

Waldorf Essentials

A Journey through Waldorf Grade 1

SAMPLE



*By Melisa Nielsen
Edited by Erik Nielsen*

A Journey Through Waldorf
Homeschooling
Grade One



by Melissa & Erik Nielsen

If you have questions about grade 1 placement, please drop us a note, we are happy to help.
waldorfessentials@gmail.com

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A portion of Chapter 2:

Children in the next stage, the one you are about to discover, need a bit more. You are still tasked with providing a happy place to live and be, but you also have a new set of responsibilities. After age seven, children are very much in their feeling stage of soul development. They are understanding things a bit differently and behaviors might arise, especially in the time between ages six or seven that really frustrate parents if they are not ready for these changes. They are leaving Eden per se and are moving on to the “lone and dreary world.”

In Waldorf circles, this time is often compared to Adam and Eve leaving Eden. While it was a wonderful time in the garden, they could not progress there. The garden was a playpen of wonderful things but in order for growth to occur, Adam and Eve had to transgress, God had to send them on to the next place. As a parent, this can be a challenge, but only if you let it! Stay on top of your game by staying connected, then watch for the changes. Some children withdraw and become sad during this time. Michael Hadley Burton, in his book *In the Light of a Child* describes this time very beautifully:

“Something comes between Nature and the soul, and the child becomes aware of himself as a unique individual whose inner life confronts another world ‘outside.’ This situation can mean for many children times of great loneliness. Shadows begin to be cast by a gradual deepening of the process of thinking. This activity, which should one day restore the human being to a conscious, knowing relationship to life, filled everywhere with the presence of God, is experienced at first as something which divides.”

During this time, providing firm boundaries, loving limits and wonderful school lessons can help children bridge this gap they may be feeling, this new place where life doesn't seem quite so rosy anymore. This age group can be very emotionally taxing for moms. I have three in this place right now and many days Erik and I feel like we are playing mental gymnastics! Playing with our four-year old, who is in a very physically taxing place is often a pleasing escape to the responsibilities of constantly being “on task” for this older set. Changes that are coming between now and 14 are going to stretch you as a parent. As you begin to approach age nine, you will find you are being challenged more and more. The time to set those firm (but loving) limits is now. Many attachment parenting couples struggle with this. Being firm is not being mean. Being firm is actually a very loving place to be. Children need direction and they need to know that you will be there to guide them. This stage also needs to know that you answer to a higher authority. These children are learning to control their will forces and need to have parents that are also actively controlling their own will. They need to feel reverence in the home and know that the adults caring for them are striving with respect and responsibility. If we do not cultivate natural authority and respect in them now, they will struggle throughout their lives in inappropriate rebellion. WOW... what did I just say? Yep! Think about rebellion... it is never wrong to question a situation where unrighteous dominion is being practiced. No one deserves abuse; everyone should be given respect and love. These are situations worthy of rebellion. All of us know (or maybe we were or are) someone who rebels just for the sake of rebelling. Just for the sake of stirring things up. One phrase that I often hear teens use is “whatever, I'll do what I want.” It bites just to type it, couple that with a popular commercial on television prompting adults to have all they want right now by upping their credit card spending limit to the tune of the Queen song *I Want It All* and it sets our society up to rebel against all things and fulfill the urges of the natural man. We live in a time where as a culture we are trying to find balance between our abundance and our duty to each other and our planet. Teaching our children with firm and loving limits is the beginning of helping them understand the appropriate times to stand up and fight verses times when

we should hold the peace. This journey will be a constant will building activity for you that can in turn be passed on to your children.

Children in the next phase, termed “adolescence” by Steiner, have different needs as well. While the youngest stage is all about imitation, the second about understanding authority and living through their feelings, this final stage of childhood marks the real birth of the intellect. Roberto Trostli gives many great descriptions of this time period in his book *Rhythms of Learning*, this is one:

“Because adolescents experience life so differently than before, they often feel ill at ease in the world. Steiner describes the reason for these anxious feelings. He says that what young children brought from the pre-earthly existence was gradually interwoven with their whole being, but at the onset of puberty, adolescents feel cast out of the spiritual world. Adolescents unconsciously compare the world that they left behind with the world they have entered; this brings about great inner upheaval. ... the high school curriculum must address adolescents’ feelings of alienation by strengthening their sense of self and connecting them to other people and to the world.”

It is so rewarding to watch our children grow and having this understanding will help to shape how you teach and understand the “why” behind the material and its introduction.

You will often hear references to the different “bodies.” This can be very confusing when you first come to the method and many Christians might worry that this view will conflict with their spiritual teachings. It is important to view Steiner both spiritually *and* developmentally. His work is intertwined for he saw everything thing as working together. I will give some basic descriptions in this chapter, and then discuss it a bit more in depth in the section on grade one readiness. I have also included on the companion materials for this curriculum, some podcasts that we have done on this topic and others pertaining to grade one.

Each of us, humans, animals, plants and minerals all have a physical body. This physical body is governed by processes and chemical laws. Humans, animals and plants also have an etheric body or life body. This is the body that enables us to live and grow. Steiner describes this body:

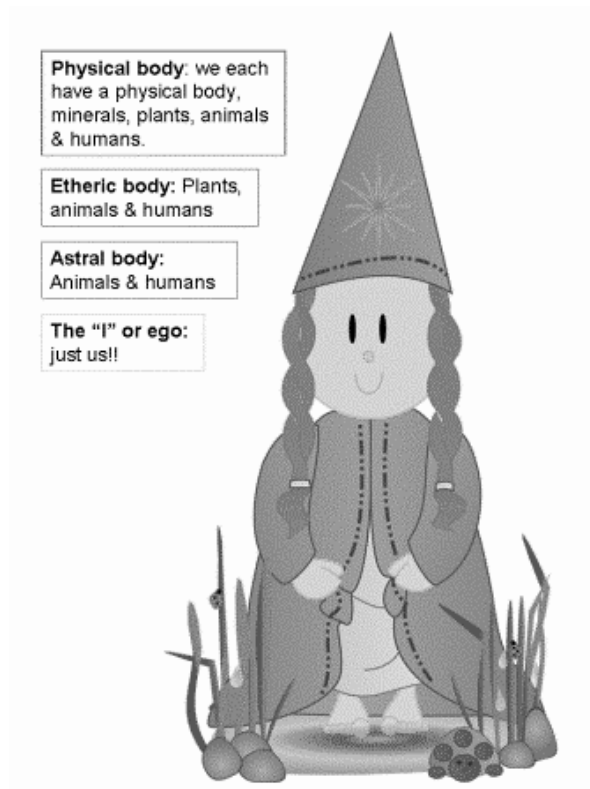
“The life-body works in a formative way on the substances and forces of the physical body and thus brings about the phenomena of growth, reproduction, and inner movement of vital body fluids. It is therefore the builder and shaper of the physical body, its inhabitant and architect.”

Animals and humans have an astral body. Steiner sometimes called this the “sentient body” – it allows us to perceive sensations and be conscious. Plants do not have this body. Even though they are changed by their environment, these are shown in the etheric level through growth, reproduction, etc. The astral body gives humans and animals a chance to experience their inner world, inner life. The final body is one that is unique to humans, the ego or “I.” I think Steiner’s description is best:

“This little word “I,” as used in our language, is a name that differs from all other names. Appropriate reflection on the nature of this name opens up an approach to understanding human nature in a deeper sense. Any other name can be applied to the corresponding object by all of us in the same way. Everyone can call a table “table” and a chair “chair.” But this is not true when it comes to the name “I.” No one can use it to mean someone else; we can only call ourselves “I.”

This ego or “I” sets us apart and is one thing that we each have as a connection to God, for we are told from a young age that we are all created in his image. This ego allows us to have freedom, to love, to have responsibilities and to give back.

Having these bodies and life stages in mind as you work your way through the Waldorf curriculum will help you with the “why” questions. I encourage you to go deeper and form understandings that work for you. Perhaps this graphic will help.



A portion of Chapter 6:

Chapter 6 Grade One Overview

“Three salient features characterize the Waldorf approach to education:

1. Waldorf education is based on a developmental approach that addresses the changing needs of the growing child and maturing adolescent.

2. Waldorf teachers strive to transform education into an art that educates the whole child – the heart and the hands as well as the head.

3. Waldorf schools are committed to developing capacities as well as skills

so that their students will become self-aware, compassionate individuals with a sense of responsibility for the Earth.” ~ Roberto Trostli, Rhythms of Learning

Is your child ready? There are so many factors that go into grade one readiness. Unfortunately our society is so quick to get these children from the womb to college that we often do not question it. By now you know that Waldorf education is different! Steiner gave some pretty clear indications for readiness. These were not just reading readiness signals but also for academic work in general. Steiner’s counsel was often “seven springs” meaning that a child should be seven or about there. I used to be okay counseling moms with children that are six and four months to start grade one, but after watching my own children and consulting with countless families, I am very firm in believing the closer to age seven, the better. Children that are closer to seven generally are more ready to take direction and meet mom as a student than their counterparts that are even two or four months younger. The blessings of homeschooling allow you to shift activities so that you can start instruction closer to the age rather than the traditional grade. This doesn’t mean I would tell a child “you are still in kindergarten” – sadly, even the young ones know the grade system, I would affirm they are in grade one, but that is all they need to know. You are the teacher, you determine the material. Now I am not trying to frighten you! If you have a child that is on the younger side of grade one, take the environmental block that I have for May and make that your first lesson block, then move slowly through the curriculum, giving your child plenty of time. Remember that reading before age seven is not a quest, it is not a goal, and there will be rare exceptions of children that have learned to read entirely on their own, but remember this is rare. Now if you are new to the method and your child is already reading, don’t worry! Your child still needs the material of first grade. Remember that Waldorf is based on development and not on speed. If your child is already reading, do not discourage it; allow them to read to you for short periods each day from age appropriate material. Continue with the lessons as laid out, you are welcome to skip the letter introductions, or use them as handwriting practice, but the stories are a must for this age group. If you have questions about placing your child, feel free to email us, we are happy to help.

We spoke in chapter two a bit about the different “bodies” Steiner believed we all had. I want to expand on that now and why these bodies even come into play when we are discussing readiness, for first grade and life in general. One of my favorite authors, Joan Almon, has a wonderful piece on first grade readiness. She beautifully explains the changes in the bodies during the first seven year cycle.

“What does it mean when we say that a child shows the signs of first grade readiness, or as the Germans so wisely say, that a child is *schulreif* (ripe for school)? There are many changes in the child’s physical, emotional, social and mental life that one looks for, which can be listed and observed in a

fairly objective manner. But there is also a *qualitative* difference that is more difficult to describe, yet very important to sense. The good gardener knows from one day to the next when a piece of fruit is ripe for picking, and when this process is translated into childhood, it relates to Rudolf Steiner's statement that a whole new aspect of the individuality is born around the age of six or seven. This new birth is not as physical and clear-cut as the physical birth of the child, but it is an important time in the growth of the child. It is the underlying reality for the many changes that are visible around age six to seven."

We often think of life itself as a linear process, development doesn't really follow this as there are many other steps going on underneath. I like to think of a seed. It is alive, it will give life. It must be nourished; the living forces within the seed must break free from the outer shell in order to move on to the next part of its existence. This is not a linear process, for it was alive still as a seed. In order to take the next step, things had to happen. Joan compares it to the life of a caterpillar that spins a cocoon to become a butterfly. It can now fly when before it could only crawl. These are a lot like the forces at work in our bodies from birth to about age seven.

Joan goes on to say:

"At this time, Steiner describes the birth of a new body, which he calls the life body or etheric body. He goes on to describe two more periods of birth in the growing individual. The next is around age fourteen when the body of feelings, called the astral body, is born. And then at around age twenty-one, the Ego or individuality comes to birth. All of these are present in the human being from the embryological stage, but they are in protective sheaths in which they grow like the embryo in the womb until their time of birth is at hand."

By understanding this birth of bodies, we can begin to watch for these changes. We spoke in chapter two about leaving Eden; this becomes part of that process. A veil is parted and a new part of our children is born. They stand a bit firmer on the earth, are a bit more inquisitive about school subjects but still enjoy playing. Before now they have been entirely in a place of imitation and now they are ready to take direction. They are ready to move from the place of copying a loved one to learning from one. Just as we had to give them appropriate things to imitate, now we have to be ready to give them instruction.

There are very subtle changes that you can observe if you are careful. A child of four or five is capable of telling you how old they are by holding up their fingers. A few weeks ago, I was out and got a call from Samuel, he is four, to tell me about the wonderful cookies he and his sister had been baking. I asked, "How many did you have?" His simple, sweet reply was "This many." We were on the phone, I couldn't see how many "this many" was! Children of this age have not yet come to understand that the fingers are counting devices. Somewhere between six and seven they begin making this connection. They can do simple math facts without prompting.

In our age of technology, many children at five or early six seem to be "ready" for education. We have many parents begging us for permission to start early. "Oh my son is really ready for first grade, he does _____." These children still need to play. Play is so very important and humanity is the only species that ceases play after early childhood. More and more studies are coming into view reinforcing the need for play. These studies are revealing that children who are allowed to play fair better in later academics than their early educated peers, they seem to be more emotionally and socially

developed as well. Our babies have the rest of their lives to know how to read, but how many years will they want to serve you pretend tea and wooden toast?

Language Arts. Many families worry that Waldorf is weak in the areas of grammar, punctuation and other things covered in a traditional language arts program. When you can view the entire curriculum for a child grades one through 12, you will find the opposite is true. Waldorf makes good use of time and resources. One thing that has always been a joy to me is that there is NO separate grammar program needed, all skills are taught within the history and literature lesson blocks. In grade one, there is no emphasis on grammar, children are consumed with learning their letters and the beginning stages of reading. Painting, drawing, modeling and writing skills are taught as integrated parts of each lesson block, giving the child a full view. In second grade, concepts of verbs and nouns begin and they are carried through and deepened in grade three. Steiner believed that a child of age nine or 10 was primed and ready for an understanding of grammar as this is when they begin to write more on their own, before then, much of the written work is imitation or collaboration. All the concepts are built upon, a gentle layering process that leads to interest and understanding of the parts of speech. While I am by no means perfect, understanding the Waldorf approach to English and grammar has healed me in more ways that I could have ever imagined. I feel a bit like Eliza Doolittle some days.

Many children in a Waldorf school would only learn the capital letters in grade one, the lowercase would come later in grade one or even in grade two. I believe this is completely up to you. I have found it easy to introduce both side by side. If you have a younger first grader then it may be a good idea to only begin with the uppercase.

The story content for grade one should come from fairy tales. There is much recent debate over the use of Grimm's tales because they can seem so dark – we have to remember that we are reading these tales with our adult lenses on. Children have a much different experience of these stories. Steiner was very serious about the content of main lesson stories for each grade, in *Discussions with Teachers* he says:

“You see, when we receive the children in Class 1 we must first of all try to find the right material for telling and retelling stories. Through this telling of fairy tales, of legends, and also of outwardly realistic happenings, and through the children retelling these stories, we train their actual mode of speaking. We form the transition from dialect to educated speech. If we see to it that the child speaks correctly we lay the foundations for a correct style of writing.”

I found a wonderful article by William Harrer called *The Value of Grimm's Fairy Tales* where he shares some wonderful nuggets about the use of Grimm's tales for this age group:

“Rudolf Steiner inspired teachers to make use of the fairy tales in a much deeper and more extensive way than it had been done heretofore. It is a well known fact that fairy tales have their origin in the period of humanity's own childhood, in far-distant times when people lived in a naïve dreamlike state of soul, before the unfolding of intellectual capacities. According to the principles of biogenetic law, children pass briefly through the different stages of mankind's evolution. Children between the ages of four and eight correspond approximately in their development with that period of humanity's childhood in which fairy tales originated. An unspoiled child absorbs fairy tales during this period of its life, with eagerness similar to the hunger and intensity with which a baby absorbs its mother's milk.”

“The fact that the contents of the most famous fairy tales are to be found, in one form or another, in legends, mythologies and folklore of all nations seems to indicate that they all have the same origin. Whether they all came from Central Asia, as some authors claim, is to my mind questionable. I should rather imagine that fairy tales came into being in different localities much in the same way as today

various people might relate the same dream. They are imaginative pictures of successive stages of human development and probably were perceived independently in different countries. It is a quite frequent occurrence in the history of inventions that the same idea springs up in different localities simultaneously.”

This journey they are on as they leave Eden is a gradual awakening and fairy tales provide the support needed for this next phase of childhood. They are learning about their own personality and the vivid depictions of these fairy tales are therapy for the quest. They are the nourishment this age group needs.

A portion of A-Year-at-a-Glance

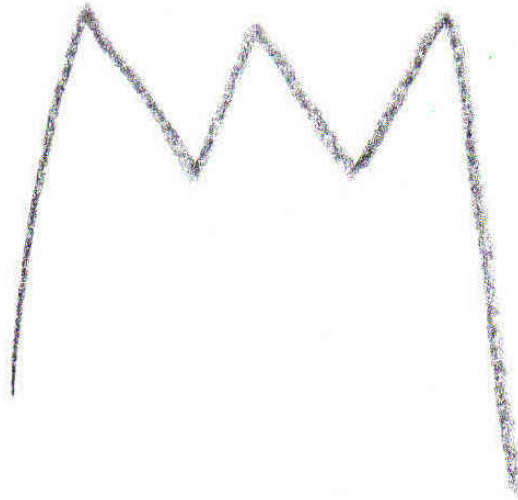
September	October	November
Letter introductions, form drawing, Michaelmas <input type="checkbox"/> 3 weeks letter introductions <input type="checkbox"/> 1 week Michaelmas	Letter introductions, form drawing, Halloween/All Souls <input type="checkbox"/> 3 weeks letter introductions <input type="checkbox"/> 1 week Halloween/All Souls	Letter introductions, form drawing, Martinmas, Thanksgiving <input type="checkbox"/> 2 weeks letter introductions <input type="checkbox"/> 1 week Martinmas <input type="checkbox"/> 1 week Thanksgiving

A portion of the weekly/daily guide

<p>Week 1 – introducing the story <i>The Wise Sophia</i>. This entire week is lesson 1. You can take the entire week or work in some painting practice in addition to the story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Tell the first part of the story and introduce the first form drawing. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell the second part of the story and introduce the second form drawing. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell the final part of week one and introduce the third form drawing. <input type="checkbox"/> Review together the first week of the story, this will begin to lay a foundation for summarizing. See if your child can retell the story to you and remember the forms. Spend time drawing what the family may look like to you, what about their farm? What are their surroundings? From there you can also draw or paint your own surroundings. 	<p>Week 2 - introducing letters M and V</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 2 – Tell the next part of the story and introduce this week’s form drawing. Introduce the letter M and tell the story of <i>Mount Simeli</i> and draw or paint about it. Draw the letter M. <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 3 – Have your child retell <i>Mt. Simeli</i> to you and come up with a short summary together for you or your child to write. Review the sound for the letter M. Take some time to look at your surrounding landscapes and the world’s geography as a whole. Do you live near mountains? If so plan a road trip together. <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 4 – Tell the next part of the story. Introduce the letter V and tell the story of <i>The Vagabonds</i>. Draw or paint about it. Draw the letter V. <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson 5 – Have your child retell <i>The Vagabonds</i> and write a summary together. Review the sound of V.
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Lesson 2 – After a full day of journeying, the family set up camp near a mountain. Joseph built a fire and Ben helped him pitch their tent. Once settled, Katie would receive her first lesson. Joseph would teach her about the letter M. He began to tell the magical story of *Mount Simeli*.

Letter introduced: M



Lesson 2 form.

Simeli Mountain by the Bros. Grimm

There were once two brothers, one rich and the other poor. The rich one, however, gave nothing to the poor one, and he gained a scanty living by trading in corn, and often did so badly that he had no bread for his wife and children. Once when he was wheeling a barrow through the forest he saw, on one side of him, a great, bare, naked-looking mountain, and as he had never seen it before, he stood still and stared at it with amazement. While he was thus standing he saw twelve great, wild men coming towards him, and as he believed they were robbers he pushed his barrow into the thicket, climbed up a tree, and waited to see what would happen. The twelve men, however, went to the mountain and cried, “Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, open”; and immediately the barren mountain opened down the middle, and the twelve went into it, and as soon as they were within, it shut. After a short time, however, it opened again, and the men came forth carrying heavy sacks on their shoulders, and when they were all once more in the daylight they said, “Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, shut thyself”; then the mountain closed together, and there was no longer any entrance to be seen to it, and the twelve went away. When they were quite out of sight the poor man got down from the tree, and was curious to know what really was secretly hidden in the mountain. So he went up to it and said, “Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, open”; and the mountain opened to him also. Then he went inside, and the whole mountain was a cavern full of silver and gold, and behind lay great piles of pearls and sparkling jewels, heaped up like corn. The poor man hardly knew what to do, and whether he might take any of these treasures for himself or not; but at last he filled his pockets with gold, and left the pearls and precious stones where they were. When he came out again he also said, “Semsi mountain, Semsi mountain, shut thyself”; and the mountain closed itself, and he went home with his barrow. Now he had no more cause for anxiety. He could buy bread for his wife and children with his gold, and had extra for wine. He lived joyously and uprightly, gave help to the poor, and did good where he

could. When the money came to an end he went to his brother, borrowed a cart and so he could haul more from the mountain. He still did not touch any of the most valuable things. After a time he had made three trips with his brother's cart to the mountain. The rich man could not figure out how his brother's fortune has changed and had become envious of his brother's possessions and comfortable way of life. He also wondered what his brother needed with his cart.. Then he thought of a cunning trick, and covered the bottom of the cart with pitch, and when he got the measure back a piece of money was sticking in it. He went at once to his brother and asked him, "What have you been hauling in my cart?" "Corn and barley," said the other. Then he showed him the piece of money, and threatened that if he did not tell the truth he would turn him in to the authorities. The poor man then told him everything, just as it had happened. The rich man decided he would take better advantage of the mountain's treasures. When he came to the mountain he cried, "Semsî mountain, Semsî mountain, open." The mountain opened, and he went inside it. There lay the treasures all before him, and for a long time he did not know where to start. He greedily grabbed as many precious stones as he could carry. He wished to carry his burden outside, but, as his heart and soul were entirely full of the treasures, he had forgotten the name of the mountain, and cried, "Simeli mountain, Simeli mountain, open." That was not the right name, and the mountain never stirred, but remained shut. He was alarmed, but the longer he thought about it the greater his confusion, and his treasures did him little good. In the evening the mountain opened, and the twelve robbers came in, and when they saw him they laughed, and cried out, "Fool! Did you think you could keep coming back and we wouldn't catch you?" Then he cried, "It was not I, it was my brother." The rich man begged for his life, but the robbers, satisfied that they had caught their man chopped off his head. THE END

With that, Joseph tucked Ben and Katie into their sleeping bags and the family drifted off to sleep.

After the story, draw or paint from it. Also, draw the letter M.