

Reading Language Arts

If you've already read our page on Homeschool History, you know how valuable historical fictions, aimed at a particular age group, can be for helping your child to fall in love with history. But, of course, a well-written novel is invaluable for teaching a child about both Reading Language Arts and Writing Language Arts. A good teacher, will use the books to show her child how to write his or her own historical fictions.

The *Jody's Michigan Adventure* series is designed for children, ages 8-10. The print is large, the line space generous, the sentences short and to the point. New, or difficult words are defined right in the text. So, for example, in *Michigan's Mackinac Island*, your child will learn about *Anishinaabemowin*, the correct name for the Ojibwe Indian language, suspension bridges, the way a bridge spans, or crosses, a body of water, a bluff, or hill, the *voyageur*, or Canadian canoe paddler, and dormer windows. With your help, she will also see the way that accurate history, language, and fictional story can be woven together to create a narrative that is both useful and delightful.

Did you know that good stories must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and that a well-written story revolves about a central problem? Three attempts should be made to solve the problem, each attempt failing more miserably than the last, until the crisis, when the solution appears. The very last part of the story ties together all the loose ends.

If you're a really good teacher, you will take each of these narratives apart for your child, with the aid of the Student Guides on the site, to show her how the author has put the story together. There are guides for *The Journals of Kevin Murphy* (written for ages 11-15), as well as for *Jody's Michigan Adventures* (ages 8-10). These guides show what questions can be put to the text: historical, literary, and, even grammatical. *The Journals* are of course much more complex than the *Jody* books, but it would be very worthwhile to have an older child read both and compare them. The sentences in the *Journals* are longer; the vocabulary more difficult, and the plot, far more complex and complete.

In *The Journals of Kevin Murphy II: Son of Fireheart*, the Mexican-Indian hero, Esteban Sanchez, speaks broken English. Of course, this accent has been modified by the author so that it is perfectly intelligible to the reader. However, Esteban makes some mistakes that are quite common to the modern generation of children, regardless of background. For example, he repeatedly uses the relative "that," when he should use "who" or "whom." Similarly, he resorts to "that" for the relative "which." These mistakes are italicized in the text, and they appear in the Student Guides to underline what NOT to do. A good teacher will make sure her child understands that 'which' (referring to a preceding THING, which is the subject of the sentence) and who (referring to a preceding PERSON, who is the subject of the sentence) are not confused

with 'that' (referring to a preceding THING, which is the object of the sentence) and 'whom' (referring to a preceding PERSON, who is the object of the sentence). For example, "I really like Mr. Thomas, *who* is my history teacher," "I talked with the boy, *to whom* the book belonged." (The book belonged to 'him.')

I always like to point out to my students that "whom" and "him" end in "-m," which is what is left of the accusative or objective case in English). And, "The book, *which* is on the table, is mine," BUT "I want the dress *that* is on the rack over there." There are a host of other grammatical points to be found in the student guides.

Another very common grammatical error among young people today is the use of the comma. It comes at the end of an introductory phrase, "As we were meandering through the woods, . . ." or before a conjunction that links two complete sentences: "My sister loves her children very much, *and* she is right to make strict rules for them." It DOES NOT come before a conjunction linking a complete sentence with another partial sentence: "My sister loves her children very much *and* knows enough to make strict rules for them." There is no subject in the second part of the sentence, so 'and knows enough, etc.' is not a complete sentence. Therefore there is no comma before 'and.' A complete sentence is made up of a subject (I, you, he, she, it, we, they or a noun), a verb (make, do, say, love, etc.) and an object (me, you, him, her, it, us, them, or a noun, etc.)

It is, of course, nearly impossible for a youngster to combine well-researched history, well-structured literature, and perfect grammar and punctuation, but the earlier a child reads, the earlier he writes, the sooner he becomes proficient at his studies. For this reason, we have started a Writing Language Arts contest page where your child can submit his or her story and picture for possible publication on our site. We hope you'll visit our Writing Language Arts page and have your child submit a story.