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SIMPLY CHARLOTTE MASON PRESENTS

# Spelling Wisdom

SAMPLE

*Learn today's 6,000 most frequently used words  
presented in the writings of great men and women of history.*

Compiled and Edited by Sonya Shafer

**Book 1**

American Spelling Version

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# Spelling Wisdom

## Book One

(American Version)

Learn today's 6,000 most frequently used words,  
presented in the writings of great men and women of history

Compiled and Edited  
by  
Sonya Shafer

Spelling Wisdom, Book One (American Version)  
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# Introduction

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## A Word about Dictation

Just as Charlotte Mason taught handwriting in the context of an interesting passage or text, so she taught spelling, not in isolated lists of words but in the context of useful and beautiful language.

We can present the child with a list of words to learn, such as: “am, will, can, I, ought.” How much more pleasant to rearrange that list of words into an inspiring or interesting thought, like Charlotte Mason’s motto for students: “I am, I can, I ought, I will.”

Charlotte used this principle with prepared dictation to teach spelling, beginning in about the third or fourth grade. In prepared dictation, the student is given a passage to study before he is required to write it—the chief objective being to write it correctly.

Miss Mason believed that “the gift of spelling depends upon the power the eye possesses to ‘take’ (in a photographic sense) a detailed picture of a word; and this is a power and habit which must be cultivated in children from the first. When they have read ‘cat,’ they must be encouraged to see the word with their eyes shut, and the same habit will enable them to image ‘Thermopylae.’”

She discouraged teachers from allowing their students to see a word incorrectly spelled, for “once the eye sees a misspelt word, that image remains; and if there is also the image of the word rightly spelt, we are perplexed as to which is which.”

Of course, students will not spell every word correctly every time, therefore, it becomes “the teacher’s business to prevent false spelling, and, if an error has been made, to hide it away, as it were, so that the impression may not become fixed.”

“Dictation lessons, conducted in some such way as the following, usually result in good spelling.”

(Quotations from *Home Education*, pp. 240, 241)

# How to Use *Spelling Wisdom*

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1. Once or twice a week **give** your student a dictation exercise you want him to learn. Simply print or copy the exercise from this book. (You have permission to duplicate the exercises for use within your immediate household.)

2. Look through the exercise together and **identify** the words that you or the student thinks needs his attention in order to spell them confidently.

3. Instruct the student to **study** the identified words—one at a time—until he is sure he can spell every word in the exercise. This study period may take anywhere from a few minutes to several days, depending on the length of the exercise and the needs of the student. Set aside a little time each day for brief but consistent study of the exercise as needed. (See below for how to study a word.)

4. When the student is confident that he can spell every word in the exercise, **dictate** the passage to him one phrase at a time, saying the phrase only once. Pause after each phrase is spoken to allow him time to write it. Keep a careful eye on his efforts. If a word is misspelled, quickly cover it with a small self-stick note so its false spelling won't be engraved in the student's mind.

5. After the dictation is complete, the student should study any words that he misspelled and, when he is ready, **write** the words correctly on the self-stick notes.

## How to Study a Word

You may want to work with younger or uncertain students to teach them how to study an unfamiliar word, as outlined below. Older students or students more accustomed to using the method below may study independently.

- Copy the word carefully, making sure it is spelled correctly.
- Look at the word until you can close your eyes and see it spelled correctly in your mind.
- Practice writing the word only if the teacher is nearby to immediately erase any misspellings.

Along with Charlotte's method of visualizing the word, we might add one or two study techniques for students who like to use their other senses in the learning process.

- Say the letters aloud in order while looking at the word.
- "Write" the word with your first finger on a sheet of paper or other smooth surface, being careful to look at the word and spell it correctly.



# About *Spelling Wisdom*

---

When I read about Charlotte Mason’s method of using prepared dictation to teach spelling, I loved the idea and wanted to use it. But I was concerned about missing some necessary words as I selected dictation passages to use. I felt very secure using my traditional spelling lists that I knew included the most frequently used words in the English language, which my children definitely needed to learn to spell.

So I decided to try to combine the two: dictation exercises that I could be sure included the most frequently used words in the English language. The *Spelling Wisdom* series is the result of that effort.

The five books’ exercises become progressively longer and contain more difficult words as you work through the series. Each book contains 140 exercises. If you cover two exercises per week, you should be able to finish a *Spelling Wisdom* book in a little less than two school years. Charlotte began dictation exercises with students around the third or fourth grade. With that schedule in mind, here is a rough model of which books correspond to which grades:

Grades 3–4	Book One
Grades 5–6	Book Two
Grades 7–8	Book Three
Grades 9–10	Book Four
Grades 11–12	Book Five

## Content

The exercises cover a broad range of subjects and topics to reinforce Charlotte’s love of a full and generous education. Because the books are not thematic, you can use and benefit from the exercises no matter what you may be studying in other school subjects.

I wanted to keep Miss Mason’s high standards for beautiful thoughts and engaging narratives, so the sources of these exercises are speeches, letters, and quotations of famous people; excerpts from historical documents; descriptions of historical people and events; poetry; Scripture; excerpts from great literature; and selections from old readers and books for young people. Most of the passages were written prior to 1900. (I did find it necessary to write a few original exercises that involved the more modern words, like “infrastructure” and “computer.”) Each book’s bibliography and table of contents will provide more specific information as to which sources were used.

The 6,000 most-frequently-used English words included in these exercises are taken from A General Service List of English Words by Michael West (Longman, London 1953) and The Academic Word List by Coxhead (1998, 2000). We have also included more than 6,500 other words that we think well-educated children should know. These bonus words are in addition to those on the lists, making a total of more than 12,500 English words covered in the *Spelling Wisdom* series of books.

# About *Spelling Wisdom* (cont.)

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## **Index**

The index in the back of each *Spelling Wisdom* book will give you a list of all the words included in that book's exercises. If you want to concentrate on or review a particular word, just look in the book's index to find any other exercises that use it. The index should also prove to be a friendly help if you spot a word or two in the child's written narrations that need some attention. You can easily find and assign a dictation exercise that uses the word in question and reinforces its correct spelling.

## **Spelling Variations**

You may have noticed that the older writings contain some different spellings than we use today. For example, in Charlotte Mason's *Home Education* passage quoted at the beginning of this introduction, the word we spell today as "misspelled" was originally spelled "misspelt." Because the main objective of dictation is correct spelling, I updated such older words to modern spelling.

Two versions of the *Spelling Wisdom* series are available: American and British. The British version contains the British spelling preferences that I'm aware of. If I overlooked a possible alternate spelling, you can easily write your preferred spelling on the printed sheet that you give your student. (Then would you please e-mail us with the details of the change, or any other corrections, so I can change it in the book? Just contact us at <http://simplycm.com/contact>. Thank you!)

## **Poetry Variations**

Many poets "take liberties" with word spellings in order to make the words fit in their assigned poetical places. Several of the poetry selections in these dictation exercises contained contracted words, such as "o'er" instead of "over." Since the goal of dictation is correct spelling, and missing letters don't help us reach that goal, I replaced contracted words with their spelled-out versions. You can easily enjoy the original form of the poems in your regular poetry studies, but for dictation purposes I thought the prudent path was to display the words correctly spelled.

## **Punctuation Variations**

Because Charlotte advocated dictating "with a view to the pointing [punctuation], which the children are expected to put in as they write," I have attempted to edit the punctuation of the older passages to bring them more closely into conformity with modern punctuation guidelines. Encourage the children to make sure they are familiar with where the capital letters and punctuation marks go in their assigned exercises, even as they make sure they can spell all the words.

It is my hope that this collection of dictation exercises will make your journey more enjoyable and your path a little smoother on the "royal road to spelling."

(Quotations from *Home Education*, pp. 241, 242)

*Exercise 1*  
**Motto for Students**  
By Charlotte Mason

---

I am;

I can;

I ought;

I will.

*Exercise 6*  
**Happy Thought**  
By Robert Louis Stevenson

---

The world is so full of a number of things,  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

*Exercise 10*  
**Inferior Books**  
From *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens

---

There are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts.

## *Exercise 117*

# The Ant

By Oliver Herford

---

My child, observe the useful Ant,  
How hard she works each day;  
She works as hard as adamant  
(That's very hard, they say.)  
She has no time to gallivant;  
She has no time to play.  
Let Fido chase his tail all day;  
Let Kitty play at tag;  
She has no time to throw away,  
She has no tail to wag;  
She hurries round from morn till night;  
She never, never sleeps;  
She seizes everything in sight,  
She drags it home with all her might,  
And all she takes she keeps.

## Exercise 128

# Dew

From *Home Geography for Primary Grades*

---

The sun is all the time heating the water on the land and in the sea, and changing it into vapor, which rises in the air. We cannot see the vapor, but it is in the air around us.

If the vapor in the air is suddenly cooled, a strange thing happens. Some of it quickly changes back into water. You have often seen, in the early morning, little drops of water hanging like pearls upon the blades of grass.

Now, where do these drops come from? They come from the air. The vapor in the air floats against the cold grass and leaves, and is cooled and changed into tiny drops of water. We call this dew.

## *Exercise 134*

# The Squire

From *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson

---

In the meantime, the squire and Captain Smollett were still on pretty distant terms with one another. The squire made no bones about the matter; he despised the captain. The captain, on his part, never spoke but when he was spoken to, and then sharp and short and dry, and not a word wasted. He owned, when driven into a corner, that he seemed to have been wrong about the crew, that some of them were as brisk as he wanted to see and all had behaved fairly well. As for the ship, he had taken a downright fancy to her. “She’ll lie a point nearer the wind than a man has a right to expect of his own married wife, sir. But,” he would add, “all I say is, we’re not home again, and I don’t like the cruise.”

The squire, at this, would turn away and march up and down the deck, chin in the air.

“A trifle more of that man,” he would say, “and I shall explode.”