

# How to Use Our 50 States

*Our 50 States* is a one-year American geography course designed for students in grades one through four. The curriculum has 26 units with four lessons each. Each unit covers two states (plus Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Territories). We recommend completing one unit most weeks.

The lessons are grouped by region. The curriculum begins in New England and the lessons take students across the country through the Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, Rocky Mountain, Southwest, and Pacific regions. It is fine to switch the order of the regions around if you are planning a trip to a certain region or have some other special reason to study certain states at a certain time. The lessons stand alone and do not necessarily have to be completed in a particular order.

*Our 50 States* is much more than geography. You can also use this curriculum as all or part of your history, literature, creative writing, music, art, and handwriting practice. You may find that eliminating busywork in an entirely separate subject and allowing that subject to be incorporated into this study makes for a less stressful, more engaging, more memorable school year. All of the instructions for what to do each day are included in the blue Activities box at the end of each lesson.

## How Does This Curriculum Work?

Parents can read the lessons aloud or students can read the lessons alone. We encourage you to enjoy looking closely at the pictures and talk about them.

This curriculum has two lessons about each state. The first lesson introduces the students to special features in that state, such as key crops, amazing natural wonders, and fascinating historic sites. The second lesson features a song that reflects the history or culture of the state. After you listen to the song, you will enjoy reading a story about a person or place connected to the state you are studying.

The first lesson for each state includes a map of that state with certain cities, sites, and geographic features labeled. These are not necessarily the largest cities or all of the most famous places. They are the sites that the two lessons discuss about that state. As you read the lessons, you will see certain words **in green**. When you come to a **green word**, look at the map at the beginning of the lesson and find that location on the map.

At the end of each lesson is a blue box with activity ideas. Don't think of these as a checklist that you must complete. Look at these as ideas to enhance your study. Let your student's grade, age, abilities, needs, and interests be your guide as you select activities. The activities should challenge your student, but he or she should also feel competent and successful.

Each state has activities to complete in the *Atlas Workbook*, questions to answer in the *Lesson Review*, a simple Hands-On Idea, and a creative writing prompt. The Activities box also includes instructions on when to read each chapter in the literature titles (see more about literature on pages vi-vii). Each unit also includes one Family Activity. These activities include recipes, crafts, and other projects.

## Song Selections

The songs included in *Our 50 States* reflect a variety of styles and historic time periods. With the exception of “Deh Wod Been Deh,” “It Happened In Sun Valley,” “Smokey the Bear,” and some original tunes written by Titus Anderson, the songs included in *Our 50 States* are in the public domain. When you come to a song, visit [notgrass.com/50songs](http://notgrass.com/50songs) to listen to a recording of the song while you read along with the lyrics in the book. We were unable to find the historic music for a few of the selections, so Titus Anderson composed tunes for those pieces. A few of the selections were originally published as poems, so Titus composed tunes for those as well.

## Family Activities

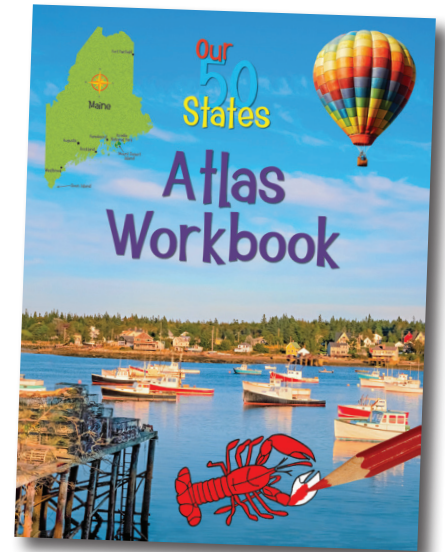
Each unit includes a Family Activity idea that is connected with one of the lessons in that unit. The instructions are on the last page or pages of each unit. We recommend reading the instructions and gathering the supplies early each week. You can complete the activity on the day it is assigned or on another day that is convenient. Many of these activities are designed with the whole family in mind.

Like all components of *Our 50 States*, the Family Activities are optional. We offer them as extra learning experiences, but do not feel obligated to do them if they do not suit your family's needs or schedule.

# Atlas Workbook

After students have read the first lesson for each state, they will complete an illustration in the *Atlas Workbook* that pictures a geographic term mentioned in the lesson. Each of these illustrations is already started for the students to help them build confidence in their drawing skills. After students complete the basic outlines of the illustration, they are free to add their own details and color the illustration.

After they have read the second lesson for a state, students will complete a map activities page for that state in the *Atlas Workbook*. Activities such as coloring illustrations on the map, tracing along rivers, and drawing mountain symbols within a mountain range will help reinforce the geographical, cultural, and historical information the student has learned about that state. Each student studying *Our 50 States* should have his or her own personal *Atlas Workbook*. We suggest using pencils and high-quality colored pencils to complete the activities in the *Atlas Workbook*.



## Lesson Review

The *Lesson Review* has five questions about each state and one or two tests for each region (approximately one test every three weeks). The *Lesson Review* is designed primarily for the older students studying this course. It is designed so that students can write their answers directly in the book. It is perfectly fine to use these as discussion questions (especially for younger students), or not to use them at all. It is up to you as the parent to know the best way for your child to retain and enjoy the material. To prepare for the tests, students can look over the review questions for the last three units and also look at the regional map on the inside front cover of *Our 50 States*.



# Creative Writing Notebook

If you plan on your child completing the creative writing ideas, we suggest you provide a notebook specifically for that purpose. There are 52 writing prompts in the curriculum, one for each state, plus Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Territories. Each prompt ties into a topic discussed in the story for the state you are studying.

If your child is not ready for creative writing, you can simply discuss the ideas presented in the prompts. You could also have your child draw a picture that illustrates his or her thoughts. A few of the prompts have an alternate activity idea that does not involve writing.

## Answer Key and Literature Guide

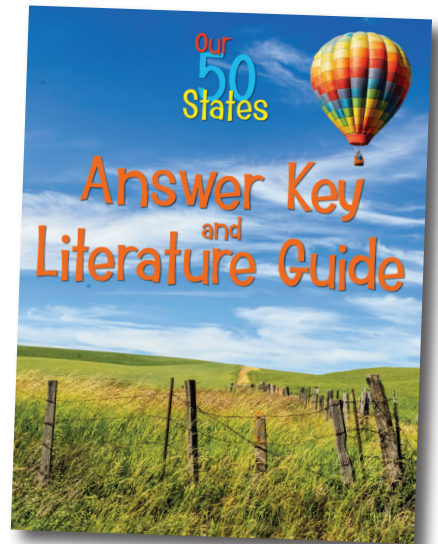
This booklet for parents contains answers for the review questions and tests in the *Lesson Review*. It also includes a guide for the literature titles.

## Literature

Seven suggested literature titles complement the lessons in *Our 50 States*. Each book corresponds to one of the regions in the curriculum. All of the titles are in print and available from Notgrass History and many other sources (with the exception of *Philip of Texas*, which we republished and is not widely available elsewhere).

You can read these titles aloud with your student, which is a fun and memorable way to spend time together. You can have your child read the books independently. You might decide to do a combination, depending on your family's schedule.

Each chapter in each literature title is assigned in the blue Activities box at the end of each lesson. These assignments are merely a suggested guide to help you finish the title while you are studying the corresponding region. You might prefer to read that region's book over a single weekend or on a road trip. The exact time you read each title does not matter, except that we do recommend you read it while you are studying the corresponding region. There are a few lessons without literature assignments when a region has more lessons than there are chapters in the corresponding book.





Each book offers an enjoyable way to learn more about a region, but if reading the literature adds too much pressure to your homeschool schedule, feel free to skip some or all of them.

*Rabbit Hill* by Robert Lawson (New England, Units 1-3)

*The Cabin Faced West* by Jean Fritz (Mid-Atlantic, Units 4-6)

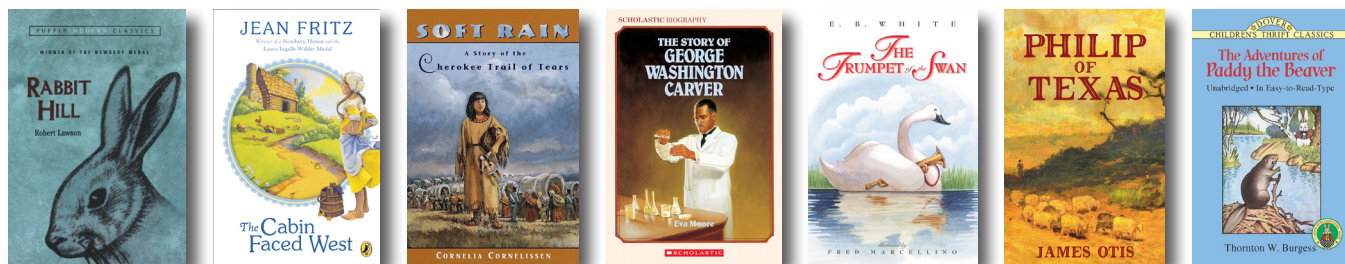
*Soft Rain* by Cornelia Cornelissen (South, Units 7-12)

*The Story of George Washington Carver* by Eva Moore (Midwest, Units 13-18)

*The Trumpet of the Swan* by E. B. White (Rocky Mountain, Units 19-21)

*Philip of Texas* by James Otis (Southwest, Units 22-23)

*The Adventures of Paddy the Beaver* by Thornton W. Burgess (Pacific, Units 24-26)



We at Notgrass History chose these books carefully with great consideration of content. Some of them do have themes or dialogue that we want you to be aware of before you hand it to your child to read. You can find comments about this content in the *Answer Key and Literature Guide*.

For suggestions about additional or replacement literature titles (including some picture books), visit [notgrass.com/50links](http://notgrass.com/50links).

## How Much Time Will Each Lesson Take?

If you are reading the lessons aloud, each one should take under 15 minutes to read. Answering the questions in the *Lesson Review* should not take more than five or ten minutes. The time it takes for a student to complete the geographic term illustrations in the *Atlas Workbook* will vary greatly depending on the child's attention to detail. The time it takes for a student to complete the map activities in the *Atlas Workbook* will also vary, but 15 minutes should be enough time for most students. Beyond that, the amount of time you invest will depend on the additional activities you choose.

Reading the literature will add some time, but if you follow the reading plan in the blue Activities boxes, you will only read one or two chapters from a literature title each day. If you do all of the suggested activities, we suggest planning on an hour to an hour and a half per lesson on average (not including the Family Activities, which will require additional time). You can use *Our 50 States* four days per week, or spread the lessons and activities over all five days of your school week. The curriculum has a total of 104 lessons divided into 26 units.

## What Supplies Will My Student Need?

Students will need a pencil and colored pencils. You will need a smartphone, tablet, or computer to listen to the audio versions of each of the songs. The simple Hands-On Ideas use common items such as play dough, building bricks or blocks, and rocks you might find in your yard. Most Family Activities require additional supplies. You can access a complete supply list at [notgrass.com/50links](http://notgrass.com/50links). The individual Family Activity instruction pages at the end of the units also list supplies needed.

## How Many Activities Should My Student Complete?

You know best what your student is capable of accomplishing. Some students will benefit most from completing all of the activity ideas. Others will do better completing only some of them. The variety of activities is intended to make it easy for your student to have a positive, rich, and engaging learning experience. You should not feel pressure to complete every assignment.

## Helping Struggling Students

For students who struggle with reading or writing, feel free to make adjustments to help them be successful and not become frustrated. You or an older sibling can read the lessons and literature aloud. Struggling students might also benefit from reading aloud to you. You can alter, shorten, or orally complete writing activities and review questions. You can also eliminate them if you feel your student is not ready.

# Using Our 50 States with Multiple Ages

*Our 50 States* is especially designed for first through fourth graders, but other ages can certainly benefit. Younger siblings can listen in on the lessons and literature, look at the pictures, and take part in the Hands-On Ideas and Family Activities. If you have a student who has already completed fourth grade, but you want to keep all your children learning together, you might consider giving your older student some additional assignments, such as copying the Bible verses at the end of the lessons, writing book reports about the literature titles, or researching and writing a report about some of the places or topics presented in the lessons. You can assign each child different activities, depending on his or her age and skill level.

## Sample Walk-Through of Unit 1

Here is one way a family might use *Our 50 States* over one homeschool week. Ethan and Hannah Jones have three children. Walter is in 4th grade, Emma is in 2nd grade, and Sam is four years old.

**Monday:** Hannah and her three children gather on the couch. Hannah opens to Unit 1 and reads aloud “Lesson 1: Maine.” Walter and Emma take turns finding the locations written in green on the map at the beginning of the lesson. After they have read the lesson, Walter opens the *Lesson Review* to the questions about Maine. He reads them aloud and they all talk about the answers. Walter writes the answers in the book. Before they go to the table, they scatter around the living room and all pretend to be statues in various positions (which is the Hands-On Idea for the day since the lesson talks about the statue on top of the Maine State House).

At the table, Walter and Emma each open their own *Atlas Workbook*. They both complete the illustration for the geographic term *coast*.

At bedtime Ethan reads aloud the first chapter of *Rabbit Hill* to the family.

**Tuesday:** In the morning, Walter and Emma help Hannah make blueberry muffins for breakfast, which is the Family Activity for the week. Ethan and Sam do their part of the Family Activity by helping to eat the muffins!

When it is time for school, Hannah and the children gather on the couch again. Hannah pulls up the audio recording of “A Trip to the Grand Banks” on her phone and they all listen to it together as they read along with the lyrics in “Lesson 2: A Song

and Story of Maine.” Hannah reads aloud the true story about Mary and her summer on Boon Island where her grandfather was a lighthouse keeper. After the lesson, they read the creative writing prompt and have a discussion about what it is like to visit their grandparents every summer.

At the table, Walter and Emma complete the map activities for Maine in their *Atlas Workbooks*. They each pull out their creative writing notebooks and Walter writes three paragraphs about visiting his grandparents. Emma writes three sentences and draws a picture of the tree with a tire swing at their grandparents’ house.

**Wednesday:** The kids all have checkups at the doctor in the morning, so there isn’t much time for school. They weren’t able to read any of *Rabbit Hill* on Tuesday, so Ethan reads two chapters aloud to the children before they go to bed.

**Thursday:** Hannah and the children gather and she reads aloud “Lesson 3: New Hampshire.” They complete the questions in the *Lesson Review* the same way they did on Monday. While the children are working on their geographic term illustrations in their *Atlas Workbooks*, Hannah gathers some quarters from her purse and the coin jar on the counter. After the children are finished with their illustrations, they study the quarters to see how many different state quarters they can find (which is the Hands-On Idea for the day since the lesson talks about the New Hampshire state quarter).

**Friday:** Hannah and her children enjoy listening to “New Hampshire Hills” and learning about how workers built a road to the top of Mount Washington in New Hampshire. They also learn that tent companies test their tent designs on the mountain to see if the tents can stand up to the high winds there. Walter and Emma complete the map activities for New Hampshire in their *Atlas Workbooks*. They listen to “New Hampshire Hills” again while they work. In his creative writing notebook, Walter writes the script for a commercial describing his design for a new tent. Emma draws a picture of a new tent design in her notebook. Hannah draws a picture of a tent on a piece of paper for Sam to color.

After supper the Jones family uses sheets, blankets, and dining room chairs to make a tent in the living room. They all get inside and Ethan reads aloud chapter 4 of *Rabbit Hill*.



## Respect for All

We at Notgrass History make every effort to write about all people in an honoring and respectful way. We realize that people have different views and preferences when it comes to describing groups such as Native Americans and African Americans. We believe that God has created all people in His own image and that they all have equal value in His sight. We have prayerfully sought to use terminology that honors and respects everyone.

## Encouragement for the Journey

Remember that God designed your family and the daily responsibilities you carry. A homeschooling mother who has one child can complete more activities than a homeschooling mother who has seven children and an elderly grandparent living in her home. God will use the efforts of both of these mothers. God does not expect you to do more than you can do. Be kind to yourself. He knows exactly what you and your children need this year. We encourage you to pray about your family's experience using *Our 50 States*. Let it be a tool to help you have a wonderful learning experience with your children.

Remember that out of all the parents in the world to whom He could have given your children, He chose you. He is the one who put your family together. He knows what He is doing. Trust in His choice. God created you. He created your children. Relax and remember that this is the day that the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24)!

We at Notgrass History are here to help you. If you have questions or simply need some encouragement, send us an email ([help@notgrass.com](mailto:help@notgrass.com)) or give us a call (1-800-211-8793).



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