

HOLLAND HOUSE SCHOOL

# An English Syllabus

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for children aged 4 to 11

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**The degree to which mastery of English improves, from the age of four onwards, by listening to stories read by teachers & parents cannot be overstated. The child who does not hear the great stories of English literature is impoverished both intellectually & linguistically.**

# WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT AT THE AGE OF FOUR ('RISING FIVES')

(These guidelines presuppose that it is appropriate to teach children at the age of four.)

Notwithstanding the extent to which a teacher or parent believes in learning through play, there is every advantage in teaching the young child to read as soon as possible, but without unnecessary haste.

Over the years, many different approaches to teaching the young child to read have been favoured. This syllabus will advocate the phonics method as the very best way forward.

In essence, the phonics method relies upon sound-to-letter correspondence. There are 26 letters in the alphabet by which 44 sounds are denoted. It is the task of the teacher or parent to teach the young child to decode each of the letter combinations that correspond to one of the 44 sounds.

There is no need at all for a child of this age to be encumbered with the sequence of letters that comprise the alphabet.

There are many commercially & privately published phonic courses.

- To recognise, decode **& blend** a sufficient number of the 44 sounds to be able to read to a level that corresponds to a Reading Age that is at least equivalent to his or her Calendar Age. (Note: there are a number of approved objective tests that can easily be administered to determine the Reading Age of a child.)

- To hold a pencil correctly, to sit correctly & make marks on paper according to sound ergonomic principles.
- To form letters correctly from top to bottom & with economical rotations. Preferably, the child should learn to form letters with a tail so that, in due course, letters may be attached to one another. At the beginning, only lower case letters should be introduced.
- To write on a line.
- To copy letters & combinations of letters; then to write down words that comprise the phonic sounds already learned. The young child should be able to write down words either from sight or sound.
- To listen to simple rhymes & poems; then to learn them & say them aloud.
- To talk & listen to a purpose.
- To use the 'five senses' to gain information about their immediate environment.
- To learn the language of comparison, whereby one object is smaller or larger than another, lighter /heavier, softer/harder, longer/shorter, & so on.
- To describe, in the simple language of a young child, the environment that is visible to him or to her.
- To know the names of the days of the week, colours & other such frequently encountered terms.
- To learn how to express in language & in gesture what he or she feels.
- To learn what books are!

## Other Targets

- To develop manual dexterity (for example, tying shoe laces, doing up buttons, etc) & physical orderliness (for example, keeping pencils in a proper place, looking after personal belongings).
- To develop physical coordination & suppleness by games, dancing & P E.
- To project their voices clearly, audibly & without shouting.
- To draw purposefully & to shade within a fixed perimeter.
- To listen & respond to simple music; then to use drums, tambourines, shakers, etc to make sounds & patterns of sounds that are sufficiently repeatable & variable not to be considered mere noise!
- To take responsibility for their own space.
- To learn the language of courtesy (thank you, please, etc).
- To learn how to behave & how to play with his or her peers.

### **Note:**

**It is the contention of this syllabus that emotional & imaginative development are not best founded on unrestrained caprice & impulse. The philosophy of 'anything goes' is as wrong for a four-year-old as at any other age!**

**The mantra of 'emotional intelligence' should reflect thoughtfulness, not precede it.**

**Rational orderliness is not inimical to the development of the very young mind.**

# WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN YEAR ONE AT THE AGE OF FIVE ('RISING SIXES')

(These guidelines presuppose that children are now proficient in the skills they have acquired in the preceding year. Teachers & parents who decide to begin the formal education of their children in Year One should begin at the beginning of this English Syllabus on Page 1.)

- To recognise, decode **& blend** all 44 sounds so that they are independent readers.
- To learn the letters of the alphabet in sequence.
- To write all the letters of the alphabet in lower & upper case.  
[Once the child can read, the emphasis moves to the understanding of text, not the decoding of it!]
- To recognise sentences & to use capital letters & full stops at the beginning & end of sentences.
- To answer specific questions orally; then to write down the answers to questions that may be posed orally or in written form.
- To demonstrate an understanding of text by their answers to specific questions.
- To express themselves in sentences.
- To describe orally such simple tasks as the young child can perform.
- To follow verbal & written instructions.
- To learn the vocabulary of questions (Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?).
- To read aloud clearly & with expression.

- To write down words & sentences that are spoken by the teacher or parent.
- To develop the habit of listening to, acting out & giving voice to rhymes, songs, simple poetry & simple stories.
- To develop further the language of description & comparison in relation to their perceptual environment.
- To play games with rules.
- To converse with one another & with adults.

**Note:**

**The more the young child interacts with other children, the more he or she interacts with his environment, the more he or she responds to a variety of stimuli, the more his or her skills in language will improve.**

**Drama is an invaluable means by which a child's experience of language is enhanced. However, the teaching of drama, even to such young children, is a specialism.**

# **WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN YEAR TWO AT THE AGE OF SIX ('RISING SEVENS')**

(These guidelines presuppose that children are now proficient in the skills they have acquired in preceding years.)

- To read stories, silently & independently, & to read aloud from books appropriate for their age.
- To retell briefly the plot of a story that has been read aloud or has been read independently.
- To read passages & write down the answers to questions.
- To understand the difference between fact & fiction.
- To write simple paragraphs on a given title; to write with regard to the sequencing & context of events.
- To develop further the capacity to give directions, to follow instructions, to describe games & events, to verbalise what the child observes.
- To express feelings; to learn the language that is appropriate to convey the emotions of a child of this age.
- To be instructed in the use of a simple dictionary, & to practise looking up words.
- To learn simple spelling rules.
- To recognise certain homophones & to know the differences in their meaning & spelling (for example, 'to', 'too' & 'two').
- To write down, legibly & not too slowly, text that the teacher or parent reads aloud in sufficiently short units (phrases, clauses, short sentences). This exercise in dictation remains as beneficial as it always was.

- To learn by heart short poems or verses from poems, & to recite them clearly & expressively aloud.
- To participate in class discussions; to put forward a personal opinion & argue politely & coherently with others.

It is in the nature of the development of language skills that what one first encounters at a very early age should be developed & enriched in every year of school life. Hence, it is an underlying principle of this syllabus that what one learns at the age of 5 or 6 should be revisited in ever more complex forms in every subsequent year.



## **WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN YEAR THREE AT THE AGE OF SEVEN ('RISING EIGHTS')**

(These guidelines presuppose that children are now proficient in the skills they have acquired in preceding years.)

Now, the child is ready to begin to learn the rules of English Grammar. In particular, he or she should be instructed in the following:

- Parts of Speech (Nouns, Adjectives, Pronouns, Verbs, Adverbs, Prepositions, Conjunctions)
  - Punctuation (Capital letters, Full Stops, Question Marks, Exclamation Marks, Commas)
  - Sentences (Phrases, Statements, Questions, Exclamations, Subject, Object)
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- To write a short complete imaginative story on a given title.
  - To learn how to set out & write a letter.
  - To extend vocabulary, & to learn synonyms & antonyms.
  - To prepare & participate in debates.
  - To think, speak & write from a moral perspective. (What is good? What is right? Why?)

### A note about diaries

Although many teachers & educators favour the keeping of diaries as a useful means of developing self-expression, this Syllabus deliberately omits this form of writing in the belief that it tends to give undue

prominence to triviality & to repetitive daily events. The essence of good writing is what one chooses to write about & to omit. By writing a diary, a child is encouraged to write everything down purely because it happened.

The teacher or parent should continue to develop those skills that have already been introduced earlier, such as: reading, spelling, comprehension, dictation & speaking & writing with increasing assurance.

Throughout his or her years in primary school, participation in activities & lessons under a proficient drama teacher is an invaluable means by which clarity of expression & interpersonal communication are enhanced. Drama offers the child the opportunity to learn how to use his or her voice correctly. The services of an outstanding teacher of drama cannot be underestimated.

## **WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN YEAR FOUR AT THE AGE OF EIGHT ('RISING NINES')**

(These guidelines presuppose that children are now proficient in the skills they have acquired in preceding years.)

To consolidate & learn more Grammar, as follows:

- Punctuation, continued (Apostrophe, Speech Marks)
- Sentences, continued (Direct & Indirect Objects, Compound & Complex Sentences, Subordinate Clauses)

**Note: This Syllabus makes no apology for its emphasis on the rules of Grammar. These rules are the pathways of thoughtfulness in language. The more a child acquires a sound grasp of grammar, the more he or she is in a position to use language freely; the child who has no grasp of grammar will forever be restricted in his or her use of language.**

**Undoubtedly, the child who is the master of grammar in his native language will approach new languages far more easily.**

- To write a book review.
- To alter the presentation & use of language in accordance with the intended reader.
- To read from a wider pool of text (newspapers, magazines, the internet, & of course to continue to read literature).

Once again, improvements in English are largely based upon the extent to which the child finds his own voice in speech & writing by continuing to practise the skills already learned.

# **WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN YEAR FIVE AT THE AGE OF NINE ('RISING TENS')**

(These guidelines presuppose that children are now proficient in the skills they have acquired in preceding years.)

- To consolidate grammar.
- To extend vocabulary.
- To learn about similes & metaphors.
- To read more complex prose passages & poems.
- To respond with greater understanding to questions on literary texts.
- To recite poems expressively.
- To engage in conversation & courteous argument with teacher or parent, & to learn to disagree with one another with mutual respect.
- To empathise: to understand what it feels like to be someone else.

## Creative Writing

The writing of imaginative stories, about the length of an A4 page, is a major part of the syllabus in Years Five & Six. Here are some guidelines:

- A story must have a beginning, a middle & an end. Throughout the emphasis is on thoughtfulness & on the avoidance of trivia & the mimicry of popular culture.
- Sentences must be properly formed; preferably shorter rather than longer.

- Adjectives & adverbs should be used prudently, not simply to fill out the story.
- Writing should be organised in paragraphs.
- This form of extended writing allows the child to make use of all the lessons of grammar & vocabulary that he has learned to date.
- Keep to the title at all times.
- The child must be encouraged to express himself or herself with both originality & conviction.
- There should be a consistency of mood throughout the story, in particular to avoid the inclination to add on a sudden happy ending to a sad story.
- Stories should be dramatic & emotional.
- Write about interesting people, be they extraordinary or ordinary.
- Remember, good stories are selective; they are not literal accounts of all that has taken place.
- Writing stories is an invaluable opportunity for a child to invent worlds as they should be, could be or might be. In so doing, the child should be encouraged to view the subject of his writing from a moral & aesthetic dimension (Do his or her characters behave well or badly? Is the context of his or her story pleasing or unpleasing?)

It is now appropriate for children to work within constraints of time. The encouragement of a child's imagination should not be regarded as the negation of the rules of grammar & the logic of creative thought. Children should now be so accustomed to writing independently that objective testing represents no threat whatsoever.

# **WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN YEAR SIX AT THE AGE OF TEN ('RISING ELEVENS')**

(These guidelines presuppose that children are now proficient in the skills they have acquired in preceding years.)

- To write in different styles, as follows:
  - \* an imaginative story
  - \* a descriptive passage
  - \* a factual account
  - \* in the form of a speech
  - \* in the form of a debate
  - \* for a newspaper, magazine or internet site
  - \* a formal & informal letter
  - \* a personal response
  - \* an entertainment

Note: It is imperative, by this age, that the pupil learns to write for a specific readership. At this stage, good writing must be targeted.

- To speak with confidence & with a range of expression, one-to-one & one-to-many.
- To extend vocabulary.
- To learn some of the distinctive features of poetry, drama & narrative. To broaden their experience of the different forms of story-telling, for example, from fairy tales to fables, from fantasy to realistic writing.
- To appreciate further the richness of English literature & to respond thoughtfully to passages & stories of great writers.

- To recite passages & poems that he or she has learned by heart. One cannot exaggerate the benefits of fixing in the young mind the patterns of language that are the hallmark of great literature. Familiarity with the cadences & the richness of great writing develops the language of the individual mind, the mind of each child.

### Comprehension

The ability to answer questions on text, preferably passages or poems of literary value, succinctly & to the point is a major part of the syllabus in Years Five & Six. Here are some guidelines:

- Read the whole passage from beginning to end at least once, preferably to grasp its content & tone.
- A comprehension is not a memory exercise & therefore questions should be answered by reference to the words of the text.
- There is a discipline in answering questions on the text whereby one neither invents nor embellishes. A specific question has a specific answer. (Of course, on some occasions, the question invites a more creative answer. Learn to identify such questions.)
- It is an invaluable principle of good reading that one does not rush to the dictionary to discover the meaning of every word with which one is unfamiliar. In comprehension exercises one hopes to gain a sense of unfamiliar vocabulary from its context.
- Unless invited not to do so, always try to answer questions in your own words rather than just copying out the words that may contain the answer.

- When asked to give an opinion, support your answer with evidence from the text.
- The practical necessities of school & the work place require the ability to comprehend & answer specific questions within the discipline of time. In the context of the classroom, some call this testing!

By the end of Year Six, the well-taught child should be a fluent & independent reader & writer. He or she should have some familiarity with the great stories of literature & with the ideas that flow from these stories. His or her language skills should be viewed as an investment in thoughtfulness & effective communication.



## **A Personal Note**

Every teacher & every parent has their favourite children's authors. Here are mine:

First & foremost, Ted HUGHES. In particular, I would recommend:

The Iron Man  
How the Whale Became  
Ffangs the Vampire Bat & the Kiss of Truth  
Nessie, the Mannerless Monster  
Meet My Folks (a book of poems)

In years to come, there are such works of genius as:

What is the Truth?  
The Iron Woman  
Tales of the Early World  
The Dreamfighter & Other Creation Tales  
Under the North Star

I also recommend everything written by Michael MORPURGO.

Finally, I urge every child to read Philip PULLMAN, among whose titles are:

Puss in Boots  
The Firework Maker's Daughter  
Clockwork  
The Scarecrow & His Servant  
I Was A Rat  
Count Karlstein

Please save Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' for later when your child is no longer a child, when he or she has the mind for great ideas!