

Pagan Degrees for Youth:

A System of Learning
Paganism for Children
and Young Adults

by
Shanddaramon

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Other Books by Shanddaron

For Adults:

1. *Self Initiation for the Solitary Witch: Attaining Higher Spirituality Through a Five Degree System.* New Page Books, 2004.
2. *Living Paganism: An Advanced Guide for the Solitary Practitioner.* New Page Books, 2005.
3. *Dewdrops In The Moonlight: A Book of Pagan Prayer.* Astor Press, 2007.
4. *The Sacred Quest: A Pagan Perspective on the Pursuit of Happiness.* Astor Press, 2008.
5. *The Worlds of Tarot: Expanding the Tarot Universe.* Astor Press, 2009.
6. *Paganism: A Religion for the 21st Century.* Astor Press, 2009.
7. *Just Being: A Pagan Guide to Meditation.* Astor Press, 2009.
8. *The Five Rings: A Guide to Pagan Ministry.* Astor Press, 2009.

For Children:

1. *Sabbats of the Northern Hemisphere: A Pagan Book for Children.* Astor Press, 2008.
2. *The Twelve Days of Yule: A Pagan Children's Activity Book.* Astor Press, 2009.
3. *Pagan Degrees For Children Companion Book.* Astor Press, 2010.

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Pagan Degrees for Youth

Introduction

Why I Wrote This Book

n 2001, I began a Pagan Studies Class in North Carolina. Over time, people began to join the classes and we developed a Pagan spiritual congregation that would later become the Sacred Order of Living Paganism. Soon after starting regular classes, it became clear to me that we needed to develop a system of learning for children as well because people were bringing their children to class. Although that fact in itself was not a problem, the classes I created were not really designed for children. Some children expressed a sincere desire to know more about what the adults were talking about but were not always able to join in the discussions. These kids needed classes of their own that could be suited to their own interests and needs.

Many may be familiar with the Boy Scout and Girl Scouts and their system of merit badges. Children enjoy earning those rewards for good work but many Pagan parents are uncomfortable with the implicit theistic and homophobic undercurrents that have worked their way into many of the dens, packs, troops, and other organizations of that sort. I decided to also create a system of learning Pagan concepts for children that used badges (I call them Achievement Awards) and Degrees. Since the Order used a degree system for the adults, it only made sense to have a degree system for the children as well. I began to work on a series of badges and degrees for children that emphasized things that I felt all children should explore but which also emphasized Pagan spiritual principles. I developed three Degrees and a long list of requirements for Achievement Awards. I decided to put the system on the web page for the Order and it wasn't long before people around the country began asking about the program. They wanted to know how they could sign up their children. Take, for example, the following letter:

I recently discovered your website, The Sacred Order of Living Paganism, while seeking ideas for images for a website I'm developing for our Temple. What I found was the Awards

page of your Youth Program - and I have to say, I am impressed.

As our family has a young Pagan, developing unusually quickly, the idea of a youth program came to us a few years back, and we laid some groundwork for a program which, in intent, was not unlike your own; however, I have been stuck for some time as to how to flesh out the idea. Your youth program seems very much exactly what I had wanted for our children!

I was a Cub Scout in youth, and I remember fondly the joy of earning merit badges and gaining titles; I can only imagine the joy the children of the Temple would feel, in a program such as your own!

Many people now use the program in their homes. Knowing this, I decided it was time to put the program into a book form so that others could use it with their children as well.

How To Use This Book

This book is designed as both a guide and workbook for individual children who are working with one or more adult mentors. The mentor can be a parent or guardian or any other teacher or guide who has some understanding of the true nature of Modern Paganism. The mentor does not necessarily have to be one person. A parent or other guardian can be the one who oversees the student's progress but he or she may also enlist the help of other adults for teaching the different Achievement Awards. This is actually a very beneficial method for teaching the Awards. If you, as the parent, can acquire the help of a professional cook to help teach the Cooking Award, for example, your children will benefit greatly from the experience of learning from an expert. That does not mean that you could not do just as well yourself with subjects you feel you know. It is just a matter of choice and availability. If you do not know a lot about, say astronomy, you may seek out the help of someone who does or you may take the opportunity to do the Achievement Award alongside your child and learn things about the stars as well

Preface

The system described in this book is not meant to be used as part of a program by a national organization. It has the solitary practitioner and her children or a small group of people in mind. Parents can teach the lessons required for the Awards or they can find people to help teach those lessons. Mentors decide if a child has successfully completed the Degrees. Awards, Levels, and Degrees are presented by the mentors themselves. Mentors can even make the Awards using materials from this book or with the use of a companion book that contains all the Awards, Levels, and Degrees in color. Nothing needs to be purchased from a national organization nor does it the work done need outside approval. Working in this way assures independence and, if need be, privacy. If there are others in the local community who wish to work and study together then, by all means, do so but know that it is not a requirement. The system can also be adapted by individual covens and teaching groups to meet their own needs. Most of all, a system like this which is free of control by a national system, allows for greater flexibility and creativity.

Above all, the book is meant to encourage exploration by you and the children with which you are working. Each Achievement Award contains a set of concepts to learn and activities that reinforce that learning. You are welcome and encouraged to explore and learn with the participating children but do not feel limited by what is in the book. Feel free to add your own requirements and activities that will help the children better understand the topic. If a child expresses an interest to do further study and exploration then, by all means, let that child do as much as he or she may want to do. You are, of course, welcome to create your own Achievement Awards as well since the system is designed to be flexible. In many cases, a list of suggested books and websites is included with each Achievement Award. These are meant to be a small example of other materials that can be used to explore each topic.

For many of the Awards, websites and books are suggested for further study. This book assumes that students will have a working knowledge of the computer and have the ability to look up information on the internet. The internet should not be the only source of exploration, however, Students should be encouraged to find suggested or related books in the library or local bookstore.

How The Book Is Designed

The system used as the basis for this book contains three main Degrees for youth and several sub-Degrees (Levels) for smaller children. Each of the Degrees is targeted toward a particular age range. Each Degree has a set of requirements but the main requirement is the completion of a number of required and elective Achievement Awards. The first chapter describes the complete system in more detail. The next three chapters describe the three main Degrees including the primary requirements for each Degree and the Achievement Awards that are considered mandatory for each. Chapter Five outlines all the optional Achievement Awards with their requirements and includes a list of suggested books and websites to use for further exploration.

This text is designed as a workbook to be used by each student under the guidance of a helpful adult. There is a checklist for each Degree with boxes to check off when work has been completed and a mentor is asked to sign off on each Degree at its completion. In this way, the book helps students mark their progress but it also becomes a sort of memory and scrap book that the child can use to observe and remember his or her early spiritual journey. For this reason, each child should have his or her own separate book. The child should also be encouraged to also keep a journal of her adventures as she progresses through the Degrees. Questions are provided throughout the book to aid with journal entries.


The book also gives you information about how to design and display the Award badges. At the end of the book I have included my designs for each badge which you can use by cutting them out and making a button or other method of displaying the Awards. Certificates of completion for Levels and Degrees are also included.



Chapter One

The Award System

Introduction

he system used in this book is based on three Degrees for youth and a large assortment of Achievement Awards. The Degree for small children is subdivided into smaller units or levels which help to maintain their interest. Each Degree has a list of requirements one of which is to earn a certain number of Achievement Awards or Activities. Certain Awards are required for each Level but the child can choose from a wide variety of additional possible Awards as well. This allows each child the ability to pursue his or her own interests while encouraging exploration in new areas as well. This chapter will discuss the basic requirements of each Level, their Awards, and will also talk about ways in which the Degrees can be taught and the how the Awards can be made and displayed.

Age Requirements

Each of the three Degrees is targeted toward a particular age range and each has a minimum required age. This helps to keep youth focused on their own range of skills and abilities. Of course, not all children are going to begin at the first Degree. They can begin the system at any point which includes their age range. The suggested age ranges and other requirements are outlined in the following chart.

Pagan Degrees for Youth

Degree	Minimum Age	Prerequisites
Seeker	3 is recommended	A Seeker is one who has performed a Dedication Ritual and is beginning work on any Degree.
Neophyte	5	none
Apprentice	9	none
Mage	12	Completion of Apprentice requirements.

Table 1 - Beginning Requirements

Children ages 5 – 9 should be encouraged to work on the Neophyte Degree which emphasizes learning through doing small hands-on tasks. To keep the child's interest, several Levels are available in the Neophyte Degree. If a child is at least 9 years old, she can begin work on the Apprentice Degree without having completed the requirements for the Neophyte Degree. Youth 12 and over can begin work on the Mage Degree but it is recommended that they fulfill the requirements of the Apprentice Degree beforehand. All of these guidelines, of course, can be altered by the adult mentor in order to create the best conditions and opportunities for their children.

In my experience, I have found that it is challenging trying to get teenagers interested in pursuing the Mage Degree if they do not begin at an early age. Therefore, younger children should be encouraged to begin this system and as long as their interest is maintained, they will continue on to the advanced Degrees. By the age of 14 or later, young adults tend to be more interested in adult activities and in whatever may be deemed “cool” at that particular time. If an older child loses interest in the system that should be considered fine. Learning rarely takes place without some personal interest involved. If she does maintain interest in the system while entering her teenage years, however, the student should be encouraged to take part in adult rituals and meetings as much as possible while still completing her final Degree. However, it should be understood that the religious training of any youth under 18 not specifically sanctioned by a parent or guardian runs the risk of legal difficulties and should be avoided. That is why many Pagan teaching and ritual groups prefer not have people under the age of 18 participate in their activities and Degree training. After the age of 18, the child should be

encouraged to begin work on adult Degrees. For guidelines on how to create personal Pagan adult degrees see my book *Self-Initiation for the Solitary Witch*.

The Three Degrees

The system is composed of three Degrees. The Degrees are named Neophyte, Apprentice, and Mage. A Neophyte is a fancy name for a beginner — especially someone beginning a new spiritual path. An Apprentice is someone who is studying alongside a mentor or guide and a Mage is a young magician. The child enters the Degree system by enacting a simple dedication ritual in which she commits herself to studying within the system. After dedicating herself to the path of learning a Pagan Degree, the child immediately becomes a Seeker. As a Seeker she can then pursue one of three Degrees. The appropriate Degree is determined by the age. After determining the proper Degree in which to begin, the student works on completing the requirements for the Degree mostly by earning Achievement Awards and by completing additional projects. The Neophyte Degree does not use Achievement Awards but, instead, focuses on small and simple activities to fulfill its requirements. For every 10 activities completed, the child working on the Neophyte Degree progresses to another Level within that Degree. Each of these Levels is named for an animal which relates to the four elements and to Spirit. When the student has completed the first four Levels, she is said to be a candidate for the Fellowship of the Dragons.

The Neophyte Levels

The following chart lists the nine Levels of the Neophyte Degree each of which is related to an element, the color and direction of that element, and the name of an animal which represents that Level. Each Level is obtained by doing 10 special Activities. When a student has completed the activities, she should take part in a special ceremony or ritual to recognize her completion of that Level and the attainment of the name of that Level.

Pagan Degrees for Youth

Level	Element	Direction	Color	Animal
1	Air	East	Yellow	Raven
2	Fire	South	Red	Phoenix
3	Water	West	Blue	Dolphin
4	Earth	North	Green	Fox
The Fellowship of the Dragons				
5	Air	East	Yellow	Yellow Dragon
6	Fire	South	Red	Red Dragon
7	Water	West	Blue	Blue Dragon
8	Earth	North	Green	Green Dragon
9	Spirit	Center	Purple	Purple Dragon

Table 2 - Neophyte Levels

Many Druids and other Pagans believe that animals represent certain things to us and the animals used for these Levels have been chosen not only for the element they represent but for their particular meanings as well. The first Level of the Neophyte Degree is the Raven. The Raven represents introspection, courage, and self-knowledge. This is the first Level of the Neophyte Degree and some reflective thinking is needed to begin. The child is beginning on the pathway to self-knowledge and understanding. The Raven was a special animal to the Norse god Odin as it was his eyes and ears; it was the animal that was sent out across the lands to help Odin hear and see how his people were doing. As children earn this Level, they become the eyes and ears for the world.

The second Level of the Neophyte Degree is represented by the Phoenix – the animal for the element of Fire. The Phoenix is a mythical bird that is believed to die and then resurrect itself in the flames of its own nest. The Phoenix is a symbol of rebirth, perseverance, and renewal. The child that is awarded this Level knows that the journey ahead is long but perseveres nonetheless. She

becomes a symbol of hope and renewal for the future. As she learns about Paganism and about the mysteries of the universe, she begins to realize what it will take in order for us to be fully human and children of Earth.

The third Level is related to the element of Water and the Dolphin. The Dolphin is a beautiful and intelligent animal of the ocean. Dolphins have often helped and befriended humans. The Dolphin symbolizes kindness, intelligence and salvation. With the completion of the third Level of the Neophyte Degree, children are beginning to develop their intellect through their understanding of Paganism. They are learning about how to live as a kind and gentle child. They learn to swim in the currents of the cycles of life and to help others on their way.

The fourth Level is represented by the element of Earth and the cunning Fox. The Fox is nimble and quick. He is able to adapt to difficult situations and escape through the use of his wit and craftiness. He is also quiet and patient. The child who has earned this Level will need to learn patience as she progresses toward the earning of the Neophyte Degree. She will have completed the first four Levels and will be entering into a new stage in her development. She will have to be smart and cunning herself to finish the Degree. The Level will symbolize her degree of intelligence that she has developed through completing these first four Levels.

The Fellowship of the Dragons

Having completed the first four Levels of the Neophyte Degree, the child is now ready to be initiated into the Fellowship of the Dragons. This should be a special occasion. If there are other children who are Dragons in this system, they should be encouraged to celebrate with the child. She should be awarded with a dragon gift. A dragon pin for her robe would be especially appropriate. With each of the four subsequent dragon Levels, the student can then earn a stole in the Level color.

The Dragon is, indeed, an excellent symbol for a child who has completed the first four Levels. The dragon was once a symbol of royalty but, more importantly, it is an ancient symbol of universal balance. The dragon is a creature that is both snake and bird which

can swim and breathe out fire. It thus contains all four elements within itself. It was also associated with goddess rites and symbolized the cycles of life. The dragon was not considered an evil creature until modern times. A child who is initiated into the Fellowship of the Dragons should be very proud of her achievements.

The Achievement Awards

The Achievement Awards are the main focus of activity for the Apprentice and Mage Degrees. Each one has a set of requirements - the fulfillment of which must be approved by the student's mentor. Using Awards allows for a great deal of flexibility within the system. Some Awards are required because it is my belief that all Pagan children should learn some basic essentials of the religion. Most Awards, however, are freely chosen; students can pick which Awards are of interest to them. The number of Awards required for each Degree assures that the child will also explore areas and topics she may not have considered looking into before. When a student has completed an Award, she should then be given something to honor that achievement. Our group has used buttons which are easy to make and to display. A button making machine is relatively inexpensive and easy to use. A cut out of the Award can be printed out (preferably with a color printer) and can be inserted into the badge. Black and white Awards can be used from this book to make buttons or full color versions are available from a companion book.

Hopefully, your children will be proud to collect and show off their Awards and there are several possible ways to display them. A special bulletin board can be used to hang them at home. We often use a stole that is worn over a robe during family rituals. A stole is simply a piece of fabric sewn to fit around the neck and hang down in front of the shoulders. Stoles can be simple to make or they can be purchased and are also not expensive. Buttons can be made to hang on the stoles and the color of the stole can relate to the color of the Degree. A stole is not usually awarded to a child until she has joined the Fellowship of the Dragons.

Degree	Level	Stole Color
Seeker		No stole
Neophyte		
	Raven	No stole
	Phoenix	No stole
	Dolphin	No stole
	Fox	No stole
	Yellow Dragon	yellow
	Red Dragon	red
	Blue Dragon	blue
	Green Dragon	green
	Purple Dragon	purple
Apprentice		silver (gray)
Mage		gold

Table 3 - stole colors

Methods of Teaching

There are several ways in which the information in this degree system can be taught. One way is for the mentor to direct the child in a one-to-one approach. In this case, the mentor leads the child through all the steps of the Degree and the requirements for each Achievement Award providing her with means to obtain information and with resources for learning while checking to make sure she has completed the necessary steps. Another method is to encourage the child to work with other adults especially in the completion of Awards. This method helps children learn from other people. In this case, the mentor is mostly responsible for keeping track of the student's progress. A third method is to use group teaching. It is possible that there are other Pagan children in the community who also seek to grow spiritually in a similar manner. A small group of these children could be gathered together on a regular basis and learning can take place by mentors, parents, and teachers taking turns

working on Degrees and Awards.

All the Degrees involve engaging in a lot of discussion and then doing several activities. The children should be encouraged to discuss the concepts introduced in such a way that they display an understanding of the concept but also come to accept it as something of their own. In other words, the learning cannot seem forced. Children will only learn those things in which they have an interest and interest is developed when something becomes related to their own life. By talking about the concepts introduced and by exploring feelings and ideas about the topic through these discussions, children will come to feel personally connected to the topics and may then take a greater interest. The same must be true concerning the related activities. Children may come to view these activities as chores if they do not understand the significance of the activity in relation to the topic and to their personal lives. Mentors must take the time to explain why these concepts are important to the spiritual and overall life of the child and why the activities help them learn the concepts. If the mentors themselves do not understand this then they should consider changing the requirements or asking for the assistance of another teacher. Once the activity has a personal connection to the child, she will then proceed with it at full force and, most likely, enjoy it as well. After all, these Degrees are all voluntary and why do them if they are not fun? It is up to each mentor to help define for the child how these activities can be best suited to the needs of each child. To do this, depend on the child's natural love of exploration and curiosity. Allow them to proceed in their own directions and at their own pace.


Degree Initiations

An important part of working through the Degrees is to have a special ceremony that is done when each Degree's requirements are met. One way to do this is to have a special initiation ritual for the child or children. The ritual does not have to be complex but it should recognize the child's accomplishments and be a time to honor her with a new stole on which she can hang her Achievement Awards. A nice certificate might be appropriate too. Feel free to create whatever ritual would be meaningful to you and your child.

Chapter Two

The Neophyte Degree

Introduction

he Neophyte Degree is designed for children ages 5 – 8 and is meant to be an easy way to introduce them to Pagan concepts as well as ideas about good learning and living. It is designed to help children grow and develop with an understanding of what it means to be part of a Pagan community – even if that community is just the family. This Degree does not focus on complex Achievement Awards. Instead, there are suggestions for a large number of activities that are fun and educational for Pagan children. Students complete the Degree by completing Levels within it. There are nine Levels each of which are identified with an animal related to one of the elements (including Spirit). To reach each Level, the child must complete 10 activities that are chosen from the list or are created by the child's mentor. Mentors can decide if certain activities can be repeated. For instance, the activity of reading a book may be a worthwhile one to repeat. If the child reads 10 books, she is considered to have completed 10 activities even though the particular activity is the same. This type of repetition must be left to the discretion of the mentor. After reaching one Level, the child can then continue on to the next. The first four Levels are named after common animals while the last five Levels are based on dragons. After completing the first four Levels, the child is then initiated into the Fellowship of the Dragon and begins work on the next five Levels. At the age of 8, the child can continue to work on her Neophyte Degree or she can simply begin the next Degree.

The chapter begins by describing the general Degree requirements and then lists the several Levels. This is followed by a long list of suggested activities. Each Level is considered complete when any 10 activities have been done.