

## **Challenge A Course Descriptions**

The purpose of Challenge A is to introduce middle school students to the whole concept of the Challenge Program. It is a mix of grammar and dialectic materials and teaching methods. The amount of reading is purposefully limited to give students more time to work on their writing skills. The program is not necessarily easy; it is just not as demanding as the other Challenge levels so both students and parents can adjust to the methods used by Classical Conversations. Following is a brief overview of the material taught in each of the six seminars and what is expected of the students and the parents.

### **Latin - Fall and Winter Semesters**

The purpose of this seminar is to introduce the student to the study of a foreign language. You will find that there are many parallels between studying a foreign language and studying English. Both require a certain amount of memorization, but once the central grammar is understood the student's task becomes much easier. The student's job is to go through the assigned lessons, using flashcards to help with memorization of vocabulary and grammar structures. The parent's job is to ensure the student completes and understands the assignment. You may find that looking at parallel passages of English grammar in *Our Mother Tongue* will be helpful, particularly if you have never studied Latin. Despite the fact that Latin is a foreign language, it is very important for your child to be able to identify the parts of speech (as they are learned) in a sentence. In seminar, the tutor will explain the next week's assignment and provide interesting group games to review the concepts learned. The tutor will also assist the student with diagramming Latin sentences, and declining and/or conjugating new vocabulary.

**TEXT - Books 3 & 4, Latin's Not So Tough**

### **Writing- Fall Semester**

The purpose of this course is to give the student a chance to read stories from Scripture and use the stories they read as good models for their own writing. Using IEW writing techniques, each week a specific story is assigned with a specific writing assignment. At home, the student rewrites the story, adding creative details if desired. Parents should make sure the assignment is completed to the best of their child's ability. It is up to each parent to insist on a specific length and to emphasize the creative and the grammatical aspects of the student's writing.

**TEXT - Bible Based Writing Lessons in Structure and Style.**



## **Newbery Literature- Winter Semester**

During the second semester, the student will read a Newbery Award Winning book one week and write a paper on the book the next week. It is MOST important to have your child finish the book the first week so the whole class can discuss the whole book. It is very discouraging to the students who read the book not to hear input from everyone. Also, that gives them a full week to work on the written assignment. The tutor leads the book discussion one week and discusses the student's papers the next week.

**TEXTS - Buy from used book stores or libraries-** Amos Fortune, Freeman by E. Yates; The Bronze Bow by E. Speare; Carry On, Mr. Bowditch by J. Latham; The Door in the Wall by Marguerite De'Angeli; The Magician's Nephew by C.S. Lewis; Number the Stars by L. Lowery; The Secret Garden by F.H. Burnett.

**Newbery Literature Study Guide** from Classical Conversations Books

## **Geography - Fall and Winter Semester**

Geography is a pure grammar course. The first week of class the student is given a large paper with latitude and longitude lines and told to draw the world. Of course, most can't begin to do this. Each week, the student practices drawing and labeling various parts of the world so that at the end of the year, he can take the blank grid and draw the world and its' countries from memory. Parents may download free blank maps from the internet for your child to label, but that is not the best way to memorize the world's places. He should sketch a couple of times looking at the map and then try to sketch the area and label its' features without looking. In seminar, the tutor will help them put the whole picture together and will have a weekly geography bee on current memory work to help the students identify the places they are studying. Remember, the student 50 years ago could not make blank map copies. He had to do everything by hand, which is a far better way to learn.

There are additional geography features included in this guide that aren't assigned for a particular week. Use these as bonus points.

**TEXT - The Compact Atlas** by DK or any 8 x 11 atlas that is easy to copy from.



## Natural Science - Fall and Winter Semester

This is one of the few times to study science using purely classical methods. In the higher Challenges, the material is difficult enough to require most people to use a textbook. Each week, the tutor will introduce and discuss a different realm of nature (excluding the physical sciences.) The student is expected to go home and research the topic using any material he enjoys. Read about the topic, record the findings, illustrate it, and relate the research to the seminar. It is up to the parents to determine how in-depth the student should research each topic. NOTE: A student may easily copy from the Internet and make a report seem like his own. Show your child how to give credit for someone else's work if he finds something useful to share in seminar.

**TEXT - Sketch Notebook**

## Clear Reasoning - Fall and Winter Semester

The Clear Reasoning class studies two topics throughout the year. The first is a very basic study on Jesus as man and God. The second topic is on the world's origins from a Christian perspective. Both courses help set the basic premises that are foundational to the rest of the Challenge program. At home, the student is expected to read a couple of short chapters from each topic, take notes on the main ideas and arguments and memorize a series of questions and answers concerning the material. In seminar, the tutor leads a discussion on the material studied, challenging the student to defend his point of view. Games are used to reinforce the catechism questions.

**TEXT - *Don't Check Your Brains at the Door*** by Josh McDowell and ***It Couldn't Just Happen*** by Lawrence O. Richards.

## Saxon 8/7 or Algebra 1/2- Fall and Winter Semester

The tutor will answer the student's questions from previous assignments and the other half will explain the next four assignments. Math lessons are completed at home. Make sure to work all of the problems. Parents are supposed to make a note of any problems they can't help their student with and instruct their child to ask for help from the tutor. Parents also administer and score all tests. Math can be more interesting when you get to work with other students, hear their questions, and get explanations from a different perspective. Please note when registering whether your child will be in Saxon 8/7 or Algebra 1/2.

**TEXT- Saxon 8/7 or Algebra 1/2 Study Kit, and Solution Manual**



**Classical Conversations**  
**Grammar for Challenge A**  
**Latin's Not So Tough Levels 3 and 4**  
**Skill Emphasized: Foreign Grammar**

**How to Study-** Memorizing the appendix before tackling the workbook is key to success in this program. Students need to write the glossary a few times and copy the appendix a few times as they are the most important resource in the entire book. Then the work pages become an opportunity to master the material in the appendices. The author put this information in the appendix so you would know the goal of the text. By becoming very familiar with the appendices, students will know the goal they are trying to achieve over the year. Parents don't need to know Latin but they **MUST** drill the students with the flashcards provided in the back of the book in order to ensure success.

Completing any workbook page is not as important as having students explain why they completed it the way they did. The tutor will lead the students through a series of questions each week to ensure understanding and to teach study skills. They shouldn't waste time drilling since parents can easily do that at home. Learning the questions taught and how to answer them will make learning all foreign languages easier to learn. Students will continue with Latin level 5 and Level 6 in Challenge B. These two years of Latin will ensure the students can do well in Challenge I Latin and work on translating original works in Latin II. Do not consider Challenge A or B Latin as high school language credits as they do not take students far enough. The role of Latin these two years is to make Latin easier to study when the credits matter in high school.

### **Latin Questions**

If students can answer these questions for every word on a page, Latin will become easy after only a few weeks of study.

Verbs- Meaning?, Number?, Person?, Tense?, Conjugation?, How do you know?

Nouns and Adjectives - Meaning?, Number?, Gender?, Case?, How do you know?

**Typing** - This is a good year to be sure your children have good keyboard skills. If your students work on learning to type this year, as suggested, you should see an improvement in their spelling skills as the tactile motion is one more way of getting words into their heads. As their typing ability increases, you may also see an increase in the amount they write just because correcting errors is easier. Suggested typing packages include "Typing Tutor" by Simon and Schuster, "Mario Teaches Typing" by Interplay, and "Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing". They are all available at local computer stores.



**Classical Conversations**  
**Exposition Syllabus for Challenge A**  
**Writing and Newbery Literature**  
**Skill Emphasized: Composition**

General Instructions: Each week you are to read a story dealing with that week's topic and retell it in your own words. You may get the story from any version you like. As an example, think of a picture book retelling Noah's Flood. God told you all you need to know to accurately understand the event and to reveal His purposes to you, but He also left a lot to our imagination, such as specifically naming the creatures on board or how they knew He sent them or how Mrs. Noah acted. Children's picture books often add information to the basic story.

The best way to learn to write well is to copy good writing and then try to recapture and even improve upon the writing by using your own words. That is what you will be assigned to do each week.

This is how Ben Franklin said he learned to write. He would read a brief story or essay a couple of times. Then he would outline the story. Then he would put it aside for a day. When he came back to the outline, he would try to retell the story in his own words and improve upon it by either making it clearer or more interesting. This is what you are to do for each story you read from the assignments. You could just retell the story and that would be pretty easy. The point is to do more. Don't just tell the story; make it very interesting or more beautiful.

For the Old Testament stories, concentrate on making the **turn of events** very clear to your readers. Again using Noah, what do you imagine happened? Which animals came on first? How did they act when the boat started rocking? What really happened on that boat?

During the second semester, students will read Newbery winning books. The students need to read a book one week and discuss it in class and then write a paper the next week. If you want your children to have time to write, make sure they read the book the first week and don't wait for the next week when they should concentrate on writing.



**Classical Conversations**  
**Geography Syllabus for Challenge A**  
**Skill Emphasized: Cartography**  
**Tutor's Text: Challenge A Study Guide and any Atlas**

The purpose of the geography seminar is to encourage students to study just geography and cartographical skills. Geography continues to be neglected by all forms of education and Classical Conversations wants to remedy this tragedy. All of literature and history can be more easily understood in the context of God's plan for mankind if students are already familiar with the location being referenced. Think about how boring the places mentioned in the Bible seem until you have a good picture of where they are and what they look like. Understanding the significance of Bible geography makes God's Word more meaningful and alive. Knowing the geography of His earth does the same for all subjects.

At home, students are responsible for two different projects. First, they need a lined notebook to make into a dictionary and reference book. It should begin with a dictionary that has a page set aside for each letter of the alphabet. As the seminar progresses, they will have lists of terms to define and enter into their dictionary for homework. When they gather as a class, they will make maps and have geography bowls questions that relate to the terms and maps. Therefore, they will be more confident during seminar if they know the terms. Have the student do more than look up the terms in a dictionary; they should also find a real example or location of the term and enter it into their definition. For example:

Bay - part of a body of water that reaches into the land, generally with a wide opening.  
Hudson Bay, Chesapeake Bay

Students also need to work on studying and memorizing geographical features on maps. Each week they will have a list of places and features to memorize. You can copy a lot of blank maps and have your students fill them in, but copying is time consuming and expensive. The classical model means a change of mindset. Copied maps and blank maps are only beginning tools that should soon be discarded. Copy machines are a modern invention but geography is an ancient subject. Use real maps, blank paper, and your mind to learn to draw maps. If they do the same map four days a week, they should come a long way in memorizing the area being studied. Students should practice art by drawing the map on a piece of paper without tracing. They can work on making a beautiful map to keep in their own atlas. The locations on the maps they have studied will be part of the next seminar's geography bowl.

Each seminar will have a similar format. The facilitator will also share with the students any interesting current events or biblical issues related to geography as the seminar progresses.



**Classical Conversations**  
**Natural Science for Challenge A**  
**Skill Emphasized: Research**  
**Text: Library Books and Internet**

*"Science is the study of nature, and the possibility of science depends upon one's attitude towards nature. Biblical religion gave to Western culture several of its fundamental assumptions about the natural world.*

*To begin with, the Bible teaches that nature is real. If this seems too obvious to mention, recall that many belief systems regard nature as unreal. Various forms of pantheism and idealism teach that finite particular things are merely "appearances" of the One, the Absolute, and the Infinite. Individuality and separateness are illusions. Hinduism, for instance, teaches that the everyday world of material objects is maya, illusion. It is doubtful whether a philosophy that so denigrates the material world would be capable of inspiring the careful attention to it that is necessary for science.*

*The Christian doctrine of creation, on the other hand, teaches that finite objects are not mere appearances of the Infinite. God made them; they have a real existence. In the words of Langdon Gilkey, professor of theology at the University of Chicago School of Divinity, the doctrine of creation implies that the world is not illusory; it is "a realm of definable structures and real relations, and so is a possible object both for scientific and for philosophical study."*

The Soul of Science, by Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton (p.22), 1994

At home, the student should research the subject. They may use the encyclopedia, science books, magazines, or anything else they like to research the topic and add information to their notebook. If the current topic is one they have never studied or they really enjoy, encourage them to put a lot of time into their studies. If resources, time or interest is short, spend less time on that topic. It is up to the parents to work with the children and make the best use of the assignment.

At the following seminar, the students will be given time to share their research with the class. This will hopefully provide some positive peer pressure in doing a good job on their research and give them practice communicating scientific ideas. They will also get to learn from the other students' research and hopefully will discover that they can learn new things from all kinds of people and not just teachers, parents, and books. The student notebook doesn't need to be perfect. Instead, allow a little less neatness in exchange for thinking about how to record information in different ways.

Use the notebook as a place to store scientific ideas that interest your child even if they were not presented in class. At the end of the year, they will have about thirty pages of information covering all aspects of God's Creation. Encourage them to take pride in their notebooks and to learn all they can about research and recording skills. Hopefully, by the end of the year, they will see a lot of improvement in their own abilities when looking back on their original research.



**Classical Conversations**  
**Rhetoric for Challenge A**  
**Skill Emphasized: Rhetoric**

**Texts: *It Couldn't Just Happen* by Lawrence O. Richards**  
***Don't Check Your Brains at the Door* by McDowell and Hostetler**

This seminar is similar to a Bible study, in that the students will be looking up passages and reading material at home in order to share what they've learned with others. The facilitator will lead the discussion and encourage the students to think about how to apply what they've learned to their own lives. Don't Check Your Brains at the Door was written for high schoolers. All middle schoolers and even younger who have had daily devotions at home and attended church regularly with their family will easily be able to handle this material. It is very basic, emphasizing both the humanity and deity of Jesus and how to respond to a culture that doesn't believe in either aspect of Our Lord. The students may struggle with the It Couldn't Just Happen questions. Instead of emphasizing answering the study questions at the end of each chapter, we want to teach the skill of reading and analyzing difficult material. They need to be able to study difficult material and the only way to make it less difficult is to work at it. The entire book and studying process will get easier if they will just study the chapter...Remind them that learning is their work! The tutor will go over the whole process in seminar and will not be very concerned about the questions at the end of the chapter. I suggest you break up this work and do it on two different days so that you will really do well and not rush through it.

Learn to skim the material and see what we will be thinking about.

1. What is the chapter title?
2. Look at each picture and read the caption underneath.
3. Look at any charts or graphs and see what they are about.
4. Look at each section title within the chapter.
5. Read the questions at the end of the chapter.
6. Write down in a short note what the chapter seems to be about.

Learn to read for content.

1. Just read the chapter like it is a novel.
2. Ignore the pictures, graphs, and side bars.
3. Make a list of each vocabulary word you don't understand.
4. Look up and write down the definitions from your list.
5. Good work! Now finish the assignment on another day.

Learn to study difficult material.

1. Write down the first section title.
2. What is the main point of that section? Answer in one sentence.
3. Repeat this process for each section.
4. Write down the title of each graph or chart.
5. What is the main point of the graph or chart? Answer in one sentence.



Now you have summarized the written material and should be able to explain what the author is teaching.

1. Read the chapter again
2. Answer the questions at the end of the chapter during seminar. You won't be able to participate in seminar if you don't study the units.

You also will need to demonstrate mastery of the material in seminar. We will do this in two ways. First, if you have done the above assignments and really studied the material you should be able to identify all the main arguments when the tutor discusses the chapters in seminar. Second, you will need to memorize a basic catechism of ideas and vocabulary from the material. A catechism is just a series of questions on a particular topic. In order to make the memorization more interesting and to get used to thinking of both questions and answers, we will use the catechism to play Jeopardy each week. Below is a chart that organizes the students' memorized questions into categories and points.

Topics	Bible	People	Body	Beliefs	Animals	Miscellaneous
Points	Question #					
100	2	18	24	57	29	4
200	6	19	43	51	30	5
300	53	23	21	12	31	8
400	54	40	44	39	32	9
500	49	52	20	55	33	10
600	42	17	45	56	34	13
700	50		46	7	35	14
800			41	3	36	15
900			47	11	28	16
1000			48	22	37	25
1100				1	38	26
1200						27

Be sure you play Jeopardy in such a way that everyone participates throughout the school year. Eliminations should only hold for a week at a time. Keep a score for a final winners version at the end of the semester if that helps everyone.



**Classical Conversations**  
**Math for Challenge A**  
**Skill Emphasized: Logic**  
**Texts: *Saxon Math 8/7 or Algebra 1/2***

Saxon math texts are popular among home school families because their incremental explanations and practice sets allow most parents and students to teach themselves Algebra. Classical Conversations uses Saxon's most recent edition texts. There is one caution; most students cannot learn Algebra in a class setting in only an hour a week. To excel, they must work daily at good study habits and completing the problem sets while a parent at home keeps up with their work. By closely following the math of their eldest child, most parents can relearn while their child learns and then the parent will have a much easier time teaching math with subsequent children. Home schooling is work for the parent as well as the child. If you couldn't read, you would need to learn how to read in order to teach your child. The same idea applies to math. Being innumerate is as dangerous as being illiterate in our culture. Christians, especially, have no excuse to give up on the entire language of God's Creation (mathematics). Included are some articles discussing how fashionable it is to be innumerate in America. Please, pray not to pass this attitude on to your children.

The goals of the Algebra seminar are to explain the new lessons for the week, go over any previous difficulties students are having, and provide a chance to discuss math with other students. At the beginning of each seminar, students need to tell the tutor which problems are challenging them, otherwise the tutor can't help. When the students' questions are resolved, the tutor will move on to explaining the next four lessons assigned for the upcoming week. The class will study the practice problems together, taking time at the board so both the tutor and students can see how they are approaching the problem. Quite often, one student will make clear a problem another student may have. There are more problem sets assigned in Saxon than can be discussed in 30 weeks, so expect your child to do math during the Christmas break and even after the seminars are completed in the spring if necessary.

By checking daily assignments, parents should be able to see if their children are progressing. Algebra students must work on good study habits. Many students who have always been good at math start to have difficulty at this point for two reasons. First, they are often used to doing math in their head. Now they will begin to encounter multi-step problems and will lose track of the steps if they do not write them down. Second, the number of steps leads to more opportunities for careless errors to occur. To help overcome these problems, insist that problems with more than one step be written down. Also, insist that only a few problems be completed per page of paper. Many students attempt to do 25 problems on the front of one sheet of loose leaf, as if paper is rare in the United States. This leads to a lot of small, printed numbers per page, which are difficult to quickly check.



We suggest dividing a page with two drawn lines into four sections for four problems. It may seem like a lot of wasted space now, but it is a habit that will pay off as the number of steps increase in higher math.

Now is also a good time to have students use the table of contents or index to look up previous lessons learned instead of asking you how to do the problem again. This is a very important study skill for any subject. If children need to review a previous lesson, help them find where it was originally explained. Have them read it and attempt to do the new problem again. If they still don't get it, go over the original explanation reading it aloud and have them explain each step to you. By discussing it aloud with their leadership, you are making them think without trying to tell them just how you would do it, avoiding parent/child battles. This should also reveal to you where their error is because they may explain something incorrectly to you. If your child needs to be shown another method that you think will help them, do so. Allow the student to reveal the difficulty first. Then if they are just being lazy or hard headed, take disciplinary actions - which usually means put the book away for a few minutes, have a hug, and start over when emotional walls have melted. It may also mean you need to demonstrate good study skills by teaching yourself a concept so you can explain it properly. A good rule of thumb in all subjects is to realize that if students can't explain a concept clearly, they really don't understand the concept.

A last tip to prevent Algebra struggles is to be sure they have memorized their multiplication tables beyond the standard  $10 \times 10 = 100$ . They need to spend time on Algebra, not figuring out  $15 \times 15$  or the square root of 625. They should also know the 11's and 12's table, plus the common squares and cubes encountered in Algebra. For assistance in memorizing all the tables needed for all of Algebra, we recommend Tables, Squares, & Cubes which can be purchased through Classical Conversations for \$5. Saxon has done a great job of hand holding through the Algebra I text. In the later texts, Saxon expects students to be able to look up previously taught information and to study the steps presented. They also make the assumption that students understand basic algebraic principles and do not always show every detail when solving a problem. Learning to study well in Algebra 1/2 and Algebra I will greatly improve the odds for success in Algebra II and beyond.

We have included a letter from Saxon explaining the credits earned in their Algebra series. You are welcome to include it in any high school or college transcripts.





12 March, 1998

Leigh Bortins  
1272 Marlborough Ln.  
Winston-Salem, NC 27105

Dear Mrs. Bortins,

The Saxon math series does not have a separate Geometry text. Geometry is fully integrated in our *Algebra 1*, *Algebra 2* and *Advanced Mathematics* texts. If students complete the Saxon *Algebra 1*, 2nd edition, and the Saxon *Algebra 2*, 2nd edition, then they would have covered all the material normally contained in a course on informal geometry.

Students completing the Saxon *Advanced Mathematics* text, with or without having gone through the Saxon *Algebra 1*, 2nd edition and *Algebra 2*, 2nd edition, will have completed the equivalent of one full-year of plane geometry, one semester of trigonometry and one semester of advanced algebra/pre-calculus. The *Advanced Mathematics* text is normally covered in three or four semesters; however, exceptionally motivated and accelerated students can cover the text in two semesters. Even so, they should be provided with academic credit for four semesters.

Therefore, students completing the three text series *Algebra 1*, *Algebra 2*, and *Advanced Mathematics* will have completed and fully covered all of secondary school mathematics and will be well-prepared for a course on calculus.

If you should have further questions, do not hesitate to give us a call.

Sincerely,

Pam Grega  
Customer Service






---

**CHALLENGE A**

---

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WED	THURS	FRIDAY	WEEKEND
<b>MATH</b>						
<b>LATIN</b> This week:						
<b>LITERATURE</b> This week:						
<b>GEOGRAPHY</b> This week:						
<b>NAT. SCIENCE</b> This week's topic:						
<b>RHETORIC</b> This week:						



## **Suggested Challenge A Homework**

### **Schedule A**

#### **Seminar Day**

1. Be clear about assignments and take home any handouts before leaving.
2. Gather any resources needed and let parents know if you need to get anything not available at home.
3. Actively read assigned Bible Story by taking detailed notes.

**Day 1** Complete a math lesson.  
Complete 1/2 of assigned Latin lessons.  
Write an outline of Story.  
Research Natural Science assignment.  
Read Rhetoric Assignment.  
Sketch and Label Map.

**Day 2** Complete a math lesson.  
Complete 1/2 of assigned Latin lessons.  
Memorize any vocabulary.  
Write rough draft for Story.  
Write outline and rough draft for Natural Science assignment.  
Reread Rhetoric assignment; answer questions.  
Define Geography Terms

**Day 3** Complete a math lesson.  
Review Latin assignment.  
Finalize Bible Story.  
Finalize Natural Science assignment.  
Sketch and Label Map  
Study Geography Terms

**Day 4** Complete a math lesson.  
Review Latin assignment.  
Reread Story; practice improving writing style.  
Enter Natural Science research into Sketch Notebook.  
Sketch and Label Map.  
Memorize Geography Terms.

**Weekend Practice** presenting aloud all written work.

Do the practice problems from the previous 4 math lessons or take a test.

## **Suggested Challenge A Homework**

### **Schedule B**

#### **Seminar Day**

Same as Schedule A

**Day 1** Complete a math lesson.  
Finish reading Bible Story; write outline, rough draft, and final essay.  
Complete 1/2 of assigned Latin lessons.

**Day 2** Complete a math lesson.  
Complete 1/2 of assigned Latin lessons.  
Memorize any vocabulary.  
Research Natural Science assignment, write outline, rough draft, and final copy.

**Day 3** Complete a math lesson.  
Study Rhetoric assignment; answer questions.  
Practice Sketching Maps until mastered.  
Memorize Geography Terms.

**Day 4** Complete a math lesson.  
Review Latin.  
Write Final Bible Story, Rhetoric Assignment, and Natural Science assignment.  
Study all Geography skills.

**Weekend Practice** reading aloud all written work.

Review the practice problems from the previous 4 math lessons or take a test.