

**An Introduction to the Veritas Academy History and Literature
Reading Lists for Kindergarten Through 6th Grade
2011-2012**

Overview

The Veritas Academy history program is roughly based on the Sonlight Curriculum¹ history program, though with many modifications. The history sequence for 1st to 6th grade is:

- 1st Grade Seven Continents and Seven Seas (world geography)
- 2nd Grade Kings and Queens (seven kings and queens chosen from Western Civilization)
- 3rd Grade US History: Beginning to 1850
- 4th Grade US History: 1850 to the Present
- 5th Grade Western Civilization: Ancient Times Through the Reformation
- 6th Grade Western Civilization: Enlightenment to the Present

By the end of his elementary history education, a student should have a firm grasp of US History and Western Civilization with a working knowledge of world history and geography.

The Purposes Behind the Lists

Unlike the typical history curriculum based on textbooks and worksheets, each Veritas history course consists of in-class lectures, discussions and other activities accompanied by at-home reading of an extensive list of books, chosen for their historical and literary qualities. Beginning at kindergarten, parents are given a list of Read-Aloud books. These are to be read by parents to their children; the books are usually at a higher reading level than what the students are comfortable with and/or contain words and themes that may require explanation from the parent. Beginning at 1st grade, a list of readers will also be given; these are books that are “low-stress” and pleasurable for students to read on their own. When the student reaches 3rd grade, the reading list is further enriched with History books, including textbooks and biographies and historical fiction that provide facts and events of the historical period under study.

A majority of the books on the reading lists from 3rd through 6th grades, whether History, Read-Alouds or Readers, correlates to the historical period for that level. Even at the 1st and 2nd grades, over half of the Read-Alouds are tied to the history program. Veritas agrees with Sonlight Curriculum’s viewpoint that the reading of these books helps to make history come alive. Unlike most textbooks, which focus mainly on giving dates, facts and events, often in a dry and uninteresting manner, stories provide a context in which the dates, facts and events assume shape and relevance. The student, by being immersed in a good story, can remember historical facts more easily and, as a result, derive greater enjoyment from history.

¹ Sonlight Curriculum is a curriculum provider mostly for homeschoolers. They have an emphasis on using literature to teach history. Their website is www.sonlight.com.

Further integration of our curriculum is achieved by utilizing certain historical fiction books for literature study. These books not only give historical knowledge but are of high quality since many of them are classics, Newbery, or Newbery Honor books. This usually begins at the 3rd grade, since it is difficult to find historical fiction written at the 1st or 2nd grade level that can also serve as literature units. Other titles for our literature units are chosen because they are great literature and representative of various genres.

Aside from making history interesting and relevant, the books on the reading list are designed to help our students become strong and competent readers. The different sublists are geared to cultivate three types of skills. First of all the Read-Aloud books are to develop the student's ability to listen well. As a child listens to a story read to him, he learns to sit quietly, to focus on hearing the words and comprehending their meaning, and to visualize the story in his mind's eye. As he becomes adept at listening to books read, he will be better skilled at listening in general. The Reader List is meant to develop the student's ability to read independently. These readers are for the student's enjoyment. Beginning at the third grade, students get to choose books from a longer list that corresponds to their taste and ability. The Literature Units are meant to develop the student's ability to analyze and evaluate literature with the guidance of the teacher. In these units, students learn how to examine story elements, analyze its characters and evaluate its themes.

Thus far, our reading lists serve the dual purpose of teaching history and developing reading skills. But that is not all; the reading of good books brings with it a myriad of other benefits. It fosters vocabulary development, inculcates patterns of good writing, extends sequential thinking and reasoning, and develops reading comprehension. Last but not least, it also brings parents and their children together. Having parents read aloud to their children involves the family in the child's education. Parents aid in the reading development of their children and, in the process, get to read some great books themselves. The books are also often a springboard for meaningful discussion.

Multiple Read-Aloud Lists

Parents with multiple children sometimes find themselves with multiple read aloud assignments and not enough time to do them all. In such a case we expect parents to use common sense. It might be prudent, for example, to read from only one child's list, perhaps the oldest's, or to pick and choose from all the lists that their children have. You can always catch up with the unread books during the summer. Children with adequate reading skills may, of course, read their 'read-aloud' assignments on their own. Talk with your child's teacher for further advice.

Summer Reading

Summer is a good time either to catch up on reading that was not done during the previous school year or to get a head start on the upcoming school year. If parents decide to get a head start, it is advisable to begin reading with the books on the Read-Aloud list since there won't be any assignments related to these books other than simply reading them. As for the other lists, students may also get a head start but keep in mind that they may have to refresh their memory of these books when their teachers assign work based on these readings. It is not necessary to begin reading the list in the summer. A good reader may wait for the fall to start, focusing

instead on choosing books of his own liking, which is also very profitable for the developing reader.

The Need to Read

No one doubts the importance of learning to read, but many doubt the importance of reading in order to learn. In education, there are two main vehicles for communicating knowledge: teachers and books. While good and excellent teachers are sources of wisdom and knowledge to students as well as being mentors, they alone are not sufficient for educating our children. Books are necessary. Books can be viewed as non-living teachers. None of us has access to an Aristotle or Augustine, but we have their books. At Veritas we want to train students to learn through books. To do that, they must become much more than adequate readers; they must become competent readers. Mortimer Adler says in his classic *How to Read a Book* that the average reader never gets beyond a 6th grade reading level. This reader cannot read a densely worded text with complicated sentence constructions and complex argumentation with understanding. We don't want our students to be average. We want them to be able to digest the great books of the past and absorb their ideas. To achieve this, we must teach students well in the grammar school years so that they are ready to attack the difficult books in their logic and rhetoric years with confidence. This is why we emphasize the reading of good and great books at every grade.