

# **Charlotte Mason in a Nutshell**

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September 14, 2000

Let me start out by saying that I don't believe anyone could ever fit Charlotte Mason's ideas, methods and philosophies into an actual nutshell (I just thought it made a good title for this article). Miss Mason's ideas were so broad and far reaching, it took six large volumes to contain her writings on just the topic of education. With that said, here's a very brief overview of a handful of Charlotte Mason's most familiar ideas.

## **TWADDLE:**

Twaddle is what parents and educators today might call "dumbed down" literature. Charlotte Mason advocated avoiding twaddle and feasting children's hearts and minds on the best literary works available.

## **LIVING BOOKS:**

Living books are the opposite of dull, dry textbooks. The people, places and events come alive as you read a living book. The story touches your mind and heart.

## **WHOLE BOOKS:**

Whole books are the entirety of what the author actually wrote. If the author wrote a book, read the whole book. The opposite of this would be anthologies that include only snippets from other works--maybe a chapter from a Dickens, a couple of paragraphs from Tolstoy, etc.

## **NARRATION:**

Narration is the process of telling back what has been learned or read. Narrations are usually done orally, but as the child grows older (around age 12) and their writing skills increase, the narrations can be written, as well. Narration can also be accomplished creatively: painting, drawing, sculpting, play-acting, etc.

## **SHORT LESSONS:**

Charlotte Mason recommended spending short, focused periods of time on a wide variety of subjects. Lessons in the early years are only 10-15 minutes in length, but get progressively longer as the children mature (lessons increase to closer to an hour per subject for high school students).

## **NATURE WALKS:**

In spite of often rainy, inclement weather, Charlotte Mason insisted on going out once-a-week for an official Nature Walk, allowing the children to experience and observe the natural environment firsthand. These excursions should be nature walks, not nature talks.

**DAILY WALKS:**

In addition to the weekly Nature Walks, Miss Mason also recommended children spend large quantities of time outside each day, no matter what the weather. Take a daily walk for fun and fresh air.

**NATURE NOTEBOOKS:**

Nature Notebooks are artist sketchbooks containing pictures the children have personally drawn of plants, wildlife or any other natural object found in its natural setting. These Nature Journals can also include nature-related poetry, prose, detailed descriptions, weather notes, Latin names, etc.

**ART APPRECIATION/PICTURE STUDY:**

Bring the child into direct contact with the best art. Choose one artist at a time; six paintings per artist; study one painting per week (maybe fifteen minutes per week). Allow the child to look at the work of art intently for a period of time (maybe five minutes). Have them take in every detail. Then take the picture away and have them narrate (tell back) what they've seen in the picture. Excellent and inexpensive prints can be purchased from the *National Gallery of Art*.

**JOURNALING:**

There's great value in keeping a personal journal. Record activities, thoughts and feelings, favorite sayings, personal mottoes, favorite poems, etc.

**COPYWORK:**

Daily copywork provides on-going practice for handwriting, spelling, grammar, etc. Keep a notebook specifically for copying noteworthy poems, prose, quotes, etc.

**DICTION:**

Each day choose a paragraph, or sentence, or page (depending on age of child). Have the child practice writing it perfectly during their copywork time. Have them look carefully at all punctuation, capital letters, etc. When the child knows the passage well, dictate the passage to the child for them to recreate the passage.

**BOOK OF THE CENTURIES:**

Essentially a Book of the Centuries is a glorified homemade timeline; usually a notebook containing one or two pages per century. As the child learns historical facts, they make notes in their book on the appropriate century's page about famous people, important events, inventions, wars, battles, etc.

**FREE-TIME HANDICRAFTS:**

Charlotte Mason's schools finished daily academics in the morning, allowing the afternoon hours for free time to pursue crafts and other leisure activities or areas of personal interest.

**HABITS:**

Charlotte Mason had much to say on establishing good habits in children. Habits (good or bad) are like the ruts in a path from a wheelbarrow going down the same trail again and again. As time goes on, it becomes increasingly difficult to run the wheelbarrow outside of the rut, but the wheel will always run smoothly down the well-worn rut in the path. By training children in good habits, the school day (and home life in general) goes more smoothly. Focus on one habit at a time for 4-6 weeks rather than attempting to implement a long list of new habits all at once.

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