

*Homeschooling Approach: Charlotte Mason*  
by Vicki S. Norris

Who would better understand homeschooling than a homeschooled student?

Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason was known as the founder of the homeschooling movement. She was homeschooled by her parents in England and orphaned at age 16. She lived in the late 1800's to early 1900's in England.

Miss Mason went on to found the Parents National Education Union which had many branches in major towns and cities in England. While her methods of instruction were very specific, they were “laid back” as well. Facts and information were not force-fed to the students whom she insisted be looked upon as persons and not just receptacles.

Let's take a closer look at some of her methods of instruction.

**Narration**

The parent reads a Bible passage, poem, book, etc., to the student and for every school-age student requires that they “tell back” what they heard, including their thoughts and opinions, what it reminds them of, etc. This is basically an oral essay (don't tell the children!) As the students advanced in age, they were required to write these narrations; this improved dictation and spelling skills and also served as a means of testing.

**Nature Study**

Miss Mason felt that the way to learn about nature was to experience it and to observe it on a regular basis - the routines, the unexpectedness, and all aspects of nature. She required each child to keep a Nature Notebook which they filled with drawings of their nature “finds” as well as poetry and written entries, including the cataloging or identifying of each find with the proper Latin name and common name. A great resource for this is The Handbook of Nature Study and is a much loved library addition to Charlotte Mason-ers.

**Living/Whole Books**

These are books by a single author who is so passionate about his subject that you are completely caught up in the story. Miss Mason believed that a child should gain knowledge through his own efforts by reading classical literature and high quality books. Instead of dry, boring textbooks, these books had life-like characters easily related to by the students.

**Copywork**

By copying Bible passages, lines from great literature, poems, quotes, hymns, etc., children learned mainly penmanship, but it was also reinforcement for grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

### **Minimal Lectures**

Miss Mason's method involved giving the student the ability to educate themselves instead of the teacher digesting the information, regurgitating it to the students, and expecting the students to take notes and regurgitate it back to her.

### **Free Afternoons**

Formal lessons ended at 1 p.m. or before and the children were then free to engage in other activities and pursuits. This included outdoor play, handicrafts, practicing an instrument, gardening, chores, cooking, or even nature study. She, however, would not have approved of the activities of many of today's children consisting of the television, videos, and/or computer games/internet.

### **No Homework**

No student, 12 and under, was given homework because none was needed. Literature was read and narrated back, letting the teacher/parent know immediately if the student comprehended it.

### **Habit**

Miss Mason strongly believed that the Will's function is to "choose" and we should equip our students to make the right choices without creating a weak Will by constant nagging.

These descriptions just scratch the surface of the Charlotte Mason approach, but don't they sound refreshing? Now, you ask, what if I decide I want to try this approach, but I've spent all this money on other curriculum?? My advice would be to do some more research on the Charlotte Mason approach, pick one area you want to incorporate into your lifestyle (which I think is the key - lifestyle) and add more as you feel comfortable. It probably would not be wise for you or your students to try to immerse yourself into this approach all in one day.

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