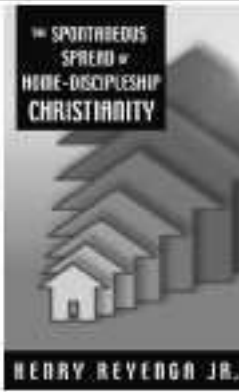



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teen reads, so she suggests essays and note-taking assignments for feedback when discussion isn't feasible. In the appendix, she also includes a set of ten essay questions that might be used with one recommended book, *Your Money or Your Life* by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin. Also, most projects are designed such that they require minimal input from parents. Students will do most of their work independently.

It would be great if parents would start using some of the books and projects with teens in the early years of high school so there is time to cover all the important topics. However even in the last year or two of high school, there should be time to cover key books and projects.

Both because of the content and the design, I think homeschoolers are likely to find this one of the most practical and important resources for high school and beyond.

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Cathy Duffy home educated her three sons all the way through high school. She is the author of *100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum* (Broadman & Holman, 2005), *The Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manuals* (Grove Publishing, 2000), *Government Nannies* (Noble Publishing, 1996), and numerous articles on homeschool and education issues.

The Theseus Learning System:

A Practical Guide to Mastering Essential Thinking Skills

By Andrew Norman, Ph.D.
with Judith Sanders, Ph.D.
Reviewed by Cathy Duffy

The *Theseus Learning System* (TLS) is difficult to categorize. From the subtitle, you'd guess it's primarily about thinking skills, but that's only part of this intriguing program. The feature that made me say, "Wow, this is really useful!" was the way it helps students in junior and senior high work through the development and organization of compositions.

There are two components to the TLS: a computer program that runs on Windows systems and a book. You can purchase these through downloads, as a hardcopy book and CD, or a CD with the PDF files for both program and book. I recommend getting the hardcopy book since it's printed in full color, and it would likely be more expensive to print its 124 pages on your own color printer. It would be cumbersome to work from the PDF files on the computer while running the program at the same

time, so printing it out is almost a necessity.

You begin the book by reading the overview and first lesson to understand why organizing thoughts well helps students think and present their ideas clearly. Lesson two introduces the software, including the simple installation process and an explanation of how it works. A quick-reference page at the end of this lesson should be handy as students actually begin to work with the program.



The third lesson gets the student working the program. In a nutshell, the program uses organizing "trees" to show how ideas relate to one another. This is not a new concept, but what is new is the way the program walks students through the process. TLS requires the student to come up with an initial question that is both central and primary. A second step asks the students to "situate" the question, as in, "Why does it matter?"

or "What was the origin of or context from which the question arose?" The third step asks the student to come up with a "claim" or hypothesis that might answer or resolve the question. This sounds more complex than it actually is when working through the program and following the prompts provided.

Once they've framed the question, students start to develop a thought "tree" of main ideas and supporting ideas. This is all done with boxes connected in a flow-chart fashion on the computer. The structure is quite flexible, so students can easily move and rearrange ideas. One section of the screen, which can be hidden, serves as an "idea bin" so that students can jot down thoughts or notes even if they're not certain if they fit into the tree.

Now we get to a feature students will absolutely love. Once the "tree" is developed, it can be exported to MSWord or PowerPoint. The program automatically arranges the ideas into a composition. Certainly, some polish-

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ing and editing will be required at this point, but the paper is basically written once the organizing has been done.

Students work through lessons in the book to learn how to use the basic tools of the program. The last three lessons are applications that help students further develop their critical thinking skills. The first of these lessons is on critical reading, and it teaches students how to analyze an argument. The second lesson on persuasive writing and presentation works through a sample and offers ten suggested topics students might tackle.

The third lesson could be turned into a complete course on its own. Titled "Mind-Bending Challenges," it presents twenty-four philosophical/political/religious/social questions,

each of which could be debated at length. For example, the first question reads: "School Versus Education: What is the difference between going to school and getting an education? What are the key skills and experiences that an education should provide, and why? How should it provide them?" These would be great to use within the context of a worldview course.

While the price seems a bit steep, TLS delivers more than I expected from such a program. It ties together critical thinking with writing and presentation better than any other single resource I've seen. Mechanically speaking, the program works exceptionally well. In addition, the book walks students through the essay organization process, taking it from beginning through advanced levels

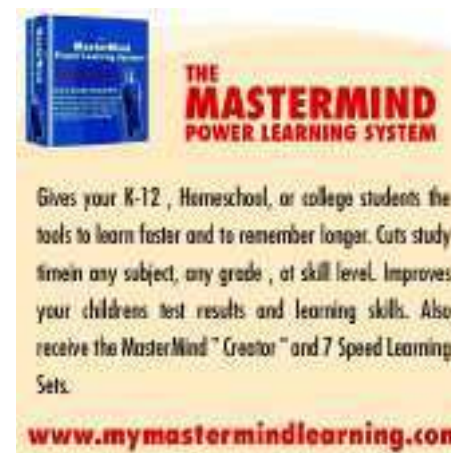
and then to an even higher level with the application lessons. On top of that, this is a program that students will continue to use through college and possibly even beyond. I can actually see it being helpful for some of my own writing projects!

While TLS is not overtly Christian, the questions in the book indicate a positive attitude toward Christianity and homeschooling as well as a worldview orientation. Those using classical education will probably recognize that the approach and style of thinking are based on classical methods. Even those not using classical education should find TLS one of the most valuable tools they will use in homeschooling.

Available three ways: Download both software and PDF book, \$75; shipped CD that contains both software and PDF book, \$85; and shipped both printed book and CD, \$95.

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