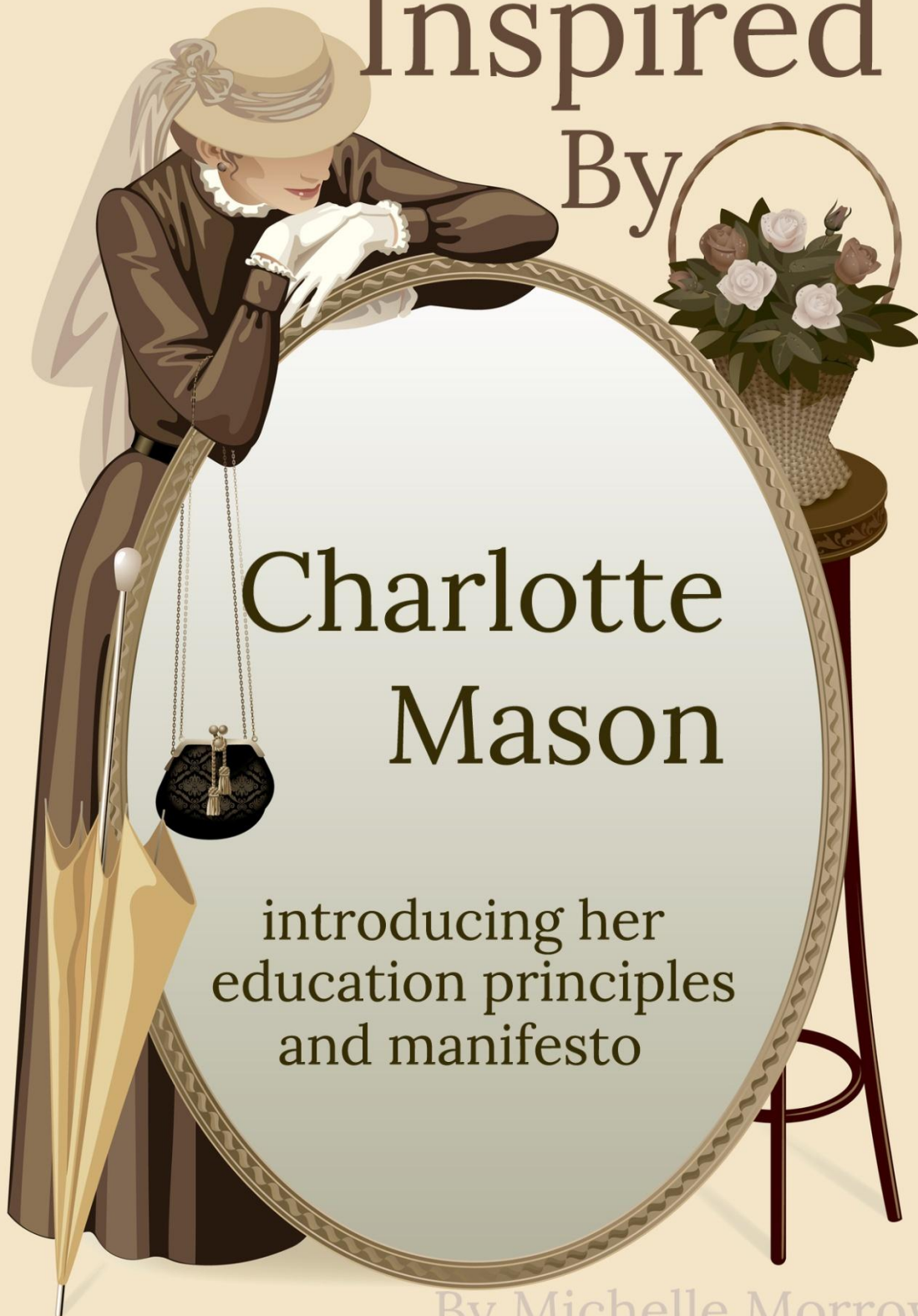


Inspired  
By

Charlotte  
Mason

introducing her  
education principles  
and manifesto

By Michelle Morrow



Inspired by Charlotte Mason: Introducing her education principles and manifesto

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Charlotte Mason quotes used in this ebook are taken from The Original Homeschooling Series: A Philosophy of Education by Charlotte Mason Volumes 1 to 6. Volume and page references are given when quoted.

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## *A Journey with Charlotte Mason*

My eldest two children (8 and 6 year old) had been enrolled in a local public school for six weeks. I had tried homeschooling for three years prior and it wasn't working. However I still desperately wanted to homeschool. I wanted them back home as soon as they went in. I was ready to listen to new ideas on how to homeschool and that is when I discovered Charlotte Mason. At the end of that school term I brought my children home ready to try again.

Our first term back was different to our past homeschool years. I started to use real books instead of textbooks to teach. Frustrating hours at the desk were now replaced with delightful reading sessions on the couch with all of my children snuggled around or playing on the floor. My children were engaged in their lessons and Jane Lambert (from Five in a Row) was teaching me how to appreciate good literature. Our lessons seemed a little more random than before because I didn't have a textbook to work through but they were a hundred times more enjoyable and I could tell the kids were learning.

Each morning we would gather around the couch and I would read to them Scripture, history, fiction and science. Their handwriting lessons were now copywork and worksheets were replaced by notebooks and oral narrations. Math lessons were short. Nature stories and nature study replaced our science lessons. We were covering all of our subjects in half the time we had before.

Over the next twelve months I read further on Charlotte Mason's methods of home education and I started implementing more and more of her ideas. We began nature journals, museum books, Bible notebooks and picture study. Our reading list grew and I really began to understand her ideas on living books.

What I liked about Charlotte Mason's ideas was that they provided an excellent education that was so simple to implement. Homeschooling had turned the corner for

me and I was now loving it and feeling much more confident in the educational direction I was taking my children. I still enjoyed reading the ideas of other homeschool authors like Sally Clarkson, Jane Lambert and Ruth Beechick and used some of their ideas in my homeschool. But I was a Charlotte Mason convert.

I've often described myself as a homeschooler who was inspired by Charlotte Mason simply because I wasn't a Charlotte Mason purist. However after using her methods for 12 years, with four children, I have seen the practical benefits of her educational theory - even when applied without the precision of a Charlotte Mason purist.

### **This is Why I'm Not a Purist:**

Education has changed in the 100 years since Charlotte Mason wrote her Original Home Schooling Series. Children still need a generous curriculum but what is expected from an educator (and student) has changed - the requirement to follow a state based syllabus is a huge example.

Charlotte Mason was an unmarried school teacher with no children of her own. She was not a homeschooling mother. Her ideas were essentially written for the one educator (teacher, governess or parent) focusing on one age group at time. Homeschooling multiple children together requires a few compromises when implementing her ideas. If you only had one child to teach it would be a lot easier to be a purist, I suspect.

I use a few resources that aren't strictly Charlotte Mason including some textbooks. This is usually because I can't find a living book option that meets the criteria I need but sometimes it is because it's just easier.

I use her writing ideas but in high school I also teach my kids to write essays and summaries as well as narrations.

I am foremost a Christian educator and I find some of Mason's 19<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican theology a bit too liberal for me - for example her belief in evolution (V2 p.130-131) and

a liberal interpretation of the Bible (see [Authorship of Genesis](#) and [On the Religious Training of the Young](#)).

## **Incorporating Charlotte Mason into Your Homeschool**

Most homeschoolers stumble across the Charlotte Mason's method. Feedback from my *Blinky Bill Newsletter* readers' survey shows that 40% of my readers use some of Charlotte Mason's ideas in their homeschool but many incorporate other homeschool methods as well.

A purist Charlotte Mason homeschooler will tell you that her method must be used in its completeness; however most people I know ease into her methods and apply them as it suits their family. In fact Catherine Levinson, writer of *A Charlotte Mason Education*, said this was how she began. Charlotte Mason said her ideas were hints to the intelligent parent who wanted to educate their children (Mason V1 p.41). She saw education as an evolution of ideas and she said, "what fulfils our needs today will not serve 50 years later hence; there is no last word on education." (Mason V3 p.46).

It's now my 15<sup>th</sup> year of homeschooling and I'm still passionate about education philosophy and I still see myself as a Charlotte Mason inspired home educator. As my kids have grown older I have found that they have all thrived under her living book approach but I see myself primarily as a Christian home educator not defined wholly by the Charlotte Mason Method.

## **Teaching Others About a Charlotte Mason Education**

Since I have found such success using the Charlotte Mason Method it has been a great passion of mine to share her methods with other homeschoolers. As there really is so much information available on the Charlotte Mason method, it is easy to learn a lot about her teaching ideas without understanding the foundations of her method. Many homeschoolers add a Charlotte Mason idea here and there to their homeschool but

because they don't understand her principles they lack many of the benefits associated with using her ideas.

Living books and nature study are often all that many homeschoolers know about Charlotte Mason's ideas. And a lot of people stop there, confident they understand her methods. But Charlotte Mason really does have so much she can share with you on educating your children.

Over the years I've written many articles on how I have implemented Charlotte Mason's ideas in my homeschool and how Mason's principles have made me a better homeschool teacher.

## **Cooking Up Your Charlotte Mason Curriculum**

When you try to tweak a cake recipe it's always good to understand how ingredients work and basic cooking principles, then you can learn what changes will work in your tweaked creation. The Charlotte Mason method also requires tweaking and substituting resources in order to make it work for your family. Many understand the ingredients (living books, narrations, copywork, nature study, et al.) but just substituting resources will not work if you if you don't understand her principles of education. Understanding these principles will help you to grasp her method so you can become confident when creating and cooking up your own home curriculum.

## **Inspired By Charlotte Mason**

*Inspired by Charlotte Mason* is my attempt to familiarize you with Charlotte Mason the educator and her core beliefs so you can understand how to implement her ideas and make them suit your homeschool.

You never know you might like her ideas so much that you will be inspired to be a real Charlotte Mason homeschooler.

## Who Was Charlotte Mason?

Charlotte Mason (1842 – 1923) was a highly respected British educator in the late nineteenth century. She offered an alternative method of education to the traditional model common in her time. Her methods were often adopted by middle-class parents teaching their children at home and by upper-class families who frequently used governesses. Many schools (mostly private) also implemented her methods with great success.

Charlotte Mason founded her House of Education in Ambleside, a teaching college for governesses in the Lake District of England. She also wrote a six volume series on educating children. Her books were written over a period of 20 years from 1904-1923. They are available today and are known as ***The Original Home Schooling Series***.

Charlotte Mason's books were well received, for they offered practical teaching ideas and taught the teacher how to give children a generous and rich education. Paramount in Charlotte Mason's philosophy was fostering children's relationship and knowledge of God. Charlotte Mason also emphasised the importance of the home environment, teaching with books and respect for the child.

Charlotte Mason's ideas and methods have been revived with the resurgence of the Christian homeschooling movement. Many home educators have adopted her teaching philosophies and techniques and this is what we call *The Charlotte Mason Method*.



# Charlotte Mason's Principles

Six years ago I spent some time studying Charlotte Mason's Twenty Principles. I shared many of my thoughts on my blog. As I compared Charlotte Mason's ideas with my own ideas on education I found she gave me much food for thought. This year I read through them again and again I was struck by how much you can learn about being a home educator through reading her principles. Over the next few chapters you will discover many of the ideas behind Charlotte Mason's teaching method and I'll share some of the personal insights I had while reading her work.

## 20 Principles of Education

- "1. Children are born persons.*
- 2. They are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and for evil.*
- 3. The principles of authority on the one hand, and of obedience on the other, are natural, necessary and fundamental; but—*
- 4. These principles are limited by the respect due to the personality of children, which must not be encroached upon whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire.*
- 5. Therefore, we are limited to three educational instruments—the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas. The P.N.E.U. Motto is: "Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life."*
- 6. When we say that "education is an atmosphere", we do not mean that a child should be isolated in what may be called a 'child-environment' especially adapted and prepared, but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere, both as regards persons and things, and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the child's' level.*

7. By "education is a discipline", we mean the discipline of habits, formed definitely and thoughtfully, whether habits of mind or body. Physiologists tell us of the adaptation of brain structures to habitual lines of thought, i.e., to our habits.

8. In saying that "education is a life", the need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum.

9. We hold that the child's mind is no mere sac to hold ideas; but is rather, if the figure may be allowed, a spiritual organism, with an appetite for all knowledge. This is its proper diet, with which it is prepared to deal; and which it can digest and assimilate as the body does foodstuffs.

10. Such a doctrine as e.g. the Herbartian, that the mind is a receptacle, lays the stress of education (the preparation of knowledge in enticing morsels duly ordered) upon the teacher. Children taught on this principle are in danger of receiving much teaching with little knowledge; and the teacher's axiom is, 'what a child learns matters less than how he learns it.'

11. 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. Out of this conception comes our principle that, –

12. "Education is the Science of Relations"; that is, that a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we train him upon physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science and art, and upon many living books, for we know that our business is not to teach him all about anything, but to help him to make valid as many as may be of–

*"Those first-born affinities that fit our new existence to existing things."*

13. In devising a SYLLABUS for a normal child, of whatever social class, three points must be considered:

(a) He requires much knowledge, for the mind needs sufficient food as much as does the body.

(b) The knowledge should be various, for sameness in mental diet does not create appetite (i.e., curiosity)

(c) Knowledge should be communicated in well-chosen language, because his attention responds naturally to what is conveyed in literary form.

14. As knowledge is not assimilated until it is reproduced, children should 'tell back' after a single reading or hearing: or should write on some part of what they have read.

15. A single reading is insisted on, because children have naturally great power of attention; but this force is dissipated by the re-reading of passages, and also, by questioning, summarising and the like.

Acting upon these and some other points in the behaviour of mind, we find that the educatability of children is enormously greater than has hitherto been supposed, and is but little dependent on such circumstances as heredity and environment.

Nor is the accuracy of this statement limited to clever children or to children of the educated classes: thousands of children in Elementary Schools respond freely to this method, which is based on the behaviour of mind.

16. There are two guides to moral and intellectual self-management to offer to children, which we may call 'the way of the will' and 'the way of the reason.'

17. The way of the will: Children should be taught, (a) to distinguish between 'I want' and 'I will.' (b) That the way to will effectively is to turn our thoughts from that which we desire but do not will. (c) That the best way to turn our thoughts is to think of or do some quite

different thing, entertaining or interesting. (d) That after a little rest in this way, the will returns to its work with new vigour. (This adjunct of the will is familiar to us as diversion, whose office it is to ease us for a time from will effort, that we may 'will' again with added power. The use of suggestion as an aid to the will is to be deprecated, as tending to stultify and stereotype character, it would seem that spontaneity is a condition of development, and that human nature needs the discipline of failure as well as of success.)

18. The way of reason: We teach children, too, not to 'lean (too confidently) to their own understanding'; because the function of reason is to give logical demonstration (a) of mathematical truth, (b) of an initial idea, accepted by the will. In the former case, reason is, practically, an infallible guide, but in the latter, it is not always a safe one; for, whether that idea be right or wrong, reason will confirm it by irrefragable proofs.

19. Therefore, children should be taught, as they become mature enough to understand such teaching, that the chief responsibility which rests on them as persons is the acceptance or rejection of ideas. To help them in this choice we give them principles of conduct, and a wide range of the knowledge fitted to them. These principles should save children from some of the loose thinking and heedless action which cause most of us to live at a lower level than we need.

20. We allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and 'spiritual' life of children, but teach them that the Divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their Continual Helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life."

The above 20 Principles are directly from *The Original Homeschooling Series: A Philosophy of Education by Charlotte Mason - Volume 6: p. xxix -xxxi*

# Children Are Born Persons

*Children are born persons* – what an obvious statement you might think! Of course they are people!

In today's society this principle is not always understood. Respect for life and even the unborn infant is often thought of as more of a possession than a complete human person. Genetic testing, abortion, even evolution, all see a person as more of a scientific entity devoid of spirit but as Charlotte puts forth "children are born persons." This of course lines up beautifully with what the Bible says:

"Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:  
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;  
Before you were born I sanctified you;  
I ordained you a prophet to the nations.'" Jeremiah 1:4-5

"O LORD, You have searched me and known me.  
You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.  
You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.  
For there is not a word on my tongue,  
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.  
You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me." Psalm 139: 1-5

## Evolution

Evolution was something she did believe in and I am a believer in 7 Day literal creation; however there were, and still are, many Christians who hold the view that God worked through evolution.

She believed in naturalism as she calls it. She seems to think it's all about the ideas and exploring them rather than absolute truth or inerrancy of the Word of God. She thought the two ideas could coexist (Mason V2 p.130-131).

Although she accepted many of the naturalists' ideas she did not fully subscribe to the idea of Darwinism (Mason V2 p.251-252 & V6 p.3).

She believed in the evolution of the mind through habits (Mason V2 p.158 -163). However her first educational principle, 'children are born persons' seems to be an anti-evolutionary statement.

Reading this chapter I was reminded that we need to respect the child and realise that they are unique people who need nourishment in their minds as much as adults. We are not to insult them with watered down ideas but rather give them food for their minds that delight and challenge them. We are also to be diligent with the food that we present to them. I think that today we might translate today as each child is an individual and should be taught as such. It's not cookie cutter education. One size does not fit all.

Charlotte reminds us that the mind of a child is "astonishingly alert" and this mind is the instrument of his education. She challenges us to feed the mind with the food it needs—ideas!

## **The Greatest Idea**

"Our business is to give children the great ideas of life, of religion, history, science; but it is the ideas we must give, clothed upon with facts as they occur, and must leave the child to deal with as he chooses." (Mason V6 p.40)

I have been pondering this thought overnight and asking myself what are the great ideas of life? Are they just ideas that are well known and accepted by others? Are they ideas that the culture accepts? Is there a way to know what those ideas are? And how can I present them all to my children? What if I don't know all the ideas?

In my heart I know that the greatest idea of life that I can give my children is eternal life through Jesus Christ. This is the most important idea and I am always mindful of this goal as I present more of the great ideas of life. I do not feel that this is the only idea that should feed their mind but it is certainly the one that I want to make sure they know. God's great gift of free will means that they will choose how they use that idea but my role as a parent is to show them God's ideas from a Biblical world view.

Charlotte Mason warns us about presenting ideas that are inane and twaddle.

I believe that we also need to be warned about ideas that oppose God—ideas that erode faith. So should we stick to ideas only from the Bible? Should we make sure everything that is presented before our children, only represents the idea of God from a Biblical perspective? This is a point that we need to think through! My answer is no! We should not limit ourselves to only Christian material but (a BIG BUT) when we choose to present material to our children that is not specifically Christian we should show them what God thinks about that idea.

“Everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive.” 1 Corinthians 10:23.

The food of ideas is a core to Charlotte Mason principles and this is a high call for us as homeschool parents as we examine the ideas we are presenting to our children. Charlotte was writing this book to share her ideas and I am now able to take those ideas captive into my mind and mull them over.

My closing scripture is:

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” Philippians 4:8

# *Children Are Neither Good or Bad*

*“They are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and for evil. “*

*Charlotte Mason V6 p.46*

I have been pondering what to write, for I have struggled with part of Charlotte's statement. After reading the whole chapter I think Charlotte was upholding the popular philosophical idea (theory) of “nurture not nature”. This idea also links closely to her ideas on habits.

When I consider the statement alone I do have to disagree with the first half –Children are not born either good or bad. When I read this principle for the first time, I began to seriously doubt Charlotte Mason's philosophy for I know that we are all born with a fallen nature; that is the condition of man and that is why we need salvation. To assume children are born amoral denies a scriptural principle.

Romans 3:22-24 states:

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Within our children's little heart there is, like mine, a desire towards sin. Temptation comes their way and they can fall. This is why we need God's redemptive grace. They do have the possibility for good and evil.

Charlotte believed in nurturing children to reach their full potential. She did not believe that some children were incapable of a rich education just because of their nature or upbringing. She wanted all children to have the opportunity of an education full of great ideas not stale textbooks. She believed if children were “nurtured” in the



right environment they would thrive. Her nurturing included developing an appetite in children for great things and giving them a hearty education, rich with the masters and literature.

I agree we do need to nurture our children and give them the best environment that we can. They come with gifts and talents and these need to be encouraged. As parents we have a heavy responsibility and we cannot leave their environment to chance. Our Father God delights in these precious little ones. Children are our responsibility while they are young and it is our duty to provide an atmosphere that will help them grow and develop into all that God wants them to be.

“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” Mark 9:42

Now there are a few conflicting points of view about this principle of Charlotte Masons. Her principles were written in a time when a lot of liberal theology was also creeping in to the church sparked by the German scholar Julius Wellhausen and fuelled by the ideas of evolution (which Charlotte seemed to agree with). According to Machen in 1924 (cited D Breese) liberal theology taught that the concept of sin was an immature concept and as man matured and became enlightened the road to salvation was education not redemption. So I think it is good to clarify what Charlotte Mason’s principle “children are neither good or bad” meant and on first reading I don’t agree. However it is true that in other places she seems to agree with the concept of original sin. If you want to learn more [Art Middlekauff discusses the topic in depth here.](#)

In summary to my thoughts on this principle I will have to say I somewhat agree. I don’t believe in Charlotte’s amoral stance if it is that. I do believe that there is innocence in childhood that we need to protect and nurture. I do believe in giving children a “good” education. I do believe that children have a choice for “good or evil” – God gave us all free choice.

## Reference:

Seven Men Who Changed the World by David Breese © 1990 Moody Publishing

# Authority and Docility

*“The principles of Authority on the one hand and Docility on the other are natural, necessary and fundamental.” Mason V6 p.68*

This principle is all about children having a teachable heart and the teacher being aware of their authority and not abusing it.

In this principle she talks about the necessity of order in education: not only the outward signs of order but also the inward qualities of self government. She does not see this as being a harsh discipline but rather something that brings delight as it allows accomplishment. High ideals to aim for!

She encourages natural consequences for the ‘natural laws of conduct’. She says this can be done by the teacher showing that they also are guided by rules of order and obedience. She challenges us to be self governed and not doing as we please. (I can feel her stinging glance at me for my efforts today!) She says, rightly so, that we are our children’s role models. She wants them to be taught the business of learning, and to begin to set personal goals.

“We may not pose before children, nor pride ourselves on dutiful getting up of knowledge in order to deliver it as emanating from ourselves. There are those who have a right to lecture, those who have devoted a life-time to some one subject about which they have perhaps written their book. Lectures from such persons are, no doubt, as full of insight, imagination and power as are their written works; but we cannot have a score of such lecturers in every school, each to elucidate his own subject, nor, if we could, would it be good for the children. The personality of the teacher would influence them to distraction from the delight in knowledge which is itself a sufficient and compelling force to secure perfect attention, and seemly discipline.” (Mason V6 p.78)

She implores the teacher to not be the “know it all” of a child’s education but to be more of a facilitator leading the children to great ideas and living books. She wants children to have unprocessed mind food that has not been predigested by the teacher’s interpretation.

Charlotte believed strongly that education was the key to an improved life with great moral standing.

“The maimed existence in which a man goes on from day to day without either nourishing or using his intellect, is causing anxiety to those interested in education, who know that after religion it is our chief concern, is, indeed, the necessary handmaid of religion.” (Mason V6 p.79)

I found this chapter challenging as I ponder my influence as a teacher but I asked myself:

- Am I not influencing my children by the type of education I am giving them?
- Are not the books they read and what I allow in spare time often choices that I make?
- Does God not require that we are the primary influence?

Charlotte wrote her book for teachers and homeschoolers are both parents and teachers who have a God ordained responsibility to our children. Our God given authority needs to be taken seriously!

# The Sacredness of Personality

*“These principles are limited by the respect due to the personality of children, which must not be encroached upon whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire.” Charlotte Mason V6 p.81*

Charlotte Mason saw the uniqueness of a child's personality and she felt this was ignored by many educators. She wanted the teacher/parent to respect the personality of a child and not place the burden of conformity on an individual.

She emphasised some of the pitfalls that are present when educating a child, that on the surface look like a “good thing” but in reality they hinder education; for they encourage a child to perform for external sources rather than a love of learning or knowledge.

Charlotte sees that there are hindrances to education and that, out of proportion, they will retard or extinguish a child's love of learning.

Here is a list of the pitfalls that she suggests impede a love of learning:

- Fear and intimidation—do it or else!
- For the teacher's sake you work as a duty of love
- Suggestion by teachers on what to think rather than how to think
- Influence of the teacher and the child idolising the teacher above the learning
- Need for approval from parents, peers, teachers or others
- The desire to excel and this makes the child work for “marks and prizes” alone
- Ambition of others can also hinder a child as they are dominated by the stronger personality
- Society and social class expectations—what a child may need to know.

It is evident that our culture does employ all of these strategies as motivators to learn and these can be detrimental. Charlotte Mason is encouraging teachers to be aware of

these pitfalls and not to use them unduly and therefore hamper a child by imposing our will over theirs or cultivating unhealthy desires in their hearts.

Once again after reading Charlotte Mason I am challenged by the responsibility of teaching and thankful that we, as a homeschooling family, are able to avoid some of the pitfalls that are present in school. I am not, for example, subject to the lottery of teachers that a school provides. I understand that it is important to develop a love of learning but I also believe that these “pitfalls” can motivate and should have a “use with caution” label on them.

## Education is an Atmosphere

*“When we say that education is an atmosphere we do not mean that a child should be isolated in what may be called a ‘child environment’ specially adapted and prepared, but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere both as regards persons and things and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the ‘child’s’ level.” Charlotte*

*Mason V6 p. 94*

I have seen the phrase “education is an atmosphere” in many Charlotte Mason books. I needed no further explanation; the quote encompassed it all—or so I thought! To explain my interpretation of that statement prior to reading this chapter I would have said, “A good learning environment stimulates a child’s education and facilitates holistic growth.”

The cult of aesthetics, still present today, holds the belief that parents should painstakingly provide an environment that is “perfect for the child”. Lovely surroundings of beauty, nice books and lots of cotton wool are used to shield children from the harsh adult world. Charlotte Mason believed this carefully constructed artificial environment is not beneficial to a child, for it makes them morally weak and prevents them maturing. She wanted a children’s environment to be one that nobody has been at pains to constitute (a natural environment).

This atmosphere was not meant to be “come what may”, but rather to be one where the child’s intelligence is respected, where their ability to acquire knowledge is encouraged and self-education is promoted.

At home it is easier to provide such an “atmosphere” rather than school. Why –because school can take the lessons to a child’s level in a watered down, sweetened and condescending way. She encouraged her teachers to make sure that school had “the bracing atmosphere of truth and sincerity”. I agree home is a natural place for raising

and educating our children. Home life offers many opportunities to learn about the things of the world.

At home there is a danger though that we can succumb to the “cult of aesthetics” – only providing our children with “nice things”. As the ‘mummy’ I want to shield them and make their life easy. This means that I may remove natural consequences for actions. For example, sloppy work becomes acceptable and hard work is not expected. As parents we can molly-coddle our children and this too produces children with a weak demeanour that are ill prepared for a life of renown.

Cultural “norms” need not be our benchmark. We need to set standards that respects them and prepares them for the future. A modern book that encompasses some of these ideas is “Boundaries with Children”.

“There are two courses open to us in this matter. One, to create by all manner of modified conditions a hot-house atmosphere, fragrant but emasculating, in which children grow apace but are feeble and dependent; the other to leave them open to all the “airts that blow,” but with care lest they be unduly battered; lest, for example, a miasma come their way in the shape of a vicious companion.”  
(Mason V6 p.98 – 99)

This chapter encapsulates much of Charlotte Mason’s philosophy of education. I have gleaned many insights into what we need for an inspiring education. Charlotte Mason reveals why the atmosphere that she proposes works.



# *Education is a Discipline – It's About Habits*

“By this formula we mean the discipline of habits formed definitely and thoughtfully whether habits of mind or of body.” Charlotte Mason V6 p.99

Charlotte Mason was interested in psychology and she saw many solutions in the science of the changing the brain by the way of habits. These ideas are still supported today with new discoveries about brain plasticity and the origins of thought (C Leif, 2013). Charlotte did seem to see solutions in science as the primary method for a change in character. She saw God working through people rather than divine intervention.

Charlotte Mason's teaching on habits reaches far beyond the educational realm. She emphasises how important it is to “lay down the rails” of good habits in our children's lives (and our own).

“We have lost sight of the fact that habit is to life what rails are to transport cars. It follows that lines of habit must be laid down towards given ends and after careful survey, or the jolting and delays of life become insupportable.” (MasonV6 p.101)

## **Teach Them How to Stay on the Rails**

Establish good habits! It sounds simple but it is not easy. The will is often present but the ability to implement these good habits can elude us.

“If we fail to ease life by laying down habits of right thinking and right acting, habits of wrong thinking and wrong acting fix themselves of their own accord.” (MasonV6 p. 101)

## **Identify the Habit**

When we identify a new habit that we want to establish we then need to work at that habit. Charlotte wisely encourages us to only work on one habit at a time. I do agree that too many habits worked on at once leads to failure but as a mother I do work on more than one at a time. My two current ones for my children are, put your plate in the dishwasher after you use it and clean up the bathroom after you have a shower. For school work with one child I am teaching them not to dawdle over their maths. I sit with them encouraging them to keep pressing on with the sums and I am keeping the lesson short.

## **Spiritual Habits**

A major goal for me as a parent is to lead my children into a strong relationship with God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a relationship and I don't want it to become a mechanical habit absent of true communion with God. But there are spiritual disciplines that I know will help them in this relationship. Bible reading, prayer, devotion, worship, giving and church attendance are all habits that need to be established for an effective Christian life. Therefore I make sure these habits are practised in our home.

## **Housework Habits**

I have tried to set up chores in my house so that the children can have success. There is no point trying to set up a habit that has a slim chance of accomplishment.

## **Educational Habits**

This is hard in the early years before they can read but once they can read for themselves they need to start coming in to contact with the books themselves so that they can perform the act of knowing.

I used to wonder how to do this. How could I organise their day in such a way that they did the work for themselves? In the early days of homeschooling everything was so dependent on me and if I fell off the rails so did everyone else. Since I have been using [the workbox system](#) I have found it so much easier to keep them going when I was off on a needed detour.

## **Physical Habits**

This encompasses personal habits plus exercise. I need to work on the physical exercise one!

## **Habits of the Mind**

“It is as we have seen disastrous when child or man learns to think in a groove, and shivers like an unaccustomed bather on the steps of a new notion. This danger is perhaps averted by giving children as their daily diet the wise thoughts of great minds, and of many great minds; so that they may gradually and unconsciously get the courage of their opinions.” (Mason V6 p.104)

Allowing our mind to stretch and digest new ideas will be covered with my next post *Education is a Life*.

A more modern speaker on this topic is Steven Covey. Here is an interview he did for homeschool.com. [Seven Habits of a Highly Successful Homeschooler](#)

Again I have been challenged by the power of setting up good habits in my family and homeschool. We do have many established good habits already in our home that I am pleased with, but there are still many more to work on.

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

# *Education is a Life*

So many times I have said to non homeschooling friends that homeschooling is a lifestyle not school lessons at home. That is exactly what Charlotte Mason is saying by this statement.

Education becomes a lifestyle of learning—feeding our mind with the mind food of great ideas. Charlotte Mason encourages us to make sure we put quality ideas into our children's lives.

## **What is an Idea?**

An idea is a live thing of the mind. It strikes, seizes and catches hold of us. Ideas form the basis of our inspiration. An idea can possess us. Without ideas education is dull.

A great book that expands on this topic is [Switch on Your Brain by Caroline Leaf](#).

## **Ideas in Education**

Charlotte argues that in many schools the concept of ideas is curiously absent. Curiosity is stilted with dull textbooks, rote learning and dry facts—I would add force feeding of political agendas, pop culture and peer group pressure. Before children receive the ideas of others it is watered down, pre-digested and often manipulated.

## **Giving Children Great Ideas**

Charlotte Mason wanted children to be exposed to great thinkers and great ideas; these thinkers nourish their mind and feed their life.

“Education is a life. That life is sustained on ideas. Ideas are of spiritual origin, and God has made us so that we get them chiefly as we convey them to one another, whether by word of mouth, written page, Scripture word, musical

symphony; but we must sustain a child's inner life with ideas as we sustain his body with food." (Mason V6 p.109)

As the educator, living literature is an instrument for giving ideas. It allows the child to touch the author's mind with their own words. This literary powerhouse helps them connect with these thinkers. Ideas clothed upon the factual stories seem to be recalled; for the delivery of an idea seems to require much padding.

Charlotte Mason cautions us not to confuse opinions with ideas. Allow the children to express their own thoughts and ask them questions before you express your opinion.

"All roads lead to Rome, and all I have said is meant to enforce the fact that much and varied humane reading, as well as human thought expressed in the forms of art, is, not a luxury, a tit-bit, to be given to children now and then, but the very bread of life, which we must have in abundant portions and at regular periods. This and more is implied in the phrase, 'The mind feeds on ideas and therefore children should have a generous curriculum.'" (Mason V6 p.111)

# How We Make Use Of The Mind

*“We hold that the child’s mind is no mere sac to hold ideas but is rather...a ‘spiritual organism’ with an appetite for all knowledge.” Charlotte Mason V6 p.112*

Again Charlotte Mason challenges the thinking of the time. She argues vigorously against the views of Herbartian Psychology, a German educational philosophy in the 1800s, which believed that a child is a mere receptacle. That philosophy she believed endangers children of much teaching and little learning.

## Her View on British Education and Higher Education

Here she outlines the outworking of education as it was in those days. Boys in particular may have been taught by good teachers but the emphasis was on the teacher and not the student. Boys were being raised to be clerks and nothing more. At the age of 14 most boys were ending their education and getting jobs. Some employers were finding that boys couldn’t sit and memorise, for example, the railway signals: for they had no entertaining teacher to help them along. They were seeing a large number of boys drop out of work with no future prospects.

She applauded the government for its decision to lift the leaving age of school from 14 to 16 (this was not compulsory). However, she wondered what the point was if you don’t change the way you teach children. Are they not worthy to be taught more than just spelling and arithmetic? She believed that older students need to be challenged and taught how to work at their education at a higher university level and not be spoon fed or taught a trade. Moreover children should be given a generous education. She also praises the education system of Denmark and Scandinavia.

## Utilitarian Education in Germany

Charlotte Mason principles are opposite to the efficient, utilitarian, trade based, education of Germany and she warns against these methods.

I've included this quote because I found it so interesting. Remember that this was written before the Second World War.

“Here is one more reason for treating the Continuation School as the People’s University and absolutely eschewing all money-making arts and crafts. Denmark and Scandinavia have tried this generous policy of educating young people, not according to the requirements of their trade but according to their natural capacity to know and their natural desire for knowledge, that desire to know history, poetry, science, art, which is natural to every man; and the success of the experiment now a century old is an object lesson for the rest of the world.

Germany has pursued a different ideal. Her efforts, too, have been great, unified by the idea of utility; and, if we will only remember the lesson, the war has shown us how futile is an education which affords no moral or intellectual uplift, no motive higher than the learner’s peculiar advantage and that of the State. Germany became morally bankrupt (for a season only, let us hope) not solely because of the war but as the result of an education which ignored the things of the spirit or gave these a nominal place and a poor rendering in a utilitarian syllabus. We are encouraged to face the fact boldly that it is a People’s University we should aim at, a University with its thousands of Colleges up and down the land, each of them the Continuation School (the name is not inviting) for some one neighbourhood.” (Mason V6 p.123)

The theme of this chapter is that we should continue to provide a rich education as our children get older. And we need to make sure that they work hard at their own education. She shifts the responsibility from the teacher to the student. She also

challenges the teacher to think about her role; are they the entertainers or the facilitators? Is it with the clever teacher that the children learn more?

She talks about the object lesson curriculum (which some interpret as unit studies) and gives two examples: 100 lessons from an apple and a year with Robinson Crusoe. Whilst she believes the teacher is clever to work out these lessons, she wonders if these lessons are good for the student. She thinks not, as it trivializes their education and to be sure they won't like Robinson Crusoe at the end of it!

Charlotte Mason ends this chapter with her hopes for continuing education past the age of 14.

“Every man and woman will have received a liberal education; life will no longer discount the ideas and aims of the schoolroom, and, if according to the Platonic saying, “Knowledge is virtue,” knowledge informed by religion, we shall see even in our own day how righteousness exalteth a nation.” (Mason V6 p. 127)



# The Way of the Will

*“We may offer to children two guides to moral and intellectual self-management which we may call ‘the Way of the Will’ and ‘the Way of the Reason’”. Mason V6 p.128*

Children should be taught to distinguish between ‘I want’ and ‘I will.’

Charlotte Mason principles are for all of us. Her question in *The Way of the Will* is – How can you tame the will!

## Character and Conduct

Charlotte makes the statement that our children’s education is more about their character than their conduct. Sometimes as mothers we can focus on our child’s behaviour, or conduct, and this can discourage us. But that is the small picture, the big picture is character. Are we working on their character, their nature? The immaturity of childhood can and does show up, but let us train their character.

Charlotte then talks about training a will—helping them to master it. So often humans follow the “path of least resistance” and they go with the flow rather than making a choice of the will.

“The Will, we are told, is ‘the sole practical faculty of man...yet most men go through life without a single definite act of willing. Habit, convention, the customs of the world have done so much for us that we get up, dress, breakfast, follow our morning’s occupations, our later relaxations, without an act of choice. For this much at any rate we know about the will. Its function is to choose, to decide, and there seems to be no doubt that the greater becomes the effort of decision the weaker grows the general will.” (Mason V6 p. 128 – 129)

Training a child’s will is helped by exposing them to noble ideas through books and pictures of the lives of outstanding men and women. This will hopefully stimulate the

will and a child learns to choose the "right". She believes as we train their character we give an opportunity for the will to develop.

## Thinking Right

She emphasises the importance of learning how to think, not just critically but to also think "right", being guided by the righteousness of God.

I will finish with this excellent quote:

"It is well to know what it is we choose between. Things are only signs which represent ideas and several times a day we shall find two ideas presented to our minds and must make our choice upon right and reasonable grounds. We shall thus be on our guard against the weak allowance which we cause to do duty for choice and against such dishonest fallacies as, that it is our business to get the best that is to be had at the lowest price; and it is not only in matters of dress and ornament, household use and decoration, that we run after the cheapest and newest. We chase opinions and ideas with the same restlessness and uncertainty; any fad, any notion in the newspapers, we pick up with eagerness. Once again, the will is the man.

The business of the will is to choose. There are many ways to get out of the task of choosing but it is always—'Choose you this day whom ye will serve.' There are two services open to us all, the service of God (including that of man), and the service of self. If our aim is just to get on, 'to do ourselves well', to get all possible ease, luxury and pleasure out of our lives, we are serving self and for the service of self no act of will is required.

Our appetites and desires are always at hand to spur us into the necessary exertions. But if we serve God and our neighbour, we have to be always on the watch to choose between the ideas that present themselves. What the spring is to the year, school days are to our life." (Mason V6 p.134 -135)

# The Way of Reason

*“We should teach children, also, not to lean (too confidently) unto their own understanding because the function of reason is to give logical demonstration of (a) mathematical truth and (b) of initial ideas accepted by the will. In the former case reason is, perhaps, an infallible guide but in the latter is not always a safe one, for whether the initial idea be right or wrong reason will confirm it by irrefragable proof.*

*Therefore children should be taught as they become mature enough to understand such teaching that the chief responsibility which rests upon them: as persons is the acceptance or rejection of ideas presented to them. To help them in this choice we should afford them principles of conduct and a wide range of fitting knowledge.”* Mason V6 p.139

## Encouraging Critical Thinking

Charlotte Mason principle in this chapter is about the importance of children learning how to think through a matter. How can it be done, is a worthy question to ask and how was that made is another. Another interesting suggestion is to teach them some of the thinking in the psychology of crime, for example when reading a book where a character makes a bad choice ask the child: “Why did they make that choice?”. This training will help a child to see that people always do what they see is right in their own eyes but does that make it right?

*“For ourselves and our children it is enough to know that reason will put a good face on any matter we propose; and, that we can prove ourselves to be in the right is no justification for there is absolutely no theory we may receive, no action we may contemplate, which our reason will not affirm.”* (Mason V6 p.143)

She encourages us to help children expose fallacies, but not waste their time discussing endless blasphemous propositions that come their way. But we must give

them principles that enable them to discern, and give them the understanding that humans are fallible, and that we should not be carried away by every wind of doctrine.

Facts are good to learn and some children excel in maths and grammar but she implores us to not stick only to these subjects or give them too much undue attention. Allow children to realise that not everything can be proved and reason comes with continued practice in congenial fields of thought.

I will finish with Charlotte's words:

“We would send forth children informed by “the reason firm, the temperate will, endurance, foresight, strength and skill,” [Wordsworth] but we must add resolution to our good intentions and may not expect to produce a reasonable soul of fine polish from the steady friction, say, of mathematical studies only.”  
(Mason V6 p. 153)

# Education is the Science of Relations

*“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 to him is vital, that is, that facts are not presented without their informing ideas. Out of this conception comes our principle that: ‘Education is the Science of Relations’; that is, a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we train him upon physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science and art, and upon many living books, for we know that our business is not to teach him all about anything, but to help him to make valid as many as may be of – ‘those first-born affinities that fit our new existence to existing things.’” Mason V6 p.154*

I used to think this meant that we should give our children a holistic education and that all subjects are somehow connected. But Charlotte does not mean that. She makes a point of refuting that idea:

*“What is education after all? An answer lies in the phrase – Education is the Science of Relations. I do not use this phrase, let me say once more, in the Herbartian sense – that things are related to each other, and we must be careful to pack the right things in together, so that, having got into the brain of a boy, each thing may fasten on its cousins, and together they may make a strong clique or ‘apperception mass.’ **What we are concerned with is the fact that we personally have relations with all that there is in the present, all that there has been in the past, and all that there will be in the future – with all above us and all about us – and that fulness of living, expansion, expression, and serviceableness, for each of us, depend upon how far we apprehend these relationships and how many of them we lay hold of.**” (Mason V6 p. 185-186)*

This principle is about teaching children to care about what they were learning and to have a personal connection with their studies. Help them to see how things are all

connected, to make their lessons mean something to them. This is why you don't just give facts because children won't connect with the facts alone but when you give them the story they can relate to the subject matter and absorb the facts "as these are connected with the living ideas upon which they hang" (V 6 p. 20).

Teach them more than they need in practice. She says do not teach from a utilitarian point of view; one where children only learn the skills they need for useful employment but give them a rich and generous curriculum.

"It is even possible for a person to go into any one of the great fields of thought and to work therein with delight until he become incapable of finding his way into any other such field. We know how Darwin lost himself in science until he could not read poetry, find pleasure in pictures, think upon things divine; he was unable to turn his mind out of the course in which it had run for most of his life. In the great (and ungoverned) age of the Renaissance, the time when great things were done, great pictures painted, great buildings raised, great discoveries made, the same man was a painter, an architect, a goldsmith and a master of much knowledge besides; and all that he did he did well, all that he knew was part of his daily thought and enjoyment." (Mason V6 p. 53-54)

The Science of Relations is where Charlotte Mason begins to spell out her syllabus in quite specific detail. Here she gives her three points for devising an educational plan:

1. Children need a great deal of knowledge given to them that must be full of lots of mind food. Do not neglect the study of God Almighty, poetry, art, literature and science. Teach their mind and hands with excellent ideas and encourage them to have a relationship with their leaning.
2. Knowledge should be interesting and varied. It should encourage curiosity.
3. Knowledge should be given to children using quality literature they can understand. This helps them to naturally respond to what they are learning. A child's knowledge is

absorbed through the process of reproduction. Charlotte believed telling back after a single reading (narration) was the best way to do this.

# Narrations

*“As knowledge is not assimilated until it is reproduced, children should 'tell back' after a single reading or hearing; or should write on some part of what they have read.”*

*(Mason V6p.155)*

Narration is the way Charlotte Mason used living books and made them part of her school room lessons. Instead of using textbooks, or memorisation of facts, she coupled narration and living books. This was a way for the knowledge heard to be This gave her a teaching tool that far surpassed a workbook or textbook.

When you use narration and Charlotte Mason's method for your homeschool you'll find that it is a little scary. This is because you feel like you're not covering all of the subjects that they might cover in a textbook. You also haven't got all the activities that can be associated with covering a set syllabus. However, if you can just put those fears aside you will actually find narration is a powerful method that demonstrates real learning and requires your child to think about what they are hearing and reading.

Narration is a skill that you develop over time. When we use it with our little six year old it might not seem like much, but as the skill develops you can really see that children learn a great deal from their readings when they add in narration.

Narration is the simple *telling back* of what has been read. Narrations can be oral or written. Narration helps the child think through the passage they are narrating and then they record what they got from it. It is a memory, comprehension and concentration skill.

## **Tell Me What You Already Know – Oral Narration**

The principle of oral narrations is that a child will tell back what they have read (or you have read to them). They will put in the facts that they thought were important.



## Why Can't I Just Give Them A Worksheet?

A six year old can tell you a whole lot more during an oral narration than they can if they had to write it and ask you to spell every word.

## How to Do Narrations?

“The teacher does not talk much and is careful never to interrupt a child who is called upon to ‘tell’. The first efforts may be stumbling but presently the children get into their ‘stride’ and ‘tell’ a passage at length with surprising fluency. The teacher probably allows other children to correct any faults in the telling when it is over. The teacher’s own really difficult part is to keep up sympathetic interest by look and occasional word, by remarks upon a passage that has been narrated, by occasionally showing pictures, and so on. But she will bear in mind that the child of six has begun the serious business of his education, that it does not matter much whether he understands this word or that, but that it matters a great deal that he should learn to deal directly with books.” (Mason V6 p. 172)

Recent research continues to support the value of narration. According to [Dr Michal Ichet from Ariel University in Israel](#) children will retain up to 15% more of the content that they have read to them if it is repeated.

## Tips for Oral Narrations

I must confess I don't do narration as strictly as Charlotte Mason required. I added in some Michelle Morrow modifications that brought success in narrations.

- You do not need to do narrations for all of your reading, choose the books that you will use.
- Read aloud a small passage (a paragraph) and have your child tell back what you just read in your own words. Do this immediately after the reading. As your child

develops this skill you can increase the amount of material that is read. Comprehension of the text is what I look for.

- Getting a decent narration was sometimes like getting blood from a stone, but with a little prompting I got my child talking about what they remembered. If they didn't remember anything (which did happen to me more than I'd like to admit) you need to take them back through what they have read. This is a bit boring for them (and you) but hopefully they will have concentrated more on the second round. Sometimes my kids were so good at remembering details it took longer to hear the narration than it did for me to read the passage.
- I let my kids play Lego, or do hair, or draw pictures whilst reading aloud but I expected them to concentrate. If they didn't listen then they couldn't fiddle.
- Sometimes we just had conversations about what they were reading and I didn't make it a "narration lesson".
- I would get them to draw pictures to illustrate what we had read about.

Use oral narration with your children until they are about 10 years old. Of course you can continue with this after 10 but now you can also introduce written narrations.

Oral narration gives children something to write about and it is great preparation for written narrations.

## Something Interesting to Write About – Written Narrations

Written narrations and Charlotte Mason's method begin when a child is around 10 years old. It is the same as oral narrations except **they write** what they remember.

**Narration is an English writing lesson with good subject content. The child has something to write about** – an excellent *kill two birds with one stone* tool. Charlotte Mason believed that living books used for narration exposed children to excellent writing models and authors which they could learn from. Children are not stressed

about trying to be creative because they already have the subject to write about so they can focus on the mechanics of writing well.

A pure Charlotte Mason form would be for a child to write their narration from memory and one reading. Again not being a purist I allow my child to use their reading books to write their narration. Many of my children's narrations would be classed as a summary of what they had read.

### Tips for Written Narrations

- I usually only have one or two books that I require narrations from. I choose books that narrate well and I can easily set portions for them to read. For example I might require a narration from a chapter or page from a book. I use narration for history, science, geography and I also count narrations as an English lesson.
- I do coach my kids if they are having difficulty. I sometimes make a few suggestions for how to make it more interesting. I correct most mistakes when I see them. I also have used extra writing resources that give ideas for writing techniques.
- I set the length of the narration required. I might say I want at least five sentences for the narration. This helps with the child who is prone to, "The king died. The end!" narration but I found it also helped the child who was overwhelmed because they remembered everything that was written and got lost regurgitating the whole story – a narration became as long as the portion of text I read. Whilst it was very impressive that they could remember all that was written, it also put them off the next narration because they thought they always needed to do very long narrations. I believe it's better to start small and expect more as they go.
- I let them do some of their narrations in points if they want. *10 facts* was often an easy way for them to record things they learnt.
- I use [notebooking and notebooking pages](#) as prompts for their narration.

- After my child has written their narration I get them to read it to me aloud. They often pick up mistakes that need correcting and do some self editing. This also gives me an opportunity to give some input into their writing.

## Choosing Books for Narrations

You want to choose book that have a good narrative style – a story that they can follow. Fact books and ones that have lots of little segments that are related but not necessarily part of the story are not good for narrations.

That is why real book or living books are perfect for this. I use: the bible, fiction, history biographies and science readers for most of our narrations.

I think new homeschoolers are often astounded at how much history I put into my children's home school curriculum. Mistakenly they assume I must be skimping on other important subjects in order to teach history because in primary school only 6-10% of your time needs to be spent on history. This equates to 1 to 2.5 hours per week. However since I use a literature based homeschooling history curriculum I can also use much of this suggested curriculum for teaching English as well.

“Why teach history like this? Isn't history only a minor part of the curriculum?” they wonder.

Although what they don't realise is that I'm really using historical content for teaching much of my English curriculum, some geography and occasionally science. Over the years I have found this has many benefits.

At least half of the content of my homeschool curriculum is history based.

# Christian Education

*“We allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and ‘spiritual’ life of children, but teach them that the Divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their Continual Helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life.” Mason V6 p. xxxi*

It is true that many of Charlotte Mason’s ideas can be taught in a secular setting. However Charlotte believed that a Christian education was an essential part of a child’s education.

*“This idea of all education springing from and resting upon our relation to Almighty God is one which we have ever laboured to enforce. We take a very distinct stand upon this point. We do not merely give a religious education, because that would seem to imply the possibility of some other education, a secular education, for example. But we hold that all education is divine, that every good gift of knowledge and insight comes from above, that the Lord the Holy Spirit is the supreme educator of mankind, and that the culmination of all education (which may, at the same time, be reached by a little child) is that personal knowledge of and intimacy with God in which our being finds its fullest perfection.” (Mason V3 p. 95)*

In her books she repeatedly emphasised, *“the knowledge of God is the principal knowledge, and no teaching of the Bible which does not further that knowledge is of religious value”* and *“if we believe that the fundamental knowledge is the knowledge of God, we shall bring up our children as students of Divinity and shall pursue our own life-long studies in the same school.”* (Mason Vol. 6, p. 272 and 338)

## Charlotte Mason’s Theology

Charlotte Mason was an Anglican Christian who was living in a time where people’s ideas on religion were changing. New discoveries and theories in science and

psychology were challenging many ideas commonly held by the church. Many well known theologians were accepting the idea of evolution including people like Charles Spurgeon.

After reading numerous authors on the subject and Charlotte's own work I found that she was definitely aware of the liberal ideas that were gaining a strong following in her time. And she didn't shy away from them. She saw herself as a progressive educationalist and decided not to ignore ideas like evolution and Bible inerrancy theories but rather investigate them. In her six volumes of *The Original Home Schooling Series* and in the *Parents' Review*, a monthly magazine, she attempts to address many of these issues.

Charlotte Mason supported the ideas of liberal theologians like Julius Wellhausen. In the *Parents' Review*, a monthly magazine she edited, she published a few articles (that I have seen but there are probably more) that challenge the ideas of reading the Bible for historical and scientific accuracy.

- [Authorship of Genesis](#) – references Wellhausen's idea that Moses didn't write Genesis.
- [On the Religious Training of the Young](#) – Does it matter if the Bible is just an allegory?

However, Charlotte Mason was still a committed Christian who believed in Christian education.

## **Classical Christian Education and the Charlotte Mason Method**

Since I've been homeschooling a distinction has been made between Classical homeschooling and Charlotte Mason homeschooling. Whilst it was obvious the two methods shared many ideals, I think that the classical educators felt that the Charlotte Mason method lacked rigor. Recently people like Karen Glass and Cindy Rollins have argued that Charlotte Mason's methods are a form of Classical education. It is largely a

theoretical discussion with passionate advocates on opposite sides. But this discussion has helped Classical Christian educators rediscover the Charlotte Mason method.

According to CIRCE institute, Classical Christian Education “is the cultivation of wisdom and virtue by nourishing the soul on truth, goodness, and beauty by means of the seven liberal arts and the four sciences so that, in Christ, the student is enabled to better know, glorify, and enjoy God.” ([Circe, 2016](#)). That sounds pretty Charlotte Mason to me.

Like the classical educators, she linked intellectual growth with moral development.

- She believed the main purpose of education was in developing character or virtue (as the classical educators call it) and laying the foundation for knowing God. She placed a great emphasis on her methods leading children to right thinking (Mason V2p.73).
- She also saw education as a tool for the renovation of man through the development of good habits (Mason V2 p158 -163).
- She believed education was the natural preparation for salvation and that ‘education in its true place is the handmaiden of religion’. (Mason V6p. 46 and 159-160).

She believed in giving a liberal arts education and summarised her priorities:

“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.” (Mason Vol. 6, p. 254)

## References and Further Reading

In researching this section I came across many interesting articles:

[Aimee Natal: Charlotte Mason - For Whose Sake](#)

[Elaine Spenser: A Rebutal to Aimee Natal's Criticism of Charlotte Mason's Theology](#)

[Karen Glass: Why Did Charlotte Mason Have To Say That](#)

[Art Middlekauff : Reconsidering Charlotte Mason and the Classical Tradition](#)

[A Classical Education Without the Classical Tradition](#)



# Charlotte Mason's Manifesto

An old friend rang me in emergency mode, she had decided to pull her son out of school and she wanted to discuss how I homeschooled. How was I going to explain to her school mindset the richness of homeschooling in two hours?

When she arrived I shared with her the Charlotte Mason method. I must confess our conversation was a random collection of Charlotte Mason's ideas. I'm sure she left my home overwhelmed and confused.

Today when I look back on that day I think I could have explained it so much better if I had just discussed the basic ideas found in The Charlotte Mason Education Manifesto. I would have disciplined myself to share the basics:

- You can give a balanced education
- Children have an appetite to learn and we can destroy that appetite using too many oral lessons and textbooks.
- Living Books and things should be our resources
- The free use of books in education make education a delight
- This method is simple, economical, and disciplined.

Charlotte Mason's manifesto is a practical summary of her ideas and its implementation.

## An Educational Manifesto

**Note:** This is a direct quote from *The Original Home Schooling Series* Volume 3p.214. I've bolded some of the text.

*“Studies serve for Delight, for Ornament, and for Ability.”*

**Every child has a right of entry to several fields of knowledge.** Every normal child has an appetite for such knowledge. This appetite or desire for knowledge is a sufficient stimulus for all school work, if the knowledge be fitly given.

**There are four means of destroying the desire for knowledge:**

- (a) Too many oral lessons, which offer knowledge in a diluted form, and do not leave the child free to deal with it.
- (b) Lectures, for which the teacher collects, arranges, and illustrates matter from various sources; these often offer knowledge in too condensed and ready prepared a form.
- (c) Text-books compressed and recompressed from the big book of the big man.
- (d) The use of emulation and ambition as incentives to learning in place of the adequate desire for, and delight in, knowledge.

**Children can be most fitly educated on Things and Books.**

Things, e.g. –

- i. Natural obstacles for physical contention, climbing, swimming, walking, etc.
- ii. Material to work in – wood, leather, clay, etc.
- iii. Natural objects in situ – birds, plants, streams, stones, etc,
- iv. Objects of art.
- v. Scientific apparatus, etc.

The value of this education by Things is receiving wide recognition, but **intellectual education to be derived from Books** is still for the most part to seek.

**Every scholar of six years old and upwards should study with ‘delight’ his own, living, books on every subject in a pretty wide curriculum.** Children between six and eight must for the most part have their books read to them.

This plan has been tried with happy results for the last twelve years in many home schoolrooms, and some other schools.

By means of the free use of books the mechanical difficulties of education—reading, spelling, composition, etc. – disappear, and studies prove themselves to be ‘for delight, for ornament, and for ability.’

There is reason to believe that these principles are workable in all schools, Elementary and Secondary; that they tend in the working to **simplification, economy, and discipline.**

### Teaching from Living Books

Living books have something special about them: they flow, they capture the imagination, and they tell us the facts while they give us the story. A living book is written by a passionate author (not a committee) who communicates this passion to the reader in a literary language.

To strictly classify a living book is difficult for what excites you may be very boring for me. I am sure you can remember a time someone handed you a ‘must read’ book and as you struggled through each page you wondered what all the fuss was about.

“A book may be long or short, old or new, easy or hard, written by a great man or a lesser man, and yet be the living book which finds its way to the mind of a young reader. The expert is not the person to choose; the children themselves are the experts in this case. A single page will elicit a verdict; but the unhappy thing is, this verdict is not betrayed; it is acted upon in the opening or closing of the door of the mind.” (Mason V3 p. 228)

I never really understood the value of living books until I started homeschooling. I had two bookoholic friends who kept giving me recommendations. My bookcases started growing. My taste for books changed. I began to exercise some discernment in the type of books I bought. Glossed up textbooks were less tempting. I saw through the eye-

catching graphics and bite sized information compiled by a team of experts. I was looking for more quality in the content that I read to my children. I wanted them to learn to love their books and to thirst for good books. I wanted their books to be delicious, captivating, brain and soul food, pure pleasure! I began to understand what a living book is!

Working directly from real books is one of the advantages you have when homeschooling. You do not need to teach a whole class from a textbook.

Many of Charlotte Mason's ideas revolve around using living books for lessons:

- English lessons with literature, handwriting, spelling and composition are taught using copywork, dictation and narration from living books.
- History, geography and science are taught from living books but also from **things**.

## Teaching from Things

Charlotte Mason wasn't just about books she was also interested in students learning about **things** by: seeing them, touching them and exploring them for themselves.

She believed *the science of relations* encouraged children to make connections with what they were learning:

- Children were encouraged outside for regular nature walks & nature study. These formed part of their science and geography lessons.
- Museum and gallery visits were encouraged to find out about history and art.
- Handicrafts like sewing and woodwork were an important part of her curriculum.

- Picture study was taught studying famous artists' works; music appreciation can be done in a similar way using famous composers' music.
- Art lessons included nature journaling and providing children with materials to do their own art work.
- She also wanted children to have access to the scholars' tools of the trade when possible which included: compasses, measuring instruments and other scientific apparatus that children could safely use.
- Early math lessons included beans or button counting.
- Early writing lessons included letters in the sand.

## Charlotte Mason Book List

[Charlotte Mason's The Original Home Schooling Series](#) (online version available)

This set by the founder of the modern homeschooling movement will inspire you through your homeschooling years. The dated 19th Century English will take some concentration, but it is well-worth the effort. Every time I read a section, I am amazed at the insights. Fully – indexed according to topic.

[A Charlotte Mason Education – Catherine Levison](#)

This was my first Charlotte Mason book that I read. I was instantly converted. It is a quick read and will give you a good overview. A summary of all the main aspects of a life giving Charlotte Mason Education for you to bring into your children's lives. A great starting *Charlotte Mason* book.

[More Charlotte Mason Education – Catherine Levison](#)

More details on how to implement Charlotte Mason's effective and gentle educational methods. Charlotte Mason in highschool and more. Good for those who have used this method for some time.

[A Charlotte Mason Companion](#) – Karen Andreola

A thoroughly inspirational mix of Charlotte Mason philosophy and Karen's blend of practical lifestyle applications, along with delicious illustrations.

[For the Children's Sake](#) – Susan Schaeffer Macaulay

The book that got so many people excited about Charlotte Mason and homeschooling in the first place. A beautiful look at the underlying philosophies of her method and how it works out in real life. Excellent – some people read it every year. A bestseller for over twenty years.

### When Children Love to Learn – Elaine Cooper

This Child Light book is written by various head mistresses who taught in Charlotte Mason schools and others trained in her college, or who had a lot to do with the schools. A practical application of the CM method-each subject discussed in its own chapter, it explains how Charlotte Mason's methods fit into our modern world, how they can be adapted to each culture, whilst maintaining the general principles.

### Pocketful of Pinecones – Karen Andreola

A delightful book about a homeschooling mother's early homeschooling days. As she tries to apply a Charlotte Mason education in her home, she describes her days, what worked and what didn't. Cleverly woven story about her family keeps you reading and considering how you can also make this gentle method of education work for you. Much practical emphasis on nature study.

### Consider This by Karen Glass

The most recent publication on the Charlotte Mason method. Very enjoyable.

### The Living Page by Laurie Bestvater – [Read my review here](#)

A book on how Charlotte Mason used notebooking to train her children into scholars. Another inspirational read about the Charlotte Mason method.

## Where To Next...

I hope I have whetted your appetite to learn more about Charlotte Mason. Personally I have found that the more I read about Charlotte Mason's work, the more my respect and admiration has grown for her.

I am becoming a better teacher of my children, for I understand better the power of my role, and disciplining myself to wield it better. I also trust my children more in their learning and helping them understand that it is their responsibility to learn, not my responsibility to force it in. When they say that they don't know their times tables for example, I say well it's your responsibility to learn it. You have to commit it to memory. You must try to memorise it. I am no longer accepting, it's my fault, as they would like to lay the blame. I facilitate the opportunity for them to learn but they need to care about learning it.

Whilst some of Charlotte Mason's thoughts are specific for her time, many of her ideas have enduring truths that have given me much food for thought. I have been greatly enriched in my thinking whilst doing this series.

I encourage you if you are looking for some chunks of wisdom on how to teach please read more books on Charlotte Mason.