

# 1. Charlotte Mason Prepared Dictation

The following sections should outline and give example to Charlotte Mason's prepared dictation: 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

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)

## 2. 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 late Year Three or 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 through 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 through 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 are based on the assumption 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.