HOMESCHOOL CURRICULUM

For parents

Read every essay yourself before your child does. They were written for adults, and several of them need a decision from you before they are read aloud.

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The essays, and what to know first

ESSAY	UNIT	WHAT TO KNOW FIRST	WITH AGES 10 TO 13
Half of Nothing	5	The Baptist's beheading, with brief, vivid lines about the head and the tongue, at the banquet and once more after it; an unnamed modern ruler some readers will connect to a living one	Retell the banquet, and the paragraph after it, in your own words; read the rest aloud with a map
The Filler of Voids	6	A one-line list of what a feed shows includes "a couple undressing" and "a child under rubble"; nothing graphic	The best fit for this age; read it whole
The Score	6	Death throughout, and the death of a girl of twelve from a tumour, the reader's own age; one line on the camps and the gas chamber	Optional; skip it for a sensitive child
Christ in the Carriage	8, 12	Wartime bombing, one line on the dying; brief nods to the other essays (a neighbour who voted wrongly, a woman in detention with no bed, a young man sold a wolf)	Read it whole, twice
Of Divers Weights	9	Long (about 4,400 words); argues one side of a live policy dispute, and says so	One numbered section a day; end on its note on what is claimed
The Meekest Man That Ever Ate in Hall	9	Sexual allusion ("body counts", seduction); nothing explicit	Ages 12 and 13 only, after you have read it; it speaks to boys who meet "alpha" content online
The Patient Who Cannot Be Guilty	9	Treats much of therapeutic culture as a form of despair, with a stated concession for real wounds	For the parent only; a child in care could hear it as condemning the help they receive
The Senate at Capri	10	Nero's murder of his mother, in one clause	Read it whole
Four Dreadful Words	10	Class disgust; it leans one way culturally, and ends "I include myself"	Optional; good for its neighbour test
On a People That Made Itself	10, 11	Nothing of concern; the densest essay on the map	For the parent; take one line from it into Unit 11
A Plate of Ice	11	Real, named, living people detained and deported in 2025 and 2026; Heschel's own expulsion by the Gestapo in 1938; openly contested politics	Read it first; a child in an immigrant family may find it frightening

ESSAY	UNIT	WHAT TO KNOW FIRST	WITH AGES 10 TO 13
The Rented Hour	12	Nothing of concern	Read it whole

The colloquy *The Misbegotten Objection* is not for this age. The reflection *The Four Soils Are All Yours* adapts well if you read parts of it.

The novels need a look too. Near the end of *The Prisoner's Dilemma*, the book for Term 3, the villain attempts suicide and is saved. Read that chapter first and decide how to take it.

Books and materials

- Trenton Lee Stewart's novels: *The Mysterious Benedict Society* (Term 1), *The Extraordinary Education of Nicholas Benedict* (Term 2) and *The Mysterious Benedict Society and the Prisoner's Dilemma* (Term 3). *The Perilous Journey* and *The Riddle of Ages* are for the summer.
- *Mr. Benedict's Book of Perplexing Puzzles, Elusive Enigmas, and Curious Conundrums*, for Monday puzzles beyond the ones each unit suggests.
- The essays, printed; each has a PDF on its page.
- A Bible and the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- A commonplace book for each child: every Friday's answers and every unit's essay, the year in one notebook.
- For the weeks with things to make: two flashlights, a pendulum (string, a heavy nut and a lazy Susan), a shoebox for a camera obscura, modelling clay, graph paper and painter's tape.
- For the suggested workshop strand: a computer with a keyboard and a web browser, for the free online IDE of Nand to Tetris, and the course's own lectures on YouTube. Neither needs an account. The setup guide walks the child through it. The book, Nisan and Schocken's *The Elements of Computing Systems* (MIT Press), is optional.

The workshop strand

Nand to Tetris was written for university students, and high schools teach it too. A child of 10 to 13 can do the first projects with you beside them. Do each chip's truth table on paper first, as a Monday puzzle, and only then build it in the simulator.

Mr. Benedict would approve of how it checks the work. Every chip comes with a test file, and the simulator says whether the chip passes. It cannot be talked into a pass, and nothing in it rewards recitation. The answers to every project are easy to find online, so the strand is the end-of-term trial's offered answers, every week. It is passed by not looking them up.

The strand's page sets out each project week by week, with its lectures and a note for you on where children get stuck. The assembler is done by hand, or in Scratch, with a real language left for a second year. Part II of the course, the software, belongs to that second year too.

Mr. Benedict's tests

The year is assessed the way Mr. Benedict chose his children: by how they think, whether they tell the truth, and how they work together, never by how much they can recite. He held that what let them resist the hidden messages was an unusual love of truth, so that is what every test looks for.

Every Friday

1. **A question hidden in a question.** One item cannot be answered without noticing something in another, as on his second test.
2. **An honesty question.** One question where the honest answer costs something, as "Are you brave?" did. Full marks for the true answer, whatever it is.
3. **A team problem.** Solved together, with each child's gift needed. There is always a way that uses everyone.
4. **Spot the Whisperer.** An advertisement, headline or slogan: what does it want you to feel, what does it want you to do, and what message sits under the one it says?

Answers go in the commonplace book. The reasons are marked, not the recitation.

The end-of-term trials, in weeks 12, 24 and 36

- **The written test.** Ten questions: three with a trick in the wording, one whose answer appears in another question, and one honesty question.
- **The tile room.** A problem that gives way to looking rather than computing, like the floor of rectangles.
- **The maze.** A route learned with the eyes open and walked again with them shut: memory and order.
- **The offered answers.** Partway through, someone offers the answers. The test is passed by refusing them.
- **The essay.** One page in a borrowed voice on the term's best question. In Term 3 it is the essay the child would add to the map.

The warning signs

If any of these creep into the schoolroom, the year has drifted toward L.I.V.E.

SIGN	AT THE INSTITUTE	WHAT MR. BENEDICT DID INSTEAD
Recitation rewarded	Memorising was officially discouraged and in practice required	Asked questions only thinking could answer
Speaking required, never allowed	Taking part was required but rarely permitted	Let Constance answer with a rude poem, and passed her
Rules denied but enforced	“No rules”, then a list of them	Offered the mission again and again, and let the children refuse
A child prized for use	Messengers, the top students, prized as channels for the Whisperer	Chose each child for a gift the others lacked
Truth by whoever says it	Every word from above counted the same	Answered with hints and let the children work it out
Punishment without a hearing	The Waiting Room, taken blindfold	Explained why candy is a poor breakfast, and gave no order
Keeping score	Quizzes, rank and the Messengers’ blue sashes	Never counted; each child was essential

The twelve cases

Each unit’s third week works one case. They were worked through a claim checker, which does not say whether a claim is true; it shows when a claim is badly formed: a fact treated as a doctrine, a law treated as a teaching, a verdict said of a person instead of an act. One of its rules is a good one to say aloud: never compute anyone’s interior.

UNIT	THE CASE	WHAT IT SHOWS
1 Reading	“The sun stood still” (Joshua 10:12–13)	Both readings kept while the fact is still open
2 Number	Two creatures each the ancestor of the other	An order has no circle in it
3 Nature	Galileo, as of 1700 and as of 1950	A finding settles a fact; a censure of heresy cannot
4 Making	The power to create given to a minister	No creature gives another its being; the sculptor makes
5 Memory	A letter of a pope who died about 160 that quotes a council of 325	The attribution fails on its dates; who wrote it and whether it binds are two questions
6 The Person	Mr. Benedict asleep	The image of God is not tied to reason in use
7 Being	God on the top rung of the ladder of beings	God is the cause of the series, not its biggest member
8 God	The Immaculate Conception in 1800 and in 1860	An open question closed by an act of the right rank; three Doctors noted, not condemned
9 The Act	The trolley: the lever, the transplant, the push	The verdict falls on the act; what was chosen is claimed, and what makes an act direct is read two ways
10 The City	The conditions for the use of force (Catechism 2309)	Supplied by those responsible; skip one and there is no answer
11 Law	When a law begins to bind (c. 8 §1)	29 February 2024, or 1 March when the month lacks the day
12 Worship	“We baptize” (2020)	The form is not ours to change; a doubt is resolved conditionally, never guessed

A note on the books

The details of the novels given in each unit come from the publisher’s educator guide, study guides and reviews. Check the chapter spans against your own copies before the year starts.

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