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More Charlotte Mason Education: A Home Schooling How-To Manual

Catherine Levison
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The growth in popularity of home schooling in recent decades has produced an explosion in the quantity and variety of curriculum options available to home educators, leaving many parents to wonder if the hardest decision is not whether to home school, but how. Levison, however, assures parents that they need not spend hundreds of dollars each year on pre-packaged curricula, they can provide a complete and challenging education for their children using the resources of public libraries and the century-old methods of a British school marm.

Parents, particularly those of an intellectual bent, will find much to like in the philosophy of Charlotte Mason, who began her work as a teacher in England in 1860 at the age of eighteen and wrote prolifically during the course of her career as an educator, which ended with her death in 1923. Mason encouraged children to read high-quality literature in its unabridged form, study classical music and art and record in a journal their first-hand observations of the natural world. Mason eschewed textbooks written for children and instead recommended “living books” such as biographies and travelogues. Mason used a six-day a week school schedule, confining the school day to three to four hours of short lessons (twenty to fifty minutes each depending upon the age of the child) in the mornings.

In A Charlotte Mason Education, published in 1999, Levison gave an overview of Mason’s philosophy and methods, providing a major service for parents curious about Mason but hesitant to track down and read Mason’s six volumes. In this follow-up, Levison shares her experiences using Mason techniques in home schooling her five children for more than a decade. This volume is full of the practical advice that home schooling parents crave: recommendations on books, sample schedules, toll-free phone numbers for ordering supplies and what to do

with preschoolers during an older child's lesson time. Levison also updates Mason's reading list with her own finds, including some books that were actually written in this century.

Levison infuses her writing with her own conservative Christian ideology, which may put off readers who are not of the same theological persuasion. Levison, however, encourages adapting Mason's techniques to each individual family situation-which she also has done-and does not insist on methodological purity. The result is a very helpful and practical advice book for those already hooked on Charlotte Mason or simply wanting to know more.

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