

## THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL CURRICULUM

### I. THE SCOPE OF A SUNDAY-SCHOOL CURRICULUM

---

REV. RICHARD MORSE HODGE, D.D.  
Union Theological Seminary, New York

---

The curriculum of a Sunday-school should be unprovincial, classified, and graded.

#### I. AN UNPROVINCIAL CURRICULUM

1. Sunday-school instruction should aim to cultivate religious living, worship, the reading of religious literature, and an appreciation of the social tasks which confront the church the world over at the present time.

2. The principal subject-matter should be biblical history and literature. But (*a*) the literary material should embrace every principal variety of religious masterpiece, including history, story, prophecy, essay, discourse, drama, psalm and hymn, and other poetry, in order thoroughly to voice and quicken our religious thoughts and feelings; (*b*) and the historical material should embrace both biblical and church and mission history, the history of non-Christian faiths, some biographies of other than Christian and Hebrew worthies, and a survey of the divine guidance of the world within the life-time of the pupil.

#### II. CLASSIFICATION BY DEPARTMENTS OF STUDY

Worship, religious literature, religious history, and religious discussion should be recognized as so many departments of instruction, each with courses of its own for nearly every grade, in order to promote the special practice of the different methods of teaching peculiar to each as a more or less independent form of religious expression.

1. Worship is learned (*a*) by actual worship, and (*b*) by the exposition of the forms, purpose, and nature of worship. It calls for several elective forms of ritual and a series of lessons upon worship.

2. Religious-literature courses will furnish stories and all other varieties of religious masterpieces. (*a*) Story work calls for story-telling by the teacher and pictorial (selected prints), oral, written, and art (drawings) reproduction by pupils. (*b*) Masterpiece work calls for a furnished list of biblical and other passages, copious enough for selections to be made by pupils for the compilation of scrapbooks, (1) some of the pieces for memorizing, (2) and some for devotional reading. (*c*) Exposition of biblical books calls for furnished lists of the books most worth while, and printed introductory and expository comment for the assistance of teachers and pupils.

3. Religious-history courses call for narrative composition by pupils, illustrated with maps of the pupils' own making, and pictures selected and mounted by them, and the peculiar aids to historical study already familiar to Sunday-school students.

4. Religious-discussion courses call for furnished lists of topics on conduct and doctrine, and tabulated facts, authorities, and issues for the discussion of each subject.

### III. A GRADED CURRICULUM

The gradual development of a child's nature, and the progressive demands made by society upon his religious capacities, call for a grading of methods of instruction already conceded by the common practice of grading classes of pupils according to age. Convenience dictates, and honest exegesis seems to demand, that the historical material be graded also, if it is to yield the various spiritual lessons required by pupils of different ages without violent interpretation.

1. Worship may be graded by different ritual for (*a*) kindergarten and primary grades on the one hand, (*b*) and Grades IV–XII on the other.

2. Religious-literature courses may be graded: (*a*) Children of story age (kindergarten grades and primary Grades I–III) call for stories and some selected masterpieces especially adapted to their religious needs. Stories themselves may be graded, in a measure (1) by form, beginning with the simplest and proceeding, as a rule, from fairy-tales (because stories of virtue triumphant) to fables (e. g., Æsop's animal fables), myths, legends, nature-tales, stories of Jesus and other biblical characters, and non-biblical anecdotes; (2) and

by teachings, beginning, as the nature of children dictates, with stories of implicit obedience, and proceeding with occasional stories both of reasoning obedience and kindness, to stimulate the growth of conscience and incipient altruism, neither of them very practical motives of conduct for children of this age. (*b*) Pupils of nine years of age are ready for the collecting of religious masterpieces, and before the end of school age will be capable of appreciating all of the literary forms in which religious masterpieces are couched. (*c*) Adult classes should undertake an expository study of separate Bible books and authors.

3. Religious-history courses should be graded, because the child repeats the experience of the race and every people, in that the development of conscience essentially precedes any great capacity to love, just as a decided development of the constructive imagination of races and individuals follows later still. We may recognize:

*a*) The period of conscience-building (Grades IV-VI). Conscience is developed by reasoning upon duty, the capacity for which is asserted even as early as the seventh year. Conscience should be well educated by the dawn of adolescence. (1) Hebrew history expresses the reflections of prophets and historians upon the reasonableness of obeying Jehovah, by revealing for us how the religious success of Israel affected the world, and every deed and policy of Hebrew citizens affected Hebrew society for weal or woe; and Old Testament history, from the exodus to the birth of Christ, may be prescribed for pupils of from nine to twelve years of age. (2) Selected parallel and supplementary New Testament narratives, the teachings of the prophets, and the course in religious masterpieces may furnish the Christian standards by which to judge the more or less imperfect ideas of God and human conduct characteristic of Old Testament historians. (3) Missionary biography may be graded according to the stages of civilization of the pagan peoples involved, and each missionary considered may be studied, as nearly as possible, at the same time as the Hebrew prophet who may be laboring with the Israelites when in an approximate stage of material development.

*b*) The period of altruism (Grades VII-XII). Adolescence is the period of the most marked development of the affections, and the sacrificial lives of Jesus and the apostles express the now first

imperative ideals of love, which should be very thoroughly appreciated by the eighteenth year. (1) Two years are necessary for the life and teaching of Jesus; (2) two years for the lives and teachings of the apostles, (3) and two years more for the history of revelation within the Bible and the history of biblical literature. (4) Church history, or Christian biography, falls within this period, (5) and the biographies of pagan sages.

The history courses are better confined to the ten months of the academic year because of the effect of summer vacations upon class attendance.

4. Religious-discussion courses may be graded. The reflection necessary is not sufficiently developed before the beginning of history age, or the tenth year. (a) Classes of Grades IV–XII call for topical talks and discussions upon obedience, fairness in play, veracity, good temper, sexual morality, temperance, honesty, the sins of graft and war, missions, immortality, and consecration to the cause of Christianity, the latter involving the circle of ideas or doctrines which determine the Christian religion. (b) The decided development of the constructive imagination at about the eighteenth year calls for topics for graduate, or “adult,” classes, relating to social betterment, philanthropy, church policies, and other problems ethical and theological, and a well-developed course for the training of Sunday-school teachers.

No courses should be divided into strictly one-Sunday lesson sections. Such dictation is no longer tolerated by day-school teachers