

First Language Lessons

for the Well-Trained Mind

Level 2

by **Jessie Wise**

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*For children everywhere—
and for my grandchildren especially*

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How to Use This Book

I believe we underestimate what young children are capable of learning. Our ideas are influenced by the school model, which aims most of its instruction at what it considers the largest population—the “average child.” But when we teach to the average, we train our children to be...average! Instead, we can grow children who exceed the average by exposing them to above-average content—as long as that content is taught patiently, frequently, and consistently, and is reviewed often.

General Thoughts on Teaching Language

Learning rules without practical application is a sterile activity. Absorbing grammar incidentally without the guidance of rules is inefficient. By combining simple rules with continued “real life” use of those rules in language, the teacher lays the foundation for a child’s application of appropriate rules to his own work in the future.

Children are natural imitators. This book provides you with examples of correctly spoken and written English in order to train the child’s ear and hand. Then his original ideas can have form and beauty when they are expressed.

Every time a child speaks or writes correctly, that pattern is imprinted on his mind; the same is true for patterns that are incorrectly practiced. It is better to do less work, and do it correctly, than to practice errors. Then the child doesn’t have to spend time unlearning and relearning.

So don’t hurry through these lessons just to finish. Take the time to have the child answer in complete sentences. Take the time to frequently repeat rules until the child knows them. Take the time to have the child write correctly. Take the time to allow the child to make corrections immediately. If you require him to correct his mistakes, you will not damage his self-esteem. Compliment the correction and you will build his confidence.

Do not wait until a child is reading to expose him to good literature. Likewise, do not wait until a child is writing to expose him to proper use of our language. This is why I encourage the use of oral exercises while the child is young. Speech patterns are developed early. The longer a child uses incorrect language, the harder it will be to teach him correct speech and writing.

This early exposure is the purpose of my introducing young children to what some may consider advanced material. But this early introduction is not intended to result in mastery; mastery comes later.

I suggest you file the child’s work in a notebook. This will serve as a way to organize all of his language work—narrations that you write for him, his copy work and dictations, his exercises, and copies of the letters he writes to real people.

The Method of This Book

First Language Lessons for the Well-Trained Mind combines the best of traditional content with examples and illustrations meaningful to present-day children. The scripted lessons focus on training the child in the proper use of standard English. They are not intended to be read by the child—instead, they aim to give you some idea of how to teach these skills. Appropriate answers that the child should give to your questions are suggested, but the child should certainly not be required to give those answers word for word! Do remember, though, to require all answers in complete sentences. If the child answers with a single word or phrase, reword the answer as a complete sentence, repeat it to the child,

and ask him to repeat it back to you. This will begin to train his ear to recognize complete sentences.

This book covers grammar skills for grade 2. You will also need to provide a phonics/spelling program, formal penmanship instruction, and a writing program. *The Ordinary Parent's Guide to Teaching Reading* (phonics) and *Writing With Ease* (writing), both published by Peace Hill Press, are designed to be completely compatible with *First Language Lessons*.

An elementary writing curriculum is recommended because *First Language Lessons* covers grammar but does not cover beginning composition. The young writer should be encouraged to write across the curriculum, rather than doing isolated writing exercises related only to his grammar lessons. *Writing With Ease* by Susan Wise Bauer, also published by Peace Hill Press, is a step-by-step guide to developing elementary writing skills. The lessons are coordinated with *First Language Lessons* so that grammar concepts taught here are then reinforced by the *Writing With Ease* assignments.

Goals for Grade 2

1. To train the child's ear by allowing him to listen to correctly spoken language.
2. To train the child's speech by practicing correctly spoken grammar with him.
3. To train the child's attention by reading aloud to him and having him narrate back to you the content or story line, using proper grammar.
4. To teach beginning skills in correct grammar, capitalization, and punctuation.

Remember: exposure, not mastery, is the goal at this level!

The Tools Used in This Book: The "Four Strand" Approach

This book teaches rules, usage, and beginning writing skills by using four different tools.

Strand 1: Memory work

The child is assigned simple memory work—short poems and brief rules and definitions to learn by heart. The poems instill the beauty and rhythm of correct language in the child's mind. The rules and definitions may not be completely understood when they are first committed to memory, but they will be a resource for the child as he¹ continues to exercise his growing language skills.

Strand 2: Copying and dictation

The student is asked both to copy sentences and to take sentences from dictation. These exercises do not replace a writing program; they specifically target particular grammar skills.

Strand 3: Narration

While the student is studying the basic principles of grammar, he is also learning how to produce original content orally. This will allow him to practice correct grammar at a time when he is still too young for extensive written work.

Two types of narration are used; both are intended to train the child in attention, observation, and expression, so that as he matures he will be able to share his own thoughts with eloquence.

¹ **A note on inclusive pronouns:** I studied advanced traditional grammar in the 1950s as part of my training in teacher certification. I learned that the pronouns "he" and "him" were generic pronouns, used to refer to both men and women. Although I understand why some users would prefer to see an alternate use of "he" and "she," I find this style of writing awkward; my early training shapes my usage! So I have used "he" and "him" to refer to the child throughout. If you prefer, simply change these pronouns to "she" and "her."

a. Picture narration. Some of the lessons ask the student to look at and describe a picture. This allows him to practice observation skills as well as proper language use—always encourage the child to describe the picture in complete sentences!

b. Story narration. In other lessons, you will read a short story to the child and then ask him to tell it back to you in his own words. This type of narration helps the child to listen with attention, to comprehend spoken language, and to grasp the main point of a work.

Strand 4: Grammar

The rules of grammar bring order to the chaos of words in the child's mind. Think of the study of formal grammar as the building of a room. The essentials—nouns and verbs—are the floor, walls, and ceiling. The room is decorated with adjectives and adverbs. The relationships between the different pieces of furniture in the room are demonstrated through prepositions and conjunctions. And sometimes the people in the room show intense emotion—with interjections!

The student is taught the correct definitions of grammatical terms from the very beginning.

I assume that many children will not be ready to do a great deal of pencil-work in second grade. For children who are physically capable of doing more writing, I have provided enrichment activities. But it is not necessary—or expected—that most children will do these enrichment exercises!

Plan on doing 2–3 lessons per week. Also plan on reviewing previous lessons as necessary, since the child may not remember material covered earlier.

Using the Lessons

Instructor: Suggested wording for the instructor is in traditional print.

Student: Suggested wording for the student is in italics.

Notes to Instructor are indented, set in smaller type and in italics.

Suggested wording that the student is to read or follow is in larger traditional print.

Definitions and terms are in larger bold print.

Note to Instructor: Assume that lessons 1-100 all require that both the instructor and the student have a pencil and paper. Additional supplies will be listed at the beginning of each lesson. If you wish to gather all your supplies in advance, you will need colored pencils, crayons, markers, construction paper, a folder, a highlighter marker, glue, scissors, two or more business-size envelopes, first-class letter stamps, five or more postcards, first-class postcard stamps, a pack of index cards, and a place setting (fork, knife, spoon, plate, glass, napkin). You will also need a dictionary and a thesaurus. My favorites for this age are Merriam-Webster's Elementary Dictionary (2009) and Roget's Children's Thesaurus (Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley, 1994).

This book is designed to follow and reinforce *First Language Lessons, Level 1*. Older students may begin with Level 2, but you may wish to stop and practice memorized lists and definitions for a slightly longer period than is suggested here.

..... LESSON 1

Nouns

Instructor: A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Repeat that definition with me.

TOGETHER: A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea.

Instructor: A **common noun** is the name of any person, place, thing, or idea. A **proper noun** is the special, particular name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Repeat the definition of a proper noun with me.

TOGETHER: A proper noun is the special, particular name of a person, place, thing, or idea.

Note to Instructor: *“Proper noun” and “proper name” both have the same meaning.*

Instructor: Is “boy” a proper or common noun?

Student: *“Boy” is a common noun.*

Note to Instructor: *Remember to encourage the student to answer in complete sentences.*

Instructor: Can you give me a proper noun that names a particular boy?

Student: *[name]*

Instructor: Is “girl” a proper or common noun?

Student: *“Girl” is a common noun.*

Instructor: Can you give me a proper noun that names a particular girl?

Student: *[name]*

Instructor: Can you tell me some common nouns that name places?

Student: *[city, park, store, library, room, yard, etc.]*

Instructor: Now, can you think of a proper name for one of these places?

Student: *[Student names familiar proper name for a place]*

Note to Instructor: *Help the student think of a proper name for a store, restaurant, or other familiar landmark.*

Instructor: There are lots and lots of common things in the world. I will name some of them, and I want you to give me proper names for them. The first is “toy.” There are many, many toys. What is the proper name of one of your toys?

Student: *[Gives proper brand name of a toy—Legos, Hot Wheels]*

Instructor: Nouns are names of persons, places, and things. Nouns also name ideas. Remember, an idea is something that you can think about or feel, but not touch or see. “Happiness,” “joy,” “freedom,” “sadness,” and “excitement” are all nouns. They are names of ideas. Here are some sentences that use “idea” nouns.

Note to Instructor: *Emphasize the names of ideas in the following sentences. Ask the student to follow along as you read.*

Happiness can be shared.

She was filled with joy when her kitty was rescued.

A caged bird has no freedom.

Excitement filled the room during the birthday party.

Sadness makes me want to cry.

I was filled with fear when I was lost.

Instructor: Can you make up a sentence about an idea?

Note to Instructor: *Help the student say out loud complete sentences that have “idea” nouns in them.*

..... LESSON 2

Poem memorization: “The Goops”
Copywork: “The Goops”

Note to Instructor: *The student will need drawing supplies for the enrichment activity.*

Instructor: For this lesson, I am going to read you a poem about the Goops.

The Goops

By Gelett Burgess

The Goops they lick their fingers,
 And the Goops they lick their knives;
 They spill their broth on the tablecloth-
 Oh, they lead disgusting lives!
 The Goops they talk while eating,
 And loud and fast they chew,
 And that is why I’m glad that I
 Am not a Goop - are you?

Instructor: The name of a poem—its title—and the first word in every line of poetry should be capitalized. Let’s look at the poem “The Goops” together. How many words does the title have in it?

Student: *The title has two words in it.*

Instructor: Both words are capitalized. “The” is capitalized because it is the first word of the title. “Goops” is capitalized because it is an important word in the title. Now run your finger down the left-hand side of the poem. There is a capital letter at the beginning of each line. The first word of every line of a poem should be capitalized. Now we will work on memorizing this poem. I will read it out loud to you three times.

Notes to Instructor: *Read the poem to the student and discuss it before working on memorization. As a helpful technique to assist in memorization, try the following: On the first day that the poem is assigned, read the poem aloud to the student three times in a row. Repeat this triple reading twice more during the day, if possible. After the first day, read the poem aloud three times in a row once daily. (It may be more convenient to read the poem into a tape recorder three times, and then have the student replay the tape.) On the second day, and every day thereafter, ask the student to try to repeat parts of the poem along with you (or the tape recorder). When he can say the poem along with you, encourage him to repeat it first to a stuffed animal, then to himself in a mirror, and finally to “real people.”*

Today, read “The Goops” aloud three times in a row. Repeat twice more during the day. Don’t forget to say the title and author as part of each repetition!

Copywork

Choose one of the following copywork assignments, depending on the student’s ability. You may want to copy the assignment in the style of print that the student is using in his handwriting lessons.

“The Goops”

By Gelett Burgess

They spill their broth on the tablecloth.

They spill their broth on the tablecloth.

Oh, they lead disgusting lives!

Enrichment Activity

The student can illustrate the poem “The Goops.”

..... LESSON 3

Pronouns

Copywork: “Emily sang”

Poem review: “The Goops” (Lesson 2)

Note to Instructor: Read “The Goops” three times. Encourage the student to chime in as he is able.

Instructor: **A pronoun is a word used in the place of a noun.** Let’s say that definition together three times.

TOGETHER (three times): **A pronoun is a word used in the place of a noun.**

Instructor: You use the pronouns “I,” “me,” “my,” “mine” when you talk about yourself. Let’s repeat those together three times.

TOGETHER (three times): I, me, my, mine.

Instructor: Can you use the pronoun “mine” in a sentence?

Student: *[gives sentence]*

Note to Instructor: Prompt student, if necessary, to use the pronoun correctly.

Instructor: The pronouns “you,” “your,” “yours” can take the place of the person to whom you are speaking. Let’s say those together three times.

TOGETHER (three times): You, your, yours.

Instructor: Use the pronoun “you” in a sentence for me.

Student: *[gives sentence]*

Instructor: Now say the pronouns “he, she, him, her, it, his, hers, its” together three times.

TOGETHER (three times): He, she, him, her, it, his, hers, its.

Instructor: Use the pronoun “she” in a sentence for me.

Student: *[gives sentence]*

Instructor: The pronouns “we,” “us,” “our,” “ours” mean more than one person. Let’s say them together three times.

TOGETHER (three times): We, us, our, ours.

Instructor: Now make up a sentence about you and me. Use the pronoun “we.”

Student: *[gives sentence]*

Instructor: The pronouns “They,” “them,” “their,” “theirs” are also used in place of nouns that mean more than one person. You use them when you are talking about a group of people that does not include you! Let’s say “They, them, their, theirs” together three times.

TOGETHER (three times): They, them, their, theirs.

Instructor: Make up a sentence using the pronoun “they.”

Student: *[gives sentence]*

Instructor: Now I will say the whole list of pronouns for you!

I, me, my, mine;
you, your, yours;
he, she, him, her, it, his, hers, its;
we, us, our, ours;
they, them, their, theirs.

Copywork

Choose one of the following copy assignments.

Emily sang. She sang well.

Don’t look, or you will be scared!

Kim and Alex had ice cream. They ate too much!

Enrichment Activity

Have the student write other sentences that use pronouns.