**Who was Charlotte Mason?**

Charlotte Mason was a British educator who lived in the 19th century and invested her life in improving the quality of children’s education. English children at that time were educated according to their social class; the poorer children were taught a trade, and the fine arts and literature were reserved for the upper classes. Charlotte promoted the idea of a liberal (i.e.: generous and broad) curriculum for all children, regardless of social class. She taught at a teacher’s training college and established at Ambleside the House of Education, where she trained governesses and others working with young children. She published six volumes on her educational theories and process, which are still in print and an invaluable resource today.

**What is a Charlotte Mason Education?**

Charlotte said, “Education is an Atmosphere, a Discipline, a Life.”

1. Education is an Atmosphere: This means we provide our children with a wealth of materials and tools to learn and grow at home by putting them in touch with great thinkers and great ideas through music, art, poetry, living books, and discussion. It also means that the relationships and general environment of our homes are nurturing, respectful, and that we aspire toward Christ-like conduct in our dealings with each other and with our children.
2. Education is a Discipline: Charlotte’s method of instilling discipline was through initiating good habits like attention, obedience, perfect execution of work, order, and kindness. In this way, children’s minds and characters are developed. Her student’s philosophy of, “I am, I can, I ought, I will” reflects the understanding that out of our character, the responsibility and desire for education is birthed, rather than enforced. This habit training is therefore like the rails of a train track – it is the foundation upon which education travels smoothly.
3. Education is a Life: Our goal as CM parents and educators is to develop life-long learners. We acknowledge that there is such wealth and wonder in the world God created, that we will never be able to explicitly teach our children every detail. Instead, we aim to instill in them a love for discovery and learning that will continue their education for a lifetime. It is important that we not only teach these skills, but model them for our children as well. Therefore, we seek to continue our own development, education, and ‘mom culture’. We are all learning and growing together to become like our Master – who never stops teaching us new things!

**Specific Teaching Methods of a CM Education:**

1. Habit Training – Developing specific, intentional habits by focusing on learning one habit at a time, until it is a part of our character.
2. Short Lessons – Through short lessons, children develop the habit of attention and perfect execution of work. Charlotte recommended that lessons at the elementary school level not exceed 15 minutes. Lessons are gradually lengthened as the student grows stronger in habits of attention and skill.
3. Living Books, Not Twaddle! – A living book is usually written by one author who has a passion for the subject and is written in a conversational or narrative style. “Twaddle is defined as diluted, stale, predictable, or ‘talking down to’ the child.
4. Self-Education – A CM education is not teacher-driven, but is designed to present knowledge. The child’s mind is not a blank slate or a bucket to be filled with facts, but a living organism that was designed to use ideas in order to develop. It needs no special preparation to learn – only contact with other great minds and their ideas.
5. Time Outdoors – Charlotte believed that nature was a great teacher and that human beings need interaction with Creation to understand their Creator. Therefore, she set aside time for nature walks, nature journaling, and time enjoying the outdoors for children.
6. Teaching the Masters – Great works of art, music, poetry, and literature are not reserved for adults to appreciate! Children develop a taste for excellence when they are regularly taught to appreciate the works of great minds.
7. Handicrafts/ Life Skills – Teaching our children to use their hands to create useful and beautiful items teaches manual dexterity, the ability to judge quality, and cultivates artistic feeling. Charlotte believed that these crafts should be useful as well as beautiful, and wanted children to be taught skills that would help them to be self-sufficient as adults.
8. Narration – Narration is the art of ‘telling back’ what has just been read or presented. When regularly engaged in, narration is invaluable in training the mind to listen well, to absorb information for later recall, and to organize thoughts into well-ordered words for writing and speaking.

Finally, as Charlotte says, “Education is the science of relations.” Children have minds capable of making connections with knowledge and experience, so we make sure that the child learns about nature, science, music and art. We teach children to love living books, to love making useful and beautiful items, and to keep their bodies fit and healthy. But more than all of this, the child makes connections through these experiences to the growing knowledge and wisdom that they are acquiring by contact with high ideals and great thinkers. They connect ideas and thoughts to form their character into a well-rounded, well-educated individual.