

**WEBSTER-COOLEY
LANGUAGE SERIES. THE
ELEMENTS OF GRAMMAR
AND COMPOSITION**

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Webster-Cooley Language Series. The Elements of Grammar and Composition by W. F. Webster & Alice Woodworth Cooley

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W. F. WEBSTER & ALICE WOODWORTH COOLEY

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WEBSTER-COOLEY LANGUAGE SERIES

THE ELEMENTS OF
GRAMMAR AND
COMPOSITION

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PREFACE

ENGLISH is a unit of study. Including, as it does, not only what is commonly called "language" in the lower grades, but spelling, reading, composition, and grammar, it is by far the most important subject in our common schools. All parts of this great whole are very closely bound together; and the study of any one of these branches is the study of all. An understanding of grammar helps toward correct expression; a knowledge of the difficulties of composition lays a foundation for the true appreciation of beautiful literature; and literature itself is the best instructor in the art of graceful and powerful composition.

The term language, in its usual interpretation, means composition and grammar. Of these two, composition, or the art of expression, is the more important subject for study in elementary education. Every child that completes a common-school education should be able to express correctly, either by writing or by word of mouth, the thoughts he has to exchange with his fellows. In social communication with friends, in the world of business, and in the performance of his duty as a responsible citizen of this nation, the man with the ability to say what he thinks is the master of him who has it not. It is

because composition is regarded of so great importance that it is found in all courses of study in constantly increasing amount. To-day in our best schools it is taught in some form from the day a child enters the kindergarten until he shines forth a graduate of the high school. The custom which once prevailed, and still prevails in some schools, of ceasing to teach composition systematically when the instruction in grammar begins is a grievous mistake. Better far, if need be, to reduce the amount of technical grammar than to give over to any branch the time that should be used in gaining the power of full, clear expression.

Composition is often classified as written and oral. Oral composition has been too often disregarded; yet it has distinct advantages. To be able to say well five or ten sentences upon a definite topic is a great accomplishment, — one of inestimable value. Fronting a large class, with a carefully wrought outline in hand ready for use if needed, the boy who frequently speaks what he thinks about a subject makes surprising gains in courage, in independence, and in the ability to give his thoughts full and complete expression.

Oral exercises have another peculiar advantage. Few, if any, children in the grammar grades *write*, "It is her;" yet too few *say*, "It is she." Written composition cannot discover these common errors in speech; and written composition can never correct them. Constant oral drill on the correct idioms,

until the incorrect form wounds the ear like a blow, is the only way to be rid of the errors of common speech. There are in this book many exercises for the purpose of purifying language of these vulgarisms; but the very best sentences for this purpose are those that the instructor makes to meet the needs of the community in which he labors.

It has already been said that the study of grammar is of great assistance in acquiring purity of speech. It would be impossible for impressionable youth to hear and read beautiful sentences each day without being better for the experience. But when there is added to this contact with beautiful expressions an analysis of them that discovers how they are formed, composition itself is really being studied. Again, the faults in our common talk are nearly all grammatical errors; and a vigorous application of the rules of grammar goes a long way towards rooting up these weeds of conversation. Moreover, a study of the relations of the parts of an English sentence lays a foundation for the study of the grammar of any language; for the expression of thought, in whatever language, follows well-established lines. The study of grammar, then, prepares the student for the study of any other language; it is one of the means of ridding our common speech of some of its worst errors; and it affords the student models of elegant and powerful sentence-structure.

A still more valuable result of the study of gram-

mar is the gain in the student's reasoning power. No other branch in the school curriculum holds such possibilities. History, geography, and spelling are memory subjects; arithmetic alone approaches grammar in the opportunity presented of making clear, careful thinkers. The instructor who teaches grammar with this end in view will train pupils to a shrewdness that looks below the surfaces of things, and to soundness of judgment that is the foundation of lasting success.

This book is planned for use in the last two years of the grammar-school course.¹ The principal language work of these years will be grammar study; but practice in composition-writing is not neglected. Instead of being injected into the grammar text, and so breaking the continuity of the subject, the composition lessons are placed at the back of the book, references through the grammar text indicating when they are to be used. Part I of the Grammar and the first thirty lessons in Composition are intended for the first year, and Part II of the Grammar and the last thirty lessons in Composition for the last year of the two years' course which the book provides.

W. F. WEBSTER.

MINNEAPOLIS, 1906.

¹ It is because grammar makes so heavy demands upon the student that its study should be delayed as late as possible. The best opinion now seems agreed that technical grammar should not be undertaken before the seventh year of school. See *The Teaching of English* by Carpenter, Baker, and Scott, page 146, *et seq.*

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