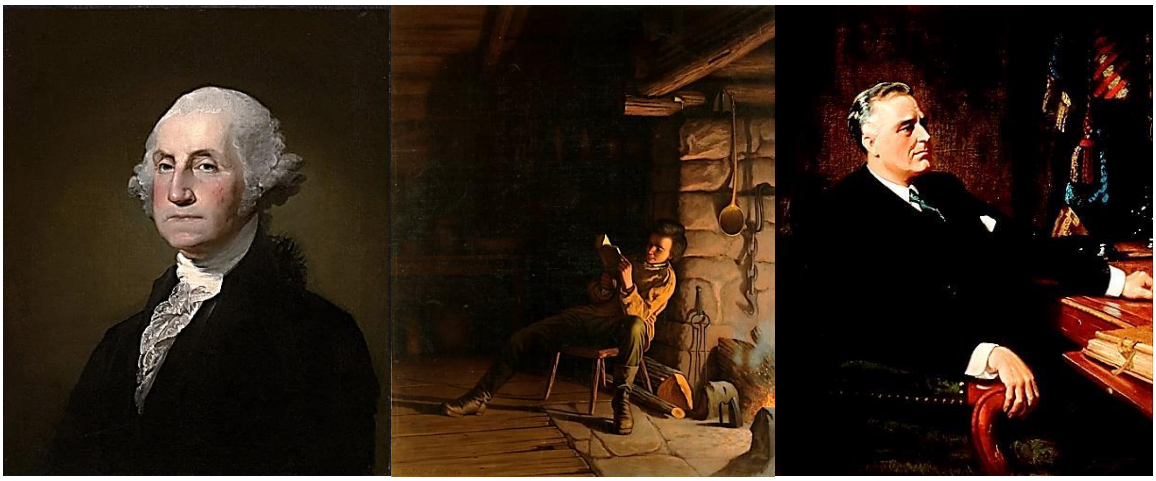
# Teaching Notes



# Lower School A

Written by Lisa Kelly

Years 5 & 6

# Schedules & Overview

# Curriculum by Programs

## Overview

## What is A Mind in the Light?

A Mind in the Light offers a K-12 curriculum for those who wish to follow the principles of Charlotte Mason. It is currently a work in progress.

There are two scopes and sequences currently emerging. A scope and sequence includes the scope, which is the coverage of topics included in a curriculum, and the sequence, which is the arrangement of that coverage. Both the scope and the sequence of Curriculum by Years will differ slightly from Curriculum by Programs, but these differences will not be dramatically significant.

Both plans when completed will give teachers and parents a complete guide for each specific year and for each specific program. The guides of the lower years will include narration suggestions, teaching notes, exams, reading schedules and more in the subjects of history, science, natural history, geography, literature, art, citizenship and music. The upper years will turn to a humanities approach with regard to history, integrating literature, primary sources, geography, art history, citizenship and philosophy. The upper years will contain all that is included for the lower years, but will also include extensions in writing and Great Ideas Discussion prompts.

## What is Curriculum by Years?

Curriculum by Years is the scope and sequence used by parents and teachers who do not wish to combine their children together in most lessons. This allows each child to progress at their own level from one year to the next with book lists and topics of study specific to the particular year they are studying. This is the curriculum for which Year One: The Complete Guide and Year Two: The Complete Guide has been completed. Year Three: The Complete Guide is currently underway.

## What is Curriculum by Programs?

Curriculum by Programs is the scope and sequence used by parents and teachers who wish to combine their students together into groups, working more often under the same umbrellas of topics and history time periods, often using the same books. Now published: Foundations: Early School and Program I: Lower School B. The programs are modeled after the PNEU programs of which Ms. Mason was the founder, but with some alterations.

## Who is Charlotte Mason?

Charlotte Mason (1842-1923) was a British educator whose ideas and methods focused on living ideas, the science of relations, habit training and so much more.

She became a teacher and then later established the House of Education, a training school for governesses. While teaching, she realized that the parents of children being educated would benefit from access to basic knowledge about children and education. The Parents' Educational Union or PEU was formed and later a periodical review was created to aid in this effort. In 1892, the word National was added to PEU and became PNEU, or Parents' National Educational Union.

She wrote a series of geography books and then later a six volume set of books setting forth her teaching ideas and methods of education.

Some of the terms and words which are most familiar to us in connection with Charlotte Mason include narration, living books, habit training, focused lessons, copywork, prepared dictation, nature study, handcrafts and artist and composer studies.

## What was a PNEU program?

A PNEU (Parents' National Educational Union) school was a school which followed the principles of Charlotte Mason. The PNEU created programs which were issued each term and were sent out to enrolled schools and families. Each program listed the books (for both students and teachers) and instructional work meant to be taught/studied for the term as well as the needed exams for that term. Each program included the work expected for each Form.

## What are forms?

Forms were how the educational years were grouped and divided in a Charlotte Mason curriculum. Form I included Years 1-3; Form II included Years 4-6; Form III included Years 7-8, Form IV included Year 9; Form V included Years 10-11 and Form VI included Year 12. This curriculum has slightly altered this arrangement.

## Is this curriculum secular?

This curriculum is designed without religion, with the idea that those who wish to add it may do so as they wish. A couple of the fiction selections have a very Christian "feel" to them. These were included, since they are beautiful works of literature. The focus of this curriculum is to provide inspiring and imaginative literature to children. Some books have moved to either optional reading lists or to free additional reading lists that were known for being specifically unfair to other faiths. An attempt to balance the desire to not offend with the opportunity to teach new perspective has been made. Any questions or concerns can certainly be directed to the author through email.

## How is Curriculum by Programs arranged?

With Curriculum by Programs, children in Pre-Preparatory, Preparatory and Year One will begin the Early School level in Foundations and will remain at this level for three years or until each student has been deemed ready to move on to Lower School B. This foundation level does not fit within the

historical divisions laid out for the remaining levels. Only when your student has moved to Lower School B, will students begin to work through the programs according to historical time period divisions.

- Program I –Pre-17th Century History
- Program II -16th-18th Century History
- Program III -19th Century History
- Program IV -20th+ Century History

American, World and British History follow these divisions, while Ancient History begins in Year Five and follows its own divisions.

This arrangement allows children to spend more time in one specific group before moving on to the next. This will make combining children together a little easier and will compare to grade levels less specifically. Children can move into and out of groups based on their needs rather than based on the typical year-to-year movement.

Year One fit best in Early School, since Year One students were typically receiving a more specific but gentle year of their own anyway. Year One students did not study history within the same time periods as the rest of the school generally did. This makes their year more unique and was better aligned with children in their beginning years. Year Four, too, typically had their own introductory year and better aligned with children in Lower School B. This allows them to share in many books, resources and lessons, yet, as the oldest in their group, receive extensions to their study.

## What does a program include?

Each program will be designed for a 3 term/36 week year*. The programs have been divided into two parts: an outline guide and the corresponding lesson guide(s). The outline guide will include the complete books lists, a suggested schedule, teaching notes, recitation selections and suggestions for picture study, music appreciation, songs and handcrafts. The lesson guide will include the lesson plans for all of the main books for its suggested level (s) as well as exams. Subjects included are history, citizenship, natural history & science, geography, literature and poetry.

*Typical PNEU programs were designed for one term, but these programs will be designed for the entire year.

## Can my student wait until Year Five to study World History?

Students can omit the World History stream (which uses *A Child's History of the World* by V. M. Hillyer) when using the Curriculum by Program's scope and sequence, if you prefer. You would then pick up ancient history in Year Five as it was traditionally added in PNEU programs. You would have completed one full history rotation (4 years) of American History and would have begun British History (which uses *Our Island Story* by H. E. Marshall) in Year Four.

There is certainly enough room in the schedule to complete both streams of history (American and World). It is designed to be included in the final year of Foundations and the first two years of Lower School B, so studying both streams simultaneously should not be overwhelming for your students. This option is included for those families who feel strongly about beginning with American History only.

# Renovating the Routine

## Morning Lessons

I've made adjustments to the typical daily routine of a PNEU student. Each adjustment is meant to help this newly renovated schedule fit a modern family's habits and routines and to allow teachers to bring their students together more often.

According to several sources, including the PNEU article "The Work and Aims of the Parents' Union School" by Miss O' Ferrall, children spent the morning in lessons and this was when most of the "bookwork" was completed. She writes:

> And now we will take a look at the carefully arranged time-tables. Practically all the bookwork is done in the morning when the children are fresh and ready to tackle the more arduous part of their work. The hours are not long—two and a half for the first form, four for the Vth and VIth; an hour more later in the day for II, III, and IV and a couple for the Vth and VIth. This is exclusive of practising, dancing, sewing and a certain amount of reading. The lessons are carefully arranged for the various days, no lesson is longer than twenty minutes in the first form whilst in the Vth and VIth the average length is about forty minutes. (pp. 777-787)

In accordance to this general layout, the suggested daily schedule which follows these notes sets the morning hours to be devoted to the main bulk of lessons for each day. Be sure to fit a short 15 min. break midway through the morning for children to play outside for fresh air and exercise, refreshing their minds and attitudes for further lessons.

## Lunch and Free Play

After morning lessons, the children would then break for lunch and more free play. It would be beneficial if students ate lunch just after their morning lessons as they would be in need of sustenance, although this also benefits children in that their free play can then move smoothly into a nature walk or nature experience.

## Nature Experiences

Typically, PNEU students were expected to spend time outdoors experiencing nature in the afternoons. This is labeled as "Nature Experiences" on the suggested schedule and follows lunch and free play. It is expected that one day per week is allotted to allow for a longer nature experience. This would also be a great day for nature-related field trips. This longer experience is scheduled by this curriculum on Day 5. It's the end of the week and good day for breaking away from the routine and getting outside. Charlotte Mason considered these longer experiences important for all ages. She writes: "It seems to me a *sine quâ non* (an essential condition) of a living education that all school

children of whatever grade should have one half-day in the week, *throughout the year*, in the fields" (*School Education*, p. 237).

The nature walks and experiences on Days 1-4 can be of a shorter nature, keeping the teacher from feeling overwhelmed with additional travel or time constraints on those days.

## Children's Hour

After researching through Charlotte Mason's own *Home Education* series as well as through articles from the *Parents' Review*, I've collected a handful of quotes in reference to this phrase. It seems that the "Children's Hour" was in reference to a time period each day when parents might read aloud to their children, typically, it seems, in the evening.

Here Ms. Mason refers to it when writing about geography in *Home Education*, "But we are considering lessons as 'Instruments of Education;' and the sort of knowledge of the world I have indicated will be conveyed rather by readings in the 'Children's Hour' and at other times than by way of lessons" (Vol. 1).

She again refers to it here with: "In connection with this subject let me add a word about story-telling. Here are some of the points which make a story worth studying to tell to the nestling listeners in many a sweet "Children's Hour";—graceful and artistic details; moral impulse of a high order, conveyed with a strong and delicate touch; sweet human affection; …" (Vol. 5) as she writes in *Formation of Character*.

In general, it seems that most of the books listed in a typical PNEU program for Form I could be read during the allotted lesson time hours, except with some specific books included for Sundays and holiday reading. Additionally, there is a caveat found at the end of the PNEU article "The Home Training of Children" that Tales, not included in some versions of the PNEU time tables, might be read during the "Children's Hour". By Form II, where students were generally reading many books independently, books set aside under the category "Reading" in the PNEU programs were understood to be read in the evening and on holidays. Additional, different books from Form I were selected for Sunday Reading for Form II and up as well. Several articles from the *Parents' Review* share suggested book titles for the "Children's Hour".

One program for Form II gives this in the General Notes, "Members are asked to remember that an average pupil should cover the whole program suitable for his age. The lighter portions of Literature (novel, play and poems) are read for amusement in the evenings and also in the holidays" (Program 125). This suggests that many books listed under Literature were to be read independently by the student in the evenings and during the holidays, so it was important that teachers/parents accounted for that when scheduling the lessons. Charlotte Mason built her curriculum on the idea that students would love to read and that reading works by Shakespeare, Longfellow and Scott would be enjoyable. This meant it was not thought of in the same way as "homework".

As the program numbers continued (increasing by number as the years increased), more details were included in the programs. These later programs included suggestions for Sunday Readings and even a newly added list of suggestions for Holiday and Evening Reading for Form I.

Books typically included for these categories are listed below:

**Sunday Readings**

- Books to support religion –Bible history, prayers, hymns, etc.
- Books to support moral lessons such as *Parables from Nature* and *A Book of Golden Deeds*
- Biographies such as *The Story of Christopher Columbus* and *The Story of Nelson*

**Holiday and Evening Readings** (these were often categorized as Reading for Form II +)

- History and Geography such as *Stories from Chinese History* and *The Book of the Long Trail*
- Myths and Legends such as *The Mabinogion* and *Age of Fable*
- Poetry such Longfellow's *Golden Legend* and Homer's *Odyssey*
- Shakespeare such as *Julius Caesar* and *King John*
- Fiction such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *Theras: The Story of an Athenian Boy*

In order to better fit our modern times, I've moved the suggested evening time period for the "Children's Hour" to an earlier afternoon time period. This allows families more free time later for those who participate in extracurricular activities. Feel free to add a snack or tea time element to it. I've also added in several other Charlotte Mason activities that were often completed in the afternoon such as picture study, poetry readings and composer study. Rotate between the book selections being read aloud and your additional activities such as art and music study.

Please note that while some time tables show a specific time allotment for "Tales" in Form I, some do not. In fact, the one which did not suggested that these be read later, such as during "Children's Hour". Tales, myths, legends, poetry and literature will **all** be included in the works read during "Children's Hour" for this curriculum. Any of these selections which do not fit during this time period can be moved down to the later period of "Storytime". Please adjust as best fits your family.

# Quiet Time and Extracurriculars

Next, in the renovated routine, comes "Quiet Time and Extracurriculars". This time allotment is designed to allow students to work quietly on handcrafts, painting, (watercolor, brush painting, etc.) and independent reading. Additionally, older students will work mostly independently on nature notebooks, Century Books and perhaps other work not quite finished from the morning.

Children today are typically involved in extracurricular activities. This is very different from children of late 19th Century and early 20th Century. These activities are generally scheduled with children who attend school until the late afternoon in mind, meaning the hours of 4-6 pm. This schedule was adjusted with this in mind. It's important to note that the work listed above would take place on

days when children are not engaged in extracurricular activities. This time might also be used for instrument practice.

This is in keeping with a typical PNEU student's day as we know from Miss Ferrall's account in the previous article "The Work and Aims of the Parents' Union School". She writes "Then comes 3:45 when the children have an hour's work before tea—handicrafts, singing, painting, picture study are the type of lessons given at this time. Then comes tea, after which the children read and sew and have some time to amuse themselves" (pp. 777-787). Additionally, in "A Liberal Education for All", it is written under General Notes that "Music, Handicrafts, Field Work, Dancing, Nature Note Books, Century Books, are taken in the afternoons."

I've included some of these activities to fit within the time period for "Quiet Time and Extracurriculars" and some have been allocated to a different time period. For example, Music technique, which focuses on singing and music theory, takes place in the morning as it requires everyone to be together and more direct instruction. Composer study takes place during the "Children's Hour" but could also be listened to during this time period. Some handcraft work takes place in the morning, allowing for some instruction, while some of it can take place independently during this time period. Nature Note Books can be finished up, as needed, and Century Books can be worked on by older students as well. Picture Study will take place during the "Children's Hour". Many of these adjustments were based on the simple idea that some fit better with the quiet, independent premise and some fit better with a noisier, group premise. It better benefits the teachers if the students can do much of the work themselves during "Quiet Time and Extracurriculars", leaving them with some much needed quiet time for themselves or options to work individually with a student, as needed.

## Dinner/Supper

The next time slot allows for a family to have dinner or supper.

## Storytime/Independent Reading and Games

This is then followed by "Storytime/Independent Reading and Games". "Storytime" falls into the time period where the "Children's Hour" was originally intended. It's in this time bracket that families can fit books which overflow from the schedule (such as from "The Children's Hour") or simply allow for free reading choices. Many of the books which fit this same description could be read on Sundays or over the Holidays, too.

Older children may wish to read independently.

Consider creating an occasional Game Night for the family. It's fun for everyone and allows the family to be together.

# ~A Suggested Daily Schedule~

| Time | Activities | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| 9-12:30 | Lessons | Years 1-3 can stop at 11:30; Years 4-6 can stop at 12:00 and Years 7+ can stop at 12:30 but should start at 8:30.<br>Include a short 15 min. outside break midway through the morning. |
| 12:30-1:30 | Lunch & Free Play | Time for lunch and extra time for free play outside. |
| 1:30-3 | Nature Experiences | Older students could have their nature experiences from 2-3, leaving 1:30-2 for additional lesson time; they will also need 1-2 days for science lab work. |
| 3-4 | The Children's Hour | -Can include snack or tea time<br>-Involves reading aloud, art study and music study |
| 4-6 | Quiet Time and Extracurriculars | This time allotment is set aside for independent reading, handcrafts and extracurricular activities. Older students can also use this time for additional independent work when not engaged in extracurricular activities. This time might also be used for instrument practice. |
| 6-7 | Dinner/Supper | |
| 7+ | Storytime/Independent Reading and Games | Evening Reading at this time would include stories read to younger children and time for older children to read independently. Some books may overflow into this time period which don't fit within the "Children's Hour". Playing games as a family is always a great option. |

**Note: This schedule is somewhat modeled after the description of a typical PNEU day, although several adjustments have been made to make it more appealing to a modern family. This is just one possible way to set up each day, so that you may better align it with the principles upon which this education is founded. Absolutely, feel free to adjust this schedule to better fit your family and your lifestyle.**

# Sample Schedule -LSA (Years 5-6)

| Day One | Day Two | Day Three | Day Four | Day Five |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Math | Math | Math | Math | Math |
| Natural History | Natural History | Natural History | British History | American History |
| Handwriting | Dictation | Handwriting | Dictation | Handwriting |
| Free Play | Free Play | Free Play | Free Play | Free Play |
| Music<br>Singing-Foreign Language Songs, Hymns, Folk Songs | Music<br>Singing-Foreign Language Songs, Hymns, Folk Songs | Music Appreciation & Theory | Art Technique<br>Drawing, Painting Sculpting | Music<br>Singing-Foreign Language Songs, Hymns, Folk Songs |
| Foreign Language | Foreign Language | British History | Foreign Language 2/Latin | Foreign Language |
| Recitations | Drawing | Recitations | Geography | Handcrafts |
| Grammar | Citizenship | Grammar | American History | Ancient History |
| | | Foreign Language 2/Latin | OPT<br>Botany/H &HB or Cl. | |
| LUNCH & BREAK | | | | |
| NATURE EXPERIENCES & NOTEBOOK<br>Day 5 is meant to have extra time allotted for a longer nature experience. | | | | |
| THE CHILDEN'S HOUR<br>Bring the family together to read aloud literature, tales, and poetry as well as conduct your picture study. You may also wish to make this a tea or snack time. | | | | |
| 1. Poetry<br>2. Literature | 1. Picture Study<br>2. Literature | Literature | 1. Poetry<br>2. Legends & Tales | 1. Myths<br>2. Literature, as needed |
| QUIET TIME & EXTRACURRICULARS<br>Give your students this afternoon time to use for independent reading, additional drawing, painting and brushwork, handcrafts, instrument practice and extracurricular activities. Play the selected pieces of the composer being studied during this time. Older students might work on their Book of Centuries, Copybooks or Commonplace Books. Younger students might make entries into their copybooks, but at this level should still be supervised. | | | | |
| DINNER/SUPPER | | | | |
| STORYTIME/GAMES/INDEPENDENT READING<br>Use this time for reading aloud or as time for older children to read independently. Some books which don't fit within the "Children's Hour" may overflow into this time period.<br>Playing games as a family is always a great option. | | | | |

# Notes for Sample Schedule

Y5=Year Five and Y6=Year Six

* Natural History lessons will be a shared activity with all students of LSA. Students who are sharing natural history lessons with LSB will share these lessons on Days 1-3. Work in botany, health & human body and classification can be done on Day 4.
* British History will be completed by all students in LSA as well as students in LSB/Y4 and has been allotted two days per week.
* Two days have been allotted for American History.
* Ancient History and Citizenship begins in this level. Students will also begin to keep a Century Book.
* Students in LSA should use a copybook, with students in Y6 moving into a Commonplace Book, if deemed ready.
* Grammar and Dictation are scheduled twice per week. Handwriting should be maintained as well.
* Narrations should continue to be oral, but at this time students should complete up to 2 written narrations per week. The latter expectation can certainly include charts, lists, letters and other forms of written narration work. Picture narrations, maps and dramatic narrations would not be considered forms of written narration work, although these can certainly be utilized for variety.
* Although students at this level often read well, continue to have students read some books and poetry aloud.
* In LSA, consider adding Latin or a second foreign language. See the slot which reads "Foreign Language 2/Latin".

Additionally

- Students can work with puzzles, blocks, LEGO® bricks or work on Handcrafts while listening to stories and poetry or while listening to the music of the composer being studied as long as this type of activity does not interfere with the student's attention.
- This is titled "Sample Schedule" for a reason. Please don't feel that you must follow it exactly as it is set up; adapt as it best fits your family.
- Typically read or do lessons with younger children first, allowing them the option to leave the group setting as they need.

Forms, Years and School Levels

# Arrangement Notes

This schedule is somewhat modeled after the description of a typical PNEU day, although there have been several adjustments in making it more appealing to a modern family. This is just one possible way to set up each day, so that you may better align it with the principles upon which this education is founded. Absolutely, feel free to adjust this schedule to better fit your family and your lifestyle.

PNEU programs show Year One students as receiving a different course of study from other students, giving them a gentle year designed with beginning students in mind. Because of this difference, I felt that it would best uphold this design if Year One students were combined with the Pre-Preparatory and Preparatory students. In typical PNEU programs, students in Form IB (Year One) had a program much of their own. Even their study of national history did not correlate with the time periods in which the other students studied (including students still in Form I, but specifically Form IA). These students typically studied the very earliest parts of British History, which were often in the form of legends and myths. Students in this curriculum will study early American History, particularly Native Americans.

In fact, following the typical PNEU programs meant that there were multiple forms in which children were arranged, with sometimes two groupings within those forms. This makes combining children difficult in that some children read books which were completely different from children in their same form but of a different level within it. For example, in Form II, children in Form IIB (Year Four) study books which differ from students in Form IIA. Students in Form IV (Year Nine) were in a form all of their own. They too had separate book lists from both the form below them and the form above them.

To create an arrangement which still supported the principle that children should remain in a level (or Form) for more than one year, I placed all early school children together and called this group "Early School". Year One students were added to this group so that their own special beginning year was able to remain intact. Year Two, Year Three and Year Four students are grouped together in "Lower School B". This allows Year Four to be part of a group, studying from mostly the same books. Year Five and Six students are together in "Lower School A". Students in Years Seven through Nine are grouped together as "Upper School B". This allows for these students to share the same books, but with some alterations for Year Nine. It's easier to allow the older students within a form to have a few books more specific to them, then it is to have the younger students of a form have books specific to them. Years Ten through Twelve repeat this arrangement but in a new level.

# Forms, Years and School Levels

| CM Level | Age | Curriculum by Years | Grade | Curriculum by Programs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nursery | 4 | Pre-Preparatory | Preschool | Early School* |
| Preparatory | 5 | Preparatory | K | |
| Form I | | | | |
| IB | 6 | Year One | 1 | |
| IA (2 years) | 7 | Year Two | 2 | Lower School B |
| IA | 8 | Year Three | 3 | |
| Form II | | | | |
| IIB | 9 | Year Four | 4 | |
| IIA (2 years) | 10 | Year Five | 5 | Lower School A |
| IIA | 11 | Year Six | 6 | |
| Form III | | | | |
| IIIB | 12 | Year Seven | 7 | Upper School B |
| IIIA | 13 | Year Eight | 8 | |
| Form IV | | | | |
| IV | 14 | Year Nine | 9 | |
| Form V | | | | |
| VB | 15 | Year Ten | 10 | Upper School A |
| VA | 16 | Year Eleven | 11 | |
| Form VI | | | | |
| VI | 17 | Year Twelve | 12 | |

*With Curriculum by Programs, children in Pre-Preparatory, Preparatory and Year One will begin the Early School level in Foundations and will remain at this level for three years or until each student has been deemed ready to move on to Lower School B. This foundation level does not fit within the historical divisions laid out for the remaining levels. Only when your student has moved to Lower School B, will students begin to work through the programs according to historical time period divisions.

Children in Lower School B and higher will work through the programs according to the following time period divisions:

- Program I –Pre-17th Century History
- Program II -16th-18th Century History
- Program III -19th Century History
- Program IV -20th+ Century History

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# The Children's Hour

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## What is the Children's Hour?

After researching through Charlotte Mason's own *Home Education* series as well as through articles from the *Parents' Review*, I've collected a handful of quotes in reference to this phrase. It seems that the "Children's Hour" was in reference to a time period each day when parents might read aloud to their children, typically, it seems, in the evening.

Here Ms. Mason refers to it when writing about geography in *Home Education*, "But we are considering lessons as 'Instruments of Education;' and the sort of knowledge of the world I have indicated will be conveyed rather by readings in the 'Children's Hour' and at other times than by way of lessons" (Vol. 1).

She again refers to it in *Formation of Character* with: "In connection with this subject let me add a word about story-telling. Here are some of the points which make a story worth studying to tell to the nestling listeners in many a sweet "Children's Hour";—graceful and artistic details; moral impulse of a high order, conveyed with a strong and delicate touch; sweet human affection; …" (Vol. 5).

In order to better fit our modern times, I've moved the suggested evening time period for the "Children's Hour" to an earlier afternoon time period. This allows families more free time later for those who participate in extracurricular activities. Feel free to add a snack or tea time element to it. I've also added in several other Charlotte Mason activities that were often completed in the afternoon such as picture study and poetry study.

Please note that while some time tables show a specific time allotment for "Tales" in Form I, some do not. In fact, the one which did not suggest that these be read later, such as during "Children's Hour". Tales, myths, legends, poetry and literature will **all** be included in the works read during "Children's Hour" for this curriculum. Any of these selections which do not fit during this time period can be moved down to the later period of "Storytime". Please adjust as best fits your family.

## What does the Children's Hour look like?

When one envisions the Children's Hour, it is idyllically thought of as a time when sweet children have gathered around the reader with glowing eyes and enraptured, upturned faces, listening with intention and delight. A fire warmly burning in the background and empty hot chocolate mugs sitting on a side table adds to this picture. Unfortunately, it can be frustrating for the reader when this is not how it turns out. Sometimes, children are bickering over who sits where, who can see the pictures and who cannot and who is touching or annoying whom. Sighs and doubts arise when the reader spends more time correcting behavior then making progress thought the story. Ideally, a

middle ground should be sought, particularly since this event takes place daily. It may not be idyllic, but it should be free of frustration.

## How is the reading of different books to multiple children to be managed?

Reading aloud to more than one child at a time brings with it some arrangement issues. Here are a few ideas of how to manage the sitting and listening part of this act:

- Read aloud while all are gathered around at the table. The reader can sit at one end, allowing for pictures from the book to be better viewed by all. Many families like to share a snack or have tea at this time. The snack and drinks should all be served or set out on the table so that children may easily help themselves before the reading commences -hopefully preventing interruptions. Eating and drinking can occupy the children, giving them something to do while listening.
- Read aloud from a chair as children sit on the floor around the chair. This too allows the pictures to be better viewed and keeps arguments over who sits where to a minimum, since all children will sit on the floor. If there is disagreement over which child sits nearest the reader, then consider rotating through the children with these positions.
- Read aloud from a chair or sofa using a computer tablet or notebook. The teacher can either use a free version of the book or take pictures of the pages of the book beforehand. As the teacher reads from her device, the children can sit on the floor around the book itself, viewing the pages in this way. This could lead to some issues in turning the pages at the appropriate time, which child turns the pages, etc. Again, putting out rules about how this could take place and rotating between the children could help with this.
- These strategies would work well with families of more than two children. If your family is made up one reader and two children, then the reader can sit in the middle of the sofa and one child each can sit on either side of him.
- Also, consider allowing children to work quietly while listening to the readings. They could work with quiet handcrafts, blocks, coloring books, puzzles, etc. Children often do not appear to be listening, but can surprise you later with how much they were. On the other hand, if your children are unable to do two things well at once (and many of us cannot), then consider letting children keep their focus more streamlined. Perhaps they can listen and use paper and crayons to draw, but what they draw must revolve around the story to which is being read. Perhaps they can better handle only quiet activities which are more monotonous such as knitting. Consider, also, if they just might be better at cuddling up in a blanket and holding onto a lovey while listening. They could play with the ears of their lovey or the ends of the blanket as something "to do with their hands". As always, find what works best for your children as individuals.

- Consider reading a book aloud when it best fits your schedule and recording it, so that the student(s) can listen to it when it best fits their schedule. This might be helpful during a stressful time period.
- Remember, even older children -who can certainly read well enough on their own-enjoy listening to their teacher or parent read aloud to them. They too enjoy belonging to this family time and can learn a great deal by watching their younger siblings experience these books.

## How should I read aloud?

- Character "voices" are optional. Some website articles and books about reading aloud suggest that one should give the characters from the books different "voices". It may be helpful in certain circumstances, such as when a lot of back-and-forth dialogue is involved, to slightly adjust the voice to distinguish between characters, but these need not be distinctive per each character. On the other hand, if you are good at doing this and it is enjoyed by all in the family, then certainly feel free to add this aspect into your reading.
- Read clearly and enunciate your words carefully. If there are words which require some pronunciation practice, such as the mythologies, then consider reading ahead in these books, giving you a chance to look up and practice the pronunciation before reading it.
- Equally important is to read with range in your voice. Try not to read in a monotone voice. For example, if a section of the story is meant to be exciting, then read with a bit more excitement in your voice. It's not necessary to overdramatize, but matching the sorrow, soberness, joyfulness and other array of human emotions with those being expressed in the book makes the story more relatable.
- Read books meant for the youngest listeners first. This way they can leave the group as both the time needed for quiet listening has increased and the reading level has increased. This also allows older children the option to be a part of the whole group from the beginning. You'd be surprised at how much older children still enjoy those picture books, even if it's just to revisit them.
- Give time to linger over pictures.
- Allow a few moments after reading for just general conversation about the reading(s). This gives children a chance to ask questions or clarify as needed. This is particularly helpful for those who go on to narrate about it.

The Children's Hour creates a time in a busy schedule when the family can come together and connect with the world of story.

# Narration

# Narration and the Very Young

## First Stones in the Foundation

Early school in this curriculum includes Pre-Preparatory, Preparatory and Year One students and these years are foundational years. Narration, like reading and writing, is an ever-evolving skill that further develops as children grow. There are many key components to this development, but the groundwork begun in the early years is certainly one of them, playing a central role in the narrator a child becomes.

Early habits and attitudes, both in children and in parents, are the first stones to be placed in this foundation. Parents and teachers, the forefront of this entire endeavor, need to examine their own attitude and goals in order to best begin the habits and methods needed for narrating. It must be understood that reading aloud quality literature, listening and engaging children in conversations, respecting children as individuals and teaching the habit of attention all contribute significantly to how well children narrate later.

Listening to quality literature, poetry, music and nursery rhymes will build good narrators in that all of these develop the ear to the rhythm of words, the structure of sentences and the imagery created by description and verse. Reading aloud instills in children the knowledge that words, written and spoken, have meaning. These words strung together are a form of communication and that they must learn to decode these words so that they can participate in this literary conversation. Follow these moments of reading loud with lots of discussion. This should not be a formal, regimented type of discussion, but a free-flowing, informal, family discussion about what was just read. Invite and support all thoughts and ideas from everyone listening. In "Lessons before School", Somervell writes: "…boys who read and remembered were very often boys who had been read to aloud a good deal at home, and I have no doubt, had been accustomed to talk over the stories read to them" (Somervell pp. 295-302). This article writes about the importance of what takes place before children begin formal lessons. Additionally, Mrs. E. L. Franklin tells us in her *Parents' Review* article that "Verbal accuracy and power of narration as well as the power of imagining may be much nourished in these early years. Story telling is always a delight to children, and I believe that we should, from the beginning, give them a knowledge of true literature" (Franklin pp. 890-898). The stories and verse awaken the imagination of children and spark a desire to reflect on them and then, in turn, reproduce them in their own way.

Along with reading aloud, regular conversations with small children will go a long way towards teaching them that their words and ideas matter. Children are more likely to want to share what they think and know if they feel that others are actually **listening** to them. This is a crucial step in showing children that narration is a beautiful extension of who they are, what they have to say and how they communicate. It trains them to recognize that they can gather their inner reactions and thoughts together, arrange them in a logical order and communicate them in a way to which others can respond. Narration is more than just retelling a story or a moment-it is children understanding

that they play a role in how this world is viewed and that they can communicate this. This knowledge then changes how they view themselves! Children who narrate well later already understand this and have confidence in sharing. This helps reduce the likelihood that they will see narration as something they "have to do" or as something that is of no real consequence.

Parents who listen to their children teach them that what they say and think has value. It also shows them respect and goes back to the fundamental principle that "Children are born persons". Respecting children gives children the confidence to want to share, since the atmosphere of respect is filled with support and encouragement and not criticism and annoyance. "Probably the most fundamental principle, and even in this age of child worship, the most neglected, is respect for the children. A respect which will forbid our neglecting their environment, or giving them anything but what is really good and true, both as regards the people and the things which surround them. We know that the little child does notice, does see and does hear, and we are careful that our respect for his powers in these directions shall act as a safe guard" (Franklin pp. 890-898).

Equally as important as reading aloud, conversations and respect is the building of each child's ability to pay attention. This is reinforced with the training made clear in Charlotte Mason's books that a reading should only occur once. This teaches children to listen carefully, since they will only have one opportunity to hear it. This focused concentration is also trained when children explore nature. Their happy explorations increase their desire to share what they've discovered. They will want to pay attention so that they can tell about it. "The habit of attention is, perhaps, almost the very best equipment with which a child can start his schooldays, and probably no means of forming this is so generally successful as that of letting the children learn to be good listeners. If they are encouraged to relate what they have heard, their powers of narration will be strengthened, and gradually they will reconstruct the ideas received and will tell stories, the apparent originality and beautiful imagination of which will surprise the heavier adult mind" (Franklin pp. 890-898).

## Informal Narration

Formal narration does not to begin until age six. Children under the age of six might narrate, but the expectation for it should not exist. Any type of narration at this level should be thought of as informal and this can be seen in several different ways. "Until he is six, let Bobbie narrate only when and what he has a mind to. He must not be called upon to *tell* anything" (Mason, *Home Education* 231).

Children often wish to share their exciting news of the day with another family member or relative. Their news will reflect the joy that often only small children can find in everyday life. As adults we begin to take such small wonders for granted, but for young children they are often still very new. Perhaps they want to tell about seeing a wild flower blooming along a familiar trail, a ladybug landing nearby, a dog racing around the yard to avoid a bath, etc. Encourage children to share and tell about these events as often as they wish. This is a "type" of narration in that they are describing something they saw or recalling something that happened. These sharing moments are the first steps in narration, but they should not be named as that and they should always come forth naturally.

Mason writes:

> Narrating is an art, like poetry-making or painting, because it is there, in every child's mind, waiting to be discovered, and is not the result of any process of disciplinary education. A creative fiat calls it forth. 'Let him narrate'; and the child narrates, fluently, copiously, in ordered sequence, with fit and graphic details, with a just choice of words, without verbosity or tautology, so soon as he can speak with ease. This amazing gift with which normal children are born is allowed to lie fallow in their education. Bobbie will come home with a heroic narrative of a fight he has seen between 'Duke' and a dog in the street. It is wonderful! He has seen everything, and he tells everything with splendid vigor in the true epic vein; but so ingrained is our contempt for children that we see nothing in this but Bobbie's foolish childish way! Whereas here, if we have eyes to see and grace to build, is the ground-plan of his education. (Mason, *Home Education* 231)

Narration can also be found in the way that children reenact a favorite scene from an adventure story to which they were listening. This story or poem sparks their imagination and they might bring these scenes to life with plush animals, dramatic play, toys, etc. Sometimes these reenactments do not occur on exactly the same day on which the story was first told. Children may digest these thoughts and ideas and then reveal what they've absorbed another time though play. Observe these reenactments from a quiet distance unless children specifically call for an audience. Just as they may wish to reenact a scene using toys to represent characters, they may also wish to reenact scenes with themselves as the characters. Access to play silks, hats, dress-up clothes, play dishes and other pretend play props and items will make this not only more enjoyable but will offer inspiration, too. "Therefore it is well that children should, at any rate, have the outlet of narration, that they should tell the things they know in full detail; and, when the humor takes them, 'play' the persons, act the scenes that interest them in their reading" (Mason, *Formation of Character* pp. 305-306).

This same type of reenactment can be expressed creatively as well. Give your children as much free access to Play-Doh, modeling clay, blocks, LEGO® bricks and other tools to build or sculpt. Children can then express scenes, characters, animals, events and objects from stories, poems, songs and nature through the creation of models.

Overall, the theme to be noted is that children can express or extend from what they've learned or heard through conversation, play and creation. These should be encouraged and if observed can be seen as early "narrations".

Informal narration is always voluntary, although daily parent-child conversations can encourage children to share their thoughts and ideas. This can be done by simply asking questions and being interested in what they say. While having these conversations, it's important for parents and teachers to model good listening skills, as this teaches children that when they speak then we are listening. We show this by not interrupting them or looking away when they are speaking. Children, too, need to be held accountable to these same interpersonal skills. "Children should be allowed to talk and ask questions; no narration should be expected. Children will volunteer their own small experiences about the matters that are brought up, will bring things from home, will repeat what they have heard

Daddy or Mummy say about the events of the day and indeed provide a large part of the carrying on. But care is necessary. Children must be trained not to interrupt each other or the teacher, to talk quietly, to ask questions one at a time" (Kitching 13).

In the *Parents' Review*, Helen Wix writes:

> Very young children, in the nursery class, are not expected to narrate, but often they insist on doing so because of this instinct to 'tell all about it' to somebody. How many of us can refrain from telling that good story we heard yesterday? And anything that must be remembered, do we not repeat it even if it is only 'First turning to the left and third to the right?' Narration is extraordinarily satisfying to the narrator… (pp. 61-63)

## How *Not* to Handle Beginning Narrations

Negative reactions and attitudes by parents and teachers in response to children sharing will not work in your favor when narrating becomes formal. The early approaches described earlier will go a long way towards setting good habits in place. It is so much harder to redo them later.

Try not to coach or lead to a specific "answer". Narration is not about the production of some pre-formed answer. In fact, it is wholly the opposite. We cannot expect a specific answer, because we should not know the answer, since it is the child's connection that is being shared and not ours. Of course, there are some elements that logically should be included in a narration as children develop, but these will not be expected or outlined for early school children at all and will often fall into place naturally over time anyway. "A narration should be original as it comes from the child—that is, his own mind should have acted upon the matter it has received" (Mason, *Home Education* 289).

Try not to interrupt or allow interruptions. This proves to be difficult sometimes, but it is really important that children feel "heard" when they are speaking. Multiple distractions will interrupt their attempts to organize their thoughts and relay them in spoken words. They might forget what they've already said or what they wanted to say next. This disrupts brain training in organizing thoughts together -an important skill needed. If needed, consider taking the child who is speaking over to the side a bit or insist that other family members remain quiet. This sounds fierce, but it cannot be stressed enough how important is for every human being to feel as if what they think, feel and say has value.

Keep expectations focused on encouraging children to share what they want to share about something. Narrations are meant to be flexible, particularly in the young. If your child does not wish to describe something he/she saw while exploring outside, then certainly let that description slide. You can also offer other ways for your child to share what was observed. For example, you might then say "If you don't want to tell me about it, then would you like to draw it?" or you could direct your child in another way. Perhaps say "Would you like to tell me about something else?" If life is busy and messy at the moment, then simply say "Oh, that's too bad. It sounds like you saw

something wonderful and I would have loved to have heard about it. Maybe you can tell me about it another time." And then let it go.

In "The Method of Narration", Stanley Boardman writes:

> Having got the right atmosphere, there are perhaps two dangers against which we must guard in narration. The first is a relic of the past. When we see a child groping his way along, struggling with the eternal question, "What comes next?" we feel we must help in some manner. We feel we must interpolate a question, we feel we must tell him—once again we are tempted to do the work ourselves. Perhaps there may be occasions when a word in season might be of help, as in the case when a child has come across an unfamiliar name, but in the main I think we ought not to interfere in the child's narration. A discussion afterwards will possibly clear up any difficulties. This is the place for the "oral" work. The second danger I see comes when we are over anxious. Knowing the value of narration we become very anxious that the child shall narrate well, and it has occurred to me that in some subtle way this anxiety is communicated to the child. I may be wrong. But I do feel that an anxious teacher makes an anxious and disturbed child, and an anxious and disturbed child is not himself, is not behind his own actions. I said we were not to help the child, but perhaps there are one or two ways we might do so. This is one. Let us help by keeping pure and unspotted our faith in the child's ability to perform a natural act. (pp. 469-475)

## Formal Narrations

Formal narrations do not begin until at least age six. For the purposes of this curriculum, they will not look very much different from the informal narrations just described. Year One is the only year of the early years in which narrations will be just **slightly** more expected. Absolutely, give your child more time if you feel they need it. Formal narrations can begin in Year Two just as well, especially if informal narrations are still being encouraged and supported.

Give children multiple ways to express themselves. Narrations should vary and should not be in the form of oral retellings only, although this is the primary method for these ages. If they don't feel like sharing, then let them express their thoughts through art, drama and other methods. Helen E. Wix shares some variations to narration in her *Parents' Review* article "Some Thoughts on Narration". She writes "But is narration, even at this age, always merely 'telling back'" (Wix pp. 61-63)?

She continues:

> It must be, we know, the child's answer to "What comes next?" It can be acted, with good speaking parts and plenty of criticism from actors and onlookers; nothing may be added or left out. Map drawing can be an excellent narration, or, maybe, clay modeling will supply the means to answer that question, or paper and poster paints, or chalks, even a paper model with scissors and paste pot. Always, however, there should be talk as well, the answer expressed in words; that is, the picture painted, the clay model, etc., will be described and fully described, because, with few exceptions, only words are really satisfying. (Wix pp. 61-63)

We also find suggestions from Charlotte Mason, who writes "For children under nine, the question of composition resolves itself into that of narration, varied by some such simple exercise as to write a part and narrate a part, or write the whole account of a walk they have taken, a lesson they have studied, or of some simple matter that they know" (Mason, *Home Education* 247).

Consider encouraging conversations at dinner or other family time moments, where children can share events of the day or stories they've heard to family members who were not present when they took place. Children might even enjoy calling a grandparent or other family member to share some interesting news or a description of a natural wonder. They might even want to share about an interesting book, poem or story just heard. Because technology is so readily available, consider letting children record a natural wonder they're observing, describing it as they record. Even those delightful reenactments described earlier might be recorded as the children describe the story behind it. These could be sent to a loved one or shared later with family members who were not present at the time.

Alternatively, allow your children to dictate their narrations to you. Ask your children "Would you like me to write down what you thought of ___?" If they agree, then write their descriptions or retellings down just as they say them. Ms. Mason tells us that children can often have more to say then we might think they have. "Children of six can tell to amazing purpose. The grown-up who writes the tale to their 'telling' will cover many pages before getting to the end of 'Hans and Gretel' or 'The Little Match Girl' or a Bible story. The facts are sure to be accurate and the expression surprisingly vigorous, striking and unhesitating" (Mason, *Towards a Philosophy of Education* 190). These narrations can sometimes be read back to the child who might then feel it necessary to supply some missing information. Feel free to insert these as neatly as possible. On special occasions, you might wish to copy the narration neatly on story paper (paper which has a blank top half and a lined bottom half). You child could then illustrate their narration. These narrations could also be dictated in the form of a letter to a loved one or friend. Feel free to be as creative as you wish.

It is also acceptable to have your child begin the narration and let you finish it. This method allows the child to get started but takes off the pressure of having to complete it. This is an excellent way for a full narration to be modeled to children.

All of the methods described for informal narrations can be applied to formal narrations. Children can still dramatize, paint, sculpt and build favorite scenes or characters from stories heard, real-life events witnessed and natural history discovered. "History readings afford admirable material for narration, and children enjoy narrating what they have read or heard. They love, too, to make illustrations. Children who had been reading Julius Caesar (and also, Plutarch's Life), were asked to make a picture of their favorite scene, and the results showed the extraordinary power of visualizing which the little people possess. Of course that which they visualize, or imagine clearly, they know; it is a life possession" (Mason, *Home Education* 292).

Provide guidance when needed, but for this level, please do not overdo it. For example, after reading "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" you might say to your child, "Tell me about this story." If your child

simply responds with "A rabbit went to a garden. His mother was mad." You can help your child expand on these sentences by asking questions. For example, ask "Why did Peter Rabbit go into Mr. McGregor's Garden?" (Notice that you've inserted the name of the rabbit and the name of the garden in your question.) You could also ask "Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?", "Should Peter have gone into the garden?" or "Why was his mother mad?" This type of expansion work should only apply to older children or highly engaged children. The two simple sentences given at first are more than appropriate for younger children and the need to expand on these is not necessary in the beginning. Apply these new expectations only to children who are really ready for it.

For children who simply shrug their shoulders or say "I don't know", then consider these questions:

- What was the most exciting part of this story? What was the funniest part of this story? What part did you not like?
- A silly or grumpy child might like a silly approach. For example, tell your child that you thought the story was about ____. Be sure to fill in the blank with something wildly unrelated to the story. For example, if the story was about a robin, then you might say "monkey" or "blanket". This may entice the child into correcting you with something more accurate.
- Would you prefer to draw a picture about this story? Or make a model of something from this story? Or act out your favorite part of this story?

Also, be patient. If your child seems uninterested in a particular story, then let it be. Perhaps this particular one didn't catch his/her interest the same way that another one might. Sometimes children who appear uninterested will later show their knowledge of a story or event in imaginative or dramatic play. You may not realize what an impact the story or event had until then. Maybe this child seemed uninterested in the story about the robins and their nest, but two days later spontaneously shares something from the story through a discussion with a sibling or through a question they might ask.

Be careful not to have written expectations which are beyond your student. If your student is not writing fluently, then be sure to allow him/her to dictate his words or to simply tell about it orally.

> Here I would suggest that the potent cause of the early loss of this graphic use of words is to be found in the fact that the child is too early made to write his own little stories, his letters, or his Nature diary. Hampered by his inability to write well and quickly, his flow of language and power of word painting leave him. I would advocate that even when schooldays have begun, he should be encouraged to narrate instead of write his compositions, the substance of his history lessons, etc. The habit of this viva voce reproduction would also help him in gaining the power of lucid expression which is becoming more and more necessary. (Franklin pp. 890-898)

Take advantage of outdoor time and nature experiences. Have your children run off to explore and let them come back to tell you about what they've discovered. Send them off on "special exploration missions". For example, tell your children to run off and see what new living thing they can find that

they've never seen before. When they come back, have each one tell about their new discovery. Or have then run off to look for a something specific such as "something which has a round shape to it". Give children a lot of room to fit inside this category, since the idea is to allow them to describe it in such a way as to show how it fits. One child might describe the roundness of a wild mushroom, one the roundness of a bumble bee and the other the roundness of a cloud in the sky. Charlotte Mason illustrates this when she writes: "By-and-by the others come back to their mother, and, while wits are fresh and eyes are keen, she sends them off on an exploring expedition—Who can see the most, and tell the most, about yonder hillock or brook, hedge, or copse. This is an exercise that delights children, and may be endlessly varied, carried on in the spirit of a game, and yet with the exactness and carefulness of a lesson" (Mason, *Home Education* 46). Mrs. Franklin adds to this in her article "The Home Training of Children" when she writes "We can also greatly strengthen the children's power of narration (and we know how great this is, both in the childhood of the race and of the man), by encouraging them to describe what they have seen in those hours when Nature has been their chief teacher" (Franklin pp. 890-898).

## A Child's Narration is Always Their Own

Kitching wrote in her Charlotte Mason pamphlet "Children Up to School Age and Beyond" that the role of a parent in their children's education is to make the knowledge accessible and then to step back and let children take it in and **make it their own**. In this beautiful quote, she writes: "In *School Education*, we read of 'Masterly Inactivity' and the necessary qualities it calls forth on the part of parents; like peace, it is not absence of action but has constructive and abiding power. It waits upon the knowledge, the self-revealing knowledge, of a child" (Kitching 7). We are not being inactive; we are being patient.

Mr. Boardman in "The Method of Narration" expands on this idea with the following:

> Edmond Holmes tells us that "any adult who exacts from the child blind faith and literal obedience, and having secured these proceeds to tell the child in the fullest detail what he is to do, to say, to think (or pretend to think), to feel (or pretend to feel), is devitalizing his whole personality. Unless the child himself, his soul, his self, his ego, call it what you please, is behind his own actions, they are not really his." I believe with Miss Mason that narration is an art inherent in the child. I am sure that a child likes to narrate because he feels that here at least is something of his own, because he feels he is behind it himself. It is a natural act, but like all other natural acts, it atrophies, and atrophies quickly, in an unnatural atmosphere. I believe that if the teacher dominates the child, narration will suffer. So will the child. (Boardman pp. 469-475)

He also writes: "It is far easier to force children to be passive recipients of certain predigested scraps of information, it is a much more difficult matter to allow the child to be active in the matter and to get him to do his best. It requires a great faith and trust—the harder the case the greater the faith and trust" (Boardman pp. 469-475).

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# A Charlotte Mason Narration

From the *Parents' Review* Article "We Narrate and Then We Know":

> Do always prepare the passage carefully beforehand, thus making sure that all the explanations and use of background material precede the reading and narration. The teacher should never have to stop in the middle of a paragraph to explain the meaning of a word. Make sure, before you start, that the meanings are known, and write all difficult proper names on the blackboard, leaving them there throughout the lesson. Similarly any map work which may be needed should be done before the reading starts.

The teaching guides for the books selected for this curriculum often include a list of the proper nouns covered in that reading. The separate category for proper nouns of place makes completing any map work easier. Students can refer to the page with this chart as they narrate. If the response is a written narration, the chart can be used to ensure correct spelling.

Why isn't the method described above included with other curricula designed to follow Charlotte Mason? The general consensus for this seems to stem from fear of it coming between the reader and the book, but since the purpose is to *prepare* the reading then this should not hinder the reader. Besides, it states quite clearly that this is to be done. It does require some teacher preparation, but this ties in well with the quoted section below on teacher preparation.

> Do regulate the length of the passage to be read before narration to the age of the children and the nature of the book. If you are reading a fairy story, you will find that the children will be able to remember a page or even two, if a single incident is described. With a more closely packed book, one or two paragraphs will be sufficient. Older children will, of course, be able to tackle longer passages before narrating, but here too, the same principles should be applied, that the length varies with the nature of the book.

This is important too. A young student attempting to narrate after reading a complete chapter filled with multiple events and ideas will not be able to give the same quality of narration as one who narrates after several pages. Dividing a chapter into halves or thirds, preferably at a scene change, gives the child a better opportunity to narrate more completely. As a student's reading selections become longer and more complex, the need to break the readings into manageable sections grows. Length is not only the consideration when regulating sections, a densely written book may also need to be broken into smaller sections.

> Do let the narration follow directly after the reading.

Try to have the narration follow directly and try to strive for a narration after every reading. Sometimes life happens and listening to a narration later in the day or not hearing a narration at all happens. Completing 2-3 narrations per day per child is a solid objective.

> Don't interrupt, even if the narrator makes a mistake or mispronounces a word. I once asked a small boy what happened if you interrupted people. I hoped he would say: 'They forget what they were going to say next'; instead, he said: 'You get put in the corner.'

It is okay to clear up any significant mistakes after the narration is complete. Allowing your student to clarify their meaning and make their own corrections, if possible, would be most beneficial.

> A Single Careful Reading. —There is much difference between intelligent reading, which the pupil should do in silence, and a mere parrot-like cramming up of contents; and it is not a bad test of education to be able to give the points of a description, the sequence of a series of incidents, the links in a chain of argument, correctly, after a single careful reading. This is a power which a barrister, a publisher, a scholar, labours to acquire; and it is a power which children can acquire with great ease, and once acquired, the gulf is bridged which divides the reading from the non-reading community.

The emphasis in a single careful reading is placed on developing the habit of attention in the student. One opportunity to read or listen trains the mind to attend to it carefully and diligently.

> Other Ways of using Books.—But this is only one way to use books: others are to enumerate the statements in a given paragraph or chapter; to analyse a chapter, to divide it into paragraphs under proper headings, to tabulate and classify series; to trace cause to consequence and consequence to cause; to discern character and perceive how character and circumstance interact; to get lessons of life and conduct, or the living knowledge which makes for science, out of books; all this is possible for school boys and girls, and until they have begun to use books for themselves in such ways, they can hardly be said to have begun their education.

Charlotte Mason gives some hidden gems inside the following quote from *School Education*, as it gives some ideas as to how to be more creative with written narrations and reinforces the idea that narrations are not meant to be retellings only.

> The Teacher's Part. —The teacher's part is, in the first place, to see what is to be done, to look over the of the day in advance and see what mental discipline, as well as what vital knowledge, this and that lesson afford; and then to set such questions and such tasks as shall give full scope to his pupils' mental activity. Let marginal notes be freely made, as neatly and beautifully as may be, for books should be handled with reverence. Let numbers, letters, underlining be used to help the eye and to save the needless fag of writing abstracts. Let the pupil write for himself half a dozen questions which cover the passage studied; he need not write the answers if he be taught that the mind can know nothing but what it can produce in the form of an answer to a question put by the mind to itself.

# Narration Misunderstandings Clarified

The following narration misunderstandings are addressed to demonstrate why the misunderstood idea would not develop the narrator, but the clarified idea will.

## Misconception #1: Narrations Are Retellings Only

**This is not true**. Narrations, both oral and written, should not be retellings only. A large component of narrations are of this kind, particularly in the very early years, but the concentration of this style should begin to adjust as early as Year Two and should continue to diminish (but not disappear completely) over each consecutive year. Each successive year should see a greater variety of type and style of writing.

Not only narrations, but also the components of writing such as dictation, copywork, recitations and discussion should vary. There are many components which make up the writer, and each of these components cannot be singled out alone as the whole of writing. It is in the entirety of the components, working together, which make up the whole of writing.

It is far more difficult to write a curriculum in which the narrations include variety, yet target and build skills needed to grow writers, speakers and thinkers. Creating a balance between growing all minds, but yet maintaining the flexibility to allow minds to differ is not an easy task. Developing the narrator is a critical part of this curriculum.

Narrations Are Varied and Build Skills.

## Misconception #2: Narrations Are Writing Assignments Without a Clear Purpose

**This idea could not be more wrong, but, unfortunately, it is exactly what I see in many curricula which purport to embrace Charlotte Mason's ideas and methods.** Many of these types of curricula are no more than good book lists with a reading schedule and general narration prompts. Some narration prompts can be as vague as "Give an oral narration" after a reading or "Write a narration on _____ (event or person)" after a reading. The latter prompt is appropriate sometimes, but should **not** be the only type available. Over the length of a student's entire education, these types of narration prompts **will become** writing assignments without a clear purpose.

Narrations can vary between creative expression types, exploration of themes, understanding character, identifying literary devices and then applying them, making comparisons, developing all major types of writing and much more. Added to this variety is the increasing complexity of books read and discussed, the increasing levels in the writing components such as grammar and dictation

and the increasing expectations to write and speak at a higher level. These narrations have a clear purpose and they, along with the components, will develop the writer.

Narration is Writing with a Clear Purpose.

## Misconception #3: Narrations Are Not for My Child.

**While it is true that not all children respond well to narrations at first, it should not be said that they will never respond to them.** Consider that perhaps the methods did not suit the teacher rather than the methods did not suit the child. This style of educating is very different from typical classroom methods. It is a big task for homeschoolers to take on the monumental task of not only parenting our children but educating them too. Educating with new methods is frightening, because we are unable to see the results until much later. When a method or idea doesn't seem to produce good results immediately, we tend to change the method rather than change our own approach.

Along with those who did not give the method enough time, there are those families who may have used the narration approach correctly, but did not tie it with the other components. In this curriculum, it is extremely important for the narrations to be used along with the components.

Perhaps, given the time and use of accompanying components and methods, the child would grow to enjoy narrating. Perhaps the child simply needs time to adjust to the new expectations, because narrating is not easy and the skills needed for it require much practice.

Narrations Are Accessible to All Children.

# Alleviating Narration Issues

Generally, children who dislike narration do so for reasons such as finding the act of narrating tedious, repetitive or difficult. Alleviating these narration issues are critical, because the child and teacher who have trouble with narration are not likely to continue with a Charlotte Mason style education, considering that it is such an essential and daily component of it. While some of these reasons will be addressed individually, in truth, they are very much interrelated. It may be helpful to look at narration more closely and delve into its particular components before attempting to pinpoint the possible problems that may arise from it. Consider that narration is actually the latter part of a larger lesson. The narration cannot take place without the reading (or picture, object, etc.) upon which to narrate.

Here is the general order of a reading and narration lesson:

1. Prepare the Reading
2. Read
3. Narrate the Reading
4. Close the Reading

By recognizing that there are several components to this lesson, it is then easier to see how many different places upon which issues may arise. The two most known components are the reading itself and the narration. Children may have issues which arise from either one of these areas, or both. Often problems begin on the reading side of a lesson, because the child cannot connect with the reading. On the other hand, troubles may begin on the narration side, after the reading. Solutions are easier at which to arrive when the issues are more specifically identified.

## Solutions for Issues on Both Sides of a Narration

### *The Reading Side of the Issue*

**The reading selection is too difficult.**

**Solutions:** Change the reading selection for one to replace the original, keeping as much of the original purpose or topic as similar as possible, but that offers a different style, perspective or reading level.

Consider reading the selection aloud to your student, letting them read aloud to you or share the reading together by taking turns. It is absolutely acceptable for high school students to handle advanced works in any of these ways. Remember, dramas such as Shakespeare and epic poetry would have been shared aloud anyway.

Reduce the reading selection significantly. It can always be increased incrementally over time as the child becomes more successful. Be aware that epic poetry, older classic literature, advanced science

and technical readings and other selections are dense and draw heavily on all skills needed for advanced reading; these types of selections are better in small doses, especially in the beginning.

**The reading selection does not capture his attention.**

**Solution:** Not every reading selection is always required. Students who have a particular distaste for it do not have to read it. It is often possible to substitute an equally worthy replacement. Be aware that it is possible that the lack of interest and attention in some choices may have more to do with the student's abilities in handling the reading level (see above), the reading length (see below) or may need their own skills in concentration strengthened (see below). In other words, it may not be the reading selection itself; it may be another problem disguised in this one.

**The reading selection is too long.**

**Solution:** Again, reduce the reading selection significantly; it an always be increased incrementally over time as the student becomes more successful. A reduction in the reading selection can either be one which omits part of a reading, omits additional reading suggestions, breaks a large reading selection into smaller sections and reads them over the course of a week or several days **or** breaks a large reading into smaller sections but is still read within the same reading session. Long selections can also be shared readings with the student reading a portion, narrating and then the teacher taking a turn and reading a portion.

**The child struggles with giving and continuing her attention.**

**Solution:** Giving and continuing the attention needed for narrations may be difficult for young children, those who are new to this approach or those who need extra time adjusting to it. Practice in these skills, in shorter more focused sessions, will lend itself to more success, not only with narration but also most other skill work. It may be a good idea to make attention-gaining and sustaining it-a focal point, setting the general curriculum aside for a short time. For example, consider using fables such as *Aesop's Fables* for giving your student practice in listening carefully to a short but complete reading and then narrating what they can from the fable. Remember, it is important to read the fable only once and to not use leading or prompting questions. Let your child only tell what they can and use questions such as "Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the fable?" if you feel the narration was not complete enough.

**The preparation before the reading was missing or inadequate.**

**Solution:** Preparing a reading, an important part of a Charlotte Mason narration, includes many or all of the following: unknown words are clearly pronounced and meanings defined where needed, unique or important locations are found on a map or globe, background or essential historical reference knowledge is briefly introduced or reviewed and a quick connection is made between the last reading but before beginning the present reading. This particular component to the CM narration is often neglected, including not being addressed by many books, blogs and websites who purport to follow her teaching methods.

A reading preparation that was either missing or was only partially included will lead to problems in both the reading side and the narrating side of a narration lesson. Skipping the practice of pronouncing the words and finding their meanings will prevent the child from being able to fully connect to the reading and to later express their thoughts with order and composure when narrating. If the map work, reviews and background and historical context are not included, then the child again misses an opportunity to connect the new knowledge to old knowledge, weaving the knowledge together more tightly. He cannot fit this smaller scheme of knowledge into the larger framework already built into his mind. The child's narration will then have to exclude new words and location, because they are still unfamiliar to him and the narrations will also lack a display of the interconnectedness between known knowledge and new knowledge.

**The child is being affected by the environment surrounding the reading.**

**Solution:** Children respond differently to different situations. Some children will need a great deal of quietness in their environment when trying to concentrate, listen and reflect on reading and learning and other children will have no trouble with the latter actions amidst noise, interruption and distraction. Be sure that you are meeting each child's own particular needs in this area. Anxiety can lead to frustration and frustration, in turn, can lead to intense dislike. Your student may not necessarily be disliking narration, but instead feels frustrated and anxious by the environment in which he must give one. It is possible that listening to a reading or trying to read herself under these conditions may not be conducive to a feeling of peace and confidence for this child.

## *The Narrating Side of the Issue*

**The child is shy or reserved in self-expression.**

**Solution:** Again, because all children are different, they will respond differently to different situations. Some children are naturally shy and less comfortable with expressing themselves. Narration holds the expectation that a student should share aloud her thoughts about a reading, especially when giving an oral narration. For a child who feels reserved about this aspect of narrating, feel free to alter them as often as necessary. This child may choose to draw or paint a picture, create a map, write a narration, give their narration to a special plush toy-privately in another room-or in other types or forms. Perhaps this child could be allowed to share only in private or to share only a portion of their narration. In the latter example, the child might go somewhere private and say his narration quietly to himself. Once finished, he then might share a much smaller part of it to the teacher, in private. These are just examples, so please feel free to adapt the environment as needed for your child. Perhaps this child may need to feel as if she is not "giving a speech" and instead allow the narrations to flow more naturally. This child could tell another family member about what they found most interesting, could call another family member and describe the picture she just drew or could share about their favorite character while the family is gathered for a meal.

**The child is not shy but still dislikes giving oral narrations.**

**Solution:** Perhaps your student is not shy but still dislikes narrating. It may be possible that he feels that by narrating he is sharing or exposing too much of himself. Giving a narration after a reading is, when done properly, highly personal. It is meant to be. This is what happens when a connection is made. Offer this student, just as the one who is shy, alternatives to oral narrations. Sometimes sharing is easier when given in writing or art or in other forms. It may be important for this particular student to really understand why you ask her to narrate.

**The child struggles with his memory of a reading or in expressing his thoughts in an organized manner.**

**Solution:** This student may have trouble remembering what happened or in what order the events happened; he may feel unable to start a narration. Firstly, the importance of preparing the reading is underscored in this issue. A student who cannot keep the main plot events in order does not need to be more impeded by also sorting through unknown words, places and the reading's historical framework. Once the reading is prepared, offer the student a short selection of the reading material, keeping this student from having too much to keep in order. Next, allow your student to refer to the chart of proper nouns. The key words of people, places and other proper nouns are included in this chart. He may refer to the chart while narrating to better supply him with the new word for which he is looking. The proper nouns charts are meant to be given to and seen by the student, but if you prefer you might transfer the words, as selected by you, to a board. Allow your student to narrate one smaller section of the reduced reading at a time, adding key word sentences to a board as he reads. Once the reduced reading section is complete, allow you student a chance to narrate again, referring to their own key word sentences. If your student is reluctant to orally narrate the whole, then he may wish to copy his list from the board and write a narration. A younger student might prefer to share his narration with a different family member later in the day, breaking away from the activity for the time being. Keep the key words on the board or on a sheet of paper to be referred when this later narration of the whole reading takes place.

If needed, you may also wish to create lessons which specifically target these skills. Print two copies of an Aesop fable or paragraph from an exciting story greatly enlarged and cut one into stripes by sentence. Have your student read it and then sort out the story strips, arranging them in order. There are many other activity ideas to target this skill.

**The child struggles to visualize during the reading, cannot connect to the reading and cannot turn it around into her own words.**

**Solution:** Visualizing or using your imagination while reading or listening to a reading can be more natural for some children over others. This will also vary according to other factors, including how new to this a child might be. A younger child or an older student transitioning to this new teaching method may need some individual practice with this skill, just as the child above tries to work on his ability to arrange his thoughts into order. Again, please break the reading section into a smaller selection, because working with an overwhelming amount of material through which to sort

provides no relief for a child already struggling with other aspects of it. Offer him a choice of types of narration, giving him the opportunity to choose his strongest manner of self-expression. Even if your student chooses the same manner of narrating for a lengthy time period, allow this child a chance to become comfortable before encouraging new types of narration prompts.

You may wish to have your student close his eyes while listening, or, if reading the section himself, read a scene and close his eyes and reflect on it and continue this throughout the reading section, to build and strengthen the ability to visualize and imagine. These students may do better with artistic and creative style narrations. Ask this child to describe, explain or share his thoughts about this narration and perhaps, to further build this skill, encourage him to share his thoughts and feelings about any of his creations. This will provide opportunities for him to practice turning something he has imagined or visualized from one form of self-expression into a verbal form of self-expression.

**The child is being affected by the environment surrounding her while narrating.**

**Solution:** Similar to the child who is affected by the environment while listening to a reading, some children may be affected by this same type of environment while narrating. Some children may prefer quiet privacy, while others may actually prefer more activity, noise and an audience while narrating, perhaps either feeling less on display with background activity or enjoying the audience. Find out what conditions work best for each child, individually, and then make a few notes as a reminder for future narrations.

**The narration prompts are too constrictive.**

**Solution:** Purposely offering multiple and varied narration suggestions, as is provided in this curriculum, gives parents the tools they need to, in turn, offer the child with as many options as possible to express their own personal connections to the reading. Each child will connect with the reading material differently, so having multiple suggestions ensures a better chance that the child will be able to find one that allows for his own particular connection to be expressed in his narration. If the narration prompts are too constrictive, then the child may not be able to narrate or may feel frustrated with his inability to express his thoughts in the direction he wished to take them. Children who constantly feel limited in expressing themselves through narration may grow to dislike them. Be flexible with narration requirements. Skill building is important, so some direction may need to be required, but allow your child's input into as much of their narration work as can be done without harming larger goals and skill building.

**The narration response prompts have become too repetitive.**

A child who feels bored or frustrated with the repetitiveness of giving narrations can be helped by altering the type of narrations she gives. She may respond better to being allowed a choice from a selection of prompts to better allow her to express herself with that which connects to her personally. The variety in narration choices is not only to provide options to meet the needs of all types of students, but also to allow children to express themselves in many ways throughout a day, a week and a year. Growth in self-expression, verbally, organizationally, logically and creatively, as well

as strength gained in skills in these same areas, is a great reason to encourage your children to vary narrations.

**Remember, combining solutions might be necessary for combined issues.**

# Transitioning from Oral to Written Narrations

Moving a narrator from oral to written narrations should be a gentle crossover, with the skills and needs of the narrator always the priority. A narrator will never leave oral narration completely behind, but as they progress through the years should add to them and replace the number of them with other variations of narration. For example, while a high school student still orally narrates sometimes, more often she writes narrations, essays and other papers as well as participates in deep discussions about what she has read.

## Important Points to Consider

1. Be sure that your oral narrator is fully ready to write. Your young student should be able to write a number of sentences without feeling any strain -physically or mentally. Oral narrations should be firmly established; they should be given confidently and should be reasonably full in their coverage.

2. Cut whatever was your typical amount of reading material for oral narrations down again. Remember, in the beginning, your very young child could not successfully orally narrate a full chapter. The chapters in the early years are divided into halves and are narrated in sections. Eventually, the child is able to narrate the entire chapter, depending on the length and type of book from which they are narrating. Moving from oral narrations to writing multiple pages for written narration will become overwhelming very quickly.

Here is an excerpt from an article from the *Parents' Review* on "We Narrate and then We Know":

> Do regulate the length of the passage to be read before narration to the age of the children and the nature of the book. If you are reading a fairy story, you will find that the children will be able to remember a page or even two, if a single incident is described. With a more closely packed book, one or two paragraphs will be sufficient. Older children will, of course, be able to tackle longer passages before narrating, but here too, the same principles should be applied, that the length varies with the nature of the book.

3. Be sure that you are always preparing the reading selection ahead of the reading. For example, go over any words which your student may need help in defining or pronouncing. Map work for knowing and understanding any important locations should be done before reading books, especially those being used for history and geography. Ask your student to recall what events and people were important in the last chapter read.

Here is more from "We Narrate and then We Know":

> Do always prepare the passage carefully beforehand, thus making sure that all the explanations and use of background material precede the reading and narration. The teacher should never have to stop in the middle of a paragraph to explain the meaning of a word. Make sure, before you start, that the meanings are known, and write all difficult proper names on the blackboard, leaving them there

throughout the lesson. Similarly any map work which may be needed should be done before the reading starts.

4. If your child wants to share more than they are prepared to write, consider letting them dictate some of it to you. Perhaps they could write the first few sentences and then let you finish writing as they dictate the remainder of the narration. Let your child give the narration a title and perhaps even a picture sometimes too. Don't feel the need to overdo dictated narrations. They can be used occasionally to help a child transition, but they needn't be a form all of their own for an extended time period. If your child still struggles, then you may need to give him more time with oral narrations and narrations which build writing skills.

5. Other types of narrations should also have been used; e.g. writing lists, dictating letters, dictating narrations, creative and artistic narrations, art and music study narrations and creating charts and tables together. All of these narration types help build and support the skills needed for writing narrations.

6. Only 1-2 narrations per week are expected the first year that you are transitioning. The remaining narrations can be in other forms such as oral, creative (e. g. picture, poem or and skit) or other forms of written work (e. g. lists, letters, etc.).

7. Don't be overly concerned with the conventions of writing at this point. Only when students have had a chance to get comfortable with keeping a narration notebook should the teacher begin to make comments of correction into their notebook. Mix positive comments with points of correction. For example, point out a capitalization problem and a spelling problem along with a compliment on word choice. Treat narration notebooks similarly to how dictation is treated. There is an eye towards noting that particular child's skill weaknesses and towards incrementally increasing the expectations.

In summary, follow the guidelines listed above; reduce the amount of material covered in a reading, allow for partial dictations, allow for more focused narrations so as to reduce the amount of material on which to write, and keep the rules and conventions of writing to just a couple on which to focus at one time.

# Transcription, Copybooks, Commonplace Books & Dictation

# A Survey of Charlotte Mason's Transcription

Transcription is what Charlotte Mason referred to when speaking of the act of "making a written copy of" (Merriam-Webster) or "a written or printed version of something" (Oxford Dictionaries); it is what we today refer to as copywork. In *Home Education* (Vol. 1), Ms. Mason sets out the value of transcription, what should be transcribed and the particulars on how it should be executed. Interestingly, it is not a perfect match to the copywork method set forth in most Charlotte Mason style curricula; copywork in many of these circles is described as having a child copy specific, pre-chosen excerpts of poetry and literature and passages from the Bible. Typically, a young child would start with one short sentence and gradually, as writing fluency and age increases, add to this amount, working up to longer passages and excerpts. Eventually, this would be phased-out as written narration and dictation would take precedence and a commonplace book would be introduced. This is a very short synopsis of how the copywork method is defined by most curricula today.

Looking more closely at Mason's own words, we discover that there is no insistence on having a child copy pre-chosen excerpts and passages, but instead is encouraged to "transcribe favorite passages" (238). Here she writes: "A certain sense of possession and delight may be added to this exercise if children are allowed to choose for transcription their favorite verse in one poem and another (238). The relationship between a child's choice of passage and their ability to actually write it must be in place before this can be properly started, which is supported by her recommendation that a child not transcribe until 7 or 8**.** She states: "The earliest practice in writing proper for children of seven or eight should be, not letter-writing or dictation, but transcription, slow and beautiful work…" (238).

Very young children should be focusing more on a handwriting program until some proficiency has been established. Their transcription can be focused on producing "one letter to be mastered each lesson" (PNEU Program 93; Form I). As fine motor skills build, and an introduction to all strokes needed to write the alphabet has been established, a child will gradually be ready to write words and then short sentences. It is at this time that transcription can begin. Beginning before this time will only create frustration as children may eagerly wish to transcribe a favorite passage only to be limited in their own ability to write the words needed for it. Since the focus is always on quality and beauty with regard to transcription, this will lost in the struggle between what children wish to write vs. what they are able to write.

Transcription and handwriting are connected in that what we know as handwriting is essentially the beginning stage of transcription. Without the latter, we cannot have the emphasis on the beauty and perfect execution of transcription. A child must have time and practice to develop the skills and habits needed to achieve at this level. Many handwriting programs, such as Getty & Dubay's *Italic Handwriting Series*, develop children's skills by beginning with specific strokes and joins and then connecting these to make letters. This approach is similar to how *A New Handwriting for Teachers* by M. M. Bridges works; the latter book used in the PNEU programs. As the book levels increase, the child begins to apply their newly developed skills to first words and then sentences. Children can

then begin additional transcription work, where favorite passages and excerpts can now be incorporated into their routine.

There is also a great deal of overlap between transcription and handwriting programs in that both emphasize and instruct on important technical habits such as proper posture, hand grip and position in writing. For young children, letter size should be developmentally appropriate for each child with smaller letter sizes initiated later and lessons should last only 10-15 minutes each time. The habit of perfect execution is vividly illustrated with the act of transcription. Ms. Mason tells us:

> No work should be given to a child that he cannot execute *perfectly*, and then perfection should be required from him as a matter of course. For instance, he is set to do a copy of strokes, and is allowed to show a slateful at all sorts of slopes and all sorts of intervals; his moral sense is vitiated, his *eye* is injured. Set him six strokes to copy; let him, not bring a slateful, but six perfect strokes, at regular distances and at regular slopes. If he produces a faulty pair, get him to point out the fault, and persevere until he has produced his task; if he does not do it to-day, let him go on to-morrow and the next day, and when the six perfect strokes appear, let it be an occasion of triumph. So with the little tasks of painting, drawing, or construction he sets himself—let everything he does *be well done*. An unsteady house of cards is a thing to be ashamed of. Closely connected with this habit of 'perfect work' is that of finishing whatever is taken in hand. The child should rarely be allowed to set his hand to a new undertaking until the last is finished (160).

Young children who are just learning to write should have daily or almost daily lessons, but focusing on only one letter at a time, but be sure to balance this if you are using a handwriting program. Since the focus is on building the habit of perfect execution, only have your child complete small sections of a handwriting book at a time; young children might complete only ¼ of the page or less per lesson. Remember that writing is a fine motor skill, but there are also many other ways to work on these skills. Painting, cutting and pasting, tracing, coloring, lacing, and many other activities build these same hand muscles and coordination. Children can trace the lines of letters using sand trays, rice trays and sandpaper letters. Gross motor skills are also important to develop-large letters can be created using the whole arm such as on sidewalks and chalkboards using chalk, on large chart paper using crayons or brushwork or just "writing" the letters in the air. Children who are transitioning from writing letters and single words would benefit from adding labels to pictures, such as labeling the parts of a bird, for additional practice. They might also dictate a title for a narration or picture and the teacher, in turn, can write on the board or type and print a model of it for them as reference as they neatly copy it.

Once a child is slightly older and demonstrates a true comfort with writing, add transcription into your weekly schedule. Allow your child to choose what they would like to copy, but keep their burgeoning skills in mind, guiding their choices as needed. If they are really motivated to transcribe a specific sentence or verse, then consider having them work on it over the course of several days, thus keeping lessons concentrated. These passages, verses or excerpts can be taken from any book with which your child has connected.

Here are some suggestions for how to guide children in their selections:

- Allow your student a chance to choose what they wish to copy. This should primarily be taken from books currently being used for lessons, but exceptions can always be made, especially with high quality books read for pleasure. If you feel that some books should be "off the table", then perhaps set out two or three approved book choices and ask their preference. Be sure to encourage your children to rotate through their books, allowing their work to reflect a number of types of books.
- Very young children should copy short and simple sentences for the most part. Sentences which reflect more complexity will come later. Longer sentences, if not overall complex, could be used but allow your student more than one lesson to complete it.
- Before each week begins, choose a handful of possible sentences from various books and write the page number and book title in your notes. These may be helpful if your student doesn't always have a specific book in mind. These could also be quickly typed and saved, making it easier to print when needed. These sentences should reflect your student's abilities. If your student cannot read it, then it is not a good choice at this time. If your student will greatly struggle to spell it, then it is not a good choice at this time. This is not meant to frustrate; it is meant to be skill-building.
- Here are three examples from the Year Two book titles: "Edward III decided he wanted to rule France as well as England." (*A Child's History of the World*) "Finally, the clouds rolled away and the moon came out" (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) or "There are fairies at the bottom of our garden!" (*Fairies and Chimneys*). Your lesson for history will have already noted the name of Edward III before reading the chapter. There is much for a child to contend with in even these short sentence samples, such as verbs ending in "-ed", capitalizing proper nouns and how singular nouns change their spelling when made plural.

It may be helpful if the selections are then typed and printed or written neatly by the teacher. The child can then transcribe from this copy. Mason writes: "In all writing lessons, free use should be made of the blackboard by both teacher and children by way of model and practice" (239). *StartWrite* is a software program which allows a teacher to create printed pages in the Italics font, so this may be helpful for children of this stage. As children become more adept at writing and transcribing, their selections could be copied directly from the book. Using book flags to mark the page or a book stand can help in keeping track of the selection and managing the book itself.

Transcription develops spelling as well as handwriting. Mason states: "Transcription should be an introduction to spelling. Children should be encouraged to look at the word, see a picture of it with their eyes shut, and then write from memory" (238). This means that each word is meant to be looked at and copied as a whole and not one letter at a time. It may be helpful to cover each word, one at a time, allowing the child time to see it, close their eyes and visualize it and then write it from memory. From Volume One: "The whole secret of spelling lies in the habit of visualizing words from memory, and children must be trained to visualize in the course of their reading. They enjoy this way of learning to spell" (243). This approach builds the skills needed by the child for dictation.

Dictation will require the student to hold a number of words in their mind, especially as it progresses. Again, children who struggle with this may need to "write" the word in the air while it is covered to help connect the word to the muscles of the hand together.

Also, while transcription typically phases into a commonplace book in the upper years, it still may benefit struggling writers of all ages and as well as students new to the methods and ideas of Charlotte Mason. Sometimes it is helpful to these students to back up a little, gain control of these skills and then move forward. Often, as they are older, they will move through these beginning stages quickly.

As children become proficient readers and writers, words and ideas from books will become even more inspiring to them, prompting them to show more interest in what they copy. At this time, I move children into what I call a "copybook". This book falls midway between copywork and a commonplace book. It even more firmly models itself after Mason's express desire that children transcribe what they choose-words and ideas to which they have personally connected.

Here is how a copybook is kept:

- A plain composition book will work fine for a copybook. The composition book should have a half-page of lines on the bottom with the top half being blank. This allows the student to copy the entry and then illustrate it. There are even primary level composition books which have additional mid-lines to serve as better handwriting guides.
- The copybook differs from copywork in that the child choses even more freely the entries they find interesting. This should be introduced only when children have proven they can transcribe properly without direct supervision. These lessons will be handled primarily by the student with the teacher checking entries weekly and making adjustments in requirements, as needed.
- An assignment sheet, if you are using this with your student, requires the student to complete at least two entries per week. The student may choose from any books currently being used for lessons. Any exceptions should be approved by the teacher first.
- A child may need more guidance in the first year. It's good to make sure the books are varying at least a little and that the child is not using just one specific book title or just one type of book. If needed, a note in the assignment sheet can take care of this. For example, your assignment sheet entry might read: *Complete two entries into your copybook using any one of your history books for one entry and any one of your literature books for the second entry.*
- The students choose any sentence(s) which they find interesting. They copy it into their book and illustrate this excerpt in the space above. They should date the entry and the book from which it was taken.
- It becomes a very special record of the books that they have read and loved.

From Volume Five, we read: "Such a diary, carefully kept through life, should be exceedingly interesting as containing the intellectual history of the writer; besides, we never forget the book that

we have made extracts from, and of which we have taken the trouble to write a short review" (260). Although this quote is referring to the commonplace book, the ideas still apply to the copybook.

# Commonplace Books

*It is very helpful to read with a commonplace book or reading-diary, in which to put down any striking thought in your author, or your own impression of the work, or of any part of it; but not summaries of facts. Such a diary, carefully kept through life, should be exceedingly interesting as containing the intellectual history of the writer; besides, we never forget the book that we have made extracts from, and of which we have taken the trouble to write a short review. - Mason, Vol. 5 p. 260*

**What is a commonplace book?**

Charlotte Mason expected older students to keep a commonplace book, or reading diary. This book served, in a sense, as a companion to the many books read in the upper years of the PNEU programs. In the above quote, Mason expressed that keeping one acted in some ways as narration does. Once a student has made an effort to connect with the words, then the words become part of them and their base knowledge. Today, students should continue this activity, keeping a commonplace book as a record of meaningful quotes, passages and verses as they read, even carrying on with this tradition throughout their life.

**At what age or level do most students begin keeping a commonplace book?**

PNEU programs show that typically students began keeping a commonplace book in Forms V and up; this correlates to Years 10-12. For the purposes of this curriculum, students can begin a commonplace book around age 12 or 13, depending on their readiness.

**What should students include in their commonplace book?**

PNEU Program 124 (Forms VI and V) includes this statement "Keep a Commonplace Book for passages that strike you particularly". This alludes to the idea that students should feel a sense of ownership with their commonplace books, choosing their entries based on what inspires or interests them. The PNEU article "The Teaching of History" suggests that students in the upper forms should keep a commonplace book for the literature which aligns with the history time period being studied and that "The pupils make entries into a 'Commonplace Book,' of those passages whose literary force or beauty have particularly appealed to them" (Nesbitt V12: 917-929).

Poetry, dialogue, detailed descriptive scenes, speeches or anything else that the student finds interesting in any way can be used as a selection for an entry. Students should look for sentences, lines or passages which catch their attention-whether by its beauty, style, use of figurative style or ability to cause the student to stop and pause, lingering over its meaning.

There are many different ways to approach the commonplace book. Literary terms, rhetoric categories or just keeping a record of favorite quotes, poetry and passages are all examples of different themes for a commonplace book.

**How often should my students make an entry into their commonplace book?**

Each student should make an entry at least twice a week, but, of course, more often than this should also be permitted. A reminder can be written on their assignment sheet. The assignment might read as follows: Complete two entries into your commonplace book for this week. The entries will be due on Friday and the entries must be made from any two of your books presently being read this term.

**In what way should my students make their entries?**

The student should vary the books they choose for entries by title and subject each term. For example, they might choose one book for literature and one book for history. The following week they might choose one book for science and a different book for literature, etc.

Each entry should be made in good handwriting and should be made with a concentrated effort to copy it as exactly as it is written.

A date for the time of entry, title of the work and author of the work should be included in every entry. Some students may wish to include page numbers to make it easier to relocate the source of their entry. It may be helpful to sometimes include a sentence or two briefly explaining the main plot points of an entry included or the characters involved in a dialogue exchange. Student can also add their impressions of the work or of that particular excerpt. These additions can certainly vary according to the interests of the students.

Writing in the margins of books which belong exclusively to the student may be an option for those families who permit this. For those who do not, sticky notes and flags or Book Darts may prove helpful in keeping a specific page marked, so that students may go back after reading to then copy their entries into their commonplace book. This allows the student to keep reading, marking points of interest quickly, rather than disrupting attention and leading to searches after reading.

Everything else is left to the independent mind of the one keeping the commonplace book, giving the students a great deal of creative and personal freedom with it.

**What supplies will my students need?**

A commonplace book can be made from numerous different types of notebooks. These can vary from a beautiful leather-bound journal to a basic composition book, whichever is the best fit for your family. Be sure that your student also has access to good pens with flowing ink, a good writing surface and any stick notes, flags or Book Darts which might be needed.

**What might help younger children better transition into keeping a commonplace book?**

In this curriculum, children begin with copywork, progress into keeping a copybook and then move into keeping a commonplace book. It is important to note that Charlotte Mason advocated for children to have more input or choice than is often associated with the general understanding of copywork. The typical understanding of copywork has usually been for the parent or the author of a

specific program to choose what is to be copied. While this is helpful in the younger years, when the transcription level is fully focused on copywork only, it is not helpful as children begin to read and write fluently, achieving independence. Mason actually encouraged the idea that children should have more say in what was transcribed. In *Home Education*, she writes "A certain sense of possession and delight may be added to this exercise if children are allowed to choose for transcription their favorite verse in one poem and another. This is better than to write a favorite poem, an exercise which stales on the little people before it is finished. But a book of their own, made up of their own chosen verses, should give them pleasure" (238). This is why my insertion of a **copybook** not only aides greatly in transitioning between copywork and keeping a commonplace book, but also provides the structure for children to choose their entries and have more of a voice in selecting what is written once they've reached this level of fluency and independence.

Another helpful transition activity is for children to begin copying mottoes into a notebook by the time they reach Form II. The task of writing mottoes was to be undertaken during Sunday Occupations (PNEU Program 124) and was considered a part of the moral training of children.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a motto was "a word, phrase, or sentence that expresses the principles or belief of a person, group, country, or organization". Mottoes for children might include phrases or sentences which express their own beliefs or principles or they might express the beliefs and principles of a person, country, culture or religion which the children wish to emulate.

In *School Education*, Mason writes:

> In the reading of the Bible, of poetry, of the best prose, the culling of mottoes is a delightful and most stimulating occupation, especially if a motto book be kept, perhaps under headings, perhaps not. It would not be a bad idea for children to make their own year-book, with a motto for every day in the year culled from their own reading. What an incentive to a good day it would be to read in the morning as a motto of our very own choice and selection, and not the voice of an outside mentor: 'Keep ye the law; be swift in all obedience'! The theme suggests endless subjects for consideration and direct teaching: for example, lives with a keynote; Bible heroes; Greek heroes; poems of moral inspiration; poems of patriotism, duty, or any single moral quality; moral object-lessons; mottoes and where to find them, etc. (135).

# Charlotte Mason Prepared Dictation

The following sections should outline and give example to Charlotte Mason's prepared dictation with a direct excerpt from Charlotte Mason's *Home Education* (vol. 1) about dictation and an article from the *Parents' Review*, detailing a lesson in dictation.

## Steps of a Dictation Lesson

Dictation lessons, conducted in some such way as the following, usually result in good spelling. A child of eight or nine prepares a paragraph, older children a page, or two or three pages. The child prepares by himself, by looking at the word he is not sure of, and then seeing it with his eyes shut.

Before he begins, the teacher asks what words he thinks will need his attention. He generally knows, but the teacher may point out any word likely to be a cause of stumbling. He lets his teacher know when he is ready.

The teacher asks if there are any words he is not sure of. These she puts, one by one, on the blackboard, letting the child look till he has a picture, and then rubbing the word out. If anyone is still doubtful he should be called to put the word he is not sure of on the board, the teacher watching to rub out the word when a wrong letter begins to appear, and again helping the child to get a mental picture.

Then the teacher gives out the dictation, clause by clause, each clause repeated once. She dictates with a view to the **pointing**, which the children are expected to put in as they write; but they must not be told "comma", "semicolon", etc.

After the sort of preparation I have described, which takes ten minutes or less, there is rarely an error in spelling. If there be, it is well worthwhile for the teacher to be on the watch with slips of stamp-paper to put over the wrong word, that its image may be erased as far as possible.

At the end of the lesson, the child should again study the wrong word in his book until he says he is sure of it, and should write it correctly on the stamp-paper. A lesson of this kind secures the hearty co-operation of children, who feel they take their due part in it; and it also prepares them for the second condition of good spelling, which is much reading combined with the habit of imaging the words as they are read.

~From *Home Education* (vol. 1) pp. 241-2; reformatted

Note: pointing=punctuation

**Subject: Dictation**

Group: English/Class II (grades 4-6) Time: 20 minutes

Objects

- To increase the girls' vocabulary
- To help them to visualize words and so write them correctly at their first attempt
- To improve their handwriting and composition
- To help to form habits of neatness and accuracy

Lesson

Step I. Let the children look over two pages of *Parables from Nature*, by Mrs. Gatty (for seven or eight minutes), which is new to them, but in which they are already interested.

Step II. Ask the children for any words they have not met with before, and write them upon the blackboard, giving other words like them, if possible, e.g., narrow, harrow, marrow; to make a stronger impression.

Step III. Choose a short passage from the two pages, and dictate once distinctly and clearly, not word by word, but in phrases. Look at the books as the children write, and if any mistakes do occur, cover them over with strips of stamp paper as soon as they are made and let them be rewritten correctly, so that the children may not get a wrong impression of a word fixed in their minds.

Step IV. Correct, noticing the neatness, accuracy and improvement in handwriting, and give encouragement accordingly.

~From *Parents' Review* (vol. 17)

# Slightly Altered Prepared Dictation

The following explains a slightly altered prepared dictation:

Dictation Selection

1. The selection should be based on their abilities with regard to writing and spelling. Very young students and students new to dictation should study a very short paragraph (one with only 2-3 sentences) and this paragraph should contain only the type of punctuation to which the child has been introduced. Children cannot be expected to properly punctuate a complex sentence filled with quotation marks, colons, etc. if they have not been introduced to this.

2. These selections can be taken from the books listed for their specific year. So a Year Three student's selections might come from *A Child's History of the World*, *Farmer Boy*, *The Trumpet of the Swan*, etc.

3. As they begin to progress in copywork, and later when grammar is added, exposure to additional types of punctuation and spelling expectations will increase. Short review lessons about spelling and punctuation can be presented as needed, incorporating them into the dictation lesson. These short lessons should not contain new material, but instead should focus only on material already learned. Presentations of new material can be incorporated into copywork lessons until grammar is studied more formally in Year Four.

## Dictation Preparation

4. You might use Post-it Flags to mark the pertinent section of the book to be studied and have your students study this marked section only. Younger students will only be studying a paragraph, but older students will eventually study 1-2 pages. They can practice spelling words on a small dry erase board or a sheet of notebook paper, whichever works best.

5. You might also type and print the selections in order to make the font larger and easier to read and provide space for marking it. Alternatively, you could photocopy and enlarge the specific page of the book too. These suggestions might only be necessary for younger students.

## Dictation Lesson-With Explanation Notes

6. Allow the child to study the selection, reading it carefully and noting all punctuation marks and all words that may present spelling problems. Before your student proceeds further, especially with students new to dictation, go over any spelling and punctuation that **you** see that might present problems.

7. Have your students combine the words from their own personal perusal as well as your own added suggestions and then copy them correctly onto a small dry erase board, into a notebook, onto scrap paper or the margins of the printed or photocopied paper. Students should write these words as often as needed to ensure that they can spell them correctly. Or write the words on a larger dry erase board or chalkboard and work though the spellings of each word together. If you wish to incorporate Ms. Mason's attention to visualizing the word in the mind, then this is the place to do this. Have your students go through each word and punctuation mark noted in the selection as ones for a closer look and study these until they are ready.

8. This is also a good time to review spelling rules already studied, as they apply. You might say to your students, "Remember what we do with words that end in 'y' and are being made plural...Yes, that's right, we change the 'y' to 'i' and add 'es' to it." You might give a short extension lesson, taking that word and writing it singular on the board or piece of paper and adding a few more examples of words like it. Then demonstrate their change to plural words.

9. Allow the students to have a few more minutes to read and study again if you've added a review lesson with them. Give them the quiet time and space they need. Let them tell you when they are ready to start and then begin the dictation.

10. Create a dictation notebook for keeping dictation work organized. This notebook can simply be a blank composition book or spiral notebook. Younger children may benefit from a composition book which contains the primary ruled lines to better aid in good handwriting. As long as the handwriting produced during dictation is reasonably legible and shows a genuine attempt for quality, then this is all that is needed. Children cannot continue to hear and write what is being dictated if they are taking too much time to concentrate on "perfect" handwriting as well. If the perfection in handwriting is important to you, then please be aware that your students will need more time to move through the skills of dictation, since the handwriting skills add another layer to the process. Students should date the dictation entry at the top of the entry and may also wish to include the author and title of the excerpt chosen at the bottom of the entry.

11. If a short paragraph was studied, then choose one sentence from all of those sentences studied and contained within the paragraph and dictate this one sentence to them. This is dictation for younger students. As students get older, they will study paragraphs with more sentences and will have 2-3 sentences chosen for dictation. Even older students will begin to study 2 paragraphs and have 1 of the 2 paragraphs dictated to them. Lastly, students will prepare and study 2 pages from which a paragraph will be selected and then dictated to them. Studying more than will actually be part of the dictation ensures that students will have prepared the selection well, since they will not know what part of it will be dictated to them.

12. While dictating, do not repeat the sentences. This is a CM style dictation that has been studied and prepared beforehand so this is different from other types of dictation. Only repeat a sentence if you as the speaker was interrupted or you read something incorrectly. The idea is to develop your child's ability to listen carefully!

13. Very short sentences can be read slowly but as a whole. If your students are writing more than one sentence, then don't start the next one until they have finished writing the one they are currently writing. As selections become more complex, and sentences become much longer, shorten from dictating in full sentences to dictating longer phrases, keeping an eye on your students as they write. Continue with the sentence as soon as you see they are ready to continue. Again, don't start a new sentence until current one is complete.

**Adaptation**: Read selections twice to new students or students struggling with dictation, especially with punctuation placement. Read once as described above and then a second time to allow them to focus on the placement of punctuation only. The first reading is sentence by sentence (or phrase by phrase) and then the second reading is straight though the whole selection in one continuous flow. It is assumed in the first reading that the dictation has already been taken down; the purpose in the second reading is for listening to pauses to correct punctuation placement.

14. As the passages get longer you must be careful to read with enunciation. Proper pauses are what will allow your child to know when to place the comma, period, exclamation point, etc.

15. After dictation, allow the child to check their own work by looking at the original text and make any corrections as needed. Any words misspelled should be corrected immediately. Teachers should

quickly check the entry as well, catching anything that might have been missed. If there were numerous mistakes, then consider giving some version of this dictation again, but on a different day and only after some attention has been given to correct these errors.

16. Teachers should pay close attention and make note of mistakes in dictation. These should be reviewed in other lessons, such as copywork or written narrations. Copywork can be specifically selected to provide practice for troublesome spelling issues and words and punctuation marks. It may be helpful to keep a notebook of your own which includes notes about each student as they work through copywork and dictation. This notebook can be an ongoing list of troublesome words, spelling rules, punctuation rules and other skills needed for writing for each student.

## Dictation Lesson-In Brief

- Mark the sections in the text to be studied and show your students it.
- Select the words and punctuation marks to be practiced and write and study these; give any short lessons pertaining to these words or marks, as needed.
- Give the dictation.
- Have your students check and correct their work.
- Make note of mistakes.

## Dictation Selection Example

Mother's teeth chattered in the cold, and she shut the door. Almanzo and Royal silently picked up the fallen icicles and silently filled the tub. It was so heavy they staggered when they carried it, and Father had to lift it onto the kitchen stove.

-From *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder (79)

Words and Marks to Study: Mother's teeth (sing. possession); Almanzo and Royal (proper nouns); commas after cold and it; spelling words –chattered, icicles, staggered

Note: These suggestions assume that students have already mastered the rules that sentences begin with a capital letter and end with punctuation.

Selection to Dictate: Almanzo and Royal silently picked up the fallen icicles and silently filled the tub.

# Grammar & Composition

# Grammar & Composition

Charlotte Mason usually began a light introduction to grammar in Year Four. An introduction to the main parts of speech as well as basic punctuation rules should be enough for Years 4-6. A more in-depth study could begin in Year 7 and 8. For the purposes of this curriculum, *A Mind in the Light*, grammar lessons can begin somewhere between late Year Three and Year Four, depending on the readiness of each student individually.

Attached to the blog post which focused on the *Parents' Review* article "Early Lessons for English Grammar" are some simple grammar lessons which would be a great way to ease into the study of grammar, particularly for beginning students. My thoughts about this article are also included. Additionally, I've linked Charlotte Mason's own grammar lessons at the website. Look under "Resources" and then "Skill Subjects and Foreign Languages". Other books, such as the Ruth Heller series, *Grammarland* and *Mary's Grammar* are linked, which may be helpful. Certainly, use other resources as best fits your family.

Remember, an effective Charlotte Mason approach includes the consistent practice of narration, copywork, dictation, recitation and reading aloud. These, individually and as a whole group, contribute to developing a proficient writer. A Year Four student should have had practice in developing skills such as organizing thoughts, arranging sentences, understanding words and sentences, attention to capitalization, punctuation and expression through these essential methods, making an introduction to grammar a sensible way to give some structure to what they already know. Also, the study of foreign languages, including Latin, brings forth attention to grammar as well.

Older students, in the upper levels, should add a more concentrated study of grammar. In Year 9+, they might also need to add a few books which focus on writing within structured formats, such as essays, learn citation and other advanced writing techniques. Numerous articles can be found at the blog which focus on writing, including upper-level writing. Be sure to read these as they may prove helpful.

See the page which follows for additional suggestions.

Additional Suggestions include:

Years 1-6

- Emma Serl's *Primary Language Lessons* followed with *Intermediate Language Lessons*

Years 7+

- *Analytical Grammar* series
- *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White
- *The Lively Art of Writing* by Lucile Vaughan Payne
- *Our Mother Tongue: An Introductory Guide to English Grammar* by Nancy Wilson
- *A Rulebook for Arguments* by Anthony Weston
- *New Oxford Guide to Writing* by Thomas Kane Archive

# Poetry & Recitation

# Recitation

## Preparing the Recitation

- Begin by reading the poem aloud to your student(s) very slowly and with good articulation.
- Discuss the poem with your student and be sure that they understand it.
- If the rhythm is complicated, be sure to practice it a few times together.
- In Year One, the poems are studied twice per week for five weeks and then once more in the sixth week. The poem is recited on Day Three in the sixth week.
- Preparatory Level students study only 3 poems this year, but adapt as needed. This would mean approximately one per term. Feel free to substitute from the additional selections if the chosen selections are too long.
- On each study day, have your student begin by listening to the entire poem as it is read slowly (but not an exaggerated slow speed) with careful attention. This helps prevent mistakes from taking hold of the memory.
- Don't feel pressure to fit this within the given timeline. If your student needs more time, please give them as much as they need. You can always remove a poem or two from the yearly list. The same is true on the other side, if your student needs to move faster, feel free to add more poems from the additional selections list.

### Beginning Readers

- Have your student listen to the poem again, but repeating each line after you.
- On Day One of the second week, you may wish to begin having your student memorize one or two lines. Repeat this until the poem is complete. Let your student listen to the line(s) and then let them repeat back what they can remember. Each time have your student recite as much as they can.
- As more of the poem becomes memorized, you might try writing the first letter only on the board or a sheet of paper to act as a guide for reciting the poem. As you progress with the poem, you can erase letters gradually. Remove the letters entirely when your student is ready.
- A practice recitation at the beginning of the sixth week (or end of term week) will prepare your student for the actual presentation of it.
- Auditory learners or non-readers might benefit from listening to a recording of the poem. As they practice they can stop and start the recording, as needed.

### Readers

- Have your student read it aloud to you slowly and with good articulation.
- On Day One of the second week, you may wish to begin having your student memorize one or two lines. Repeat this until the poem is complete. Let your student read the line(s) and

then remove the copy of the poem and see what they can remember. Each time have your student recite as much as they can.

- As more of the poem becomes memorized, you might try writing the first word or first letter only on the board or a sheet of paper to act as a guide for reciting the poem. As you progress with the poem, you can erase words or letters gradually. Remove the words or letters entirely when your student is ready.
- A practice recitation at the beginning of the sixth week (or end of term week) will prepare your student for the actual presentation of it.
- Auditory learners might benefit from listening to a recording of the poem. As they practice they can stop and start the recording, as needed.

## Recitation Day

- Once your student has the poem memorized, he/she can then recite the poem to a friend, family member or yourself.
- **Please allow your student time to practice reciting the poem on the day of the presentation before actually presenting it.**
- Encourage your student to stand up straight and to stand (relatively) still.
- Encourage your student to recite the poem with good articulation and feeling but not with an exaggerated amount of drama.

# Historical Poems and Ballads –Their Abundance

A study of Charlotte Mason's PNEU programs reveals that an abundance of historical poems and ballads are included in them. What is the significance of this?

The titles of books listed under Literature (Forms III and up) and under Reading are included in the programs, but sometimes there are only 1-2 specific titles for each of these categories. Yet, Shakespeare selections are always included and most often titles for historical poems and ballads are listed as well. We know that literature was included in the programs, but it is often hard to distinguish between those to be read aloud and those meant to be read independently. It is also difficult to discern which books from the literature and reading categories were read during lesson time and which were read during evening hours, holidays and Sundays. Why were poems and ballads deemed important enough to take the place of what could have been another literature book? Poetry read from anthologies and poet studies were already included in each term as well. Why were historical poems and ballads separated from this poetry reading?

It would be easy to suggest that perhaps these poems and ballads were included as a reflection of the limitations of literature during the time the PNEU programs were written or to assume that perhaps it was associated with the teaching approaches of that time. This way they could be excluded in any modern interpretation of a Charlotte Mason education. This would be a mistake.

*It is important to remember that book lists are meant to be reflective of teaching methods, ideas and philosophies and, as such, are tools in which to implement them.* Book lists *are* important and much can be learned by reading them, but they serve no purpose if they are not the pinnacle of an educational philosophy rather than the base of it. Curricula which first build their book lists and then attach teaching methods to them fail to understand some of the most fundamental ideas of education. Charlotte Mason developed her curriculum on a teaching philosophy and her book and poem suggestions are based *on her principles*. It is crucial to not remove what appears to be an important part of each program without first examining its relevance. Only after this examination can adjustments be made to her selections, perhaps replacing some of them and adding a few newer suggestions as well, thereby leaving the purpose of the poems and ballads in place, but yet modernizing them as needed.

# Historical Poems and Ballads –Their Purpose

Historical poems and ballads were included in every term program, because they share connections with literature, citizenship and history, capture the imagination, show the beauty of words, build skills in recitation and train the ear and mind for higher ideas and language.

Charlotte Mason expected history and literature to be studied concurrently by Form II, linking literature selections, history readings and historical poems and ballad to the same time period. Charlotte Mason writes "Readings in literature, whether prose or poetry, should generally illustrate the historical period being studied" (Vol. 6). Reading about historical events or people from both a

literary and historical perspective gives a more complete picture of what was happening in the past and how people truly felt about it. The literary side breathes more humanity into the historical side and the historical side keeps the truth in place, providing balance. Historical poems and ballads bring emotion to the story with their vivid verbs, imagery and exciting rhythm, giving a fuller picture; the poems are personalized and musical, capturing the ear and the attention of readers and better imprinting on their soul. Studying historical poems and ballads illustrate in words how poets of that time, and even of times just after, felt about the people and events of their time period. It helps move readers past the dates and facts and gives them a window in which to really "see" the life of that time.

In *Towards a Philosophy of Education*, Ms. Mason writes:

> We study English history in every grade. But in the earliest years, it's studied alone. We know from experience that it's not always possible to get the perfect book, so we use the best one we can find and supplement it with the best literary essays from the historical period. Literature hardly even seems like a separate subject because it's so closely associated with the term's world or English history. It might be a first-hand document or a story to teach a little about the time period. It's amazing how much actual knowledge children get when the thoughts and ideas from a time period are meshed with their study of the same time period's political and social developments. I'd like to make a point about the way poetry helps us to understand the thoughts and ideas of a time period--including our own. Every age, every era, has its own poetry that captures the soul and spirit of the time. It's a wonderful thing for a generation to have someone like Shakespeare, Dante, Milton or Burns to collect and preserve its essence as a gift for generations to come (Vol. 6).

Words can be beautiful and poetry is well-known for its ability to express this beauty; words in all of their glory –few, many, vivid, impactful, precise, haunting and descriptive. Is there a more beautiful way to introduce children to the many arrangements and uses of words? Not only does reading poetry model this for them, but it also lays the foundation for writing poetry. Students can begin to experiment with their own arrangements of words and poems, finding yet another way to express themselves.

Charlotte Mason writes "He should have practice, too, in reading aloud, for the most part, in the books he is using for his term's work. These should include a good deal of poetry, to accustom him to the delicate rendering of shades of meaning, and especially to make him aware that words are beautiful in themselves, that they are a source of pleasure, and are worthy of our honor; and that a beautiful word deserves to be beautifully said, with a certain roundness of tone and precision of utterance" (Vol. 1).

The above quote includes yet another purpose for the inclusion of historical poems and ballads-their role in building skills for recitation. First students hear poems read aloud beautifully and then they practice reciting them for themselves, sharing the beauty of poetry with others. Reciting poetry requires attention to the rhythm of the words as well as to words which should be accented. Some words should be spoken with a hushed reverence, some with firm resolve, some with intense energy

and some with quiet love. These alterations in speech require first the attention of their meaning, building skills in distinguishing between them.

Historical poems and ballads, like all poetry, encourage imagination. The mind of the reader plays with the images, ideas and emotion evoked by the words, adding their own tangents to them, making them their own. Poetry, because its form and nature has a natural reduction in word count, has more interpretation space available to the reader. This space allows readers to connect emotionally to the words, since they can make it a reflection of their own thoughts and feelings. While history books will tell the stories, the historical poems and ballads will repeat the stories but from new angles and interpretations; this makes them highly relatable.

Literary skills are needed to make intelligent readers. These skills develop over time and give students the tools they need to later connect to more advanced works. Poetry's use of rhythm, rhyme, imagery, figurative language, word choice and word arrangement gives practice in discernment to the ear and mind, preparing both for more complex language. In a *Parents' Review* article, Ronald McNeill writes, "But give him *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake*, and "The Revenge", "The Relief of Lucknow", and a little later *Enoch Arden*, *The Idylls of the King*, and *Childe Harold*. The fancy will be caught by the romance, the ear captivated by the rhyme and rhythm, the sense of fitness will gradually respond to the appropriateness of epithet and metaphor and imagery. Later on the attention will fasten on the curiosa felicitas of verbal nicety, and, as the mind and taste expand, the fitness of poetic expression and poetic method as a vehicle for high thought comes to be recognized" ("The Choice of Literature for the Young").

Lastly, historical poems and ballads often elicit a sense of patriotism, stirring the reader's emotions with such ideas as loyalty, freedom, duty, truth and honor. It would be important to include historical poems and ballads which are relevant to the student's own country, requiring those who live in the United States, Canada, Australia or other countries outside of Great Britain to make some adjustments to those included in Charlotte Mason's own selections.

Professor S. S. Laurie wrote a *Parents' Review* article which expands on many of the above thoughts. Included below are excerpts from this article:

> We must teach history to the young as an epic, a drama and a song. A certain number of dates connected with great crises of national history, or with great characters, must, of course, be known for the sake of the time-sequence, and certain prosaic facts must enter as connecting links of the epic, as the pupils increase in years. But the younger our pupils are, the more must the epic and dramatic and lyric idea of history be kept in view, and the more indifferent must we remain to causal explanations. Thus, the history of the school will be full of humanity, and so be a humane study; thus will it connect itself with literature; thus will it stir ethical emotion; thus, in short, will it be the true matter of history; and when history, in the larger philosophic conception of it, comes within the range of the cultured adult mind, this epic view of it will contribute to a true-reasoned comprehension--a comprehension, that is to say, which will take full account of human character, feeling, and motive.

> History taught in accordance with this method shows itself to be, above all other studies, a humane study, and to be rich in all those elements which go to the ethical culture of the young. All subjects, when properly taught, contribute, it is true, to this ethical culture, for even science can be humanized; but language (in its larger significance) and history contribute most of all, and these two play into each other's hands. Together they constitute, along with morality and religion, the humanistic in education, and furnish the best instruments for the ethical growth of mind.

The author continues with:

> This is the epic: the dramatic and the lyrical enters by reading to him, or with him, all the national poetry and song that has gathered round the period. He then, as in other subject, is invited to *express himself* in the construction of a narrative of the leading events.

> So in the history of England, the periods of the French wars and the Spanish Armada, for example, are to be treated in like manner. The boy must strike his roots deep into the national soil, or he will never come to much. It matters nothing that the poetry you give contains much that is legendary. A national legend is a far truer element in the inner history of a people than a bald fact ("Instruction in History and Citizenship").

# Shakespeare

# Shakespeare: His Work's Role in Programs -both Charlotte Mason & A Mind in the Light

William Shakespeare, also known as "Bard of Avon", is so well known to us that we often refer to him by his last name only. Adding new phrases and words to the English language, using soliloquies to give us insight into character thought and expanding ideas of character and plot within plays, he made dramatic changes to theatre and the literary world. This affect went on to influence authors, poets, artists and composers who followed. Even today, his words and craft still impact us.

He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire and became an English playwright, poet and actor. He married Anne Hathaway and had three children. While his family lived in Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare primarily worked and stayed in London.

Shakespeare's works include many plays such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. His plays are usually divided into three main categories: tragedy, comedy and history. Some of his later plays, such as *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* crossed comedy with tragedy and were known as romances. He was a well-regarded poet, creating what we know as the Shakespearean sonnet.

Aware of his significant effect on literature, poetry and drama, Charlotte Mason included a study of his works in her PNEU programs. This study began in Form II [Year Four] and continued throughout, although sometimes the programs for Form VI students included other forms of drama instead. Each year focused on one play per term, so three plays each year. A 1913 article from *The Parents' Review* affirms this when Ms. Daphne Chaplin writes:

> In Class II., the children range from nine to twelve years old, and their literature lessons are re-animated for them by the interest and pleasure of reading aloud. Thus, even when so young, they come to know and enjoy Shakespeare; there are not many people who do both. Each term they read a play, attending only to the swing and beauty of the lines, the simpler points of characterization (528-532, 546-547).

After rereading a number of the retellings from *Tales from Shakespeare*, I wondered again, if Charlotte Mason actually included all of Shakespeare's plays, especially with intending for students as young as 9 to be reading and listening to them. Some seemed particularly inappropriate for children this young. And, of course, his plays are written with more complexity than is normally read by children who have usually only just begun to gain reading fluency. After some research, I found that not all plays were covered and Form II students included even fewer options. From a large study of PNEU programs for Form II and above, here is a list of some of these plays:

Form II

*Henry V*, *Henry VIII*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King John*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It*, with the first six listed showing up more than once. A *Parent's Review* article: "Art and Literature in the Parents' Union School" also listed *Cymbeline* for Form II, but I was not able to access all of the PNEU programs, so it could have been included in another program. Nancy Kelly's article: "A Programme for Shakespeare" asked this same question. Having access to

some programs that I did not, she also listed "King Lear" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for this level too.

Form III +

All of above but with these added: *Hamlet*, *Richard II*, *Othello*, *Richard III* and *Romeo & Juliet*. Nancy Kelly adds "Much Ado about Nothing" and "The Taming of the Shrew" to this level from her list. So, it seems that even Mason was strategic about which plays were included for children as young as 9.

As far as how the plays were incorporated into a typical week, the programs show that students would choose some lines from the play of the term for transcribing as well as for recitation. In two scenarios, the correlated reading from Plutarch would also be read: *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, with the latter happening on just some occasions.

It seems that students would read the plays and many times act them out. In narration, they would sometimes create verses for characters and scenes from the plays or write scenes for the plays. In "The Work and Aims of the PNEU", another article from *The Parents' Review*, Mrs. Conyers Alston writes: "One play of Shakespeare's is read each term, not analytically, but for the joy of the thing. Children are also encouraged to write verses on given subjects and to make little plays and scenes from something read in the history, geography or literature lessons" (Alston, 1925, pp. 305-313). Even Ms. Mason refers to how students write verses inspired by their Shakespeare plays in *Towards a Philosophy of Education* (Vol. 6) with the following:

> The children write with perfect understanding as far as they go and there is rarely a 'howler' [*glaring mistake*] in hundreds of sets of papers. They have an enviable power of getting at the gist of a book or subject. Sometimes they are asked to write verses about a personage or an event; the result is not remarkable by way of poetry, but sums up a good deal of thoughtful reading in a delightful way… (242)

If there are concerns about much younger children reading Shakespearean plays in their original form, then Ms. Mason addresses this in Volume 6. She writes:

> In IIB they read their own geography, history, poetry, but perhaps Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, say, Scott's *Rob Roy*, *Gulliver's Travels*, should be read to them and narrated by them until they are well in their tenth year. Their power to understand, visualise, and 'tell' a play of Shakespeare from nine years old and onwards is very surprising. They put in nothing which is not there, but they miss nothing and display a passage or a scene in a sort of curious relief (182).

Charlotte Mason assures us that they will enjoy the stories, the acting out of them, the characters, plots and dialogue exchanges. It seems they are to enjoy the general frameworks of the stories until, as they grow older and with repeated exposure, they then take more and more from the plays. From *In Formation of Character* (Vol. 5), she writes:

> And Shakespeare? He, indeed, is not to be classed, and timed, and treated as one amongst others, — he, who might well be the daily bread of the intellectual life; Shakespeare is not to be studied in a year; he is to be read continuously throughout life, from ten years old and onwards. But a child of

> ten cannot understand Shakespeare. No; but can a man of fifty? Is not our great poet rather an ample feast of which every one takes according to his needs, and leaves what he has no stomach for? A little girl of nine said to me the other day that she had only read one play of Shakespeare's through, and that was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She did not understand the play, of course, but she must have found enough to amuse and interest her. How would it be to have a monthly reading of Shakespeare—a play, to be read in character, and continued for two or three evenings until it is finished? The Shakespeare evening would come to be looked on as a family *festa*; and the plays, read again and again, year after year, would yield more at each reading, and would leave behind in the end rich deposits of wisdom (226).

Ms. Mason indicates that Shakespeare offers the students a unique view into characters and the choices they make. These choices then go on to affect the outcome of the story.

From *Ourselves* (Vol. 4), Ms. Mason tells us:

> We probably read Shakespeare in the first place for his stories, afterwards for his characters, the multitude of delightful persons with whom he makes us so intimate that afterwards, in fiction or in fact, we say, 'She is another Jessica,' and 'That dear girl is a Miranda'; 'She is a Cordelia to her father,' and, such a figure in history, 'a base Iago.' To become intimate with Shakespeare in this way is a great enrichment of mind and instruction of conscience. Then, by degrees, as we go on reading this world-teacher, lines of insight and beauty take possession of us, and unconsciously mould our judgments of men and things and of the great issues of life (72).

While *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb are mentioned a number of times as worthy literature for much younger children in *Parents' Review* articles, it is not used specifically in the programs as literature. *The Shakespeare Storybook* by Mary Macleod is mentioned in the *Parents' Review* as a good alternative for a slightly more grown-up version of Lamb's tales.

*A Mind in the Light* has chosen to approach Shakespeare a little differently. It will not be introduced until Year Six, which is still in Form II but at the end of it. In this year, students will be introduced to Shakespeare with a specially designed introductory guide which will focus on the plays which Charlotte Mason *actually* included in her PNEU programs, including some of the missing histories. Largely based on Mary Macleod's *The Shakespeare Storybook* as well as some of Morrison's retellings of some of the history plays, this guide will provide students and teachers with pre-reading notes, narration prompts and other helpful resources. The selections needed for study will be included in the guide.

Students will begin reading Shakespeare's plays in their original form in Year Seven and will continue reading them through Year Twelve. Students aged 12 and older will read the plays -acting them out as desired, select verses for recitation and their commonplace book, write responses and papers and have Great Ideas Discussions. Attending live productions of plays when possible are always highly recommended, but movie options can also be enjoyed. Optionally, students may add lectures from The Great Courses.

Recommended Resources include:

Note: Free coloring pages are linked at the website.

Forms II, III & IV

- *Bard of Avon: The Story of William Shakespeare* by Diane Stanley
- *William Shakespeare & the Globe* by Aliki
- *Great Characters from Shakespeare* [Paper Dolls] from Dover
- *Great Scenes from Shakespeare's Plays* [Coloring Book] by Dover
- *Will's Words: How William Shakespeare Changed the Way You Talk* by Jane Sutcliffe and John Shelley
- *A Shakespeare Coloring Book* [Bellerophon Books]

Form V+

Note: As with any books and resources for older students, please preview; mature content is to be expected with Shakespeare.

- *Shakespeare After All* by Marjorie Garner
- *A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare* by Joseph Rosenblum
- *Players: The Mysterious Identity of William Shakespeare* by Bertram Fields
- *Shakespeare: The World as Stage* by Bill Bryson
- *How to Read and Understand Shakespeare* -other options are also available [The Great Courses]

# Languages

# Learning Languages

How did Charlotte Mason approach the teaching of foreign languages? How did this look in a general scope and sequence? To what main principles did she adhere?

Here are just some of the main points of how a Charlotte Mason approach to learning languages was constructed:

## A. The first new language to be introduced to children is French.

From her first volume, *Home Education*, Charlotte Mason felt that "all educated persons should be able to speak French" (Mason, 300-307). The children began to learn French in Form I. This is not to suggest that today you must also choose French as the first language, but the main idea is to choose a language that is most beneficial to you and your family and begin it while the children are young.

A. S. Tetley's "On the Teaching of Modern Languages" gives us several more reasons as to why French was considered the language to learn first, especially to the English:

> What language should be first taught is a problem of great interest, but one can hardly discuss now. German has many advantages over French in its early stages, but afterwards it becomes much harder. Moreover it lacks the ease and grace of its rival, and is never likely to become the "lingua franca" of educated society. Of all European languages Spanish is probably the easiest for Englishmen; but its modern literature, like that of Italy, is incomparably inferior to that of France or Germany (Tetley, 801-807).

## B. The best approach to learning a new language was encapsulated in the M. Gouin Method.

Charlotte Mason believed that M. Gouin's approach to the study of languages as was relayed in *The Art of Teaching and Studying Languages* was "the most important attempt that has yet been made to bring the study of languages within the sphere of practical education" (Mason, 300-307). M. Gouin believed that "we must acquire a new language as a child acquires his mother tongue" and that "the verb is the key to the sentence, and more, is the living bridge between thought and act" (Mason, 300-307). She goes on to add, "He maintains, too, that the child thinks in sentences, not in words; that his sentences have a logical sequence; that this sequence is one of time- the order of the operations in, for example, the growth of a plant, or the grinding of corn in a mill; that, as the child perceives the operations, he has an absolute need to express them; that his ear solicits, his memory cherishes, his tongue reproduces, the words which say the thing he thinks" (Mason, 300-307).

This method is not without its misuse or limitations. Take care that a student working through this series does not feel as if the exercise he/she is working through is too childish or inappropriately

leveled for him/her. Also, be aware that this method really does need the skills of a fluent, or very nearly fluent, speaker of the language being studied.

## C. Young children should begin learning a language primarily through oral means, such as through songs, poems and conversations.

Children in Form I complete all of their French lessons orally. All children of these ages learn songs, poems, singing games and work through *Cours de Francais, Methode Orale, Premier Livre* by F. Themoin, additionally making new sentences with words learned from the latter series. Form IB students might also work through *Le Livre Rouge* by E. Magee, one lesson per week. Students in Form IA learn poetry from *Becueil de Poemes*, Vol. 1 by J. Molmy and might also narrate a fable from *French Fables in Action* by V. Partington. Those in their 6th term might use *La Vie de Madame Souris* as a first reading book (PNEU Program 113).

Apply these general ideas to your chosen language. Use a book, curriculum or resource to create a vocabulary, sentence and dialogue foundation along with a songbook and its audio component for singing. Introduce words which have particular meaning to children, words which name that which they come in contact with regularly. For example, children relate to conversations which center on food, family, play, friends and nature. Use these new words in sentences and keep track of them in a notebook. The notebook can be referred to in lessons throughout the year. As children progress into the next form, they will begin to write some words and sentences of their own. In Form IA, add a collection of children's poems and a resource for fables, short children's stories and/or dramatic scenes to be acted out in your target language. Charlotte Mason explains:

> Again, the child's vocabulary should increase steadily, say, at the rate of half a dozen words a day. Think of fifteen hundred words in a year! The child who has that number of words, and knows how to apply them, can speak French. Of course, his teacher will take care that, in giving words, she gives idioms also, and that as he learns new words, they are put into sentences and kept in use from day to day. A note-book in which she enters the child's new words and sentences will easily enable the teacher to do this (Mason, 300-307).

Picture lessons are another approach for teaching younger children. A child can do more than just name the persons or objects seen, although sometimes this is one way to reinforce vocabulary. Pictures can be described, first by the teacher, in terms of what the people or animals might be doing. This connects nouns (names of people and objects) to verbs (what is being done) in an authentic, conversational manner which models appropriate speech to the children. The children can then, using their own words, tell about the same picture. Dialogues can branch off from these conversations, the teacher introducing basic question sentences, expressions, colors and numbers over time. Be careful to choose pictures which are appropriate, both in theme and intensity. Too much contained in one picture can be overwhelming, distracting your child's attention. Pictures with

too much obscurity or symbolism may interfere with your child's ability to describe the picture with what is, at this time, a very limited vocabulary.

## D. As children move out of the primary ages, more writing, grammar and narration should be added to their study of the language, with resources from previous years continued.

Clara L. Daniell, from "When and How to Begin Modern Languages" states:

> By this time the blackboard will be wanted, and the sentences referring to the actions in picture or song can be written down. We will suppose the children are now over eight. The next step will be to copy the sentences for themselves in writing. Soon they will begin to ask questions about plural endings and agreement of adjectives (not, of course, in that grammatical way, but they are almost sure to notice the differences in spelling), and with skillful leading they can find out reasons and rules bit by bit and will remember them because the joy of discovery will be theirs" (Daniell, 808-814).

A.S. Tetley similarly agrees with the need for including a written aspect to the study of language. In his article "On the Teaching of Modern Languages" he writes "I strongly believe in accustoming the children from the beginning to the written language. They should see the words on the blackboard and write them in sentences for themselves. It is not enough to get them to repeat the phrases or invent new ones with mere verbal accuracy; they should have incessant practice in writing" (Tetley, 801-807).

At this level, Charlotte Mason felt that narration should begin to take a fuller role. The teacher would read a small section from a children's story or collection of stories written in the target language, such as *Sur La Montagne*. The children and teacher translate the section to be read, the teacher reads this section in the target language and then the children narrate it back. Mason's *Towards a Philosophy of Education* expands on this:

> …they are expected to narrate the sentence or paragraph which has been read to them. Young children find little difficulty in using French vocables, but at this stage the teacher should with the children's help translate the little passage which is to be narrated, then re-read it in French and require the children to narrate it. This they do after a time surprisingly well, and the act of narrating gives them some command of French phrases as far as they go, much more so than if they learnt the little passage off by heart (Mason, 209-213).

Grammar is given more attention at this level with books and resources to provide the base for this. Grammar is studied naturally as well, as it arises, such as was described above by Clara L. Daniell. As sentences and phrases are written on the board, the children will notice differences in spellings and pronunciations. These differences are often related to changes based in grammar. The teacher can lead the students into understanding these changes.

Also, picture lessons are used to encourage children to describe more fully what they see. This further builds their skills in narration. Older students of this form will listen to longer reading sections and narrate them as well. Latin begins in Form II.

## E. Students of the upper forms will have begun their second modern language and later add a third one. Their study of languages becomes more challenging.

In Form III, students will add another modern language. Their study of French and Latin will continue and advance as they also begin to learn either German or Italian. Their language studies include many aspects as was used in earlier years such as poetry, readings and narration, grammar and songs. To this more challenging and lengthy readings are added. Students read and narrate chapters from books, begin translating and are able to parse sections from books, since their grammar knowledge has grown. As the upper years advance, students begin to read classics in their target languages such as, works by Victor Hugo, Livy and Dante and the *Nibelungenlied* in German. The writing assignments match the advancement of reading selections in challenge. Charlotte Mason gives us a sense of the types of assignments the students of the upper forms might have with regard to languages in the following excerpt:

> Thus Form II is required to "Describe in French, picture 20." "Narrate the story *Esope et le Voyageur*." Part of the term's work in Form III is to "Read and narrate *Nouveaux Contes Français*, by Marc Ceppi." Form IV is required amongst other things to "Read and narrate Moliere's *Les Femmes Savantes*." Forms V and VI are required to "Write a résume' of *Le Misanthrope* or *L'Avare*," "Translate into French, *Modern Verse*, page 50, 'Leisure'" (Mason, 209-213).

# Natural History & Science

# Natural History & Science

## General Principles for Science and Nature Study

**Observation** is of one of the greatest and most foundational components of a good approach to the study of science and nature study. It should begin in the very earliest of years and will continue throughout. This can be practiced and supported through the following: nature walks, field trips, and other activities involving the natural world, sitting quietly while in nature, conducting experiments, object lessons, and watching demonstrations.

**Documentation**, also foundational, extends the observation component into a thoughtful and reflected account of those observations. These records can be made through nature notebooks, science notebooks, nature and seasonal lists, special study notebooks and later formal lab notebooks.

**Verification**, necessary for the search for truths, will be needed as the student and the curriculum build upon the scientific method. The student will learn to make comparisons, study timelines of observations, compile notes and observations into charts, copy or create diagrams, give accounts and descriptions of singular and compiled observations, give accounts as natural science laws are demonstrated or introduced and to which the student then connects, trace developments, discern patterns, examine results and group or classify.

**Experimentation** will begin as the students move into the upper years. This level of science will be based upon the idea that the student has already spent a great deal of time practicing the above three components and are now ready to expand on their knowledge and skills by analyzing and questioning their studies. They will need to separate what is relevant from what is irrelevant, separate what is reliable from what is unreliable, question, infer, make predications, note cause and effect, generalize and incorporate new knowledge into understood known knowledge and natural laws. This will be supported with a formal lab notebook, a special studies experiment notebook and a special studies presentation (or you might substitute an entry into a science fair). This special study experiment notebook and its presentation will allow the student to express, persuade or defend their hypothesis and follow it to its conclusion.

**Additionally**, books and other resources will be of good literary value and interesting to offer the student more opportunities to make connections with natural science laws, make connections with the skills needed to study science and make connections with real scientists at work. Science journals will be read, annotated and used to generate a journal response paper in the upper years. Some study will occur with the use of oral lesson, usually including demonstrations, to introduce or continue to build on the study of natural science laws. These laws will continue to be built upon in each successive year. The students will apply them as needed.

# Nature Experiences

The schedule is designed so that a longer nature experience can take place on Day 5, with shorter nature experiences to be included into your weekly schedule as it best fits your family. A good nature experience involves some planning because what is really needed is a window of time allotted to it. The planning aspect revolves more around allowing for the time than what is to be done during that time. In other words, as long as your child is on task about living, observing and experiencing nature, then there is no need to structure what will be studied or not, as the natural world will offer up its surprises as it will. Nature is studied as it presents itself. The guide will offer a general structure, but it is important to always follow your child's interests and what is readily available to be studied at the moment.

From *School Education* by Charlotte Mason, Vol. 3 (emphasis mine)

"They notice for themselves, and the teacher gives a name or other information as it is asked for, and it is surprising what a range of knowledge a child of nine or ten acquires. **The teachers are careful not to make these nature walks an opportunity for scientific instruction, as we wish the children's attention to be given to observation with very little direction**" (Mason 237).

"Geography, geology, the course of the sun, the behavior of the clouds, weather signs, all that the 'open' has to offer, are made use of in these walks; **but all is incidental, easy, and things are noticed as they occur**" (237).

A longer experience will require more time set aside and perhaps, sometimes, a little more planning. It is not necessary for every week to contain a very specific field trip or specialized event. Some of the best nature experiences will happen in your own backyard or in your own neighborhood. Simply having even more time to study, dwell, observe and notice will be the changing factor for this to take place. Although these longer nature experiences are scheduled for Day Five, this day can be altered as best fits your family. In the *Program I Lesson Guides*, the "Find and Describes" are written in for this day with the idea that your student could seek out one or two specific natural items, but with the majority of her time spent experiencing nature as it unfolds for her on that day.

On the other hand, it is not realistic to expect that families can set aside short periods of time and one longer period of time for nature experiences every week without some disruption to this routine. Life can be busy and complicated. This is when nature can be experienced in whatever life moment is happening at the time. If your schedule is busy for a couple of weeks, then allow backyards, parks and neighborhood walks to fulfill your longer nature experiences and allow your child to study his collections, make notes on a pet, watch the birds who come to your birdfeeder, study an ant pile, walk the dog and other everyday life experiences to fulfill your shorter nature experiences. The key is to not allow smaller periods of disruption to a routine dominate the overall year. Try to get back on track as soon as possible.

## Short Nature Experience Suggestions

- walking in your neighborhood
- playing and observing in yards, playgrounds or parks
- observing collections of leaves, rocks, shells, feathers, etc.
- caring/keeping/observing pets, plants, aquariums and wildlife
- maintaining and observing a bird feeder or bird bath
- observing the sky for weather patterns, stars and planets, constellations, etc.
- keeping an ant farm, watching caterpillars turn into butterflies, catching fireflies, etc.
- studying spiders and their webs

## Long Nature Experience Suggestions

- any shorter experience but with more time allotted for it
- hiking, walks in parks-both local and state sized
- field trips to natural museums, butterfly houses, wildlife preserves, zoos, etc.
- observe and experience beaches, ponds, rivers, streams, tide pools, woods, lakes, etc.
- picnics, horseback riding, fishing, canoeing, camping, volunteering at animal shelters, boating, travel, Scouts, etc.

## Year-Long Plant and Animal Observation Study

Each *Program Lesson Guide* will include 4 nature experiences per term (12 per year in total) devoted to the study of (1) plant of choice and (1) animal of choice to be observed throughout all three terms. Your student will make observations about their plant and animal choices and then sketch and dictate some notes about what they see throughout the seasons.

The *PNEU* article: "The Charm of Nature Study" by G. Dowton affirms, "Children should be encouraged to make notes about the same plants or birds for several consecutive years. Each year will bring some new things to their notice and a fuller knowledge of the ways and habits of their subject. It is a tremendous encouragement to find that one has discovered some peculiar little habit of a plant or bird purely by frequent and careful watching and not by reading about it in some book" (Dowton).

Please note that most of the plant study suggestions, other than trees, will be difficult to study through the entire year. Plant life is much harder to study in the winter. If your student chooses to study a plant that cannot be observed through all 3 terms, then please observe this plant during the seasons it is possible to do this. In the winter, you might substitute something else which is related to plant life, such as tree twigs, or study something completely different, such as animal tracks or omit this study completely until the spring. If you choose the latter option, then simply study your

animal of choice during this time or use these days as time for your child to freely experience nature as desired.

If possible, your students might study the same plant the following year, adding new notes and observations. Alternatively, they might study something related but slightly different to allow for comparisons in future years. For example, if one year thistle was studied then next year yarrow could be studied.

The importance of choosing a plant or animal which is easily accessible for observation should be emphasized to the child. This experience should be as simple as sending students outside with a sketch book and allowing them to sit quietly, observing the plant or animal and making a few quick sketches of what is fascinating. The teacher might come out after a reasonable amount of time has passed to answer any questions that have arisen, allow students to dictate any questions they might hope to answer with future observations and notes that they expressly wish to document.

## Suggestions for Plant and Animal Study

**Please be sure that your child does not choose to handle a poisonous or dangerous plant or animal as his specimen to study!**

Plant Suggestions

Trees-pine, oak, maple, fir, magnolia, palm

Wild Flowers, Weeds and Grass-dandelion, grass, honeysuckle, thistle, black-eyed Susan, yarrow

Garden Flowers-sunflower, daffodil, marigold, lily, sweet pea

House Plants-African violet, spider plant, amaryllis, cactus

Fruits and Vegetables-snow pea, cucumber, strawberries, blueberries

Herbs-rosemary, basil, parsley, mint

**These are simply some suggestions. Please make use of whatever plant life is native or accessible to your home.**

Animal Suggestions

Mammals-dog, cat, squirrel, rabbit, chipmunk

Amphibians and Reptiles-frog, turtle, toad, lizard

Birds-robin, wren, blue jay, dove, hummingbird, cardinal, sparrow

Fish-aquarium types, goldfish, bass, minnow

Invertebrates-crabs, insects, spiders, snails, worms

**These are simply some suggestions. Please make use of whatever animal life is native or accessible to your home.**

## Nature Extensions-Summer

The summer season is also a great time for many of the suggestions for longer nature experiences. A significant amount of natural history can be observed in summer's freedom from intense schedules and structures, making this particularly helpful if your year has been full of disruption.

Students may wish to continue their plant and animal observations so that the summer season is also included in the study.

## The Nature Notebook

Filled with sketches and notes based on a child's own personal connections with nature experiences, the nature notebook fulfills two fundamental principles in developing the science mind: observation and documentation. The ultimate goal is for a child to observe nature, thereby experiencing it, connect to it and then document the connection. An experience cannot be so named unless there is first an observation. Without an experience there can be no connection. Documenting the experience deepens the connection and further hones the skills of observation, preparing the student for the next experience. As you can see, these are so interrelated.

The nature notebook is kept by students of all ages, although in what way it is kept "…will vary according to the age of the children" … (Furneaux 286). After studying several PNEU articles and Charlotte Mason's own works, the variations of how to keep a nature notebook has been divided into three levels, although there is overlapping between the first and second level and the second and third level.

## Level One

This level is primarily designed for very young students, such as preparatory and sometimes Year One students. According to Mason's *Home Education* (Vol. 1), children should keep a calendar of sort, a record of "firsts", although it will continue on as these first observations will become second and third observations. Mason describes:

> **Calendars.** —It is a capital plan for the children to keep a calendar—the first oak-leaf, the first tadpole, the first cowslip, the first catkin, the first ripe blackberries, where seen, and when. The next year they will know when and where to look out for their favorites, and will, every year, be in a condition to add new observations. Think of the zest and interest, the

> *object*, which such a practice will give to daily walks and little excursions. There is hardly a day when some friend may not be expected to hold a first 'At Home' (Mason, Vol. 1).

**This calendar is more fully described in the article "Calendar of Firsts" at the website blog as well as in *Foundations: The Outline Guide for Early School*.**

You may wish to allow each child to collect some of their specimens, keeping them in a special box or basket. You may also wish to allow each child to have his own sketchbook, one outside of the family calendar, using it for natural history observation entries and other entries at their leisure. There are many possibilities to how this can be arranged, so please choose what works best for your family.

A child may begin to keep a nature notebook as soon as she is reasonably fluent with a pencil, crayon or paintbrush. At this time, you will now need to use a true sketchbook or notebook filled with paper heavy enough to take watercolor paints, etc. Your child may now sketch what interests her about the natural world, particularly during a nature experience.

"Nature Diaries. —As soon as he is able to keep it himself, a nature-diary is a source of delight to a child. Every day's walk gives him something to enter: three squirrels in a larch tree, a jay flying across such a field, a caterpillar climbing up a nettle, a snail eating a cabbage leaf, a spider dropping suddenly to the ground, where he found ground ivy, how it was growing and what plants were growing with it, how bindweed or ivy manages to climb" (Mason, Vol. 1).

While many children of this age will still be working on writing fluency, it is ideal to include some notes with the nature notebook. The PNEU article "The Works and Aims of the Parents' Union School" by Miss O'Ferrall directs parents and teachers by telling us that "Children who are too small to write dictate their notes which are written down for them" (O'Ferrall 777-787). Your child will sketch what he wishes and then tell you about it. You can then write any words that he dictates to you pertaining to his sketch.

Expanding on this base, your beginning writers might be able to write down some words on their own, so labels and captions can be encouraged too. For example, perhaps your child has seen a sparrow and wishes to include this into the notebook. After the sparrow has been drawn or painted, write the word "sparrow" on a board or sheet of chart paper. Your child can then copy it neatly underneath the drawing. Making note of dates will already be a part of your child's work, so you can encourage and support the writing of the date in the notebook. Ask your child to tell you about the sparrow. What was noticed about it? What colors could be used to portray it? What was it doing? Are there any other words to be written on the board? Perhaps your child would like to write "Today I saw a brown and grey sparrow in my yard." You can add any words that will be helpful in writing this sentence under the word "sparrow" on the board or chart paper, so that it can then be copied.

You might prefer to have your student write brief notes rather than complete sentences. If so, then he/she might write "sparrow", the date, "brown and grey", "small" and "drinking water" to any side of the sketch. Please choose whichever approach works best for your student. These examples merely describe two of a variety of ways to help a new writer keep notes in their notebook.

There are many different ways to organize and keep the nature notebook. Choose the method that works best for you and your family. "When the children are old enough to keep a diary for themselves the teacher will decide on the most suitable form of book, and also on the manner in which the entries are to be made" (Furneaux, 286-end). Look for the approach that will realistically fit the amount of time you would like spent on it. A maintained simple notebook will be more beneficial than one that is extravagant but too involved with which to be consistent.

Furneaux, in *A Nature Study Guide*, suggests "For the younger children a book of about forty pages is ample. Let them write the names of the months of the year at the top of each page, using an open folio of two pages for each month, and then enter their own observations under those headings. The remaining pages of the book may be used for miscellaneous observations and descriptions which are not necessarily connected with any particular month or season" (Furneaux 286-end). This nature notebook is very similar in description to Option 1 of the Calendar of Firsts. The difference in these is in the emphasis of "Firsts" in the latter notebook. If you choose this approach for the nature notebook, then you may wish to choose a different approach (Option 2 or 3) for the Calendar of Firsts to prevent confusion.

In the *Program Lesson Guides*, the Day Five "Find and Describe" suggestions set aside for each term, such as "Find and Describe 2 leaves" would also be included in this nature notebook. Choose only 4-6 of these nature specimens to record in full detail and color per term. For example, your student might choose to spend more time on one leaf, one flower, one bird and one animal per term. The latter entries can be made with oil pastels, crayons, colored pencils, watercolor paints or dry brush work. Any other nature specimens which fulfill the "Find and Describe" suggestions can be quick sketches and notes. Younger children may use the suggestions from the Natural History Observations list as entries for their nature notebook, if they keep one. This list is found in the *Foundations* guide. You can certainly choose to have all of your children follow the "Find and Describe" suggestions as well.

## Level Two

The nature notebook previously described by Furneaux from Level One can be expanded upon as children grow older. "It will be seen that the simple notebook just described is not a diary in the strictest sense of the term, though, of course, daily entries might be made if desired, in which case a much larger number of pages would be required if the book is to last a few years" (286-end). The notebook entries can also become more focused and detailed in Level Two. At this level it is also assumed that the child will write his own notes. O'Farrell also describes the nature notebook, "In connection with the Natural History every child in the P.U.S. keeps a Nature Book in which he

paints from nature flowers, birds, insects, animals—in short, any natural object which takes his fancy—and he writes his own descriptions and notes, not those dictated by his teacher (777-787).

The notebooks now include lists, although this aspect can certainly be included in the Level One books. These are lists of birds, flowers, trees and other natural specimens as they are discovered or observed by the child. The child would keep a record of when and where these discoveries were made, possibly keeping the lists in the back of the nature notebook.

Some students may need suggestions about what to observe, especially in winter and the teacher should feel free to offer ideas as needed. G. L. Davies from "Knowledge of the Universe" writes:

> The keeping of a Nature Note Book is an excellent means of encouraging scientific self-expression. However, I have found that some children need guidance as to which subjects to observe. In the winter months for instance a child may complain: 'But what is there to write about? Everything is covered with snow.' Of course there are also the enthusiasts who fill several Nature Note Books each term but generally it is as well to discuss with the class at the beginning of the month some likely subjects for observation. For example, in a snowy January the children may be told to look for birds searching for food, footprints in the snow, evergreens and certain constellations (Davies 264-271).

But, it is also extremely important that the nature notebook is not overly prescribed by a teacher or parent. This notebook is meant to be a record of the child's connections to the natural world. Your requirement may well reflect your connection and not necessarily his. Be careful to provide structure and guidelines when needed, but not to overtake the child's own path. Find balance between both sides. Furneaux cautions "The idea, at this stage of the child's education, is not to enforce frequent entries, but rather to see what the child takes a pleasure in recording. The teacher encourages, rather than forces the child, and leaves it as much as possible to its own initiative, giving occasional advice, and avoiding such rigidity of method as may tend to make the work a toil rather than a pleasure" (286-end).

This curriculum provides some structure in that Day Five's nature experience might state "Find and describe (1) tree" or "Find and describe (1) fish". These are written so that by the end of the term the child has met another of Charlotte Mason's guidelines. They are based on the idea that the PNEU programs show that the children were expected to "Find and describe (a) six wild flowers; watch, if possible and describe (b) ten birds, (c) five other animals", for example. The type and number varied each term and each year, but the idea remained the same. Based on these variations of the same idea, I've adjusted the type and number of natural specimens to observe and describe. The adjustments reflect the type of work and living books being completed for that year as well as what was included in previous years. For example, in Lower School B of Program I, the students study birds for two terms and the animals and plants of ponds and rivers in the last term. These students are then expected to find and describe, over the course of all three terms, a total of 3 trees, 3 cultivated crops, 6 animals, 3 weather or sky events, 3 sets of animal tracks, 3 fish and 3 reptiles or

amphibians. Birds were deliberately excluded from this list for this year, since they are studied exclusively for two terms already. These lists are, of course, broken down by terms. But, the "Find and Describes" are minimal in amount and should not take from the child's overall time for exploring and recording nature as they wish.

## Object Lessons

**The emphasis for the object lesson is in modeling, encouraging and supporting close observation.** The included lessons come from a variety of sources, correlating the objects studied to those specimens most accessible. The lessons are meant as a framework from which to work and the teacher/parent should not feel compelled to follow them exactly or completely. Please feel free to adapt these as best fits your family.

At this level, it is not necessary for your child to draw the object and include it into his notebook, but it is an option. A slightly older child or one who is both proficient in writing and drawing and also highly interested would benefit from adding object drawings to their notebooks. If your child does include them, please be sure that they label their work, including a date, the name of the object and, when needed, labels for the parts of the object.

## Concluding Notes

**The emphasis for the nature notebook is on the child's development of observing and recording what they see; it is not on art work.** Your student's notebook will be as it should be if it is filled with only a dozen or so well-done brush-work drawings for the entire year, the remaining entries consisting of a few extra sketches and a great deal more notes. The notebooks are meant to be as each individual child means it to be and are not to be overly-corrected by the teacher.

## Overview of Natural History for the Lower School B

Multiple short nature experiences with free use of nature notebooks over the course of the week.

Days One-Two: Typically, these days are set aside for listening to books read aloud.

Day Three: Object Lessons are sometimes scheduled and these most often take place on this day. Other activities and demonstrations which support the topics will also be scheduled on Day Three. Drawing is additionally scheduled to further strengthen fine motor and observation skills.

Day Four: Art technique work should include attention to drawing, watercolor painting and dry-brush work, sometimes focusing on natural objects.

Day Five: One long nature experience is scheduled along with time allotted for work in the nature notebook. In *Program I Lesson Guide –Year Two & Year Three* and *Program I Lesson Guide –Year Four,* the "Find and Describe" work is scheduled for this day as well and can be incorporated with the long nature experience. Younger children working through the *Foundations* guide can follow their

siblings with the "Find and Describe" work or may use the suggestions from the Natural History Observations list from their guide.

## Natural History Curiosity

Be sure to share the natural history that you experience with your children. Share what you see, smell and hear while on a nature walk. This models to them that the walk is about these experiences and not just traveling from point "A" to point "B". Share your curiosity out loud. When you see an ant scurrying along the path, ask "Where do you think that ant is going?" If you smell the scent of pine, ask "What do you think that smell might be?" If you hear a bird's song, then ask "Have we heard this bird before?" Evoke discussion and wonder as you experience nature. However, be careful not to overly dramatize. It's important to be authentic in our reverence for the natural world.

## Incidental Object Lessons

In *Parents and Children*, Charlotte Mason writes "Object-lessons should be incidental" (182). Nature experiences are important for many reasons and one of these is the spontaneity of what can be observed during them. Whether your students have come across a chrysalis hanging from a branch, a new bird sighting, a never-seen-before flower blooming or a rabbit sitting quietly near the path, these unpredictable moments are delightful!

Handle these moments in one of two ways:

1. Have your students call to you what they see and use this moment to ask questions which provoke more discovery, encouraging the students to seek more details and share them with you as they observe more carefully. For example, perhaps you are sitting nearby on a picnic blanket while the children have all gone off to explore nearby. Your youngest child then comes to you and excitedly shares that she has seen a new flower. Instead of jumping up immediately to see for yourself, allow the child to tell all that she can about it. Repeat the description and then ask more questions. For example, your child simply says that the flower is white. You might then ask "Is the flower entirely white, or are there parts which are other colors?" Let your child run back to examine it further, coming back to say "The middle part is yellow." You then might ask "Where is the flower? Tell me where it is in words so that I might go find it." Again, the child runs back, carefully noting the way to the flower and then comes back to explain this. You might then ask "Which part of the flower is white? Is the whole entire plant white?" After the child further explains, then you might ask "If only the petals are white, then I wonder what color the leaves and stem are? Even more, does this flower even have leaves and a stem?" This can continue as long as the child is still eager to learn more about her flower and share it.

[This is modeled off of an approach described in the PNEU article "Object Teaching; or, Words and Things" by T.G.R]

2. Allow your students to study their object on their own, tell what they see and then have you come over to see for yourself. At this point, ask them a few more pointed questions to provoke further discovery.

It's important to note that only a few questions are needed. This is not meant to turn into a lengthy lesson. Certainly, adjust the questions to the specific child in front of you. Very young children need only learn to observe and describe more carefully, while older students may begin to further expand their natural history vocabulary. Mason continues in *Parents and Children* with "It is unnecessary in the family to give an exhaustive examination to every object; one quality might be discussed in this, another quality in that" (183).

Encourage students to use all of their senses when observing their object. [Although it is important to be sure that the object they are studying is safe to touch, smell or approach.] If it is safe for the students, then encourage them to touch the object to note how it feels. How does it smell? What colors has it? What do they hear?

Here are some general questions you might use for incidental object lessons:

- How does the ___ eat/sleep/move/fly/swim, etc.?
- What is the ___ doing? Why?
- What happens when ___? What might happen if ___ [suggest the opposite of what it does]
- Where might I usually find ___? Could I find ___ in the ___ [suggest places it would not be]
- What color is it? Is the entire object this color, or just part of it? What other colors does it have? Is it shiny or dull?
- Describe its shape and size. [Compare the shape and size to something else relatable –Is ___ larger or smaller than a robin? Is ___ round like a ball? ] What is its shape from above?
- Is ___ smooth, rough, glossy, velvety, prickly, scaly, furry, etc.? Why?
- Does ___ have a scent? Describe that scent.
- Where might ___ home be? Tell how the home is made.
- How does ___ protect itself from its enemies?
- Tell how ____ grows.

## Prepared Object Lessons

Prepared object lessons will be included in the *Program Lesson Guides*.

# The Arts

# The Purpose of Displaying the Art Pieces

Displaying the works of the current artist being studied is a simple and effective way to create interest in that artist and in art, in general. That display can be arranged on a bulletin board, wall, easel or other designated area before any lesson work has begun with that particular artist. The art pieces are always readily available to be viewed. Daily views of the art pieces allow children an opportunity to examine a piece and then examine it again with a new perspective or approach, just as they are able to consider one work on one day and a different one by the same artist on another day. Display each piece only as they have been studied. The final display will then hold all of the artist's works.

# General Approach to an Artist Study

1. Choose an artist and then 5-8 art pieces of that artist, with 6 as a good goal. Try to include a self-portrait as often as able. This gives the students a visual of the artist.

2. Gather books about the artist or research suggested books that could be checked from the library.

3. Print the art pieces in color or mark them in a book. You may wish to find an article which explains or provides more information about each specific art piece but these articles are merely meant to be supportive to you as the teacher.

4. Display the art pieces on an easel, bulletin board, wall space or other designated area with labels for each piece.

5. At the beginning of each new term, discuss art. Why do we study art? Why do artists paint, sculpt, draw or build? What do we, as humans, learn about ourselves when viewing art?

6. Read at least one biography of the artist. Usually a short book such as one by Diane Stanley or Mike Venezia will work, but books with short or chapter biographies of artists work as well.

7. After reading the biography, study one picture for each lesson. It would be helpful, although not required, for each student to have their own copy of a picture. Each study of a piece will be followed by an art study narration.

8. Quick sketches of the general outline of the art pieces are introduced in the next level, but if your child is particularly keen to do this or you have some slightly older children joining in with this guide, then you may wish to allow a brief sketch for just one selection per term. Instead allow your student to choose their favorite and sketch this one.

# Picture Study

Picture Study is meant to be kept simple, keeping the focus on the actual art work itself. It would not be necessary for the teacher to spend a lot of time going over specific art details at this level. A simple introduction to the work itself and perhaps a relevant point about the artist is all that is needed initially. The student would have already listened to a light introductory story about the artist at the beginning of the art study, so only a point or two related or pertinent to the specific picture being studied would be needed.

The picture study approach described below is the one generally used by those who follow the methods of Charlotte Mason and was the approach used in her schools as well. Suggested below is a second approach. It is very similar but with a few minor alterations. These alterations will require a little more additional time to the overall lesson, but it offers some advantages. Please follow whichever method you prefer. Large families may benefit from the original approach as this helps keep the lesson combined and more efficient. The original method might be called a group approach and the altered method a private and then group approach.

## Group Approach

1. In general, the children should have some time to study the piece in quiet concentration. Each child having his/her own copy really helps make this happen. It's a lot harder for young children sharing a picture together to be able to uphold the quiet concentration part, but a careful teacher could certainly make this work too.

2. After careful study, the picture is taken away or turned over and the children tell all they can about the picture. They should describe it in great detail and spend time wondering about what they see and discussing what that might mean. In a group picture narration, allow one child to begin the narration, stop this narration after a minute or two and then allow the next child to continue with the narration, repeating this pattern until each child has narrated. Be sure to teach the children to listen well enough so as not to repeat what has already been said about the piece, otherwise this may feel repetitive. Also, be careful to alternate which child narrates first and also encourage children to continue to look intently enough to find something different to share. This approach to narrating can cause some children to refrain from sharing because they may feel that what they wanted to share has already been said.

3. Now the picture is brought back out or turned back over. The children then discuss what they might have missed in their description narration. It is at after the children have had time to discover for themselves what they might have missed that the teacher might pose a question or two, directing them towards something of which they might not have considered. Use the notes on the art piece to share the dimensions of the work and, in some cases, show your students what this size "looks" like in reality. Sometimes these selections are much larger or much smaller then was thought.

According to "Picture Talks" by Miss K. R. Hammond, the overall focus should remain on instilling a sense of beauty and a deep appreciation for art. Her ideas of picture study are encapsulated with this summary: "To sum up, then: In accordance with the root-idea of our Picture Talks, in these lessons we aim at giving ideas of three classes, concerning-- (1) the meaning of the picture; (2) the beauty with which that meaning is expressed; (3) the personality of the artist--where this is clearly felt in his works" (Hammond).

It is expressed by Miss Hammond that the teacher should provide some guidance and support during a picture study, but should not spend time lecturing about the work, particularly at this level. She stated, "The teacher will probably find she has a very small role to play, her part being merely to secure attention for some point that the child is inclined to overlook, and to explain in a very few simple words those problems that the child cannot solve for himself. Definite teaching is out of the question; suitable ideas are easily given, and a thoughtful love of Art inspired by simple natural talk over the picture at which the child is looking" (Hammond).

## Private-Group Approach

1. Have your student study the art selection, quietly and independently.

2. After studying it, remove or turn the picture over, and then have your student describe the art piece in great detail without looking at it. Students narrate to you privately, keeping the words and ideas of siblings and friends from having an influence on their own. Jot down some of these thoughts or points in a quick list as they narrate. Each child would meet with the teacher for a private narration.

3. Now you will come together as a group for a shared discussion. Share with your group the points which the students had in common about the piece, writing them on a board or large sheet of paper if you wish, and allow each student to offer at least one unique perspective as well.

4. For those students who are interested or are older, wait until all selections from the artist study has been completed and at that time have your student make a quick sketch of their favorite piece, drawing only the main outline points of it. **Remember, this is a quick sketch and not meant to replicate it.** Label the picture with their name of the work, date and artist's name on the back.

Several advantages arise from this approach, such as keeping students from influencing one another about what they see and what that might mean, allowing students who are more reserved their own separate voice and demonstrating in the shared group discussion that while some aspects and meanings of a work are revealed to most of us, others are not.

# Supportive Picture Study Questions

**General Background Information- only as needed**

Tell the children about the historical time period of which the work expresses.

Tell the children about the literary or historical significance of the work.

**Note: You may wish to read an excerpt from the book or poem for which the work illustrates. Treat this excerpt like a story and have the children narrate it afterwards. Let them see if they can find which scene in the story the picture is portraying.**

Tell the children just a little bit about the artist.

**Note: This is generally well-covered in the artist biography which is read at the very beginning of each new artist study. You may only need to remind your students of something that was learned earlier that has particular relevance with the specific work they are currently studying.**

# General Questions

What do you see in this picture? Describe this picture as if you are helping someone who cannot see it.

What colors are used? What do you think of these colors? What do these color choices make you feel?

If you could step inside of this painting, then how would you feel?

Is it night or day? How do we know this? Do you think it might be morning, noon or evening? How does the color used by the artist help us to know this? Does the artist show us light? Where is the light in the picture? Does the artist show us shadows? Where are these?

Is there any movement captured in this work? Who or what is moving?

Which parts of the picture seem nearer to you? Which ones seem farther away?

Why do you think the artist created this work? What might the artist want us to see, know or learn? How does the artist help us see this?

What is beautiful about this work-is the meaning or message we've learned from the work beautiful or just the artistic rendering of it?

What helps us to know that this work is by this artist? What part of whom the artist is as a person shows in the work?

## Works with People

What expressions are on the people's faces? Tell how you think each one might be feeling.

If you could step inside this picture and just listen and look quietly, then what do you imagine these people might say or do next?

## Suggestions for Alternate Days in Art Study

1. Have your student study the picture again and look for something they may have missed from the first time it was studied.

2. Read a book from the additional reading suggestions list.

3. Use this day for one of the extra resources, such as a coloring page.

4. After many pieces have already been studied by your artist, you might allow your student to complete an art piece of their own but in the style of the artist. What characteristics have you noted about your artist? Keep a short list and add this to your artist display section. Your child can then incorporate these stylistic techniques into their art piece.

5. Use this extra day to spread out the work as described in the previous week. For example, the National Gallery of Art (NGA) has many video tours at their website. These make interesting additions to the study of a famous art piece. These extensions could be moved into the alternate week.

6. Go visit an art museum.

7. For a student who is very interested, find additional art selections from this artist and study those as well.

## Suggestions for Alternate Days in Music Study

1. Have your student listen to the music selection again and look for something they may have missed from the first time it was studied.

2. Use this day for extra resources suggested or to spread out the work as described in the previous week.

3. Attend a symphony, opera or ballet.

4. Listen to an additional piece not already included in this guide by a composer that your student particularly enjoys.

5. Listen to a previous piece that was especially liked by your student just for the enjoyment of it.

# Art and Music Technique

## Music Technique

Formal lessons with an instrument are a great way to achieve good music technique and theory, but this is not possible for every family. Some suggested resources are given below to provide music technique and theory, giving the student opportunities to learn the language of music and a creative outlet of expression while honing motor skills, refining habits and reinforcing discipline.

## Music Technique Found in PNEU programs

- Singing-carols, French songs, hymns, English songs
- Learn to play the piano
- Sight singing-solfege-Tonic Sol-fa
- ear training and sight reading of music (PNEU P124)

## Music Technique Suggested by AMITL

- Singing-carols, hymns, folk/patriotic songs, French songs, Spanish songs, etc.
- Learn to play the piano or another instrument of choice (recorder, guitar, violin, etc.)
- Music Theory-learn to read basic music notes and symbols either alongside of instrument study or an introductory level for even those not learning an instrument
- Solfege-Tonic Sol-fa
- Kindermusik or other music class
- Church Choir or other organized singing groups
- The Core Knowledge book series has some basic information about music education for each of grades 1-6 that might provide a base from which to work.
- Other curriculum providers offer published music resources and curricula. For example, Veritas Press suggests *Discoveries in Music* for first grade along with *Classical Kids* CDs and the *Classical Kids Teaching Edition*. Use whichever programs work best for your family.

Additional websites offer some free resources as well. Links are provided at the website. See Resources: The Arts.

## Art Technique

Equally important is the student's own instruction in the skills and techniques behind creating art. This further augments a student's practice in important habits such as attention and application. Drawing, painting and sculpting are just some of the variations in art techniques practiced and some suggested resources will be included to achieve this.

# Art Technique Found in PNEU programs

Techniques for art were given more detail. Pencil use is limited to specific skills. Typically, students work on their skills in observation, memory, accuracy, proportion, light, shade and color work and these are often grouped into three technique areas: drawing, modeling-work and brush-work. From the Parents' Review article "The Teaching of Art", Marion Thomson explains that "At least an hour a week should be allowed for the drawing lesson as well as the half-hour or three-quarters allowed for modeling and brush-work respectively" (259).

## Form I; Years 1-3

**Note: These suggestions are meant for Form I students, but they could be adapted for younger children. For example, some exercises in brush strokes could be used but on a larger scale. For example, have your early school students do their brush stroke exercises on a large sheet of chart paper or in a sand tray. Younger children can also paint or color freely on large sheets of chart paper, use sidewalk chalk outside on the driveway, create imaginative pictures or make cards from construction paper.**

Accuracy and Observation-careful drawings or sketches of observed nature were made with pencil, with brush-work or with pastels. Some nature specimens that were drawn or painted included: wildflowers, animals, fruits, trees and budding twigs.

Proportion, Light, Shade and Color Sense can be achieved with younger children with modeling-work and brushwork. These techniques might include the following:

- exercises in brush strokes
- painting freely on large paper using brush, crayon, charcoal or chalk
- simple flat washes of shapes and of nature
- using a paint box with specially chosen colors and brushes, only these were to be used for this particular lesson

Imaginative work was encouraged with assignments for creating pictures of people, scenes from literature or tales read and holiday and birthday cards.

Sometimes assignments were to be created from memory.

## Form II; Years 4-6

Accuracy and Observation-careful drawings or sketches of observed nature were made with pencil, with brush-work or with pastels. Some nature specimens that were drawn or painted included: wildflowers, animals, fruits, trees and budding twigs.

Proportion, Light, Shade and Color Sense can be achieved with modeling and brush-work. These techniques might include the following:

- exercises, as needed, with brush strokes
- using a paint box with specially chosen colors and brushes, only these were to be used for this particular lesson

Some studies made by the children in Form II include:

- figures and horses
- simple sketches from nature
- trees
- doors and objects with wheels
- things used in the kitchen or in the garden
- autumnal coloring
- people at work in the field
- children at play

Imaginative work was encouraged with assignments for creating Christmas cards, Christmas calendars with beautiful lettering and original scenes from books assigned from reading or from nursery rhymes.

Children in this form were also encouraged to join the PUS portfolio. Sometimes assignments were to be created from memory.

Suggested Resources

- *What to Draw and How to Draw It* by E. G. Lutz
- *Drawing for Young Children* by Horace Grant
- *Drawing for Children and Others* by Vernon Blake
- "Drawing Lessons" by F. Monkhouse-*Parents' Review* article
- Consider the *Draw Write Now* series as well
- *Brushwork* by Marion Hudson

Additional Resources

- *Drafting, Design and Craftwork* by F. J. Glass
- "The Teaching of Drawing and Its Place in Education" by J. Williams-*Parents' Review* article
- The Fesole Club papers by W. G. Collingwood-*Parents' Review* articles
- *Sketching and Painting* by D. D. Sawer
- *The Way to Sketch* by Vernon Blake
- *Animal Drawing and Anatomy* by E. Noble
- *The Basis of Design* by Walter Crane

# Citizenship

# Citizenship

## How was citizenship studied in Charlotte Mason's PNEU programs?

Examining several PNEU programs will reveal that by Form 2B the study of citizenship was added. These Year Four students typically began to read or listen to either *Stories from the History of Rome* by Mrs. Beesley or *Stories of the Old Greeks* by W. H. D. Rouse. It was in Years Five and Six (Form 2A) that students began to study *Plutarch's Lives* along with *The Citizen Reader* by H. O. Arnold-Forster, although later programs show the latter book as being read by both levels A and B within Form 2 (so Year Four along with the typical Years 5 and 6). Other books for Form 2A included Bunyan's *The Holy War* and Sir Edward Parrott's *The Path of Glory*. Forms 3 and 4 add Charlotte Mason's *Ourselves*, the fourth volume in her series along with the continued study of *Plutarch's Lives*. Once a student had reached Forms 5 and 6, the category of citizenship changed to one titled "Every-day Morals and Economics".

## Where does citizenship fit within this curriculum?

While the books selected for Citizenship in many new Charlotte Mason programs exactly match the books listed in the PNEU programs, citizenship in this curriculum was developed after these PNEU programs had been studied. Their arrangement was noted, including looking closely over a number of programs of varying years. The books themselves, when accessible, Ms. Mason's own writings and *Parents' Review* articles were also examined. It is in knowing and then emulating Mason's purpose and intent and not the exactness of book titles, which will ultimately lead us to a modern curriculum that she might have supported.

Citizenship was included so that children would not only learn about how their country was to be governed and the ideas which evoked patriotism, but also to develop their own individual character. This might include: distinguishing between good and bad ideas, discovering what inspires statesmanship, learning how leadership affects a country and its people and understanding what happens when a community has no voice. These are all solidly built on great ideas.

This curriculum will include important speeches, documents and biographies, including *Plutarch's Lives*, as part of the history and geography component of each year. Citizenship will begin in Year Five and will continue through Year Eight. From Year Nine through Twelve, the aspects of citizenship will be incorporated into history, geography, philosophy, government, economics and even literature. Great Ideas Discussions are already part of or will be part of the teaching guides for these areas, connecting ideas such as justice, mercy, courage and loyalty to citizens, leaders, kings, queens and countries.

A biography of a leader or significant person better gives a student the ability to connect to his life over that of a short summary of him in a history book, as the former's length and detail better

reveals him. Miss M. Ambler wrote in a *Parents' Review* article that "The early histories also are practically biographies, written about great men by men of their own time. With the child, a biography is of greater use than a number of detached history stories, because in the latter it is difficult to make the characters real living men and women, whereas if he drops leisurely into some biography, he begins to think the thoughts and take the point of view of the man whose life he is studying, and he becomes accustomed to the dress and habits of his time. In this way, he is living not only in the life of one man, but in his period" ("'Plutarch's Lives' as Affording Some Education as a Citizen"). Plutarch's short biographies of Greek and Roman men were considered the best example of this. Mason writes "We find *Plutarch's Lives* exceedingly inspiring. These are read by the teacher (with suitable omissions) and narrated with great spirit by the children" (Mason Vol. 6). Other biographies and books were also used as well.

It is through the use of pivotal speeches and historical documents, those that define a country, biographies of leaders, pioneers and visionaries and government, political and economic books which will form the base of our citizenship study. Great Ideas and character will be further weighed and considered through discussions, narrations and essays, completing Mason's purpose and intent.

This curriculum is designed for the United States of America, but you should freely substitute speeches, documents, biographies and books which will best support your country. Most of the discussion questions revolving around the Great Ideas and character will be applicable to any country, but please always adapt as needed.

# Geography

# Geography

## Keeping a Map Record

Many books included for geography in a Charlotte Mason curriculum will consist of travel and exploration books. These living books follow the adventures of famous people and the descriptions of the new lands they encounter along their journey. Ideally, students should keep a map record of these journeys or voyages.

In *Home Education*, Charlotte Mason wrote "Maps must be carefully used in this type of work, -a sketch-map following the traveller's progress, to be compared finally with a complete map of the region; and the teacher will exact a description of such and such a town, and such and such a district, marked on the map, by way of testing and confirming the child's exact knowledge" (275).

Here are some ideas for keeping a map record:

- Print out a blank outline map of an area which includes the main portion of the journey or voyage and have students fill in and color the map as they read.
- Students will need access to a good atlas to label and mark their maps correctly.
- Some explorers traveled extensively across the world and for these people a world map may serve better.
- Concentrate on significant locations, keeping the main journey as the focus.
- Have students narrate using their map record as a reference.
- Check the lesson plans as links to good maps are often included.
- Younger students will need more guidance than older students, so be prepared to sit near or with younger students during this map recording process.

Alternatively, purchase the large outline maps from Beautiful Feet Books designed to accompany *Paddle-to-the-Sea*, *Minn of the Mississippi* & *Tree in the Trail* as a map record.

## Country Study

Students should devote some time in Years 3-5 studying their home country. For those living in the United States of America, this study coordinates well with the books written by Holling C. Holling used in these same years, since they too will cover the general expanse of the USA. *Paddle-to-the-Sea* by Holling C. Holling does include some areas in Canada, so is still a great option for Y3.

All students would benefit from having access to puzzle maps and a large wall map of their home country. There are many resources online –for purchase and sometimes for free- of printable state and province coloring pages, map outlines, etc. See the website tab "Resources" and then scroll down to the category "Geography" for links to some options for these.

Provide students with blank outline maps to label with capital cities, state or province names, abbreviations, regions, etc. Be sure to focus on just one aspect at a time. Perhaps cover regions and state/province names in one year, abbreviations in the next year and capital cities in the final year.

USA Book Suggestions

*National Parks of the USA* by Kate Siber –consider the following arrangement –Cover East and Central sections in Y3; Southwest and Rocky Mountains in Y4 and West, Alaska and the Tropics in Y5 or *50 Adventures in 50 States* by Kate Siber –consider covering 16-17 states per year. These books are beautifully illustrated, but are certainly just meant to be enjoyably perused.

*The Scrambled States of America* by Laurie Keller –fun read; can be checked from the library.

Canadian Book Suggestions

*Big Book of Canada: Exploring the Provinces and Territories* by Christopher Moore

# Book of Centuries

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Notes:_____
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# Creating and Keeping a Book of Centuries

**The preceding page is a format page to be used with a blank book in creating a Book of Centuries.**

## Components of a Book of Centuries

- A two-page spread should cover a century.
- The first page will be for words or short phrases for each year of the century. It is not necessary to include an entry for every year: the important events are all that are needed. Use the format guide included on the previous page for organization. The bottom of each left side page will have some lines underneath for any additional notes.
- The second page (on the right) is blank for simple drawings of archeological objects significant to the century covered.
- The main focus should be on giving students their own personal journal as they learn about history. They should choose what they consider most important to draw and what dates, words and phrases are included.
- The notebook should be neat and written in their best handwriting and it is suggested that the work is entered in pencil first and then color or ink added. The books were usually done with ink, but color would be fine as long as the tools for color are chosen carefully. For example, colored pencils would work well so as to prevent any discoloring onto the other pages.
- Leave at least 10 pages at the end blank as this is where your student can add maps they have drawn.
- Using a nice sketch book would work well, but of course the lines must be added for each left side page. A large journal book (not the small ones, but a larger one) such as seen in larger bookstores (spiral bound) would work very well.
- It would be best to guide the student in how to properly set up the dates and measure the number of pages.

## Instructions for Creating a Book of Centuries

A Moleskine book or something similar can be used for a Book of Centuries. These are very nice blank books with a bookmark strap and pocket in the back.

- Print the guide for each student and allow them to place it under each left side page. This will give them a guide for keeping their notebook organized as the printed lines will show through the blank page.
- It might be a good idea to laminate this sheet or place it in a sheet cover.
- The right side is to remain unlined, because this side is for their drawings.
- The first box will represent the first year of a century (For example, 1700 would be the first year for the 18th century.) and each box thereafter will represent the next year running across the top and then moving down each time.

**For example:**

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1700 | Act of Settlement | 1702 | 1703 | 1704 | 1705 | 1706 | 1707 | 1708 | 1709 |
| 1710 | 1711 | 1712 | 1713 | 1714 | 1715 | 1716 | 1717 | 1718 | 1719 |

- **<u>Writing in the dates for each individual box is not needed. The above example simply demonstrates the order of the boxes.</u>**

- Simply use the space to write one or two words of any important event for that year. For example, in the box for 1701 your student might write Act of Settlement.