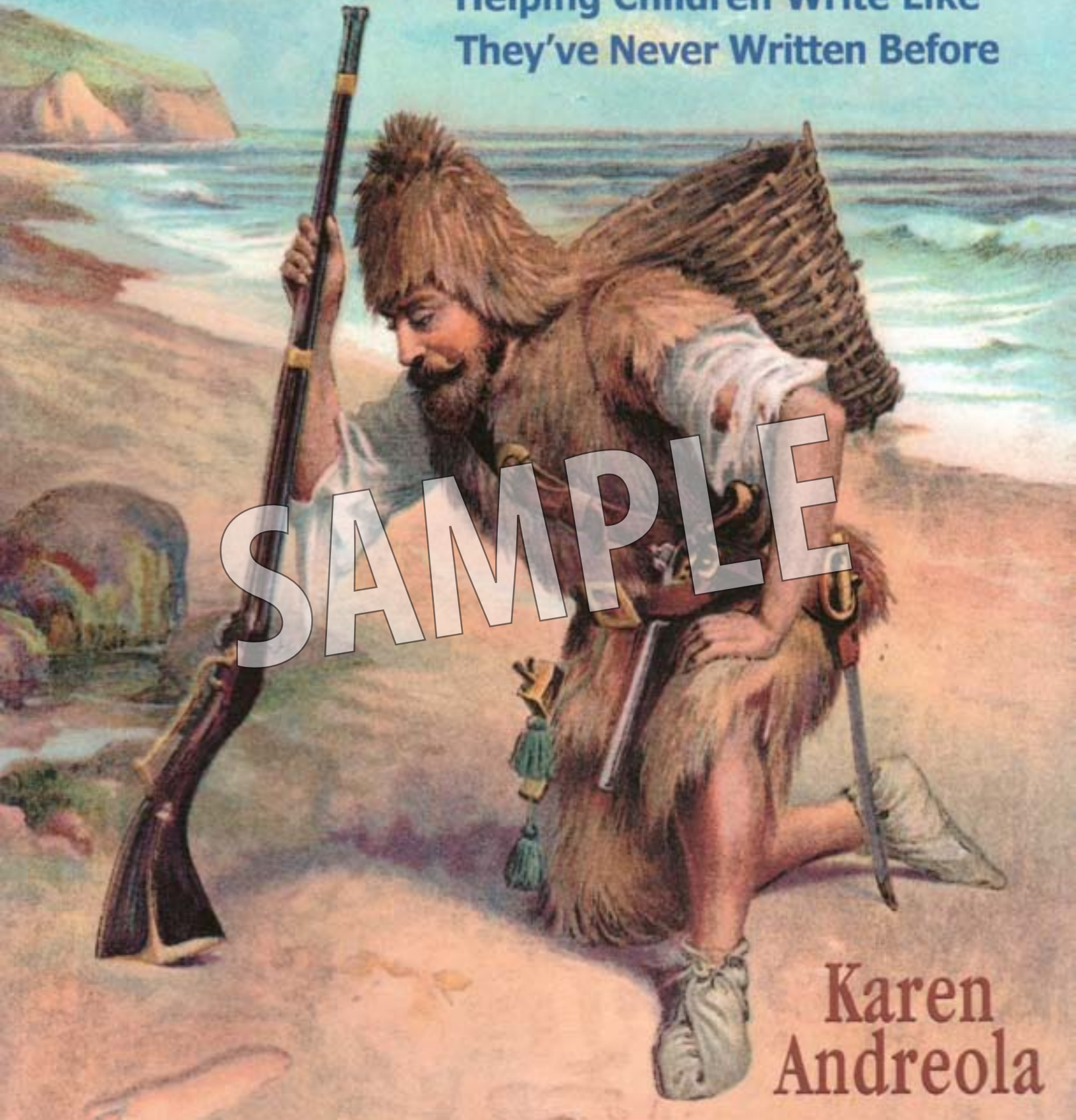


# Story Starters

Helping Children Write Like  
They've Never Written Before



Karen  
Andreola

## ***Story Starters... because a picture is worth a thousand words.***

**K**aren Andreola's charming book has the right ingredients to inspire even the reluctant writer or the student who has experienced discouragement. Her story starters encourage children to write in ways they have never written before.

**A** story starter suspends a student in the middle of a predicament. He is then faced with the question, "What happens next?" This is his cue to expand and embellish the story however he wants. He learns to write freely, with imagination and zest – and with far more boldness than he may be accustomed to.

**T**he action-packed stories are especially appealing to boys. Thumb through the pages to choose whatever story catches your fancy. Karen has written a large selection to satisfy the varied interests of both boys and girls.

**T**o spark even more curiosity, each story is illustrated with one or more engaging 19<sup>th</sup> century pictures. The settings are sometimes intense, sometimes funny, sometimes sweetly domestic, but always pose a challenge. Here is your child's opportunity to rescue those in danger, comfort the sick, cheer the lonely, laugh with the ridiculous, tame the wild, and do battle for good.

**A**waken the dormant writer in your child with this lively approach to creative writing and you will take part in what Karen calls "the gentle art of learning."



### ***Story Starters is designed to***

- Replace dry, dull writing with exciting writing
- Invoke sympathy for characters and encourage writing with feeling
- Expand a child's literary powers with the practice of narration
- Develop a child's imagination with the embellishment of story plots
- Stimulate reasoning powers with opportunity for problem-solving
- Reawaken an interest in language arts
- Uphold biblical virtues

### ***Story Starters***

**One book per family**

**Non-consumable**

**Lavishly illustrated**

**Multi-skill level (grade 4-12)**

**Supplementary English course**

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Education / Homeschooling / Creative Writing



**Charlotte Mason  
Research & Supply  
Company**

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Research and Supply  
Company

My gratitude extends to my editors for their assistance.  
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All of the pictures in *Story Starters* have been electronically manipulated for use in this book and are from Karen Andreola's personal collection of antique illustrations—a collection that took some fifteen years to acquire. Therefore they may not be taken directly from this book to decorate or illustrate books, newsletters, websites, curricula, etc. One's own research and collection of original source material should be relied upon for one's own projects.

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*Section One*

Notes for the Teacher



## 🌿 Preface 🌿



'd like my child to do more writing.”

“My child needs a greater incentive to write.”

“I have a difficult time getting two sentences out of him.”

“My daughter loves to write and needs a wider range of opportunities.”

“Writing seems too laborious a task for my son.”

Perhaps one of the above comments mirrors your personal experience and that’s why you’ve picked up this book. When parents meet me as one of the speakers at a homeschool conference, they often ask, “How do I get my child to write?”

“With narration,” I reply. Then, I briefly explain the method of narration. I encourage home teachers to read aloud to their children, and then to request that the children tell, in their own words, what was just read to them. It’s that simple. “At the heart of writing is the ability to tell—the ability to narrate,” I share with them.

### ***Narration from Books***

*“If we would believe it, composition is as natural as jumping and running to children who have been allowed due use of books.”* Charlotte Mason

Books of quality will be the main source of a young child’s composition. By putting what he\* has read (or what has been read to him) in his own words, he is learning, from the authors of these books, how to use words. For instance, in his narration the child will naturally borrow an interesting “turn of phrase” from an author. Without even being conscious of it, the child learns from authors how to use words to describe setting, action, and what characters are feeling. He is developing writing skills (a talent for using words) as he practices narrating.

Wonderful arrays of good books are available from which a child can narrate.

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\*For continuity, throughout this book I use he/him in reference to any child.

## ***Creative Narration***

With all of this reading and retelling going on, it isn't difficult to switch gears to make room for the occasional creative narration. By creative narration I mean creative *telling* rather than *re-telling*. While a child's "imagination muscles" do develop by narrating from books, these and other intellectual abilities also grow as they are used in a more playful way with creative narration.

## ***What Happens Next?***

I have discovered the best way to prompt a child to narrate creatively. It is by giving him a story starter. Instead of expecting a child to compose "from scratch" by supplying him with only a topic, a task even the average adult finds daunting, we can kindle in him a keenness to write by using a story starter. An unfinished story is meant to draw him into a colorful situation. Some stories plunge him into a predicament that holds him in suspense. Upon the invitation, "What happens next?" the child then springs forth to enhance and embellish the story as much as he wants.

## ***Writing with Feeling***

*Story Starters* is based on a form of composition I call "Exciting Writing" because the story starters invite the child to write with feeling. Many of the story starters present an exciting or intense situation. Others are calmer, more open-ended, and the consequences are less momentous. Whichever ones you chose, *Story Starters* is about focusing on content. Let the first draft be as rough as necessary as the children express their ideas and impressions. They are encouraged to write with boldness, with zest, with gusto, and with far less restraint than they may be used to.

## ***Stories of Virtue***

*"A person's worldview almost always shows through in his creative output."* Francis Schaeffer

A host of biblical virtues are embodied in my stories. They are a mix of kind gestures and heroic deeds. Many characters willingly step out of their comfort zones to perform self-denying acts of bravery. It may be a small act of bravery, as found in "Making a Call," or a

larger act, as suggested in “A Man-eating Tiger.” Overall, the characters care about the welfare of others. In these stories, you will find correction and forgiveness, patience and gratitude, resourcefulness and responsibility, admiration and respect. You will discover friendship, love, and humor as well. Good stories show us what virtue looks like.

### ***Worth a Thousand Words***

With *Story Starters* a student’s imagination is also sparked by my collection of antique pictures. Much research and discrimination has gone into providing morally uplifting, exciting, or humorous illustrations that form the basis of my stories. If it is true that a good picture is worth a thousand words, then let the pictures be translated into the words of a child whose interest and imagination have been sparked by it.

The use of pictures and story starters together is designed to inspire the less confident writer in our media based, sight-oriented culture.

### ***New Attitude***

*Story Starters* is my contribution to the art and discipline of writing for the home educated child, an aspect that I have found missing in standard writing courses. Its purpose is to empower your student to write at a new level of vibrancy that communicates the best of what is going on in his developing mind and emotions. May he discover that yes, he *can* write—and even like what he writes. It is my hope that Exciting Writing will foster a positive attitude toward writing in general and that this newfound confidence will carry over to other writing aspects of his schoolwork.

This book took root and grew from the many pleasures and rewards I have found in teaching my children at home. The article “Exciting Writing” explains how I came upon this form of composition that I put to the test with my own children.

The article “Narration: Tapping into the Talking Resource” explains further the beautiful simplicity and power of narration and how to use it in your homeschool.

# Exciting Writing

**S**tory Starters has its roots in a form of composition I call “Exciting Writing.” In researching the writings of nineteenth-century British educator, Miss Charlotte Mason, I borrowed old volumes of her magazine, *Parents’ Review* from a British library. It was an article from the magazine by teacher Raymond Ward that introduced me to the idea of story starters. When I read of the success of Mr. Ward’s scheme, I couldn’t resist using it as a writing exercise with my own children. The experiment worked and I was quite pleased. The children composed directly from their imaginations. They wrote with descriptive phrases and vocabulary unlike anything they had written before.

## Writing with Feeling

What is Exciting Writing? In brief, the student is provided with a situation that involves conflict by way of a story starter and its accompanying picture. He sympathizes with the characters and, wrapped up in the emotion of the scene, calls on his developing skills of reason and imagination to continue the story. Emotions such as fear, joy, wonder, sadness, worry, or great relief create the spark to write more vividly. The student expresses himself spontaneously, leaving penmanship, spelling, grammar and punctuation for a later time.

An exciting story starter and picture create a vivid impression in the mind of the student. The story starter provides parameters and shape so that he can immediately visualize what the actors might do next. The student is free to write whatever he wants. He taps into any previous experience he has had with an emotion. It is a student’s past personal and literary experiences that enable him to sympathize with the characters—to feel as they might in the situation depicted. He translates these emotions and concepts into words that are quite descriptive. In his article, Raymond Ward writes, “The deeper the emotion and the keener the feeling, the more readily will the child find words with which to express them; and this expression will be far more vivid, genuine, revealing and meaningful than the more conventional composition exercise.” Standard exercises such as “What I Did on My Summer Vacation,” “My Pet,” “A Visit to Grandma’s,” “A Trip to the Zoo,” all have their place, but an exciting story starter will better accomplish what Mr. Ward describes above. Even a student



who normally has a dull, rambling narrative will, with Exciting Writing, compose at least one notable phrase. Small though it may be, his one vivid description *is* a break through. It is something to rejoice in. The dormant writer in him has awoken and is emerging from his cocoon.

## ***The Rough Draft***

I've always been a believer in the need to begin with a rough draft. At its conception, a piece of creative writing needn't be bound by formal style, because this can squelch budding enthusiasm. The birthing stage of writing should not be bound by all the rules of composition. Mr. Ward's article even advocates putting down an idea or an impression in a single phrase. The student keeps a list of what strikes him at the moment, or, he might begin each new idea, phrase, or sentence on a new line. Content is stressed over form. Sentence structure and connectors are secondary to this first creative stage. If the latter is not developed the former will be less effective. Students who are accustomed to Charlotte Mason's method of oral narration from books are apt to write in prose more naturally than others. When a situation of exciting conflict demanding resolution is presented to a child, his ideas develop faster, hence the suggestion of a list of phrases (rather than a paragraph).

For those students new at narrating and new to using these writing exercises, I suggest the home teacher take dictation.

## ***Mr. Ward's Example***

Below is an example of Exciting Writing that Mr. Ward used in his classroom about half a century ago. He told his ten- and eleven-year-old students,

*"I am confronted with a mad dog. See, there it is!" I called out urgently, and started backwards, pointing. "It's there, all right. Now—quickly write down what you feel about it."*

*The children started. There was no pencil-biting, head-scratching, window-gazing, restless fiddling or doodling, but quiet intensive effort. There was not a sound in the class. One could almost hear the heavy breathing of the mad dog.*

*Then I said, "Begin a new line. Write down what kind of dog it is. Say something about its eyes, its jaws, what it looks like. Remember to start a new line for each new idea."*

## **My Experiment**

Some years ago I adapted these ideas to my own elementary school age children. Instead of coaching them through it like Mr. Ward did, however, I stimulated their emotions with the following story starter:

SECTION ONE: NOTES FOR THE TEACHER



*Dad was away on a business trip. Mom and little brother were in bed with the flu and their fever wasn't going down. An announcement came over the radio that rabies was on the rise. From her bed Mother asked her two young daughters to check the doors before all retired for the evening. They found the back sliding-glass door caked with ice—the latch couldn't lock. They tried opening it wide and slamming it shut to crack the ice. This activity attracted the attention of a rabid dog that some men were tracking in the dark. It was staring at them through the glass.*

I left them, pencils in hand, to continue with the story as I prepared lunch, because very soon we needed to run out to music lessons. They worked quietly and quickly at the kitchen table with a real sense of purpose. Just as Mr. Ward had noted, I also observed no dawdling, pencil biting, or other signs of restless fiddling. What they wrote wasn't long. Each wrote one paragraph that was brief but concentrated. The results were remarkable!

My nine-year-old daughter started out with, "The mad dog's huge face was contracted and of a hideous form. Poisonous saliva oozed from his mouth and dripped from his jowls." She then added a little comic relief: "I slowly edged away from the door. The dog's eyes followed my every move. I tripped over a large book—my math book. As I fell, the dog leaped..." In the story's climax she throws her hardcover math book—her least favorite schoolbook—at the dog.

I liked her younger sister's ending sentence very much: "The dog stopped, let out a long piercing cry, pawed the air and fell dead." Such words might describe a scene in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, which we had listened to on cassette earlier in the year. The more imaginative reading a child does, the more images and words he will have in store to draw from in his efforts to create a story.

A week or two prior to the writing experiment described above, they had viewed the film *Old Yeller*. I should also confess that they were familiar with Louis Pasteur's experiences in finding a cure for rabies from listening to the dramatic *Your Story Hour* tapes. Thus they just happened to be primed when it came to wild dog stories.

So pleased was I with their creative narration (as I called it) that I made up some more story situations that posed a conflict, problem, or challenge that needed to be resolved. Some of my story starters were not as intense, though all contained emotions and situations to which a child could relate. My children felt sympathy for the characters automatically. I didn't have to tell them what to feel. They took to Exciting Writing so well that I decided to make the same kinds of story scenarios available to my fellow home educators by way of this book.

## 🐉 A Flexible Resource 🐉



Most schoolbooks are designed so that the student does all the exercises in the order in which they appear. *Story Starters*, however, is different. It is a more flexible resource for the homeschool.

You needn't be overwhelmed by the book's big size. A student is NOT expected to do all the exercises. Rather, you and he are invited to choose from a panorama of stories. Skip back and forth among its pages to look for pictures and stories that appeal to you and your children. It is inevitable that some stories will be of better use to you than others. Therefore, I included a wide variety to strike your fancy.

This one book can be used with children of varying levels of writing ability. I designed it primarily for grade four through high school, but younger siblings can participate, too. Therefore, keep *Story Starters* on hand to use year-by-year, student-by-student.

*Story Starters* is flexible in yet another way. It can be used in layers. In more than several places I remind you that the purpose of the story starters is primarily to awaken the dormant writer in your child. He is encouraged to write freely with imagination and feeling, unencumbered by the usual restraints. If finishing the story is the only way this book is used, and it propels your student forward to write in ways he hasn't written before, I say, "splendid." Perhaps you will also decide to go even further and take advantage of the optional writing helps—i.e.; the other layers. The decision is yours. As with all teaching materials, it is best to make books our servants and not the other way round.

### Impetus for Writing

*Story Starters* is supplementary material for your English composition course. Although not a comprehensive writing course, it does incorporate some basic elements for good writing. If the various writing helps are referred to, the student will be introduced to hints and how-tos and a cross sampling of literary terms—incidentally, not incrementally.

Primarily meant to be an impetus for writing, *Story Starters* provides children young and old with plenty of opportunities to put thoughts into words and develop their powers of imagination. Odd and interesting illustrations stir up curiosity. Descriptive settings draw the child into the story further and create challenges that call for a resolution. All of these work together as a very buoyant jump-start to creative narrations.

Some of the pictures and stories are calm and endearing. Many more, however, are action-packed scenes designed especially to appeal to boys, who can be reluctant in getting out their words. Even though many of the story starters were chosen with boys in mind, both boys and girls can easily adapt the topics to their world. And it is my hope that they both will become keenly interested in a good number of them. My son and younger daughter had quite different favorites. Also, some themes sparked more fluent writing than others.

## A Notebook of Narrations

*Story Starters* is non-consumable. The student is invited to keep his narration in a notebook or as a document on a computer. Therefore, one book can be purchased for the whole family. Permission is granted, within one family, to photocopy pictures from the book so that your students can have a picture to accompany their story. Younger students may wish to use colored pencil on their pictures. The story starters themselves can also be photocopied if they are to accompany the student's polished writing in his portfolio.

### ***Optional ways to incorporate story starters into your schedule:***

#### **Biweekly**

Write, "story starter" into your schedule to remind you to choose one biweekly.

#### **Monthly**

Assign one story starter a month to space out the assignments over a longer period (years). An occasional story starter will add spice and variety to any English composition course.

#### **A One-Semester Course**

If your student is especially keen on writing, you may certainly do a story starter as often as you like to accommodate his interest, pace, and developing skill. You may wish to use *Story Starters* as your regular writing course for one semester, working on one per week. This stronger focus on less formal writing may be one way to encourage a reluctant writer.

#### **A Group Setting**

Because our family has had positive experiences holding various group classes in our living room over our years of home teaching, I offer these suggestions—one formal, and one informal.

Start a creative writing group in your home. It need only be a few gatherings— possibly one afternoon a week for an hour and a half, for a limited time of four to six weeks. This may provide enough of an opportunity to get students more excited about writing. Using *Story Starters*, participants could choose a story to work on at home during the week. When the group meets together the children read their papers to the group. Expect some nervousness and giggles. Even in a small group there will probably be students of different ages, ability and experience. Therefore the leader (host or hostess) should keep the meetings light, of good humor, and non-competitive.

### **A Game**

My second suggestion is the game of Round Robin. As it is designed for two or more persons, it is suitable for a group or family setting. After the story starter is read aloud, the children take turns orally adding one or two sentences to the plot. As the plot thickens, you will hear the children chuckle. The last child, in turn, gives the story its final resolution. Passing a paper round the room so that each person write a line or two to what has already been written is another way to play Round Robin. When the writing has gone full circle, the story is read aloud. A teacher and one student can also play the game together.

If a “Just Picture” (Section Four) is used, rather than a story starter, those who participate will create the entire story.

# 🎨 Don't Take Creative Writing Too Seriously 🎨



Although it may seem odd, I will remind you here and there in these Notes for the Teacher to “have a good time.” Each story starter invites a certain aspect of “play” in the student’s writing; it sometimes appeals to his sense of humor, and *always* appeals to his creativity. He can be more relaxed. What he writes is not being chiseled in stone. Anything he writes can be changed around and refitted. There is no one right answer. The important point is to allow the first draft be as rough as necessary.

The greatly admired author of stories J.R.R. Tolkien, said, “All who wander are not lost.” I will reemphasize here that *Story Starters* encourages the student to write his first draft with more abandon than he might be used to, to write freely with enthusiastic effort, and to let his imagination *wander*, without concern for spelling, grammar, or other aspects of “good writing.” All writers go over their writing again. The work of polishing up is done afterwards. The second or third drafts are more formal and not as fun. There is a certain amount of difficulty involved in writing so do let the first draft be as fun and free as possible.

Even if you, the teacher, find your student’s narration to be weak, try to point out something you like about it. He can build from your comments. Encourage the student to feel free to play around with his writing. If he likes it, keep it; if not, enhance it or scrap it and tailor a new situation. Better yet, try a different story starter. Choices are plentiful—more than you will need. Your patience with any difficulty, such as writer’s block, will demonstrate your confidence in him—confidence he may not have at the beginning.

If less writing (narrating) is accomplished in your first attempts, let this not worry you. Anxiety gives small things big shadows. Remember that a pleasant atmosphere is a tool of great advantage in the homeschool. Put all pickiness aside. And remember that patience accomplishes more than push—and far more than alarm or disapproval. Most children take time to warm up to writing. Allow them this time.

At the beginning my son would get discouraged with himself. Even though he had done years of narrating (retelling) from books, at age thirteen he found the newness of creative narration to be a challenge. I didn’t expect too much from him at the start but let

him warm up to the exercises without being too picky about the result. I had to remind myself that confidence and experience are slow-growing plants. We did not give up. Although it was awkward for him at first, we kept at it. I remember one day vividly. Nigel was in junior high and in his second semester of working on story starters. That day he hit upon one that sparked his interest amazingly. He chose a picture from a new set of pictures I had given him. It accompanied “Hunting for Rabbit,” a story starter I had just written about the growling bear that had chased Uncle Gordon up a tree. For this new story he wrote oodles, using vocabulary that had me bowled over. Eureka! Keep patiently feeding and watering your slow-growing plant and he will, eventually, blossom.

## What About Style?

I wouldn't be too concerned about your child writing in any special or formal style within the exercises of *Story Starters*. Children who are accustomed to narrating their lessons from well-written books become stylists on their own. There are opportunities here for letter writing, writing in first and third person, getting into the heads of characters, using vivid verbs, artful adjectives, sensory language, etc. I call only a little attention to these aspects of writing, and trust the children to pick up on these naturally as the stories draw them into expressing themselves more and more vividly.

## Fiction or Fantasy

My story starters encourage realistic fiction. Whether or not to accept an element of fantasy in your student's stories is up to you. Some realistic fiction incorporates a certain amount of fantasy. Fantasy may contain elements of the supernatural, other possible worlds, or the future. The film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, a favorite of mine, is a good example of a realistic story that is embellished with an aspect of fantasy. In that film an angel was shown the events of the life of the main character so that he could intervene at a defining moment to help him see how his life had a positive effect on so many others. Science fiction is another example of intelligent writing that incorporates what *could* happen, based on technical or medical advances, or alien interference. Fairy tale elements such as mythical beings, may result from the student's past reading.

Here is one caution. If fantasy were allowed, I would dissuade nonsense. Any depiction of an absurd circumstance is getting too carried away.

## About the Pictures


The children's book illustrations in *Story Starters* were first published in the nineteenth century; hence my text was written in the spirit of the times. Therefore you will not find jet planes, plastic bags, Styrofoam, televisions, computers, or electric refrigerators in my stories, but if the student includes these modern artifacts as he finishes the stories, this is fine. The illustrations have a timeless quality.

The Victorians had high ideals, were sentimental, and were also believers in realism, which is reflected in their art and literature. Some of the Victorian pictures may represent situations too intense for young siblings or the very sensitive child. Please use them at your discretion.

You will find that a number of story starters are illustrated not by one picture but by a series of pictures. These are meant to give further aid to your budding writer.

# Optional Teaching Tools

## Writing Help

any of the story starters include a section marked “Writing Help,” which supplies leading questions to trigger the conception of ideas and give direction for developing and ending the story. Beginners may welcome its guidance. The questions are optional, however. I sometimes remind the student that answering all the questions is not necessary. He is invited to use one, any, or all of the questions if he likes—or none if he prefers. Because *Story Starters* encourages spontaneity, Writing Help can be ignored if your student is ready and willing to freely and spontaneously set the wheels of his creativity in motion.

## Additional Challenge


Writing Help can also be used to improve the student’s rough draft “on second thought.” For instance, where can he add more descriptive vocabulary or sensory language? Can he use a vivid verb in place of a general one? In short, he will be developing writing skills that will carry over to other forms of writing, including nonfiction. Writing is work, but the more he writes, the less daunting and more engaging he will find it to be.

If the Writing Help includes an “Additional Challenge,” read through it to decide whether or not you would like him to give it a try. The student may not find it to be as difficult as you (or he) may suppose.

## Hints for Polishing

*Story Starters* touches upon just a few basic components of good story writing. If, after doing some exercises, your student is writing more fluently and is more comfortable about writing than he was before, you may read over the lessons in the section entitled “Hints for Polishing.”

# What Are the Symbols?

 first marked every story with one of a set of symbols to indicate four levels of difficulty. Although the symbols were for the teacher, upon further consideration, I removed them, except for (B) beginner. I did not wish to hinder the student from trying out a picture that looked interesting or to prejudice his thinking.

My mother used to tell me, “Life is what you make of it.” The same holds true with a story: a story is what you make of it. A child may choose a simple story that happens to have a (B) and “take off” with it, making it more complex. Or he may choose a potentially more complex story and keep it simple. Far be it from me to deter any creative directions by my system of subjective labeling.

## Just Two Marks

### (B)—Beginner.

These stories have simple or bold conflict, simple action, and the outcomes are more predictable. In some cases the child will be describing what is taking place in the picture and little else.

I suggest younger students be *introduced* to the story starters marked with a (B). Of course, later, they need not stick to these exclusively. With some of the (B) stories there is greater challenge and encouragement to add detail or embellish in the Writing Help. Therefore, all (B) stories are not just for beginners.

### (I)—Intense.

These stories are more intense. They are especially good for the reluctant writer and provide greater opportunity for Exciting Writing. I’ve written many of them with boys in mind, such as “A Man-eating Tiger,” which was written with help from my husband Dean.

## Unmarked Stories

The unmarked stories are of varying levels of difficulty. They are more detailed, and involve greater interaction of characters as well as more complex characterizations. They have less predictable outcomes, and allow for a wider range of possibilities for plot direction than do the (B) stories. They are not quite as intense as those marked (I).

# 🐉 How to Use the Story Starters 🐉

**H**ere are the three basic steps to using a story starter. First, a picture is selected that grabs the student's interest. Second, the story starter is read. Third, the student tells or writes what comes next and finishes the story.

During the years that my children and I did story starters together we used four methods—variations on the basic three steps. The children, each at their own pace, progressed through them. Thus, it is by practical experience, home teaching different ages and abilities, that I come to make these notes for you. I recommend that a student begin with method one and progress through to the others. Of course, if you are already quite familiar with narration you may decide with what method you would like to begin. Along with “Picture Talk” I have outlined the four methods below. On the pages that follow I supply further instruction for each method.

## ***Picture Talk***

Allowing young siblings to talk about a picture encourages them to be imaginative and more verbal. (A less intense picture is preferable.) Picture Talk prepares young children for writing.

Children in grades one through three may try a story starter once they have had practice narrating from books.

## ***A Peek at the Methods***

### **Oral Narration with Dictation**

The teacher reads the story starter aloud. The student “tells” what happens next. The teacher takes dictation and reads it back to him.

### **Oral Narration with Copywork**

After reading, telling and dictation, the teacher makes a model for the student to copy. He eventually does the exercises on sensory language in “Hints for Polishing.”

### **Written Narration—Rough Draft**

The teacher or student reads the story starter. The student writes a rough draft. He works with his teacher to polish and makes a second draft. The exercises in Hints for Polishing are recommended. He eventually tries a “Just Picture.”

### **Working Independently**


The student reads and writes on his own. The teacher may help with polishing. He does all the exercises in Hints for Polishing, goes on to Just Pictures and reads “A Lesson on the Basic Elements of a Story.”

## ***Before Embarking***

Read “Introduction to the Story Starters” silently to yourself. Read it aloud to your student with enthusiasm as a sort of pep talk the day he attempts his first story. Students working independently with method level four may read it to themselves but (since home teaching is relational) I think it would be a nice touch to read it to them.

## 🐉 Four Methods 🐉

### Method One: ORAL NARRATION

 Level one is a good place to begin for a young student—or a student of any grade—who is attempting creative narration for the first time. Start here, also, if your student has experienced discouragement with writing. Level one is the first step in getting the wheels turning and the juices flowing in a reluctant writer.

Oral narration, also known as oral composition, is “writing” in which the student does not actually write anything down. Robert Louis Stevenson, when a young boy, was frequently ill and had to spend much time in his bed recovering. To pass the time, his nanny would read aloud to him. Young Stevenson would also narrate his own little stories to his nanny while she took dictation. Could this have been his preparation for becoming a writer of stories when he was older? Undoubtedly.

These story starters are exercises in creating content. I suggest that the novice be permitted to flesh out the story orally, unencumbered by the process of putting pencil to paper. Some students may like to record their compositions on a tape recorder.

1. Select a picture that invokes curiosity. I most often let my students select one themselves. After they have done several stories, I eventually get my turn to choose one. (This provides more challenge, unless they have chosen the challenging ones first.) Stories marked with a (B) are for beginners of any age, but of course you are not confined to these.
2. Read aloud the story starter to your student with enthusiasm. Have a good time.
3. Let the student pause to think and sympathize with the characters.

These moments of contemplation are necessary. If a child responds instantly with “I can’t think of anything” tell him that this is because he needs to pause to think. “Longer than a split second, if you please,” I have said with a smile.

After some quiet, invite dialogue if necessary. Suggest that he run the scene in his head as if he were watching a film. Can he see the people or animals in the picture moving? What is

happening? What are the people saying? Imagination takes work. Only by experience do the wheels of imagination turn more easily. In time he will be able to write with more spontaneity. “What else?” is what I’ve asked my students (with a ring of expectation in my voice) when I’ve wished them to tell me more. “Okay, good. What else?” I say again, continuing to give my full attention, and the narration unfolds.

Writing Help provides guided questions for those who want it.

#### 4. Take dictation from his narration.

You will probably resort to scribbling, as I have, since a student can talk faster than you can write. Try not, however, to slow down your child too much while his creative juices are flowing. He will slow down just a bit if you require that he pause between phrases or sentences. To allow the student a more uninterrupted flow of words, I’ve developed a sort of shorthand over my years of hearing narrations. For instance, instead of spelling out the word “the” I just write a “t.” “With” is a “w.” I often leave out some vowels, like this: T hors rn w grt spd (The horse ran with great speed). After step four, I make a clean copy so that I can collect the narrations in a notebook. At the end of the semester I can encourage the student by showing him the notebook and saying, “Look at all the writing you have done!”

#### 5. Read his narration back to him enthusiastically. We always enjoy this step.

Do not nit-pick at this beginning stage or be concerned with polishing. Little suggestions for improving his writing (or the story) as well as any light editing should be attempted only after the student has done a number of story starters. (See #4 in Method Two).

### ***Having Trouble?***

If your reluctant writer is of a young age and is having trouble with story starters, discreetly postpone these lessons for a while. Continue reading aloud to your child, feeding his mind and heart with interesting and well-written books, requiring him to narrate. Try a story starter again after your child has become a bit more fluent with narration.

If your child is in junior high or older and having trouble, take heart. Patiently plod ahead. It may take more than several stories (and some months) for greater creativity to develop or for that certain story to ignite the right spark.

## Method Two: ORAL NARRATION WITH COPYWORK

1. Select a picture that grabs the student's interest. Read aloud the story starter enthusiastically. Have a good time.
2. Let him pause to think and sympathize. Refer to Writing Help if desired.
3. Take dictation from his narration.
4. Read his story back to him with enthusiasm. Have a good time with this, too.  
 Point out something you like about it. Ask him if there is anything else he would like to add. The next day, suggest one or two ways he may improve his writing. For instance, suggest that he provide more detail, some sensory language, a bit more conversation, etc. "This is good. I like this, but *show* us the alligator by describing it more." (See note below.)
5. Assign copy-work from your model.

If you would like your child to write out his story make a model from your dictation using the same penmanship style you would like him to use. Require him to copy from your neat model. This provides him with all the proper spelling and punctuation. *The emphasis in this book is on content and on getting the student to narrate*, but he will also gain practice in spelling and punctuation simply by doing copy-work. Photocopy the picture and story starter from the book to accompany his paper, if you'd like.

A younger student's copy-work may take several sessions over a few days to complete. You decide how many (or which) stories are to be copied or kept in a notebook.

Note: At some point have the child do the exercises on Sensory Language in the section "Hints for Polishing."

## Method Three: WRITTEN NARRATION—ROUGH DRAFT

1. You or the child selects a picture. Either you read the story starter aloud or the student reads it to himself.
2. He writes his creative narration in the form of a rough draft. If it is an intense situation, you may suggest that each new phrase or sentence begin on a new line, so that he can get his impressions down on paper faster. Phrasing, however, is not mandatory.
3. He is invited to use the Writing Help provided at the end of the story starter. He can polish with your help on the next day if you want to keep the lesson short. (Younger students give better attention to shorter lessons.) Or, polish after a suitable break.

Initial excitement may usher in the need for continuity. In this case, feel free to have a longer lesson to accommodate the desire to stay on a roll.

4. Make a model from his worked-over rough draft (we can call this a second draft), providing all the correct spelling and punctuation for him.
5. After doing a number of story starter exercises, at some point read over the section Hints for Polishing. Do the topics one day at a time. Explore with him ways to polish the content of the writing (perhaps adding vivid verbs, artful adjectives, sensory language, etc. for finer description.) These lessons, however, are of secondary importance.

### ***Spelling & Punctuation***

If you notice that a commonly used word is misspelled in the rough draft and ask your student how to spell it, he will probably spell it out correctly for you. Errors in spelling are typical when a student is concentrating on content and the creative aspect of writing is at work. You can ask him to help you polish it by asking, “Isn’t there a word here that needs to be capitalized?” “Quotation marks are needed where?” If he has been taught these things, he will probably correct his work without difficulty.

### ***Rough, Rough Drafts***

I used the model copy-work method for some years with oral and written narration with my son because his rough drafts were very rough and because it eliminated the need for making red proofreader’s marks all over his paper. I kept a list of his misspelled words for separate study. I did not point out *everything* that needed correction, but made note of it for separate study, also.

### ***When No Model Is Needed***

I had a student whose rough drafts were not so rough. She produced a much cleaner copy. Therefore, she could then make a polished copy (a second draft) from her own rough draft. Some students may not need the help of a written model. During the polishing-up stage, she looked up for herself words in the dictionary or thesaurus.

### ***Word Processing***

Older students who have learned to type enjoy editing their work on the computer. Reworking the story and making major content changes are more easily done on the computer. It amazes me that Charles Dickens wrote his extensive novels without a word processor!

### ***Just Pictures***

If your student has completed a number of story starters and has become more proficient at expressing himself, he might like to try a “Just Picture.” With Just Pictures he will be challenged to develop his own characters, describe the setting, and make up the entire story himself.

After writing a few of his own stories to these pictures your student may be ready for the additional challenge provided in “A Lesson on the Basic Elements of a Story,” which is written to the student.

### **Method Four: WORKING INDEPENDENTLY**

This level of writer may be an older student who has experience in both oral and written narration. Or perhaps this student is younger, but is innately keen on writing, and can work independently.

1. The student chooses a picture and reads the story starter to himself.
2. He writes a rough draft of his story.
3. He reads it aloud to you.
4. You provide encouraging comments for some light editing to help him polish. He writes a second or third draft. If you and he haven't already done so, read over the section Hints for Polishing. Do the topics one day at a time.
5. If the student has become proficient at expressing himself, suggest that he write a whole story with Just Pictures. In the introduction of Just Pictures is “A Lesson on the Basic Elements of a Story,” which is written to the student and will provide additional challenge.


### ***A note on polishing, for perfectionists only:***

Keep in mind that these story starters are predominately exercises in imaginative creativity and the kind of descriptive writing a student would not have the opportunity to use elsewhere. Save the larger “improvement” muscles for formal essay writing.

# A Word About Internal Motivation and Grading

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## Satisfying Ideas

 wrote *Story Starters* to create a schoolbook from which children like to work. Yet it is a mistake to think that all lessons must be fun and easy. Rather, they should be interesting and satisfying, so that minds grow in knowledge. Children's growing bodies thrive on nutritious food. As Charlotte Mason said, "Ideas are to the mind what food is to the body" therefore, children's lessons ought to provide nutritious ideas. Ideas give us something to think about. Ideas are food for thought. An idea may be as small as a seed. Though quite small, it has just the right amount of life in it to develop and branch into a whole panoply of thought, as the mind makes its own associations. This process makes learning satisfying and enjoyable for children. To supply children with interesting ideas for writing was my aim in *Story Starters*.

## Grades

"What about grading?" some are sure to ask. Here is my suggestion. If your student is in eighth grade or lower, do not grade. Instead, give your student credit for his diligent effort. Write an evaluation of his progress if you desire.

## Interest—A Little Pearl of Great Value

In Charlotte Mason's practical philosophy, attentive interest in what the student is learning is promoted. Interest is a little pearl of great value. It creates a pleasant and valuable atmosphere in the homeschool. Unhappily, in the lives of many children, their progress is unceasingly measured and attention thus becomes focused on this continual measuring. What children are learning should be of more importance (and of more interest) than the grade on the report card. The fact that you are giving your child some personal attention with *Story Starters*—that you, also, take an interest in the work—is preferable to flattering praise, or tangible rewards such as happy face stickers, grades, M&Ms, etc. We wish to foster internal motivation in the student so that he sees that the activity of writing is satisfying in and

of itself. We want him to have the experience that he is creating something that can be satisfying, especially when someone else appreciates it. External motivators have been proven to lessen interest in the learning activity.

## Awaken a Child's Curiosity

If the learning activity becomes a means to a reward, the attention is on the reward (or praise of progress—the grade) rather than the value of the activity. Children are trained in schools to learn something because it will be on the test (or count for the grade), not because it is good to know. This is why it is helpful to awaken children's curiosity with a question or two that draws interest. It is also helpful to tell children what it is about the learning activity that is of value. (I have done this for you below.)

## Grading: For High School Only

Some of you might be thinking, "This educational philosophy sounds all well and good, but my student is in high school and we must grade work that is to contribute to high school transcripts. Please suggest some way to evaluate a student's work that will facilitate necessary grading."

Here are two suggestions for grading the exercises in *Story Starters*.

- 1) If *Story Starters* is being used as supplementary material to an existing English course, consider it "extra credit," or consider giving the student more "points," which would enhance the student's overall grade for the subject.
- 2) If you are using this book as a one-semester course, here is a sample point system.
  - 18 points is a C, 19 points is a B, 20 points is an A, 21 points is an A+
  - Give your student 18 points if he writes (free-flowing) at least a sizable paragraph typed or a whole page handwritten. His paragraph ought to reflect an affinity for the story starter plot and characters. Does his writing show that he is really getting "into" the story with at least a quiet element of enthusiasm?

Remind your student to include what he learned in Hints for Polishing.

- Give 1 point for at least one vivid verb.
- It could be added during the polishing stage. Some of the story starters provide vivid verb suggestions.

- Give 1 point for an artful adjective.  
This also could be added during a second or third draft.
- Give 1 point for sensory language.  
Has he described anything in the story by way of the five senses? If not, where can he add some description?

## A Warning

I ardently appeal to you not to reveal the above grading system to your high school student during his first attempts at creative writing. Let the student write, write, write, unencumbered—as is emphatically mentioned throughout this book. After he works on a good number of stories, let him later choose which ones he would like to improve upon to count toward a grade.

# What Is the Value of this Learning Activity?

## Imagination



First, to add a student's creative narration to a story will exercise his muscles of imagination. Imagination grows with use. It is a necessary and pleasing mental capacity that works in conjunction with other capacities.

*The soul without imagination is what an observatory would be without a telescope.*

H.W. Beecher

## Narration

Story starters give the child an opportunity to tell. Much of the paper work given to children seems to be that of filling in blanks, choosing from multiple choice or true and false statements. The common worksheet enables ease of grading. It does not provide, however, the opportunity for the child to articulate his answers—to explain how or why. For a child to tell about something in his own words is to be exceedingly more verbal. Even to compose two sentences requires far more intelligence than to fill in a blank. The student is using more brainpower. His narrating is developing his verbal skills naturally and powerfully. Voila, he is writing.

## Reason

With story starters the student makes use of reason. He is invited to think in terms of cause and effect, and is required to use logic. While considering a natural and convincing consequence to actions taken in the story starter, he will be considering what will be likely to occur next—what will be a logical or reasonable outcome. In many of my stories, I provided the cause and the student provides the effect. He may decide however, to cleverly give the story an unlikely or surprise ending.

## Emotion

Ample opportunity is provided for your student to write in ways he may never have written before—to write with emotion, as explained in “Exciting Writing.”

## Problem-Solving

In many of my stories there is tension and conflict. A problem is presented that begs to be solved. Solving the problem (that pulls on the emotions as well as the reason) will be creating a good story—a story that has conflict resolution.

## Vocabulary

Each story starter is a lesson in becoming more literate. The Writing Help section that follows most of the stories helps the student to be more literary-minded. He can use the hints, clues, and suggestions to help him create a good story. Guided by the occasional question, he is to fill out or polish his writing.

Some of the vocabulary in the story starters may be unfamiliar to students. I have placed an asterisk before them and put the definition at the bottom of the page. In most cases however, children will apply meaning to the word from the surrounding text. This is the natural way they develop their vocabulary.