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WRITE WITH THE BEST – Vol. 2

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I dedicate this curriculum to my four children, who, by their presence,
have always challenged me to do my best!

Special thanks to my oldest son, Evan, for his enthusiastic assistance
with the literary passages.

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INTRODUCTION

Except for two words, the first two paragraphs that follow are restated verbatim from Volume 1.

It doesn't take long, when looking in educational arenas – homeschool, public, and private – to discover that writing has been one of the most neglected subjects of our modern educational era. In the state in which I live, mandatory educational reforms have been made to improve the writing skills of students in elementary, middle, and high-school grades. This was finally accomplished because state colleges complained about incoming freshman who were unable to write even a paragraph adequately. The large majority of these students were required to take remedial composition classes before they could enter regular freshman English classes. In twelve to thirteen years of public or private education, they were never taught to write. Unfortunately, I have also seen this trend among homeschooled children. In the writing classes that I teach, I have found that many students have been taught to write sentences and brief paragraphs, but have never moved beyond that point into proficiency in various writing genres. For example, they have no idea how to correctly write a letter, compose poetry or write an essay and have no idea what it means to write descriptively. We all know that competent writing is essential in our age of communication and is a huge component of an excellent and complete education.

This curriculum was devised as a result of twenty-one years of teaching writing to students in grades K-5 through 12, including public, private, and homeschooled children. Many of the ideas presented in this book were used in a homeschool writing class that I have taught for the last five years. I used classical literature and other great works as models of excellent writing, while teaching students literary appreciation and analysis at the same time. Students were required to bring in weekly samples of “excellent” writing and to be able to explain what made the

writing “excellent”. They took weekly dictation from the passages and modeled their assignments after these writings. Amazing improvements were made, and many of my students who had been diagnosed as having learning disabilities in written expression began to enjoy writing for the first time in their lives. I also interviewed homeschooling parents who were dissatisfied with the writing curriculums they had used thus far, and I found that they desired a curriculum that taught writing systematically, yet in a simple and clear way. They requested that a guide be included in the curriculum that would provide instructions on exactly how to write specific genres. Many parents also indicated that their students became bored with various curriculums because they did not offer interesting activities, etc. All of these issues have been addressed in this program. In addition to the instructions contained within the curriculum, a helpful “HOW TO WRITE GUIDE” is included to assist parents in the teaching of each genre. A chapter entitled “Additional Literary Passages For Modeling Writing” is also included. Both of these make it possible for parents to continue teaching writing by using my approach, even after the initial literary passages are used. The greatest way for students to learn to write is through continued practice, so I have included resources to insure the continuation of writing skills. Proofreading and listening comprehension skills, which are essential to successful writing, are also taught, and all learning styles are accommodated.

The curriculum contains excerpts from great works of world literature and writings by great authors of world literature. Although all genres for excellent writing are listed in the complete set, each volume stands alone as complete regarding the genres that it contains. Volume 1 naturally begins with the prerequisites of successful writing and progresses until the end of volume 2. Volume 1 is for grades 3-12 and Volume 2 is for grades 6-12. You are not required to purchase separate books for each grade level. Devised in this way, the curriculum is also very cost effective.

There are two main reasons why *WRITE WITH THE BEST* contains several different genres of writing.

First, it is a known fact that students learn to become good writers by writing, writing, and writing. The more genres they are exposed to, the more writing experience they will gain.

Secondly, to be proficient writers, students must learn to write a variety of genres and not just know how to write a paragraph or book report. The more kinds of writing they are proficient in, the more equipped they will be to “write with the best”!

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Focus and Goal

The focus and goal of this writing program are effective and simple. Its purpose is to zero in on the skills that produce excellent writing and to teach students to use these same skills. To accomplish this, the program doesn't abstractly emphasize various grammatical rules for composition, but rather focuses on the *actual skills* of successful, excellent writers and teaches the observation and emulation of these same skills. Grammar is taught in the context of writing, not as a separate subject. The effective method of this curriculum follows in the *literary* steps of writers of great works of world literature, modeling writing after their methods and techniques for successful composition. *In summary, the focus of this program is to teach students to write **descriptively, persuasively, and informatively** through emulating the actual skills of masters of great writing. The goal of this program is to produce successful writers who know how to write effectively, who know how to proofread their work efficiently, and who know how to properly analyze great writing.*

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

1. *WRITE WITH THE BEST, Vol. 2* was designed to be used for a total of 20 weeks, making it possible to complete the curriculum twice each year. Many parents, however, will want to extend each unit to insure mastery of the material and use the program for a full year. Students who have never written an essay or a speech before may need more than the allotted time to perfect each skill. It is *very important* that students master each prerequisite skill before moving on, even if this takes a great deal of time. The objective is mastery of each writing genre. I personally recommend going through the curriculum slowly once a year.
2. I highly encourage teachers to have their students write about topics that they are studying in other areas, such as history or science. It is a proven fact that children retain information much better if it is incorporated into as many subjects as possible. An example of this would be to write a business letter to George Washington while you are studying the American Revolution or to write an expository essay about the cottage industry while you are studying the Industrial Revolution.
3. Evaluate the writing of your students according to their ages and ability levels. For example, if you have two students (one in 6th grade and one in 12th), you certainly cannot expect the same quality of writing from both students. A simple dramatic monologue with 5-6 sentences will suffice for a sixth grader, but an older student would be expected to write a longer and more detailed dramatic monologue. However, keep in mind that this does not include students with learning difficulties. Also, regardless of age or grade level, if a student has not learned the elementary skills of writing, evaluate him as a beginner.

4. Each family must have a dictionary and a thesaurus. I suggest *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, current edition. An English handbook may also be beneficial for parents. Many parents will want to provide additional practice in capitalization, punctuation, English usage and using specific parts of speech. Many excellent English workbooks cover these skills. For students in grades 6-8, I recommend *Daily Grams* and *Easy Grammar*. For students in grades 8 and up, I recommend reading Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* once each year before beginning this writing program. I also recommend that each student (grades 8 and up) complete a research paper on a chosen or given topic each year, preferably in the last 2 months of the school year. I have not included this skill in this volume because there are several excellent guides available that teach how to write an effective research paper. Students need to learn these research skills as early as possible to become proficient in this skill before possible college admission.
5. To thoroughly utilize the "Proofreading Checklist", some students will need instruction in some of the skills addressed in the checklist such as run-on sentences and subject-verb agreement. Any English handbook will cover these, as will most English workbooks. For additional practice with proofreading skills, I recommend *Editor-In-Chief* or *Great Editing Adventures*. However, the best practice for proofreading skills is for students to constantly proofread their own papers, which is an effective feature of *WRITE WITH THE BEST*.
6. Some students may have difficulty reading the literary passages by themselves. If this is the case, parents should read these to the students while the students follow along. For students who have motor difficulties or problems writing down their thoughts on paper, it is totally acceptable for teachers to write what their students dictate to them. This can be done with each objective that requires writing on

the part of the student.

7. The teacher should read the objectives of all the days of each unit before the student begins so that the progression of the curriculum can be realized. There is a calculated progression in the program. Also, some days are extended into the following days.
8. Teachers must make sure that all of the objectives of each day are achieved so that the goal of this curriculum, mastery of good writing skills, can be realized.
9. Emphasis in the form of **bold** text, *italicized* text, underscored text, and “quotation marks” is used throughout the book. Each different kind of emphasis is utilized for clarification of each objective so that the student will not miss each important element within each objective. Sometimes emphasis is not repeated when the objectives restate issues.
10. Students should look up the definitions of all unfamiliar words in the literary passages while reading or listening to the passages. This will help improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills. Writings of great authors are excellent for teaching vocabulary. If your student finds any of the passages difficult to understand, realize these passages were chosen to teach vocabulary and writing skills.
11. Parents are permitted to copy only the pages containing the cited literary passages and the actual proofreading checklists for their students’ use. You will need to make copies of the pages containing the cited literary passages and the proofreading checklists if you are using the book for more than one student or if you desire to maintain the book unmarked. Therefore, under such circumstances, making copies of these passages and the proofreading checklists is not just permitted, but also recommended.
12. A select answer key has been provided in the back of this book to verify the student’s work. Regarding parts of speech, only descriptive adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and specific nouns are listed. Not all

nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are included. The verbs, adjectives, and adverbs listed are color specified in order to facilitate use of the answer key.

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Special Note #1 (with additions to that of Vol. 1)

We have chosen the great authors and works of world literature found in this program because of their incomparable **themes, characters, techniques, persuasion, descriptions, and styles of writing**. Even though these authors were excellent writers, some times they did not follow a number of our modern rules for punctuation and sentence structure or utilize our modern models for writing. Therefore, we have corrected some of the punctuation and sentence structure in the literary passages, but have not changed any of the essential structure of the passages. Furthermore, when teaching your students, please point out to them that we are modeling these writers because of their content, style, superb descriptive skills, and persuasive techniques. When they depart from our modern rules of punctuation, structure, and our models for writing, we will follow the proper requirements as stated in the “HOW TO WRITE GUIDE” and your English handbook or workbook. **In summary, our aim is to combine the best of both worlds – superlative writing style and correct writing form.**

Special Note #2

We have not changed the spelling in the various literary passages cited. We have reproduced the spelling as rendered by each author.

Special Note #3

Using the analogy of a journey up a mountain, the skills learned in Volume 1 can be likened to the beginning of the trek. In that volume, we

mainly focused on *descriptive* writing skills as we learned to master its genres. In this volume, as previously indicated, we will mainly focus on *informative, persuasive, and procedural* writing skills as we learn to master these genres. In taking this approach, we will progress to the top of the mountain. Accordingly, the method of this volume will employ a greater refinement in its execution than Volume 1 did. For example, within the units of Volume 1, the student was instructed to use the “HOW TO WRITE GUIDE” on a limited basis. In this volume the student will utilize the “HOW TO WRITE GUIDE” on a regular basis as essential to the completeness of each unit. Moreover, because of the *nature and similar aspects* of the genres covered, in this volume I have employed a greater degree of repetition, essential for learning to master these particular genres. I have, nonetheless, endeavored to keep the method of this volume within the same simple and effective scope as that of the previous volume. Be sure to remind your students to utilize the skills learned in Volume 1 of this curriculum in the daily objectives of this volume when it’s appropriate. Although I will touch on those skills throughout this volume, it is largely left to each student to use the descriptive writing skills that they were taught in Volume 1 as they learn to master the genres of Volume 2. Our goal is to reach the summit of writing, invigorated and able, not tired and ineffective.

UNIT 1
WRITING POETRY
- FREE VERSE -

Day 1 7 Objectives (each objective is indicated by an asterisk)

*Read the poem “The Railway Train” by Emily Dickinson. Another title for this poem is “I Like to See It Lap the Miles”.

THE RAILWAY TRAIN

I like to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks;
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,

Stop -- docile and omnipotent --
At its own stable door.

*Look up all unfamiliar words in the dictionary such as “prodigious” and “supercilious”. The use of “Boanerges” is called an allusion.

⇒ **Allusion:** a reference to a familiar person, thing, event, or place in a literary passage to *enhance* the theme or make a *comparison*.

*If you haven’t done so already, look up “Boanerges” and write down its meaning. Why do you think that Ms. Dickinson used it here? *Read the poem again now that you understand the meanings of the words. *Now close your eyes and have someone read it to you out loud. What images did you see *immediately*? *Name all of the things that the train is compared to. *Does this poem rhyme?

Day 2 3 Objectives

*Consider the definitions of *specific nouns*, *descriptive verbs*, and *descriptive adjectives*. (If you need to, review these definitions from Vol. 1 of *WRITE WITH THE BEST*.) *Read the poem from yesterday again. *Circle all *specific nouns*. Underline all *descriptive verbs* in green and all *descriptive adjectives* in red. (See the Answer Key to verify the student’s work.)

Day 3 3 Objectives

**Memorize* the following definitions and **discuss* them with your teacher.

Poetry: language that shows imagination, deep emotion and/or thinking in verse form

Free verse: poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme

Figure of Speech: a form of expression used to create a special feeling or convey meaning by making an interesting or creative comparison (For example: metaphor, simile, personification, or hyperbole)

Imagery: the actual words that a poet uses to bring forth images or pictures in the mind of the reader

Simile: the comparison of two unlike objects using the words “like” or “as” – Example: “My love is *like* a red, red rose.”

Personification: a figure of speech in which an animal, object, or idea takes on characteristics of a person – Example: “The rain *danced* on the street.”

Alliteration: the repetition of initial consonant sounds in two or more words of a line or phrase of poetry, used to appeal to the ear – Example: “**B**ooth led **b**oldly with his **b**ig **b**ass drum.”

Tone: the author’s outlook or attitude toward his subject and the devices that he uses to create the mood of his literary work

Rhythm: the repetition of beat or the measured flow of words in poetry

*Write two of *your own* examples of (a) simile (b) personification and (c) alliteration.

Day 4 3 Objectives

*Review *all* definitions from yesterday.

*Write down the answers to these questions about Ms. Dickinson’s poem:

1. What *animal characteristics* does the poet give to the train in the first stanza?
2. What *human characteristics* are given in the third stanza?
3. In the last stanza, what are the two *similes*?
4. In the third stanza, what is the example of *alliteration*?

5. Even though this poem does not rhyme, does it have *rhythm*?
6. What interesting detail does the author end the poem with?
7. What is the *tone* of this poem?
8. What animal does Ms. Dickinson emphasize through the imagery of her poem?

*Write in your own words what you think that Ms. Dickinson is saying in this poem.

Day 5 5 Objectives

*Find another poem in *free verse* by a well-known author in a book that you have at home or from the library. *List all of the *images* or *pictures* that this poem portrays. *List all *figures of speech* in the poem. *Look for *allusions* in this poem. If you find any, write these down. *Compare this poem to “The Railway Train”, looking for the same kinds of *features* dealt with in the questions from yesterday.

Day 6 4 Objectives

Today you will prepare to write your own poem in free verse.

*Read “HOW TO WRITE A POEM IN FREE VERSE” on pages 83-84.
*Choose the subject of your poem. Make sure that you choose something that you can adequately describe. *Decide on your *theme* or the *message* that you will convey through your poem. *Decide on the *tone* of your poem. For example, is it serious, lighthearted, or sad?

Day 7 3 Objectives

*Write down *descriptive* words and phrases that come to mind when you think of your *subject*, *theme*, and *tone*. Also, come up with some *figures

of speech and some *sound devices to use such as alliteration. Do not use too much alliteration. Remember Ms. Dickinson's singular and effective use of alliteration.

Day 8 2 Objectives

*Start writing your poem by jotting down your initial ideas, and keep writing until *every line* says exactly what you want it to say. *Make sure that you are creating *pictures* in your readers' minds through the use of *specific nouns* and *vivid* or descriptive **adjectives, verbs, and adverbs**.

Day 9 3 Objectives

*End your poem today with something *exciting* or an *interesting detail*.
*Read your poem out loud to make sure that you have included all necessary details discussed on Day 3. How does your poem's details compare to Ms. Dickinson's? *Proofread your poem thoroughly, using the proofreading checklists on pages 104 and 114.

Day 10 2 Objectives

*Rewrite or type your poem. You may also want to illustrate your poem with a drawing or painting. *Keep your completed poem in a folder to serve as your writing portfolio.