

OBJECTIVES FOR THE TEACHING OF WRITING

1. We teach the covenant child to write so that, despite the corruption of the curse, he may fulfill the creation mandate to use his talents to subdue the earth (Cf. Genesis 1:28; 3:17-19; Psalm 104:23).
2. We teach the covenant child to write so that he may appreciate the language God has given him (Cf. Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:5-11; James 1:17; John 1:1-3; Psalm 68:11).
3. We teach the covenant child to write so that he may be trained to express his heart-directed response to reality, i.e., God and works (Cf. Psalm 51:10; Proverbs 4:23; 16:1-2 and 23-24; 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; I Thessalonians 4:11-12).
4. We teach the covenant child to write so that he may know and interpret reality in the light of the Scriptures (Cf. Psalm 19:14; 119:105; Ephesians 5:16).
5. We teach the covenant child to write so that he can communicate precisely and permanently his interpretations of reality to his fellow man (Cf. Job 19:23-26; Isaiah 30:8; I Corinthians 14:8-9).
6. We teach the covenant child to write so that he may use and sharpen the senses (sensory tools) God has given him. (Cf. Exodus 4:11; Psalm 25:15; 34:8; 40:5; 85:8; 139:14; Matthew 13:16-17).
7. We teach the covenant child to write so that the exercise of writing will stimulate, cultivate, and refine the imagination, a function of the mind (Cf. Proverbs 21:5; 29:18; Joel 2:28; Isaiah 26:3; Acts 2:17-21; II Corinthians 2:16; 10:5; Colossians 3:23-24; I Timothy 3:17).
8. We teach the covenant child to write so that he may experience the delight of communicating a fresh insight into and about reality (Cf. Proverbs 15:23; 25:11; Matthew 13:16-17; James 3:17).
9. We teach the covenant child to write so that he may be able to express the revelation of God in a stimulating and provocative mode (Cf. Psalm 150; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:14-17; 4:2-6).
10. We teach the covenant child to write so that he learns to share knowledge and insight, thereby fostering the nurture and growth of the body of Christ (Cf. Psalm 149:1; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 5:3-7; Colossians 3:14-17).

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A Position on the Teaching of Formal Grammar in Grades 4-6

by Mr. James Huizinga

Mr. Huizinga teaches literature and other courses at Covenant Christian High School. This essay appeared first in "A Writing Program for the Covenant Child", a manual for teachers, 1972.

The members of the Language Skills Workshop maintain that the teaching of formal grammar ought to be reserved until grade seven. By formal grammar we mean the systematic study of language that aims at a complete mastery of the inner characteristics of the language. Formal grammar is a scientific study that investigates all of the intricacies of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Traditionally the study of grammar formally has begun in the primary grades with repetition and further development in succeeding grades. We have no quarrel with the teaching of formal grammar as such. We do not agree with the increasing number of educators who would completely discard the teaching of formal grammar on the grounds that it has no relevance to the student's life. We wish to be staunchly traditional and maintain that there is something far bigger and vastly beyond the student that is the real object of our teaching, even our teaching of grammar. We insist, however, that grammar ought not to be taught as a formal discipline in grades four, five, and six.

The teaching of English in the schools of our country, and in our Protestant Reformed schools as well, has suffered greatly in the past as a result of confusion of goals and methods. All of the trouble seems to center in the question of what should be the content of language instruction. We have all been convinced that our students should by all means learn to write, but the fact remains that we have done very little as far as teaching them to write is concerned. The idea that a formal knowledge of grammar will automatically guarantee good writing is patently false, and the idea that a thorough mastery of the principles of grammar is necessary for good writing is only partly true. It ought to be a principle that every Protestant Reformed teacher accepts that the basic aim of the language program in the primary grades is to

help the students learn to express themselves in writing. Then hopefully they will see that the business of writing and the business of learning grammar are really not two separate and largely unrelated disciplines. The study of formal grammar is valuable because in language there is structure and order and design. There is beauty that reflects the wisdom and genius of the Great Designer. The study of grammar, however, is an exacting, exhausting study. It requires a good deal of concentration, a good deal of energy, and considerable ability to understand and to appreciate the abstract. The older the student, the more likely he will be to master and appreciate the principles of the grammar of his language. One reason that students must be drilled year after year in grammar is that for most youngsters it is painfully difficult. It seems to be a wise move, practically, to postpone the teaching of grammar formally until the student has acquired the mental equipment necessary to make such a study meaningful and worthwhile.

If the teacher does not have to spend hours and days, even weeks, teaching all of the minute items of English grammar, she will have the freedom to initiate a writing program in which the emphasis is on how to use language rather than on what language looks like on paper. A solid writing program will involve teaching various writing skills specifically and will expose the students to as many kinds and forms of writing as possible. Naturally the students will have to have a working knowledge of some grammatical principles. It would be futile to try to teach writing without teaching what constitutes a good grammatical sentence. One cannot teach writing without talking about verbs and nouns, adjectives and adverbs. All of these things can and should be taught incidentally, however. Grammar need only be taught when and where it relates directly to the process of writing.

What we are trying to say is that grammar is only one aspect of the English class at the primary level. It plays an important role, but really a subordinate one. Nothing should take up more time or be more important than writing. We teachers of English have to begin thinking of ourselves as teachers of writing. We have to make the concept of communication central in all of our thinking, planning, and teaching. If we do, maybe then our schools will begin to produce more outstanding writers. We have the richest language in the world. Our students have potential that we have only begun to tap. We have to make English a vital subject. A good deal depends upon it.