

**SPECIAL METHOD FOR  
LITERATURE  
AND HISTORY IN  
THE COMMON SCHOOLS**

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Special Method for Literature and History in the Common Schools by Charles A. McMurry

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# SPECIAL METHOD

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IN

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BY CHARLES A. MCMURRY, PH.D.

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FOURTH EDITION.

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1898.

## PREFACE.

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This is the first of a series of small books treating of special method in each of the common school studies. The plan is to outline courses for each important branch of school work, to discuss the value of the materials and to explain the method of treatment in classes. The relation of studies to each other will receive much incidental notice.

The series of *Special Methods* is designed to carry forward to a fuller application and in definite detail the principles discussed in the *General Method*.

This first of the series of *Special Methods* is a selection and discussion of those literary and historical materials which are adapted to an *oral treatment* throughout the grades. In the history work of the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, books and references may be much used by the children.

The use of the best English classics as regular reading books in all the grades will be discussed in the second number of the *Special Methods* (now in press).

Another series of books is in preparation in which the actual materials (Fairy Tales, Robinson Crusoe, etc.) to be handled in history and literature, as here discussed, will be presented in the simple form required in the schools. Our plan, therefore, is to advance from the most general statement of principles to the most specific application to particular studies.

Normal, Illinois, September 26, 1894.

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## HISTORY AND LITERATURE.

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The formative influence of classic literature and good reading upon young people is generally acknowledged. With many boys and girls who show a taste for it, the reading of choice books is held to be a sign of intellectual and moral progress. Such a taste once formed, is regarded as a strong protection and aid in the coming work of education. But where does this taste for literature properly begin, and how may it be fostered among average boys and girls? The schools of to-day are not in the habit of seriously meeting this problem till children are verging into manhood and womanhood, toward the close of the grammar grades. What of the years from six to fourteen, devoted especially to the common school, in which the great majority of children receive their whole school training? If there are choice stories, epics, and histories which have power to impress youthful thought, fancy, and feeling, let the early years reap the full benefit. Even those first entering the school should find something fair and attractive in the stories presented to them in the early months. In each grade the children should be led through some of the garden-plots of



literature, leaving rich memories behind and gaining a culture that will abide through life.

By keeping steadily in view the leading purpose, to lift and strengthen moral character by means of materials of instruction suited to the needs of children, lesser advantages will follow. The highest aims in education, if wisely pursued, will yield much fruitage to the secondary aims. Those stories and books which reveal the best typical men and women in action, furnish also the most interesting and instructive lessons in other respects. The poet instinctively seizes what is beautiful and good for the highest manifestation of his art. If ignoble characters appear, it is as a foil to choicer spirits. To banish formalism from our schools we need the presence of interesting and stimulating characters, not simply as embodied in the teachers, but also as exhibited in the history and literature studied. Important as formal drill is, no teacher can find in this his best expression and influence. Sympathy with human life and struggle is the most inspiring force in schools as well as outside of them. The interest awakened is a fair gauge of the value of the work done in a school, and for native interest there is nothing that can surpass the best literature. To put this literature into the hands of teachers and to cause them to feel responsible for the transmission of its best treasures to children is a thing to lend priestly dignity to our calling.

Of necessity, the school must be the first to pioneer the children into these regions of delight. Not many homes are capable of giving them a fit entrance. There should be no jealousy between school and home at this juncture, but rather mutual support. The school knows best how to open the doors and lead the children in; or at least it should be the pride of teachers to fit themselves for this duty. The school has more time and equipment for this work than the home, although it can only imitate the sympathetic qualities of the home. At the best, teachers can only make a beginning, cultivate a taste and habit, open the eyes and sympathies of children for what is beautiful and good, hoping that home, friends, libraries, and life's opportunities will do the rest. What books to select, and how to best present the stories to children, can be better judged by thoughtful educators than by parents. There is a vast amount of sham in literature, and pupils and parents, to a large extent, are not good judges of excellent, as compared with inferior, products. Few teachers, indeed, would be prepared to make a good selection of our best literary materials for children. But this is our problem, and considering the great interests at stake, the millions of boys and girls growing up to life's duties among us, it behooves us to spare neither labor nor pains to sift out the best for each school year.

American history and literature supply some

choice materials, while England, Germany, Greece, and other countries furnish myths and epical stories of great culture value. We glean from broad literary fields and from the history of many lands. It may surprise us also to find that it is the profound literary artists and critics that can help us most in selecting choice products for children. At this point the university and the first primary school are drawn into the closest relation. Men of profound learning like the brothers Grimm, Herder, and Goethe have opened up to the world the treasures of literature for children. It can not but inspire and ennoble the primary teacher to know that she is cultivating her own mind on some of the best literary masterpieces, and while teaching children is only making use of what the best poetic minds have prepared.

Our purpose is to discuss a few of those literary masterpieces which may be made use of in schools, beginning with the first primary grade.