

Charlotte Mason Homeschooling



In 18
EASY
Step-by-Step
Lessons

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Shining Dawn Books

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In 18 EASY Step-by-Step Lessons

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Welcome to Your Charlotte Mason Course

“Education is an atmosphere, a discipline and a life.”

Charlotte Mason

Would you like to teach your children in ways that encourage curiosity and enthusiasm, while at the same time expecting excellence in many areas – even more areas than most curricula expect? Charlotte Mason’s philosophies and principles are still fresh today and can help homeschoolers who use them to raise bright, resourceful children. In this 18-week, practical, easy-to-understand, easy-to-implement course, you’ll get all the basics for adding Charlotte Mason’s methods to your homeschool.

Here’s what you have to look forward to!

Over the course of eighteen lessons, I have provided simple explanations for each aspect of a Charlotte Mason education with practical suggestions for implementation in your homeschool. It’s your very own step-by-step how-to course that will have your homeschool up and running Charlotte Mason style by the time you reach the end of the book!

It’s suggested you tackle only one lesson per week. Why only one lesson per week? It would be nearly impossible to dive into a full-blown CM style of education all at once, especially for those of you who are already homeschooling using different methods. My desire is to teach you how to successfully implement Charlotte Mason’s methods into your homeschool. From experience, I realize that successful, stick-to-it changes rarely happen when diving into something new head first. Rather, adding a little here and a little there ensures a comfortable, confident change.

To help you go from simply reading about Charlotte Mason’s methods to actually doing them in your homeschool, I’ve included “homework” for you at the end of each lesson. Don’t worry, the homework is your chance to mull over the week’s topic and make a plan for including it in your school routine. It’s my hope that this

one-step-at-a-time method will allow you to not only understand each topic thoroughly, but will allow you and your children a slow and successful journey into all the CM style has to offer.

In other words, this book makes implementing a Charlotte Mason style of homeschooling EASY! All you have to do is read one lesson each week and do the homework. In approximately one semester's time, you should have everything you need under your belt to enjoy the best homeschooling method out there.

Lesson 1

Why Implement the Charlotte Mason Style?

Just who or what is Charlotte Mason??

Charlotte Mason was a 19th century (1842-1923) British educator who believed education was “an atmosphere, a discipline and a life.” She believed in teaching children in ways that encouraged curiosity and enthusiasm, while at the same time expecting excellence in many areas – even more areas than most curricula expect. Her philosophies are still fresh today, especially among homeschoolers who use them unfailingly to raise bright, resourceful children.

Although Charlotte Mason never had children of her own, she believed strongly that all children (not just the upper class) deserved a full and rich education. During the 10+ years she taught at the Davidson School in Worthington, England, she began to establish a vision of how this full and rich education for all social classes would look.

As her vision grew, she was asked to teach and give lectures in Chichester, England at the Bishop Otter Teacher Training College. Soon after, she began giving lectures to parents to help them understand basic principles about raising children. From these lectures, *Home Education* was written and the Parent's Educational Union began. (Think the first organized homeschool teacher's group.)

In 1891, Charlotte Mason moved to Ambleside, England and started the House of Education which trained governesses and others working with children in Charlotte Mason's principles and methods. New books followed, which we now call *Charlotte Mason's Original Homeschool Series*. Because her teaching methods and philosophy made so much sense, and made such a difference in a child's education, more and more schools began adopting her style, which we now call the Charlotte Mason style.

In this lesson, I'd like to focus on WHY our homeschool follows the Charlotte Mason style.

I'll get into the nitty-gritty of Charlotte Mason (CM) particulars within the lessons that follow, and you'll clearly see how the methods build brilliant students. As an introduction, though, I want to share about the ooey-gooey, mushy feelings that make this method of homeschooling my primary style.

Through such things as reading living books with my children, teaching them handicrafts and enjoying nature together, there's a sort of "life is school" attitude that's had me hooked from the beginning. Lessons are gentle and many of them conducive to sitting on the couch all snuggled up.

I had been a public school teacher previously and saw so many precious children who could have thrived if their parents would have simply taken the time to love on them during lessons. (Homework, of course.) As much as I tried, as their classroom teacher I couldn't love on every single student every day – making school work and home work sterile and uninviting. I knew from the moment I started homeschooling that a loving, encouraging, anything-but-sterile environment was what I wanted to create for my children.

After reading Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's *For the Children's Sake* when my oldest was five years old, I knew I had found the answer! It was possible to "do school" with the sweetness that I had envisioned. And the author spelled it out for me in such a way that built my confidence enough to carry me through schooling with the CM style eleven years later!

Little did I know in the beginning how much more blessed our school would become using this approach. For example, one major added bonus to this "gentle style of learning" (and there are lots of bonuses) includes lessons that are short and sweet, which allows more time for the extras of life. Those extras including: time for my kids to be kids, time to explore personal interests, time to take outside enrichment classes, and even time for running errands. Blessings indeed!

Don't be fooled, though! All this gentle, loving, short and sweet talk doesn't equal up to a less than superior education. On the contrary, I have been able to offer my children very challenging material, and lots of it. It's actually because of the simplicity and sweetness that we have more time to dive deep, tackle tough stuff and take outside classes that we otherwise wouldn't have the time to do!

Okay, enough for this lesson. Snuggles, sweetness, time for kids to be kids, AND real learning...Have I convinced you about how wonderful a CM education is yet?

Homework:

Think seriously about the parent and teacher you want to be. Think about the goals you have for your children before they leave your home – character, academics, abilities, etc. Jot these down.

Think about your current style of homeschooling and whether or not it's working. In other words, is it achieving the goals you have for your family (and is everyone joyfully on board?) Pray about this. Talk with your husband and maybe even your older children.

If you know you want to have a homeschool that is loving, serious, encourages character, allows time for passions and more, then read the rest of this book. I think you'll find the CM style to be a perfect fit.

Lesson 2

Living Literature as Education

"Let their books be living books, the best that can be found in liberal supply and variety."

Charlotte Mason

What in the world is a living book?

Quite simply, living books come alive as you read them. They are so well-written and engaging that you can hardly put them down. Unlike boring, dry textbooks, or silly “twaddle”, living books don’t make you feel as if you just wasted your time.

They come in all subjects and can be found in the form of picture books, chapter books and even some textbooks. Although there are many examples, I would consider *Story of the World* by Susan Wise Bauer and the *Exploring Creation* series by Jeannie Fulbright as textbooks with a “living” feel.

Living Literature: A Beautiful Picture

Picture yourself with your children – PK through high school – snuggling on the couch reading a wonderful book together. Every single one of your children is begging you to read more once your time is spent. And you, secretly as excited as your children, agree to “just one more chapter”.

Think about your family loving books so much that you all race for the audio book section of your library to see who can find the next best thing to listen to in the car.

Imagine your children filling their library cards with so many books that you can’t imagine they would really read all of them. But they do!

These scenarios REALLY happen in our home, and can happen in any home where living literature is given a priority!



Developing a deep love for literature in your children takes a little effort on your part. You have to enjoy this time yourself. You have to become as intertwined in the stories as your children, at least at first, until they find the love of literature themselves. This can be hard for parents who either don't like reading or don't want to take the time to schedule it. Think of it like exercise. Once you start exercising and get in the habit, you feel so much better, right? It's the same with living books. Once you start reading really good books with your children, not only will you find yourself surprisingly enthralled, you'll form a habit for your family from which everyone will benefit.

When Do You Add Living Literature?

Lessons in all subjects can come from living books, but our family tends to focus most of our reading attention on historical fiction and biographies of famous historical figures, scientists and missionaries. Adding a really good book (or more) to a study of any history topic, for instance, brings my children personally into the time period. As they get to know the characters and become part of the storyline, it gives them an emotional perspective unlike other lessons. We can read textbooks, complete lapbooks, make projects, write our own stories, etc., but nothing quite puts them into the time and place of history like a living book.

Even though I said we tend to focus most of our living literature attention on history and science, don't forget that great books can be found to enhance any subject from

grammar and math to artist and composer study. And sometimes, just reading for the sake of reading a good book fits the bill!

Oh, and you definitely don't have to do all living literature as read-alouds (as much fun as they are.) I make sure my children are reading living literature on their own as well. Whether assigned or pleasure reading, I try to make sure all the books are worthwhile.

Twaddle-Free Reading

*Twaddle (n.) Trivial or foolish speech or writing; nonsense.
(source: dictionary.com)*

Unfortunately, you will come across lots of twaddle out there, but you can find more living books in every genre than you could ever read in a lifetime! To save you the burden of searching for great books on your own, below are some great online lists for all age levels.

- [Our Journey Westward](#) (That's me.)
- [Classical Christian Homeschooling](#)
- [Paula's Archives](#)

Luckily, there are several companies who have products which save you the burden of figuring out which living literature to incorporate into your lessons. Before you read this list...not all of these companies claim to offer Charlotte Mason style lessons. I'm not necessarily endorsing any company's curriculum. Each of them, however, offer really good options for adding living literature to your lessons.

- [Beautiful Feet Books](#)
- [Living Books Curriculum](#)
- [Shining Dawn Books](#) (That's me.)
- [Sonlight](#)
- [Veritas Press](#)
- [Winter Promise](#)

There are also great reference books to help you choose living literature.

- *Books Children Love* by Elizabeth Wilson
- *Books that Build Character* by William Kilpatrick, Gregory Wolfe and Suzanne Wolfe
- *Honey for a Child's Heart* by Gladys Hunt
- *Honey for a Teen's Heart* by Gladys Hunt and Barbara Hampton
- *Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease

Homework:

Start slowly. Choose one subject your child is currently studying. Take a look at the reading material that goes along with the lesson(s). Is it living (interesting, meaningful, engaging?)

If so, way to go! Move on to another subject and see how the reading material stacks up.

If not, why not try replacing the lesson text with a living book from the library instead? Use one of the online lists above for ideas.

Some of you will ask, "If I replace lesson text with living literature, what about the tests? Won't it take us longer to read a living book than the short bits in the textbook?" First, if you replace the text with a living book, maybe you can ask your child to narrate (more on that soon) in order to show comprehension and/or complete a [project](#) to "show what they know." Second, living literature might take longer than the short bits of a textbook, but likely you can skip several days' lessons by adding one meaty living book. Go for it, whether you're afraid or not. I bet you'll be surprised how well it goes.

Lesson 3

The Short Lesson Model

“You want the child to remember? Then secure his whole attention,”

Charlotte Mason

Ah, Refreshing!

One of the most refreshing aspects of CM style homeschooling is the implementation of short lessons, especially for elementary-aged children. Most lessons should last no more than 10-20 minutes for elementary children and up to 40 minutes for older children.

My philosophy has always been, “Why go on and on when you don’t need to?” As a new homeschooling mom many years ago, I was always in a conundrum about how to keep records. According to my state’s requirements, I was supposed to teach various subjects for XX hours per day. But, what those making the rules didn’t know is that it doesn’t take XX hours per day to accomplish the exact same amount of work as a normal public school child. In fact, it usually takes WAY less time!

Once jumping fully into the CM philosophy, I realized that not only were my instincts right to not keep pushing certain subjects “just because”, but it’s actually better for children to work on lessons in shorter bursts. Charlotte Mason knew, like any of us



who have ever worked with children (or adults) that the attention span is only so long. Once past a certain point, little minds zone out. You know I'm right, don't you?

By incorporating short lessons, you're actually requiring your child pay closer attention and work more diligently. How's that? Think about the typical grammar lesson, for instance...One or two pages from a grammar book are generally plenty for one day's worth of grammar. Unless your child is a dawdler, there is no reason the teaching and completion of the lesson should take more than 10-15 minutes. If your child is a dawdler, he is simply wasting both his time and yours. The dawdling has become a habit. (We'll talk more about habit training in Lesson 17.) The longer the dawdle, the less focused attention to learning. And the less focused attention on any other lessons of the day.

I never let my children get in the habit of dawdling, but occasionally they slip into it anyway. When that happens, I set clear expectations and pull out the timer. It doesn't take too many episodes of having extra work assigned as "homework" to get them back on track with getting busy the first time around. (Wink)

Of course, I'm talking about a bad habit rather than a child who's struggling. But even for a struggling child, lessons should be kept short and sweet. He is no different than anyone else in the length of attention span. It might mean that you simply move more slowly through the curriculum.

What Does a Short Lesson Day Look Like?

I've written about my typical daily schedule in Lesson 18, but here's a quick look at a morning of lessons for any one of my students 8th grade or younger. The lessons vary as the week goes on, but this is pretty normal.

- Bible 10-15 minutes
- Memory Work 5-10 minutes
- Math 20-40 minutes, usually on the 40 minute side
- Copywork and/or a Phonics/Spelling Lesson 10-15 minutes
- Narration, Dictation, or Transcription 5-15 minutes
- Writing (for older children) 30-40 minutes
- Foreign Language 10-15 minutes
- Reading Alone 15-30 minutes
- History and/or Science as a family 30-60 minutes, includes living literature

So, before lunch, they've tackled all the 3 R's + some. The afternoons aren't wasted educationally! They just take on a different "look" – nature study, artist study, passions, chores, etc. You'll learn more about each of these throughout the book's lessons.

Short Lessons Can't Possibly be Enough

Some people really struggle with the concept of short lessons because they feel like their child can't be getting "enough" in such a short amount of time. The Lord blessed me with several years teaching in the public schools before homeschooling so that I could have plenty of encouraging words to say to homeschooling moms and dads. Listen closely. *What I cover with my children in short lessons at home is no less than what I covered in much longer lessons in the classroom!*

What takes my children a few short minutes to do at home is the same material I would've spent way too much time trying to explain to 30 students in the classroom – while at the same time making Johnny sit down, asking Sally to stop talking, allowing Robby to go to the bathroom, stopping to answer a question from the teacher next door and answering a phone call from the front office. Trust me. Short lessons done well are enough!

Homework:

"Never let the child dawdle over a copy-book [penmanship] or sum, sit dreaming with his book before him. When a child grows stupid over a lesson, it is time to put it away. Let him do another lesson as unlike the last as possible, and then go back with freshened wits to his unfinished task...the lesson must be done, of course, but must be made bright and pleasant to the child."

Charlotte Mason

Keep a "time card" of each lesson and how long it takes from start to finish. Do this every day for a few days.

If you see a pattern of long lessons as compared to short lessons, contemplate why the lessons are taking so long. Are you expecting too much? Is your child

dawdling? Are you over-explaining during teaching? Is your child struggling with the work?

Once you pinpoint a cause, make a change or two to diminish lesson length. Maybe you'll only assign half of the problems in math as long as your child scores 90% or better. Maybe you'll set a timer to challenge your child to stay on task. Maybe you'll work on shorter, more concise teaching to model less wasted time. Maybe you'll back up and reteach from the point where your child stopped understanding the material.

Again, keep notes and see if the shorter, more focused lessons don't change the "weight" of your homeschool almost immediately.

Lesson 4

Narration

“Narrating is an art, like poetry making or painting, because it is there, in every child’s mind, waiting to be discovered, and is not the result of any process of disciplinary education. A creative fiat calls it forth. Let him narrate; and the child narrates, fluently copiously, in ordered sequence, with fit and graphic details, with a just choice of words, without verbosity [. . .] as soon as he can speak with ease.”

Charlotte Mason

What is Narration?

Quite simply narration is the retelling of something in your own words. Narration is a very important skill for many reasons:

It requires focused attention.

It encourages attention to details and information.

It builds long-term memory.

It helps a child organize his thoughts.

It teaches him to speak clearly and expressively.

It is the precursor to writing well.

Those are pretty big-time consequences from something as seemingly “little” as retelling something you’ve heard or read!

Narration is quite easy!

Read a sentence, poem, passage or chapter to your child, or have her read it herself. Read it only once. This is key because you want her to listen well the first time.

Encourage her to retell as much as she can remember in her own words, adding any opinions or comments as she wishes. (The parent should refrain from interruptions.)

If necessary, the parent might ask a guiding question help the child when stuck.

Really, that's it. It seems such a little thing to make such a profound difference in an education, doesn't it?

My Experiences with Narration: The Ugly Truth

I did some narration with my first child. She has always been able to learn easily, so I didn't feel like narration was absolutely necessary for her. As she progressed from elementary to middle years, I was surprised to see that writing was way harder for her than most other subjects. It took quite some time and effort to help her learn to organize thoughts, write with a "voice" and have her writings lead somewhere.

I'll come back to my daughter, but first a little info about my second child. He talked all the time. Did he really need narration? Or, better yet, did I really need to sit and purposefully listen to more of his talking? (Gasp.) Not to mention, narration takes focused effort on the part of the parent and I was feeling a little overwhelmed schooling two children at this point. So, shame on me, my second child didn't get much narration practice at all early on.

Even though I corrected this in later years, guess what? His ability to write is still a struggle compared to other subjects. And, not to my surprise this time, he struggles with the exact same writing problems my daughter had to work through.

Working on narration with my third child, I was able to clearly see why my older two have struggled with writing. You see, I decided to give narration a "real" try with my littlest guy. From the time he could talk, I've been asking him to repeat things I've said. I've read simple little stories and rhymes to him and asked him to tell them to mommy.

Now that he's seven, he has a lot of story and picture narration under his belt. At six, he can narrate some really in-depth things with total confidence. His "voice" shines through with inflection. He is also able to narrate his own story from a picture and in some cases, even makes up his own fabulous tales full of characters and plots. I've come to realize, this is just what seven-year-old boys do when they don't know anything different.

Even though he's not writing yet, I fully expect the writing process will come much easier for him when the time comes. And, I feel like I owe it all to Charlotte Mason's method of narration.

Trust me that it's never too late to start narration! That's the method I've been using to help my second son improve his storytelling skills. Even though it's a slower process for him, it is working!

Homework:

Now that I've shared my big ugly Charlotte Mason secret with you, get honest with yourself. Do you incorporate narration regularly into your homeschool day? If so, good for you! Your children will benefit greatly from it.

If not, plan to add narration to the schedule at least once this coming week. No matter the age of your child, start small. Read an Aesop's Fable or a short poem and ask your child to tell it back to you. Remember, you aren't looking for a word for word retelling. It's important that your child internalizes the meaning of the story or poem herself. (You can [watch one Eli's narrations](#) as an example if you like.)

Once your child gets the hang of narration, try to add a short time for it daily. Your child might retell a picture book one day then narrate her history lesson the next. She might narrate a grammar rule one day then narrate the directions to a game the next. Make it fun and relaxed as much as possible.

Watch skills soar!

Lesson 5

Copywork and Dictation

"A sense of beauty in their writing and in the lines they copy should carry them over this stage of their work with pleasure. Not more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour should be given to the early writing-lessons. If they are longer the children get tired and slovenly."

Charlotte Mason

What is Copywork?

Copywork is quite simple: A child is given a sentence, poem or passage, depending on his ability, and is expected to simply copy it word for word, capital for capital, and punctuation for punctuation.

Its purpose is to encourage handwriting, while at the same time reinforcing grammar and spelling. Not to mention, copying well-written works from others offers beautiful examples to follow once the child begins writing his or her own thoughts. In other words, a child exposed to excellent writing through copywork will internalize such things as spelling rules, sentence construction and “voice” in writing.

How to Implement Copywork

First and foremost, make it enjoyable. Charlotte Mason suggested allowing children to choose their own favorite passages from poetry, literature or the Bible.

Next, and just as important, copywork should take no longer than ten to fifteen minutes per day. Otherwise, the process becomes tiring and frustrating.

The goal is to “accomplish something perfectly in every lesson—a stroke, a pothook, a letter.” (CM) The goal isn’t necessarily to develop an ease in writing. That comes with practice over time. At first, simply expect work done well – quality, not quantity.

Teach proper positioning. Sit squarely with both feet on the floor and good posture; situate paper in a comfortable parallel or slightly turned position; hold the paper with the non-writing hand; hold the pencil lightly between the thumb and first and second fingers; and make sure the end of the pencil is pointed in the direction of the forearm.

Expect letters to be written correctly. If you allow incorrect formation, bad habits quickly set in.

Don't rush the work – even if that means you expect less volume to keep the lesson within ten minutes or so.

Encourage children to check their own work. Having the correct example to reference makes it easy to make sure the copywork is done as it should be.

Where Do I Find Copywork Passages?

Just about anywhere! Copying Bible verses is typically where I start with my children. I also pull sentences or passages from literature, poetry, textbooks, famous quotes, famous speeches, hymns, recipes, mailing addresses, and even phone numbers or math facts once in a while.

As for what type of paper to supply your children, I have jumped back and forth more than I care to admit. My best advice is to purchase a lined writing paper meant for your child's age level and progressively move to smaller lined paper as your child is able.

Transcription for Older Children

Older children (around ten years old) can replace copywork with transcription. Again, just like copywork, transcription is very simple. Your child reads a sentence or passage and tries to rewrite it correctly without looking back at the original. I have been known to allow my older children to type their transcriptions as well.



What is Dictation?

Some people associate dictation with the academic subject of spelling. I like to think dictation is meant to encourage attention to spelling, as well as grammar and punctuation.

I think it's important to note that Charlotte Mason didn't practice formal spelling in the early years. Spelling was integrated into copywork, just as grammar and punctuation. After copywork, her student's might have been given some letter tiles and asked to spell one or two of the words from the copywork. When a child didn't need tiles anymore, he might be asked to orally spell or write one or two of the words for some spelling reinforcement. We're going to talk more specifically about spelling and other typical language arts in the next lesson.

For now, let's jump back into dictation. An older child (around ten years old) is given a poem or passage and asked to read and reread until he feels comfortable with spelling all the words and adding the correct capitalization and punctuation. The parent then reads one phrase or sentence at a time expecting him child to write it correctly. Incorrect spelling, grammar and punctuation are corrected immediately so that bad habits don't form.

It's only necessary to practice dictation a couple times a week. It's perfectly okay to give the passage or poem early to allow for studying. You can find dictation excerpts in the same places you find copywork.

Homework:

If you have a child younger than ten, add copywork to your lessons twice this week. Depending on his or her ability level, consider focusing on a couple of key words for gentle spelling practice.

If you have a child ten or older, add one transcription lesson and one dictation lesson to your week.

Remember to keep the lessons short! You will need to explain clearly what is expected and plan on very small excerpts for at least the first few lessons, no matter the age of your child.

Lesson 6

What About; Reading, Writing, Spelling and Grammar?

"Reading presents itself first amongst the lessons to be used as instruments of education, although it is open to discussion whether the child should acquire the art unconsciously, from his infancy upwards, or whether the effort should be deferred until he is, say, six or seven, and then made with vigour."

Charlotte Mason

Are language arts skills taught explicitly?

The past two lessons dealt very specifically with the main model Charlotte Mason used to teach the language arts. As I mentioned there, as well as the living literature lesson, language arts “happen” when you consistently employ read-alouds, narration, copywork and dictation in your homeschool. Your children organically pick up on the structure of good sentences, spelling patterns, characters, plots and so much more.

Is there ever a time for specific language arts skills to be taught explicitly? In other words, should you make sure your child has a good understanding of phonics? Should you give weekly spelling tests to ensure excellence in spelling?

The answer is yes and no. It really depends on the child. For example, my oldest picked up on reading without much help from me. Because of this, we only casually covered phonics skills when something perplexed her in reading. My middle child did not pick up on reading easily. Not at all. With him, I implemented daily reading lessons that specifically taught phonics and sight word skills.

Let's take a look at each of the traditional language arts and consider how they might fit outside of copywork, narration and dictation. We'll also discuss how you might teach them “Charlotte Mason style.”

Reading

What makes a good reader?

The ability to decode words.

The ability to read fluently.

The ability to comprehend what has been read.

Unless a child can decode words, he won't be able to read fluently with understanding. If your child struggles to decode words, the first step, then, is to teach phonics and sight word skills.

CM Style: Use a selection you're already using for copywork or narration. Choose a few words from that selection that all follow the same phonics rule. Give a mini-lesson about the phonics rule. Then, pull out some magnet letters to make and read other words that would follow the same rule. Lessons using copywork or narration selections have meaning to the student. The spelling lesson, then, is pertinent to the selection at hand. I like to call these lessons "living" because they're real or have relevance to the child.

There are many ways to pull phonics lessons from your copywork or narration selections. I'll mention just a few in hopes that you'll begin to find your own ways to develop a living phonics lesson.

Write words from the selection all over a white board and ask your child to erase the words as you read them.

Write a few words from the selection on index cards. Ask your child to find those words in the text.

Write the words from one sentence on index cards and ask your child to arrange them correctly.

Write several words from the reading selection on index cards and ask your child to put words with similar rules together.

Others prefer a more sequenced approach. There are more phonics programs available than you care to know – many of them good at what they teach. Only a handful would I consider "living." My favorite prepared phonics program is *All About Reading* from All About Learning Press. It includes multi-sensory lessons that build upon skills to teach phonics, sight words, fluency and comprehension.

Either way you choose to teach, organically or sequentially, be sure to allow your child plenty of opportunity to read aloud to you. Choose living books and be very encouraging. Again, keep the reading time short. No more than ten minutes for early readers.

Don't forget, you should still read aloud to your child often! He's hearing the flow of words, the inflection in your voice and the wonderful images behind words. These are important because they give him an example of good reading, as well as a reason to learn to read.

Spelling

Spelling and reading are very much intertwined. A good phonics lesson will inevitably teach spelling as well. For this reason, you likely don't need to teach spelling as a separate subject if you're already teaching phonics.

Sometimes, your children have moved beyond the need for daily phonics, but still have spelling issues to tackle. I learned this Charlotte Mason-style idea for teaching spelling years ago and it really works – for any age level.

Choose 5-20 words you want your child to know.

Write those words on individual index cards.

Hold one word up at a time and go through these steps.

Look at the word.

Say the word.

Spell the word aloud.

Spell the word in the air

Take a mental picture of the word.

Put the card down and ask your child to spell the word orally and/or write the word on a piece of paper.

Move on to the next card.

Practice the same set of cards four days in a row.

Have your child write all the words without looking at the cards on the fifth day.

This method is great for those pesky sight words that don't follow the rules. It's also worked well for my older children trying to learn difficult vocabulary words! Remember to keep the lessons short.

Grammar

Formal grammar lessons shouldn't begin until at least the age of ten. The CM philosophy maintains that consistent use of living literature, copywork, dictation, etc., is enough before ten. After ten, a few years of formal grammar is all a child needs to know the meanings behind what they are naturally speaking and writing.

This is a tough idea for many parents to accept. It just doesn't seem right that grammar shouldn't be systematically taught from the early years. Even I created a [grammar program](#) for my first child when she was in the 4th grade. While the program worked, it just wasn't necessary. I didn't learn this lesson until I found her reviewing the same concepts over and over all the way through middle school.

With my second child, we held off on formal grammar until middle school. At that time, we went through *Easy Grammar Plus* by Wanda Phillips over the course of about two years. His understanding of grammar is no different than hers.

Writing

Composition, creative writing, research papers, essays...In a Charlotte Mason education, this type of writing isn't encouraged until around the middle school years.

As I think back to my days teaching in the public school, I remember the dreaded portfolio. This was a set of writings to be turned in and graded for each and every fourth grader in the state – much like standardized testing, but with writing instead. The fourth grade teachers dreaded the portfolios each year. The third grade teachers dreaded preparing their students to be portfolio writers the following year. Why? Third and fourth graders, for the most part, weren't ready to write yet!

Physically, it was hard to get their papers written. They were just on the other side of learning handwriting and cursive, for heaven's sake. Mentally, most of them didn't understand how to put a well-written story to words. They could tell stories.

They could illustrate stories. But, actually writing them down was way more than they could handle.

Miss Mason understood this. Her philosophy keeps creative writing in the early years (grades 1-3) to a minimum and encourages only copywork and oral narration instead. By 4th grade, you begin adding in written narration. Once a child makes a mental shift, around the age of ten, he is then able to begin writing his own compositions.

In middle school, I still don't do much direct writing instruction. I just ask my kids to write. Memories, research, historical fiction, letters, poems, silly stories...just write. We spend a lot of time reading the finished writings aloud. I encourage them to listen for places that don't make sense and revise them. I ask them to use their new found grammar skills to edit their work. For the most part, my intention is to be their cheerleader, rather than their writing teacher.

That might seem odd, but it's worked. A mini-lesson here or a quick suggestion there without expecting perfection in writing has allowed my children have confidence that they can write. That's the biggest brick wall most kids face who struggle with writing. They think it's too hard to be perfect, so why try?

I know at least one of my children would completely shut down if I pulled out the red pencil and started marking all the imperfections. He would be overwhelmed with the necessary changes and decide he's just not up for being a writer.

By high school, I begin to introduce the formal types of writing – the five paragraph essay, the formal research paper, the persuasive argument and more. Tackling these types of writing in the upper years is super-simple because they have both the skills and confidence to do them well.

Homework:

Whew! This was a meaty lesson. Let's break the homework into a few doable steps:

Reading and Spelling: Consider reading and spelling this week. Do you need to do more copywork and narration in place of some of the busy work you're giving your children? Perhaps you need to shorten your lessons a bit? Really look at the

reading and spelling lessons you've been doing and decide what, if anything, needs to be changed to align more with the CM style of learning.

Grammar: If your children are under ten, consider the necessity of your grammar lessons.

If your children are ten or older, decide whether their grammar lessons are meaningful, or just plain busy work. It's okay to skip lessons that your children already understand.

Writing: If your children are under ten, make sure most of their writing is focused on short lessons of copywork and oral or written narration. Know that some children absolutely love to write creatively at an earlier age. Don't discourage this if you are blessed with a gifted writer.

If your children are over ten, evaluate whether or not writing lessons are building their confidence, or whether you're wearing them out with too many expectations. Remember to focus on only one or two issues at a time. Learning how to improve one thing at a time makes it way easier for your child to add that improvement next time around.

Lesson 7

Poetry and Shakespeare

[Reading] “should include a good deal of poetry, to accustom him to the delicate rendering of shades of meaning, and especially to make him aware that words are beautiful in themselves, that they are a source of pleasure, and are worthy of our honour; and that a beautiful word deserves to be beautifully said, with a certain roundness of tone and precision of utterance. Quite young children are open to this sort of teaching, conveyed, not in a lesson, but by a word now and then.”

Charlotte Mason

Poetry

My first thought about poetry was...yuck. Who wants to waste time on frilly words that often seem to circle without landing? But, to honor Charlotte Mason's methods, I gave poetry a go. Much to my surprise, not only did my children enjoy our time spent with poetry, but I did, too!

Our process for coming to love poetry took the form of several distinct steps. I've listed them below, but feel free to go about the steps in whatever order best suits your children. The most important thing to remember is to instill a love for poetry before expecting assignments having to do with poetry.

Step One: Just read poetry aloud to your children. Yep, that's it. Start reading good poetry aloud once a day or a few times a week. (Remember the lesson about twaddle vs. living literature? You'll find twaddle in poetry out there, too. I've listed some of my go-to resources for living poetry below.)

Step Two: Consider using a line, stanza or entire poem for narration, copywork, transcription or dictation. This is especially beneficial if your child seems drawn to a certain poem. Poetry is also great for memorization and recitation. Warning: The appreciation of poetry is more important than making sure you “put it to work” during other lessons.

Step Three: Continue to read poetry aloud, but spend some time reading various works from a single poet. In doing this, children begin to recognize writing styles,

word choices, rhythms, themes, etc. from poet to poet. I typically focus on one poet per month, while others choose to study the same poet for an entire semester or year. We'll read (and reread) two or three of his or her poems per week and spend just a little while learning the poet's biography. This is called poetry study.

Step Four: Encourage your child to begin writing her own simple poems in nature journals, writing journals, or Bible journals. Don't worry about format or content at this point.

Step Five: After many, many, many poems have been read for the pure joy of it, begin analyzing poems for meanings. Also, begin analyzing the structure of poetry. Finally, begin writing poetry following examples of the masters. (For those of you, like me, who don't know exactly where to start with diving deep into poetry lessons, you might consider using *The Grammar of Poetry* by Matt Whitling.)

My Favorite Books of Living Poetry:

For Younger Children

A Child's Garden of Verses by Robert Louis Stevenson

Favorite Poems Old and New by Helen Ferris and Leonard Weisgard

Lavender's Blue by Kathleen Lines and Harold Jones

The Random House Book of Poetry by Jack Prelutsky and Arnold Lobel

For Older Children

One Hundred and One Famous Poems by Roy Cook

“A child should speak beautiful thoughts so beautifully and with such precise rendering of every shade of meaning that he interprets the author's work to his listener. It takes appreciation for a work to be able to do that, as well as sensitivity and expressiveness. That's why reciting is a learning experience on its own...”

Charlotte Mason

Recitation

Since recitation fits so well with poetry, I've included this CM method here for you. And, recitation is simple – just like about everything else we've covered so far. Don't you love the simplicity of Charlotte Mason's methods? Recitation requires only two steps.

Step One: Memorize a poem, Bible verse, passage, quote, speech, etc.

Step Two: Recite the memorization in front of others.

Help your child to be successful. In the beginning especially, require memorization passages that won't be frustratingly difficult. As he grows in ability and experience, expect more to be memorized at a time.

Recitation not only “proves” memorization, but greatly strengthens a child's ability to speak publically. Attention should be paid to speaking loudly and clearly, standing confidently and maintaining eye contact.

As I mentioned in the copywork lesson, I typically begin memorization and recitation with Bible verses and passages. We then move on to reciting poetry, famous historical speeches, words to hymns and even essays my children have prepared. I love the confidence my children have gained through this exercise.



"And Shakespeare? He, indeed, is not to be classed, and timed, and treated as one amongst others, - he, who might well be the daily bread of the intellectual life;

Shakespeare is not to be studied in a year; he is to be read continuously throughout life, from ten years old and onwards. But a child of ten cannot understand Shakespeare. No; but can a man of fifty? Is not our great poet rather an ample feast of which everyone takes according to his needs, and leaves what he has no stomach for? A little girl of nine said to me the other day that she had only read one play of Shakespeare's through, and that was "A Midsummer Night's Dream." She did not understand the play, of course, but she must have found enough to amuse and interest her. How would it be to have a monthly reading of Shakespeare —a play, to be read in character, and continued for two or three evenings until it is finished? The Shakespeare evenings would come to be looked on as a family fiesta; and the plays, read again and again, year after year, would yield more at each reading, and would leave behind in the end rich deposits of wisdom."

Charlotte Mason

Shakespeare

Well, it's time for me to share one more ugly truth. I don't like Shakespeare. At all. Luckily, my children don't have the same distaste because they've been wonderfully, excitingly introduced to Shakespeare and his works through a sweet co-op teacher. (By the way, I'm not excusing myself. I just feel blessed that the co-op opportunity presented itself before I was forced to teach it! HaHa)

Quite honestly, even knowing where to start with Shakespeare can be confusing. Some of the plays I remember reading (ahem, more likely watching) in high school were not really appropriate for my kids, if you know what I mean. Through research, I understand the [Ambleside Online Shakespeare Study Rotation](#) offers a suggested play schedule that is both thorough and "safe."

From our co-op teacher and brilliant bloggers I've gleaned from over the years, here are a few tips for painlessly including Shakespeare in your homeschool.

Read children's versions first.

Read modern translations in tandem with the originals.

Consider books on tape every once in a while. The voice inflections often help in comprehension.

Yes, I'm really going to suggest it. Read through [Sparks Notes](#) or some other online book summary to help get the gist of confusing parts.

Read slowly, drawing pictures of characters as they are introduced. Consider character charts to include things you learn about each character in order to keep them straight throughout the play.

Dramatize acts with people, puppets, stuffed animals, play dough figures, etc. (Count this as narration!)

Preview movie versions of plays you are reading and watch them with your children if appropriate. You can also find some [free online versions](#) to watch.

Take in a play when it comes to town.

As a last resort, be a sissy like me and find someone else to teach for you!

My publisher, Prufrock Press, has a series of [Advanced Placement Shakespeare Courses](#) for several plays. I own three of these and they are quite good! I'm saving them for the third child who likely won't have a co-op Shakespeare teacher. (Wink.)

Homework:

Poetry: Check out a good poetry book from the library and enjoy one poem together each day this week.

Recitation: Choose one passage for your child to memorize and recite this week. Remember to help your child be successful with by assigning something fairly easy.

Extra Credit:

Shakespeare: Go to the children's section of your library and try to find a child's version of a Shakespeare play to read or listen to together. Try to spend at least 15 minutes with it per day.

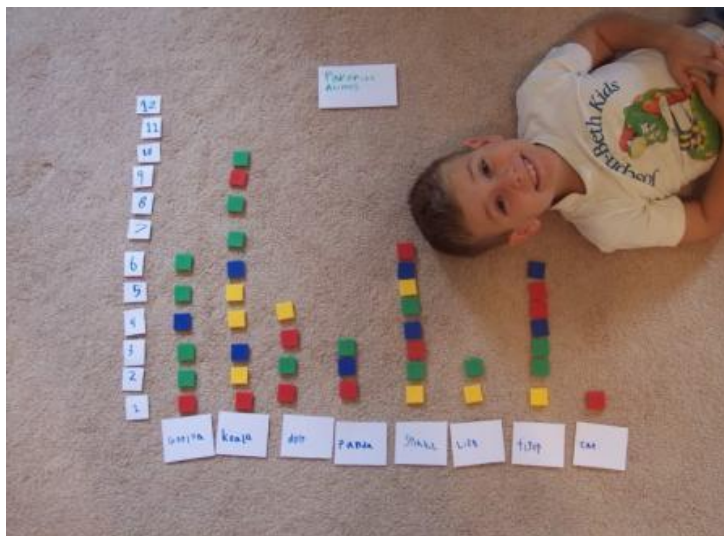
Lesson 8

Living Math

“The practical value of arithmetic to persons in every class of life goes without remark. But the use of the study in practical life is the least of its uses. The chief value of arithmetic, like that of the higher mathematics, lies in the training it affords to the reasoning powers, and in the habits of insight, readiness, accuracy, intellectual truthfulness it engenders. There is no one subject in which good teaching effects more, as there is none in which slovenly teaching has more mischievous results.”

“Mathematics depend upon the teacher rather than upon the text-book and few subjects are worse taught; chiefly because teachers have seldom time to give the inspiring ideas, what Coleridge calls, the ‘Captain’ ideas, which should quicken imagination”

Charlotte Mason



What is Living Math?

Surprisingly, the term “living math” is not part of Charlotte Mason’s actual vocabulary. She does, however, talk frequently about living teaching, which we can assume means all subjects should be taught in a living manner. Thinking back to the definition of “living” - lessons should be engaging, come alive and not make our children feel as if they’ve wasted their time. In other words, the lessons should be meaningful and have a real means to an end.

When talking about math, it’s a little harder to convince most of our children that lessons really do have a means to an end! However, when we are giving assignments that build upon understanding, turn on “light bulbs” in the mind, and tie learning into real-life, we aren’t wasting their time (no matter what they may think.) On the other hand, we do waste their time when we dole out assignments that produce nothing more than making our children repeat problem after problem...all of which they already can do proficiently, or with no real understanding.

With that in mind, living math can take on MANY forms – including textbook lessons – IF they have meaning. Each lesson then, should build on a previously mastered concept, practice concepts that haven’t yet been mastered, or introduce entirely new concepts.

Real understanding should be the first and foremost goal, rather than your child providing correct answers. Believe it or not, some children can get the right answers, but have no idea why. Later down the road, they begin to struggle with higher level math because they never really understood the basic concepts to begin with. In order to build real understanding, especially for younger children, learning needs to go from concrete to abstract. Manipulatives are a great way to do this because your child can actually touch, move and form a picture of math. Once your



child has a good grasp of the concept using manipulatives, the next logical step is to draw pictures on paper, followed later by writing equations. In this way, you move your child from concrete to abstract understanding and math begins to make sense.

There are many, many methods of teaching math so that it's well-rounded, concrete, meaningful and joyful. In our home, we use a math textbook about 3 days a week (adding manipulatives when necessary) and use other methods the rest of the week. I've been known to include:

- living literature
- logic
- problem solving
- technology
- projects
- real-life activities
- games
- and anything else I can dream up

The biggest question I get when talking about my living math schedule is, "What about the textbook? If you only use it three days a week, how do you finish it?" You're right, if I'm only doing the textbook 3 days a week, it's not being finished each year! We finish about $\frac{2}{3}$ of it, and have ever since my children were in kindergarten. At the end of the school year, I have my children take the math placement tests I find online (Saxon) and they've NEVER failed to sail easily into the next year's curriculum, sometimes higher.



Homework:

I have written tons of [posts sharing practical living math lessons](#) for various ages. Your homework this week is to browse through some of those posts to get a better feel for living math.

Try to replace just one regular math lesson with a living lesson. Your children will thank you!

Lesson 9

Nature Study

“It is infinitely well worth the mother's while to take some pains every day to secure, in the first place, that her children spend hours daily amongst the rural and natural objects; and, in the second place, to infuse them, or rather to cherish in them, the love of investigation.”

“The child who learns his science from a text-book, though he go to Nature for illustrations, and he who gets his information from object lessons, has no chance of forming relations with things as they are, because his kindly obtrusive teacher makes him believe that to know about things is the same as knowing them personally.”

Charlotte Mason



I've been so excited to write about nature study because it's become such a rich, exciting time of learning for our family! I've been a nature lover from the time I was a child, but had no idea how much something as fun as nature study could reach so deeply into every single realm of science. Nor did I realize that God would reveal Himself to my family in such a powerful way as we find Him during nature walks.

Can you tell I'm pretty passionate about nature study? Early on, I used to be a Charlotte Mason homeschooler who added nature study to the schedule when and if we had time. It was an "extra" that came after the "real" lessons. Several years ago, I challenged myself to incorporate nature study weekly since it was such an important part of Charlotte Mason's method. Boy, was I surprised to find our scheduled afternoon of nature study became the most anticipated activity of the week!

Children love to get outside. They need to get outside. Fresh air, sunshine and exercise keep us healthy and happy. Something about a lesson outdoors just sparks the interest of my children in a way that no other lesson can. For my rambunctious son, I'm sure he appreciates being able to run, jump and climb without being told to "sit down and get busy!"



Why Study Nature?

God teaches us through nature and helps us to grow closer to Him.

It involves most of the sciences and opens the door to other academic areas.

It stimulates excitement about learning, curiosity, discrimination/comparison skills, memorization, research and more.

It allows for family time, fresh air, sunshine and exercise.

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Romans 1:20

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.” Psalm 19:1-3

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?” Job 12:7-9

And about the wisest man to ever live, King Solomon – “He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.” 1 Kings 4:33

“Let them once get in touch with Nature, and a habit it formed which will be a source of delight through life. We were all meant to be naturalists, each in his degree, and it is inexcusable to live in a world so full of the marvels of plant and animal life and to care for none of these things.”

Charlotte Mason

How To Study Nature CM Style

Time spent outdoors should include a small bit of purposeful, prompted time by mom or dad, “Go find out about that rock wall.”

- Charlotte Mason calls this “educational sight-seeing” when children develop a keen sense of observation to be able to come back and describe what they saw. (It’s similar to narration.)
- Some children need further prompting in order to learn this skill. “What’s growing on the rock wall? Does the growth remind you of anything you’ve seen before?”
- The questioning should be very relaxed and gentle. It shouldn’t be turned into a “lesson”, nor should it be regurgitated later for another parent.

The parent should be genuinely excited to learn about the child’s observations.

The parent should refrain from talking too much.

Regular written documentation is encouraged in the form of a diary, drawings, notes, pressings, calendars and more.

Describing and/or noting correct names and parts should be encouraged, within reason considering the child’s age.



Creative and Practical Ways To Study Nature

My overall philosophy when asked how to study nature is, “Any way you like!” or “Whatever works for your children!” The most important thing, in my opinion, is that

your children are immersed in and overjoyed with God's creation. This is why the [NaturExplorers](#) studies I have written offer so many ideas. Some children love to draw and document in journals, others enjoy scavenger hunts, and still others enjoy on the spot experiments and observations.

A few ideas for varied walks include:

Simple walks with no planned purpose in mind. Take along a blank nature notebook and sketch or write about whatever strikes a fancy.

Walks with a purpose in mind. Take along specific field guides, notebooking pages or nature bag materials that will enhance the learning about the particular topic.

Nature projects are walks that go a step further to include experiments, comparisons, collections, maps, graphs, writing, storytelling, art, crafting, planting, etc.

Seasonal unit studies allow you to take one nature topic and focus on various aspects about it over the course of a month, a season or longer.

“For the evil is, that children get their knowledge of natural history, like all their knowledge, at second hand. They are so sated with wonders, that nothing surprises them; and they are so little used to see for themselves, that nothing interests them. The cure for this blasé condition is, to let them alone for a bit, and then begin on new lines. Poor children, it is no fault of theirs if they are not as they were meant to be—curious eager little souls, all agog to explore so much of this wonderful world as they can get at, as quite their first business in life.”

Charlotte Mason

I have written [10 free nature study lessons](#) that you are welcome to use and/or browse through to give you a better picture of how we do nature study in our house. We don't always complete a follow-up activity. Many, many walks are just plain ol' walks with simple journaling (or not.)

Homework:

Carve out at least an hour to take one nature walk this week. Don't worry about any plans. Everyone in your family should look for one thing they've never noticed before. You could even call it a nature scavenger hunt if you like. No need to worry about various age levels because nature study lends itself to multi-age learning!

(Oh, and it counts as science. Maybe you could skip one regular science lesson this week to make room for nature study?)

Lesson 10:

Science

“But we, believing that the normal child has powers of mind which fit him to deal with all knowledge proper to him, give him a full and generous curriculum; taking care only that all knowledge offered him is vital, that is, that facts are not presented without their informing ideas.”

Charlotte Mason

As you can tell from the last lesson, Charlotte Mason believed wholeheartedly in the study of nature as the primary method of learning science. Nature study reaches far into all the sciences.

Some people, me included, enjoy learning science in ways other than nature study sometimes. And that's perfectly okay in the Charlotte Mason model. How can you do a CM-style science outside of nature study? It's easy. Think back to the previous lessons. Three premises have been consistent the entire time... “literature,” “living,” and “short.” The same goes for science instruction.



Literature

Living literature spans the curriculum. You can easily find living literature to go with just about any [science topic](#) under the sun. These books can be used to supplement science lessons, or they can be the lessons themselves. Let me give you some examples.

Literature Books as Curriculum: These books are meaty enough to take the place of any additional readings or lesson activities. There are hundreds of them, so I'll only give you a few examples. Have fun hanging out in your library!

Life in the Great Ice Age by Michael and Beverly Oard

Snowflake Bentley by Jacqueline Briggs Martin

Germs Make Me Sick by Melvin Berger

Crinkleroot's Guide to Knowing the Trees by Jim Arnosky

Literature Books as Supplements: These books often provide science truths in the midst of a storyline that may be fictional. There are even more than hundreds of these, so again, I'll only provide your with a few examples.

Miss Ladybird's Wildflowers by Kathi Appelt

Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell

Rocks in His Head by James Stevenson

Owls in the Family by Farley Mowat

Don't forget narration as a part of science reading once in a while.

Living

As we've been talking about the term living, it's referred to lessons that are real, engaging, meaningful, have a purpose, or bring the learning to life. Tons of lessons could fulfill these adjectives. To help you understand the difference between living and nonliving science lessons, let me share some examples.

Living: Your family took a trip to the apple orchard where you saw a display of honey bees. Your children were full of questions. So...the next few days find you and your children reading books about bees, experimenting with colors that attract

bees, drawing diagrams of bees and their body parts, and writing a letter to the local newspaper about how important bees are to our food chain.

Nonliving: Bees are the topic in the next chapter of your textbook. No one is at all interested in learning about bees. Rather than finding a way to make bees relevant to your children, you simply force them to read the boring text that makes them want to scratch their eyes out. Then, to be sure they read it, you assign a multiple choice test. Next week, they know nothing about bees and actually can't stand the thought of discussing bees – ever.

Living: The next chapter in your science text is on the topic of the moon. No one is really interested, so you spend a little time helping them understand the relevance of the moon. You read a living book to them before bed one night and then all observe the moon out the window together. You talk about what the world might be like without the moon and tell a silly story about the man in the moon. The next day, you read the text together – stopping to talk about things that have meaning to them. You don't have time to do all the experiments suggested in the text, so you tell each child to pick out one experiment. They will become the expert scientist and present their experiment to the rest of the family at supper tonight.

Nonliving: You do experiment after experiment with no understanding behind the results. Hey, the experiments are fun and you're able to check science off in your lesson plans, right?

Believe it or not, there are living science textbooks! You don't have to design every living science lesson yourself. Yay! Just be sure you don't let the lessons rule your homeschool. Use any textbook with a discerning eye. Is the writing engaging? Does it share relevant information? Are your children interested? Are the lessons short enough? Are the activities meaningful?

Living Science Textbooks and Curriculum

- [Elemental Science](#)
- [Exploring Science Series](#)
- [NaturExplorers](#) (That's me.)
- [NOEO Science](#)
- [Winter Promise](#)

Short Lessons

I won't go overboard on this since I've talked about it so many times before. In our home, science and history tend to be longer lessons. We're typically all working together and so engaged with reading or experiments that no one minds if we go for 45-60 minutes – or longer. Note that we usually only do science or history in one day.

The rule of thumb on time limits during these lessons tends to be what I see in my children. I can tell when their tanks are reaching full. I try to stop just in time to keep their interest piqued for the next lesson.

Homework:

Evaluate what you've been using for science. Is it living? If yes, then keep on truckin' – but don't forget to replace at least some of these lessons with nature walks!

If your curriculum isn't living, you have a couple options. First, ditch it and get something that is living. Or, probably better – at least for now, think about what you can do to Charlotte-ize what you have. Maybe you could read a living book in place of a chapter or two from the text. Maybe you could consider nature study in place of a chapter or two. Maybe you could do things here and there to make the chapter more relevant to your children. Don't worry if these suggestions seem daunting. Once you learn to make a few changes to make something more CM-friendly, you'll find it easier and easier to do in the future.

Lesson 11

History and Geography

“Let him, on the contrary, linger pleasantly over the history of a single man, a short period, until he thinks the thoughts of that man, is at home in the ways of that period. Though he is reading and thinking of the lifetime of a single man, he is really getting intimately acquainted with the history of a whole nation for a whole age.”

Charlotte Mason

In regards to the instruction of history and geography, Charlotte Mason suggested the use of...wait for it...living literature. Of course, narration of the literature is encouraged once in a while, too.

History

History was the very first subject I began to teach exclusively with living literature early on in our homeschooling journey. I worried a bit about my children understanding the eras and events until I read aloud that first piece of historical fiction and I realized that not only were we all completely immersed in the storyline, but everyone was fully comprehending the people, culture, customs and events. Not only that, but they could talk about the period of history in depth because of the book we were reading.

We would often find ourselves so excited about a topic that we naturally wanted learn more via the internet, informational books, DVD's, field trips, and/or hands-on activities.

I was hooked. Not only was I hooked, but my children still enjoy reading living historical books. (And they're very smart about history in general.) It was through the success of historical literature that I became so confident in living literature as a teaching tool for all subjects!

You can find living literature lists of any historical period, person or event all over the internet. I took some time not too long ago to note my family's very favorites for

[ancient history](#), [medieval history](#), [early modern history](#) and [late modern history](#) on my blog. I know you'll enjoy reading each of these with your family!

Don't get the idea that historical fiction is the only form of living literature to teach history. On the contrary, there are wonderful biographies and factual literature as well. On the topic of biographies, Charlotte Mason said:

"Though he is reading and thinking of the lifetime of a single man, he is really getting intimately acquainted with the history of a whole nation for a whole age."

And yes, there are history textbooks that I would consider living literature, as well as many companies who create curriculum based on history.

- [Beautiful Feet Books](#)
- [Heritage History](#) (Use the code westward at checkout. There's usually a discount applied.)
- [The Mystery of History](#)
- [Sonlight](#)
- [Story of the World](#)
- [Truthquest History](#)
- [Winter Promise](#)

Make sure whatever you choose to use for history captures the imagination and informs the mind. The text should place you smack dab in the middle of the period and make you feel as if you're part of the story.

To ensure a thorough study of history from ancient times through modern history, I have always chosen to follow a Classical education model of four-year cycles for our historical studies. Year one, we study ancient history; year two, middle ages; year three, early modern; year four, late modern. Every four years we start the cycle over again in more depth.

As a Charlotte Mason homeschooler, you can choose to introduce history in any sequence you like. Through the use of a Book of Centuries (see below), your children will see how various people, events and eras fit together.

The Book of Centuries

The Book of Centuries is essentially a timeline in a book. Yep, that's it. You can put it together in any way that suits your fancy. I know many homeschoolers who choose

to create a wall timeline rather than a book timeline. Whatever works for your family is perfectly acceptable.

Because there are so many wonderful ways to design your Book of Centuries, I'm not going to supply a link to any particular method. A quick internet search will offer plenty of ideas.

Geography

Geography, just like history, should utilize good living books as much as possible. Oftentimes, when reading historical literature, I simply pull out colored maps or blank maps to discuss and/or label. In the younger years, I especially like to read [geography related picture books](#) to stir images of the various cultures around the world.

Charlotte Mason also suggested map drills to teach geography. In our home, we've drilled many different ways. The most CM-like method would be to pull out a blank map and ask your child to label everything she knows, checking herself in an atlas to correct mistakes or fill in unknown information. You would repeat this activity once per week using the same map until your child labels everything correctly.

I've found games to be much more motivating for my children. Once per week, we pull out a [board game or card game](#) to play as a family. Afterward, each child takes a turn working through some quizzes on [Seterra](#), a free online map quiz game.

I have never followed a particular geography plan, but Ambleside Online offers a thorough [plan of study](#) if you're interested.

Homework:

History: What is your current plan for history? Consider whether you need to add more living literature in place of dry, lifeless text. If so, it's very easy. Make a list of the next five history topics in your text. Search online for a living book to replace each of those topics. Put the text aside altogether. If you want to pull a fun activity or two from the textbook to add to your living reading, that's perfectly acceptable. What about the tests, you ask? Use narration instead. Or, ask your child to put together a [project](#) to show you what they learned about each topic.

Book of Centuries: Do you currently do some sort of timeline with your children?

Don't worry if the answer is no. Begin where you are. Search online this week for a timeline style that will fit your family.

Geography: All it takes is once a week. Can you set aside a quiz session once each week from now to the end of the semester? Be sure to evaluate the knowledge of your children from the first quiz session to the end of the semester. I bet you'll see lots of improvement!

Lesson 12

Foreign Language

"In French, we have invited parents to take a bold plunge, and they have responded delightfully. 'But they have never learned any French,' says the surprised mother of children of eight and nine, when she is asked to have her children taught, orally, say forty lines of a French tale during a term."

"However, she tries, and is surprised to find at the end of the term that the children know these forty lines quite well, and not only so, but they know the words and phrases so well that they can construct other sentences with them. It is a delightful surprise to the parents to find that the children possess quite a considerable French vocabulary, and have none of the miserable insular mauvaise honte in saying foreign words upon which the French of many of us makes shipwreck; and this, because they do not learn to read French, but learn it from the lips of one who can speak it."

Charlotte Mason

Foreign Language

Charlotte Mason's method encourages foreign language teaching to begin very early in a child's education. French was her first foreign language of choice, but most of my research in current CM practices claims any foreign language is an acceptable starting place. If someone in your family already speaks Spanish, for instance, that would be a wise choice to begin learning. In our home, we chose to start with Spanish because we run into many Spanish speaking people through my husband's occupation.

To implement foreign language instruction in the CM style, follow these basic steps.

1. *Listen.* Allow your children to hear the new language frequently. If someone in the house or extended family speaks another language, have them speak in that language as much as possible. If not, play music CD's

and DVD's in the language. If your television allows you to switch languages, do this occasionally.

2. *Speak.* Teach your child words, phrases and songs in the language.
3. *Label.* Identify things around your house with word labels in the other language. This allows your child to begin recognizing the spellings of common words.
4. *Read and Write.* In the same ways you would teach reading and writing in English – easy readers, copywork, and even dictation – follow this principle with the new language. Following along with books on CD can be useful in this step, too.
5. *Narrate and Recite.* Again, in the same way you would narrate and recite in English, do so with the foreign language.

Add Another Language Following Steps 1-5. Continue working on the first language as you follow the steps to introduce a second language. Charlotte Mason routinely taught her students three or four different languages!

Latin

Around the age of ten, children should be ready to begin Latin. Besides building understanding of English grammar and the other language(s) you're learning, the study of Latin gives a huge boost to overall vocabulary. Latin knowledge grows the ability to decipher word meanings and encourages more sophistication in writing. Additionally, all the languages begin to make more sense and you clearly see how they complement one another.

Now that I've shown you Ms. Mason's practices, I should admit that we haven't been quite so industrious about languages in our home. Some basic Spanish in elementary school with more serious Latin instruction beginning in 5th or 6th grade is our limit thus far. Why? Teaching a language you don't know is hard. And, taking the time to find a foreign language program that I like enough to stick with hasn't been my top priority.

I took a French class for two years in high school and learned little more than the numbers one through ten. The class was so incredibly boring that diving deep into a language with my own children has seemed daunting.

On the other hand, I had Latin training in college. The engaging teacher taught me to enjoy the language...and (because of his teaching) it made sense. We have given Latin a much higher priority in our homeschool simply because I "get it" and have warm, fuzzy feelings about it.

Is my experience an excuse for you? Nope. Just keeping it real to let you know that no one can do everything and do it well. And, to admit that I could have done much better if I had taken the time to get a tried and true Spanish program like *Rosetta Stone*, or even a computer help like *KidSpeak*. When you don't feel confident enough to teach a subject yourself, don't glaze over it (like me), or worse, skip it altogether. Get help. Besides curriculum, check out foreign language classes through community learning or co-ops. While these likely don't follow Ms. Mason's steps listed above, they will give you a place to start if foreign language is a scary proposition.

Since we have done much better with Latin, I feel a bit more confident in telling you my favorites. For upper elementary, I like *Latin for Children* by Aaron Larson and Christopher Perrin. You can stick with this through three volumes and get quite far in the language. As high school rolls around, I really like *Latin in the Christian Trivium* by Gail Busby and Mary Herrington. Again, it comes in three volumes and goes quite deep.

Homework:

If you haven't started a foreign language, take some time this week to map out a plan for including a 10-15 minute lesson at least a few times a week. Don't feel like you have to jump into those lessons right away. Get your plan together and begin gathering supplies. Start lessons next week, next month or next semester.

If you have started a foreign language, evaluate to see how it compares with Charlotte Mason's method. If you can (and want) to tweak it, do so. If you're happy, give yourself a pat on the back!

If you have older children who have not studied Latin before, research Latin programs and make a plan about how/when/if you will include it in the future.

Lesson 13

Artist Study

"We cannot measure the influence that one artist or another has on the child's sense of beauty, upon his power of seeing, as in a picture, the common sight of life..."

Charlotte Mason



Sadly, art is a subject that too many people choose to leave out of their curriculum. Either they can't find the time or don't think the material is important. It's easy to feel so overwhelmed with "real" schoolwork that "extras" seem unimportant. However, these "extras", like art, pack more academic punch than you might think. Not to mention, if you're incorporating short lessons into your day, there should be plenty of time left over for the "extras."

Artist Study

Truth be told, Charlotte Mason would probably prefer me to call this picture study rather than artist study. To me, the two terms are synonymous, but picture study (with a focus on a particular artist) is the more appropriate terminology.

Here I go saying that word again...artist study is *easy*. A particular artist is to be studied for one full semester (about 12 weeks), with at least 6 different prints used during that time for picture study.

Picture study only requires that the student observes an art print then talks about what he sees, feels and thinks about it. The parent can lead with a few questions, but most of the thoughts and discussions should begin with the child.

One Simple Method To Follow

Allow the child to enjoy the picture quietly and intently for a time.

Ask him to tell you about the picture – everything from facts to feelings. Even telling a story of sorts is fine. Sometimes, the picture should be left in front of the child, sometimes it should be hidden during this narration time.

You will likely need to ask some leading questions the first few times until your child understands what to notice in the picture. “What colors stand out to you? How do they make you feel?” “Would you consider this picture to be still or moving? Why?” “What story might this picture be telling?” “Is this a picture you enjoy? Why or why not?”

Once in a while, you can ask your older child to write their picture narration. I tend to stay away from this because writing isn’t the favorite subject in my house.

You might also ask your child to “narrate” by attempting to draw a sketch without looking.

Finally, at some point during the semester, you will want to allow your child some time to attempt a re-creation of one or more of the pictures you have studied. Don’t be critical about the finished works.

You are welcome to focus on a particular art element. For instance, if the artist’s print contains only warm colors, you can and should discuss the concept of warm colors versus cool colors. You might ask your child to recreate the artist’s work with warm colors during one lesson and cool colors the next.



Planning for Artist Study

Planning which artist to study next in my home is not very methodical. I simply choose someone we haven't studied before and go for it. [Ambleside Online](#) has a sample schedule you may choose to follow if you like.

In our home, we have generally focused on one artist per month, rather than one artist per semester. During that month, we have weekly picture study with an art lesson following. I typically read a biography or two about the artist during that month as well.

To get a feel for how I plan (or better yet, to grab my plans without having to plan your own), [see my artist study posts](#) for an in-depth look into most of the artist studies we have completed.

Homework:

Start planning for next month, or next semester. Choose one artist, 4-6 of his or her pictures to study and begin gathering art supplies. Check out a living biography or two from the library and you're ready to go!

Lesson 14

Composer and Hymn Study

"It is a pity that we like our music as our pictures and our poetry mixed, so that there are few opportunities of going through as a listener a course of the works of a single composer . . . Let young people study as far as possible under one master until they have received some of this teaching and know its style."

Charlotte Mason

Composer Study

Music education was not left out of Charlotte Mason's teaching method. Much like artist study, her plan was to immerse a child in the music of one composer for a period of time, preferably an entire semester. Many selections of the composer's music should be played regularly so that your child begins to recognize the composer and his or her style.

Our family has rarely set aside a specific learning time for composer study. Instead, I play a CD of the chosen composer as we work on art or play board games. I play the CD in our car or as we get ready for bed.

You may or may not choose to learn more about the composer himself, but your child should definitely be able to call him or her by name. I'll mention the name and the song titles often as we informally listen. When appropriate, we'll talk about things like tempo, instruments, feelings the music invokes, etc.

If you care to make composer study more formal, consider reading and/or writing biographies of composers, comparing one composer's style to another, or composing your own music in a similar style. You might like to [see my composer study posts](#) for an in-depth look into some of the studies we've completed. [Ambleside Online](#) provides a sample schedule of composer study to help you in making plans.

I might mention that we've spent just a little time studying music genres and their differences in place of composers. For about a semester, we went on a musical tour of orchestras, operas, ballets, jazz bands, folk music, bluegrass, etc. I wanted my children to recognize the unique sound of each style. Of course, if opportunities to attend a live performance come around, we jump right in whether we're currently studying the style or not.

I've also made it a point to offer my children piano and guitar lessons. This covers music theory and gives my children the opportunity to take music to a new level if they desire.

Some of my favorite composer study resources include:

- Classical Kids CD's
- [Classics for Kids](#)
- Music Masters CD's
- Opal Wheeler Biographies

Hymn Study

Charlotte Mason taught her students three hymns and three folk songs per semester. In a homeschool, the entire family should learn all stanzas of a hymn or folk song together. Reading about the history of the song is encouraged if possible. Hymn and folk song lyrics are good choices for copywork, dictation and recitation, too.

Once your family has mastered one song, move on to another. We've always chosen hymns from our hymnal and folk songs that go along with a period of history we're studying. [Ambleside Online](#) offers a schedule of hymn study if you're interested.

- Some of my favorite resources for hymn & folk song study include:
- A good old-fashioned hymnal
- [Hymn Time](#)
- [Contented At Home Hymn Study Series](#)
- *History Alive Through Music* by Diana Waring

Homework:

Composer Study: Choose one composer that you plan to study next semester. Start a wish list of CD's (and maybe a biography or two) so you'll be prepared. Many libraries keep plenty of books and CD's available of famous composers, so check there before you buy. Unless, of course, you want to start a home library which is a fabulous idea.

Hymn & Folk Song Study: Again, plan for next semester. Choose three or four hymns and two or three folk songs to study. Begin gathering the lyrics and/or sheet music.

Lesson 15

Handicrafts and Life Skills

“Again we know that the human hand is a wonderful and exquisite instrument to be used in a hundred movements exacting delicacy, direction and force; every such movement is a cause of joy as it leads to the pleasure of execution and the triumph of success. We begin to understand this and make some efforts to train the young in the deft handling of tools and the practice of handicrafts. Someday perhaps, we shall see apprenticeship to trades revived and good and beautiful work enforced. In so far, we are laying ourselves out to secure that each shall “live his life”; and that, not at his neighbor's expense; because, so wonderful is the economy of the world that when a man really lives his life he benefits his neighbor as well as himself; we all thrive in the well-being of each.”

Charlotte Mason

Handicrafts

One of the biggest benefits to homeschooling CM style is that much of your afternoons are free! During this time your children can be children and play to their heart's content. Charlotte Mason suggested outdoor play as much as possible. Or you can take nature walks, read living literature together, practice musical instruments, complete artist study, and more. One of the coolest “afternoon activities” we do is handicrafting.

Handicrafts are things produced using your hands. The list below doesn't cover nearly everything, but some handicrafts include:

- sewing
- knitting/crocheting
- woodworking
- gardening
- ceramics
- jewelry making

- flower arranging
- cake decorating
- photography
- sculpting
- decoupage
- scrapbooking
- collage
- metalworking
- pottery
- mosaics
- flower crafts
- wood burning
- cross-stitch
- drawing/painting
- latch-hook
- rubber stamping





Life Skills

Along the same vein are life skills. These are things your children really should know before leaving home, but might not be covered in academic lessons. A short list of examples includes:

- cooking/baking
- canning/freezing
- organizing
- caring for animals
- plumbing/electricity
- household chores
- household decorating
- care for a lawn
- mechanics
- building projects
- computer skills

Both handicrafts and life skills are things every child should have the opportunity to learn, but sadly many children don't. They're often so busy "doing school" they never have the opportunity to really cultivate the skills that seem less necessary. I have to tell you that I've watched my children find some of the Lord's purposes for their lives as I've allowed them opportunities and time to dive into handicrafts and life skills!



In my home, I've been very proactive to offer my children opportunities to experience as many handicrafts and life skills as possible. When 4-H offers a sewing class, we take it. When a friend arranges a trip to the local florist, we go. When co-op has a woodworking competition, I've encouraged my children to join in. For someone like me who isn't naturally gifted in most handicrafts, these opportunities have opened the eyes of my children to something they would not have seen/learned otherwise.

When one of these handicrafts "sticks", the enthusiasm of my children takes over and they push themselves to learn more or find other classes or people to help them.

Where to go for help with learning handicrafts and life skills?

The answers will depend on what's available in your area, but some of my suggestions include:

4-H: In my county, 4-H has offered many, many wonderful classes like sewing, cooking, basket making, art, crafts, horticulture, beginning electricity, service projects, livestock care, gun safety, and more!

County Extension Office: 4-H is associated with the extension office, but we have taken several classes offered through their adult education programs like Landscaping 101, Garden Q&A's, and a Jr. Master Gardener course. Although we haven't taken the time yet, we would be very welcome at knitting, quilting and canning classes, too.

Field Trips: Get together with a few friends and take turns scheduling informative field trips in your area. Fun choices might include the florist, a bakery, an art studio, a business that hand-makes any product from candles to soap to clothing, a scrapbooking shop, a veterinarian's office, a farm, a contractor's jobsite or an interior decorator's shop.

Pay for Classes: Whatever your child is interested in, there's a class or teacher somewhere!

Find Family Members or Neighbors Who Love To Teach a Skill: My daughter has learned to knit and crochet from her grandmothers and a sweet 90 year old neighbor. The neighbor was a huge asset to us, but my daughter's visits brightened her day once a week as well.

Start a Keepers of the Faith (for girls) or Contenders of the Faith (for boys) Club: When my daughter was a preteen, we started a small group (about 5 families) for girls who were all around the same age. We met monthly and the moms took turns planning classes to teach "girlie skills". These were precious times together for the moms and daughters. The girls learned to decorate cakes, arrange flowers, sew potholders, create scrapbook pages and so much more. We used the Keepers of the Faith book as a guide for ideas, but didn't follow it as a program. You can see more from our Keepers classes [here](#).

Get Dad Involved: Dads generally have knowledge about various skills that are unique and priceless. Encourage him to invite the kids along as he goes about his "manly" business.

Be sure to take advantage of the library for how-to books of all sorts. My children will often check out books on their own interests, but I've been known to pick up books outside of their typical interests and lay them around the house for browsing. A few new skills and interests have been found this way!

As for life skills, my children have worked alongside me at the house (and my husband on the farm) from the time they could walk. Household chores, gardening, canning, working cattle, fixing broken things, etc. are just normal and won't surprise my children when they start their own homes.



Homework:

Find out what handicraft or life skill your child might be particularly interested in learning. Do what you can to make it happen this week.

Lesson 16

A Love for the Word of God

The Bible

In this lesson, I'd like to let Charlotte Mason speak for herself a little more than I have in previous lessons. Her words about studying God's Word are so eloquent that I really have only very little to add.

Delightful Moments

"The Word is full of vital force, capable of applying itself. A seed, light as thistle down, wafted into the child's soul will take root downwards and bear fruit upwards. What is required of us is, that we should implant a love of the Word; that the most delightful moments of the child's day should be those in which his mother reads for him, with sweet sympathy and holy gladness in voice and eyes, the beautiful stories of the Bible; and now and then in the reading will occur one of those convictions, passing from the soul of the mother to the soul of the child, in which is the life of the Spirit."

Charlotte Mason

Ms. Mason tells us time in the Word should be delightful and loving. The parent should expressly love the Word of God herself to pass on its holiness and wisdom. That's a beautiful picture, isn't it?

I also love how she says, *"The Word...is capable of applying itself."* Let that soak in.

Imaginations of Children

"But let the imaginations of children be stored with the pictures, their minds nourished upon the words, of the gradually unfolding story of the Scriptures, and

they will come to look out upon a wide horizon within which persons and events take shape in their due place and due proportion. By degrees, they will see that the world is a stage whereon the goodness of God is continually striving with the willfulness of man; that some heroic men take sides with God; and that others, foolish and headstrong, oppose themselves to Him. The fire of enthusiasm will kindle in their breast, and the children, too, will take their side, without much exhortation, or any thought or talk of spiritual experience.”

Charlotte Mason

Read God’s Word fully – without watering it down and adding frilly pictures. Let images swirl in your child’s mind as he sees fit.

The Less Talk the Better

“Let all the circumstances of the daily Bible reading--the consecutive reading, from the first chapter of Genesis onwards, with necessary omissions--be delightful to the child; let him be in his mother's room, in his mother's arms; let that quarter of an hour be one of sweet leisure and sober gladness, the child's whole interest being allowed to go to the story without distracting moral considerations; and then, the less talk the better; the story will sink in, and bring its own teaching, a little now, and more every year as he is able to bear it.”

Charlotte Mason

Notice how she says to read the Bible “with necessary omissions.” Reading the Bible from cover to cover with all the genealogies, prophecies and other tough issues is more appropriate for older children than younger children.

Also notice how she says to read “without distracting moral considerations.” Are you guilty, like me, of trying to turn every Bible reading into a lesson? Yep, this is my reminder, too, to get out of the way more often and let God speak.

The Method

“The method of such lessons is very simple. Read aloud to the children a few verses covering if possible, an episode. Read reverently, carefully, and with just expression. Then require the children to narrate what they have listened to as nearly as possible in the words of the Bible.”

Charlotte Mason

I love how Ms. Mason calls a time of Bible reading an “episode.” If we’re getting out of the way and letting God stir our children’s imagination, doesn’t it make sense to present an entire episode?

Just for your information, we don’t always narrate our Bible readings. Remember, I’m often too busy turning our readings into lessons! 😊

Memory

“The learning by heart of Bible passages should begin while the children are quite young, six or seven. It is a delightful thing to have the memory stored with beautiful, comforting, and inspiring passages, and we cannot tell when and how this manner of seed may spring up, grow, and bear fruit;”

Charlotte Mason

Start early. Consider pulling verses here and there for copywork, dictation and recitation.

One Final Reminder

“Above all, do not read the Bible at the child: do not let any words of the Scriptures be occasions for gibbeting his faults. It is the office of the Holy Ghost to convince of sin; and He is

able to use the Word for this purpose, without risk of that hardening of the heart in which our clumsy dealings too often result."

Charlotte Mason

Remember, try to step out of the way and let God speak as often as possible.

Homework:

Evaluate your Bible time. Do you need to read more? Maybe you need to read less? Do you need to work a little less on "moralizing" every reading? Do you need to include more Bible verses as copywork or recitation?

If you have changes to make, write a few goals for your new and improved Bible time.

Lesson 17

Habit Training

"Let children alone-...the education of habit is successful in so far as it enables the mother to let her children alone, not teasing them with perpetual commands and directions - a running fire of Do and Don't ; but letting them go their own way and grow, having first secured that they will go the right way and grow to fruitful purpose."

Charlotte Mason

Habit Training

Charlotte Mason didn't teach only about schooling, but how to parent as well. One of those topics which has become a main attraction of modern day homeschoolers is the formation of good habits in our children. As Ms. Mason wisely said, "The habits of the child produce the character of the man..." I've found this to be SO true!



We all have habits – good and bad. Good habits might be considered brushing teeth, chore routines, daily Bible reading, exercising, completing work on time, being joyful or using manners. Habits, then, cover everything from character to hygiene to household chores. Starting off with good habits is far easier than replacing bad habits, but getting rid of bad habits isn't impossible.

Catherine Levison, author of *A Charlotte Mason Education* helps us recognize bad habits in our children when she says, “Charlotte Mason taught us that when you find yourself always telling (your children) to do the same thing, you have not trained them in the habits you wish they would perform.”

Amen to that, right? Charlotte Mason felt it best that you identify one habit that bothers you most and begin with it. Spend several days, and even weeks, training your child out of the bad habit and into a good one. (Many experts agree that it takes at least 21 days of routinely doing something before it becomes a habit.) Once the bad habit is replaced, then you move on to the next most annoying habit.

Sounds easy enough, but breaking habits is truly about training your child to do something. And training = work for the parent. When the parent gives up on the training, the habit either won't happen, or will take much longer to form. Believe me, I know! Don't be overwhelmed, though. As Charlotte Mason put it, “The mother who takes pains to endow her children with good habits secures for herself smooth and easy days; while she who lets their habits take care of themselves has a weary life of endless friction with the children.” In other words, you'll quickly work yourself out of the job of habit training if you're diligent in the beginning!



So, in short, the parent has to work on the habit just as hard as the child. If you desire that laundry should be brought to the laundry room every morning before breakfast, you'll have to make sure it's been done. That can come in many forms – reminding, charts, tokens, discipline, privileges, goal setting, or contracts. (I won't pretend to know the best method because every child is different. However, I will say that positive motivators seem to work better in my home.) No matter how you

choose to keep track of the completion of the habit, you'll have to keep track of it! It won't help your child if you forget to make sure the habit was completed successfully.

I can honestly tell you that I've put forth the effort several times of forming good habits in my children and the rewards are worth the effort! My children are by no means perfect and there are constant new challenges, but each new good habit brings them closer to the person I want them to be before they leave my home. And, you know, since God's going to be working on them through their entire lives, it's good practice!



Homework:

Write a {short} list of habits your child needs to improve. Circle the most irksome and make a plan. How are you going to take that habit from bad to glad? What is the new responsibility of your child? What will you need to do in order to help, encourage and/or keep your child accountable?

Sit down with your child and talk about why the particular habit needs to change. Give her the new plan (or come up with the new plan with her.) Make a serious commitment to stick with the plan to the bitter end of the bad habit!

You may find some of these resources helpful in developing various good habits:

- Donna Young's Chore Chart Maker
- Confessions of a Homeschooler's Chore System and Printables
- That Resource Site's Printable Charts
- *For Instruction in Righteousness* by Pam Forster

Lesson 18

A Typical Daily Schedule

There are so many, many ways to schedule your Charlotte Mason homeschool day. Whatever works for your family is what you need to do. Since I'm asked so often what our typical day looks like, I am providing our plan for you. Please use this as a reference only. By no means am I saying a CM-style day needs to look like ours!

Scheduling a CM Style Homeschool Day

Here's the short and sweet of it...

We do chores and bookwork in the morning and the less "academic" things in the afternoon.

The longer explanation varies daily, but I can give you a typical picture. I never put strict time limits on anything because we just do what we need to do until it's done. That plan works out into something similar to this:

Before breakfast:

Everyone does simple daily chores like making the bed, bringing laundry downstairs and brushing teeth.

During or just after breakfast:

We have Bible reading and memory/recitation time. Memory/recitation time includes one or more of the following – Bible verses, Greek and Latin roots, math skill flashcards, geography, timelines, or other things we've been working on (like reciting the presidents in order.)

After breakfast:

Everyone does a few chores to get the house tidy. I assign the chores daily and they rarely take more than 10-20 minutes. Lately, we've been meeting together for about 15 minutes for some stretches and light exercise. Then it's on to schoolwork...

Math:

Depending on the day, this time is either textbook or [living math](#).

Language Arts:

This will include several (but never all) of the following – reading, narration, copywork, dictation, transcription, poetry, and/or foreign language. Remember, these activities include such things as spelling, grammar and handwriting.

Science and/or History:

Sometimes we do a short lesson of both science and history. Most of the time, though, we do slightly larger lessons of one or the other. Almost always, these lessons are completed as a family. After so much “bookwork” (texts, worksheets, narrations, etc.) in the other subjects, I try to make these lessons a little more exciting through the use of living literature, hands-on projects, games and more.

When applicable, I will often include the day’s narration or writing lesson as part of science or history. In doing this, I can often kill two birds with one stone. Tying the subjects together can save time and they reinforce each other.

Lunch:

We take about an hour to eat and have free time.

After lunch:

The afternoons can be anything and everything – finishing up morning studies, [nature walks](#), reading living books, handicrafts, cooking/baking, horse training, 4-H, barn chores, experiments, building projects, art, board games, plain old play time, and the list goes on.

I will tell you that I find myself having to train good habits into this time. If I’m not the afternoon activity director, it’s very easy for my children to use this time less wisely – like sitting in front of the TV all afternoon. Many afternoons, I try to loosely organize or suggest worthwhile activities, but I also allow freedom for personal exploration and projects as much as I can.

There you have it. It seems simple, yet really works for us. My children are academically challenged, my house is relatively clean and organized, and we all have time to pursue our passions.

Homework:

This week write out your dream Charlotte Mason style schedule.

Check to make sure your week includes all CM's aspects (narration, nature study, artist study, etc. – everything you've learned through this course.)

Check to make sure you aren't expecting way too much in one week's time.

For younger children, make sure your schedule includes short lessons that keep your children fresh and focused. For middle and high school children, some of the lessons can be a little longer, but try to keep even the longest lessons within 45 minutes.

Compare your dream schedule to your current schedule. Work on a plan to slowly go from your current schedule to your dream. Or, if you're like me, plan to jump in to the new schedule next Monday!

Fantastic Charlotte Mason Resources

“First and chiefest is the knowledge of God, to be got at most directly through the Bible; then comes the knowledge of man, to be got through history, literature, art, civics, ethics, biography, the drama, and languages; and lastly, so much knowledge of the universe as shall explain to some extent the phenomena we are familiar with and give a naming acquaintance at any rate with birds and flowers, stars and stones; nor can this knowledge of the universe be carried far in any direction without the ordering of mathematics.”

Charlotte Mason

You did it! Eighteen weeks of learning more about the Charlotte Mason homeschooling style - finished. Are you ready to go for it? Have you been slowly adding things here and there already? I'm so excited for your homeschool. We have so loved homeschooling with CM's methods and I just know you will, too!

What you have just accomplished is part of what Charlotte Mason calls “mother culture.” Essentially, that means you have filled your mind with continued learning to nourish and inspire yourself. Never cease learning. After all, isn't a lifestyle of learning what we're trying to pass on to our children?

Just in case you need a bit more mother culture on the subject, I'm including a list of some of the best Charlotte Mason resources out there. Read one or two if you need them, then go for it if you haven't already begun implementing Charlotte Mason's methods into your homeschool.

- *Original Homeschooling Series* by Charlotte Mason
- *A Charlotte Mason Companion* by Karen Andreola
- *A Charlotte Mason Education* by Catherine Levison
- *For the Children's Sake* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay
- *When Children Love to Learn: A Practical Application of Charlotte Mason's Philosophy for Today* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

A few notes of caution: Don't spend so much time reading everything there is on the subject of Charlotte Mason homeschooling that you get stuck dreaming about it

rather than doing it. Don't ever feel pressured to do it all and/or do it all "perfectly." There is no 100% right way to do anything. Heck, I'm sure my vision of Charlotte Mason homeschooling differs from other veteran CMer's. Homeschool in ways that work for you and your children and it will be right, no matter if you're following a method closely or not. Enjoy your children and enjoy your homeschool. God bless you on your journey! ~Cindy

About the Author



My passion is teaching! I've known since first grade that I would be a teacher – and I'm so very thankful to the Lord for revealing His perfect will for me early on. With a Master's Degree in elementary education, I found myself teaching in a public school for five short years before coming home to be mom and teacher to my then one-year-old daughter. How blessed I am sixteen years later to say that I am mom and teacher to three wonderful children! I wouldn't trade our days together for any amount of money!

God continues to burn in my heart a desire to teach others as well as my own children. Encouraging women in their walk with the Lord and/or homeschooling is truly one of my favorite things to do. I absolutely love sharing from my heart and experience with others!

I own [Shining Dawn Books](#) where I have written and published the popular NaturExplorers series, which are creation-based nature studies. I've also written a [grammar curriculum for third and fourth graders](#) based on living literature, a [how-to book for living math](#), and have several other writing projects in the works for Shining Dawn Books.

I also speak regularly around the country and online. You can keep up with my speaking topics and book me via [my speaking page](#). If you would like to personally consult with me about your homeschooling questions, I am available for [phone consultations](#), too.

