

### ENGLISH COMPOSITION IN GRADES VI, VII, AND VIII.

The study of English Composition, of so great importance to the student, both as discipline for the mind, and use in practical life, is rather a difficult one—for the teacher, as well as for the pupil; and the organization of the class work in this subject, when compared with most other subjects on our course, leaves much to be desired. A text book, in which the essential facts of language and composition were brought together, graded and tabulated in an economical and efficient form for study, drill, and test would materially diminish the amount of time and effort which the teacher of today must spend on this subject. Such books have been published in recent years.—“Elementary English Composition” by Frederick Henry Sykes, published in 1902, and authorized by the Education Department of Ontario, is an excellent book; but perhaps the most excellent for these grades is “The Mother Tongue” by Sarah Louise Arnold, Dean of Simmon’s College, and George Lyman Kittredge, Professor of English in Harvard University. A revised edition of this work was published in 1908. It is in two parts—Book I contains lessons in speaking, reading and writing English and, Book II, lessons in Elementary English Grammar. I would like to see this book, or a book of this type, prescribed for use in our schools, and Book I in the hands of pupils of Grades V and VI, and Book II in Grades VII and VIII.

The first essential in teaching any subject is to have a distinct aim. What is our aim in teaching composition? I think we will all agree in making the object of all language teaching to develop in the pupil the power to express his thought with ease and correctness both in speaking and writing, and to enable him to enjoy, in the highest degree, the beauties of English Literature.

Composition involves thought, the acquiring of vocabulary, and a mastery of the phrasing and of the construction of the sentence. In its highest form, it involves a high sense for form, proportion, and beauty, by which it becomes a fine art.

A source that greatly contributes to thought, vocabulary, and phrasing, is reading. It is then, a desirable thing that our pupils become familiar with the works of our best English writers. What can we do in this regard with our pupils in Grades VI, VII and VIII? Certainly there is little time to give to it in school hours, but we need not confine our efforts to the reading or literature periods. We can very often add interest to a history, geography



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or science lesson with material from English Literature. At the opening exercises, let the pupils give quotations, or select some poem and let the class study one verse each morning until all is learned. Encourage them to commit to memory all the good poetry possible. Read to them occasionally—one or two good books in a year, and try, by every means in your power, to give them a desire to read for themselves. By reading and memorizing, not only does the child fill his mind with good and beautiful thoughts, clothed in beautiful words, but he unconsciously acquires for his own the forms of phrase and sentence structure usual in good writing and establishes ideals of force and beauty in expression.

Work in written composition requires much thought and study on the part of the teacher. In the first place, the subject matter must be of such a nature as to claim the child’s interest, and to give him opportunity to express himself freely. Let him write on such subjects only, as come within the range of his own experience. If it is description,—let him describe his own home, his class-room, a certain plant, tree, or bird, or some other object with which he is perfectly familiar. For reproduction, read a short story, and have the pupil write it in his own words. In this process, an outline