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Evaluating Elementary-Level English Textbooks

Choosing textbooks can be a time-consuming frustration. Asking the right questions will guide you to the right textbooks for your child.

When you stroll through the aisles of a home school convention or leaf through the pages of any of the dozens of home school catalogs and magazines that likely find their way into your mailbox, the options can be overwhelming. How do you choose the best textbook for you and your child?

Textbooks for the core subjects, such as English, are especially important. The home schooling parents I've met are keenly interested that their children develop the ability to listen, talk,

and write with clarity and power. If your end goal is to help your child develop into a Christlike communicator, here are some specific questions to ask as you examine elementary-level English textbooks.

Question 1: Is it relevant?

Many students ask, "What's the point? Why do I have to learn language?" To help them understand how critical good communication skills are, you need a tool that is specifically designed to help students appreciate language as a gift from God, a tool that will

- Lead students to understand that through words we understand God, we talk to God, and we communicate God's truth to others.
- Motivate students to apply God's Word in a variety of life situations.
- Encourage creative-thinking skills along with critical-thinking skills.

opposite of this is a text that gives just a detailed list of rules to memorize.)

- Integrate independent practice only after multisensory, active learning. Some materials simply ask the student to read and fill in blanks. It would take hours of painful drill to make such abstract memory work

actually produce interesting and coherent writing?

If you use a well-written textbook, you are putting good writing in front of your student every day. Find a textbook that regularly shows the student what good literature looks like and that is written by authors who know how to engage a student's interest. Such a tool should

You'll want to find materials that have lots of action activities to get your student up and involved in the lesson.

Question 2: Is knowledge applied? Is grammar taught as a means of learning how to become a good communicator?

If students can recite all of the parts of speech and all the punctuation rules but still fail to use strong active verbs and correctly punctuate their own sentences, the application is missing. Look for a tool specifically designed to develop a student's skill in using correct grammar in written and oral communication. Such a tool will

- Incorporate inductive teaching to help students go from what they already know about the words they use to understanding how those words function and what they are called. (The

stick. You'll want to find materials that have lots of action activities to get your student up and involved in the lesson. There may still be a workbook page or two, but that is for review after you have taught the lesson in a lively, engaging way.

- Base all lessons on communication and connect all learning to relevant life application. Do the sentences and pictures in the book connect with things your student is interested in? Do the activities include places for your student to write actual sentences?

Question 3: Does this material take my child step by step through a writing process so that he will

- Guide the teacher and student through the writing process and provide ideas for publishing student work.
- Teach various types of expository and creative writing, balancing each grammar chapter with a chapter on writing.
- Provide a writer's reference section with answers to recurring questions and samples of each type of work the students are to produce.

Question 4: Will this book encourage my student to write clearly and effectively?

Many students think that whatever they have written is wonderful. They often see no need to revise because they understand what they were trying to say—even if it comes across a bit incoherent. They are used to boundless praise for any work that is creative. Encouragement is great, but to develop

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Executive Editor:
Steven N. Skaggs, M.Ed.
Assistant Editor:
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Parents want their children to develop good study and reference skills, but so often these crucial abilities are never clearly taught in an interesting, relevant manner.

skill, students need to understand ways to improve their message and their mechanics. The grammar book will

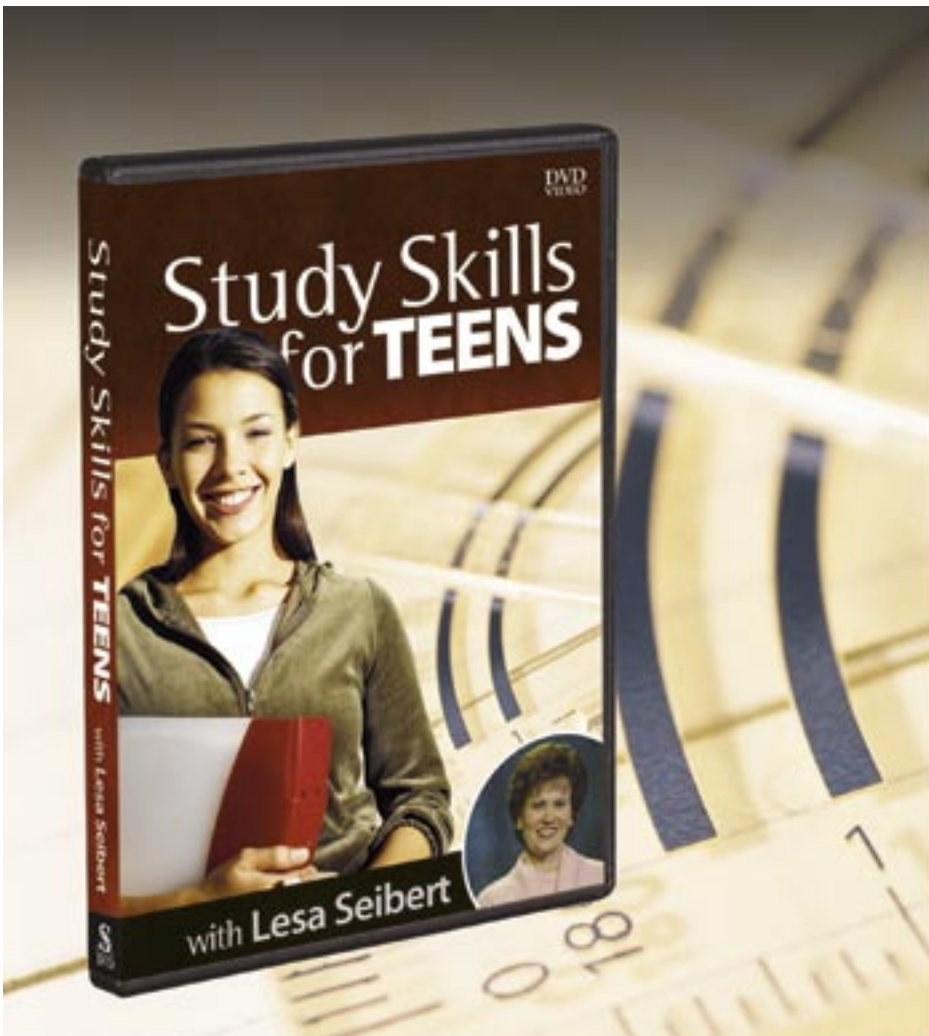
- Give students a checklist to use as they evaluate what they have written.
- Show examples of student work before and after revision.
- Make the grading process clear for students and parents by providing a rubric that lists clear criteria for evaluating each assignment.

Question 5: Will this book give my child the skills needed for lifelong learning?

Parents want their children to develop good study and reference skills, but so often these crucial abilities are never clearly taught in an interesting, relevant manner. The book you use should

- Teach reference skills.
- Guide students through the process of gathering and using research in an interesting, individualized report.
- Incorporate reference tools.

(continued on p. 7)



Need Help Studying?

Help students understand how to study effectively with *Study Skills for Teens*. They will learn better techniques for listening, note taking, reading textbooks, scheduling study time, and test taking that apply to either classroom or home study. Let *Study Skills for Teens* encourage your students that they, too, can succeed in school.

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So What Can AHE Do for Me?

What is Bob Jones University's Academy of Home Education (AHE)? What services does it provide for home schooling families? Recently *Home School Helper* interviewed Elaine Payne, who has been AHE's office manager since June of 2003, to get the answers to these and other questions.

Elaine, what is AHE's primary goal? AHE provides home school families with the academic validation they need while allowing parents the freedom to educate their children at home.

How are AHE's services beneficial to home school families? Home schooling provides parents with the opportunity to instruct their children academically and spiritually, equipping them to positively impact our world.

But home schooling carries with it a responsibility to accurately record grades, track academic progress, and ultimately be prepared to provide a diploma and high school transcript. AHE is able to assist home school families with these things.

Specifically, then, what services does AHE offer? We offer a structured curricular program as well as academic advising and counseling. We also keep records of each student's coursework. All grades issued for work completed while enrolled in our program will be assigned by the

parent/educator. These grades become part of the student's permanent file. And we issue a report card once the grades are recorded.

In addition, each student is required to have yearly achievement testing. The results of this testing also become part of the student's permanent record. And when a student successfully completes his high school academics, AHE awards a high school diploma from a recognized institution.

We will also provide a high school transcript to assist with the college application process.

Has AHE expanded its offerings in any way recently?

Yes. In 2004 The Academy of Home Education expanded its recordkeeping services to include the elementary and junior high grades. We are thrilled with the opportunity to assist home schooling families from the beginning of their child's formal education all the way to his receiving his diploma and sending off his transcripts!

How long has The Academy of Home Education been in existence? AHE started in June 1992. We



began as a third-party record-keeping service for home educated high school students. Our first graduating class in 1996 had 23 graduates. Since that first graduation we've had a total of 684 graduates!

Does AHE sponsor any special events for its members? Yes, we have several throughout the school year for our students and families. In the fall we have the junior class trip—our eleventh graders are guests on the BJU campus. It's a wonderful opportunity for the students to get to meet their "classmates," and many activities are planned especially for them. They get to experience college life firsthand by staying in the residence halls and visiting University classes.

In the spring we host AHE Open House Days, where AHE students participate in various fun times while parents enjoy home schooling workshops, question-and-answer panels, and tours of the BJ LINC and BJ HomeSat facilities. In addition, AHE high school students may visit Bob Jones University classes.

But perhaps best of all is the formal graduation ceremony that our seniors are able to participate in. Before the actual event, held on the campus of BJU, AHE seniors and their families are invited to celebrate their academic success during two days of special activities with their fellow graduating seniors.

Lastly, on the personal side, have you been a home schooling parent yourself? Yes, I was a home schooling mom for twelve years to my five children. Two of my daughters were actually AHE students while we served as missionaries in Brazil. AHE helped us tremendously to stay on track and to keep accountable. I am thankful for the support AHE was to our family while we were home schooling in a foreign country. 🙏

If you have any questions about The Academy of Home Education or any other BJ Home Education Services, please call our Customer Services at 1.800.845.5731. Home Education Services catalogs are available free.

BJ Home Education Services: An Outreach to Home Schoolers

In addition to The Academy of Home Education, BJ Home Education Services also offers the following support ministries for home schooling families.

BJ Testing and Evaluation: Besides the nationally recognized achievement and learning abilities tests, our testing service also supplies numerous other types of assessments, preparation helps, and supplemental materials of particular assistance to families who are educating their children at home.

BJ HomeSat: Beginning a home schooling program can be intimidating without sufficient

knowledge and the right tools. Our satellite education service provides an easy, cost-effective way to access the knowledge and tools to help your child excel in the world of learning.

Home School Consultants: Our team of experienced home school consultants can give you advice on teaching. They can also provide tips on getting started, organizing, scheduling, grading, teaching more than one child, and teaching children with special needs. This team works closely with The Academy of Home Education to help parents understand achievement test results and to advise parents on how to strengthen their students in subjects with which they are struggling. 🙏

A New Front in the War on Creationism

“Just because we have the same enemy does not mean we are on the same side,” says the character William Tyndale in the drama *To Serve a Higher King*.

Biblical creationists may need to say the same thing to an eclectic group of scientists and philosophers who have over the last two decades found that natural laws and chance alone cannot explain everything in nature.

Biblical creationism has long been the target of attack by evolutionary scientists. But a new movement called intelligent design (ID) has recently drawn fire for questioning the almost inviolable sanctity of Darwinism. It would seem then, at first glance, that biblical creationism has a new ally.

True, both creationists and ID followers agree that some biological processes are so functionally complex that astronomical odds would prevent their development. They also both see the “irreducible complexity” of certain living systems—that is, structures ranging from the complex human eye to the flagellum that propel certain single-celled organisms have so many interdependent parts that they could not have developed in gradual steps by evolutionary processes.

And both creationists and ID proponents agree that nature abounds with evidence of design—and not the result of chance mutations as evolutionists maintain.

Instead, ID calls for some intelligent force or being with a plan. Unfortunately, the ID movement is so broad in its ranks that its supporters range from biblical creationists to agnostics. The designer could be the God of the Bible—or it could be Gaia, Mother Nature, or some unspecified life force.

The research and scholarship of the ID camp can certainly provide critical ammunition for our fight against the threats of evolution.

The ID movement has certainly caught the attention of the science establishment and has drawn fire from many of the same scientists opposed to a literal interpretation of Genesis. Simultaneously, it has fueled a more serious reappraisal of Darwinism among nonbelievers. The movement has caused many states to reevaluate their state science standards and has even influenced textbook adoption.

Because most ID adherents refuse to defend any sacred text or even to claim the identity of the designer, they have been granted more license than creationists have to question the status quo of modern science education. And their impact is significant. The November 2003 issue of the National Science Teacher Association’s periodical, *The Science Teacher*, dealt almost entirely with helping teachers understand the nature of the intelligent design movement as well as scientific creationism and the “threats” they pose to “real” science.

The research and scholarship of the ID camp can certainly provide critical ammunition for our fight against the threats of evolution. A few of their writers are not only sympathetic with—but even promote—a literal interpretation of Genesis. However, many others share few of our convictions. While

we benefit from many of their efforts and face some of the same foes, should we form alliances and fight from the same trenches? Some suggest that we should.

Just as the apostle Paul used the words of Greek poets (Acts 17:28) to direct his hearers toward the true Source of life, we have the opportunity to confront our culture using the scholarship of some who might not be in total agreement with us. However, this must be done with caution. Romans 1:20 makes it clear that the “eternal power” of the real Designer is clearly seen in His creation. We must be careful not to become “intelligent fools” by failing to give God the glory for His works (vv. 21–22). 🙏

Brad Batdorf is a science author for BJU Press. He has also served as a high school science teacher and as director of education at several zoos.

(continued from p. 3)

Question 6: Will this book explain how to listen and how to give a speech?

Children often love to talk—even when they should be listening. But even the most talkative children tend to mumble or rush when they are giving a speech to an audience. Find a tool that will

- Give instruction in speaking and listening.
- Provide opportunities to practice and evaluate speaking and listening.

Question 7: Does this book make learning English fun?

All of us learn best when we

enjoy the learning. Find a tool that encourages student enjoyment through well-written text, professional design, interesting chapter themes, and relevant connections with other subjects. Such a tool would

- Include writing and graphics that inspire creative thinking.
- Use a variety of themes throughout the year to keep interest, show life application, and link English with other subjects.
- Include easy-to-use resources so that teachers can focus on creativity.

Whenever you evaluate an English curriculum, check to make sure all of these questions are answered affirmatively.

Yes, BJU Press elementary English will help students succeed on standardized tests. But far more importantly, it will help them become creative, effective communicators. 🙏

Esther Wilkison, author of the youth novel *Camp Sierra Secret*, is an educational consultant and a Territory Manager in California for Precept Marketing.



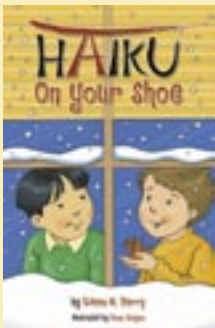
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What's New!

JOURNEYFORTH



***Haiku on Your Shoe* by Eileen Berry**—Jeremy isn't sure how to make friends with the new boy from Japan. Then a class assignment makes him see that they're not worlds apart after all.

(218461, \$7.49)



***Regina Silsby's Phantom Militia* by Thomas J. Brodeur**—

The redcoat-infested streets of Boston are rocked by the return of Regina Silsby's "ghost." But little does anyone know that the defense of freedom has now become a family affair!

(227454, \$7.49)

ELEMENTARY LEVEL



Phonics and English 1—Serious learning that's a whole lot of fun!

A colorful student book that gives handwriting instruction, practice with phonics skills and word families, and reinforcement of other skills taught in the Teacher's Edition.

(211789, \$19.00)

Teacher's Edition (available fall 2005)—Provides easy instructions to teach phonics for understanding and to guide the teacher in developing a reader who can get meaning from print and a writer who can communicate effectively. Exciting theme lessons combine phonics, reading, listening comprehension, composition, and grammar. The worktext and the phonics practice pages include overprint answers.

(211797, \$99.00)