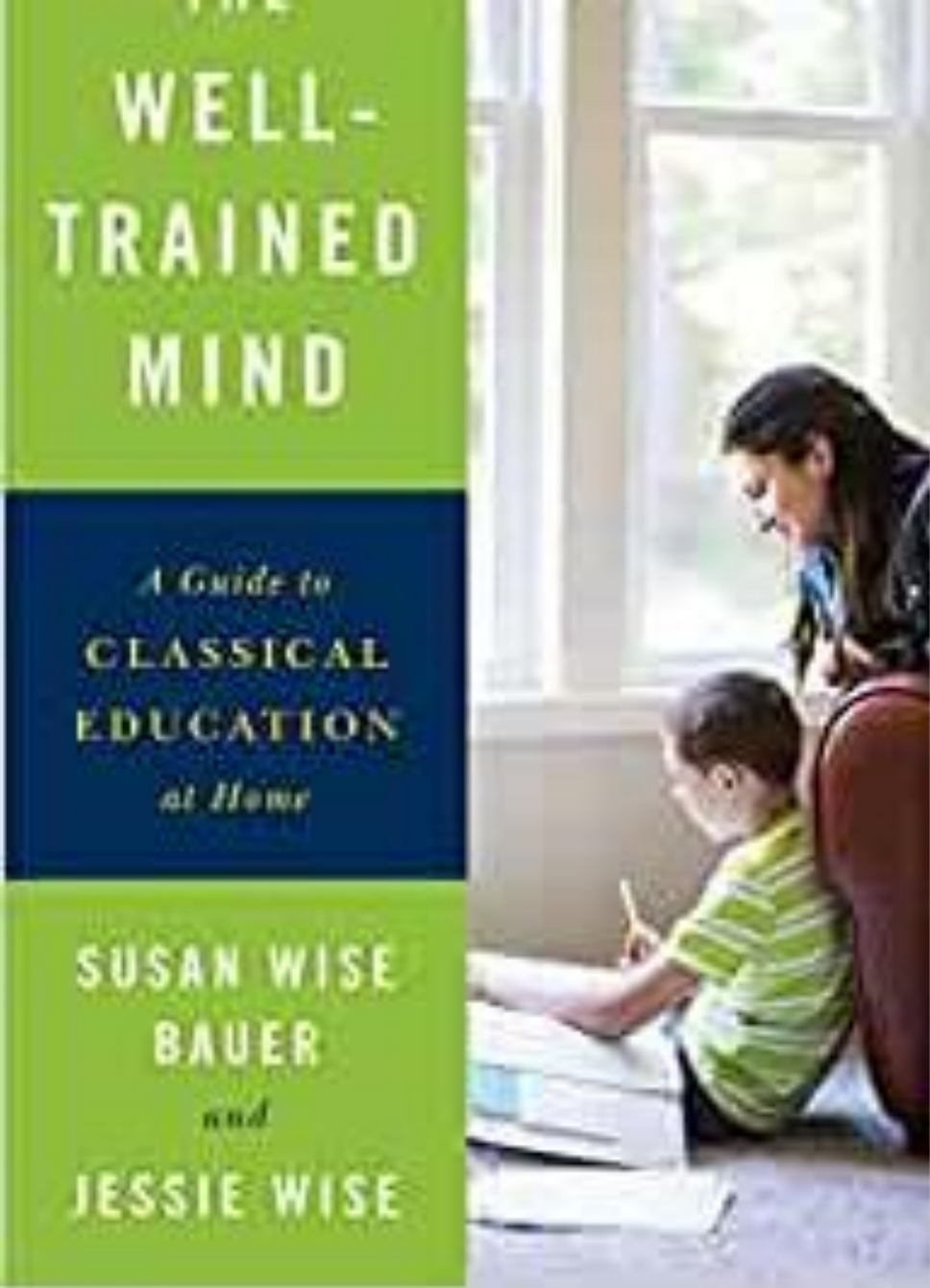


## BLOOM'S TAXONOMY: MASTERY LEARNING



# Variety Matters!

THERE ARE  
DIFFERENT WAYS TO  
“SPLIT” THE STAGES  
AND CLASSICAL  
CURRICULUM  
PROVIDERS DIFFER  
ON WHERE THIS  
SPLIT BEST TAKES  
PLACE



# The Well-Trained Mind

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# The Well-Trained Mind

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## STAGES/GRADES

Grammar: Grades 1-4

Logic: Grades 5-8

Rhetoric: Grades 9-12

## CONTENT

Year 1: Ancient Era

Year 2: Medieval Era

Year 3: Early Modern Period

Year 4: Later Modern Period

Neat & Tidy ... for the 1<sup>st</sup> child, anyway!





# Veritas Press

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THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS THAT YOU  
CAN LEARN WITH THESE PEOPLE

# Veritas Press—Elementary

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## STAGES/GRADES

Grammar: Grades K-6

They take longer to go through their first sweep of history, allowing more time to hear good stories, and solidify basic skills in reading and math.

## CONTENT:

K and 1<sup>st</sup> Grade: Me and My Nation

2<sup>nd</sup> Gr: OT and Egypt

3<sup>rd</sup> Gr: NT with Greece and Rome

4<sup>th</sup> Gr: Medieval, Renaissance, Reformation

5<sup>th</sup> Gr: Explorers to 1815

6<sup>th</sup> Gr: 1815 to Present



# Veritas Press—Secondary

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Logic/Dialectic Stage: Grades 7-9

Gr 7: Omnibus I – Ancients

Gr 8: Omnibus II – Medieval

Gr 9: Omnibus III – Modern

Rhetoric Stage: Grades 10-12

Gr 10: Omnibus IV – Ancients

Gr 11: Omnibus V – Medieval

Gr 12: Omnibus VI – Modern

Uses different books at each of these levels.  
No separate US History, only integrated.



# Tapestry of Grace

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Four “year plan” sets each divided into 36 weekly plans

Use the library or purchase books for your research build upon the already provided background information in the curriculum.

Notebooking pages, writing ideas, mapwork, and lapbook ideas also available.

# Tapestry of Grace

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Uses a customized approach to stages within a framework of content, so it's flexible

Children can move up and down within each overarching stage depending on the assignments while in one particular “Year Plan” for the family

Year 1: Creation to the Fall of Rome in 426 AD

Year 2: Fall of Rome 426 AD through the Signing of the American Constitution in 1787 AD

Year 3: Colonialism and Rise of Empires (Mostly the late 1700s through the 1800s)

Year 4: Modern Era (Mostly 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present)

# Tapestry of Grace

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Stages are not based on specific grade or age splits, but aligned more to the individual child

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- ❖ Lower Grammar – Corresponds to building basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic with the history and science being the “dessert”
- ❖ Upper Grammar – Corresponds to the “Reading to Learn” stage, being able to manipulate numbers, and write unified paragraphs on a wide variety of topics
- ❖ Logic – Aligns with the desire to question and make sense of the world
- ❖ Rhetoric – Analysis and Synthesis of Ideas formatted for Effective Communication

What REALLY  
matters is that  
you READ the  
CHILD for  
these STAGES!

THIS IS WHY I  
PERSONALLY LIKE  
USING PHYSIOLOGY  
AS MY OWN GUIDE  
BECAUSE THERE IS  
OVERLAP BETWEEN  
EACH STAGE.

# We tend to do a lot of things backwards

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Instead of reading the CHILD to see what they CAN do, we read a book that says that they SHOULD do.



Instead of using methods that make the most sense for children, we use methods that disregard their natural stages of learning.



Instead of teaching from whole to parts, we teach the parts and only much later allow the whole to be seen.



Instead of beginning with a few general ideas and building upon those, we tend to teach many specific things.



# Two sides of the same coin

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Children have a receptive side as well as an expressive side. This coincides to the intertwined ideas of teaching and learning, listening and speaking, reading and writing.





# What if Child just wants to ‘do school’ with the big kids?

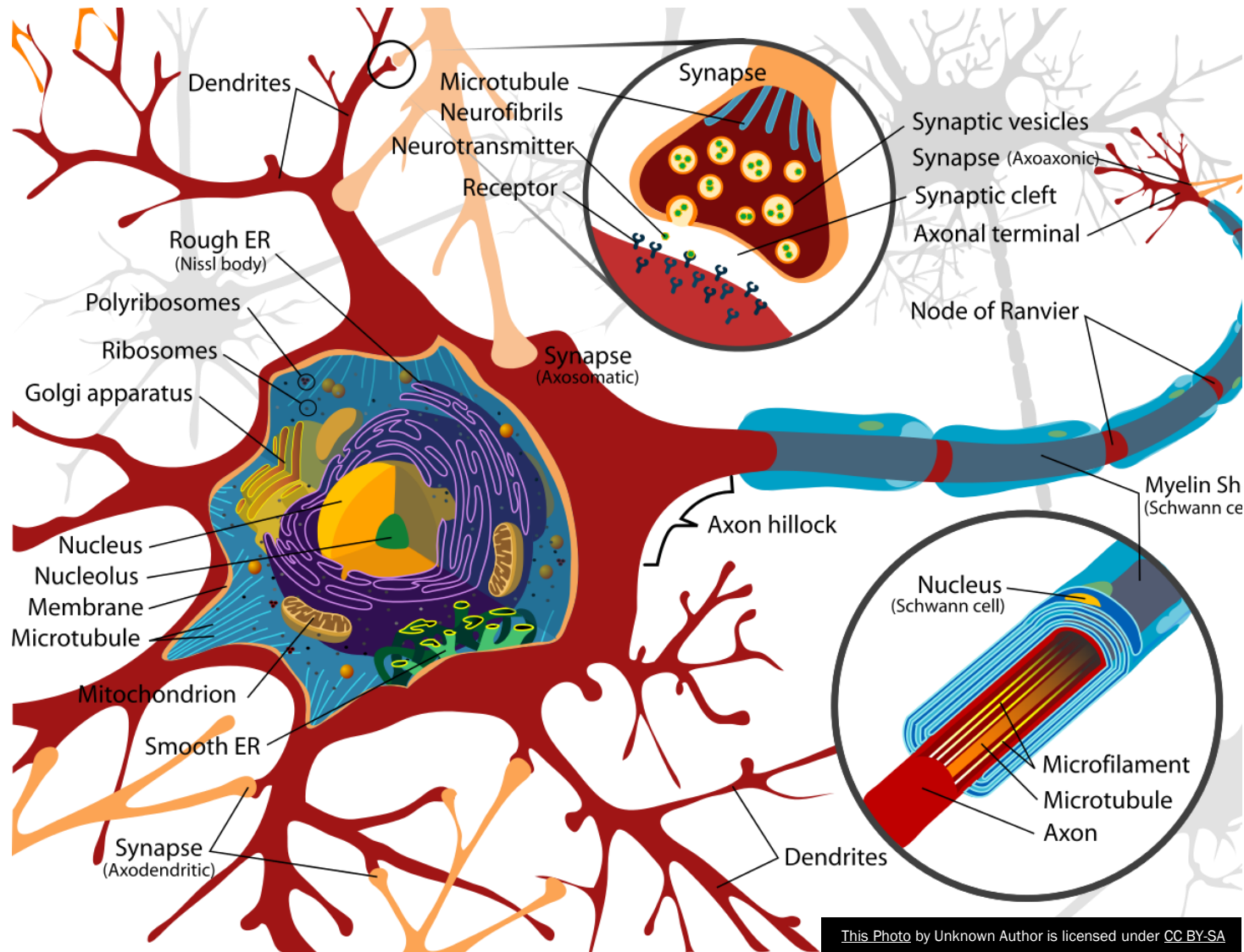
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- Don't confuse wanting to do something special with Mom or Dad with true readiness!
  - PreK and Kindergarten are not REALLY necessary!
  - Modern notion that stems from the idea that the state does not trust parents to raise children!
  - Read John Taylor Gatto's, Underground History of Education
- It does mean little ones can work on getting ready!
  - Potty trained and weaned
  - Gross motor skills are developmentally appropriate
  - The child speaks clearly enough that other people outside the family can understand what they say
  - Phonemic Awareness is developing and the child has an understanding of how print “works”
  - Fine motor skills: strengthen fingers (scissors, clay); they can use a fork
  - Sit and play quietly when stories are being read
  - Beginning “Narration” (telling back what was said)
- When really ready, children will exhibit more interest in learning to read, doing simple arithmetic without counting every object, and will be able to grip a pencil correctly (as opposed to using a fist grip)

# Lower Grammar Stage or Beginning Learners

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- Guiding Question – What?? Or When something happened?? They are beginning to understand “time.”
- Facts: Nuts and bolts of a topic
- Snow-banked knowledge (saved in the mind for later)
- Memorization since it comes easy to younger children
- Remembering
- Learning to Read
- Not having to COUNT every single object or count on from “1” and the ability to conceptually “see” a group of five objects as “5” without having to count them individually
- Able to learn basic handwriting
- Some ability to sit still (This varies GREATLY in children!)



# Gender Matters!

- Ø Readiness for ANY of the stages happens sooner for girls than for boys.
- Ø This has to do with the myelin sheath that coats all nerves.
- Ø In boys, testosterone production takes precedence.
- Ø Boys generally will be between a year to a year and half “behind” girls in terms of these physical readiness signs.
- Ø Even then, individuals vary!

Concrete



Representational



Abstract

$$4 + 6 = 10$$

C-R-A Method of Teaching Math

# Upper Grammar or Upper Elementary Learners

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Generally characterized by:

- Student has memorized basic math facts and is ready to work with parts of numbers
- Student no longer has to actively remember how each letter or number are formed when writing
- Student has progressed from “Learning to Read” to “Reading to Learn”
- Student has the ability to write a unified paragraph on basic topics from what is read or investigated
- Sentence structure is still likely simple (although some students can use several “openers” to construct complex sentences with relative ease)
  - NOT writing essays or research papers yet, but generalized reports about a variety of topics and facts



# Jeanne Chall



Stage	Typical age range	Concepts of Print	Phonemic Awareness	Alphabetic Principle (including spelling)	Fluency	Vocabulary	Writing Development	Stage-Appropriate Reading Material	Knowledge	Key Teaching Practices/Routines	Key Teaching Principles
Stage 4	Typically, 15 to 18 years old (Grade 10 to 12) for L1 learners. And achieved in 4.5 to 7 years for ELLs and adult learners.										
Stage 3b	Typically, 12 to 14 years old (Grade 7 to 9) for L1 learners. And achieved in 2.5 to 3 years for ELLs and adult learners.										
Stage 3a	Typically, 9 to 12 years old (Grade 4 to 6) for L1 learners. And achieved in 1.5 to 3 years for ELLs and adult learners.										
Stage 2	Typically, 7 to 9 years old (Grade 2 to 3) for L1 learners. And achieved in 6 months to 2 years for ELLs and adult learners.										
Stage 1	Typically, 6 to 7 years old (Grade 1) for L1 learners. And achieved in 0 to 1 years for ELLs and adult learners.										
Stage 0	Typically, birth to 6 years old for L1 learners. And achieved in 0 to 6 months for ELLs and adult learners.										

"Literacy can be seen as dependent on instruction, with the corollary that quality of instruction is key. This view emphasizes the developmental nature of literacy – the passage of children through successive stages of literacy, in each of which the reading and writing tasks change qualitatively and the role of the instructor has to change accordingly."

– (Chall, 1996 as referenced in Snow, 2004)

Note: ELL & adult rates of learning are impacted by (a) levels of existing literacy (e.g. in first language), (b) the quality and intensity of current instruction/opportunities, and (c) motivation/perseverance.

# Logic or Dialectic Stage Learners

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- Guiding Question – How?? Or Why??
- This differs from the 4-year-old child's "Why?" which is more curiosity. This is more about deductive reasoning and figuring out why the world works the way it does
- Student wants to know WHY this or that happens, and especially why so and so can do whatever but they cannot.
- This student doesn't WANT to be a pill; they just want to know why the world works the way it does and they want to find their place in it.
- Logic Stage doesn't happen overnight! It takes a couple of years.
- Additionally, you will see physical and hormonal changes! Puberty!!
  - Hair
  - Increased appetite
  - Need for more sleep
  - It's kind of like "toddlerhood" all over again



# Rhetoric or Scholar Stage

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- Guiding Question – Now what do I do about it?
- This is the application stage
- Communication is the key here
- Very much like a “capstone”
- When you see puberty coming to a close, the hormones leveling off, and your child becoming “human” again, that’s a sign that he or she is ready for rhetoric stage
- When your child is able to take hold of a task and complete it correctly, that is a sure sign of readiness for rhetoric stage
- When the student wants to delve deeply into a topic or “hot button issues” AND fix them, that’s rhetoric stage!
- Rhetoric stage is all about being prepared for adulthood and a person’s life’s work

WE CAN TARGET  
OUR INSTRUCTION  
DIRECTLY TO THE  
STUDENT EXACTLY  
WHERE THEY ARE!

Homeschoolers  
don't need to be  
locked into grade  
levels!

# When might grade levels be useful?

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- Remember – Grade Levels are more like actuary tables
- About the only good use of a grade level is for things where you do want your kids grouped with peers their own ages, like sports, scouts, or other groups.
  - Useful for legal “hoops” as well! How else will we know what years we need to do testing ;-)
- OK for general informational purposes, as a way to know what “normal” is. Averages do have SOME use, though, simply because they ARE average.
- Range of Normal VARIES
  - If you have more than one child, you already know this!
- In any classroom, skill levels range by 3-5 years! That’s a BIG swing
  - Teachers in schools know this and they vary their instruction in the hopes that more kids will “get” whatever skill they are teaching on this go-round, but they know that there are more opportunities for the child to “get” it in the future

# Grade Level Objectives



Can help you decide WHAT to teach and when it is most appropriate to do so, thereby being both more effective and more efficient!



It is NORMAL for kids to be ahead in some things and delayed in others



Everyone has strengths and weaknesses ... nobody is perfect or amazing at everything!

# What do you mean by, “Behind”?

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## ➤ Behind who?

- Behind what other homeschoolers are doing?
- Behind what the neighbor’s kid is doing?
- Behind what the public schools are doing?
- Behind, as shown on a standardized test?
- Behind where you wanted to be at this point in the school term?
- Behind in a course?

Averages mean average. That means that most kids won’t be “behind.”

If you mean “behind” as in a rank, like a race, realize what you mean when you say that. You may need to rethink your definition of education because it is NOT about stuffing the brain full of facts and calling yourself DONE.

Be sure that you are comparing apples to apples, and not apples to oranges ... or porcupines!



Treat your child  
as an individual  
...not as some  
fictionalized  
average kid!

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YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD BEST AND YOU KNOW  
WHAT IS RIGHT AND WHEN IT IS RIGHT FOR  
HIM OR HER TO LEARN VARIOUS THINGS.

# “Behind” in a School Subject

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Content subjects don't really have anything to be “behind” in – it only means you haven't taught something yet

A child's readiness to hear or learn anything matters and it is an individual thing. Some kids just need more time before they have the capacity to process certain topics.

Skills subjects do have a progression that matters to the mastery of the subject.

You really can only go as fast as the child is able to learn and consistently apply the concepts. You can go as fast as you can, but it will take as long as it takes!



# What about when standardized testing “proves” that my child is “behind”?

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Keys to remember:

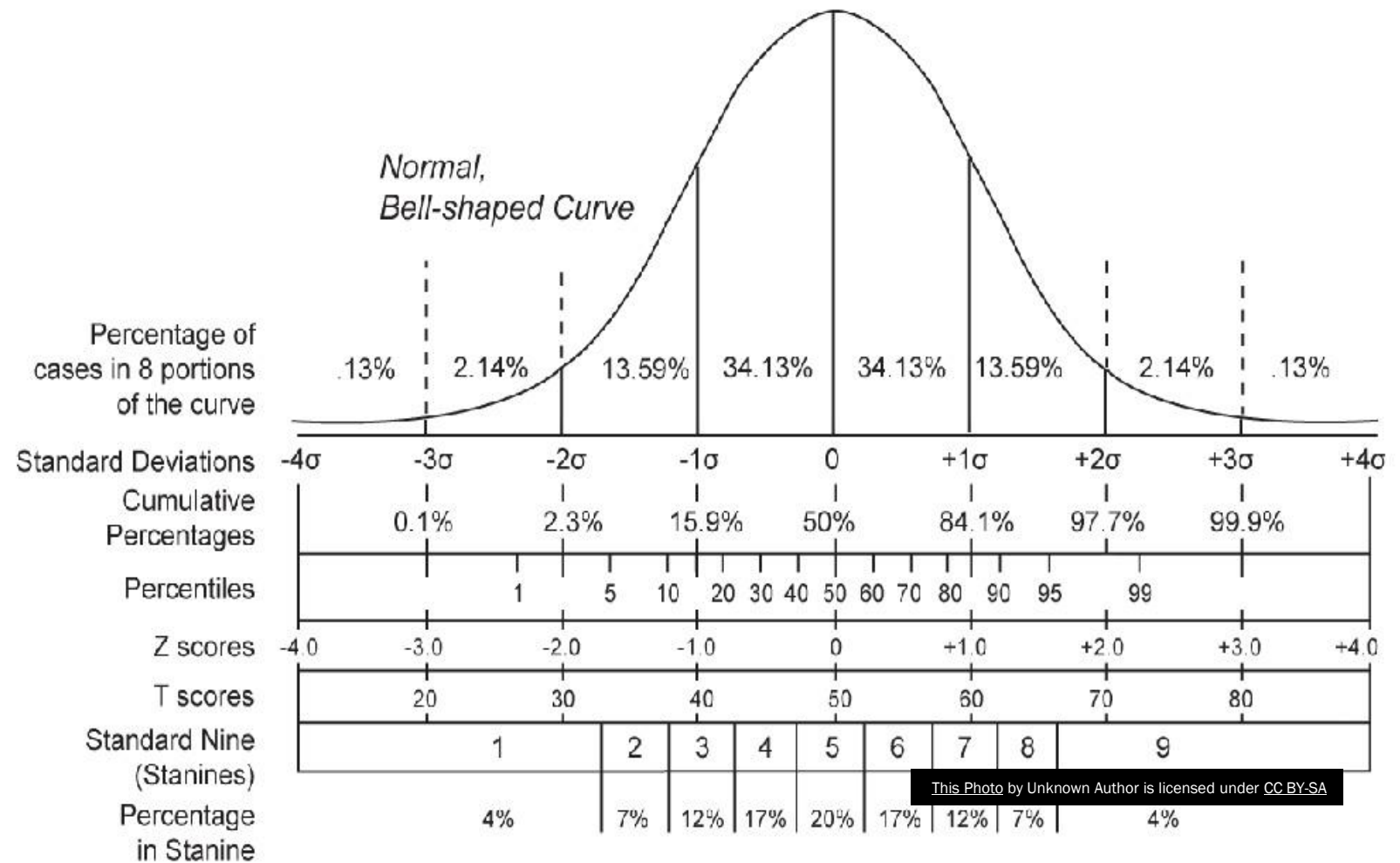
- Here in Pennsylvania, we only HAVE to test in grades 3, 5 and 8—and WE decide the grade level for our child. Legally, we only have to provide the age, so this gives us some wiggle room.
- There is no minimum score required in order to continue homeschooling
- Nobody but you and the evaluator will ever see those results
- What about the “overall sustained progress” wording of our law?
  - Is the child making progress from the last time testing was done?
  - Is there evidence in the portfolio as to progress?
  - Not all kids are good test takers!
  - Sometimes kids have a bad day!

# Interpretation of Standardized Tests

Standardized tests are based on averages.

Most people fall somewhere in the middle on a bell curve. A few will be at one end and few others at the other end. This is the law of averages at work.

Standardized tests work great to show progress for kids who are good test takers and who sit in the middle part of the bell curve.



We moms tend to view  
our worth with how  
well our kids do on  
these tests!

WE SHOULDN'T, BUT WE DO.



# ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

*Academic Excellence Educational Resources*

PO Box 68734, Schaumburg, IL 60168

*Phone: (866) 960-9331 ~ Web site: [www.AcademicExcellence.com](http://www.AcademicExcellence.com)*

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**Student Name: Elizabeth Christian**

**Date Test Taken: March 3, 2014**

**Test: CAT Test Level 5**

**Grade Entering: Grade Level 10**

Subject	Raw Score	Grade Equivalent	Percentile Rank	Stanine
Reading Vocabulary	33	11.2	85	9
Reading Comprehension	42	10.2	70	8
Mathematics Computation	23	12.2	87	9
Mathematics Concepts & Problems	54	12.2	92	9
Language Mechanics	40	10.6	82.1	8
Language Usage & Structure	27	10.4	80	7
Language Spelling	37	10.8	88	8

The above is an example of a very high achieving test results.

# How to interpret those test results

Say your child is in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and you took the test in February. That would be the 6<sup>th</sup> or the 7<sup>th</sup> month of that school term, depending on when you started your year. Because of this, you are looking for 5.6 or 5.7 as the score for each subtest. What you probably don't realize is that this 5.6 or 5.7 score is just comparing your child against all the other kids who took this specific test and got these questions correct. If your child scored a 9.3, or anything else over their actual grade level, that just means that he or she did as well as an average 9<sup>th</sup> grader in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of school on that specific subtest with those questions. It does not mean that your child is doing 9<sup>th</sup> grade work. Conversely, if your child got a 3.2 on that subtest, it means that he did as well as an average third grader in the second month of school would have done on this specific set of questions. It does mean that he is two years behind his peers. The questions themselves are based on an average list of topics created from a composite of "usual and customary" topics that are often taught during a specific grade in an average school district in America. None of these scenarios take into account whether your child was hungry, bored, sleepy, cranky, worried, or if you had even taught the things on this test!

# What can I learn from standardized test results?

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Look at what is on the test:

- Did you ever teach those things? If not, is it because your child simply isn't ready yet?
  - Whose scope and sequence are you going by in your teaching? It may be that what you have chosen doesn't align with that progression.
- Did you teach them recently enough that your child remembers that you taught them?
  - Let's face it, kids forget things.
- Did you use the same words as the test does to teach that thing?
  - The terms "subject" and "predicate" come to mind here. Many homeschoolers don't use those words, but the tests do.

A big part of the beauty of homeschooling is that we can customize the environment, the content, and even the delivery for each of our children!



# Physiology Matters!

Child development experts know that you can't force a child into a level of development for which they are not ready!

## Embrace difficulties

The more effort required to retrieve, the more learning takes place.



STEP  
01



## Avoid illusions of knowing

Familiarity is not mastery. We are drawn to immediate, short term gains, not slower, effortful, long term retention.

STEP  
02

## To learn, retrieve

Periodic practice and testing strengthens retrieval routes. Test yourself rather than constantly re-reading notes.



STEP  
03



## Space it out, mix it up

When testing yourself, variety, and a little time to forget, raises the challenge of retrieval and results in greater retention.

STEP  
04

## Move beyond learning styles

We have multiple intelligences and by drawing on a wide variety, you improve retention.

STEP  
05



## Increase your abilities

Embrace a growth mindset, practice like an expert and construct memory cues.



STEP  
06



## Elaborate

Find different layers of meaning in new material by explaining ideas in your own words and by making connections.

STEP  
07

## Generate

Attempt to answer a question or solve a problem before being shown the solution. Wade into the unknown and puzzle through it.



STEP  
08



## Reflect

Combine elaboration and retrieval by recalling learning, connecting learning and reflecting on the success of the learning.

STEP  
09

## Calibrate

Use objective measures, such as tests or expert feedback, to clear away illusions and adjust the accuracy of your judgements of your learning.

STEP  
10



# What if we really are “behind”?

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We can throw out that average grade level label in favor of teaching in a linear fashion, while striving for solid mastery and circling back as often as needed for that child to succeed.

- This is a good practice even when being differently-abled is not an issue.
- Use a framework instead of a scope and sequence to know what should be taught.

Go at your own pace.

- Homeschooling is much more about the journey than just the destination.

Your relationship with your child matters.

- People before things!

# What if my child has a learning disability? What then?

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1. Learn as much as you can about your child and the diagnosis. Do this even if you only just suspect a learning disability. Try [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org) first.
2. Teach your child with kindness! The relationship is far more important than skills or topics.
3. Work to remediate the weaknesses. Don't think that if you only work on the strengths that these weaknesses will go away on their own. You don't "outgrow" a learning disability.
4. Find support! Along with this, be mindful of who you gripe to about your struggles because there will be struggles. Remediation is HARD WORK!
5. Even if your child was not "identified" and does not have an official IEP, do consider learning how to write reasonable, measurable goals because they are helpful.



## Hasbrouck & Tindal Oral Reading Fluency Data

This table shows the oral reading fluency rates of students in grades 1 through 8, based on an extensive study conducted by Jan Hasbrouck and Gerald Tindal. The results of their study are published in a technical report entitled, "Oral Reading Fluency: 90 Years of Measurement," which is available on these websites:

- **ERIC website:** [eric.ed.gov/?id=ED531458](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED531458)
- **BRT website:** [www.brtprojects.org/publications/technical-reports](http://www.brtprojects.org/publications/technical-reports)

This table can help you assess the oral reading fluency of your students relative to their peers. Students scoring 10 or more words below the 50th percentile using the average score of two unpracticed readings from grade-level materials need a fluency-building program. Teachers can also use the table to set long-term fluency goals for struggling readers.

### For more information:

- **Essential Components of Reading:** [readnaturally.com/components](http://readnaturally.com/components)
- **Correlation Between Oral Reading Fluency and Overall Reading Achievement:** [readnaturally.com/correlation](http://readnaturally.com/correlation)
- **Read Naturally Tools for Assessing Fluency:** [readnaturally.com/assessment-tools](http://readnaturally.com/assessment-tools)
- **Read Naturally Intervention Programs That Develop Fluency:** [readnaturally.com/fluency-interventions](http://readnaturally.com/fluency-interventions)

Grade	Percentile	Fall WCPM*	Winter WCPM*	Spring WCPM*	Avg. Weekly Improvement**
1	90		81	111	1.9
	75		47	82	2.2
	50		23	53	1.9
	25		12	28	1.0
	10		6	15	0.6
2	90	106	125	142	1.1
	75	79	100	117	1.2
	50	51	72	89	1.2
	25	25	42	61	1.1
	10	11	18	31	0.6

Grade	Percentile	Fall WCPM*	Winter WCPM*	Spring WCPM*	Avg. Weekly Improvement**
3	90	128	146	162	1.1
	75	99	120	137	1.2
	50	71	92	107	1.1
	25	44	62	78	1.1
	10	21	36	48	0.8
4	90	145	166	180	1.1
	75	119	139	152	1.0
	50	94	112	123	0.9
	25	68	87	98	0.9
	10	45	61	72	0.8
5	90	166	182	194	0.9
	75	139	156	168	0.9
	50	110	127	139	0.9
	25	85	99	109	0.8
	10	61	74	83	0.7
6	90	177	195	204	0.8
	75	153	167	177	0.8
	50	127	140	150	0.7
	25	98	111	122	0.8
	10	68	82	93	0.8
7	90	180	192	202	0.7
	75	156	165	177	0.7
	50	128	136	150	0.7
	25	102	109	123	0.7
	10	79	88	98	0.6
8	90	185	199	199	0.4
	75	161	173	177	0.5
	50	133	146	151	0.6
	25	106	115	124	0.6
	10	77	84	97	0.6

\*WCPM = Words Correct Per Minute

[www.readnaturally.com](http://www.readnaturally.com)

\*\*Average words per week growth



Even if it's "just" a grade level label—your child is so much MORE than the sum total of his or her parts.



Give each child opportunities to shine!



The stages of learning relate more efficiently to physiology than to arbitrary averages.



You know your child best and you are the best teacher for him or her.



Your child was put into your family at a particular time, for a particular reason, and for a particular purpose.



There are no mistakes!

# Your Child is FAR More than a Label!

For more info, please PM me on FB 😊