



Subject by Subject

The Charlotte Mason Way

by Sonya Shafer



*D*iscover wonderfully natural methods of learning about God, people, and the world around you. Each school subject fits into one of those three categories. This book walks you through each subject and details how to teach it in a Charlotte Mason way.

Many parents find Charlotte Mason's methods to be intuitive—what they would naturally do with their children. These methods just make sense!

Use them and you will enjoy watching your children thrive and take delight in how much you will learn in the process. In fact, you may start to wonder if education can really be this simple.

Yes, it can . . . the delightful Charlotte Mason way!

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A Note from Simply Charlotte Mason

We love Charlotte Mason's brilliant methods, and we want to make it as simple as possible for you to use them in your home school. Here is a quick overview of how to teach each school subject in a Charlotte Mason way.

The short, practical chapters will get you up and running quickly, so you can spend more time confidently teaching your children and enjoying the methods.

Whether you want to add a method or two to your existing curriculum, work your way up to them gradually, or go all out from the start, this book will help you find your way one subject at a time.

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Chapter 1

A Generous Curriculum

As parents, we know that children grow best on generous portions. Meager meals can stunt a child's physical growth, but a generous diet of food gives that growing body lots of nutrients to draw from. It's the same emotionally; children need a generous supply of pure love to grow secure and happy and loving.

And the same holds true for a child's mental growth. A generous supply of ideas is needed. Charlotte Mason knew that.

“The mind feeds on ideas and therefore children should have a generous curriculum” (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 111).

A Wide Range of Subjects

Charlotte did not believe in only preparing children to hold down a job one day. She believed in feeding the children's minds and shaping their characters, as well as equipping them with skills.

So you won't find a skimpy curriculum that focuses on the three R's. Instead you will find a wide and generous curriculum that attempts to spread a feast of ideas before the children.

“Give children a wide range of subjects” (*School Education*, p. 162).

In a Charlotte Mason-style home school the children are given a wide variety of subjects so they will have plenty of mind-food to grow on.

- History

- Geography
- Bible
- Art
- Handicrafts
- Foreign Language
- Literature
- Music
- Poetry
- Science
- Beginning Reading
- Spelling
- Writing
- Grammar
- Math

We will walk through each of those subjects in the pages ahead and explain how to teach them in the Charlotte Mason way. You will be able to teach most of them with all of your family together.

Two Extremes

Now, the challenge of a generous curriculum is in trying not to swing to either extreme when you look at that list of subjects. One extreme is a tendency to panic and think, “There is no way we can cover all of those subjects every day!”

The answer to that extreme is to keep in mind that Charlotte did not do every subject every day. She kept variety in the schedule. Those subjects were all presented some time during the weeks of the term, but not every one every day.

The other extreme is the mind-set, “That’s a nice list, but I don’t really want to mess with some of those subjects; they look a bit inconvenient. Besides, I have my children for only a few years, so I’m going to focus on just the required stuff.”

Charlotte would encourage you to consider a wide variety of subjects as a necessity.

“In the nature of things then the unspoken demand of children is for a wide and very varied curriculum; it is necessary that they should have some knowledge of the wide range of interests proper to them as human beings, and for no reasons of convenience or time limitations may we curtail their proper curriculum” (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 14).

Sure, you might want to ease into it. There’s nothing wrong with getting some subjects up and running and then adding in the others little by little. But always keep that ideal goal in mind: a generous curriculum with a wide range of subjects.

Generous portions encourage generous growth.

Chapter 2

Three Basic CM Principles

When I was taking piano lessons, my teacher started with some basic, foundational points: keep your fingers curved; sit tall on the bench with both feet on the floor; listen to your playing. No matter what piece I was working on—from *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* to Beethoven's Pathétique Sonata—those principles remained constant.

If I neglected those foundational principles, my playing would suffer. Without them I would never achieve the degree of success that I desired.

The same is true in a Charlotte Mason (CM) education. Three principles are foundational. No matter what school subjects you are teaching, you want to be sure to keep these three principles in place. They should be a constant as you provide a generous curriculum for your child.

Three Basic Principles to Remember

1. Short Lessons

A key component of a Charlotte Mason-style lesson is that it is short. But there is a reason behind the short length: short, interesting lessons build the habit of attention. The more often your child pays attention for the whole lesson, the more that habit will become engrained. Once the pay-attention-for-the-whole-lesson habit is established, you can start nudging out the length. But start short.

It's just like training to run a marathon. Start short and build. You want to stop the lesson before you lose your child's attention. If he ends up daydreaming at the end of each lesson, that will become his habit. The more often he daydreams, the more it will become engrained. But if you stop the lesson before his eyes glaze over, he will develop the habit of paying attention for the whole lesson.

In Charlotte's schools the lessons for grades 1–3 were no longer than 15 or 20 minutes maximum and some subjects didn't take that long. Grades 4–6 nudged the maximum length out to 20 or 30 minutes, and grades 7–9 increased to 30 or 45 minutes maximum. Following that pattern, grades 10–12 should spend no more than 45 minutes to 1 hour on a lesson.

Short, interesting lessons build the habit of attention.

2. Quality Over Quantity

Many of Charlotte's methods are designed to cultivate good habits, particularly the habits of attention and perfect execution. Perfect execution means working toward perfection, or giving your best effort.

The second basic principle will encourage both of those habits: emphasize quality over quantity.

For example, rather than requiring your child to copy a whole page of handwriting—and watching as the child gets sloppier and sloppier as he moves toward the bottom of the page,—require a shorter portion, but let him know that only his very best work will suffice. If he writes one or two words (or lines, depending on his level) and puts forth his best effort, he will be done. If, however, he does slipshod work, he will be required to do it again until it is right.

Once again you are trying to instill a habit by repetition. The more times he concentrates on doing his best, the more it will

become a habit. But the more times he is allowed to be sloppy, the more that action will become engrained. Emphasize quality over quantity every time.

To learn more about habit-training, download the free e-book, [*Smooth and Easy Days*](#). You might also find helpful a recording of the [*Laying Down the Rails*](#) workshop, available in audio or video; the complete reference book, [*Laying Down the Rails: A Charlotte Mason Habits Handbook*](#); the treasury of motivational readings and ideas, [*Laying Down the Rails for Children: A Habit-Training Companion*](#); and the book for parents and older teens, [*Laying Down the Rails For Yourself*](#).

3. A Varied Order of Subjects

Another basic principle that will encourage full attention and best effort is to sequence the order of subjects that you do throughout the day to use different parts of the brain and body. You want to avoid over-fatiguing one part of the brain.

For example, if you come to the couch with a stack of books for your child to read and narrate, as you work your way through the stack you will find that it gets increasingly harder to pay full attention and narrate well. Why? You are overusing the read-and-narrate part of the brain.

Instead, try to vary the order of subjects. You might read and narrate one book; then switch to a different part of the brain and do some math; then use some fine motor skills and do a little copywork; then do a picture study; then do some singing; then come back and narrate another book. Do you see how that works? Use different parts of the brain and body as you order your day and you will make it easier for your child to pay full attention.

Short lessons, quality over quantity, and varying the order of subjects—whether you are just making the transition to incorporating some Charlotte Mason methods into your home

school or are an old pro at CM, these three basic principles are foundational. Get these three principles firmly established and your days will go much more smoothly.

Chapter 3

Teaching History

When I graduated from “the school of the yellow bus,” I knew next to nothing about history. Yes, I had made good grades, but very little about history had stuck. There was no reason to retain that mental list of events and dates past the test day, because I had no personal relation with those events or historical figures. They didn’t matter to me. Maybe you can relate.

Thankfully, over twenty years of homeschooling in a Charlotte Mason way, I have developed an appreciation for history and personal relations with the people involved. How? By using Charlotte’s methods of teaching history, I have learned along with my children and enjoyed doing it!

So, let’s talk about how to teach history.

Teaching History So It Means Something

In a Charlotte Mason education, history is taught through living books, narration, and a Book of Centuries.

Living Books

Living books are a key component to teaching many subjects in the Charlotte Mason Method, and history is one of them. [A living book](#) is a book that makes the subject come alive. It is usually written by one author who has a passion for the subject, rather than by a committee who has been hired to dispense facts in a textbook. A living book touches your emotions and fires your imagination, making it easy to see in your mind’s eye the events

that are being described. The facts are there, but they are clothed in those living ideas that make the events stand out in your mind.

There are all kinds of great living history books available. The [CM Bookfinder](#) on our website is a database full of living books that you can search by title, grade level, topic, and more. You'll find hundreds of living history books there.

If you want to see our favorites, take a look at the [SCM Curriculum](#). We've incorporated our top picks into those enjoyable and complete lesson plans.

To learn more about living books, feel free to spend a little time in our [Learning Library](#). There you will find all kinds of articles on many topics. You'll be able to read more on choosing good living books, using them, where to find them, and grasping that concept of living ideas vs. dry facts.

Narration

So you select a wonderful living history book and you read a portion of it to your student. Then what do you do? You require the child to narrate. He should tell back in his own words everything he can remember from the reading.

Narration demands a much higher thinking level than true/false, multiple choice, or fill-in-the-blank questions. You are asking the child to pay full attention and to compose a mental essay, in a sense.

Narration may seem easy until you try it for yourself. Charlotte encouraged adults to narrate in order to help them learn too. When you understand the power of narration, you will see why Charlotte used it in teaching many subjects.

While you're in the Learning Library, look for the [articles on narration](#) too. You'll find lots of great help and encouragement with this simple but powerful method.

Another resource that you might find helpful is the practical book, [Your Questions Answered: Narration](#).

Book of Centuries

The third tool that Charlotte used in teaching history is the Book of Centuries. It's basically a timeline in a book, organized in 100-year increments. As you read about (and narrate) people and events in history, jot them down on the appropriate pages in the Book of Centuries.

The genius of this idea comes to light when you add a person to a page that already contains someone or something that occurred in the same century. Now your brain makes the connection: "Oh! He lived at the same time as _____." A connection that your child makes for himself will have the deepest impression and last the longest. And a Book of Centuries is a prime tool for helping your child make those mental connections.

When the children are old enough, each should have his or her own Book of Centuries. Charlotte's students received theirs at about ten years old. During the younger years, you can compile a family Book of Centuries.

My Book of Centuries (yes, the parent should have one too!) has become a great companion and record of the fascinating people I've met through living history books. Now history makes sense!

You can create your own, using our [free basic Book of Centuries template](#) or purchase the ready-made [deluxe version, *My Book of Centuries*](#).

Teaching Tip for History

Charlotte recommended that history be taught in chronological order, which makes sense since so much of what happened was based on cause and effect. So make sure you work your way through history sequentially, but don't feel like you need to force other subjects to coordinate with the time period you happen to be studying.

Charlotte advocated natural connections, like history and geography. But you don't have to limit your art study, let's say, to your current historical period. You can select artists from a variety of eras with distinctly different styles. The key is to enter them into your Book of Centuries as you go along. Then when you progress to that point in history, your child will have a wonderful opportunity to make a mental connection when he sees that "old friend" looking out at him from that century's pages.

Whether history is your favorite subject or a lot of forgotten dates from days gone by, you can enjoy watching it come alive alongside your children when you use Charlotte's wonderful methods of living books, narration, and a Book of Centuries.

Chapter 4

Teaching Geography

If you had mentioned geography to me twenty years ago when I started homeschooling, my mind would have immediately visualized dusty maps with puzzling colored shapes and lists of imports, exports, and natural resources. Oh, and currency types. And sometimes a line-up of flags around the border.

But today my concept of geography has changed dramatically. It is now intricately linked to the people and events with whom I've formed a relation in my history readings. It is also tied to the present-day people I've met through travel books, current event magazines, and missionaries' videos.

And that's as it should be. History and geography are not about numbers, they are about real people and real places. They are living subjects and should be taught as such. With the Charlotte Mason Method, they are.

Teaching Geography in Context

When geography is taught in the context of people who live in various parts of our world and what their lives are like there, it comes alive. Charlotte used [living books](#), narration, and map work to teach geography that way.

Living Books and Narration

There are wonderful living geography books available that will help your child visit places around the world without ever leaving

home. Of course, if you can actually make the trip, do so; but that's not always possible. Living geography books are the next best thing to being there.

And asking for a [narration of each reading](#) will help cement the book's contents in your child's mind. You will find that Charlotte used living books and narration to teach many subjects to great advantage. Geography was one of those subjects.

Two living geography books that we have especially enjoyed through the years are [Material World](#) and [Hungry Planet: What the World Eats](#) by photographer Peter Menzel. In *Material World* the author went to various countries and took a picture of a typical family outside their house with all of their possessions. *Hungry Planet* is similar, but in that book he shows families in their kitchens with one week's worth of groceries. You can imagine the culture and contrasts and similarities that can be learned just from looking closely at the photographs. And the author includes first-hand accounts of his time with the various families.

Living Books on the Map

But there is another way you can use living books to help your child learn about geography. Whenever you read a living book—no matter on which subject,—locate its setting on a world map or globe. This technique will help your child see the countries on the map as places where people and animals reside and events occur, not just as funny-colored shapes.

So if you're reading *Heidi*, for example, go look up the Swiss Alps and see where they are located. If you're reading [Jack's Insects](#), locate on a map or a globe where each insect lives. Such natural connections do wonders to help make geography “living” for your child.

Map Drill

And then, to help students put the pieces together—to discover which countries are next to each other, which are near an ocean, or where the coldest countries are collected, for example—we also include map drill.

A simple once-a-week activity can help your child become familiar with that bigger picture. Give each child a blank outline map of the region (I usually focus on one continent at a time.) and ask him to label any countries he already knows. When he has labeled all he knows, give him a labeled map of the region. Tell him to check that he has recorded correct spellings and locations, then to copy one or two more countries onto his map. The next week, give him a new blank outline map of the same region and repeat the instructions.

As he sees the same region each week, he will become quite familiar with it and, little by little, put together the pieces in his mind. When coupled with the living books ideas given above, map drill will help round out your geography studies.

The [Visits to . . . geography notebooks](#) are designed to help you teach geography in that way. Each notebook focuses on one region of the world. The once-a-week lessons feature passages from *Material World* and *Hungry Planet*, narration prompts, map drills, and other recommended living books that take place in that region.

It was Charlotte Mason's goal that the geography lesson would be so alive to the students that it would "take them there" in their imaginations (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 40). You can accomplish that goal with a combination of living books, narration, and map work.

Chapter 5

Teaching Bible

Of all the subjects we include in our children's education, the most important should be their Bible lessons.

When Charlotte Mason talked about the knowledge that is important to give our children, she cited, "First and chiefest is the knowledge of God, to be got at most directly through the Bible" (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 254).

So let's talk about how to teach Bible.

Teaching *The Living Book*

Since the Bible is *the* living Book, we treat it as such by letting our children interact directly with it. Just as with other living books, we do not depend on fill-in-the-blank or true-and-false questions to guide them through Scripture. Instead, we read the Bible and require a narration. Discussion is encouraged following the narration.

1. Read and narrate the historical accounts.

The Old Testament accounts, the life of Christ recorded in the Gospels, and the acts of the early Church provide wonderful opportunities to read and narrate. Since those historical accounts are written in narrative form, it is easy to simply read them and ask the children to retell the stories in their own words.

Charlotte encouraged us to keep two things in mind when reading these accounts. First, try to read a full scene so the children

get the whole gist of what is going on. Don't feel obligated to stop and start at exact chapter breaks; go by scene changes in the narrative. Second, make necessary omissions. Some accounts are not as appropriate for young children to hear or understand at their tender age. Those narratives can be saved for future inclusion.

You'll find a day-by-day guide to reading and narrating these Biblical history accounts in the first three of our [history lesson plan books](#), covering Genesis through Acts.

2. Discuss and apply the epistles.

The epistles offer much food for thought and discussion. But beware of treating them like textbooks. Don't settle for fill-in-the-blank type studies. Wherever possible, encourage your students to read and put the passage into their own words to test their comprehension. Discussion questions are welcome, as are gentle applications without heavy-handed sermonizing.

Feel free to make use of Bible study helps, such as Bible dictionaries or commentaries. But be careful not to use those aids as a crutch. Teach and show your children how to study Scripture for themselves first before they read another Bible student's comments.

Sometimes it is hard to find good Bible studies that adhere to these superior study methods. That hunt is what led to our writing and publishing [our own Bible studies](#), designed for older students to complete either with or without parental help. Your student will learn solid Bible study methods as he interacts firsthand with Scripture.

The key is to get your children in the Word. But that is only half of it; you also need to get the Word in your children, and that means Scripture memory.

3. Memorize Scripture.

Charlotte's students memorized several portions of Scripture every school year—both large and small portions. Our children (and we, as parents) should do the same.

As Charlotte explained, “It is a delightful thing to have the memory stored with beautiful, comforting, and inspiring passages, and we cannot tell when and how this manner of seed may spring up, grow, and bear fruit” (*Home Education*, p. 253).

The [Scripture Memory System](#) described on our website is a great tool to help your whole family learn and review individual verses or whole chapters of the Bible, all in just five or ten minutes per day. Consistency is a key to getting the Word in your children.

So read and narrate the historical accounts, discuss and apply the epistles, and memorize Scripture. With these simple yet powerful methods you can give your children the most important knowledge of their lives: the knowledge of God in the Bible.

Chapter 6

Teaching Art

It seems that many schools either sprinkle a little art into the curriculum here and there as an afterthought or ignore it all together because of time constraints. Neither approach reflects the goal of a [generous curriculum](#).

Charlotte Mason approached art in a balanced way, regularly scheduling time for her students to both appreciate others' art and to express their own art. We can do the same regardless of our own artistic capabilities.

Art Appreciation

Art appreciation is accomplished through a method called picture study. Just ten or fifteen minutes once a week is all it takes. Here's how you do a [picture study](#).

1. Select one artist and linger with him or her for twelve weeks.
2. Once a week, select one of that artist's works. Look at it together until everyone can close their eyes and see every detail in its place.
3. Hide the picture from view and have the children describe what it looks like.
4. Look at the picture again and discuss any other points of interest.
5. Display the picture in your home for the rest of the week.

The next week look at a different picture by the same artist. Continue doing a picture study once a week until you have looked closely at six or eight pictures by one artist. You can also read a living biography about the artist, and be sure to grab your Book of Centuries and enter the artist on the appropriate page.

At the end of twelve weeks, you and your students will have a pretty good feel for that artist's style and ideas communicated through his works. Then choose a different artist and go again.

Charlotte's desire was to [introduce to the child the great ideas](#) of the great artists, presented in their work, and to get out of the way. Hers was not a course in art criticism or art interpretation. She encouraged the children to look closely at each work and to form their own relations with it.

Our award-winning [Picture Study Portfolios](#) make art appreciation easy to do and keep everything you need for picture study right at your fingertips.

Art Expression

Charlotte also gave her students instruction in art and opportunities to express themselves artistically. She allowed time for both drawing from the imagination and for reproducing what was seen in life around them with a variety of art media: clay sculpting, charcoal, painting, and drawing.

While there isn't a lot of detailed description as to how Charlotte taught art instruction, many of the principles that she used for handicrafts (see [chapter 7](#)) would apply.

- Schedule art instruction in the afternoon to allow more time for it after the shorter morning lessons are done.
- Emphasize the habit of best effort.
- To encourage the students to do their best work, teach them slowly and carefully what they are to do.

- Keep the project within reach of their skills. Challenge but don't frustrate.
- Select projects that are worthwhile. Don't give them assignments that will just be thrown away, but something that requires their time and effort and will evoke a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when completed.

Our favorite resource for art instruction is the [*Creating a Masterpiece videos*](#). You and your students will learn many different medium types from a master artist as you work on projects of varying skill levels. The emphasis is on slow, careful work in an encouraging atmosphere for all ages.

Art is a wonderful way to add variety into your day and to nourish your child's mind and heart with what is good, noble, and beautiful. With Charlotte's simple methods and all of the wonderful resources available, you don't have to be an art expert to give your children the gift of art.

Chapter 7

Teaching Handicrafts

The more time you spend around the Charlotte Mason Method, the more you come to realize what a nicely balanced approach it is. CM is not all books and narration; Charlotte also recognized [the importance of working with your hands](#).

There is much to be learned in working with one's hands to create something of use and beauty. Charlotte selected a handicraft for her students to learn each term.

And don't be afraid of working with a variety of materials. Charlotte's students worked in clay, wood, brass, iron, leather, fabric, food, and more.

Whichever skill or material you are working with, keep in mind these four main principles:

1. The children “should not be employed in making futilities.” Make sure the project is useful.
2. Teach the children “slowly and carefully what they are to do.” Allow plenty of time for the children to learn the skills step by step and to do them correctly.
3. “Slipshod work should not allowed.” Encourage careful work and best effort right from the beginning.
4. “Therefore, the children's work should be kept well within their compass.” Select a handicraft and a project that will challenge but not frustrate.

As far as scheduling goes, handicrafts don't always fit well into short lessons. It might work well to [schedule handicrafts during the afternoon](#) when the children have plenty of time to get out the supplies, learn the next step, practice until they are satisfied they are doing it correctly, and see progress on the project. Oh, and clean up!

If you are looking for help with handicraft skills or project ideas, our [Handicrafts Made Simple videos](#) might be just what you need. Each video starts with the basics and gradually increases the challenge, with practical projects tucked in all along the way. The included booklet outlines a suggested schedule for a 12-week term of handicraft work, so you can focus on enjoying the new handicraft along with your children.

Handicrafts are a great way to help your students discover talents they didn't know they had and cultivate a habit of working with their hands to create useful objects in the home—all part of a generous Charlotte Mason curriculum.

Chapter 8

Teaching Foreign Language

If you had graduated from one of Charlotte Mason's schools, you would have studied several different foreign languages: French, German, Italian, and Latin. And not just studied, but used and understood those languages quite well.

In fact, her students were so fluent in French that they could read or listen to a reading in that language and give their narrations in it. How did she accomplish that level of expertise? Let's talk a bit about Charlotte's brilliant approach to foreign language.

The Series Approach

Charlotte believed that we should approach learning a foreign language in the same way we approach learning our mother tongue: hear it and speak it before you ever read and write it. So she used the Gouin series method, which agrees with that approach.

Francois Gouin developed the idea of using a series of statements that describe what you are doing. The statements are taught in the known language first, then incrementally introduced in the new language, and always accompanied with the actions.

For example, the students might learn a series like this:

I take the box.

I open the box.

I close the box.

Here's how it works.

1. Students say the series of statements aloud a few times as they do the actions: take a box, open it, close it.
2. Once they know the series, it is simplified to just the verbs: *take, open, close*.
3. They learn each of those verbs in the new language and practice saying it aloud as they continue to do the corresponding actions.
4. They learn the one phrase needed to finish the sentences (*the box*) and practice the entire series in the new language with actions.

The beauty of this method is that by coupling everyday activities and actions, they begin to think in the new language. What other things do I open and close? A book, maybe. By learning one more new word (*book*), they can then narrate a new activity and are beginning to feel at home with using the language for themselves.

Younger students can do the series completely by hearing and speaking; older or more experienced students can add the reading and writing component by copying the series into a notebook.

As with so many of the methods that Charlotte Mason used, the Gouin series is a simple yet wonderfully effective approach! [Cherrydale Press](#) has created resources for this approach, and we highly recommend them.

Layering the Languages

In case you're curious how Charlotte accomplished several languages with her students, here's an explanation. Charlotte started with French, most likely because that was the most prominent foreign language in her students' surroundings. France was right across the Channel. Grades 1–3 incorporated French

songs and games along with the hearing and speaking activities of the Gouin series. Grades 4–6 expanded on that foundation and added French reading and writing, plus, the students in those grades were introduced to verbal German. In Grades 7–9 the students expanded on both French and German, and added Italian. So the acquisition of several languages was a gradual sequential process over many years, all meant to equip the students to be courteous and kind global neighbors.

Learning Latin

Teaching Latin is a little different, because Latin is not as much a spoken language today as the others we have discussed; it's mostly written. So Charlotte didn't start this language study until the children were older (4th grade and up) and were studying English grammar. Two resources that I have liked for teaching Latin are [*Getting Started with Latin*](#) followed by the [*Cambridge Latin Course*](#).

Chapter 9

Teaching Literature

I've been cleaning off my bookshelves these past couple of weeks, trying to cull out duplicates. Now, usually duplicate copies of a title are not a problem in a household of readers, but when the shelves are full and you need more space . . . sacrifices must be made.

Most of the duplicates in my collection are literature books that have been added to our home library over the years. And as I pull each book off the shelf, my mind reflects on the characters inside. They are like old friends to me now. I have to keep reminding myself that I do still have a copy; it's not like I'm getting rid of all those close companions completely!

That's what good literature will do for you and for your children: it will come alive to your emotions, fire your imagination, and plant seeds of ideas in your mind. It will form a vibrant connection to your heart and affect who you are becoming.

Remove the Middle Man

If there is one way to destroy the joy of a good living book, it's to shred it to bits with analyzing. Well do I recall some very good books that were assigned for reading in my high school years, my enjoyment of them as I read, and the subsequent letdown from all the tedious dissecting of hidden meanings, possible symbolism, and overly-detailed structure. Not to mention vocabulary lists, plot summaries, and character evaluations. It felt like the book and its characters were no longer alive in my mind; they had become

specimens under a microscope. It's hard to form a relation with a specimen.

Charlotte Mason was an advocate of removing the middle man. She encouraged her teachers to introduce great minds—authors, artists, and composers—to her students and then get out of the way. So it makes sense that the methods she used for literature were simply reading and narrating.

Read Living Books

Choose a well-written living book—one that makes the story come alive; one that feeds the mind with good, loving, and noble ideas; one that touches the emotions and fires the imagination; one that has withstood the test of time—and read it. Enjoy it. Live in it. Don't inhale it as fast as you can; take your time and savor it.

We have always had a family read-aloud book going since my children were small. I chose classic children's literature to begin with and moved on from there to harder classic literature books. One chapter a day most days; some days less. The time of day that we read has changed as children have grown and schedules have changed. But the shared experience has remained, and I wouldn't replace it for the world.

With so many good books available and limited time for family read-alouds, I also assign some literature books to the older students to read on their own.

Check out our favorite literature selections for younger, middle, and older students in our [SCM Curriculum](#).

Narration

When my older children are assigned to read a literature book independently, I ask them for a narration. And lest you fear that they will never know how to do any kind of analysis on a literary

classic, let me explain that you can encourage deeper thinking and evaluation by how you word narration questions. Make sure you keep the questions open-ended, but feel free to ask them to explain any comparisons between this book's main character and another one they have read, or ask them to contrast the plot in this book with another one. In other words, don't shy away from discussion, but give them the benefit of the doubt that they are gleaning much on their own and don't need or want you to dissect things for them.

For the books that we read aloud as a family, I do not require a narration. I want us to simply enjoy those classics together, to share the experience, to build memories, and to store up common ideas that knit our hearts together. These books become lifelong friends, and we are all the richer for having read them.

Chapter 10

Teaching Music

Charlotte recognized that not every student would become a virtuoso, but she understood that beauty and enjoyment can be added to life by appreciating good music, singing, and learning the basics of playing music. Here's how to approach music in a Charlotte Mason way.

Music Appreciation

Simply choose one composer and play his or her music around your house for several weeks. You can play the music in the background while you are all eating lunch or working on handicrafts or running errands in the van. You can play it during rest times or while the children are going to sleep (provided the composer was not too rambunctious!). You don't need fancy introductions or elaborate explanations; just tell the children which composer's work you are playing.

During those weeks of listening, if you can find a good living biography on your selected composer, read it aloud to the children and have them narrate it. Enter the composer in your Book of Centuries. Then once each week, gather to spotlight one of the composer's works. Our [*Music Study with the Masters* portfolios](#) provide biographies, dates, spotlights, and great music recordings, so you will find music appreciation easy to do.

At the end of those weeks, your children will have a pretty good feel for that composer's style. Then you can choose another composer and go again. It's simple, yet effective!

Singing

Charlotte's students had fun with singing in short sessions a couple of times a week. They used the sol-fa method. If you have watched the movie *The Sound of Music*, you've heard the sol-fa method used to teach the song "Do, a Deer." The complete method has hand signals, too, and is a great way to teach children to listen closely and to sing in harmony easily.

Don't worry if you aren't Julie Andrews and don't know how to teach your children to sing in harmony; they can still enjoy singing along to recorded music, singing while playing, and singing together as a family. The key is to encourage singing.

One great way to do that is through Hymn Study. Simply select one hymn and sing it together, all the stanzas, until everyone knows it well. You might sing it a couple of times a week for a few weeks, then add another hymn and alternate. It's a great way to make sure the rich heritage of God-honoring hymns is passed to the next generation and to enjoy singing together. [*Singing the Great Hymns*](#) provides lyrics, music scores, and simple piano recordings for more than 70 hymns.

Playing an Instrument

Piano was taught to all of Charlotte's students. Whichever instrument you or your children select to learn, keep in mind the facets of a well-rounded instrumental education. Charlotte encouraged parents to make sure any music lessons included three aspects: music theory, ear training, and instruction on the instrument itself.

And if at all possible, give your child an excellent teacher right from the start. Remember, you are laying the foundation as well as cultivating your child's taste for the fine arts. Charlotte said: "If possible, let the children learn from the first under *artists*, lovers of

their work: it is a serious mistake to let the child lay the foundation of whatever he may do in the future under ill-qualified mechanical teachers, who kindle in him none of the enthusiasm which is the life of art” (*Home Education*, p. 314).

Remember, you’re not doing everything every day. With the wide range of subjects to draw from in a generous curriculum, you can enjoy a wonderfully diverse week with some delightful variety each day.

Chapter 11

Teaching Poetry

Most homeschool parents I talk to get a funny look on their faces when I mention poetry. That's because their own schooling experience with poetry consisted of dissecting a poem to bits at the teacher's insistence. Such over-analysis and examination steals all the joy from the beautiful words. Charlotte Mason's approach is vastly different.

Good poetry reaches the heart in a way few other words can. It's amazing how deeply a well-crafted phrase from a thoughtful poem can shape our lives. As Charlotte said, "Poetry is a criticism of life; so it is, both a criticism and an inspiration; and most of us carry in our minds tags of verse which shape our conduct more than we know" (*Ourselves*, Book 2, p. 10).

We are doing our children a great service when we nourish their minds and equip their hearts with good poetry. Here's how.

Enjoying Poetry

Read poetry aloud. Often. Enjoy how the words fit together and create pictures and feelings within you and your children. There. That's it.

Oh, certainly, you can do other things with poetry, but that's the foundation. That's where it starts. Schedule poetry once a week to begin with. Select a poem and read it aloud to share with the others. Be sure to read beautiful words in a beautiful way.

"But how do I select a poem?" Choose one that you like, one that nourishes your mind and heart or just makes you smile. The

key is to surround your poetry times with a mind-set of enjoying words well chosen.

Charlotte would often do a poet study by selecting one poet to focus on for the whole year. Read poems by that one poet, illustrate a few, narrate some of them, and soon your children will get a good feel for that poet's style.

As your children grow comfortable in the world of poetry, have them read the poem aloud sometimes. Help them practice beforehand, if needed, for poetry is one of the hardest genre to read aloud well. You can also assign a favorite poem for the children to memorize and recite. Again, coach them in reciting well.

But above all, read poems often and enjoy them. You can do that! Our [*Enjoy the Poems series*](#) is designed to make it simple. Each book features one poet, a living biography, twenty-six of the poet's works, and a suggested schedule for enjoying them throughout the year.

Shakespeare in Three Steps

Charlotte's students also enjoyed the poetry of Shakespeare. In fact, Charlotte didn't give Shakespeare only one year of study; she incorporated his plays every year.

Shakespeare can also be an enjoyable part of your generous curriculum if you follow these three easy steps:

1. Read the play in story form.
2. Read the lines from the play in Shakespeare's words.
3. Watch a performance of the play—either live or recorded—that is as close to the original as possible.

Our [*Shakespeare in Three Steps*](#) books and audio recordings walk you through those simple steps and make his plays very accessible.

You will be amazed at the deep thoughts and worthy ideas that can be added to your home school simply by sprinkling in some poetry to enjoy.

Chapter 12

Teaching Science

Charlotte Mason used a two-faceted approach to teaching science that was very effective: systematic studies and spontaneous discovery. The systematic studies were accomplished through reading and narrating living science books. The spontaneous facet was added through doing nature study.

Living Science Books & Narration

Just as with teaching history, living books and narration provide many fertile educational opportunities for teaching science. Remember, a living book can be written in story form or in a conversational tone directed to the reader; but whichever style it uses, a living science book should make it easy to picture what is being talked about.

In the younger grades, you can easily read aloud a living science book to all your children in grades 1–6 and have them narrate it. You will find delightful living science book suggestions combined with nature poetry, simple experiments, and outdoor projects in our living science studies, like [*Outdoor Secrets*](#) with the [*Outdoor Secrets Companion*](#) or [*Pond and Stream*](#) with the [*Pond and Stream Companion*](#).

Once the students get to the upper grades, it usually works best to have each child study those upper-level sciences individually. Charlotte sometimes used a textbook for higher-level science topics. Not all advanced science details can be comprehensively explained and practiced in story form. But on those occasions

we can couple a conversational science textbook with a good living book to introduce or supplement the topic and help the student make a personal relation and want to learn more details. Our [SCM Curriculum](#) uses conversational textbooks and living science books in that way.

Nature Study

But just reading about the world around us is not a full education; children need opportunities to experience that world for themselves. Nature study lays a great foundation on which to add the science readings. As our children observe different elements and living creatures outside, they form a personal relationship with those things and are ready to learn more about them.

Nature study is not hard to do and can provide a nice break from indoor studies during your week. Simply get each child a blank sketchbook and some colored pencils, and grab a field guide or two. Then once a week go outside and look, listen, smell, and feel. Record your observations in writing and drawing. What is the weather like? What does the sky look like? What do you see by way of plants and animals? What are the insects doing and where? What does your favorite tree look like today?

Use the field guides to help you label your drawings. Spend time observing the habits of various creatures and plants. Check on them at different seasons of the year to see what is happening. Over time you will gain at least a “nodding and naming acquaintance,” and probably an even deeper connection, with God’s creation. That is time well spent.

[Journaling a Year in Nature](#) is a sturdy and beautiful nature journal that walks you through the seasons of the year, giving gentle prompts of nature items to look for and timely encouragement every week.

If you would like to read Charlotte Mason’s thoughts about

nature study in her own words, [*Hours in the Out-of-Doors: A Charlotte Mason Nature Study Handbook*](#) compiles her writings on the subject, combined with modern-day examples and other inspiring nature quotes. It makes a great reference book for the teacher.

Teaching Beginning Reading

When my oldest child was a little one, the thought of teaching her how to read hovered in my mind as a huge challenge. I don't remember waking up at night, wondering if I would be able to teach her to tie her shoes or to drive a car; but I do remember staring at the ceiling in the dark, wondering if I would be able to teach her to read.

It can seem a daunting task, because so much of education depends on reading. The better a child can read, the easier his schooling will be. But let me assure you that most children will pick up reading quite naturally if raised in a language-rich environment where books are treasured. Many people who grow up in such an environment cannot recall exactly how they learned to read, but learn they did.

So relax and take a look at Charlotte Mason's gentle and natural approach to teaching your child to read.

Playing with Letters and Sounds

Though Charlotte did not start formal reading lessons until the child was at least six years old, she outlined many helpful informal activities you could do during the early years to lay the foundation. Read A-B-C books together. Get your child a set of letters that he can handle and play with, whether wooden blocks with letters or foam letters or magnetic letters.

As he becomes familiar with each letter, allow him to locate the ones he knows on signs or pages of books. Learning the sounds

the letters make comes next, again, accomplished informally as the child is ready. Encourage his discoveries but don't push. Let him progress at his own pace. Take your cues from his expressions of curiosity.

Word-Building Activities

Eventually you can start using those play letters to put sounds together to make short words that mean something to him, words like *at, cat, bat, sat, fat, mat* or *dog, fog, log*. As he becomes familiar with word-building, you can introduce blends into the mix and expand to words with long-vowel sounds. Basic phonics can be introduced at this point. But even these activities should be informal and done as the child expresses interest.

Reading Lessons

Once the beginning word-building foundation has been laid, formal reading lessons can begin. Lessons should stay short (no longer than 10 or 15 minutes) and should contain variety to keep them interesting. Following the Charlotte Mason principle of [no twaddle](#), you would select a good children's poem or fable and focus on one line or sentence to begin with.

1. Introduce the word.—Write on the board a new word from your selected passage. Draw the child's attention to it and tell him what the word is. Discuss it a bit to help the child form a personal relation to it.
2. Learn the word.—Ask the child to look at the word carefully until he can see it in his mind even with his eyes closed. Erase the word and see if he can spell it using letter tiles. (No handwriting required.) If he hesitates, write it again so he can see and copy the correct spelling.

3. Find the word.—Point out a pile of word tiles or word cards that contains each word in your selection. See if the child can find the word he just learned in the pile. Display a sheet of paper that has your selected passage on it, and see if he can find the word on that page.
4. Review all words.—Write the word on one side of the board, starting a list of all the words he will learn today. As each word is learned, add it and review them all in varying orders.
5. Read the words.—Once all the words in your selected line or sentence have been learned in this way, have your child put together the word tiles in the correct order and read the whole line or sentence. Then allow him to read it from the printed page. Play with the word tiles to form other sentences or phrases. As more lessons are added, you can use all the words learned to form a multitude of sentences.
6. Record the words.—Last, add the words learned to a Word Book that you can use for other review activities.

To add variety, Charlotte would alternate sight-reading lessons (outlined above) with word-building lessons. Here's how.

1. Review an old word.—Write on the board one of the words learned last time. Ask the child to read it. Erase it and see if he can spell it with his letters. Again, if he hesitates, give him the correct model to copy.
2. Build more words.—Using his letters, change the first letter of the word and see what new word it makes, just like he has been doing in his word-building activities. This step will reinforce basic phonics.
3. Review the new words.—Each new word can go on the board

to be reviewed in varying orders as the lesson progresses.

4. Read more words.—Add these new words to the mix to create even more new sentences for your child to read and enjoy.
5. Record the words.—Last, add the words learned to his Word Book.

Continue in this fashion as you work your way through the children's poem or fable, always keeping the lessons short and the attitude delightful.

Our [Delightful Reading Kits](#) contain everything you need to guide your child at his own pace all the way from learning the letters to reading books with confidence—*Level 1: Playing with Letters and Sounds*, *Level 2: Words I Can Build*, and *Level 3: From Words to Books*.

With Charlotte's simple yet effective methods, your child will soon be reading with confidence and ease. Beginning reading can be delightful when you approach it the Charlotte Mason way!

Chapter 14

Teaching Spelling

I'm a list person. As I sit at my desk and type these words, I've lost count of how many items I've added to my to-do list already today. Lists can be effective tools for many things. But when it comes to spelling, Charlotte Mason showed us that lists are not the most effective way to learn.

Charlotte taught spelling in context, not in lists. And her methods make total sense when you see the progression from beginning reader to advanced student.

Build the Words (Beginning Reading Lessons)

From the time the young children begin to learn to read, they are encouraged to look closely at words and try to remember their spellings. In Charlotte's method for teaching reading, the child uses letter tiles to build the words he is learning. The letter tiles are a great way to make the path smooth for beginning readers, because they don't have to concentrate on forming each letter, only putting the letters in the correct order.

Charlotte also emphasized the importance of making sure the children see the word spelled correctly as much as possible. If the child is not sure how to build the word with his tiles, don't let him guess. Write the word on the board and let him use that correct model for his guide. In this way you will reduce the chances of his seeing the word incorrectly spelled and getting it confused in his mind. We all have certain words that stump us—"Is it *-er* or

-ar?”—because we have seen them spelled both ways. Charlotte’s method helps eliminate that mental debate.

Notice the Spelling (Practice Writing)

Once your child is past the beginning-reading-lessons stage and is just reading aloud to practice, and is past the learning-how-to-write-the-letters stage and is just doing copywork to practice and gain fluency (see [chapter 15](#)), you can use his copywork to continue encouraging him to look at how words are spelled.

An easy way to do this is, when he has finished copying the line (or two lines) for today, ask him to spell one or two of those words. Let him know beforehand that you will be asking for a spelling or two. You can allow him to spell any word he likes or you can select a word for him to spell aloud.

That consistent, gentle expectation will do much to motivate him to keep alert and notice spellings of words even as he practices beautiful penmanship. It is a simple technique that will continue cultivating that important habit of learning spelling in context.

Prepared Dictation (Grades 4–12)

Once your child is nine or ten years old, you can take the next step and increase the expectation with prepared dictation. Here’s how it works. Select a passage from a good living book or a beautiful poem or Scripture, just as you do for copywork. But now have your child read through it and identify the words he doesn’t already know how to spell. Those are the words he should study.

Once he is sure he knows how to spell all of the words in the passage, dictate it to him a phrase at a time (saying each phrase only once) and watch as he writes to make sure he is spelling every word correctly. As he gains experience in prepared dictation, you can add the responsibility of learning the capitalization and punctuation too.

You can [watch a video of a prepared dictation lesson](#) on the *Spelling Wisdom* page of our website. The *Spelling Wisdom series* contains pre-selected dictation passages that cover the 6,000 most frequently used words in the English language.

Teaching Tips for Spelling

Allow me to offer two teaching tips for the subject of spelling.

First, slow down. Charlotte believed that a key to being a good speller was being a fluent reader. However, some children are prolific readers but poor spellers. How can that be? The problem is that they are reading too fast; they are not looking at how the words are spelled as they read. That habit of looking at the words' spellings as you read is what will enable you to be a good speller and continue to increase your spelling proficiency the rest of your life. So encourage your child to slow down enough to notice the spelling as he reads. It can make a big difference.

Second, don't confuse phonics and spelling. I've spent years traveling to homeschool conventions across the country, and I've met mom after mom who lament that their children are spelling phonetically. Phonics are one tool we can use to help our children learn to read, but phonics rules can create a lot of confusion when applied to spelling. Know the difference.

Learning spelling in context gives your child a big advantage. With a traditional list method, there is often a disconnect between the spelling list and the child's writing those same words in sentences. Children who get 100% on the spelling test, later misspell those words in a writing assignment. But with Charlotte's method of teaching spelling, you don't have to deal with that disconnect, because your child is seeing the words used in context all the time. Plus, you are cultivating within him the habit of looking at how words are spelled as he reads, a habit that will equip him to continue learning new words for the rest of his life.

Chapter 15

Teaching Writing

When we talk about writing, we usually have one or both of these aspects in mind: handwriting and composition. Let's look at each one and outline how Charlotte Mason approached them.

Handwriting

Charlotte taught handwriting through the method of copywork.

Copywork is pretty much what the name implies: the student copies something. In a Charlotte Mason school that “something” is interesting quality poetry or quotes or Scripture or excerpts from literature that the child copies to practice good penmanship. The selection should give the child a living idea to ponder even as he works to copy it in his best handwriting.

Lessons are short, with an emphasis on quality over quantity. In fact, when the children are just learning how to form the letters, one perfectly executed letter is the goal of the lesson. As their proficiency grows, that goal can be expanded to three or six perfect letters and then a line or a sentence. But mindless repetition has no place in Charlotte's handwriting lessons.

Young ones, who are just beginning to learn their letters, are encouraged to draw in sand or on the chalkboard, learning a simple stroke and then the letters that use that stroke. As soon as possible, those learned letters are combined into words so the writing exercise will have more interest and communicate an idea.

For an example of how those beginning writing lessons might look, download the sample of [*Delightful Handwriting*](#).

Composition

Charlotte taught composition through the method of narration.

Since the majority of composition is mental work, Charlotte focused on that part of the process during the earlier grades, while the children are still learning how to form their letters and practice writing with ease. We already discussed the method of narration when we talked about teaching history. Charlotte used that method for many subjects; and while it is a fabulous tool for learning, it is also a solid foundation for composition. In fact, oral narration can also be called oral composition.

Once the children are proficient and comfortable with oral narration, you can begin to introduce some written narration, usually around the age of ten. They are already experienced in the mental process of organizing and expressing their thoughts, now they just need to take the next step and put those organized thoughts on paper.

Charlotte was a firm believer in letting the children develop their own unique styles, because she knew they would be well acquainted with a variety of wonderful writing styles from the great literature they had been using throughout their school years. They would pick up a little from one great author and a little from another and mix it together with their own personalities. Such a method is consistent with her priority of respecting the child as a person. Formulaic writing is eschewed.

When the children are comfortable and proficient with getting their organized thoughts on paper, you help them polish their writing skills by focusing on just one or two points that they need to improve on. That point is explained and corrected in their work, then they focus on mastering it in future written narrations. Once it is mastered, they work on another point or two. In this way, composition is not taught as a separate subject, but is intertwined with other subjects' narrations.

That is the approach to composition that is integrated in our [*Using Language Well series*](#). Each teacher book contains a set of rubrics, assignments, and teaching tips that give practical guidance in helping your child grow in composition through the years.

Writing, spelling, and reading are all components of language arts. You might find the video, [*The Natural Progression of Language Arts*](#), a good overview to see how Charlotte Mason methods help the student gently and naturally progress in the art of using language well.

If you would like an in-depth look at language arts in a Charlotte Mason approach, [*Hearing and Reading, Telling and Writing*](#) contains all the fascinating details we found in Charlotte's writings, including sample written narrations.

Chapter 16

Teaching Grammar

Most of you were probably taught English grammar the same way I was. In first grade we were told, “A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Circle the nouns in these five sentences.”

Then in second grade we were told, “A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Circle the nouns in these ten sentences.”

And in third grade we were told, “A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. Circle the nouns in these fifteen sentences.”

Charlotte Mason’s approach to grammar was vastly different.

The Timing

Probably the biggest difference between the way we were taught grammar and how Charlotte approached grammar is the timing. The educational system we grew up in believed that children must study parts of speech every year all year long. Charlotte did not think it would take that long for children to learn nine parts of speech.

Plus, she realized that grammar is an abstract concept. Many times you can’t say what part of speech a word is until you see where it fits in the sentence and how it relates to all the other words. That’s a tough concept for a concrete-thinking child to grasp (which may explain why the traditional educational system has to keep reteaching it year after year).

Charlotte believed you could make more progress faster if you

waited until the children were older—ten or so. Up until that time they were seeing, hearing, and practicing correct usage (like proper verb tenses, simple punctuation and capitalization, proper pronouns) through their copywork, reading, and narration. That rich exposure laid the foundation for ease in analyzing the language later.

The Method

Once the children are ready, the parts of speech are introduced in a straightforward way with simple exercises. The “living” part comes in when the children are assigned to practice identifying the parts of speech and analyze the jobs they perform. Just as with handwriting and spelling, you use good literature from living books to practice grammar analysis.

For example, you could present a stanza from a poem with several words italicized and ask the children to identify what part of speech each one is. In this way you can continue to nourish their minds with great ideas even while practicing grammar.

The [*Using Language Well series*](#) provides short lessons in English usage and grammar pulled from the wonderful literature passages in the [*Spelling Wisdom books*](#). Together, they make a rich literary approach to grammar.

Chapter 17

Teaching Math

by Richelle Baburina

Richele Baburina has extensively researched Charlotte Mason's approach to math and compiled her findings in her excellent book, [*Mathematics: An Instrument for Living Teaching*](#), and helpful DVD series, [*Charlotte Mason's Living Math: A Guided Journey*](#). She is also the author of [*The Charlotte Mason Elementary Arithmetic Series*](#) curriculum.

Charlotte Mason valued a generous curriculum. Though emphasis on the three R's alone makes for a meager education, these subjects did have their rightful place of study.

Charlotte valued the study of arithmetic primarily for its use in training mental and moral habits, including accuracy, attention, careful execution, neatness, and truthfulness. Though its use in daily life was important, it was the “beauty and truth” of mathematics, that awakening of a sense of awe in God's fixed laws of the universe, that afforded its study a rightful place in Charlotte's curriculum.

Let's take a brief look at *how* mathematics are taught in a CM education—because without living teaching, that sense of wonder might not be awakened nor the desired habit training take place.

The Early Years

The study of arithmetic falls well within Charlotte's definition that “education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life.” Before the age of six, a child's education is by means of his senses, natural environment, and unstudied games. Direct preparation for

mathematics in these years is considered not only undesirable but detrimental.

Elementary Arithmetic

The formal study of arithmetic begins at about six years of age and is characterized by thorough, careful work in which the children make discoveries for themselves. Its study follows Charlotte's basic principles of short lessons with concentrated attention.

Manipulatives

Though the term *math manipulative* did not exist in Charlotte's time, the use of concrete objects as aids in conveying ideas is significant in her method of teaching arithmetic.

Some important points to remember:

- All the manipulatives you need can be found in your own home—beads, buttons, and craft sticks to name just a few. A variety of simple objects should be used rather than a single specially-designed manipulative so the child doesn't form a hard-and-fast connection between the math facts and the manipulative.
- Manipulatives are only a tool used for the presentation or investigation of an idea. If a manipulative's use requires too much teaching, it becomes more important than the idea it is to represent.
- Arithmetic tables should not be memorized until the child proves the facts first through the use of manipulatives.
- Allow your child enough time to work with the manipulatives but then progress to working with imaginary objects. Once the child can mentally picture the number, or has grasped the

abstract, put away the manipulative until the introduction of a new concept.

“A bag of beans, counters, or buttons should be used in all the early arithmetic lessons, and the child should be able to work with these freely, and even to add, subtract, multiply, and divide mentally, without the aid of buttons or beans, before he is set to ‘do sums’ on his slate” (*Home Education*, p. 256).

Mental Arithmetic and Oral Work

In Charlotte’s methods of teaching mathematics, written work is used sparingly. Mental arithmetic and oral work help reinforce math facts and vocabulary, plus they are instrumental in the training of good habits.

“Give him short sums, in words rather than in figures, and excite in him the enthusiasm which produces concentrated attention and rapid work. Let his arithmetic lesson be to the child a daily exercise in clear thinking and rapid, careful execution, and his mental growth will be as obvious as the sprouting of seedlings in the spring” (*Home Education*, p. 261).

While children advance in their understanding, the oral questions should always remain within their ability.

“Engage the child upon little problems within his comprehension from the first, rather than upon set sums” (*Home Education*, p. 254).

“Now he is ready for more ambitious problems: thus, ‘A boy had twice ten apples; how many heaps of 4 could he make?’ ” (*Home Education*, p. 257).

Some points to consider:

- The oral questions we give our children should be engaging.

For example, “How old will you be when your sister is four” will be more apt to fix your child’s attention than the same question given as, “Add $4 + 5$.”

- Require your child to give fully worded answers in complete sentences for the most benefit.
- Along with oral work throughout the math lesson, consider following Charlotte’s schedule of five minutes of rapid drill at the end of the lesson or ten minutes for older children at another time in the daily schedule.

Careful Teaching vs. Careless Teaching

Charlotte felt that careless teaching—which includes offering crutches and failing to pronounce sums wrong—fosters habits of carelessness in children. In contrast, carefully graduated lessons, along with Charlotte’s methods already mentioned, foster the training of good habits.

“Arithmetic is valuable as a means of training children in habits of strict accuracy, but the ingenuity which makes this exact science tend to foster slipshod habits of mind, a disregard of truth and common honesty, is worthy of admiration! The copying, prompting, telling, helping over difficulties, working with an eye to the answer which he knows, that are allowed in the arithmetic lesson, under an inferior teacher, are enough to vitiate any child; and quite as bad as these is the habit of allowing that a sum is nearly right, two figures wrong, and so on, and letting the child work it over again. Pronounce a sum *wrong*, or *right*—it cannot be something between the two.” (*Home Education*, pp. 260 and 261).

“Therefore his progress must be carefully graduated; but there is no subject in which the teacher has a more delightful consciousness of drawing out from day to day new power in the

child. Do not offer him a crutch; it is in his own power he must go” (*Home Education*, p. 261).

For a wonderful math curriculum that adheres to these methods, take a look at [*The Charlotte Mason Elementary Arithmetic Series*](#). The corresponding videos, [*Charlotte Mason’s Living Math: A Guided Journey*](#), demonstrate each method described.

Living Math Books

Charlotte believed mathematics fell outside her rule of literary presentations. She stated:

“...mathematics, like music, is a speech in itself, a speech irrefragibly logical, of exquisite clarity, meeting the requirements of mind” (*A Philosophy of Education*, p. 334).

Charlotte did not employ the modern notion of “living math books” to teach mathematical concepts. She advocated acquainting the children with the “captain” ideas of math by introducing the different branches or their great thinkers through an interesting or exciting history.

Advanced Mathematics

The methods we’ve discussed are not just for the teaching of elementary arithmetic; they also apply to more advanced arithmetic: geometry, algebra, and beyond. Whether you are comfortable teaching the higher levels of mathematics or rely more heavily on textbooks, a curriculum, or a tutor, be sure to ensure a living treatment of math for your older child as well.

- Guide your older child in discovery, allowing her to think for herself. Be patient and advance slowly. Allow your older child to wonder, discover and permit ideas to germinate.

- Practical exercises should continue along deductive exercises in geometry, and the practical side of algebra should be introduced as early as possible.
- Provide a slow, steady approach with lots of practice.
- Exclude long or tedious examples for calculation.

The *Mathematics: An Instrument for Living Teaching* book includes all the details and practical step-by-step instructions that describe how math was taught through each advancing level of Charlotte's classrooms—from learning numbers through algebra and geometry.

Chapter 18

Next Steps

We hope this Subject-by-Subject overview has been helpful to you. Once you know Charlotte Mason's methods, the next step is to get a plan and gather the resources to put the methods into practice.

If you would prefer to draft your own plan, our [*Planning Your Charlotte Mason Education* book and DVD](#) will walk you through the process. With its guidance you can design a custom plan for your family in 5 simple steps. The [*SCM Curriculum Overview*](#) will also give you lots of ideas, including our favorite resources for every subject and every grade.

If you would like ready-made plans, take a look at the [*SCM Curriculum*](#) for a complete and enjoyable Charlotte Mason curriculum. You will receive lists of wonderful resources to gather, weekly schedules, and daily itineraries so you know which books to use on which days and how much to complete. The daily plans also include reminders of the Charlotte Mason methods you have learned about in this book.

If you would like to see those methods demonstrated and dig deeper into the details, the [*Learning and Living: Homeschooling the Charlotte Mason Way* DVD set](#) will make the methods very practical and give you the confidence you need to teach the Charlotte Mason way.

Then all that is left is to enjoy learning and growing with your children. Many parents tell us that they find CM methods to be intuitive—what they would naturally do with their children. Charlotte Mason's methods just make sense!

So enjoy this wonderfully natural method of learning about God, people, and the world around you. Enjoy watching your children thrive with these methods. And enjoy how much *you* will learn in the process.

In fact, you may start to wonder if education can really be this simple. Yes, it can . . . the delightful Charlotte Mason way.

Subject by Subject At a Glance

Subjects	Methods
Basic Principles for All Subjects	Short lessons; quality over quantity (habits of attention and best effort); varied order of subjects
History	Living books; narration; Book of Centuries
Geography	Living books; narration; map work
Bible	Read aloud; narration (discussion for older students); memorize and recite regularly
Art	Picture study for art appreciation; art expression in a variety of media
Handicrafts	Slow and careful work on useful projects, using a variety of media
Foreign Languages	Hear and speak, then read and write with Gouin series; Latin starting about ten years old
Literature	Living books; narration
Music	Music study for music appreciation; singing; any instrumental instruction
Poetry	Read aloud and enjoy frequently; memorize and recite occasionally; Shakespeare in three steps
Science	Living books (conversational textbooks for upper grades); narration; nature study
Reading	Playing with letters and sounds; word-building; lessons with sight-reading and word-building
Spelling	See the words in reading lessons; notice the words in copywork; prepared dictation starting about ten years old
Writing	Copywork for handwriting; oral and written narration for composition
Grammar	Not formally studied until ten or older; straightforward teaching, practice with literature
Math	Everyday objects as manipulatives; move from manipulatives to imaginary objects to pure number with interesting scenarios; guided discovery

Sample Schedule

Here is a sample of how to give your student a generous curriculum in short lessons.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Scripture Memory (5 min.)	Scripture Memory (5 min.)	Scripture Memory (5 min.)	Scripture Memory (5 min.)	Scripture Memory (5 min.)
History (20–30 min.)	History (20–30 min.)	Poetry (5 min.)	Bible (20 min.)	Bible (20 min.)
Picture Study (10 min.)	Music Study (10–15 min.)	Geography (10 min.)	Hymn Study (5 min.)	Nature Study (30 min.)
Foreign Language (15 min.)	Habits (10 min.)	Handicraft or Art (20–30 min.)	Shakespeare (20 min.)	Habits (10 min.)
Literature (20–30 min.)	Literature (20–30 min.)	Literature (20–30 min.)	Foreign Language (15–20 min.)	Literature (20–30 min.)
Math/Science/ Language Arts per student	Math/Science/ Language Arts per student	Math/Science/ Language Arts per student	Literature (20–30 min.) Math/Science/ Language Arts per student	Math/Science/ Language Arts per student

Check out our [SCM Curriculum](#) for daily lesson plans.

Some Key Terms

Book of Centuries—A timeline in a book. Each two-page spread covers 100 years, a century. Enter people and events in their correct centuries as you learn about them. Use with a variety of subjects to record historical persons, scientists, poets, composers, artists, Biblical characters, favorite authors and book settings, etc.

Charlotte Mason (1842–1923)—A British educator who invested her life in improving the quality of children’s education. She believed a person’s education was influenced by three things: the atmosphere in which he lives, the discipline of good habits intentionally instilled, and the living ideas generously presented.

Copywork—An interesting passage given to a child for penmanship practice. The passage is shown in a handwriting font for the child to reproduce carefully as he copies it.

Early Years—A time of informal learning between 0 and 5 years of age. Formal lessons do not begin until the child is six years old.

Guided Discovery—Leading a child to new ideas through carefully graduated incremental steps, then spotlighting the new concept and waiting to see if the child is ready to discover it for himself.

Living Book—A book that makes the subject come alive. It touches the emotions and fires the imagination. Usually written by one author with a passion for the subject. Can be in narrative or conversational tone.

Narration—Retelling what was just read or heard in your own words. Can be done orally or in writing. Oral narration is done

throughout all the grades. Written narrations are added around fourth grade.

Prepared Dictation—An interesting passage given to an older child to study and then reproduce in writing as it is dictated to him one phrase at a time.

Twaddle—Material that talks down to a child, assuming he cannot understand a well-crafted sentence or story line.