

Notes for the Preparatory Level

Author's Note:

These notes are to help prepare the teacher for how to best teach children at the Preparatory Level. Generally, this level is not required as most children should begin their Charlotte Mason education at age 6. This curriculum is designed with an emphasis on allowing a younger child to gently work on habits and skills which will benefit them as their education moves forward and to offer a teacher the structure and guidelines from which to do this. A child who interacts with his family through play, daily life and conversation, who shares his imagination and is encouraged to do so, who is allowed to use child-friendly tools (pencils, crayons, paint, yarn or string, magnifying lens, notebooks, etc.) and who experiences the joy of listening to stories and music and looking at art and pictures will receive all that is needed to prepare him for his future education. If you feel confident that your child is receiving these things, then please do not feel compelled to use a curriculum. However, if you wish to have access to a curriculum from which you can freely adjust or choose what best suits you and your family, then this level is available. Please feel free to use only what you wish and to adjust as needed. Please do not feel as if you must complete everything included in this level or that you must use it according to the time table for which it is designed. Follow your child's needs in every instance. Also, please allow plenty of free play time-particularly imaginative play and outdoor play and don't cut these acts short to make way for this curriculum. For example, if your child is happily engaged in some imaginative game outside, please don't feel the need to cut it short to meet the needs of this schedule. You can also remove a smaller box from this day's list, allowing your child the more important moments of finishing their imaginative play.

The following notes are drawn from actual PNEU programs that were uploaded to the Internet Archive. I've only gently modified some of the instructions and have added new suggestions in some places.

Time Table

- 10 min. is recommended for skill subjects-reading, writing and math
- 15 min. is recommended for story time, lighter lessons, free choice activities, etc.

It is important to alternate skill subjects-or those requiring higher levels of attention and concentration- with content subjects and family style lessons. Skill subjects are typically considered math, reading and writing; content subjects would include history, science, literature, geography, art study and music study.

These lessons should be greatly interspersed with breaks and the afternoons should be set aside for outdoor time with activities such as nature walks, gardening, nature study, field trips, and most importantly, play!

Lessons

Narrations should not be required for this level. Some children may enjoy sharing what they have found interesting after listening to a story read or observing a natural object or event and this can be encouraged but not forced. Narrations can include acting things out through play, drawing a picture or telling a friend or family member, who was not present for this reading or event, what they wish to share about it.

Important or new words, especially terms, proper nouns, hard-to-pronounce word, etc. can be gently introduced beforehand.

History and Geography

The history suggestions for this curriculum are different from the books used in the PNEU programs. I tried to stay with a very gentle study of history and geography, with the plan of increasing this in Year One.

In this level, the first term is spent studying Native Americans and the second and third terms are spent reading books which represent other countries around the

world. The latter study will include looking at a world map and the location of major places as they appear in the books read.

Some study of US holidays and landmarks are included in the study of time, seasons and holidays, which coordinate with the calendar study for the year.

Coloring pages and crafts may accompany some of these lessons, but these are always optional.

Writing

Children should copy letters or words as well as trace them.

Labels to their pictures or work should be implemented wherever possible. A child can dictate his words to his teacher, the teacher can print it very lightly and the child can then trace over it. It would be important that you try to keep the number of words used in a label to a minimum for very early writers. Labels could include titles or captions for pictures drawn by the child or labels for the contents of the picture such as the person drawn, the name of the animal, the name of the object, etc.

Alternative: Give a child a letter box filled with paper printed letters, individually cut out. The child can create their own labels by either laying them out underneath their work or gluing them in place. A child should lay them out first and glue them only after the teacher has checked it for proper spelling. For some projects, you could give your child individual letter stickers, which can be carefully placed on their work at the bottom.

Be sure to give attention to proper posture and pencil grip for early writers.

Allow children to work through a handwriting program but they should complete only very small sections at one time. Their hands tire more quickly and the emphasis is on quality not quantity. This work should last no more than 5-8 min.

Science and Nature Study

Again, this curriculum differs from the types of books used in the Preparatory Class as listed in the PNEU programs I studied. My intentions were to keep this level light and gentle, using mostly picture-books and involving only a few full-size books. The focus of this year will be on life cycles, farming, seeds and weather.

Below is a list of what will be covered in this year:

- books will be read on the topics listed above
- follow -up activities to the books read, such as growing a plant from seeds can be included
- cut-and-paste life cycle diagrams can be drawn or colored
- calendar work is expected, which includes some attention to weather, seasonal changes, etc.
- the natural world can be experienced through nature walks, field trips, gardening, etc.
- a nature sketchbook can be kept, but children should be given free rein to draw and color what they wish. You should try to insist that they at least attempt to make their sketches based on careful observations, both before and while drawing and some attempt at neatness should also be made. Labels would be helpful, but they may need help with this. Also help them date each entry as this will reinforce the date learned during calendar time.
- keep a list of birds, insects and flowers in the back of the sketchbook, but this should be a very simple list: what I saw, when (again date) and possibly where. The PNEU program suggested that this could be done by putting large sheets of paper on the wall as a method for keeping track of these observations. Either approach would be fine.
- time is studied by learning about how day turns to night and how seasons change

Family Lessons

In this curriculum, the suggested schedule for this level matches the time slots set aside for years going forward in several areas. This is to allow these activities to be accomplished as a family or group. Picture and composer study, recitation on Day Five and art and music technique are lessons which can be taught together. Also, if a foreign language is being studied, this too may be taught as a family.

Handwork

Many of these examples would also fit under the Fine Motor Skills category, so feel free to borrow as you wish.

The PNEU suggests that Handwork should be kept simple and should be of 3 kinds: one that is executed quickly, that teaches a new skill and that is collective, when possible. To be quickly executed the activity should be complete in just a couple of sessions and since 2 time slots are allotted for Handwork per week, then should the project or activity should be complete in one week. A collective effort may happen less often than would happen if in a school environment, but when possible a family effort can be made towards a project, for example making a fleet of boats, model of a village, etc.

Examples of Handwork:

Cutting out and pasting-be sure your student has good scissors, old catalogues and magazines and colorful paper to practice this skill. The cut-outs can be used to make collages, scrapbooks, pattern work, birthday and holiday cards, mosaics, etc.

Paper Tearing-torn colored paper to be used to create a picture, such as to fill in the basic outline of a large object or animal or to be used in collages and mosaics as suggested above.

Crayon-resist paintings-color a picture by pressing heavily with crayons and wash over the picture with light or watery paint, the paint filling in where the crayon did not

Sewing-a large piece of a sturdy cloth, a large needle and thick, colored wool can be provided to allow children to practice their sewing skills. You might even place it in

cross-stitch frames to hold it more securely. Alternatively: You could also use simple lacing cards with yarn or laces.

Modeling-Play-Doh and modeling clay can be used to allow children to create models

Sand and water play

Models of objects related to what is learned in history, science, geography, etc. can be created. For example, your child might create a geographical example of an island after reading *The Little Island*.

Stamps can be used for printing patterns, making birthday and holiday cards, etc.

Calendar

The emphasis on keeping a calendar is important to this level (and to continue into Year One as well) as it affords many opportunities to incorporate early math skills, helps a child develop a sense of the passage of time and includes the tracking and observation of daily events such as weather, holidays, etc. It is also important for children of this age to begin to use and understand time-related terminology. Of course, the book list for the study of Holidays, Seasons and Time supplements this work too.

On Day One of each new week (though sometimes this may be every other week), a book will be read which relates to the season or holiday as it occurs over the course of the year.

On Day Three, a poem (from one of several books listed for Poetry for the Calendar) will be read which also relates to the season or holiday of the time.

The entire theme for the year revolves around the idea of the passage of a time, the changes of the earth, animal life and human customs and habits over the course of a day, a week, a month and a year.

-Sources vary but are drawn from multiple examples of the PNEU Programs for the Preparatory Class; Box 16 from Internet Archive, beginning with the program in 1952. Some alternative suggestions have been added by the author.