

## Other subjects Ages 5-7

What about history, science, geography, literature, art, music and so on? These can be areas of great interest to your young child and it's great to study them, but you don't need to worry about covering a syllabus. You don't need textbooks at this stage, either: for history, science and geography, the easiest thing is to sit with your child for half an hour or so in the afternoon and look through a good history or science encyclopaedia or an atlas together. If a topic particularly sparks your child's interest, stick with that topic for a while. Check some books out of the local library (or buy some second hand) so that you can explore the topics further together. Make a notebook to keep a (very simple) record of what you've learned. Keep it simple and enjoyable. If your child shows no interest at all (some don't, not until seven or later) you can either wait a year or two or choose a few topics yourself and help him investigate them (in which case *you'll* need supply the enthusiasm).

Here are a few subject specific resources and suggestions (note that all these books and ideas can be reused and recycled for the later years so they make a good investment):

### History

A good history encyclopedia is always handy to have as a quick reference and can be the springboard to further learning. There are several available from publishers such as Usborne, Kingfisher and Dorling Kindersley. All these book inevitably start off with a page about pre-history and apes coming down from the trees and developing into human beings; you can deal with this quite simply with children of this age. They don't seem to have any problem with the idea of the information in the book simply being wrong (in fact they will probably tell *you* it's wrong since you've already taught them about the direct Creation of Man...).

It's worth building up a small reference library of history books on the various epochs and peoples for you and your child to study together (there are more links for this in the Primary age history pages). Good reference books are of much more use than textbooks throughout the primary years.

At this age there are two particularly good ways to get into history:

#### **1. Read simple biographies of famous people.**

- The Ladybird series 561 books are excellent and you can find most of them cheaply second hand. If you know which topics you are going to study over the term, plan ahead and buy a few of these about famous people of the relevant time. [Here](#) is a list of most of these - there are MANY!

- R.J. Unstead wrote a whole series called '[People in History](#)' which still read very well today (though, as you'll find with all British history books, there is a definite bias towards Protestantism in the later books which you will need to balance out). Here is a description:

*These capsule biographies of over 40 men and women who influenced the history of Great Britain offer a variety of brief reading selections suitable for children in search of heroes and heroines. Arranged chronologically, Part One acquaints readers with Britain under Caractacus fighting the Roman army, with portraits of great figures in the spread of Christianity: Saint Alban, Saint Patrick, Saint Columba, Pope Gregory and Saint Augustine. This section closes with the life story of Alfred the Great. Parts Two and Three cover illustrious figures from the Norman invasion to the present -- William the Conqueror, Richard the Lion-Heart, Watt Tyler, Chaucer, Drake, Shakespeare, Raleigh, Samuel Pepys, Captain Cook, Lord Nelson, David Livingstone, Florence Nightingale, Captain Scott and Sir Alexander Fleming among others.*

Basically, if you come across any character about whom you want to know more, try looking for a simple biography; they really bring history to life.

## **2. Read stories from history**

- If you want to use a book that tells the whole story of Britain, the most popular book for this is probably [Our Island Story by H.E Marshall](#) This book is well written but does present some difficulties for the Catholic parent as it is written very much from the perspective of the great British (protestant) Empire. There is a very good analysis of the book at Mater Amabilis, [here](#). If you read this, and are aware of the dangers and ready to correct the perspective, this could still be a good text to use. It is available on cassette and CD too.
- R.J. Unstead also wrote a general 'History of the World' and a series called 'Looking at History'. [Here](#) is a list of most of his more popular books.
- Another popular narrative world history book is '[The Story of the World](#)' by [Susan Wise Bauer](#) (author of 'The Well Trained Mind'). This also comes with an activity book which you could start now or save for later.
- Recently a new series has been written: '[The Story of Civilisation](#)' series by Philip Campbell, published by Tan Books. It is a narrative form similar to 'The Story of the World' but written from a Catholic perspective, and also comes with workbooks and a CD ROM (if you don't mind the American pronunciation!).

## Literature

Stories are *tremendously* important at this age. Please do take a moment to read the Primary Level section on [English Literature](#) to find out why a well known Catholic writer said that '*reading stories aloud is the archetypal act of the Trivium*'. The best sorts of stories for this age group are the old favourites - fairy tales. This is a very broad category and incorporates not just the classics such as Cinderella but also traditional folk tales from around the world. There is a treasure trove of such tales from Ancient Greece, Norse culture, Ireland and Russia. Again, there are suggestions on the Primary Level English Literature pages which would also be suitable for this age group. Do read ahead and keep your eye out for good books in this category as they can often be found second hand.

## Geography

At this age, the easiest way to incorporate some geography into your day is through other subjects, unless you are a keen geographer and want to dedicate specific time to it. It's a good idea to have an atlas, a map of the world and/or a globe handy at all times and refer to them often whenever questions crop up. If you have a map on the dining room wall, you can talk about various places over dinner.

- **History:** When you read about an era, an event or a famous person (usually all three at once) you can look at maps to find out where events took place. You can compare the historical map with a modern map to see how things have changed. This also gives plenty of opportunities to explain how maps work.

Another excellent way of linking history and geography is to read about great explorers. For a simple introduction try the [Usborne Book of Explorers](#). [Dorling Kindersley's Atlas of Exploration](#) is very good to.

- **Science:** a lot of physical geography can be covered in science, such as looking at the weather, looking at how the earth is formed, reading about the habitats of animals and so on. Human geography (population, tourism, urban development and so on) is better left to much later!

If you want an easy text to help you know what to cover in this subject, try '[The Earth](#)' by Barbara Taylor. This author also wrote the Kingfisher 'Young Discoverers Geography: Facts and Experiments' series: [Mountains and Volcanoes](#), [Weather and Climate](#), [Rivers and Oceans](#) and [Maps and Mapping](#) which are very basic and have plenty of hands on experiments.

## Music

At this age, music isn't a formal subject for lesson times - it's simply a pleasure to listen to, enjoy and learn more about.

If you want to formalise things a little, you might like to choose a composer and focus on a specific piece for a little while, getting to know the work and learning to talk about it.

Mozart can be a good composer to start with because he was so varied in his creations.

A great way to enhance your family's art appreciation can be to listen to CD's telling the story of a composer's life which is set to the artist's music. The most popular of these are the Classical Kids series, especially [Mozart's Magical Flute](#) and [Beethoven Lives Upstairs](#)

If you want to help your children learn about the various instruments, the series [Majors for Minors 'Learning the Orchestra'](#) is popular. This series uses familiar stories such as Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel and Jack and the Beanstalk; each character has a different theme on a different instrument, in a similar way to [Peter and the Wolf](#).

If you are not sure which music to start with, you might like to try [Classics for Children \(Decca\)](#), a 2CD set with plenty of variety. CD1 includes The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (Britten), Scenes from Childhood (Schumann), The Carnival of the Animals (Saint-Saëns). CD2 includes Peter and the Wolf (Prokofiev), Children's Corner (Debussy), Children's Games (Bizet) and 4 other pieces.

Classical music aside, it is always worth learning more about folk music, especially as there are many excellent folk songs which you can learn to sing as a family (great for long walks). You can find a good selection in [The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs](#) (if you can't read music, find a good rendition in the Internet). Don't forget to listen to some of the beautiful Irish and Scottish tunes too. Many folk songs are renditions of ballads which you can read/study in your literature lessons too, such as 'Sir Patrick Spens'.

## Nature Study (science)

Young children are often naturally very keen on science: they love to see how plants grow, are fascinated by the behaviour of pets and want to know what happens to the dinner they've just eaten (there's your biology sorted). They ask interesting questions about everyday things: how does the light come on? how does the water get into the tap? (physics). They especially love anything which involves mixing, fizzing, whizzing, popping and banging (so that's chemistry covered without leaving the kitchen).

At this age, you don't need to be using a textbook or even thinking in terms of biology, physics and chemistry as 'subjects'. Most parents find that the best approach to science in

the early years is to focus on nature study. For this, you simply need access to the outdoors and a decent field guide. You'll have a whole term's work (probably a year's work) without even leaving the garden or the local park as you help your children observe the changes in the natural world through the seasons. Encourage close observation and plenty of drawing if they are keen. This doesn't have to be just the obvious things like flowers and insects; don't forget to look up and learn about the moon and stars too. When the weather is bad, stay indoors and study closer to home- the human body (skeleton, digestive system, blood - young children love all that!).

[Lyn Seddon's 'Exploring Nature With Children'](#) is a popular Charlotte Mason style year long guided Nature Study programme with thematic studies, poems and art study suggestions. It fits in very well with a Classical approach as it integrates a variety of disciplines.

For a more standard approach, The Kingfisher Young Discoverers Living Science series has three easy books with an emphasis on experiments: [Animals in Action](#); [Plant Life](#); [Minibeasts in close up](#). (The fourth biology book, 'Inside the Body' is not really suitable for this age group as it goes into a bit too much detail about reproduction for under 7's). These are available second hand for pennies if you look for the 1994 rather than the 2004 edition (there's no difference in the text, only in the presentation). The accompanying Kingfisher Young Discoverers Science series covers physics and chemistry topics: [Batteries, bulbs and wires](#); [Crashing and flashing](#); [Flying and Floating](#); [Making and Breaking](#).

Lastly, don't forget to include biographies of scientists in your history reading - and stories about great experiments and discoveries too. There are a couple of good Naxos CD's '[Great Scientists and their Discoveries](#)' and '[Great Inventors and their Inventions](#)'. If these are too complex, save them for later and try the [Usborne Book of Scientists](#) and the [Usborne Book of Inventors](#). It's worth investing in a good science encyclopaedia which covers science chronologically as you can use it for years (but also refer to it now if your child asks a question you can't answer!) Dorling Kindersley's [Science Year by Year](#) is a good one.

## Art

There are two aspects to this subject:

- **Learning about great artists and the history of art:** you can choose an artist and focus on a specific painting for a little while (it can help to work chronologically to tie in with history but it is not essential). A chronological encyclopaedia of art will be useful for reference. Dorling Kindersley's '[Art: a Children's Encyclopedia](#)' is very visually rewarding. [The Usborne Children's Book of Art](#) is quite accessible, as is the

Usborne Book of famous Artists. These are a bit old for this age group but you could have a look to plan ahead: Angela Wenzel's ['13 Paintings children should know'](#) and ['13 artists children should know'](#) (the latter fits in very well with a Classical approach as it covers the artists chronologically and puts them in historical context).

As ever, biographies of famous artists are a great way to make them more accessible. There is a lovely series by Laurence Anholt which covers many of the major artists. These books are original stories written from the perspective of a child involved in the painter's life. Here is an example - his book on Da Vinci, [Leonardo and the Flying Boy](#). Another series is the 'Katie' books by James Mayhew; a little girl becomes involved in the lives of great artists: see [Katie and the Starry Night](#), a story of Van Gogh.

- **Practising art techniques:** there are very many books available to help children learn basic techniques, though at this early age children can get very discouraged if asked to work above their capabilities so keep things very simple unless your child shows precocious talent! Some children (like some adults) simply don't enjoy drawing and painting, so if this is the case don't force it. This should always be an enjoyable activity - there is nothing compulsory about it.

These books will be too advanced for this age but for your own interest and as an investment for later, try a book such as ['13 art techniques children should know'](#), also by Angela Wenzel (yes, they are part of the '13' art series from Prestel Books, a division of Random House. [Here](#) you can find a list of most books in the series).

Fine art colouring books can be an easy way of combining history of art and something more hands on. There are several of these available. Try the [Usborne Art Colouring Book](#) for a start. You can also find books which combine information about the artist with hands on activities such as [Leonardo da Vinci for Kids](#) by Janis Herbert.

#### **NB!**

*You don't need to do ANY of this with your child aged 5-7. If you are very busy (for example, looking after other children) and your child is quite happy doing a bit of maths and English then running off to play for the rest of the day, don't panic because you haven't done any art or music with him. These are simply suggestions for parents who have a keen child and/or plenty of time on their hands.*