

CURRICULUM USER GUIDE



“Putting the *story* back into History”



HERITAGE CLASSICAL CURRICULUM



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INTRODUCTION

The Heritage Classical Curriculum is a study program based on classical children’s history books. It was founded on the belief that well-written, age-appropriate history books could be of such natural interest that with sufficient guidance, many students can actually “teach themselves” history. The real teachers, of course, are the wonderful authors and learned scholars who produced the outstanding collection of histories that we drew upon to create the Heritage Libraries. H. E. Marshall, Helene Guerber, Jacob Abbott, Alfred J. Church, James Baldwin, Mary Macgregor, Andrew Lang, Samuel Harding, John Haaren, and Edward Sabin are only a few of the better known Heritage History authors. These writers and others like them are the true architects of the Heritage Classical Curriculum—the “permanent faculty,” so to speak.

The Heritage Curriculum focuses squarely on intermediate and general-interest readers, containing neither picture books for small children nor analytical texts for college students. Instead, it emphasizes story-based history told in engaging prose from introductory to advanced reading levels. Some of our books intended for older grammar school students can be read-aloud to younger students, but the Heritage libraries contains only a few books written below a fourth grade reading level. Likewise, many of our advanced selections provide an excellent preparation for college-level historical analysis, but we explicitly exclude books that are exceptionally challenging or books with excessive commentary.

The Heritage Classical Curriculum differs from many modern curriculums not only in the books and authors that it relies on but in its educational philosophy. Its approach to history reflects teaching methods of yesteryear, which differ considerably from modern approaches. The following list summarizes some of the major differences in learning methods. The Heritage History Curriculum—

- Takes a *Living Books* rather than a *textbook* approach to history—students read a variety of engaging biographies and historical sketches rather than one comprehensive text.
- Is based on *national* histories rather than *epochal* histories—students study one civilization at a time rather than contrasting contemporaneous civilizations.
- Is *narrative* rather than *analytical*—students are introduced to the great characters and events of history without being required to make comparisons or draw conclusions.
- Focuses on studying the most important periods of Western Civilization in depth rather than touching lightly upon dozens of unrelated cultures.
- Encourages students to pursue historical topics of personal interest in addition to making selections from directed reading lists.

The great benefit of the Heritage Classical Curriculum is that it provides a strong foundation for understanding the critical episodes and movements of Western civilization, beginning with the Greeks and Romans and continuing through the cataclysmic wars of the early 20th century. It does not attempt to impose a sophisticated understanding of these events on young students, but it introduces them to the conflicts and personalities in such a way that when they are mature enough to consider the significance of great happenings, they will have a broad knowledge of history to reflect upon.

No history curriculum is perfect. Like all programs, the Heritage Classical Curriculum has some limitations. It omits much 20th century history since the Heritage library only includes books published before 1923. No books in the Heritage collection suffer from the distortions of political correctness, but a few evince biases that were common in the early twentieth century. Most Heritage selections do not emphasize commentary and analysis, so they are appealing to introductory readers but not adequate for teaching civics or political philosophy to older students. The curriculum includes learning resources such as maps, character lists, battle dictionaries, and era summaries, but no assigned learning activities. For these reasons, we do not promote Heritage History as an entirely self-sufficient curriculum, but welcome collaboration with other curriculum providers.

On the plus side, the Heritage Classical Curriculum dispenses with almost all “busy-work” associated with history. Students spend most of their time reading rather than reviewing, filling in worksheets, or cramming for tests. They become familiar with notable stories from history by reading about events from multiple sources rather than memorizing facts from a single text. There is ample opportunity to supplement learning with written or oral reports, but this is not a required part of the curriculum. Best of all, the Heritage Curriculum actively encourages students to select readings on topics of particular interest to themselves. A broad understanding of history can’t be based entirely on individual interests, but neither can the most important lessons of the past be learned without personal initiative.

THE HERITAGE HISTORY PHILOSOPHY

The top priority of most curriculum providers is to stress the *essential* facts of history, so that instructors can be sure their students have been exposed to the *fundamentals*. This is a worthy goal, and the Heritage Curriculum does provide a solid overview of the most important events of Western Civilization. But the primary goal of Heritage History is not to reiterate a set of stories that “all students should know”, but rather to engage students’ genuine interest and instill a life-long passion for history.

What we consider *essential* is not perfect retention of a particular set of historical facts and concepts but an abiding interest in history itself. Our object is to build on students’ natural curiosity about the past with books that are both informative and engaging. Books from the Heritage library hold our students’ interest not by pandering to them with games or gimmicks but by emphasizing fascinating stories of human endeavors.

We believe that history can be learned very well through self-motivated, independent study. While knowledgeable history instructors who can lead discussions, ask questions, and engage students are *invaluable*, students who do not have access to a first-rate history teacher can learn much from the outstanding juvenile history authors of yesteryear. Well-written books can teach as well as entertain.

Obviously students who are completely unfamiliar with a particular field of history will need some guidance, and the Heritage Curriculum does recommend a certain amount of *core* reading. But to a larger extent than most other curriculums we emphasize student choice. Interest-driven history, which takes advantage of a student’s natural curiosity and allows him to devote more time to subjects which hold special fascination for him, is a far more effective route to really mastering history than mere drill. When a student sees history as a life-long engagement rather than an academic chore, he is well on his way achieving a real history education.

Our collection of books is broad enough to engage young people with a wide range of abilities and interests. One student may prefer to read mythology or legends; another might enjoy military history, and another may pursue biographies. Some will not be willing to engage our more challenging selections and others may seek them out. We do not promise our users that they will need to read every book in our library, but that every book they do select will be high quality and worth the effort.

We believe there is no substitution for being well read in history. The wisdom gained from studying history cannot be confined to a set of lessons or a checklist of historical references. It is an appreciation of the breadth and variety of human aspirations and frailties that is the wisdom itself.

The lessons that history teaches are best gained by breadth; and breadth takes time and persistent interest. There is no “getting right to the point” in history—it is a panorama, not a point.

USING THE HERITAGE PROGRAM—The Heritage Classical Curriculum was designed to be flexible so it could be useful to students with a variety of learning styles. For those that would like to keep things as uncomplicated as possible, using the Heritage program can be as simple as making selections from the Recommended Reading lists provided in each Compact Library, combined with six or more age-appropriate books from our collection. More ambitious instructors have access to a broad range of information that can be used to prepare review exercises, lectures, or projects for students of differing abilities. There are a great many study aids associated with each Curriculum CD, but it is up to individual instructors to decide how this material should be used.

It is not possible, therefore, to provide a “one-size-fits-all” guide to using the Heritage Curriculum. The program can be used as a reading program for individual students, as a source of supplemental readings for use with other curriculums, as a unit-study resource for multi-age learning co-ops, or as a collection of resources for history instructors who desire to develop their own personalized curriculum. The Heritage program leaves a great deal of discretion to individual instructors, so no single guide can address all possible concerns. Nevertheless, this User Guide contains explanations and recommendations that will be helpful to most Heritage Curriculum users, no matter what methods they use.

COMPACT LIBRARIES

For the convenience of users, all of the books, learning aids, and study guidelines associated with each curriculum package have been organized into a **Compact Library**. The information in these libraries is organized as if it were on a website so that you can use familiar browsing tools, such as Internet Explorer, Safari, Firefox, or Chrome to navigate through hundreds of files, images, and texts. Information can be retrieved just as if you were viewing a website, but without requiring a connection to the Internet. Users can navigate book lists, browse book reviews and recommendations, read era summaries, display images, maps, and timelines, and follow informational links while having direct access to all data files on their home computer.

The books included in each Compact Library are presented in both printable and e-Reader format, so any book from the collection can be printed on a home printer, read on a laptop or downloaded directly to any e-Reader or Tablet. For users who are not familiar with e-Reader technology, an Electronic Text User Guide is included with each Compact Library that contains tips for using e-Books.

There are nine Compact Libraries currently available from Heritage History, but only five are configured as **Classical Curriculums**, complete with study resources, a printable Study Guide, and a Curriculum Guide. The remainder include civilization-specific libraries and suggested reading lists, but lack additional resources such as maps and timelines. Eventually, most of the **Classical Libraries** in our collections will be upgraded to Curriculums. The five that already exist correspond to Heritage History’s recommended sequence for fourth through ninth grade.

Classical Curriculum	Contents
Young Readers	Grammar School Intro to Western Civilization
Ancient Greece	Rise of Persia to the Roman Conquest of Greece
Ancient Rome	Founding of Rome to the Fall of the Western Empire
British Middle Ages	Roman Britain to the Reformation
British Empire	British Empire and World Colonial History

The following collections do not include Study Guides, maps, timelines, or other resources, but they may be used to supplement other curriculums or for independent study.

Classical Library	Contents
Early America	Early American Exploration to the Great War
Christian Europe	Fall of the Roman Empire to the Enlightenment
Modern Europe	French Revolution and Rise of Prussia to the World Wars
Spanish Empire	Spain, Latin America, and the Age of Exploration

Most of the Heritage Compact Libraries are focused on a particular civilization or time period and include books at a variety of reading levels. A few of our collections, however, are more eclectic. The [Young Readers](#) library, for instance, covers a broad range of historical topics, but only includes books that are age-appropriate for grammar school students.

STUDY GUIDES

Each Compact Library that features a full curriculum includes a menu entitled Study Aids. This section includes resources such as timelines, character lists, battle dictionaries, maps, images, and summaries organized by historical era. This information can be browsed on the compact library, but it is also included in printable format for the benefit of students who would like a physical copy for reference. The printable version of these study aids is referred to as a **Study Guide**.

We recommend that the Study Guide that accompanies each curriculum be printed out and put in a three ring notebook for reference. Most students will either print out the books they intend to read or download them to a tablet or e-Reader, so they won't be tied to a computer. It is most helpful, therefore, if they have easy access to printed maps, timelines, and other information while they read.

The main body of each Study Guide includes four sections, each with its own particular purpose. These sections consist of:

- Recommended Reading—core suggestions for beginner, intermediate, and advanced students;
- Historical Divisions—study resources organized by era;
- Maps—historical maps, outline maps, and geographical terms;
- Accountability—reproducible forms to help track students’ progress.

In addition to these sections, there are several appendices that can be printed and included in the student’s history notebook, such as the Electronic Text User Guide and civilization-specific Battle Dictionaries.

HISTORICAL DIVISIONS—Each Heritage Study Guide follows a particular nation or people from its earliest formation until its eventual demise, or, in the case of contemporary civilizations, until the early 20th century. In many cases this time span is hundreds of years. The important turning points, memorable characters, and critical conflicts for each civilization vary, so each Study Guide defines a number of eras specific to that particular civilization.

These eras form natural breakpoints in the study of a civilization. They are usually, but not always, chronological. The Heritage Curriculum does not specify weekly or even monthly assignments, but it does use era designations to group related readings, characters, and events. Dividing a civilization into comprehensible eras helps students remember characters, events, and conflicts in the context in which they occurred.

The following table displays the era divisions for Ancient Rome. Each of the other Study Guides divides the material in a similar manner.

Era	Dates	Description
Kingdom of Rome	753-510 BC	Reign of Romulus to the exile of Tarquin Superbus
Early Republic	510-275 BC	Establishment of Republic to the Conquest of Italy
Punic Wars	274-146 BC	First Punic War to the Destruction of Carthage
Decline of Republic	146-44 BC	Age of the Gracchi to the Death of Julius Caesar
Early Empire	44 BC-180 AD	Second Triumvirate to the Death of Marcus Aurelius
Fall of Western Empire	180-476 AD	Reign of Commodus to the Fall of Western Empire

MAPS—Heritage History emphasizes reading over activities, worksheets, or projects. There are, however, a few history-related activities that we believe are worthwhile, particularly those involving historical maps. To this end, each Study Guide contains civilization-related outline maps, historical maps, and geography terms. We encourage students to spend some time becoming familiar with the geography of an area while studying the history of the region.

The selection of maps and geographical terms varies greatly between civilizations. Some, such as Ancient Greece and British Middle Ages, are confined to a specific region. Others, such as Spanish Empire and British Empire, are very widespread. In each case, however, a series of outline maps, historical maps, and corresponding geography terms has been provided. Writing important geographic information on a blank map is one of the most effective ways of learning place names, and many students learn better when they are able to visualize the location of important cities and landforms.

The Study Aids section of each full-curriculum Compact Library contains between two and four dozen historical maps. Only ten to fifteen of these maps are included in the printable version of the Study Guide, but the others are worth reviewing, and any that seem especially helpful can be printed and added to the collection. Likewise, geography terms can be added to reflect personal interests during the year as students study more events in detail. Tracking the location of towns, battles, castles, rebellions, or other places of interest helps students retain information.

TIMELINES—Timelines are a powerful learning aid and an important complement to our story-based histories. Many of the history stories in our collection omit dates and other minute details so that they don't detract from the narrative. This makes the stories more engaging than an encyclopedia entry or a textbook, but unless students are familiar with the timeframe in which the stories occur, they may miss the chronological significance of some events.

In order to provide a chronological context for studying classical history, each Study Guide contains a set of timelines for each civilization, organized by era. Some eras, such as the Persian War and French Revolution, are filled with memorable events over a relatively short period of time. Others, such as the rise of the city states in Greece or the Plantagenet dynasty in England, are more drawn out and cover centuries rather than decades. This is one reason we break our civilization timelines into specific eras rather than plotting them together on a single graph.

Additionally, the beginning and ending of different eras generally correspond with the most important events in a civilization's history, those most worth memorizing. For example, in Roman history the critical dates include the beginning of the Roman Republic (510 B.C.), the conquest of all of Italy (275 B.C.), the fall of Carthage and Corinth (146 B.C.), the assassination of Caesar (44 B.C.), the death of Marcus Aurelius (180 A.D.), and the passing of the Imperial crown to a barbarian (476 A.D.). Focusing on these dates alone gives students an excellent idea of the basic outline of Roman history. There are other important dates worth remembering, of course, but even if a student does not remember the exact dates of important battles or other critical events, he will associate them with a specific era and have a good grasp of the historical chronology.

RECOMMENDED SEQUENCE

Each Compact Library designates core reading lists for beginner, intermediate, and advanced students. This means that no matter what reading level your student is at when he begins studying a particular civilization, we provide an appropriate core curriculum. Families with children of various ages can have the whole family study one civilization at a time or have each child follow his own course of study.

Heritage History does, however, recommend a sequence for using our curriculum packages which guarantees students are exposed to the essential narratives of classical western history by the time they reach high school. It takes into account the maturity of students and postpones dealing with complex historical topics until high school.

In brief, Heritage History recommends using the grammar school years to introduce students to engaging and age-appropriate stories of American history and Western Civilization, without any particular emphasis on chronology or mature themes. Stories that emphasize “good character” are appropriate for this age, but those that emphasize political themes generally are not.

In the middle school years, we begin a study of Ancient history and British history through World War I. In the high school years we return to American history, this time in more depth, and also take on modern European history, focusing primarily on the period from the French Revolution to the World Wars. We believe that 19th century events are critical to understanding the secularization of Europe and the rise of the global economy and modern nations, but these topics are best left until students are fairly mature.

Grammar School—Once a student is reading fluently, we recommend that he spend his late grammar years reading a variety of short stories from history adapted for children. Our Young Readers collection includes over eighty engaging, easy-to-read books that cover a broad range of historical topics. Most are just as engaging as typical “chapter books”, and many are short enough for a fluent reader to finish in three to four hours. Each book tells a complete story, so they can be read in any order.

The Young Readers collection is perfectly suited to the late grammar school years and provides young students with a broad introduction to the most famous events in Western Civilization. It includes legends and historical literature as well as stories from real life, but it does not contain any comprehensive histories. The stories and major characters are presented in an anecdotal manner so young students can move from topic to topic with ease.

At this age-level, we make a few specific recommendations to make sure students are exposed to a good selection of famous American history stories, Bible stories, and legends, but we also encourage students to follow their own interests. A student who spends two years reading history for only three hours per week may complete fifty or more easy-to-read history books and be acquainted with many important characters by the time he reaches middle school. This lays a strong foundation for future learning.

Middle School—By sixth or seventh grade, most students are ready to tackle structured history lessons. Nevertheless, even at this age we do not rely on fact-filled, textbook style histories. For the middle school grades, we recommend *core* reading selections that introduce students to all the major events and characters of a civilization. But even our comprehensive histories are story-based, narrative histories rather than textbooks. Our curriculum encourages students to read short biographies, episodic histories, and occasionally historical fiction to supplement their primary curriculum rather than learning every detail from a single text.

Our middle school program focuses on two main topics: Ancient history and British history through World War I. The modern tendency is to study all of “world history” together, briefly touching upon dozens of civilizations. In contrast, the Heritage Classical Curriculum focuses mainly on the civilizations and incidents that pertain most directly to Western civilization and American history and covers them in depth even in the early grades. The fact that we focus more narrowly than other world history curriculums does not mean that we ignore events outside our subject areas. The British Middle Ages unit introduces important stories and characters from other European countries, and our unit on the British Empire covers a great deal of 19th century regional history. Even our Ancient history units deal with other contemporary cultures, but in each case the central focus of the classical curriculum is a primary civilization learned in detail, rather than the “civilization smorgasbord” approach common to modern textbooks.

One reason for emphasizing British history instead of the more general European history is because virtually all of the major themes of European history—barbarian invasions, Christian conversion, feudalism, the Crusades, the Renaissance and Reformation, imperialism, the Napoleonic wars, and the World Wars—play themselves out in British history, but in a personal manner that is easy for students to understand. We believe that most middle school aged students are still concrete thinkers, so making history personal and specific rather than abstract and general is crucial to holding their interest.

Secondly, studying the British Empire is a fascinating way to study much of world history. During the 19th century, Britain controlled colonies on every continent, dominated world commerce, and interacted with native peoples the world over. The British Empire curriculum can be considered a world history course from a British point of view, just as the British Middle Ages curriculum covers the all the major points of the Middle Ages and the Reformation from a British viewpoint.

Finally, Britain was the birthplace of parliamentary democracy, the industrial and scientific revolutions, and modern capitalism. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Britain dominated the fields of exploration, industry, science, literature, and invention. It revolutionized the world of international economics, trade, and banking, and for good or evil was a juggernaut of modernization. The modern world is simply incomprehensible without a solid grounding in British history, especially since Britain was directly antecedent to America, and the founders of our Republic were entirely British in worldview and culture.

High School—Students following the Heritage Classical Curriculum should have a solid grounding in Ancient, Medieval, and British history before they begin high school. At this point, they should be mature enough to tackle Early American, Modern Europe, or any other historical topic that requires insight into political philosophy and worldview. Although having a well-defined worldview is helpful to understanding historical developments at all ages, it is essential for understanding the modern world.

The Heritage Library is not equipped to cover much of later 20th century, but it has many resources that deal with the critical period from about 1750 to 1922 during which much of Europe transitioned from a fundamentally Christian to a largely secular culture. Few of our materials, however, deal explicitly with civics, political science, or other topics that can be usefully integrated into a high school curriculum that covers these periods. Our library includes a great many stories and character portraits of the time that can be read with great benefit, but since we favor narrative over analytical texts, some families may want to use a more instructive core text than we provide.

PREPARATION AND SCHEDULING

The Heritage Classical Curriculum leaves the design of detailed reading lists and schedules to individual students and instructors. We expect each student to customize a program based on personal learning goals and interests. The Heritage Classical Curriculum is more in depth and flexible than most conventional history curriculums, but to get the most out of the program, instructors must spend time defining a schedule suitable for individual needs. Heritage provides all the required materials, including a complete library of books, maps, and timelines, but leave day-to-day scheduling and special assignments to the instructor.

Every homeschooling family is unique, and even students within a family have differing interests. The Heritage Curriculum can be easily adapted to meet both family and individual needs. However, all students should begin the year with a good idea of which books they intend to read and adhere to a weekly reading program. Modifying one's reading list later in the year is perfectly acceptable, but short term assignments and weekly reading goals should be explicit. Students work best when they are working toward a specific goal and can check off their accomplishments.

Preparation—The first order of business when planning a yearly schedule is to define a tentative list of books that each student intends to read. We recommend that students and instructors spend a few days reviewing the complete collection of books on their Compact Library and becoming familiar with their range of options. A short description of each book and series in the each collection is provided, and the complete text of each book is available to preview.

Each student should identify about three core books and three supplemental books at the beginning of the year. More can be added later when the subject civilization is better understood. Younger students, especially those who have no inkling of a new subject civilization, may have

difficulty selecting books at the beginning of the year since they are unfamiliar with the topic. The best thing to do in this case may be to read a short comprehensive history to help get oriented. Another idea is for instructors to help narrow the field to just a few high quality books, so that novices are given meaningful choices, but are sure to stay on track. To help with the task of book selection, Heritage History provides a reproducible BOOK SELECTION REGISTER that can be used to track books that students read during the course of the year.

Title: <i>Famous Men of Rome</i>	Category: <i>Core</i>	Length: <i>69 pp.</i>
Author: <i>John Haaren and A. P. Poland</i>	Start: <i>10/5</i>	Finish: <i>10/29</i>
Comments: <i>Lots of short biographies about famous men. Lots of cool illustrations. Most characters are from Republican era. *****</i>		

Reading Levels—Determining the reading level at which a particular student learns best can be tricky. Most students read fiction more fluently than non-fiction, and biographies or adventure stories more easily than comprehensive histories. For this reason, we encourage students to select core reading material history at or below the level at which they are reading literature. History does not have to be challenging to be worthwhile, and students learn best when they are genuinely engaged.

Some students take a real interest in history at a young age and read far beyond their expected grade level. For such students, Heritage History’s vast collection of intermediate and advanced histories is a treasure trove waiting to be explored. Others students take longer to mature and do better with less challenging fare. Fortunately, Heritage History has plenty of easy-to-read books that can keep slower students interested until they are ready to move one, so if a student struggles with a book he has chosen, we advise letting him give up and move on to something more appropriate.

Even the beginner level books included in the Heritage libraries are engaging, informative, and well-written, so they are quite worthwhile, even for older students. Some very capable students prefer to read many easy books rather than fewer difficult ones, and as long as a student is engaged, there is nothing wrong with this approach. It is fine to encourage students to read somewhat challenging texts that you believe will be especially worthwhile, but if they struggle, it is better to back off let them set their own pace. There is no shortage of interesting books, and history should be a pleasure, no matter at what level a student is reading.

Scheduling—We believe that the best way to master history is to make reading history a regular part of a weekly schedule. The amount of reading demanded of a particular student can vary, but for intermediate students of average ability, three hours per week is a reasonable goal. If you would like your student to read more than this, we suggest offering incentives for extra reading rather than increasing his mandatory lesson time. We typically assign history reading as

the last subject of the day, so that if a student wants to continue reading beyond their allotted time they can do so. Even for a motivated reader, however, it is essential that a substantial amount of history reading be worked into a regular schedule rather than relying solely on student interest.

Unless a student is involved in a structured history class or co-operative with other students, it will probably be unnecessary to assign specific pages of individual books on a weekly basis. Instead, Heritage recommends tracking the number of *hours* read per day and allowing the student some flexibility in what books he reads. A student using the Heritage Curriculum might have two or three “active” books on his list at any one time and can choose which to read during his assigned study time. Obviously, instructors must insist that core reading get done in a timely fashion, but they can allow students to read their other selections in any order.

The amount of time that a student spends reading history should be explicitly tracked. There are a number of ways to do this, but Heritage History has provided sample WEEKLY READING REGISTER pages at the end of each Study Guide. Like the Book Register, the Weekly Reading Register provides a permanent record of history books read during the year. The Heritage program is very flexible, but it is important to hold students accountable for their reading assignments by tracking their progress* on a daily basis.

Date	<i>Mon Sept 20</i>	<i>Wed Sep 22</i>	<i>Fri Sep 24</i>	<i>Sat Sep 25</i>		Weekly Total
Time	<i>1:00</i>	<i>1:30</i>	<i>1:00</i>	<i>:45</i>		<i>4:15</i>
Title	<i>Guerber SOG</i>	<i>Guerber SOG</i>	<i>Church Iliad</i>	<i>Church Iliad</i>		
Chapter/ Page	<i>14-19</i>	<i>20-28</i>	<i>1-7</i>	<i>8-12</i>		<i>SOG-14 Iliad-12</i>

**Note: The pagination scheme of most e-Readers depends on font size, so it is not meaningful to track page numbers on an e-Reader. Instead, we recommend that students using electronic readers track chapters instead of pages. The page counts of the PDF print-ready books, on the other hand, are unchanging and can be used to track progress. Each PDF sheet number corresponds to approximately two pages of the original text.*

At a rate of only three hours per week, a typical student should be able to read 10 or more history books per year. Extended over a six year period (fourth to ninth grade), students who follow the Heritage History curriculum should have read somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 to 150 history-related books before high school—an excellent foundation for future learning.

BREADTH AND DEPTH

Comprehensive Histories—Most history programs rely heavily on comprehensive history textbooks. Comprehensive histories are texts that cover the entire course of a civilization and point out all of the major characters, events and developments. Comprehensive histories written for young students are usually quite simple and emphasize interesting stories and characters, while those intended for high school students are typically packed with details and analysis.

At Heritage History, we believe that comprehensive texts, especially story-based, readable ones, are a critical part of history instruction. But even the best comprehensive histories are often more difficult for students to read than books that cover fewer episodes in more detail. The problem is that comprehensive histories—no matter how well written—introduce dozens of different characters and move along at pace that requires students to remember a great many facts in short order. Although some students can absorb information quickly and may complete a comprehensive history in a short time, others prefer a slower approach, and in most cases, comprehensive histories are not “favorite” history books.

Because they are critical tools for learning the full scope of a given civilization, the Heritage Classical Curriculum assigns comprehensive histories as *core* reading. However, we believe that other history formats—episodic histories and biographies in particular—are very valuable, and they are often more appealing to students who have difficulty remembering all the details of more condensed histories.

Breadth, Depth, and Interest—The three keys to mastering history are **breadth**, **depth**, and **interest**. A student’s reading program should attend to all three aspects. We therefore recommend that only about a third of a student’s time be spent reading our recommended core history texts. These books are usually comprehensive histories or important biographies and cover material that all students studying a particular civilization should be familiar with.

In order to supplement the core reading, an additional portion of a student’s time should be spent reading biographies, detailed histories of specific events and folklore that pertain to the civilization he is studying. This *supplemental* reading provides **depth** so that the student gains insight into particular characters and incidents of history and develops an appreciation for the complexity of detailed historical accounts. It is critical to understanding the true nature of history to get some insight into the “behind the scenes” of historical events, since abbreviated accounts of an event often give an incomplete and sometimes misleading version of affairs.

Finally, we recommend that the final portion of reading time be open-ended, meaning that each student should be allowed to spend at least some of his time reading any good quality book he desires about any historical topic. Heritage History provides a broad collection of books that lie outside our structured curriculum, and a student may have access to other history books that interest him. *Free-choice* reading allows each student to pursue his own **interests** and helps him see history as a field of enduring fascination rather than simply an assignment to be done with.

Naturally, we are not advocating that this division be adhered to strictly on a week-to-week, hour-to-hour basis. Just as three hours per week is a somewhat arbitrary but reasonable goal for history reading, dividing reading time into *core*, *supplemental*, and *free reading* is also intended to be a general guideline. As long as a student reads the core selections, at least three supplemental books for depth, and three or so substantial free-choice books over the course of the year, the order doesn't particularly matter.

Each of these three aspects of history plays an important role in a student's overall history education. Breadth, depth, and personal interest are the three keys to a classical history education. Many curriculums focus too narrowly on "covering the basics". We believe it is essential for students of history to have some time to pursue their own goals for learning. It is precisely through developing their own interest in history rather than following an assigned curriculum, that mastery is achieved.

Given his druthers, one boy might be interested in naval warfare and pirate tales while a young lady might read biographies of famous women or pursue an interest in regional folklore. A family of Slavic origin might be particularly interested in Russian history, while a young man whose grandfather fought in World War II might want to read every book available on the subject. It is these personal interests, combined with proficiency in the great events of Western Civilization, that provide a true foundation for a lifetime passion for history.

RETENTION AND REVIEW

Retention—The core reading selections for the Heritage Classical Curriculum usually include two separate comprehensive histories. This is because we recommend that students read core histories that cover much of the same material from at least *two independent authors*. Most other curriculums use a single primary text and rely on tests and worksheets to reiterate material and make sure a student is familiar with particular facts of history. The Heritage Classical Curriculum instead relies on multiple readings of similar material, so the two-source approach is needed to guarantee that students retain essential information. A single reading of a comprehensive history book is usually insufficient. Books that cover the entire history of any civilization present too many events and too many new characters for most students to absorb fully on an initial reading.

One advantage to reading two separate comprehensive histories is that independent authors emphasize somewhat different events and cover similar material with diverse styles. But the primary benefit of the two-source approach is that reading the same stories more than once is an essential way to master the material, and most students would prefer to read two similar books than to read one book twice. Enjoyable history stories are just as enjoyable the second time through, *and retention is far better after more than one reading*.

Since Heritage classical histories are all story-based and accessible to intermediate students, reading two *core* histories over the course of a year is usually less difficult than reading a single more dense and technically challenging text. In regular history courses, students are expected to re-read portions of a single history textbook, and worksheets or tests are often just vehicles for motivating students to go back and revisit portions of the text. Our method accomplishes the same goal, but is less cumbersome for most students.

There is no set order in which the core histories must be read. Many students find that reading one comprehensive history quickly at the beginning of the course gives them a good overview. Others prefer to progress section by section, reading just the material having to do with the historical era being considered from two books concurrently. For instructors who prefer this approach, a reading list that defines the sections in each book history associated with particular eras has been provided as part of the **Study Guide**. Families and students differ greatly in how structured they prefer their program, but the Heritage Classical Curriculum can be used with a wide range of approaches.

Written Review—Almost all educators emphasize the importance of teaching students to express themselves well, and history is frequently used as a subject for both expository writing lessons and analytical essays. While it is true that history can be an excellent vehicle for rhetoric, we do not make reports or writing about historical topics a mandatory part of our curriculum.

If you do desire to use history as a subject for writing assignments, bear in mind that in the lower grades most students are still building skills in expository writing. We therefore believe that the best writing exercises at this age are narrowly tailored. Most students can understand and absorb much more historical information than they can effectively communicate, so for many students the complexity of the material that they are capable of reading will outstrip that which they can relay back in oral or written form.

It can be very convenient to supplement a writing curriculum with short historical essays from your student's history reading. Likewise, it may be helpful to assign an occasional book report or character report as an essay topic. But be careful that writing assignments do not detract from the time spent reading history, especially for students who struggle with writing. Students who are not gifted writers can still attain a good mastery of history stories even if they are unable to express and analyze all they have learned.

Oral Review—The Charlotte Mason approach uses an oral recitation method to make sure students have mastered the basics of their lessons. This is difficult to do in a classroom setting, but is very appropriate for homeschoolers. Once a student has finished a book or a particular section in a comprehensive history, he could be required to recite the basic facts as he remembers them before going on to the next assignment. This could be done in a question and answer fashion for younger students or as an oral report for older students. Usually, this is much less time-consuming than doing a written report. In any case, these exercises will build oral communication skills, which are at least as important as writing skills. After all, relatively few jobs require extensive analytical writing, but almost all careers—not to mention personal relationships—benefit by good oral communication.

Good communication skills are at the most fundamental level about having something in mind to say. We believe that modern students' poor communication skills are less a function of their abilities to speak and write and more related to the relativistic and vacuous ideas to which they are constantly exposed. Learning history provides a feast of information about the human condition, the difficulties of government, the frailties of human nature, the cruelties and abuses of power, and the causes underlying the rise and decline of civilizations. We believe that for students of all ages, getting plenty of information into their heads is essential to developing good communications skills in the long term, even if they don't appear to fully understand or are not able to communicate what they have learned in the short term. Students can only learn to reason well and communicate clearly when they have something of importance to say.

USING WITH OTHER CURRICULA

One unusual aspect of Heritage History is that in addition to promoting our own program, we seek to provide inexpensive resources than can be used with other traditional history curriculums. Heritage History was first conceived of as a library rather than a program of study. Our objective was not to develop yet another core curriculum, but rather to provide a vast body of elective resources that motivated students might read for depth and interest.

There are many different approaches to teaching history, and most high-quality curriculums have some features that make them especially attractive to particular families. Some recommend activities and project ideas that can be helpful to instructors who like “hands-on” activities. Others provide an integrated curriculum that incorporates literature, art, and philosophy with history, and are especially good for facilitating group discussion. Some religion-based curriculums address the concerns of specific faith traditions, and some writing-based curriculums use history as a topic for teaching rhetoric.

All these specialized approaches are worthwhile. Many curriculums do a better job than Heritage Classical Curriculum at providing history related activities, teaching contemporary history, integrating civics lessons, or emphasizing particular faith traditions. No other curriculum, however, provides the breadth of resources that Heritage History makes available. The great strength of the Heritage Curriculum is its outstanding collection of traditional history books, which complement rather than compete with the best features of other curricula.

Combining Curricula—How to best integrate history curriculums depends entirely on the learning goals of the instructor. Core reading material from another curriculum can be substituted for the Heritage Curriculum core reading. Structured activities can be done in conjunction with a learning co-operative, while independent reading can be based on the Heritage Curriculum. It is even possible to do two history curriculums simultaneously. As long as a primary instructor is willing to put some thought into the best manner of integrating curriculums, the possibilities are endless.

The easiest type of curriculum to integrate with the Heritage Classical Curriculum is another “Living Books” style curriculum. In this case there is no divergence of philosophy and it is only a matter of integrating the best resources from multiple reading lists. Many reading based curriculums, including Ambleside, Old Fashioned Education, and Living Books, already recommend Heritage books or books with similar titles.

Three and Four Year Curriculums that introduce students to all of World History are also popular with homeschoolers. Tapestry of Grace, Story of the World, and Veritas/Omnibus are three well-known examples of such an approach. Most of these curriculums do recommend many supplemental books in addition to their core texts, and Heritage History books cover much of the same material as those currently recommended by these programs. The Heritage Curriculum is organized along civilizational instead of by epoch, but it is a straight forward matter to identify Heritage libraries that correspond to epochal history units.

Most curriculums that do provide supplementary reading lists confine suggestions to books currently in print but as more people adjust to the opportunities presented by electronic books, many of the Heritage titles will likely become better known. We hope that other curriculum providers will avail themselves of Heritage resources as they update their reading lists over time. In the meantime, it is usually possible to find substitutions for most common historical topics among the Heritage collection.

The idea of using electronic rather than printed resources is still a novelty for many families, but this is changing quickly. We expect that electronic readers will become less expensive, easier to use, and more widespread over the next decade. Heritage History has already done the work of sifting through thousands of classical juvenile history books to bring the best-written, most interesting texts to traditional homeschooling families. We believe that the combination of high quality, easy to reproduce electronic texts and low-cost e-Readers will prove irresistible, and we hope our resources can be used by families with diverse learning styles and worldviews. We are not trying to replace other curriculums—only to augment them with the best possible, lowest cost supplemental reading material.