

*Simply Charlotte Mason presents*

*Getting Started in*  
**Homeschooling**



*by Sonya Shafer*

*Homeschooling does not have to look just like a school classroom at home. You can customize your home school by choosing the methods and materials that best fit your family and lifestyle. Yes, you have choices!*

Learn how to

- Tell the difference between the five main homeschool approaches.
- Find the approach that will help your children flourish.
- Create a rich, comprehensive, and engaging education for your children.
- Save time by teaching all your children together.
- Begin homeschooling with confidence.

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# *Getting Started in Homeschooling*

by Sonya Shafer

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Excerpts from Charlotte Mason's books are surrounded by quotation marks and accompanied by a reference to which book in the series the excerpt came from.

- Vol. 1: Home Education
- Vol. 2: Parents and Children
- Vol. 3: School Education
- Vol. 4: Ourselves
- Vol. 5: Formation of Character
- Vol. 6: A Philosophy of Education

Getting Started in Homeschooling  
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## ***Chapter One***

### ***You Have Choices***

“So they just send you the books, and you do them at home?”

I still remember the puzzled lady at the grocery store trying to wrap her mind around “homeschooling.” I’m afraid she would have been even more puzzled had I told her that I knew of at least five different approaches to homeschooling.

It’s not a one-size-fits-all process, like it is in traditional schools and classrooms, like the lady at the grocery store was thinking of it. One of the great benefits of homeschooling is that you can select the methods and materials that best fit you and your children. You have choices!

#### ***Your Choice***

Fifteen years ago, when I started homeschooling, an experienced mom shared with me these five approaches so I could make an informed choice. Now I share them with you so you can find the approach that will work best for your family.

- ***Traditional***—Uses textbooks for the various subjects. Assigns a chapter in the textbook to be read and questions to answer from the content. Uses workbooks with fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice questions. (We often refer to it as “school in a box.”)
- ***Unit Studies***—Takes a theme or topic and incorporates all the school subjects (Language Arts, History, Science, Music, Art, etc.) into that topic. For example, when you study Ancient Egypt, you read books about Egypt (history), make a salt dough map of Egypt (geography), explore how they irrigated their farm land from the Nile (science), read a historical fiction book set in Ancient Egypt

(literature), build sugar cube pyramids (art), learn how to spell “pyramid” (language arts), etc.

- ***Unschooling***—Basically goes with the interests of the children. No set curriculum. If a child is interested in butterflies, you research and learn about them until the child is satisfied. If he develops an interest in race cars, you give him information on race cars.
- ***Classical***—Children are taught in three stages, called the Trivium. The Grammar Stage (ages 6-10) focuses on absorbing information and memorizing the rules of phonics, spelling, grammar, foreign language, history, science, math, etc. The Dialectic Stage (ages 10-12) emphasizes logical discussion, debate, drawing correct conclusions, Algebra, thesis writing, and determining the why’s behind the information. The Rhetoric Stage (ages 13-18) continues the systematic, rigorous studies and seeks to develop a clear, forceful, and persuasive use of language.
- ***Charlotte Mason***—Based on the educational writings of Charlotte Mason, a turn-of-the-century British educator. Uses “living books” rather than textbooks or twaddle. Respects children as persons and gives them a broad education. Presents a generous curriculum, including nature study, picture study, music study, and handicrafts, as well as the usual academic subjects. Seeks to “spread a feast” before the child and let him digest what is appropriate for him at that time. Uses methods that will nurture a love for learning, not just present a body of information.

### ***My Favorite***

So what was your first reaction when you read the description of each approach? When I first heard those five approaches explained, my heart resonated with the Charlotte Mason Method right away. I knew that was the approach that I could teach wholeheartedly and enjoy. And that was the approach that would shape my children into the kind of people I hoped they would become.

Why? I knew I wanted to use living books instead of textbooks. I knew I wanted to cultivate a love of learning in my children, rather than the cram-the-facts-just-long-enough-to-pass-the-test kind of education that I received.

I wanted my children to receive a broad education, to enjoy art and music and

nature study as an integrated part of their growing years. I wanted to surround them with beautiful and interesting ideas that would feed their souls and motivate them to learn.

I wanted to use teaching methods that made common sense and respected each child as a person. And I wanted to give them a carefully-thought-through curriculum that would not only educate them well, but also teach them how to keep learning for the rest of their lives, to self-educate.

Is all of that possible in one approach to homeschooling? Yes.

Does it require special training? No. Just a willingness to discard your baggage, step outside the box, and enjoy the freedom of fresh ideas.

How? The rest of this book will explain the details. Turn the page.

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*If you're new to homeschooling, be sure to check on the homeschooling laws in your state or province. They can vary from region to region. A great resource for checking on any legal requirements is the Home School Legal Defense Association's Web site at [hsllda.org](http://hsllda.org). Also look for local or state homeschool groups. They should be able to provide valuable information.*

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## *Chapter Two*

### *Meet the Lady*

Our family has been cooking and serving some meals for large groups lately. That's a new adventure for us—not the cooking part, the “for large groups” part. So we've been scouring the Internet for helpful tips, ideas, and recipes.

Along the way we've discovered an important principle: Always know who is giving you advice. If a person posts a tip or a recipe with a hint as to how to make it serve a large group, we check to see if that person has actually served any large groups.

The best tips and ideas have come from a friend of ours who regularly serves food to large groups. She even loaned us some wonderfully large pots!

So what does that have to do with homeschooling? The principle holds true: Know who is giving you advice. If you are intrigued by the Charlotte Mason Method, you need to know who Charlotte was and what ideas ruled her life. It just makes sense.

So allow me to introduce Charlotte and her ideas to you.

#### *Charlotte Mason*

Charlotte Mason (1842–1923) was a British educator who invested her life in improving the quality of children's education. Orphaned at the age of sixteen, she enrolled in the Home and Colonial Society for the training of teachers and earned a First Class Certificate. She taught school for more than ten years at Davison School in Worthing, England. During this time she began to develop her vision for “a liberal education for all.” English children in the 1800s were educated according to social class; the poorer were taught a trade, and the fine arts and literature were reserved for

the richer class. By “liberal,” Charlotte envisioned a generous and broad curriculum for all children, regardless of social class.

Charlotte was soon invited to teach and lecture at Bishop Otter Teacher Training College in Chichester, England, where she stayed for more than five years. Her experiences there convinced her that parents would be greatly helped if they understood some basic principles about bringing up children. So Charlotte gave a series of lectures, which were later published as *Home Education* and widely received. From this beginning, the Parents’ Educational Union was formed and quickly expanded. A periodical was launched to keep in touch with PEU members, the “Parents’ Review.”

Charlotte was nearly fifty when she moved to Ambleside, England, in 1891 and formed the House of Education, a training school for governesses and others working with young children. By 1892 the Parents’ Education Union had added the word “National” to its title, and a Parents’ Review School had been formed (later to be known as the Parents’ Union School), at which the children followed Miss Mason’s educational philosophy and methods.

The following years brought more collections of writings by Charlotte, which were eventually published under the titles of *Parents and Children*, *School Education*, *Ourselves*, *Formation of Character*, and *A Philosophy of Education*. More and more schools adopted her philosophy and methods, and Ambleside became a teacher training college to supply all the Parents’ Union Schools that were springing up. Charlotte spent her final years overseeing this network of schools devoted to “a liberal education for all.”

### ***Her Ideas***

You can summarize Charlotte’s approach to education in three words. Charlotte believed that “Education is an Atmosphere, a Discipline, a Life.”

By “atmosphere,” Charlotte spoke of the environment our children grow up in. She knew that the ideas that rule our lives, as parents, will have a profound impact on our children. “The child breathes the atmosphere emanating from his parents; that of the ideas which rule their own lives” (Vol. 2, p. 247).

By “discipline,” Charlotte emphasized the importance of training our children in good habits—habits that will serve them well as they grow. In fact, she likened good

habits to railroad tracks that parents lay down and upon which the child may travel with ease into his adult life. Good habits are a powerful influence on our children and must play an important part in their education. “It rests with [the parent] to consider well the tracks over which the child should travel with profit and pleasure” (Vol. 1, p. 109).

By “life,” Charlotte wanted to remind us that “all the thought we offer to our children shall be *living* thought; no mere dry summaries of facts will do” (Vol. 2, p. 277). And the methods that Charlotte used presented each subject’s material as living ideas. Here is where the reading, writing, and arithmetic come in, along with all the other school subjects. But notice two important points: first, they are presented as living thoughts; and second, those school subjects occupy only one-third of the big picture of education.

All three components of Charlotte’s three-pronged approach are vital in the education of our children. Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life. What a well-balanced, all-around approach!



## ***Chapter 3***

### ***Take Your Pick***

As you try to decide what homeschooling method or curriculum you want to use, let's take a closer look at the five main approaches to homeschooling and note some key similarities and differences. In other words, how is the Charlotte Mason approach different from the other four approaches: classical, unit studies, unschooling, and traditional?

#### ***Three Key Questions***

To begin understanding the differences and similarities, we need to ask three key questions.

1. How does this approach view the child?
2. How does this approach define “education”?
3. What does this approach say is the role of the teacher?

#### ***Charlotte Mason Answers***

Here are the Charlotte Mason answers to those three questions.

##### ***1. How does Charlotte Mason view the child?***

The child is a whole person whose education should cultivate the whole person. A child's personality deserves respect, and his natural appetite for knowledge should be nourished.

##### ***2. How does Charlotte Mason define “education”?***

Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.—“By this we mean that parents and teachers should know how to make sensible use of a child's circumstances

(*atmosphere*), should train him in habits of good living (*discipline*), and should nourish his mind with ideas, the food of the intellectual *life*” (Vol. 3, pp. 216, 217).

Education is the science of relations.—The child should form personal relations from a feast of great ideas given through a broad curriculum.

“They come into the world with many relations waiting to be established; relations with places far and near, with the wide universe, with the past of history, with the social economics of the present, with the earth they live on and all its delightful progeny of beast and bird, plant and tree; with the sweet human affinities they entered into at birth; with their own country and other countries, and, above all, with that most sublime of human relationships—their relation to God” (Vol. 6, pp. 72, 73).

### *3. What does Charlotte Mason say is the role of the teacher?*

The teacher is a guide. She is to carefully prepare the banquet and spread the feast of living ideas by introducing the child to the great people of the past and present who thought up those ideas, then get out of the way and let the child form his own relations.

“Give children a wide range of subjects, with the end in view of establishing in each case some one or more of the relations I have indicated. Let them learn from first-hand sources of information—really good books, the best going, on the subject they are engaged upon. Let them get at the books themselves, and do not let them be flooded with a warm diluent at the lips of their teacher. The teacher’s business is to indicate, stimulate, direct and constrain to the acquirement of knowledge, but by no means to be the fountain-head and source of all knowledge in his or her own person” (Vol. 3, p. 162).

You will find that most of the differences between homeschooling approaches center around those three key questions. And when you understand how each approach answers those questions, you will gain a greater confidence in teaching, as well as in selecting resources and planning your year of study.

## *Charlotte Mason Method vs. Traditional Curriculum*

“What’s the difference between the Charlotte Mason Method and the traditional curriculum that I’ve been using?” Just to make sure we’re all on the same page, let’s define what we mean by “traditional.” A traditional curriculum uses textbooks and workbooks, for the most part, to dispense facts. And it usually uses direct questions

to assess retention of those facts. The direct questions are commonly fill-in-the-blank, true-or-false, multiple choice, or short answer.

If you want to know simply how the methods are different, the Charlotte Mason Method uses living books instead of textbooks and narration instead of direct questions.

But let's look a little deeper and take a minute to ask *why* Charlotte Mason used living books and narration instead of textbooks and direct questions. The answer lies in how she defined education.

Charlotte believed that education is “a life”—that we should nourish the child's mind upon ideas, not just dry facts. Therefore she used books that touched the imagination and emotions, that made the subject come alive to the student.

“They will plod on obediently over any of the hundreds of dry-as-dust volumes issued by the publishers under the heading of ‘School Books,’ or of ‘Education,’ they keep all such books in the outer court, and allow them no access to their minds. 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” (Vol. 3, p. 228).

Charlotte also defined education as “the science of relations.” She wanted the children to form relations with God, with mankind, and with the universe around them. By asking the children to retell in their own words, and with their own opinions and personality involved (narrate), she was inviting them to share those relations they had formed. And forming personal relations is a completely different concept from recalling information that someone else tells you is necessary.

“It cannot be too often said that information is not education. You may answer an examination question about the position of the Seychelles and the Comoro Islands without having been anywise nourished by the fact of these island groups existing in such and such latitudes and longitudes; but if you follow Bullen in *The Cruise of the Cachelot* the names excite that little mental stir which indicates the reception of real knowledge” (Vol. 3, p. 169).

### *Charlotte Mason Method vs. Unit Studies*

When I started homeschooling fifteen years ago, I used a unit study approach because I thought it was my only alternative to a traditional curriculum. At the end of

that year I heard about Charlotte Mason and knew that the Charlotte Mason Method was the one I wanted to pursue.

Over the next few years I pondered what makes the difference between a unit study approach and the Charlotte Mason approach. It wasn't until I read a couple of passages in Charlotte's writings that I understood the distinction more fully.

As we have mentioned, Charlotte believed that true education consists of forming relations with God, with mankind, and with the universe around us. She was particularly emphatic that it was the child himself who should do the mental work of forming those relations.

Herein lies the first difference between Charlotte Mason and unit studies. With a unit study approach, it is the teacher who forms the relations and makes the connections for the child and then presents her findings. "The teacher has done it; he has selected the ideas, shewn the correlation of each with the other and the work is complete" (Vol. 6, p. 114).

In Volume 6 Charlotte gave an example of a unit study with Robinson Crusoe as the focal point (p. 115). The activities included

- Object Lessons on the sea, a ship from foreign parts, a life-boat, shell-fish, a cave, etc.
- Drawing Lessons on an oar, an anchor, a ship, a boat, etc.
- Building models of the seashore, of Robinson's island, of Robinson's house and pottery
- Reading passages from *The Child's Robinson Crusoe*
- Reading passages from a general reader on the items mentioned in the object lessons
- Composing summary sentences as a group and have students copy this composition from the blackboard
- Arithmetic related to Robinson (no examples given)
- Singing and Recitation, for example, "I am the monarch of all I see," etc.

In the typical unit study, the student depends on the teacher to show him how ideas are connected and related to each other. Charlotte wanted the student to form those relations himself, which she believed is a key to "owning" the idea.

But didn't Charlotte's curriculum correlate certain subjects? Yes, Charlotte did often correlate history, geography, and literature for the same time period. But herein

lies the second difference: Charlotte made a distinction between what she considered natural connections and forced, arbitrary connections.

In Charlotte's schools "the co-ordination of studies is carefully regulated without any reference to the clash of ideas on the threshold or their combination into apperception masses; but solely with reference to the natural and inevitable co-ordination of certain subjects. Thus, in readings on the period of the Armada, we should not devote the contemporary arithmetic lessons to calculations as to the amount of food necessary to sustain the Spanish fleet, because this is an arbitrary and not an inherent connection; but we should read such history, travels, and literature as would make the Spanish Armada live in the mind" (Vol. 3, p. 231).

A typical unit study tries to correlate every possible school subject around the chosen theme of the study. The Charlotte Mason approach limits itself to just those natural connections that are inevitable. For example, when studying a person or event in history, it naturally follows that the child will learn about the place in which that person lived or that event happened (geography). And if the child is using a good living book, he will most likely be exposed to the literature of that time period. Those three school subjects are inherently combined.

Now you know the two passages, in Volumes 3 and 6, that helped me figure out the difference between the Charlotte Mason Method and the unit study approach.

### *Charlotte Mason Method vs. Classical Approach*

When we look at how Charlotte Mason differs from the classical approach, we need to clarify what we mean by "the classical approach." An education based on classic, language-rich books that hold up high virtues is sometimes called a classical approach. Charlotte Mason would endorse those elements and use the same type of books.

The difference comes in the classical approach that is based on the trivium (the three stages of learners) and that emphasizes memorizing and outlining facts.

Probably the biggest difference between these two methods lies in what kind of "food" each approach feeds the child's mind. The classical approach seems to emphasize facts as food, with a carefully organized standard of which ingredients of information to feed the child at which times. And certain fact-foods are deemed crucial to having a correctly nourished mind.

With the Charlotte Mason method, ideas (rather than facts) are the food for the mind. In a Charlotte Mason-style education, you spread a banquet of nutritious and inviting idea-foods and let the child choose what he will form a relation with—which ideas will “click” with him and provide nourishment for his mind. Each child might take away something different from the feast, but that’s fine because it is all healthful, delicious food.

Remember the motto “Education is the Science of Relations.” Charlotte was not so concerned about what facts a child knew as what relations he had formed—what ideas he felt a kinship with and cared about.

“Our aim in Education is to give a Full Life.—We begin to see what we want. Children make large demands upon us. We owe it to them to initiate an immense number of interests. ‘Thou hast set my feet in a large room,’ should be the glad cry of every intelligent soul. Life should be all *living*, and not merely a tedious passing of time; not all doing or all feeling or all thinking—the strain would be too great—but, all living; that is to say, we should be in touch wherever we go, whatever we hear, whatever we see, with some manner of vital interest. We cannot *give* the children these interests; we prefer that they should never say they have learned botany or conchology, geology or astronomy. The question is not,—how much does the youth *know*? when he has finished his education—but how much does he *care*? and about how many orders of things does he care? In fact, how large is the room in which he finds his feet set? and, therefore, how full is the life he has before him?” (Vol. 3, pp. 170, 171).

Charlotte believed that only the ideas that had taken up residence in the deep recesses of a child’s mind would influence his life and, thus, truly educate him.

“Though they will plod on obediently over any of the hundreds of dry-as-dust volumes issued by the publishers under the heading of ‘School Books,’ or of ‘Education,’ they keep all such books in the outer court, and allow them no access to their minds” (Vol. 3, p. 228).

“In the end we shall find that only those *ideas* which have fed his life are taken into the being of the child” (Vol. 2, p. 38).

### *Charlotte Mason Method vs. Unschooling*

Unschooling refers to a spontaneous approach that is mainly child-directed. There

is usually no set curriculum. The parent and child study whatever interests the child at the time. They try to take advantage of learning opportunities as they arise.

Both unschooling and Charlotte Mason respect the child as a person. Unschooling shows this respect by deferring to the child's interests and encouraging his individuality to direct his studies.

Charlotte Mason respects the child's individuality too. In fact, one of the key tenets of the Charlotte Mason approach is that the child is a unique person and should be treated as such. Many of the methods used in a Charlotte Mason-style education show respect for the individual.

For example, the nature notebook is the child's own possession; he enters into it whatever he notices himself. Narrations, also, respect the child as a person. The parent listens carefully while the student tells what he took in, mixed with his own opinion and any relations that he formed with the ideas.

The Charlotte Mason Method spreads a feast of ideas before the child and encourages him to form his own personal relations with the ideas.

If education is spreading a feast, as Charlotte described it, unschooling allows the child to set the menu for the feast. He gets to choose which foods will be prepared. And that is where Charlotte Mason and unschooling differ.

Charlotte believed in the teacher's planning and preparing the feast. She explained that teachers should present the feast of living ideas in a carefully planned order. "Their reading should be carefully ordered, for the most part in historical sequence" (Vol. 6, p. 341).

Yes, the children are free to take away from the feast what they are ready for at the time. They are encouraged to form their own personal relations with the ideas that are presented, but the ideas are presented in a well-thought-out, orderly way.

The studies are not haphazard, directed by the interests of the child. In fact, Charlotte specified that in her schools, "There is no selection of studies, or of passages or of episodes, on the ground of interest. The best available book is chosen and is read through perhaps in the course of two or three years" (Vol. 6, p. 7). And, "No stray lessons are given on interesting subjects; the knowledge the children get is consecutive" (Vol. 6, p. 7).

Does Charlotte Mason then leave no room for individual learning or pursuing of interests? No, that's what free afternoons provide for. In the Charlotte Mason

Method, lessons are completed in the morning, leaving the afternoons free for students to pursue individual interests.

I hope this chapter on how the Charlotte Mason Method is different from other homeschool approaches has been helpful as you ponder various curriculum, methods, and schedules. Obviously, I prefer the Charlotte Mason Method, but I want to encourage you to use what fits your family at this season of life. Some homeschoolers like to do a combination of two or more approaches, pulling their favorite aspects from each. Think through the three foundational questions, then put together an education that will work best for you and your children.

The rest of this book will focus on the Charlotte Mason Method. In the next chapters, we'll dive into the fun part—how to do a Charlotte Mason approach!

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*Different publishers cater to the different approaches. Once you decide which approach you want to use, you will be able to find the materials that use that approach.*

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## ***Chapter 4***

### ***Learn the Basics***

Don't you love it when you can take just a couple of basic ideas, combine them with a couple of skills, and use them to accomplish a lot?

Take sewing, for example. The basic ideas to keep in mind for general sewing are (1) allow 5/8" from the edge of the fabric to the seam, and (2) put the right sides of the fabric together.

Combine those ideas with a couple of skills—like (1) learning how to “steer” the fabric as it feeds into the sewing machine, and (2) running the foot pedal—and you can make a pillowcase pretty quickly, or some curtains, or a bedspread.

It feels good to get started with just a few basic ideas and a couple of skills.

And you can get started with the Charlotte Mason Method the same way. Let's take a look at a couple of basic ideas and a couple of skills that will allow you to accomplish quite a bit.

#### ***Basic Principles***

First, let's look at three principles to keep in mind when you're teaching the Charlotte Mason way.

##### ***1. Keep lessons short.***

Charlotte advocated short lessons for younger children: fifteen or twenty minutes at the most. These short lessons are part of training children in the habit of attention. Children can get a lot accomplished in fifteen minutes of complete attention (so can adults). As children grow older, the lesson time should lengthen to thirty or forty-five minutes.

*2. Emphasize good habits.*

Charlotte believed that forming good habits in your child make up one-third of his education. Two very important habits for school time are the habits of attention and best effort. You can encourage these habits from the beginning by emphasizing quality over quantity. Start with short tasks, but require best effort. Read or say things only once. Don't get caught in the "What?" trap. Set time limits that assume full attention. Start small and gradually work up to longer tasks as these habits are instilled.

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*Download the free book, Smooth and Easy Days, to learn more about this Charlotte Mason principle of good habits. It is available at [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).*

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*3. Vary the order of subjects.*

Along with the short lessons should come a large variety of subjects, alternating the quieter, concentration-intense subjects with the louder, less-concentration-intense subjects and those that allow for physical movement and exercise. Using different parts of the brain and body makes it much easier for your child to pay full attention, because he isn't overtaxing one part.

Keeping these three basic principles in mind will make your life easier. In sewing, I've torn out many a seam because I forgot the basic principle of putting the right sides of the fabric together. When you keep the basic principles in mind, things go much smoother.

### ***Basic Skills***

In addition to the three basic principles, let's get you started quickly with just two basic skills. Once you learn these two methods, you will be able to teach several school subjects in a Charlotte Mason way. You will use these methods to teach history, geography, Bible, science, literature, poetry, and Shakespeare. That's a lot of subjects you'll be ready for!

The two methods are living books and narration.

### *1. Living Books*

Probably the most well known of Charlotte's methods is her use of living books instead of dry, factual textbooks. Living books are usually written by one person who has a passion for the subject and writes in conversational or narrative style. The books pull you into the subject and involve your emotions, so it's easy to remember the events and facts. Living books make the subject "come alive."

So instead of using textbooks for the subjects listed above, look for living books that will make the time period, or the geographical area, or the science concept come alive.

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*Our free CM Bookfinder will give you lots of suggestions for living books, and our free SCM Curriculum Guide will list our favorites. Look for both at [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com)*

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### *2. Narration*

The second basic method is narration. When you ask a child to narrate, you're asking him to tell back in his own words what he just saw, heard, or read. Because the child must think through the information and determine how to present it, mixed with his own opinion and impressions, this method of evaluation requires a much higher thinking level than mere fill-in-the-blank or answer-the-posed-question-with-a-fact methods.

So read some portion of your living book and then ask your child to tell you everything he can remember. (Keep in mind the habit of attention. This method will put it to good use!)

When requesting a child to narrate, word the question in an open, essay-type form, such as "Tell all you know about \_\_\_\_" or "Describe \_\_\_\_." The narration can be oral or written or drawn—whatever.

Next, we'll talk about some hands-on learning with the Charlotte Mason Method.

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*You can read more about living books and narration on page 37.*

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## *CM Methods*

This chart lays out all the school subjects and which methods Charlotte used to teach them. Notice how many use living books and narration. You'll learn about the other methods in the next chapter.

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Basic Principles for All Subjects	Short lessons; habits of attention and perfect execution (best effort); varied order of subjects
History	Living books; narration; Book of Centuries
Geography	Living books; narration; map drill
Bible	Read aloud; narration (discussion for older students); memorize and recite regularly
Math	Manipulatives; understanding of why
Science	Nature study and notebook; living books; narration
Foreign Languages	Hear and speak, then read and write
Writing	Copywork for handwriting; oral and written narration for composition
Spelling	Prepared dictation
Grammar	Not formally studied until older than ten
Art	Picture study for art appreciation; handicrafts; nature notebooks for drawing and painting
Music	Music study for music appreciation; any instrumental instruction; singing
Literature	Living books; narration
Poetry	Read aloud and enjoy frequently; memorize and recite occasionally (include Shakespeare)

## *Chapter 5*

### *Add Hands-On Methods*

When I first heard about the Charlotte Mason Method, I envisioned my children and me sitting on the couch, reading wonderful books together and smiling. Well, we have done a lot of reading—and a lot of smiling—with the wonderful books. But over the years I have learned that there is much more to the Charlotte Mason approach.

Charlotte interspersed that reading and narrating with some other activities that used different parts of the brain and body. (Remember, that's one of the basic principles.)

Let's take a look at some of those great Charlotte Mason activities that you can use to add variety to your days.

#### *Handicrafts*

Charlotte taught the children a variety of handicrafts, one at a time. Follow her lead by focusing on quality, showing your child slowly and carefully what he is to do, and making sure that the end product is useful. Don't worry if you don't know how to knit or sew or whatever handicraft you want your child to learn. Take advantage of relatives, neighbors, and church family members who would love to pass on their special crafts. Also look for videos and resources online or at local craft shops that will allow you and your child to proceed at your own pace. Set aside some time once a week to learn and practice an enjoyable handicraft.

#### *Nature Study*

Charlotte's students experienced the original field trips: once a week they went

to the field or meadow or pond to do nature study. You can do the same, even if it is only in your backyard. Get each student a blank sketchbook, then go outside and look around. Record your observations in your sketchbooks, either in writing or drawing. If you see a plant or insect or bird you don't know, check a field guide or research the Internet to find out its name and label it in your book. This type of nature study lays the foundation for science lessons and gives you the benefit of a refreshing change of pace outside.

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*For more information on nature study, take a look at **Hours in the Out-of-Doors: A Charlotte Mason Nature Study Handbook** available at [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).*

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### *Art and Music*

You can also add art appreciation and music appreciation to your homeschool very simply. Choose one composer and listen to his works for six to twelve weeks. You can play his music in the background during lunch or listen to it as you run errands in the van. After six weeks or more, your children will have a pretty good feel for that composer's style.

And the same goes for artists. Choose one artist and "study" six of his works, one at a time. Here's how to do a once-a-week picture study: Display a picture and mention the artist who created it. Have the children look at the picture until they can see it clearly in their minds' eye. When all the children are ready, turn the picture over or close the book and ask them to describe the picture. When their narration is finished, display the picture again and notice together any new aspects. Display the picture in a prominent location in your home so the children can look at it throughout the week. The next week, select a different picture by the same artist and repeat.

### *Foreign Language*

Charlotte's students learned several languages during their school years, but they all started the same way: hear it and speak it before you ever read and write it. Again,

take advantage of people around you who are fluent in another language. Spend time with them, learning the names of objects around your house, then putting more words with those until you can hear and speak sentences. Several computer programs are available to help with the reading and writing aspect once you get to it, but remember to focus on the hearing and speaking first.

### *Math*

Yes, math should be a hands-on activity, especially during the younger grades. Charlotte emphasized the importance of working with things before working with symbols on paper. So make sure your children have plenty of practice learning math concepts with concrete objects.

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*See page 41 for some help in selecting a good math curriculum.*

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### *Handwriting and Spelling*

Charlotte used interesting passages and portions of good books to teach handwriting and spelling. This method keeps those two subjects interesting—much more interesting than pages of single letters to copy or lists of words to memorize.

As the child carefully copies a noble poem, a Scripture passage, an inspirational quotation, or the lyrics to a hymn, he also absorbs grammar and punctuation rules. Copywork lessons should be short with an emphasis on giving one's best effort rather than hurrying to fill the paper with words. Keep a child's copywork in a dedicated notebook, journal, or tablet. You'll be amazed at how much the child's handwriting improves over time with short, concentrated effort every day or so.

Using passages for spelling lessons gives many of the same benefits. Most of us were taught spelling with lists of words. Charlotte realized that lists have drawbacks: they aren't interesting and they don't show the words in context. Spelling is a lot more enjoyable when the student receives his spelling words couched in an interesting idea.

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*See page 42 for a quick description of how Charlotte taught spelling*

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*through prepared dictation. You might also like to watch a video that walks you through the process step-by-step in less than ten minutes, filling in more details, showing examples, and giving helpful tips along the way. Visit [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com)'s Spelling Wisdom page.*

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So you see, a Charlotte Mason education is not all sitting and reading. There are many great hands-on activities that you can incorporate into your homeschool. In fact, there are so many great Charlotte Mason methods that you might be wondering which ones to start with. In the next chapter we'll discuss an easy way to make the transition to a Charlotte Mason education in your home.

## ***Chapter 6***

### ***Make the Transition***

When I got married, I knew how to cook exactly two dishes: canned soup over rice and macaroni and cheese from a box. (And once I forgot to drain the macaroni.) Needless to say, those first few meals required a lot of effort and thinking on my part. But the more I cooked, the easier it got. Now I can cook a meal in my sleep.

It's the same with getting started in homeschooling. The Charlotte Mason methods may be new to you, something you've never done before. At first it may require a lot of thinking and effort on your part; but take heart, the more you do it, the easier it will get.

My advice to you is, "Ease into it." It will make things easier on both you and your children if you make the transition in stages.

#### ***Stage 1: The Basics—Short Lessons, Living Books, Narration***

One of the easiest places to start is with a key Charlotte Mason principle: short lessons. In order to build the habit of attention, keep your lessons short, especially for younger children. Aim for no longer than fifteen or twenty minutes per subject for young children (including their oral narrations), and lengthen the time to thirty or forty minutes for older students. Some subjects, like copywork, might take only five minutes. But five minutes of full attention and best effort can accomplish much.

Your goal is to stop the lesson *before* your child loses attention. The more times your child pays attention for the whole lesson, the quicker that action will become a habit. Then you can gradually lengthen the lesson times and reap the benefits of the habit. But establishing the habit of full attention first is foundational.

Living books are another component that you can transition into easily. If you're already using a textbook for History, you can supplement with some living books on the side until you're ready to make the complete change-over and drop the textbook. For example, if you're studying Ancient Egypt, you could get *Boy of the Pyramids* for your elementary-age children and read it aloud together. Or get *The Cat of Bubastes* for your older student to enjoy.

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*You can search for other good living books by topic in the free CM Bookfinder at [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).*

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Once you get those living books home, what do you do with them? Narration is the next step. With other methods, it is common to quiz a child to see if she recalls the facts that you think are important from the book. In the Charlotte Mason Method, however, the child is asked to listen closely as you read a few paragraphs or pages of the story and then to retell in her own words all that she can recall of what she heard, adding in her own observations and opinion.

One of the most important rules to keep in mind is to read the passage only once. If the child knows he will get a second chance to hear the book, it will be easy to let his attention wander. In this method, as in others, cultivating the habit of attention is a key.

Narrating is not easy. So encourage your children as they develop this art. When you are first starting out, explain to the children how to do narration and tell them before you read when you will require it. Do some narrating yourself to give them an example of what you're expecting from them (and to see for yourself how much effort it takes).

Start with oral narrations until the children (of all ages) get the hang of it. Once they feel comfortable with oral narrations, you can begin to require some written narrations from the older children.

### ***Stage 2: Once a Week—Art, Music, Poetry, Nature, Dictation, Handicrafts***

Once you feel comfortable with the Basics, you can easily add one more CM

method per week. Each of these methods can be done once a week: Picture Study, Music Study, Poetry, Nature Study, Dictation, Handicrafts.

Simply choose one of them to add to your schedule during the week, and continue incorporating that method once a week for a few weeks until you're comfortable. Then select another one to add to your schedule during the week, and continue doing it once a week until you're ready to add another one.

We like to spread these once-a-week activities throughout the week. For example, you could do Picture Study on Mondays, Music Study on Tuesdays, Poetry on Wednesdays, Nature Study on Thursdays, Handicrafts on Fridays. Dictation can be done once or twice a week, so you might want to add it to Tuesdays and Thursdays. Of course, you know your schedule better than we do, so tuck Dictation in where it works best for you.

Take your time and enjoy the simplicity of these methods, but be assured that they are quite effective. After you are comfortable with all these once-a-week additions, and have found a place for them in your schedule, you'll be ready for Stage 3.

### ***Stage 3: Check Up—Math, Science, Bible, Grammar***

Stage 3 is the time to check your existing Science, Math, Bible, and Grammar curricula to see if they are CM compatible. Go through each one and ask yourself

- Do our science books use a conversational tone (as if speaking directly to the reader) or a narrative (story) style? If the book reads like an encyclopedia, you may need to make a switch. In science, as in several other subjects, living books and narration work well.
- Does our math program explain the “why” as well as the “how”? Does it use hands-on manipulatives and activities that make math apply to everyday life?
- Am I reading directly from the Bible, *the* living Book, and having the children narrate it?
- Have I saved English grammar lessons for when my child is nine or ten and older?

Once you have stepped through Stages 1–3, your home school will be using Charlotte Mason methods for the most part. Then you'll be ready for the final stage of making the transition, Stage 4.

### ***Stage 4: Add In—Geography, Foreign Language, Shakespeare***

In Stage 4 you can add some finishing touches to your Charlotte Mason education. You can also increase the frequency of some subjects, if desired. For example, you could read poetry several times a week instead of just once a week.

Go ahead and add some geography living books. Look for interesting travelogues, or simply keep a globe nearby. Anytime you read a living book, go to the globe and find where the events took place. The closer you can tie geography to people, the more living it will become.

If you want to teach a foreign language, remember to teach it the same way as our native language: hear and speak it first, then read and write it.

Charlotte read Shakespeare with the children who were ten and older. An easy way to do Shakespeare is to read the play in story form to get a good feel for the plot and characters, then read part or all of the play in its original language, and watch a presentation of the play, either live or recorded. (As with any material that you give your children, please use discretion and wisdom in selecting which Shakespeare plays you want to use and previewing the presentations you will show them.)

Those are the stages you can use to ease into the Charlotte Mason Method in your homeschool. Remember to take your time and get comfortable with each step and each stage before you move on to the next. This is not a race. It involves many new decisions and new ways of thinking. So don't get in a hurry or feel like you're "behind"; you'll do just fine.

## *Chapter 7*

### *Save Some Time*

Ever since we began homeschooling, I've combined all the school-age children for as many subjects as possible. That decision has saved countless hours, both in planning and in teaching. I love to recommend that strategy everywhere we go.

This chapter will explain how we've done it. We'll talk about which subjects work well for this strategy, what it actually looks like in practice, how to do narration in a combined group, and a few other tips along the way.

#### *Which Subjects*

Let's talk about subjects first. You can't combine the children for all the school subjects. Some subjects need to be taught one-on-one, going at the individual's pace. So how do you know which subjects you can teach all together? The answer is in two little key words: "topic" and "skill."

Some subjects are topical, you just pick a topic and learn about it. For example, you might want to study Spain or the Life of Christ or the Middle Ages. Topical subjects work well for combining the children. It doesn't matter whether you study Spain when you are seven years old or seventeen years old; either works.

Other subjects are skill-dependent. These are the subjects that you have to teach in a certain order, making sure the child understands one concept before you move on to the next. For example, math is a skill-dependent subject. You need to know how to count before you learn to add. And you need to know how to add before you learn to multiply. Skill-based subjects need to be taught individually, in a certain order,

working one-on-one at each child's pace.

So to identify your Family subjects—the subjects that you can combine all your children for—look through the school subjects you are teaching and ask yourself, “Is this subject dependent on certain skills, or does it just cover topics that can be studied at any age?” The subjects that cover topics can be taught with all the grade levels combined.

Here are the subjects that we have done combined as a family over the years.

History

Geography

Bible

Poetry

Science (until the high school years, when it gets much more in-depth)

Shakespeare

Art and picture study

Music study

Nature study

Foreign Language (spoken)

You may be thinking, “Combining all my students for certain subjects sounds like a great idea, but what does it look like?” Glad you asked.

### ***Subjects with Books***

Let's talk first about Family subjects that are taught primarily with living books. In our house those subjects are history, geography, Bible, poetry, science (in the younger grades), and Shakespeare. Here's what combining the students looks like when we're using living books.

First I select a Family book on the topic we are studying. A good living book will appeal to a wide range of ages. So I select a good living book on our topic and read it aloud to all the children together.

Then I assign other books to the older students to read on their own. These Individual books are geared toward their reading levels, so the high school student reads more difficult books than the fifth-grade student. The Individual books are also

related to our selected topic, but they don't have to be exact duplicates of our Family read-aloud. They might elaborate on a specific event or person that is mentioned in our Family book or present some ideas about a different aspect.

By the way, I don't try to synchronize everybody's readings to be on exactly the same event or person at the same time the Family book mentions it. I tried that approach, but we got really bogged down and frustrated. So now the readings are all in some way related to our Family book but not restricted by it.

### *Narration As a Group*

When you're reading the Family book, all of the children can participate in the narration—the telling back in their own words. An easy way to do narration in a group is to call on one student to tell all he or she can recall, then go through the rest of the children one by one and ask if they have anything to add.

I can see that you're way ahead of me: “If I did that with my kids, they would catch on really fast and everybody would say, ‘No, nothing to add.’ ” That's when you can mix things up a little just for fun. Here are a few ideas.

Call on one person to start the retelling. When he has given a portion, stop him and let him choose the next person to continue the narration. Keep going in that way until the whole story has been retold and all the children have participated.

Make it a challenge. Start with the youngest child, who tells all he can remember. The next oldest must add something that hasn't been said yet. Then the next oldest must add something that hasn't been said yet. Remember, if all the facts have already been shared, the older ones can draw conclusions or offer considered opinions on character traits, etc. But each child must listen closely to be sure of what has already been told.

Use an idea from the Narration Ideas on page 39 and assign one or more students to do their narration in that way.

For the older students' additional individual readings, assign an oral or written narration to be given when they have finished their reading for the day.

“But what if I haven't read the book?” several moms have asked regarding their older students' narrations. “How do I know if the narration is sufficient?” Sometimes we moms can't read every book that we assign to all our children. Maybe the child is a voracious reader, and maybe Mom is a voracious reader too, but Mom also has to

spend time with all the other students and cooking and organizing and laundry and ... you get the idea. For most of us, there comes a time when we hand our child a book that we haven't read yet.

In those instances I listen to narrations from the standpoint of a learner rather than a teacher. I tell my child right up front that I haven't read that book yet, but I'm very interested in it and I'm counting on her to tell me all about it.

As I listen to the narration, I try to listen as an interested learner who is excited about what can be learned, what happened in today's reading, what might happen next. And if I make any mental connections—have any ah-ha moments—I share that joy of discovery with the student in an enthusiastic manner. I try to show appreciation for details that make the narration come alive to me.

In other words, I turn the tables and put the student in the place of the one who knows and myself in the place of the one who is eager to find out, not in order to assess or evaluate the student, but to learn for myself. This approach requires a mental shift on the part of the parent, but it has worked well for us.

### *Hands-On Subjects*

Many hands-on school subjects are easy to do all together as a family regardless of the ages of the children. You can easily do Picture Study, Music Study, Nature Study, and oral Foreign Language as a group.

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*See chapter 5 for a refresher on how to do these hands-on subjects.*

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You'll find that combining your children will save you planning time and simplify your teaching. It will also provide some great character-building opportunities as you encourage the children to protect the younger and respect the older. Plus, learning together can build many lasting memories.

So as you make plans for your home education, I encourage you to think about combining your children for as many subjects as possible.

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*The free SCM Curriculum Guide is set up with Family subjects and Individual subjects, and will give you specific suggestions for both. Take a look at [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).*

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## Chapter 8

### *Common Questions and Their Answers*

#### *Q: “How can I tell whether a book is a living book?”*

Here is a short list of what Charlotte said to look for when you are book shopping.

- *Make the subject come alive.* To make a real connection, a relation, with an idea, it must touch our emotions. Mere dry facts don't usually accomplish that vital aspect of real knowledge. Look for living books.
- *Get in touch with great ideas from great men.* As much as we, parents, would like to think that we know a lot, there is so much we don't know. So allow your children to form relations with great minds of the past and present. The best way to get in touch with those great minds is by reading their thoughts. Look for worthy ideas in books.
- *Well-written.* Charlotte described well-written books with these terms: “written with literary power,” “a word fitly spoken,” “worthy thoughts, well put,” “inspiring tales, well told.” Look for books written in good and simple English (or Spanish or French or whatever your primary language is) with a certain charm of style.
- *Not childish twaddle.* Avoid books that present “little pills of knowledge mixed into weak diluent.” Twaddle talks down to the child and assumes she can't understand more than tidbits of information. Look for books that you, the adult, will enjoy too.
- *Give the children the idea that knowledge is supremely attractive and that reading is delightful.* In other words, check both the content and the style in which it is

presented. Look for books that will give your child a love for learning through books.

- *The best you can find.* Charlotte admitted that sometimes it's very hard to find just the right book for just the right occasion. In those cases, choose the best you can find and remind yourself that those are the exceptions, not the rule. Look for the best of what's available at the time.

**Q: “So we just read these living books? That’s all?”**

Charlotte Mason gave us clear instructions on how to best use living books.

- *Enjoy the book yourself and share your enthusiasm.* There is something stimulating about enjoying a good book together.
- *Do not interpose yourself between the book and the child.* Allow the child to get directly in touch with the author's mind by reading her words. Let him form his own relation.
- *Do not ask direct questions on the content.* “Questions are an impertinence which we all resent” (Vol. 6, p. 260). When we ask direct questions, we are telling the child what his relation should be.
- *Require the child to narrate a paragraph or chapter after a single attentive reading.* Ask the child to tell you all she recalls, rather than quizzing her to find out what she doesn't remember. Let her tell you what relation she is forming. And keep in mind that a single reading is crucial to developing the habit of attention.
- *Let the child labor mentally to draw out the ideas that he forms relations with.* Charlotte was adamant that the child must do the work. It's easy to get lazy and wait for someone else (the parent or teacher) to spoon-feed information. But a truly educated person has learned how to feed himself, how to “self educate.” And if the book is living, that mental labor will not be tedious.
- *Require older children to read for themselves.* As much as we moms like to snuggle on the couch and read aloud to our children, Charlotte reminded us that children who can read on about a fourth-grade or fifth-grade level should start reading some of their books on their own. They need to see the words and punctuation as they read in order to add to their mental storehouses for spelling, grammar, and composition.

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**Q: “Are there other ways to narrate besides just ‘Tell me all you know?’”**

Yes, absolutely. Here are several more narration ideas.

### *Speaking*

Compose and tape a radio show that dramatizes the events read about.

Compare and contrast a practice in the account you read with a similar practice in modern society (for example, the feudal system vs. free enterprise; or infanticide in Rome vs. abortion today).

Compare and contrast two or three rulers read about who lived during the same time period or in the same country. Which one would you rather live under and why?

Play the part of the person you read about as he or she is being interviewed.

Explain what this story tells you about the character of the person you read about.

Name three things the person you read about is remembered for.

Tell all you know about . . . (for example, the habits of a bluejay or the founding of Rome).

Describe our . . . (for example, trip to the ocean or lighthouse experience).

Tell five things you learned from what you read.

Tell back the story in your own words.

Ask five questions covering the material you read.

(For Picture Study) Describe the picture you just saw.

(For Picture Study) Which picture did you like best of all you studied? Describe it.

Describe your favorite scene in the story you read.

Tell what happened into a tape recorder.

Tell how the scene reminds you of another story.

Say three questions you would ask if you were writing a test about what you just read.

Tell me anything new you learned from the passage.

Tell what may happen next and why.

Describe the problem and how it was solved or how it could be solved.

Tell what you think this means: “. . .”

Tell how you might have done things differently as a character.

Compare how people did things back in those days to how we do them today.  
Describe any clues left by the author in previous readings pointing to the plot twist.

Describe a character's worldview. Compare it to a Christian worldview.

Compare kindred spirits from this book with those who might be good friends from another book.

Compare yourself to a kindred spirit of yours from this book.

Tell what you have learned about history, geography, or science from this book.

Describe any golden deeds from this book.

### *Writing*

*Any of the Speaking ideas listed above, done in written form, plus . . .*

Write and perform a play that depicts the event read about.

Create a newspaper article about the event or person read. Put the article in a time-appropriate newspaper that you create; just the front page will do. Include ads, weather, and any other elements that would give the feel of the time period.

Write an obituary for a person you read about.

Write an interview with a person you read about.

Write journal or diary entries from the person's point of view whom you read about.

Write a letter to a younger sibling, explaining what you learned.

Write a poem that retells the story you read about.

Write five interview questions you'd like to ask the person you read about.

Write five questions covering the material you read.

Write five sentences about the passage.

Make a fill-in-the-blank quiz (oral or written) about the story for someone.

Write a letter (or e-mail) to someone about the passage.

Write a letter from one character to another.

Write a one-act play of a scene.

Write a letter from the author to the publisher about key scenes.

Write an imaginary conversation between two characters from two different books.

Write a review of the book for Amazon.com.

### *Drawing*

Draw a diagram of a machine or series of events you read about and explain it.

Draw a picture of the event or one particular scene in the event you read about.

Draw a map of the place you just read about.

(For Music Study) Draw a picture of what you hear in this composer's music.

(For Picture Study) Draw the basic components of this artist's work, putting each in its proper place.

Describe and/or draw a theme park based upon this book (adventure stories).

### *Drama*

Write and perform a play that depicts the event read about.

Dramatize and videotape a news broadcast that summarizes the events read about.

Spend 10 minutes planning a short skit based on what you read.

Describe how you would adapt the scene to a movie.

Describe special features for a DVD made from this book.

### *Building*

Make a model of a machine you read about and explain how it works (for example, the Trojan horse or Archimedes' stone-throwing machine).

Set up the scene you just read about with blocks, toys, Legos, etc.

Model something from the scene with clay.

### *Q: "Did Charlotte endorse a particular math program?"*

Charlotte did not advocate a specific math program, but she gave some good principles to keep in mind as we teach math. Many good math curricula are available for homeschoolers. Here are some components to look for when you're evaluating math curriculum to see how CM-friendly it is.

- *It introduces the child to things before symbols.* The child needs to see the concepts in action before putting them on paper with mathematical formulas and equations.
- *The curriculum writer or teacher/parent has a strong grasp of math.* Math, of all

subjects, is heavily dependent on the teacher—whether that teacher is the parent or the curriculum writer. Referring to mathematics, Charlotte said, “There is no one subject in which good teaching effects more, as there is none in which slovenly teaching has more mischievous results” (Vol. 1, p. 254). If your grasp of math is not as strong as you would like it to be, make sure the curriculum you use was written by a strong math teacher.

- *It is conducive to use in short lessons.* It might be written specifically that way or can be easily modified that way.
- *It gives you the ability to move at each child’s pace.* Use a curriculum that does not hold a child back or push a child ahead before he’s ready.
- *It emphasizes mastery of a concept.* Math must be learned well at each stage or the child will be lost in the next stage.
- *It gives lots of practice with new concepts.* The child should work with a new concept enough that he or she finds the function becoming second nature.
- *It should contain sufficient review.* A “sufficient” review doesn’t have to be long and drawn out. A good review could involve just enough problems to keep the child’s math skills fresh. Reviews can also let you know if the child didn’t really learn a concept the first time through and needs a refresher before moving on to the next concept.
- *It should provide a comprehensive, accurate answer key.* This component is crucial for busy homeschool moms.

***Q: “How did Charlotte teach spelling? What does prepared dictation look like?”***

Charlotte used a method called prepared dictation to teach spelling to her students who were ten and older. Did you notice that key word “prepared”? This is not cold-turkey dictation. With prepared dictation, the student studies the passage ahead of time so he is prepared when the dictation happens.

Here are the simple steps to prepared dictation:

1. Select a passage from a good living book. (The *Spelling Wisdom* series at [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com) has already done this step for you.)
2. Look at the passage and identify any words the student doesn’t know how to spell.

3. Help the student to, or assign the student to independently, study those words.
4. Tell the student to look at the punctuation and capitalization of the passage too. (Some moms like to assign the passage for copywork as part of the preparation process.)
5. When the student is ready, dictate the passage phrase by phrase while the student writes it.

**Q: “Where can I find out more about the Charlotte Mason Method?”**

Here are some great resources to help you keep learning.

- *Education Is an Atmosphere, a Discipline, a Life*—A free e-book that gives an overview of Charlotte’s ideas about education and includes lots of practical tips. Download your free copy from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).
- *All-Day Charlotte Mason Seminar* on DVD—Walks you through each school subject and how to teach it with Charlotte Mason methods. Includes a session on good habits. Hours of encouragement and help. Available from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).
- *Planning Your Charlotte Mason Education*—Offers five simple steps to help you design a custom plan for your family, from the big picture to the daily schedule. Available from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).
- *Charlotte Mason’s Original Homeschooling Series*—Charlotte’s original writings, filled with her ideas on education, parents, children, character, and methods. Available in printed form or free on the Internet. (Books in the series: *Home Education*, Vol. 1; *Parents and Children*, Vol. 2; *School Education*, Vol. 3; *Ourselves*, Vol. 4; *Formation of Character*, Vol. 5; *A Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 6.)
- *A Charlotte Mason Education* by Catherine Levison—Gives a great overview of Charlotte’s methods in short chapters.
- *More Charlotte Mason Education* by Catherine Levison—Adds more details, deals with some specific questions especially with older students, and even gives some sample schedules.
- *A Charlotte Mason Companion: Personal Reflections on the Gentle Art of Learning*

by Karen Andreola—Offers a look at how one mom incorporates Charlotte’s methods into her homeschool. Lots of wonderful ideas, recommendations, and practical tips.

- *Charlotte Mason Study Guide* by Penny Gardner—Arranges pertinent quotes from Charlotte’s original writings into sections centered on various topics, such as the child, habits and character, narration, goals of education, the arts, and more.
- *When Children Love to Learn: A Practical Application of Charlotte Mason’s Philosophy for Today*, edited by Elaine Cooper—A collection of articles by various teachers and administrators who have sought to incorporate Charlotte’s philosophy and methods in modern classrooms.

And here are some resources on forming good habits.

- *Smooth and Easy Days*—A free e-book that will help you learn more about cultivating good habits in your child’s life. Download your free copy from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).
- *Laying Down the Rails* workshop—The quick-start guide that will teach you how to instill good habits in less than an hour. Available in CD or DVD format from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).
- *Laying Down the Rails: A Charlotte Mason Habits Handbook*—The complete reference guide to Charlotte Mason habit training. Includes all the habits Charlotte recommended and what she said about each one. Available from [SimplyCharlotteMason.com](http://SimplyCharlotteMason.com).