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SIMPLY CHARLOTTE MASON PRESENTS

# Spelling Wisdom

SAMPLE

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presented in the writings of great men and women of history.*

Compiled and Edited by Sonya Shafer

**Book 4**  
American Spelling Version

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## Book Four

(American Version)

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by  
Sonya Shafer

Spelling Wisdom, Book Four (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*

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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 2*

# Eloquence

From *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

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Catherine wished to congratulate him but knew not what to say, and her eloquence was only in her eyes. From them, however, the eight parts of speech shone out most expressively, and James could combine them with ease.

## *Exercise 5*

# On War

By Sir Winston Churchill

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Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

## *Exercise 9*

# So Live

By William Cullen Bryant

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So live, that when thy summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan which moves  
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,  
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

## Exercise 107

# Riding Camels

From *Wonders of the Tropics* by Henry Davenport Northrop

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Our hero gives an interesting and withal humorous account of the experiences of himself and wife voyaging on the “ships of the desert.” He says:

“When a sharp cut from the stick of the guide induces the camel to break into a trot, the torture of the rack is a pleasant tickling compared to the sensation of having your spine driven by a sledge-hammer from below, half a foot deeper into the skull. The human frame may be inured to almost anything; thus the Arabs, who have always been accustomed to this kind of exercise, hardly feel the motion, and the portion of the body most subject to pain in riding a rough camel upon two bare pieces of wood for a saddle becomes naturally adapted for such rough service, as monkeys become hardened from constantly sitting upon rough surfaces.

“The children commence almost as soon as they are born, as they must accompany their mothers in their annual migrations; and no sooner can the young Arab sit astride and hold on, than he is placed behind his father’s saddle, to which he clings, while he bumps upon the bare back of the jolting camel. Nature quickly arranges a horny protection to the nerves by the thickening of the skin; therefore an Arab’s opinion of the action of a riding camel should never be accepted without a personal trial. What appears delightful to him may be torture to you, as a strong breeze and a rough sea may be charming to a sailor but worse than death to a landsman.”

*Exercise 112*  
**Friends, Romans, Countrymen**  
From *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

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Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;  
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.  
The evil that men do lives after them;  
The good is oft interred with their bones;  
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus  
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:  
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,  
And grievously hath Caesar answered it.  
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—  
For Brutus is an honorable man;  
So are they all, all honorable men—  
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.  
He was my friend, faithful and just to me:  
But Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And Brutus is an honorable man.  
He hath brought many captives home to Rome  
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:  
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?  
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:  
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And Brutus is an honorable man.  
You all did see that on the Lupercal  
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And, sure, he is an honorable man.  
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,  
But here I am to speak what I do know.  
You all did love him once, not without cause:  
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?  
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,  
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;  
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,  
And I must pause till it come back to me.



## *Exercise 117*

# Our Great Catastrophe

From *Journey to the Center of the Earth* by Jules Verne

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My uncle and I gazed on each other with haggard eyes, clinging to the stump of the mast, which had snapped asunder at the first shock of our great catastrophe. We kept our backs to the wind, not to be stifled by the rapidity of a movement which no human power could check.

Hours passed away. No change in our situation; but a discovery came to complicate matters and make them worse.

In seeking to put our cargo into somewhat better order, I found that the greater part of the articles embarked had disappeared at the moment of the explosion when the sea broke in upon us with such violence. I wanted to know exactly what we had saved, and with the lantern in my hand, I began my examination. Of our instruments, none were saved but the compass and the chronometer; our stock of ropes and ladders was reduced to the bit of cord rolled round the stump of the mast! Not a spade, not a pickaxe, not a hammer was left us; and, irreparable disaster! we had only one day's provisions left.

I searched every nook and corner, every crack and cranny in the raft. There was nothing. Our provisions were reduced to one bit of salt meat and a few biscuits.