Lower MS English Syllabus

Younger Middle School (5th–6th)

2026–2027

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor	Email	Room Location	Class Days & Time
Luke Hegelund	Luke@rivertech.me	Younger Middle School Room	Tuesday–Friday, 9:35–10:25 am
Charlotte Tebow	—	Younger Middle School Room	Monday, 9:35–10:25 am

This syllabus explains what your student does in English this year, when things are due, and how they are graded. Keep it; the dates do not change.

Updated Sunday 20 September 2026: the story and spelling grading sections now match how work is actually being marked, and a week's writing may now be as long as the student wants.

WHO TEACHES WHAT

Day	Teacher	What Happens
Monday	Charlotte	Kumon Writing, 2 pages. Then silent reading or story work.
Tuesday	Luke	Spelling test · read aloud · handwriting
Wednesday	Luke	Reading Skills · "How to Be Good at English"
Thursday	Luke	"How to Write a Story" — the Hero's Journey
Friday	Luke	Kumon Writing, 2 pages. Then silent reading or story work.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Kumon Writing (Monday and Friday)

The backbone of the year. Every student works through one book, at their own level, at a steady pace.

- **On grade level and attending five days:** 2 pages a week
- **Behind pace, or attending four days:** 3 pages a week
- **Catching up, five-day students:** 4 pages a week

Each book has a dated page plan written in by the teacher, spreading the required pages across the school year. The goal is simple and non-negotiable: one book finished per year, more if behind. Progress is checked regularly and parents are kept informed. If a student falls behind, we will contact parents to communicate about a realistic catch-up pace rather than let it drift.

Spelling (Tuesday)

One dictated sentence, every week, written from hearing it. It is marked for spelling, capitals, punctuation, the layout of the page and handwriting. Vocabulary is discussed in class but is not tested at this level.

Read Aloud (Tuesday)

Read together across the year, plus handwriting practice.

Reading Skills and "How to Be Good at English" (Wednesday)

Comprehension, grammar and usage taught by Mr. Luke.

"How to Write a Story" — the Hero's Journey (Thursday)

The main writing project of the year, and the part parents ask about most. Each student writes one part of the story a week, and those parts build a single complete story following the hero's journey. Thirteen parts, one adventure with their name on it.

How long is a week's part? About five sentences is the floor, not the ceiling. A student who wants to write a full page, or a whole chapter, for that week's step is welcome to, and it costs them nothing. A short, careful paragraph and a long, enthusiastic chapter can both earn full marks. The one limit is where it stops: write as much as you like about this week's step, then stop there, because next week's step is taught next week.

Every week also teaches one piece of writing craft inside the story: describing a place, choosing who tells the story, showing feelings, making events cause each other, editing and proofreading. Students are not asked to learn craft in the abstract; they learn it on the paragraph they are writing that day.

Silent Reading (Monday and Friday)

Students who finish their Kumon pages read, or work ahead on their story.

QUARTERLY FOCUS

Quarter	How to Write a Story Focus
Q1 (Sep 1 – Nov 1)	Part One. The hero leaves home and reaches the door of the scariest place in the story. Seven paragraphs, ending on a deliberate cliffhanger.
Q2 (Nov 2 – Jan 17)	Part Two. The hero goes through that door and comes home changed. Six paragraphs, finishing the story.

Quarter	How to Write a Story Focus
Q3 (Jan 18 – Apr 4)	—
Q4 (Apr 5 – Jun 4)	—

Kumon Writing, spelling, reading skills and read-aloud continue in every quarter regardless of the focus.

A note about Q2 and filmmaking. In Quarter 2, the Tuesday filmmaking class makes a film out of Part One of these stories. Students are told this in Week 1 so they write knowing a camera is coming. Each student chooses: film their own story alone, or join a group and film one member's story. Nobody is put in a group they did not choose, and nobody's story is used without them wanting it used.

DEADLINES

Every week, all year

- Tuesday: spelling test, written in class
- Weekly: two pages of Kumon Writing completed (or the pace agreed for that student)
- Thursday: the story part for the previous week's lesson, at least about five sentences and as much more as they want

Story schedule

Each lesson is taught on a Thursday, and that part is due by end of day on the following Thursday. Students always get a full week and a weekend.

Assignment	Taught	Due
Weeks 1 & 2. Your Hero's Normal Day, Then Something Big Happens	Thu Sep 3 and Thu Sep 10	Thu Sep 17
Week 3. Your Hero Says No	Thu Sep 17	Thu Sep 24
Week 4. Someone Helps Your Hero	Thu Sep 24	Thu Oct 1
Week 5. Your Hero Leaves Home	Thu Oct 1	Thu Oct 8
Week 6. Friends and Enemies	Thu Oct 8	Thu Oct 15
Week 7. The Scary Place	Thu Oct 15	Thu Oct 22
Week 8. Fix Your Writing (revision and catch-up)	Thu Oct 22	Thu Oct 29
Week 9. Put Part One Together	Thu Oct 29	Thu Nov 5
Week 10. Your Hero Goes In	Thu Nov 5	Thu Nov 12
Week 11. Your Hero Finds a Way	Thu Nov 12	Thu Nov 19
Week 12. Your Hero Wins Something	Thu Nov 19	Thu Dec 3
Week 13. The Trip Home	Thu Dec 3	Thu Dec 10
Week 14. One Last Problem	Thu Dec 10	Thu Dec 17

Assignment	Taught	Due
Week 15. Your Hero Gets Home	Thu Dec 17	Thu Jan 7
Week 16. Put the Whole Story Together	Thu Jan 7	Thu Jan 14
Week 17. Read It Out Loud	Thu Jan 14	Thu Jan 14

Weeks 1 and 2 were taught separately and handed in as one assignment worth 10 points. Every week after it is worth 5.

No class Nov 26 (Thanksgiving), Dec 24 or Dec 31 (Christmas Break), which is why two of the gaps are longer.

Where to turn things in. Every story paragraph is posted in the class at rivertech.me, inside that week's assignment. Not by email.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

What is tested

- The spelling sentence, weekly
- Kumon Writing progress against the dated page plan in the book
- The story paragraph each week
- Reading skills work set by Mr. Luke
- Participation in class discussion

How each story part is graded

Five things, each scored 1 to 5. They do not all count the same.

What Is Scored	Share of the Grade	What It Means
Imagination, heart and real work	30%	Did they invent something? Does it sound like them? Did they actually put the work in?
Did what the week asked	20%	Everything the assignment asked for is on the page, and the writing stops where that week's step stops.
This week's skill	20%	The one piece of craft taught that week, used on purpose.
Length	15%	At least the minimum the week asked for. A paragraph, a section, a page or a whole chapter are all fine, and longer is never marked down.
Mechanics and paragraphing	15%	Capitals, end marks, spelling, one tense throughout, and the writing broken into paragraphs rather than one block or a list of one-line beats.

What the numbers mean. 5 = right all the way through. 4 = nearly, one slip. 3 = half there. 2 = attempted, but not there. 1 = not there at all.

The five scores are weighted into a mark out of 100, and that percentage becomes the grade out of whatever the assignment is worth.

Where the weight sits. Seventy percent of the grade is the story itself: the invention and the work put in, doing what the week asked, and the week's craft skill. Presentation, meaning length and mechanics, is the remaining thirty percent. Mechanics still counts, and every piece comes back with the exact sentence that needs fixing, but a student is not held back from a good grade by punctuation they have not been taught yet.

Length is a floor; the week's step is the boundary. A week's part can be a paragraph, a section, a page or a chapter, and how it is shaped is not what the length score is about. About five sentences is the least we expect, and beyond that a student may write a page or a whole chapter for that week's step. A longer piece is never marked down for being long. What we do ask is that the writing stops where that week's step stops: a student who races through the refusal, the mentor and the ordeal in Week 2 has written next month's lessons before they were taught, and that does cost marks under "did what the week asked".

How the spelling test is graded

One dictated sentence, marked out of 100.

Part	Points	How It Is Scored
Spelling	50	Each misspelled word costs 50 divided by the number of words in the sentence.
Capitals	10	5 off for each wrong or missing capital.
Punctuation	10	5 off for each wrong, missing or extra mark.
Formatting	15	5 for double-lining, 5 for the name top left, 5 for the date top right.
Handwriting	15	Legibility, scored 1 to 5, times three.

A letter that is simply written too tall is treated as handwriting, not as a capital-letter mistake.

Late work and missing work

Late work. Every week late takes 10% off the highest grade still possible, and part of a week counts as a week: up to a week late caps the grade at 90%, two weeks at 80%, three at 70%, and so on. Late work still counts and should still be turned in; it simply cannot be perfect. Weeks 1 and 2 were an exception: that first assignment was accepted up to a week late with nothing taken off.

Missing work is not zeroed straight away. A paragraph that has not been handed in stays open, and Week 8 is a catch-up week for everything from Weeks 1 to 7. It only becomes a zero if it is still missing at the end of the quarter.

One rule for the whole year. In Week 2 each student chooses who tells their story and whether it happened already or is happening now. That choice is kept until the end. Switching narrator halfway is the most common way a student loses points.

HOW TO HELP AT HOME

- **Ten minutes, once, before Thursday.** The minimum is short by design, so it is never a big evening. A student who writes it on Saturday and reads it out loud on Wednesday will do well; a student who keeps going because they are enjoying it should keep going.
- **Read it out loud.** Most of the mistakes at this age are audible before they are visible. Backwards, last sentence first, catches even more.
- **Ask what their hero wants.** If your student can answer that in one sentence, the paragraph is usually fine. If they cannot, that is the thing to talk about.
- **Do not write it for them.** Ask questions instead. The point is that the story is theirs, and in Quarter 2 some of these stories become films.
- **Praise the idea first.** Imagination carries the biggest part of the grade, so react to what happens in the story before you react to the spelling.
- **Kumon pages are the part that slips.** Two pages a week is small. Two pages a week missed for a month is not.

QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK

My student says it is only one paragraph. Is that really enough writing?

One paragraph is the minimum, not the assignment's limit: students are told they may write a page or a chapter if they want to, and several do. Keeping the floor low is what makes it possible to teach a real skill each week and actually have it practised, instead of assigning a long essay and grading spelling in it. Kumon Writing, reading skills and spelling carry the volume; the story carries the craft.

What if my student misses a Thursday?

The lesson is on Thursday but the work is due the following Thursday, so one absence rarely costs anything. The assignment on rivertech.me contains the full instructions, so a student can do it from home.

My student's spelling and punctuation are poor. Will that wreck their grade?

No. Mechanics, which also covers breaking the writing into paragraphs, is 15 percent of the grade. A student with a real story and rough punctuation still earns a good grade, and gets told exactly which sentence to fix.

What if they hate their story by October?

That is normal and it is allowed. They may change anything about their story except who is telling it. Several students will restart a character in the first few weeks; that is fine.

Can my student write more than is asked?

Yes, as much as they like. A week's part can be a paragraph, a page or a whole chapter, and a longer piece is never penalised. The one limit is scope, not length: the writing should stop where that week's step of the story stops, so each new step is written after the lesson that teaches it. Kumon Writing can be worked ahead freely.

How do I know if my student is behind?

Check the dated page plan in the front of the Kumon book, and the assignment list at rivertech.me. If either is slipping we will contact you before it becomes a problem.

CONTACT

Questions about Kumon Writing, reading skills, the story, spelling, or grading go to Mr. Luke at Luke@rivertech.me. Mr. Luke can also be reached through rivertech.me.

Teachers keep a full lesson plan for the story, including everything taught each week. Ask if you would like a copy.