

Exploring America

Exploring America provides material for one entire school year in three subjects: American history, English, and Bible. To complete one credit in American history, one credit in English, and one credit in Bible, the student must read the text in *Exploring America Part 1* and *Part 2* and complete the weekly and daily assignments as they are given in those volumes.

Students should complete each day's assignments on that day. The actual time spent on each subject on a given day will vary, but you should allow your student about 2 1/2 to 3 hours per day to complete all the assignments.

We believe that you are in charge of your child's education and that you know best how to use this material to educate your child. We provide you with tools and instructions, but we encourage you to tailor them to fit your child's interests and abilities and your family's situation and philosophy. You might need to experiment with the curriculum for two or three weeks to know how your student can use it most effectively in your situation. Being able to do this is one of the benefits of homeschooling!

Course Descriptions

You can use the following course descriptions as you develop your school records, produce a high school transcript, or report grades.

American History. The student will survey American history from the time of the Native Americans and first European explorers through the administration of Barack Obama. The course discusses actions and developments on the national level, especially involving the Federal government, as well as issues and events in American culture. A special emphasis is placed on the role of slavery and subsequent racial issues in American history. The student will read a significant number of original documents and speeches while studying the narrative of lessons.

English (American Literature and Composition). The student will read classic works of American literature, from *The Scarlet Letter* to *The Giver*. The literature will include novels, short stories, essays, autobiographies,

memoirs, poetry, and hymns. Emphasis is placed on how the literature reflects the historical settings in which the works are set. The student also has several writing assignments. Most of these are based on historical issues from the various periods of world history. The writing assignments take several forms, including essays, editorials, speeches, and letters. A research paper is assigned in the second half of the course [see page xii in *Part I*]. *Note: You also have the option of assigning other kinds of projects for each unit as alternatives to writing. You will need to decide how often your student will complete a writing assignment and how often he or she will complete another project.*

Bible: Issues in American Christianity. The student will examine developments in American religious history, from the role of religion in the founding of the colonies to contemporary moral and spiritual issues such as abortion and evolution. The student will study American religious movements such as the First and Second Great Awakenings, Fundamentalism, and religious groups founded in America. The student will also study how religion and spirituality have played a role in the unfolding of American history. Bible studies bring Biblical teachings to bear on the historical issues discussed.

Student Review Pack

The *Student Review Pack* has a great deal of material that you might find helpful for increasing your student's understanding of the course and for giving you a way to know and grade your student's grasp of the content. It is an optional supplement that contains the following three components.

The *Student Review* includes review questions on each lesson and on some of the readings from *American Voices* and literary analysis of the books assigned in the curriculum. (The literary analysis is also available on our website through the link given on page 8.)

The *Quiz and Exam Book* has a quiz to be taken at the end of each unit. In addition, after every five units, it has a history exam, an English exam, and a Bible exam. That makes a total of six exams in each subject over the course of the year.

The *Answer Key* contains answers for all of the review questions and for the quizzes and exams.

Suggestions for Grading

To earn credit in American history, English, and Bible, the student is expected to complete the assignments listed on the second page of each unit introduction and at the end of each lesson, except for the *Student Review*, which is optional. A weekly assignment checklist is available on our website.

You have several activities that you can include in arriving at a grade for each subject. These activities include: memory work; unit projects (writing assignments and hands-on projects); review questions for each lesson, for the readings in *American Voices*, and for the literature selections; unit quizzes on history; and exams every five weeks on history, English, and Bible. You can give equal weight to each element, or you might choose to give different weight to each component.

Depending on the chosen topic, you might choose to grade some of the weekly writing assignments as history or Bible assignments instead of as English assignments. You might choose to grade some of the readings in *American Voices* as Bible assignments when they deal with topics that are related to Bible study. You might also count some of the literature titles as English or Bible work. For instance, you might count *Co. Aytch* and *Up From Slavery* as reading for history. You might count *In His Steps* and *Miracle in the Hills* as part of the Bible credit.

Grades are usually assigned on a percentage basis for an individual assignment and as letter grades for a semester on the basis of the cumulative assignment grades. We recommend giving an A if the average weighted grade is 90% or above, giving a B for 80-89%, a C for 70-79%, and a D for 60-69%.

If your child consistently gets grades lower than 60%, you might need to evaluate his readiness to study a course with this level of difficulty. On the other hand, you might need to adjust your expectations. You might consider an additional grading element based on your perception of your child's overall grasp of the material. This is another advantage of homeschooling: you can judge how well your child understands the material and how he or she is growing from the study in ways that are not reflected by test and assignment scores.

We designed this curriculum to cover what we believe a high school student should learn about American history. Helping a student pass a CLEP or AP test was not our primary goal. However, this course provides a good foundation for preparing for those tests, combined with one of the test preparation books that are available.

Teaching Writing

The three most important activities to help students write well are reading good writing, writing as frequently as possible, and having his or her writing critiqued by an experienced writer or teacher.

You can find many aids to help you in teaching writing. The Online Writing Lab from Purdue University is an excellent source that is available on the Internet. We have found *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White to be concise and helpful. This book is available from Notgrass Company and many other sources.

Other resources that have been recommended to us include *The Elegant Essay* by Lesha Myers, *Format Writing* by Frode Jensen, *Writing Skills* by Diana Hanbury King, and *Teaching the Essay* and *Teaching the Research Paper* by Robin Finley. The Institute for Excellence in Writing offers comprehensive instructional courses, and Reconciliation Press offers writing instruction services. These suggestions are offered as resources you can investigate. We do not endorse one program over another.

Grading Writing Assignments

Teaching writing skills can sometimes feel more like an art than a science. We know good writing when we read it, but trying to explain why we like it is like trying to explain why we like a particular flavor of ice cream. Good writing engages the reader and makes him or her want to keep reading. It covers the subject well and uses proper mechanics (spelling, grammar, and punctuation). Good writing informs, inspires, and sometimes challenges the reader. Above all, good writing says something of significance.

Because defining good writing is difficult, giving a grade to a writing assignment can be somewhat subjective. What is the difference, for example, between an A paper and a B paper? One student might write the best that he or she can, and it still might not be as good as what another student writes with less effort. What grade should you assign to that first student's work? In addition, how can the grades you give reflect a student's improvement over the course of a year? After all, we hope that the student will be writing better at the end of the year than at the beginning.

A grade for a writing assignment usually has two elements: one is mechanics, and the other is coverage of the subject matter. Noting errors in spelling and punctuation is relatively easy. Misused words and awkward sentences might be more difficult to detect. The most difficult part of

grading is determining whether or not the paper is organized well and covers the topic adequately.

Beginning with the highest possible grade of 100, you might want to take a point off for every misspelled word, punctuation error, or grammatical error. An awkward sentence might count two or three points off. A paragraph that does not flow well or have a clear purpose might cost five to eight points. You can also consider whether the paper is well-expressed but has mechanical errors as opposed to its being poorly expressed but mechanically good. We suggest not giving a grade on the writing assignment until the student submits the final version of the assignment. Use the rough draft as a teaching opportunity. It is fair to have higher expectations later in the course. Also, if a student has numerous mechanical or grammatical errors in a paper, covering the paper with red ink might do more harm than good. Instead, focus on what appear to be the three most serious or common mistakes and don't worry about the rest at that point. When the student has corrected these problems, move on to other problems to correct in later papers.

The website of the College Board, which administers the SAT and CLEP examinations, has an Essay Scoring Guide that its graders use. On their website, you can read this guide and also read sample essays and see why those essays received the scores they did. In addition, the National Assessment of Educational Progress program of the U.S. Department of Education has information available online about its writing assessment.

You will probably find it helpful to have someone outside your family read one or more of your student's essays and give constructive feedback at some point during the school year.

Maps and Timelines

If you want map resources to supplement your study of *Exploring America*, consider *Uncle Josh's Outline Map Book* or *Uncle Josh's Outline Map Collection CD-ROM* from Geography Matters. Other available resources are the *maps.com United States History Atlas*, the *Hammond Atlas of United States History*, and *U.S. History Map Activities* by Walch Education.

Timelines of U.S. history are available from Geography Matters and other publishers. You might consider creating your own timeline in the format that works best for you, such as a chart, successive pages in a book, or a long sheet you can post on a wall.

Notes About the Literature

These are the twelve books we choose for the English component of *Exploring America*:

- Units 2-3: *The Scarlet Letter*
- Units 6-7: *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*
- Unit 8: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- Units 9-11: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- Units 12-13: *Co. Aytch* (pronounced Company "H")
- Unit 15: *Humorous Stories and Sketches*
- Units 16-17: *In His Steps*
- Unit 18: *Up From Slavery*
- Unit 19: *Mama's Bank Account*
- Units 20-21: *Miracle in the Hills*
- Units 22-23: *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Unit 27: *The Giver*

We chose literature that is upbuilding, that won't assault your faith or sense of decency. Some of the books we included have words or ideas with which you will be uncomfortable (as we are). We want to let you know about them in case you want to do some editing before your child reads the books or in case you want to substitute another book. You might want a parent to read a book aloud to the student and skip over inappropriate words. Our family has done that with several of these books.

However you decide to use them, we believe that the overall impact of these books for good outweighs the use of inappropriate words. A few of the books use the derogatory form of Negro, which we do not use or encourage but which was the cultural practice in the settings of those books. The editions listed below are the ones that are available from Notgrass Company.

The Scarlet Letter (Dover)

This novel begins with an act of adultery having already taken place. The book focuses on what happens in the community and with individuals as a result of that sin. There are no graphic scenes or suggestive language.

Narrative of the Life of David Crockett (University of Nebraska)

- References to drinking and getting drunk (pages 30, 42, 150, 153)
- Graphic descriptions of the horrors of war (pages 88-89, 105, 109-110, 122)
- Expletives used (pages 39, 95)

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Dover)

- Expletives used, some written as d— (pages 4, 15, 53, 56, 57, 58, 74)
- Reference to sexual exploitation of slaves (page 31)

Uncle Tom's Cabin (Dover)

- The Lord's name or an abbreviation of it is used as an exclamation numerous times.
- The treatment that Tom receives at the hands of Simon Legree is quite brutal.

Co. Aytch (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster)

- Expletives or the Lord's name used as exclamation (pages 16, 25, 39, 49, 64, 67, 72, 92-93, 103, 123, 157, 164, 166-169, 174, 204, 226, 234, 238)
- Suggestive joke (page 75)
- Many of the descriptions of injuries and death in battle are quite graphic.

To Kill a Mockingbird (Warner Books)

This book has several uses of the derogatory form of Negro, several uses of the Lord's name as an exclamation (especially harsh ones on pages 194 and 274), a few references to women as whores or sluts, and several instances of the h-word and the d-word. Other expletives or questionable topics are found on pages 5, 54-55, 128, and 161. A key element of the latter part of the book is a white girl accusing a black man of assaulting her.

To Kill a Mockingbird deals with difficult subjects such as racism, rape, and other sinful attitudes and actions. It helps readers understand the social environment in the South in the early 20th century, but it does so quite realistically. This is a good book for parents to read aloud to the family, or at least to discuss with their children.

The Giver (Laurel Leaf/Random House)

This novel describes a community that appears to be perfect but in fact is not. There is a brief reference to a boy beginning to feel "Stirrings" toward a girl, and this is handled by his parents giving him pills. Older persons are "released," and this is found to mean that they are euthanized. The father of the main character is a nurturer of newborns, and he is found to have taken the life of a baby that is not thriving.

Alternate Literature Selections

If you choose not to use one or more of the books that we suggest for this curriculum, here are some other titles for you to consider:

- Instead of *The Scarlet Letter*, you might use *Calico Bush* by Rachel Field. This 1932 Newbery Honor book is set in northern Maine in 1743.
- Instead of *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*, you might use one of James Fenimore Cooper's novels.
- Instead of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, you might use *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* by Jean Lee Latham. This 1956 Newbery Medal book is an historical novel about the career of an American who developed important navigational tools.
- Instead of *Co. Aytch*, you might use *Across Five Aprils* by Irene Hunt. This 1965 Newbery Honor book is set during the Civil War.
- Any of the *Little House* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder would be excellent for learning about life on the American frontier in the late 1800s.
- *Sgt. York: His Life, Legend, and Legacy* by John Perry is a good account by a Christian writer about the World War I hero's entire life. The book contains two curse words, both in quotations by people other than York.
- Instead of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you might use *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, by Mildred Taylor. This 1977 Newbery Medal book is set in Mississippi in the 1930s.

For links to other resources, a unit assignment checklist,
and ideas for using this curriculum
in a co-op or other group, visit:

www.notgrass.com/ealinks