

The Christopher Curriculum

A Rough Guide to
Eighth Grade

by Donna Simmons

Christopher Homeschool Resources
PO Box 231
Viroqua, WI, 54665
608-637-8559

www.christopherushomeschool.org

A Rough Guide to Eighth Grade

Welcome to our *Rough Guide to Eighth Grade*. Please feel free to print this document out for your own use or to share with others — though we request that you credit us if you share our work.

Please be sure to check back to the document on our website fairly frequently as we will be revising and changing it as we add further relevant publications to our Bookstore.

Don't forget to visit our [Amazon Store](#) where you can purchase most of the books referred to in the following pages. Do remember as well that there are many more resources listed and lessons explained in both our [Curriculum Overview](#) and [From Nature Stories to Natural Science](#) books, available from the Christopherus Bookstore.

Eighth grade is completely different from all the preceding grades, both in terms of the Waldorf curriculum, what actually happens in Waldorf schools and what makes the most sense in terms of homeschooling. This year is a real adventure and, with a bit of daring and a lot of creativity, could be the best year of your child's education so far!

Before reading further, I strongly recommend that you read through both the [Sixth Grade Rough Guide](#) and the [Seventh Grade Rough Guide](#). I won't be repeating things from there and there is an awful lot in both *Guides* that is relevant to eighth grade. Also, it might well be that your child has missed something from the curriculum and you feel that he should have the opportunity this year to address that. If you are new to Waldorf homeschooling or to Waldorf or your child's education has been very different from the Christopherus sequence, you might actually want to look even further back in the curriculum for ideas and resources. If, for example, your child never did any form drawing or only a bit, there is no reason in the world not to do it now. Look through the *Sixth Grade Rough Guide* for comments on this.

Do consider purchasing our [Audio Download on 7th and 8th Grade](#) as you plan this year.

Figuring Out Eighth Grade

The first thing you need to do (after reading the sixth and seventh grade *Guides*) is to have a long conversation with your child and your husband/partner about the future and about what your child hopes to achieve in eighth grade. The following are a few points for consideration and exactly how you answer them will determine how you structure your child's education this year:

- Will your child go to high school next year? Will that be a public, Waldorf or other school? What requirements might the school have which you need to focus on this year?

- Or will your child homeschool for high school? There are very few Waldorf high school resources available and so you will have to compromise even more than in past years. However, one can certainly find many good solid resources, curriculums and support for homeschooling high school. We recommend [Clonlara](#) and [Oak Meadow](#) as possible resources and that one consider using our high school resources in addition to or instead of some of their possible suggestions. Clonlara basically provides support services and structure to homeschoolers who create their own course of study while Oak Meadow provides curriculum and offers support as well. Neither is Waldorf, but both are open to Waldorf.
- What strengths, weaknesses and gaps need to be addressed this year, regardless of your child going on to school or not?
- What will your child do for her Eighth Grade Project? (more on this later in this Guide)

As hinted to above, no two Waldorf eighth grades are very much alike. The goal for the year, as stated by Rudolf Steiner, is to bring the child up to modern times in all aspects of learning, be that science, art or the humanities. That was a tall order back in Steiner's day and it is overwhelming today! And each Waldorf eighth grade teacher tackles this in a different way, depending, as always, on the needs of his students, what is possible given all the various restraints in a school and what there is time for.

Generally, though, one finds a number of usual classes and goals in Waldorf schools — it's not as if there isn't a curriculum for eighth grade! But...between the class play, fund raising for the class trip, taking the class trip, Eighth Grade Projects and all the other things that children do in their last year of elementary school, the usual curriculum does tend to look a bit different than in past years. As you read through this *Guide*, you will see suggestions for various subjects, based on the Waldorf eighth grade curriculum and tempered by my experience as a Waldorf teacher, homeschooling parent and educational consultant.

Schedule of Main Lessons

Here is a possible schedule for you to use this year. Remember, your schedule of lessons might look very, very different! Adjust as necessary.

Fall

Math 3 weeks

Shakespeare 3 weeks

Modern History 4 weeks

Geometry 3 weeks

Magnetism and Electricity 2 weeks

Break

Winter/Spring

American History 4 weeks

Human Anatomy and Physics 3 weeks

Geography 4 weeks

Food Chemistry 3 weeks

Sustainability 4 weeks

Finishing Up Week

Notes:

- Your math main lesson could focus on the binary system and computers and your geometry main lesson on Platonic Solids.
- Studies of the ocean and meteorology can come in during geography....but might best be left for high school.
- Biography is an important theme for eighth grade and can be included in a variety of lessons. For instance, biographies of famous mathematicians can be included in

math lessons and other biographies can come in during history and language arts lessons.

- As always, leave one week open at the end of the year for finishing up any loose ends.

Language Arts

Like last year, we suggest that you schedule one 1 hour lesson and two 30 minute lessons per week, instead of three 30 minute periods as in past years. This will give you and your child a longer uninterrupted period during which you can work in-depth on a paper and discuss relevant points about grammar, spelling or so on. During the shorter lessons your child can work in a workbook or copy things into his English Notebook as in past years.

Remember, you will also have plenty of time to address language arts issues during most of your main lessons.

Please refer to the language arts section of the *Rough Guide to Seventh Grade* for specific suggestions. Much of what you do this year depends, of course, on what you did last year. There will be time for review and for taking work a few steps further. Bearing in mind what requirements your child might need to fulfill for her next steps in education will also determine what exactly you do this year.

Here are a few notes:

- Your child no longer needs to read aloud to you except in the case where he needs to read something to you so that the two of you can then discuss it.
- But do continue to read aloud to your child. Indeed, this can continue until your child leaves home. Read aloud came to an abrupt end (for the most part we still maintained the tradition of special holiday read-aloud selections) when our then 14 year old declared that he much preferred to read to himself. Our then 16 year old would have been very pleased to have carried on but we decided to go with the preference of the younger son. Discussing books together, however, has remained something that we all enjoy very much.
- Do take an American theme for your explorations of poetry, tying it in with American history. Poets such as Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson (to name just a very few) really explore themes unique to being American — yet, because they are artists, manage to make their work universal at the same time. Obviously, if you are in another country and not studying American history, then find suitable poets from your country.

- Science reports; creative descriptions and narratives; copying your writing or that of an author's; dictation; writing summaries from history lessons or of narratives you tell or your child reads; working together to write short pieces as well as a couple of biographies: all are good things to do this year. Do not be afraid to continue to work together, but it is also a fine time for your child to struggle alone with her writing.

You could also try helping your child write a short story. [Writing for 100 Days](#), which we sell in the Christopherus Bookstore, is a great help with this and with all other aspects of both fiction and non fiction writing. There is also a very good section on writing poetry.

- This year you can challenge your child with a formal vocabulary building program. I have reviewed many such offerings on the market and am most enthusiastic about *Vocabulary from Classical Roots* by Norma Fifer and Nancy Flowers. This series of books is really well done — they never patronize children and the examples they give are actually worthy of discussion and thinking about. No “edutainment” here! Unfortunately, these books are rather hard to get ahold of. You could try used on Amazon, but you need to know which volume to get — and that is not obvious from the cover. A better bet might be to go to their publishers at www.epsbooks.com where you can read a description of the various books. I used the Teacher's Guide for myself and the workbooks for my students (and for my sons when I was homeschooling them). I used Books B and C for 9th and 10th grade.

Here is just a sprinkling of books for your child to read to herself or for you to read to her. Please also check our [Amazon Store page Great Read Alouds Age 12 — 14](#) for more suggestions as well as the seventh grade *Guide* as many of those titles will be appropriate.

Bear in mind that many of these following titles have to do with American history because it is an eighth grade theme. And many are biographies as this is also a key theme this year. The reading level of these books varies enormously: some will be way too easy for your child and some will go over his head, better left for high school.

Kim, Rudyard Kipling

Kidnapped, Robert Lewis Stevenson

A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett, David Crockett

The Winter People and *The Journal of Jesse Smoke*, Joseph Bruchac

The *Montmorency* series, Eleanor Update

Tales from King Arthur, Andrew Lang

Ivanhoe, Sir Walter Scott

The Witch of Blackbird Pond and *The Sign of the Beaver*, Elizabeth George Speare

The Red Badge of Courage, Stephen Crane

The King's Fifth and *Streams to the River, River to the Sea*, Scott O'Dell

Escape from Slavery, Frederick Douglass

The Perilous Journey of the Donner Party, Marian Calabro

The Hound of Bakervilles: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery, Arthur Conan Doyle
 Various short stories by O. Henry
To Be a Slave, Julius Lester
The Thief, Megan Whalen Turner
The Red Pony, The Pearl and Travels with Charlie, John Steinbeck
 Various stories by Agatha Christy
Wild Animals I Have Known, Ernest Thompson Seton
George Washington Carver: The Man who Overcame, Lawrence Elliott
The Pirate Hunter, Richard Zacks
Black Elk Speaks
The Diary of Anne Frank
Autobiography, Benjamin Franklin
Napoleon, Paul Johnson
Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela
The Story of My Life, Helen Keller
Letters and Papers from Prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
And There Was Light, Jacques Lusseyran
The Autobiography of Malcolm X
David Copperfield, A Christmas Carol and Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens
City of the Beasts, Isabel Allende
Rifles for Watie, Harold Keith
Johnny Tremain, Esther Forbes
 Various titles by Louisa May Alcott
Andromeda Strain, Michael Crichton
Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Prince and the Pauper, Mark Twain
The Giver, Lois Lowry
Jacob I Have Loved, Katherine Paterson
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Mildred D. Taylor
Souder, William Armstrong
Fahrenheit 451, Ray Bradbury
My Antonia, Willa Cather
April Morning, Howard Fast
The Three Musketeers, Alexander Dumas
The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Washington Irving

Biography, as said repeatedly throughout this *Guide*, is an important theme for eighth grade. There are a number of biographies and autobiographies in the list above. You could also purchase a wonderful book from the Christopherus Bookstore called [*Biographies for 8th Grade History*](#) written by a Waldorf teacher and illustrated by students in her class.

History

If you haven't already, you might also want to give some thought to what general history resources you have in your family library as these books will become increasingly important in the years to come. I highly recommend the multi-volume *The Story of Civilization* by Will and Ariel Durant. Though not all parts of the world get the treatment they deserve, these books are some of the most brilliant, entertaining, scholarly yet accessible history books available.

Another possibility is Hendrick van Loom's *The Story of Mankind*. I do not recommend Susan Wise Bauer's history books as they bring an unfortunate triviality and lack of depth to the retelling of history.

You could also think about getting a couple of history textbooks. You can get second hand ones from Amazon or sometimes local public schools sell their outdated (ie a few years old and usually in good condition!) textbooks for very reasonable prices. I suggest you get one middle grades text and a high school text and that you use these to give yourself the background and chronology that you need. Eighth graders are too young to have history spoiled for them by the dry or, conversely, hokey, ways that modern textbooks approach history. Remember, from a Waldorf perspective we are treating history as story, as narrative and as the adventures and misadventures of individuals. Mass movements, cause and effect and a concern with dates is for high school. And text books are never used for history in Waldorf schools – even in high school.

Our Island Story by Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall is an old fashioned narrative with some rather unfortunate ideas about “the Natives” which would have to be explained (not skipped in 8th grade — it's time for your child to understand about things like racism) but which is, nevertheless, a wonderfully rousing read, covering the whole of British (ie English) history into the early part of the 20th Century. It is well written and full of the kinds of stories and anecdotes that bring history alive. I recommend it for those who want a lively history of Britain but who are prepared to also look for additional resources to convey a fuller and less biased picture to one's child.

In this year's schedule we have created time for two history main lessons. Please, please think carefully about how you want to approach history and what you wish to cover! The rule of thumb is that you bring the child up into the modern world in history this year. But that could be overwhelming. Much will of course depend on where you left off last year...but that does not mean that just because you barely got into the Renaissance with your child that you only say manage to get into the 19th century this year! You'll just have to be ruthlessly efficient in your teaching and unsparing in what you skip or abbreviate. Do bear in mind that your child will get a lot of history through the books she reads this year (see the massive list in the language arts section of this *Guide*). And you can also sneak a bit more history into your Extra Main lesson times. But be careful – it is crucial that your child gets a good grasp of the flow of history and a sense for development and change over time. She may not recognize every historical event and important person, but she really ought to know how, for instance, the Reformation and

the French Revolution effected human development (in an age appropriate way, of course).

So you should try to get at least as far as World War II and possibly as far as the Cold War during history. Further still would be better but might not be feasible.

And this needs to be undertaken during the first of the two history blocks. The second block in the schedule included in this *Guide* is devoted to American history, which, if you're somewhere else, would be instead focused on the modern history of your country. Thus one could gloss over relevant US history in one's first main lesson. In our [Curriculum Overview](#) we suggest that one try to have a history block of a country such as Russia or China. That could be good and might be a better choice if, for instance, your child is about to enter public school for high school, where, in many states and districts, students are only able to study American history. Thus it could be especially important for your child to become acquainted with the history and culture of another, very different, part of the world. Another possibility is that one spend time looking at various countries in Africa. This could have been part of your geography studies last year. But if not, do consider purchasing *Hear the Voice of the Griot* an indispensable resource for any study of Africa. Note: This book is currently out of print but can be found used or through a library loan.

The main history resource for the first history main lessons is [The Age of Revolution](#), by Charles Kovacs, sold in our Bookstore. While there is some overlap between what you have already done in seventh grade and then what you will do in eighth grade, this book is a very valuable resource, giving living and colorful stories of some of the main figures and movements during the period of history which you will be studying with your child this year. You can use it as the basis for your own narrative or you can read from the book to your child. If you do the latter, you can supplement and add further information as the narratives Kovacs provides, while warmth-filled and true to how a Waldorf teacher would spin his tales, are rather thin. What is missing from Kovacs' books is the context for the stories. My assumption is that he did indeed give his class a much fuller picture of what he was talking about but that this did not make it into his books. So you will have to supplement. And, as Kovacs, who taught in a Scottish Waldorf school, is very British-centered (with special references to Scotland as is quite appropriate given where his students lived) you will need to find additional material to give a fuller picture of the history you are covering.

Here are links to a couple of websites full of links to other websites which should either serve to help or utterly confuse you as you prepare for your child's history lessons this year and into the future!

<http://www.academicinfo.net/histaateach.html>

<http://www.worldhistorycompass.com/select.htm#Select>

And here is one man's history lessons for his college class at a college in Florida. Lively and helpful if you are patchy with history. But this is waaaay more than you really need for teaching eighth grade history — I used this material for when I was brushing up for high school history classes I taught. However, if you really draw a blank when it comes to history, it might be a good idea to read this, or some other source.

<http://www.historyguide.org/>

For American history, Joy Hakim's *A History of Us* is a wonderful resource for any family library. It is, unfortunately, written for younger children but even if your child turns his sophisticated nose up at it, you yourself might find it useful (I certainly did when preparing to teach both middle grades and high school American history). Although it is written for younger children (maybe about 11 or 12 years of age) it is done really, really well, relying heavily on primary resources and documents. If you can, and if there is a real interest in American history in your household, do consider splashing out for the whole series.

If the Civil War especially captures your child's imagination, do consider watching Paul Fleischman's brilliant film, *Bull Run*. This is a compelling and fascinating account of Bull Run told from the perspective of 16 people of vastly different viewpoints.

A good online American history resource for 8th grade on up is www.thisnation.com The [Discovery Channel](#) also has a lot of useful information and, of course, films to watch.

For your own preparation, you might like to read Howard Zinn's lively *Voices of a People's History of the United States*. There is much in there that you might wish to share with your child.

Please refer to the extensive reading list in the language arts section of this *Guide* for many titles relevant to your child's history studies this year (especially American history). If you are not going to do an American history block, then you will have to see what other resources you can find! Don't forget to include a number of biographies of people from the different time periods you study.

Here is a very rough and very approximate outline for your first history main lesson:

Main Lesson I, Modern History 4 Weeks

Week One

Review from last year. Key ideas: growth of independence and freedom exemplified by the guilds in the Renaissance and the questioning of all frontiers and boundaries, including relationships between kings and underlings; the individual's relationship to the Church and God; new frontiers in art and science; and exploring beyond the Old World.

Week Two

The French and American Revolutions. Discuss ideas as well as historical events. Contrast the lives of kings such as the Sun King Louis XIV and the peasants. Touch on the idea of the Divine Right of Kings. The slave rebellions and founding of Haiti (it is important for children to see that the ideas of the French Revolution inspired people beyond Europe and America). Napoleon and a new Europe.

Week Three

The Industrial Revolution, Enclosures and the rise of the Worker's Movements in Europe. Imperialism and Colonialism leading to WWI.

Week Four

The Depression and the Rise of the Nazis; World War II. The Cold War. American world domination; Viet Nam and the Middle East.

That's a lot! Good luck!

As for your possible American history main lesson, I leave that to you. Find a good resource to work with (and aside from the ones I mentioned, your public library will be chock full of great books on American history) and go for it! Just try to remember 1) you cannot cover everything; 2) to take a symptomatic approach, describing what was characteristic of a period; 3) to include plenty of biographical material and anecdotal stories to keep your history studies alive!

Geography

This year's focus is on the Earth as whole, though you should first look at regions you have not covered yet, such as Australia, New Zealand, countries of the Pacific, the Antarctica. It would also be really good if you could spend some time looking at the ocean and at meteorology, picking up from your third grade weather block and now looking more deeply at climate and global weather patterns.

In order to achieve all of this, you could look at Australia, New Zealand and the island nations of the Pacific during Week 1; at the ocean during Week 2; at meteorology during Week 3; and at the Earth as a whole during Week 4. You will have to be extremely disciplined to make this coherent and not feel rushed. But do not despair — this kind of thing happens to Waldorf teachers all the time! And you can always use some of your Extra Main lesson time or find other times during the day to extend your geography lessons.

Here is a link to a [blog article I wrote about a World Geography main lesson](#) I taught the eighth grade at our local Waldorf School a few years ago.

This is a helpful website for geography studies: www.physicalgeography.net. [NASA](#) and the [US Geological Survey](#) website are also very informative.

Here are some notes adapted from past years:

- as always, look at the land, plants, animals, water, weather, and human culture/industry
- Tell or read stories and myths from various countries and look for ways that similar stories traveled from one culture to another
- Do not make a main lesson book for this block. Instead, make a portfolio, collage, scrapbook or other way of recording what your child has done.
- Your child can research and then write a report on a country. Now, in eighth grade, this could involve a look at the past, at the country's history as well as something about the current political, social situation of the country.
- Create a variety of folk crafts from various countries/regions. There are zillions of books in any public library which can help with this. Resources for regional recipes will also be plentiful!
- As with past year's geography lessons, you should create a quiz for your child. Make sure this is more sophisticated and challenging than in past years.

Handwork, Crafts and Art

Please refer to the [overview of our Handwork Curriculum](#) to see a flow from one year to the next and to check if you missed anything that might benefit your child.

You really are on your own with such subjects now. Those of you who are gifted at handwork, making complex crafts or who are artists will be able to teach your own children. But most of you will need to enlist the help of others in your community. You might be lucky enough to have a Waldorf handwork teacher who will give your child lessons or you might find some other craftsperson or local artist who is also skilled at working with children. In the latter case, you will need to compromise in terms of the curriculum as that person will have his or her own ideas about what to teach and their own skills. That's the adventure of homeschooling an older child!

In a fully staffed Waldorf school (and those are rare) your child might still be having woodworking lessons (continuing work begun in sixth grade) or he might even be doing sculpture or metal work. It depends entirely on the resources of the school. And so you should not hesitate to seek out skilled craftspeople in your locality and see if they can work with your child. Blacksmithing or other metalwork, pottery, sculpture, basket weaving, making stained glass, weaving on a large stationary loom....the possibilities are endless and the only constraints are the ability of the craftsperson to teach and the interest of your child. An exploration of traditional American country crafts could be an excellent pursuit this year.

A wonderful resource with some clear directions for various woodworking and other craft projects is *Educating the Will* by Michael Howard. This book also gives profound insight into some of the deepest and most significant aspects of Waldorf education. It is absolutely brilliant.

In handwork, the exact curriculum varies somewhat from one to school to the next. We recommend that you knit a sweater with your child following on from the pull-over vest knit in seventh grade. This sweater can be as simple or complex as ability allows. Your child should be able to follow a complex knitting (and other) pattern by now.

Since the main theme for the year is "into the modern world", it is finally time to use a sewing machine! Usually, a child would make a shirt this year in a Waldorf school, making the design and pattern himself. A shirt could be a complicated affair complete with set-in cuffs and collar or a simpler peasant-type blouson shirt with a round neck and no cuffs. To work up to making a shirt, it could be that a few simple sewing projects on the sewing machine need to be created first. There are many, many online resources for sewing projects.

<http://www.craftandfabriclinks.com/sewingbook/sewbook.html>

Another wonderful project this year could be for your child to make a doll, perhaps for a younger child, complete with clothes. [Magic Cabin Dolls](#) has a good selection of doll patterns and supplies:

[Learning About the World through Modeling](#) by Arthur Auer and [Painting in Waldorf Education](#) by Dick Bruin and Attie Lichthart continue to be your main resources for these two disciplines. Do remember that there are sections on drawing in the latter book, including specific lessons for eighth grade.

Using art books is also possible, but probably only works for those who basically know what they are doing or have taken a few art lessons. Here are a few books which you might find helpful. None are “Waldorf” as there isn’t any Waldorf art book I can recommend other than the ones above:

Sketching and Drawing for Children, Genevieve Vaughan-Jackson

Drawing: A Complete Course, Lucy Davidson Rosenfeld

The Complete Book of Drawing, Barrington Barber

Portraiture is an important subject to be mastered this year in art classes, complementing the work the children do in exploring the biographies of famous people. We sell a lovely little book, [Biographies for Eighth Grade History](#), for use this year. Each section on the biography of a famous person is complemented by a portrait of that person drawn by a Waldorf student. Just don’t be intimidated by this!

If you are able to teach or your child is very skilled at drawing or you have found him a good teacher, a self portrait is also a wonderful challenge this year as your child completes an important stage of his life.

Science

The main science subjects this year are magnetism and electricity; human physiology and physics; and food chemistry. There is also a block on Sustainability which could be counted as a science main lesson or could be more along the lines of a politics, economics and even ethics block. That main lesson is discussed in the section following Science.

Our book, [*From Nature Studies to Natural Science*](#) lists many resources and provides more ideas on what you can do during these science blocks.

Please look carefully through the Science section in the preceding guides as there are many links and resources which are relevant for eighth grade.

Magnetism and Electricity — for this short 2 week block you can base most of your lessons on the wonderful book we sell called [*Safe and Simple Electrical Experiments*](#). You could also do some research on Thomas Edison and Benjamin Franklin with your child so that they also learn about electricity from a historical perspective and get some understanding of the steps taken to unravel its mysteries. There are many wonderful books and also museums dedicated to the lives of these men.

Human Anatomy and Physics — You can carry on with Charles Kovacs' [*Muscles and Bones*](#) where you left off last year and enrich this study enormously by mainly basing it on the book [*Uprightness, Weight and Balance*](#), sold in the Christopherus Bookstore. This is an amazing book written by a master Waldorf teacher and Goethean scientist who really knows his stuff — and who weaves human anatomy and physics together in a beautifully artistic way. Our suggestion is that this be a 3 week main lesson.

Your third science main lesson this year is on **Food Chemistry**. Please refer to *From Nature Stories to Natural Science* for a discussion of how you can approach this block. And do connect it with studies on the digestive system and nutrition from last year.

Sustainability

In many ways this main lesson could become the crowning achievement of your child's education, the block that pulls it all together, presenting the pinnacle of human achievement as the modern rediscovery of how to live a sustainable life on our dear planet Earth. Without demonizing progress and modern achievement or romanticizing cultures and societies from the past, one can present a sober but nevertheless exciting look at what can be achieved now and into the future.

It is entirely up to you how you create this main lesson. Here are just a few ideas. And do refer to the relevant section of *From Nature Stories to Natural Science* for more ideas, discussion and resources.

- green technology including energy, land use and housing
- the politics of energy consumption
- political and cultural ideas around sustainability including direct democracy, consensus, resource sharing
- fiction written about societies of the future
- fair trade issues
- visits to communities or protest sites working with ideas of sustainability such as community farms, intentional communities or various camps and teach-in sites
- reading journals and newspaper articles supportive of or critical of any of the above

What could really make this block special is if you are able to visit places where sustainable living is practiced and shared. Biodynamic farms, Camphill communities, CSA's, fair trade companies, local food co-ops, green housing communities....there are many places in every community which would welcome visitors who want to learn more about what they do.

Mathematics, Computers and Geometry

Make sure you begin by having a thorough read of the math and geometry section of the sixth and seventh grade *Guides*. There is much overlap between the grades in mathematics and every child will be on a slightly different path, even if you have used Christopherus materials from first grade! Please also look carefully at the various middle grades pages on our website for an explanation of what we offer and how to choose the appropriate *Key To* workbooks for your child's math and geometry studies.

Your goal in math this year is to really make sure that you child is up to speed with basic math such as fractions, percentages and decimals; to explore geometry as thoroughly and as far as your child is able; to work with Platonic Solids both on paper and in 3-D models; and to take further steps with algebra.

You can use your math main lesson time to consolidate from last year or to explore computers, an important topic for eighth grade. Any study of computers should start with looking at how computers actually work. This can begin with a study of the binary system and also of Jacquard looms.

Your geometry main lesson can be focused on reviewing work from last year and on Platonic Solids. The following book is a good guide for this.

[*Mathematics in Nature, Space and Time*](#) is the main text for 8th grade math and geometry. It has examples in it, but you'll need a selection of *Key To* math workbooks for practice and drill, unless you are willing to create all the extra problems yourself!

Note: if you use this book to base your year's lessons on, do bear in mind that it recommends a sequence of math somewhat different from what we lay out in the Schedule part of this *Rough Guide*. You will have to decide whether you do one main lesson on computers or not and also what will be covered during main lesson time and what is covered in math practice lessons.

[*The Ambitious Horse*](#), which we sell in our Bookstore, is a wonderful collection of challenging mathematics problems for your child which you might like to consider.

Have a good look at the various math games, books and other resources which we sell in [our Amazon Store](#).

In addition to the books we sell, you might also want to consider L. George Saad's *Developmental Mathematics* books. We provide more information on this book on our page where we outline what [resources we sell for eighth grade](#).

This year, like last year, your child needs both a protractor and a good compass for work as proofs and constructions are a major part of geometry. Make sure your child is equipped with a high quality compass which does not slip once its position is set — the kind with the wheel work best.

Here is a very useful collection of links to various websites with puzzles, work sheets and hands-on exercises for a variety of geometric exercises:

<http://42explore.com/geomet.htm>

It would be good to present, even briefly, the biography of various mathematicians and to ensure that your child has an overall grasp of the development of mathematics throughout history. *The Ambitious Horse*, mentioned above, does a good job at looking at the development of mathematics in China.

Literature/Drama

In all Waldorf schools the eighth grade performs a class play at or near the end of the year. Traditionally, this has usually been a Shakespeare play but other plays are also performed, depending on what the teacher thinks suits her class best.

Ideally, your child will have an opportunity this year to be in a community play or perhaps in a play with other homeschoolers or in a youth group of some kind. This is an opportunity which, if you can make it happen, is incredibly enriching to a child, even if

he shies away from the limelight. Acting would be best, but help with costumes, lighting or other aspects of a performance are also valuable experiences.

In addition to your child (hopefully) performing in a play, it would also be good if you and he read a play together and discuss it as a play. You could, for example, read one of the stories of Shakespeare's plays given in Charles and Mary Lamb's wonderful *Tales From Shakespeare* and then read the play together. Then, what would be best, is if you could go to a performance of the play. Second best would be to watch a film — but one that is created as a film of a play, not as an adaptation. The BBC has a series of Shakespeare's plays which are just that — films of plays. For 8th grade, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It* are probably the best, though *Julius Caesar* is also quite good for a keen history buff (and was suggested in sixth grade during one's study of Roman History).

We recommend that you use plays from the Oxford School series, published by Oxford University Press. The plays are untouched and unabridged, but there are accompanied by a very full set of notes and explanation of words, terms and references, as well as plot summaries and discussion of the text and characters which you might feel you need to teach your child successfully. The books are also lightly but tastefully illustrated.

During this block you could extend your studies into a look at Shakespeare's life and his work. There are many, many books on Shakespeare, but one I especially like is *Shakespeare: His Work and His World* by Michael Rosen and Robert Ingpen. This book is filled with beautiful illustrations and works passages from the plays and sonnets seamlessly into the text, making it a joy to read. The synopsis of the plays is also done in an especially skillful way.

An intriguing book for you to read for your own preparation is *Shakespeare's Prophetic Mind* by AC Harwood. This book is written from an anthroposophical perspective and brings a fresh perspective to a study of Shakespeare's plays.

If your local theatre is putting on quite different plays you could instead choose one to see with your child and read that play together first. Then you could carry on with a study of Shakespeare during this block as well. In other words, viewing a live play and reading the play beforehand and discussing it together is the object of this block. A study of the life and work of Shakespeare is also important, but can be in addition to working with a live play.

Foreign Language, Movement/Sports, Social Studies, Health & Safety, Cooking and Music

Please refer to the relevant section in the *Rough Guide to Sixth Grade* for guidance on these subjects.

As in years past, you should have no trouble at all satisfying any requirements for social studies which your State (or Province or Territory) might have. Geography and history lessons should be ample. Your block on Sustainability can also be counted as Social Studies in addition to Science (and Language Arts and possible Art requirements, depending on what you do). And, finally, you will be able to point to your studies of American history to satisfy that perennial requirement!

Please [refer to our science outline](#) to view the overall flow of cooking lessons through the grades. A general goal for the year would be to strive toward as much comfort and mastery in the kitchen as your child can manage, including planning, preparing and (most importantly) cleaning up after entire meals. The meals should be nutritious, aesthetically pleasing and well balanced and your child should have some understanding of budgeting and family preferences when creating his meals.

Eighth Grade Project

When I was a girl at my Waldorf school (in NYC) we did not do an Eighth Grade Project. Many years later, as a teacher and then as a homeschooling parent I heard about such Projects and thought that this was a wonderful idea. What a great way for a student to round off his or her elementary school education!

However, in some Waldorf Schools the Projects I have seen have been a bit lackluster, I would say. They seemed to only reflect a student's current interest and didn't, in my estimation, fully stretch him or her to complete something that really showed that they are well rounded, well educated individuals, with a diversity of skills and knowledge. For me, that is what an Eighth Grade Project should be all about.

And of course it should be focused on something that the child is interested in. But, ideally, it should have components from all three main branches of learning, from the sciences, humanities and the arts.

So a student who is an ardent ballet dancer could put on a performance — but she should also have to write a paper which, for example, focuses on the history of ballet and could perhaps include something about the physics of dance.

A student who raises and trains a puppy should also write a paper on dogs — but one that requires some research and analysis, not just a simple paper about German Shepherds or similar. And then there should be a science component. Maybe something about the evolution of canines, or a study of the anatomy of the dog. And he could make a sculpture of his dog.

A child who writes a computer program also needs to write a paper, perhaps exploring some aspect of the work she has completed. Or maybe she could write a short story about

computers of the future. This could be illustrated, thus fulfilling the artistic aspect of the Project.

And so on. The Eighth Grade Project should be an exercise in planning as well. You should set definite goals and deadlines for each step of the process. For example, after having a general conversation with your child about the Project in September, you could require that he write out a proposal for what he wants to do due 1 October (and of course you have to show him how to write a proposal, giving him exercises in writing proposals for language arts classes for instance). Then you and he discuss this. Make sure that you guide and help him but that you do not teach him, instruct him, fill in for his lapses or otherwise take on work which should be his and his alone. You are a resource and facilitator in this process. This is an opportunity for your child to learn where his strengths and weaknesses are.

By, say, 1 December he needs to show you a number of agreed-upon (and written down) steps. The dancer has to show that she has spoken to her dance teacher and has her cooperation in this project and that they are discussing what piece she might do. She also has to show/tell you her thoughts on the other aspects of the Project.

The puppy-trainer has to keep a journal of his work with his dog and show you the books he is using for research.

The computer programmer must show/write out the steps she is taking to learn how to write her program.

Some time in the spring the first drafts of all the Projects should be due. You read/view the materials and offer feedback for improvement. Then set a date for completion.

Your child should have the opportunity to present his Project to a group of people (fellow homeschoolers, neighbors and friends, etc). After watching his presentation and looking over the various parts of his Project, you should write an evaluation. At the same time, your child should complete a self-evaluation. This should be written. He should be encouraged to sit down and really think about what he has completed and where it did and did not meet his goals and expectations. He should be helped to articulate what could have been better and to also acknowledge what went well. It would be best if he learns how to write such an evaluation as well as be able to discuss this with you.

Be mindful whilst helping your child complete his Project that many of the documents about its process will be of great interest to any high school he attends. His portfolio will be the richer for having completed such a Project and he himself, assuming you help him find the right balance between pushing himself and not overdoing it, should have that wonderfully precious sense of pride which comes from great accomplishment.

