

Waldorf Essentials

Grade Eight

Blocks & Notes

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SAMPLE

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Introduction

It seems like I have dragged my feet on this volume for forever. Reflecting back on why I might have allowed my sanguine temperament to get the better of me, it just comes down to the amount of material that needs to be covered in this year. In teaching my own children, I always combined a lot of material from grades eight and nine together. Steiner's recommendations were to bring history current in grade eight and it just was never possible. I began talking to families that had children in Waldorf schools about the content of these two grades and each of them had positive and negative things to say, the negatives always fell around feeling that their child did not obtain the depth of the subjects that they wished they had. At least I wasn't alone! After much meditation, I split the history blocks a bit to shift some of them to grade nine. That volume will follow this one and the two will eventually be under the same cover. For now, enjoy, don't be too worried, take your time and remember this is supposed to be fun!

What you have here is a layout of the blocks from grade eight in a home setting. It is not intended in any way to mimic the school setting. I have laid out the blocks with suggested time frames. In some cases, I have also given a weekly layout as a suggestion of what topics to cover and how to cover them. At the end, you will find a scope and sequence for grade eight as well as references from Steiner and suggestions on meeting United States education standards for each subject. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at melisa@waldorfessentials.com

When you discharge a child from school you should have laid the foundations for him or her to be no longer tied to the body with every fibre of the soul; in thinking, feeling and will he must have become independent of the body. ~ Rudolf Steiner, Practical Advice to Teachers

Your 14-year-old. This year will in many ways be an extension of last year and a looking forward to next year. These kids feel a bit in the middle – just barely teens and not old enough to do much about it. They do have opinions. Their intellect is forming and they are really asking questions. You better know the answers! Do not be afraid, while they are very much in a place of working through how everything relates to them and the world, your preparation will get you through. You cover a lot of ground this year and they are ready.

I like what Trostli had to say in his book *Physics is Fun!*

“The innocence, wonder, and reverence they displayed as sixth graders are gone. The interest and curiosity that compelled them as seventh graders seem muted. “What’s the point?” asks the eighth grader; “Why do I need to know this?”

Our task is to relate them to the world, to help them see their space in it and allow them to come to conclusions on their own. We have helped them with knowledge and now they are forming judgments. They can work on their own a lot more than in the past so be sure to flex those muscles with plenty of writing assignments and grow those capacities even more. Give them opportunities to write plays, business letters, be a newspaper reporter and more.

How to use this guide. I have again left many spaces in this guide for you to fill in – become your own Steiner – study and prepare. I shy away from writing daily guides for grades seven and up because the children are just different. They have capacities they didn’t have just two years ago and it is likely that you will have more fun – and fear – teaching them at this stage. Many parents are looking ahead to the next education their child might receive, via university or trade school. When you are teaching these years, don’t be bogged down by worry. Your job is to educate them and know just when to nudge. Remember that it is better to understand something well than it is to dabble, so for those of you who have been trying to teach a college level course since they were eight years old, now you can have your way – a bit, do not go overboard.

Steiner warns us about missing the forest for the trees:

“Most of what forms history today will be merely mentioned in passing. It is much more important for the child to learn how the steam engine or the mechanical loom, etc. transformed the world than that he should learn about incidents such as the altering of the Emser telegram.” (Bonus points for you if you know about the Emser telegram without looking it up – I had to look it up!)

He goes on to say that we don't need extensive detail at this age. Finding a balance might still be a challenge, just keep in mind that you will give even more detail later. Remember they will again cover these topics in the upper grades (9-12) but in a slightly different manner. I have laid out sample blocks, and in many cases, sample weekly subjects as well. Take the time to flesh out these weekly sections into full daily lessons.

Please note that I realize this volume is heavily centered on the events in America during this time period. I encourage you to look at the actions that shaped your area during this time as well as look at world history as a whole. I urge Americans to delve into the history of their ancestors a bit this year as many of us came from somewhere else. Do you have German or Irish or French ancestors? Take the time to understand this time from their perspective – it might prove to be an excellent writing prompt.

SAMPLE

History blocks are based on Steiner's recommendations AND my personal experience teaching these grades. There is a LOT of history here and I found that splitting it up a bit and giving some blocks to grade 9 is very appropriate. There are wonderful documentaries and movies that I will list where appropriate, due to differences in each family, please view the material BEFORE your child does. Please keep in mind that this is by no means a full list.

Steiner recommends *The Works of Frederick Schiller* for teacher preparation. It is available free on the Internet.

If you have a child that has perhaps not studied the history content of grades 5+, consider a book like *The Story of Mankind* by Hendrik Willem Van Loon. I like the edition that is updated by John Merriman

A Whole New World and the Birth of America (4-6 weeks)

Books for school reading: *To Be a Slave* by Julius Lester.

Documentaries: *America, The Story of Us* series (History Channel), *Colonial House* (BBC 2004).

Historical movies: *Revolution, The Patriot, Amistad, Lincoln*.

Topics & Concepts:

- Recapitulate some grade seven history with a focus on explorers coming to the New World.
- European settlers & the Puritans.
- The battle for independence from Great Britain, The Revolutionary War.
- The Articles of Confederation, The United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights.
- The first leaders of the United States.
- The war of 1812.
- Westward expansion, land acquisition and the displacement of Native Americans.
- Mexican-American War.
- The Slave Trade and the political struggles surrounding it.
- The United States Civil War.

Week 1

Review explorers coming to the new world from grade 7. Discuss others that came and the race to conquer this new world.

Study the first settlers and later the Puritans that came. How was the first settlement different from those that landed on Plymouth rock in 1620. What did the Puritans do differently? What holiday do Americans celebrate because of these settlers? What was the first major export from the new land?

What country laid claim to the new land? What were the restrictions? What does the map look like at this point? At about 1650?

Week 2

The settlers are getting uneasy, they don't want to pay taxes to the English crown. Study events such as the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party. Explore the tension leading up to the American Revolution. Who was George Washington and what was his part in the war? Who were John Hancock,

Benjamin Franklin and John Adams? What was their part in the Declaration of Independence? Why is July 4, 1776 important? If you have an opportunity, view a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Read it together. Why is it an important document to begin establishing a government in what would later be the United States?

Week 3

Study the Articles of Confederation and discuss why this was a weak way to govern a growing country. Why was there a need for the United States Constitution? When was it signed? What is the Bill of Rights? Did it cover everyone? Who signed the Constitution and were any of them also signers of the Declaration of Independence?

Week 4

What happened during the War of 1812? How did native people play a part? Who did they fight with? How did the American government take more land? Who did they take it from? What was the Indian Removal Act? Who was the president? Why was it controversial? What was the Trail of Tears?

Look at current Native American reservations verses what they looked like prior to 1700.

Week 5

Study the expansion of the United States. What part belonged to Mexico? What was the Mexican-American War and what part did Texas play in that war?

Week 6

Turn your attention to slaves in the United States. How long have they been here? Where did they come from? What was the African slave trade like? Study the tribes' involvement as traders in addition to the involvement of the Europeans as buyers. What was the buyer/seller arrangement like?

Were all African Americans slaves? What was the difference between the North and South of the United States? What was the role of President Lincoln?

Study the United States Civil War. What was the struggle about? Who was Ulysses S. Grant? Who was Robert E. Lee? Who won the war? How might life have looked to the slaves after the war? Was it easier for them?

European Colonialism, The French Revolution and Social Reform (4-5 weeks)

Books for school reading: *The Story of France* by Mary Macgregor, *Historical Tales: French* by Charles Morris, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo (this is a really long book and may not keep their interest but perhaps you can find a film or play adaptation to explore.)

Documentaries: *The French Revolution* (History Channel, 2005)

Topics & Concepts:

- Review British history. Discuss English Civil War, how it shaped what we now know as Great Britain and the United Kingdom.
- The War of 1812.
- The French Revolution.
- Australia, Boer War, European colonialism.
- The Slave Trade Act.
- The lives of Florence Nightingale, David Livingstone and Marcus Garvey.

Week 1

Review British history from grade 7. Who was Charles I? Who was Oliver Cromwell? What was the English Civil War?

Discuss the War of 1812 from a British and French perspective.

Week 2

This week study the French Revolution and Napoleon. What necessitated the revolution? How did these events change life in France and shape how they govern today?

What was the Battle at Waterloo? How did it change European warfare?

Week 3

Study the first people to explore Australia, the Dutch. Who were they and why did they abandon it? When did the British come and claim it? What was it originally used for? Was there a native population?

This week also study countries that were involved in colonialism and what lands they claimed. What happened to the native populations and their cultures? How long has colonialism been going on? What were the Boer Wars? What is the Berlin Conference? How does it affect the population of African countries today? What is the Slave Trade Act and why was it important?

Weeks 4 & 5

During these two weeks discuss the lives of people like Florence Nightingale, David Livingstone, Marcus Garvey as well as others.