

What is the Charlotte Mason Method?

Original text to this summary can be found at SimplyCharlotteMason.com

The Charlotte Mason method is based on Charlotte's firm belief that the child is a person and we must educate that whole person, not just his mind. So a Charlotte Mason education is three-pronged: in her words, "Education is an Atmosphere, a Discipline, a Life."

An Atmosphere, A Discipline, A Life

By "Atmosphere," Charlotte meant the surroundings in which the child grows up. A child absorbs a lot from his home environment. Charlotte believed that the ideas that rule your life as the parent make up one-third of your child's education.

By "Discipline," Charlotte meant the discipline of good habits—and specifically habits of character. Cultivating good habits in your child's life make up another third of his education.

The other third of education, "Life," applies to academics. Charlotte believed that we should give children living thoughts and ideas, not just dry facts. So all of her methods for teaching the various school subjects are built around that concept.

Living Methods

For example, Charlotte's students used living books rather than dry textbooks. Living books are usually written in narrative or story form by one author who has a passion for his topic. A living book makes the subject "come alive."

And the students were required to tell back, or narrate, in their own words what was read in the living book, in order to secure it in their minds. No fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice for them; they practiced using rich language as they pointed out the ideas they gleaned from the reading and any mental connections they made between it and other ideas already residing in their growing minds and hearts.

She taught handwriting and spelling by using passages from great books that communicate great ideas rather than using just a list of words.

She encouraged spending time outdoors, interacting with God's creation firsthand and learning the living ways of nature.

She introduced the work of great artists and composers to her students and let them spend time with each, getting to know their works personally.

She spread before her students a feast of ideas from a wide variety of sources—from Shakespeare to knitting to Bible to tramping through field and stream to algebra to singing to foreign languages. And woven throughout it all, she emphasized the habits of full attention, best effort, and learning for the sake of learning.

All designed to help the child grow; for we learn, to grow.