

## **AmblesideOnline Frequently Asked Questions**

These are the questions that were found on the AmblesideOnline email list to be most commonly asked by list members. Information from nearly two years of list archives has been collected and compiled here; we encourage you to read this page in its entirety - the chances are good that your question has already been answered here!

**About Charlotte Mason**  
**About AmblesideOnline**  
**Getting Started**  
**Language Arts**  
**Mathematics**  
**Science**  
**Social Studies/History**  
**Fine Arts**  
**Foreign Languages**  
**High School**

---

### **About Charlotte Mason**

#### **Who was Charlotte Mason and what is her method of homeschooling?**

Charlotte Mason lived in England in the 1800's. Orphaned at age 16 and never married, she devoted her life to children and their education. Her ideas were ahead of her time - while others thought that children were no more than empty slates to be filled with information, she believed that they were already real people capable of independent, intelligent thought and that they needed vital ideas, rather than dry facts, to feed their growing minds.

The students in the schools she founded read and discussed living books written by excellent authors on various subjects, took daily nature walks and recorded their observations in notebooks, enjoyed art and music, cultivated and maintained good personal habits such as attention to detail, focused attention and consideration to others, and learned foreign languages. And, by using short lessons, they accomplished all of this (and more) by lunchtime so that they had their afternoons free for their own individual worthy pursuits.

The Charlotte Mason method uses living books with an emphasis on quality rather than quantity, narration instead of comprehension exercises or composition, copywork for handwriting, spelling and grammar modeling, nature observation as the primary means of

early science, and literature, poetry, art and music to give children's minds beautiful ideas to feed on.

"We want our children to feel that each fresh lesson gives them an 'open sesame' to a fairy palace full of treasures worth the seeking; that they are the inheritors of all the heaped-up gains of past ages, not slaves doomed to a treadmill of weary monotony." [*Kathleen Warren, Parents' Review, 1903*]

**CM is not unschooling**, nor is it **delight-directed**. To illustrate the difference, imagine that you had a son who was interested in knights and wanted to learn more about them. With unschooling, you wouldn't plan any lessons but you would let your son read all the books he could find about knights, play knights games, look up knights on the internet. Then, you'd count those hours as school time. With delight-directed, you would note his interest in knights, and ditch your plans to teach about ancient cultures and US History, and instead plan a semester of lessons about knights. With CM, you would allow your son to learn all he wanted about knights in his spare time, but during school hours, you would continue to assign readings from chronological history and literature so he'd still be learning about ancient Egypt, Rome, US History, etc. because, as Charlotte Mason said, you never know what will ignite a passion in a child, so exposure to many topics is necessary. However, you would keep school hours short to give him plenty of time (and inclination) to learn about knights after school.

**CM is not unit studies**. Unit studies attempt to link knowledge in the child's mind by arranging lessons around specific topics. Charlotte Mason felt that this was an artificial way to create mental relationships based on a faulty concept of ideas as taught by Herbart. Children don't need unit studies to organize ideas for them. Their minds are perfectly capable of taking ideas from various unrelated sources and figuring out how they relate to each other on their own. Yet, if you look at the whole curriculum, there's no lack of hands-on activities--there are science experiments, handicrafts, nature notebooks and collections, making timeline books (for the older ones), etc. Children can also be asked to narrate by illustrating a scene from a story or by acting something out. Many children will go on to "play the stories" of what they've read or to do hands-on projects of their own. The point is that these should not be stage-managed by the parent--they belong to the children themselves.

**CM is not Montessori**. While Maria Montessori's goals were much like Charlotte Mason's (educating the whole person and creating an attitude where learning is enjoyed for a lifetime), CM isn't about creating an optimal environment to entice children to learn. Charlotte Mason

felt that that children could and should learn by dealing with real things in their real world rather than an artificially manipulated environment. Montessori relies more on sensory, hands-on experience while CM's emphasis is on training the mind to process knowledge by focusing the attention. (To get an idea of Charlotte Mason's opinion of Montessori's method, read her letter to the editor of the paper at <http://rusticanda.blogspot.com/2006/01/cms-letter-to-editor-regarding.html>)

**CM is not about making learning fun.** Charlotte Mason felt that, although children enjoy being entertained, entertainment is a passive activity. Children need to apply their own minds to the effort of getting knowledge from their books and making their own mental relationships with the world around them. However, since humans have an inborn curiosity to learn things, the process of education itself, while challenging, can be enjoyable for its own sake.

**CM is not vocational training.** Although Charlotte Mason had nothing against students learning skills they might be able to use at a job, she was very much against vocational training when it replaced a broad, mind-enhancing education for the personal growth and enrichment of the student. She was also against focusing a child's education on math, or science, or any one subject, at the expense of a well-rounded education.

**CM is not Classical Education** in the way homeschoolers understand classical education today. Charlotte Mason did not adhere to the trivium idea of stages of a child's mind, although her method dovetails nicely with classical education and falls very squarely and firmly with the classical tradition as practiced for centuries by a stream of Christian educators and philosophers. When trying to contrast CM with CE, Michelle Duker suggests "thinking through the following thought questions, which will require some reading of the two perspectives: 1. What is the view of a child in each method? What is a child? 2. What is the purpose of education? 3. What is the role of the teacher/parent?" Rather than having students read classics in dead languages for cultural literacy as traditional classical required, Charlotte Mason felt that there were just as many wonderful books that her students should be reading and reflecting on in their own native English language. (Read Karen Glass's article about CM and CE, and a related post she wrote to Truthquest at [http://www.truthquesthistory.com/articles/articles\\_detail.php?contentid=93](http://www.truthquesthistory.com/articles/articles_detail.php?contentid=93). Karen has also written a book about the subject called Consider This: Charlotte Mason and

the Classical Tradition with a related podcast, and a brief Q&A podcast with Cindy Rollins.)

**First and foremost, Charlotte Mason is a 12-year Christian Character Building curriculum.** Books are chosen not for cultural literacy so much as the literary quality with which they were written, and even more, their ability to develop the whole person and inspire his character. For all those years that children are getting a CM education, what's really being trained more than anything else is their character. Students receiving a CM education don't need any character building program because the entire curriculum is geared towards building character with the use of personal habits, quality books, teacher guidance, the work of the Holy Spirit and personal reflection.

### **How does CM compare with other homeschool approaches?**

These sites give a brief overview of common homeschool methods:

Homeschool.com

<http://www.homeschool.com/Approaches>

HowStuffWorks

<http://people.howstuffworks.com/homeschool4.htm>

Homeschool Learning Network

<http://www.homeschoollearning.com/index.php/homeschool-resources/homeschool-methods>

Arkansas HRD

<http://www.lchr.org/a/29/kr/ahrd99/curriculum.html> \*

Homeschool Marketplace

<http://www.homeschoolmarketplace.com/newsletters.html>

(used to be Elijah Co) has posted a four part series in their newsletter archives called Choosing Teaching Materials that includes one of the best overviews of common teaching approaches:

1. 10 Rules of Thumb
2. Determining How Your Child Learns Best
3. Common Teaching Approaches
4. Developing an Educational Philosophy

Not exclusively CM-related, but the article "No Thank You, We Don't Believe in Socialization!" by Lisa Russell shows the absurdity of school socialization as a means of preparing children for real life.

We collected a few posts from members who discussed how AO compares with other CM-inspired programs; you can read them at

<http://www.amblesideonline.org/AOcompared.shtml>.

---

**About AmblesideOnline**

AmblesideOnline is an attempt to create a curriculum that's as close as possible to the curriculum that Charlotte Mason used in her own PNEU schools. Our goal is to be true to Charlotte Mason's high literary standards. AmblesideOnline is not the only way to implement a Charlotte Mason education, and, in fact, Charlotte Mason herself warned that simply taking her booklist and applying it to a school would not be enough - her method is more than a booklist. It is the principles and philosophy behind the approach as well as books with a high literary standard that are the distinctions of a true CM education. (Read more about what distinguishes a CM education, and how AO compares to other curriculums.)

**Does that mean you should not use any booklist, or curriculum?** Not at all. While Charlotte Mason warned against simply applying the booklist she used, she never intended teachers or parents to attempt to school without a plan, and always provided them with a booklist and schedule, and it was expected that her books (what we know today as the 6-volume Original Homeschool Series) would be studied. Charlotte Mason is not alive today to consult for book choices, but AmblesideOnline is one way to provide parents with a guide on their homeschool journey. However, following AmblesideOnline's schedule without also learning about Charlotte Mason's approach will not give your children the full benefits of a CM education, and we cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of reading her series and learning all you can as you school. AmblesideOnline is not intended to replace a parent's own understanding of CM's methods, but is a way to remove the burden of creating a curriculum from scratch while discovering more about the method itself. It is imperative to understand the CM method in order to know how best to tweak AO to suit the curriculum to meet your needs without compromising Charlotte Mason's principles. As well, the more you grasp her principles, the more you'll notice the synergy that's built into AO, as some AO moms have observed:

". . . the more time invested in learning CM's methods, the more the program will reveal itself to you." ~ Carol

"Yes, Carol hit it right on the nose with this statement. I can't say that I fully understand how, but this has been so very true for me. I'm reading along with the CM series and have learned so so much more than I could have imagined. I jumped into using AO Year 1 last year and am now seeing all the concepts I missed by just 'checking off' my AO list. We learned so much together and had so much fun, but I now see that I was teaching truth but not in spirit and truth, if that makes any sense. I'm excited and looking forward to starting Year 2 with

so much more to offer my dear little students. Hard to believe it can be better!" ~ Susan B. in TX

### **Who put all of this together?**

A group of moms very much like you! The Advisory are all moms who are often busy, tired and distracted, who sometimes raise their voices when they shouldn't, who don't always get the laundry done when they should or meals on the table on time, who deal with sick children and plumbing emergencies, and who worry about not doing enough in their children's schooling. If they can do a Charlotte Mason, so can you -- especially with the help and support the AO Forum offers. We all help each other.

### **Why are you putting so much work into something for which you receive no remuneration?**

The Advisory members are all homeschooling moms who have seen firsthand what Charlotte Mason's methods have done for their own children and homeschool experience, and believe with a passion that her approach can have just as beneficial an effect in any homeschooling family. They are encouraged that such an education might be a positive influence on the next generation, but that parents discovering her methods may need the kind of practical help that a curriculum outline such as AmblesideOnline provides while learning about Charlotte Mason's philosophy and implementing it in their own homeschool. Although the Advisory receives no payment or dues for their work on the curriculum, they do benefit from the collective pool of research and information, which enhances and takes some of the burden from their own attempts to homeschool. As the Advisory are all busy moms themselves, the information here is posted in the hopes that homeschooling parents can obtain enough information and confidence to apply a Charlotte Mason education in their families. Unfortunately, Advisory members' roles as mothers and teachers and hours planning and maintaining the curriculum does not often allow them as much time to handle individual questions as they might like.

### **Wow! All this for free? Isn't there any way we can contribute something?**

Yes! Any contribution to the virtual worldwide library of texts online, whether AmblesideOnline uses a specific book or not, is in the spirit of AmblesideOnline's vision to make available resources and information at no cost to the public at large, provided by volunteers for the benefit of others without expectation of return. We encourage members to help put texts online by either scanning, typing, or proofreading texts to put online. If you would like to know more about getting texts online, Project

Gutenberg's volunteer page  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Category:Volunteering> is the best place to start gathering research.

In the same spirit, list members have written lesson plans to go with the curriculum for the free use of members, made art prints available at no more than their cost of production, shared resources such as online websites that enhance the term's studies, written biographies to enhance the term's artist or composer, exchanged ideas for implementing the curriculum, shared narrations and exam results with one another and worked together to create audio readings of public domain books for participating members. Individual list members keeping their email posts on topic also contributes to the fine-tuned focus, which enables parents with limited time to participate in the email list. And list members answering questions and providing encouragement to new members is a great help, since Advisory members rarely have as much time as they'd like to help new members.

Please note -- while we appreciate the willingness of anyone wishing to provide products that benefit members, the Advisory is not able to donate time to help with projects intended to generate income for others. In general, we prefer that contributions be on a volunteer basis and provided for free.

You can help support the cost of AO's website and domains when you visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) from our link and by clicking on the "purchase" links or "Kindle" links from our booklists. We have tried to link to unabridged editions published by reputable book sellers for each book.

**Can children follow the plots of many books read slowly in the same term? Why shouldn't I just read the books at a quicker pace so my child can focus on just one or two at a time?**

Education is more than the accumulation of knowledge. Maturity and wisdom require reflective thought about ideas. Rushing through lots of books doesn't leave the book in contact with the child long enough to make the kind of lasting impression that will influence him. Getting through a book at a quick pace leaves room for little else besides a brief brush with the storyline; it leaves no time for the mind to linger with the characters and contemplate their moral aspect. Taking an entire term to read a book allows the child to almost live the book in a way not possible if he breezed through it in a week or two before picking up the next one. AmblesideOnline schedules a few books to be savored simultaneously over the entire term to give the child more time with the ideas and allow him more than casual

contact with its ideas. In the end, it may result in fewer books being read, but the books are chosen with excellence in mind with an emphasize on quality over quantity. Children seem to have no more trouble following along with six books at a time than many people do following various soap operas. Read more about this topic at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/AOSlowReading.shtml>.

**Why does AmblesideOnline use books that are so challenging for most children?**

Charlotte Mason wanted to put students in direct contact with the best minds of all time, so she had her students reading first hand from books written by great minds with great ideas. Retellings of these books will usually be inferior, watered down versions of the original. The strength of great literature is often in its detailed depiction of characters who come to life as we read and allow us to see a different world through their eyes and consider their moral dilemmas - this is the kind of reading that helps a child firm up his own convictions. When books are abridged, they are stripped of almost everything but the plot line, and the wonderful vividness of the characters is sacrificed.

Children are at their prime stage of development to learn language - and what better vocabulary teacher is there than a well-written but challenging book? As Charlotte Mason found a hundred years ago, and Marva Collins found more recently, even children lacking the benefits of a good education will rise to the challenge of understanding difficult books when given a chance. Charlotte Mason said that "children naturally take to literary expression. They love hearing it, reading it, and using it in their own tellings and writings. We should have known this a long time ago. All the old ballads and songs of the ancient wild warriors and barbaric kings have been thought too complicated for anyone but highly educated people to enjoy. But we'll soon see that only minds like a child's could have produced such fresh, finely expressed thoughts. Children have a natural aptitude for literature. Their inclination for it can overcome the challenge of the vocabulary without effort. Knowing that should direct the kind of teaching we give." (see vol 6, pg 91)

It's difficult to train up children to be readers of Great Literature on a diet of easy books. It's even more difficult if books have to compete with TV and video games for a child's attention. An understanding and appreciation for challenging books begins with early exposure to well-written literature that uses rich literature and demands something of the child's mind. An accurate definition of "living books" is imperative, as well the use of narration

to help the child's mind work with the material, and teach him how to pull knowledge from books.

Read Colleen Manning's article about how "Living Books" are defined in a CM education at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/LivingBks.shtml>. Also, there is more great discussion on this topic at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/QualityofBookSelection.shtml> as well as Wendi's thoughts on the benefits of words vs pictures in education at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/BookPictures.shtml>.

For a quick look at how AO's books rate on the Lexile scale, see a short list here: <http://www.amblesideonline.org/lexile.html>

### **Why use short, varied lessons instead of long lessons that might train children to persevere at their work?**

Charlotte Mason advocated short lessons for home schoolrooms as well as school classrooms. She wrote in volume one that short lessons teach the children the value of a golden minute, that now is the time to do this lesson and one time is not as good another- another way of putting it would be to say that short lessons help children learn to make the most of the time. Short lessons ensure both that lots of free time will be available, and that the child's interest will be high.

We on the advisory, as well as many list members, have tried both longer and shorter lessons. What we have found is that when we stop while the child is still hungry, so to speak, for more information on that book, my child is nearly obsessed with thinking about the material in the book. She spends time wondering what might happen next, why events have fallen out as they have, what might have been done differently- each child will spend more time in reflection, more time play acting (later, in their spare time) and more time making the material their very own in a deeply personal way (obviously, some books work out better for this than others). One thing we find makes this more possible is to follow reading lessons with subjects that make it possible for them to spend some time thinking about what they just read. So we might read from history, then do handwork, then read from a science book, then do copywork, then read from a literature selection and then do nature study, and so on.

Wendi Capehart says, "Before I actually tried this, stopping while a child was still interested was anathema to me - I thought it a terrible, ridiculous thing to do, and it went against all my assumptions. But putting it into practice has made me a believer - I even get extra 'narrations' as my children will come up to me sometimes during lunch or while we are at the park and

suddenly say, "I just can't believe that he's dead!" and I, startled, will say, "who?" and then they proceed to tell me their concerns about where some story is going and what is going to happen and their indignation at the behaviour of some character. =)

### **If AmblesideOnline is a Christian curriculum, why does it use books that assume evolution like *A Child's History of the World* and *Van Loon's*? Why does it use fairy tales, myths and fantasy? Why does it use Shakespeare?**

AmblesideOnline attempts to use the best book based on various criteria. If there were an excellent book for any required subject area that met our standards and also taught from a non-secular perspective, we would use it. (One might ask, Why aren't Christians, especially in our modern world, producing excellent work to offer us? One theory is that a mediocre education using inferior-quality materials may result in a person who is a solid Christian, but nonetheless doesn't know or recognize quality and therefore is unlikely to produce cultural work of excellence. Perhaps a well-disciplined Christian trained with good habits and accustomed to the best that culture has to offer will be in a better position to write works that rival the old classics, and will be better equipped to represent Christianity to a society that values creativity. This is one of our highest hopes for AmblesideOnline graduates!)

Unfortunately, the only flawless book is the Bible itself. Even books written by Christians may not hold to our particular viewpoint - there are Christians who fall under young earth, old earth, and selective adaptation. In cases where the best book had a few flaws, it was chosen for the curriculum with the assumption that parents would handle situations as they arise. It is worth considering that reading only books coming from one perspective will not prepare children for pervasive ideas and cultural norms that they will be confronted with outside of the home. Further, children need to confront the fact that man-made books are fallible. As an example, using a book that contains some evolutionary ideas can provide parents with a natural opportunity to present the other side, using their choice of resources, which prepares children to be able to defend their position. Some have studied Genesis side by side, or used the book *It Couldn't Just Happen* by Lawrence Richards, or *Adam and His Kin* by Ruth Beechick or information at <http://www.icr.org/>. Rejecting books point blank because of some objectionable content may teach our children to reject whatever doesn't fit their viewpoint without first resorting to constructive dialogue or intellectual consideration - which can flow over into an attitude of automatic rejection of people who hold different views.

Read more at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/HillyersEvolution.shtml>. Related question: Was Charlotte Mason a creationist or an evolutionist? Read our response at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/HillyersEvolution.shtml#cm>.

Some parents just skip offending chapters, or choose to wait until their children are older to read books that present evolutionary ideas.

There is an element of fantasy in some books used in the curriculum - King Arthur has Merlin, and The Hobbit is scheduled in Year 6. Fantasy, when used correctly (and not by a 'hero' who abuses magic for his own selfish ends) can be a very effective literary device in a book with themes of good and evil. Myths can open a discussion about the beliefs of other cultures.

Some parents object to fairy tales either because of the fantasy/magic element, or because they fear that their children may be disturbed with the violent nature of some of them (although it seems that many children, even those sensitive to real life events, are undisturbed by it in fairy tales). AmblesideOnline has scheduled fairy tales in keeping with the practices of Charlotte Mason - she did read them to her young students. She felt that they were valuable as well-written mind food to help children identify noble and evil characteristics. Some parents selectively edit the most grisly portions as they read. Suggestions for substitutions that have been mentioned are Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales, Perrault's French Fairy Tales or Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales, but it is recommended that you read Wendi Capehart's essay before reaching a conclusion. "A Landscape With Dragons: Christian and Pagan Imagination in Children's Literature" by Michael D. O'Brien also addresses this issue, as does "Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination" by Vigen Guroian (read a series of blog posts about this book starting at <http://rusticanda.blogspot.com/2008/02/awakening-moral-imagination.html>).

Shakespeare is literature at its best. He had such a gift that his name is still the most well-known in the world of literature after hundreds of years, and his lines have become a part of our everyday conversation. Charlotte Mason believed that all truth came down from God and could be enjoyed regardless of which instrument it came through. AmblesideOnline's curriculum is an attempt to do what Charlotte Mason did in her schools, and her students read Shakespeare. If you have reservations about using Shakespeare's works, you may read Peter

Leithart's book "Brightest Heaven of Invention" or this essay by Rev. Ralph Smith.

Regardless of what AmblesideOnline has scheduled, if you are uncomfortable with something, feel free to make substitutions - you are the best judge of what is right for your family, and there are many reputable booklists from which to choose alternatives. If it is the husband who objects after considering the information, then members are encouraged to submit to their husbands' leading. AmblesideOnline respects the rights of every parent to homeschool as they see fit. However, please understand that different families have various convictions that they feel very strongly about for reasons that they feel are intelligent and reverent. Bringing up this topic on the list tends to create a divisive and judgmental atmosphere on both sides. Therefore, we encourage members to read the information posted on our site and make a decision without taking it to the email list for open discussion.

### **I'm not a Christian. Can I still use AO?**

Yes, although some of our books and resources are distinctly Christian and you may prefer to make substitutions to fit your family's needs. The Advisory is unable to take time to locate alternative books and resources and the AO email list is not the appropriate place to ask for alternate suggestions. Although the Advisory is unable to tailor the booklist to accommodate all of the various denominational differences that exist, the CM movement is growing daily and email lists for CM homeschoolers with specific religious affiliations, special interests, individual needs, and unique circumstances are always being added to Yahoo's groups. We suggest that you find one of these groups and ask what resources they've found. You can do a search at <http://groups.yahoo.com/>.

Before requesting that the Advisory locate suitable alternatives or create an alternative booklist for you, please read this blog post and consider contributing to the CM community by finding and posting alternate selections for others who may be looking for the same thing. You might also check our links page to see if there's a support group that has already started such a project.

### **Can I do this if my child has ADHD, dyslexia or Asperger's?**

Yes. Any child, regardless of aptitude or learning challenges, will make the most of his or her potential from a plan that respects the person of the child, broadens the mind with exposure to many subjects of interest, and relies on instilling habits that build

character. Short lessons, small steps, focus on skills and habits, use of manipulatives and exposure to living ideas through books are perfectly geared for children with special needs. You can read more <http://www.amblesideonline.org/SpecialNeeds.shtml> as well as some thoughts about which Year to place your LD child. Donna-Jean Breckenridge wrote an article on using AO with her son. Also, see AO Mom Tammy Glaser's Asperger Page and her daughter's page.

### **All I see is a booklist. Why isn't AO more "hands-on?"**

If you look at the whole curriculum, there's no lack of hands-on: there are science experiments, handicrafts, nature notebooks and collections, making timeline books (for the older ones), etc. Children can also be asked to narrate by illustrating a scene from a story or by acting something out. Many children will go on to "play the stories" of what they've read or to do hands-on projects of their own; the point is that these should not be stage-managed by the parent--they belong to the children themselves. Some parents do supplement their reading with additional related activities, but it isn't necessary.

### **One mom in my homeschool group tried AO and isn't doing it anymore, why should I try it?**

We don't know why the mom in your group isn't using AO anymore, and we understand it isn't for everybody, but here are some issues that have caused some people problems with implementing AO in their homes:

--They do not read this FAQ list or other pages in the website that would help explain more about the curriculum.

--This is a Charlotte Mason curriculum and they do not have the time, or don't have the inclination, or for some other reason are not going to read more about Charlotte Mason's ideas.

--They have uncooperative children and are uncomfortable with the principles of proper use of authority that are found in Charlotte Mason's books (and the Bible).

--They do not use Fairy Tales/fantasy and are uncomfortable even making substitutions from a booklist that includes them.

--They have a large family of varying ages and abilities and feel they need a curriculum that tells them exactly what to do and keeps everybody on the same page. We do have members with large families who use our material, but some families need more assistance than we are able to provide. Although we're happy to make this free curriculum available, we're only a small volunteer group of mothers with our own children to homeschool

and that doesn't leave us time for the kind of personal one-on-one support that some moms need.

### **I have a product which would meet the needs of AmblesideOnline users. Can I email details to your list?**

You can write the Advisory with your plan, and ask permission, but the answer will probably be no.

AmblesideOnline is a free program lovingly put together with much labor, time, sweat, tears, and thousands of man-hours as a voluntary service to help other homeschooling parents implement their vision of a Charlotte Mason education at home. We do not exist to serve as a market for somebody else's business. We do not have time to devote to helping somebody else make a profit. We are not opposed to businesses making money, we just don't believe that our list is the place for it. Neither do we have time to help other families make money from our work using our list. We also are protective of the time constraints and the privacy of the members of our list, as well as our own.

Therefore, we almost never permit businesses to e-mail our list seeking a market for their business. The rare exception may be when an established business is considering producing a product that:

A. Would be of great help to our members at a reasonably affordable price;

B. Our members cannot get anywhere else; and which

C. Is specific to AmblesideOnline (The Homestead Pickers' CD of our folk music, for example).

On rare occasions, we have permitted an AmblesideOnline member acting as liaison between the list and the business to pose the simple question 'Would members be interested in this?' To date, this has only happened twice. We can't imagine it will be a common occurrence. If you are a business seeking a market through AmblesideOnline and you meet the above criteria, we will consider your request. Please be aware, though, that the answer will probably be no, and that buying and selling through our list is never permitted. I don't understand why you won't allow people to market products and services that make it easier for moms to use AO. Why are you so stingy with something that's free? Why shouldn't I expect remuneration if I help people use AO? After all, my time is worth something.

After purchasing and pre-reading countless books that end up not making the cut, paying hundreds of dollars in library fines for overdue books that were being previewed for the curriculum, correlating pages and pages of notes to come up with history rotations that fit

across the terms, working days together on three hours of sleep finalizing each high school Year, spending multiple series of 12-hour days linking books to free online etexts to the point of back pain and thumb-muscle discomfort, this sounds ungracious, as if our time means nothing. We are pleased to offer AO as a gift to homeschooling parents, and we prefer that our users offer their help and contributions in the same spirit.

---

## Getting Started With AmblesideOnline

### **I'm new to CM; where can I learn the basics of this kind of education?**

You can learn more about the Charlotte Mason method from various online sources, such as:

What is CM?

<http://www.amblesideonline.org/WhatIsCM.shtml>

A Charlotte Mason Education

<https://charlottemasonhome.com/2012/01/08/charlotte-mason-in-a-nutshell-2/>

The ABC's of Charlotte Mason

<http://homepage.bushnell.net/%7Epeanuts/faq1.html>

Charlotte Mason Approach

<http://pennygardner.com/brief-overview-of-charlotte-mason-approach/>

or books such as The Charlotte Mason Study Guide by Penny Gardner, A Charlotte Mason Education by Catherine Levison, For The Children's Sake by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, or Charlotte Mason's own six-volume Original Homeschool Series. Not sure which volume to read first? Go to

<http://www.amblesideonline.org/CM/CMVolumes.html> for help.

We suggest that those using AmblesideOnline's curriculum be learning about the philosophy behind the Charlotte Mason approach because the full benefits of this type of education cannot be realized without understanding the foundational ideas behind the method. We recommend joining a local support group devoted to learning more about Charlotte Mason, or the CM Series reading group on the AO Forum, which reads through her books together. We also suggest reading the Parents' Review articles from Charlotte Mason's original magazine, which are posted on AmblesideOnline's website.

**The Advisory's hardest struggle to date** has been convincing teachers that if they attempt to use our AO curriculum without the support of the CM method and

philosophy for instructional wisdom in each subject area, they will simply not realize the success that is attainable in a CM education.

### **What do I need to do to start, what does it cost, and where do I get the books?**

Find out what you need in the way of registering and record-keeping. Every state has different laws; find a local homeschooler or ask someone from a local homeschool group what your state requires. You might be able to find this information online.; try [http://a2zhomeschooling.com/regional/regional\\_worldwide\\_homeschooling/](http://a2zhomeschooling.com/regional/regional_worldwide_homeschooling/)

We have a page to help you get started with AmblesideOnline at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/New.shtml> There's also a How to Use the AO Website video tutorial at <https://afterthoughtsblog.net/2017/03/use-amblesideonline-website-curriculum-purposes.html>

### **How much does it cost to use this curriculum?**

Advisory members receive no funds, fees or dues, and the curriculum is as free as they could make it. There is no charge for using the books, booklists, or any other material found on this website or offered through our list. The vast majority of scheduled books are available free, online, as e-texts. A few books will have to be purchased, but never from AmblesideOnline or the Advisory. You purchase the book from the source that works best for you. So how much you have to spend on the curriculum will vary from family to family.

**You do not need to notify AmblesideOnline or obtain our permission to use this curriculum** - it is posted for individual homeschool families to implement or alter freely. You may join the AO Forum if you wish, but even that is not required. We ask that you read over this entire page carefully before asking questions - your question may already be answered here. Please keep in mind - we on the Advisory are all busy homeschooling moms ourselves and are rarely available to answer questions about placement, book substitutions or individual implementation of this curriculum. If you have specific questions, you will stand a better chance of receiving an answer on the email list. There are specialized email lists for AmblesideOnline members with special circumstances, religious preferences, and regional areas; an incomplete list is at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Links.shtml#AOrelated>.



**Choose a Year for your child to start in** by looking at the booklists and assessing what seems appropriate for your child.

**Look at the booklist, make a list and gather materials** - buy, borrow or print out books, choose a math program, consider what you'll use for transcription/copywork (you can simply have your child transcribe appropriately sized passages from any of his school books).

You can help support the cost of AO's website and domains when you visit amazon.com from our link and by clicking on the "purchase" links, which are marked with a (\$), or "Kindle" links, which are marked with a (K), from our booklists. We have tried to link to unabridged editions published by reputable book sellers for each book.

The booklists have links to online etexts where etexts are available. Those can be printed out, or read from your computer screen (although most people prefer to have a hard copy to bring to a comfortable chair). Hard-to-find books are linked on the years' booklists to websites where they're commonly sold. Find free etext links, publishers that specialize in classics, online booksellers and online used books vendors on our Books page. Books can be purchased from online booksellers, or your local bookstore, or from used bookstores. Look for the unabridged, complete edition (beware of Landoll classics that claim to be complete and unabridged but are not). AmblesideOnline uses many classics that are available in libraries. There's an area to buy/sell AO books on the AO Forum.

Please note that it is not our intention parents to feel pressured to pay inflated prices for an out-of-print book. No book is so instrumental to providing a CM education that you need pay a lot of money for it. If a book is so hard to find that copies are going for a king's ransom, there is always a book that can be substituted. Valerie's Living Books has an article that addresses this. We suggest you read it before you stress about cowing to price-gouging to get your hands on a book because you saw it on our booklist. :-)

**Decide how you'll divide the workload** over the term or year (use or adapt the 36-week schedule if it helps) and plan a schedule, remembering to schedule short lessons of 10-20 minutes for younger children, 25-30 minutes for older children. You don't need to do every subject every day. You can do math Mon/Wed/Fri, geography Tue/Thur, US history Mon/Tues/Wed and world history Thu/Fri. You can break up the week in any way that suits you. Some break up the traditional subjects over four days and reserve Fridays for art or

music. There is no one right way. You do not need to purchase special cards, books or forms to create a schedule, nor does your schedule need to match a school timetable. Find what works for your family. Be prepared to make changes as you see what works.

AO Auxiliary member Brandy Vencel (AfterThoughts) has some tips with videos to help you create blank weekly chart templates and weekly schedules.

Plan to start slowly, beginning with history, geography, copywork, math, natural history/science, literature and poetry - you can add nature study, art, music and foreign language one step at a time as you feel ready.

On your first day, alternate the day between quiet subjects and hands-on subjects to keep your child's mind fresh. After your child reads from one of his schoolbooks, have him tell you what he read (this is narration). You may discuss it with him, if you wish. Most students do copywork every day. Ideally, your school day should be done by lunchtime, but plan for longer at first as you and your child adjust to this new endeavor.

After the first week or so, assess how your schedule is working and what you might change. Add nature study, art or music if you feel ready. Over the following weeks, slowly add one subject at a time as you feel you can handle it. Remember that any new venture can seem overwhelming and don't rush yourself to get it all in at first. Many who have been doing this for 2 or 3 years still have one or two things they have trouble fitting in.

Learn as much as you can before you start, and continue to learn as you go. The Charlotte Mason method is more than a booklist. It's a whole philosophical approach. The more you understand, the more effective your homeschool will be.

You can read some samples of real questions from beginners on the email list and their answers at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/beginning.shtml> and reviews/tips from AmblesideOnline members at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Reviews.shtml>.

Find support! Almost everyone has doubts, frustrations and feels overwhelmed at times - and everyone does at first. Find support -- either a local support group, a friend who has some experience homeschooling, or an online group.

**At which Year/level should I place my child?**

*(This is the most frequently asked question posted to the support group!)*

In general, the best Year for each child is the Year that challenges him without paralyzing frustration. An AmblesideOnline "Year" does not mean "Grade" as it would in public school. AmblesideOnline's Year levels (year 1, year 2, etc) are loosely equivalent to grades, but, true to Charlotte Mason's standards, the curriculum is rigorous, so a Year level of AmblesideOnline will be advanced compared to the same grade in most public schools - some gifted sixth graders doing AmblesideOnline's Year 4 find it plenty challenging! Charlotte Mason placed her students in their form or grade levels somewhat according to their ability as well as age. It's normal for parents to place children coming from public school in an AmblesideOnline Year that's a notch or two below his actual grade level - which works out fine because, even if a child graduates from high school after having only completed AmblesideOnline's Year 8, it still may be more than they may have learned in many public high schools.

All children should be working at their grade level in math and language arts regardless of which Year of AmblesideOnline they're doing.

Where you start your children will depend on what they can handle - the books should be a challenge, but not so frustrating as to be discouraging. Some people look at the booklists for each AmblesideOnline Year and if their children have read most of the books in a particular Year, they start with the following AmblesideOnline Year. These books may be more difficult than some children, even good readers, are used to. If you've been using a different curriculum, you will probably want to look at Years a year or two behind their actual grade level and adjust by moving up or down from there.

Consider the level of difficulty of the books the children currently read and compare them to the majority of the books in the curriculum for the year you are considering. If a child can read classic books like Pilgrim's Progress, Black Beauty, Water Babies and other books on the Year 3 and earlier lists like Heidi, he should be ready to attempt Year 4, even if he hasn't read all the books on the Year 3 list. The books should not be too easy, but neither should they be nearly impossible. Many times children will rise to the occasion when placed in a Year that looks at first glance above their abilities. One parent, whose fourth grade child was still having trouble reading, decided to try Year 4 anyway: "I went ahead and put her in Year 4, but was afraid. It was a tough, tough year. However, we persevered, and by the end of the year her

reading skills had leapt forward at an astonishing rate, and she now says Plutarch is her favorite school book."

Is it preferable to place a 9 or 10 year old child in Year 1 so he doesn't miss all the great books? Generally, no, it is not. Parents who did start an older child in Year 1 found themselves having to jump ahead a couple of Years after finding that the books were too easy for their child. If there is a concern about missing books done in earlier Years, they can be read in the child's spare time or in the evenings as family read-alouds.

When choosing which Year to place children, it's important that the workload not be too easy or boring. It should be a challenge, something they work at and think about - but it shouldn't be so difficult that the child is frustrated and dreads school. That generally means that the ideal is for each child to be working at his own level rather than placing two children in the same Year for the ease of the parent.

It is not necessary that the child be able to read all the books himself. In fact, it is assumed that the parent will probably be reading the books to the child at least in years 1-3; gradually, as his reading level increases, the task of reading the books will be handed over to the student. Limiting early texts to those a child can read himself sacrifices literary quality, and the early years are the prime time for exposure to well-spoken language, which isn't found in early graded readers with limited vocabulary. Ideally, by Year 4 he should be able to read them himself, but this is the ideal and there are many situations and circumstances where this won't be the case.

Some texts are scheduled over two or even three years - don't worry about starting in the middle portion of the history books. Most of the chapters in the history books are rather self-contained. Having a child "speed read" in order to get the whole book in may cause more problems than just starting in the middle and is not recommended, as rushing results in less time to linger and absorb what's been read. With "so many books, so little time," it's important to remember the value of emphasizing quality over quantity and not try to squeeze in more books than the child can assimilate. There may be gaps, but no education is free of gaps, and it's better for a child to learn a portion and learn it well than to rush to cover much and remember nothing. If your child is ready for Year 4, don't worry about missing earlier history books - reading This Country of Ours, An Island Story and A Child's History of the World are not prerequisites to starting Year 4.

When deciding where to place a child, consider that, by the time he finishes Year 6, he will need to be prepared for the more difficult work in Years 7-12. It may be beneficial to put a child as old as 12 in Year 4 as preparation for the more advanced later years. Year 4 is not at all insulting to the intelligence of a 12 year old. Many of the Year 4 books, like Kidnapped and Rip Van Winkle, are ageless classics, yet are still very engaging.

Year 4, being a transition year into more advanced work, is a jump in difficulty and is considerably more challenging than Year 3 (this is true of almost all curricula). In Year 4 children begin reading Shakespeare's actual plays and Plutarch's Lives. One option might be to use Year 4 but scale it down a little by omitting some of the books (at least temporarily) or proceeding at a slower pace at first, then picking up the pace later. By Year 4, children should be reading the bulk of their books themselves. If an older elementary child is still working on reading skills, it may be helpful to drop back to Year 2 or 3 to give the child time to improve their reading skills. Or, difficult books can be read with or to the student. Some parents "buddy read" with their child by taking turns reading a paragraph at a time to help get them through a challenging book. (If your child completes Year 3 and is not quite ready for Year 4, you might consider Year 3.5 as a transitional course of study between Year 3 and 4. It has been designed so that it can be started at any week during the first term, so if you get started on Year 4 and find that your child is struggling, you can switch mid-term.)

Year 7 is also a transition year. Like the AmblesideOnline curriculum, the House of Education (currently Years 7-10, with Years 11-12 still in the planning phase) is quite advanced. Many of the books scheduled for Years 7 and 8 (middle or intermediate school years) are used in public high schools, and even in college work, so don't assume your student is ready for Year 6 or Year 7 based on age alone.

The Pre-7 booklist is a compilation of books from Years 4-6 that are recommended for students to have read by the time they do Year 7. These are books from the lower Years that shouldn't be missed. A student might read these books in free time, or perhaps over the summer before beginning Year 7. Or, a child coming directly from public school who needs a period of adjustment to homeschooling could use the Pre-7 list as a slow transition before jumping into Year 7.

Read more at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/WherePlace.shtml> about what Year/level to place new students as list members respond to questions from new AO users about

placement. Cheri Hedden has also written an article for parents wondering where to start as they transition from textbooks. You can read it at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Placement.shtml>

### **How soon can my child start Year 1?**

Young children may be impulsive, need to move and have trouble focusing enough to listen to an entire story and narrate it. Charlotte Mason knew this and therefore recommended that children not do formal school until they were 6 years old. She said that no child under six should be required to narrate. They would gain more from playing, exercising their limbs and getting to know their environment first-hand in a casual, natural way by being outdoors.

Some children still aren't ready at six. There is nothing to lose and much to gain by waiting until a child is ready. More is required from AmblesideOnline with each progressive Year, so the child who is not ready for Year 1 at age 6 may not be ready for Year 2's more intense history at age 7. Some children need a year or two more to mature. One AmblesideOnline student wasn't quite ready at age 6; he couldn't keep still and was easily distracted. He didn't start Year 1 until he was 8. Two years later, he is in Year 3, reading most of the books himself and enjoys school - a couple years made all the difference. Had his parents insisted on making him sit still for school at age 6, it would be a struggle for both the student and his parents and he would have quickly learned to dislike school. How do you know if your child is ready? When he can listen along and follow a story and tell enough about back to convince you that he comprehended.

In the years when a child's readiness is still developing, there are things you can do to prepare him for AmblesideOnline. Severely limiting TV watching will help his mind to reach its intended potential and help his ability to focus attention. Jane Healy's book *Endangered Minds* explains the relationship between the visual information of TV and a child's attention span. Help your child become less dependent on visual images by reading him chapter books with few pictures - perhaps Peter Pan, Pinocchio, fairy tales, or E.B. White's books. These sorts of books encourage him to form pictures in his mind as he receives auditory information. Get him used to hearing well-spoken language in the form of poetry and well-written stories like Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit series, nursery rhymes and classic children's poems, A.A. Milne's Pooh classics, and James Herriot picture books. Cultivate an interest in growing things by planting a garden (or even a potted plant) or watching insects. Listen to music together, including classical music by

Mozart and Bach. Go for walks and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature together. Help your child learn to be observant.

What about a child who is advanced or already reading at age 5, or even 4? Should that child begin Year 1? Although a young child who is able to do formal schoolwork may reflect well to onlookers, list members overwhelmingly said no. None of those parents who waited regretted their decision. Some children did start early and did fine - but many of those parents said that, if they had to do it over, they would have waited. One mother started her 5 year old in Year 1 with success, but, due to family needs, had to stop and start Year 1 again the following year. Her daughter got more out of the books a year later. Even a precocious child will benefit from a little maturity, and will gain much by waiting. Don't think that waiting a year means your child isn't learning - the very young brain is programmed to grow best by learning from its environment - watching and participating in routine family life, learning about numbers through day-to-day activities and math games, use of linguistic skills through natural conversations with parents, hearing good language modeled by listening to well-written books, and free play. If you desire some kind of history exposure, your child may enjoy hearing books from the Childhood of Famous American series for fun.

One benefit of waiting is that it gives you, the parent, more time to learn about Charlotte Mason's methods - she herself said that, without understanding the "why" behind her approach, a Charlotte Mason curriculum was little more than just another booklist. There is more information about this age group at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/00.shtml>.

### **How do I do this with more than one child?**

Members vary in how they manage with multiple children. Many combine history/literature readings so they can read aloud to all the students at the same time. Their children do math and language arts at their own appropriate levels. Since many of the books are advanced and not 'dumbed down,' this can work well as most of the books in the earliest Years will not be below the level of older students. On the other hand, many parents have found that it works out easier to keep children in their own levels, especially when students do most of their school reading on their own.

Whether you combine children in the same Year or keep children in their own Year, you can combine art appreciation, music, nature study, Shakespeare and other topics that aren't specifically grade-relevant. It can be

useful for even the youngest child to listen in on the older child's Plutarch lesson; even if nothing is required of him, the exposure to the language may help prepare him for future books in later Years.

Theoretically, if a parent wanted to combine students into a younger and older group but keep them all in the same period of history, this would be how AO years line up. Year 12 doesn't match any earlier Year's history. Note that the line-up of Year 1/6 and Year 6/11 aren't an exact match.

Year 1 -- early history  
Year 6 -- modern; ancient history

Year 2 -- Middle Ages  
Year 7 -- Middle Ages

Year 3 -- 1400 - 1600 (Renaissance and Reformation)  
Year 8 -- 1400-1600's (Renaissance and Reformation)

Year 4 -- 1700-1800 up to the French/American Revolutions  
Year 9 -- 1688-1815 including French/American revolutions

Year 5 -- 1800 to 1920 up to WWI  
Year 10 -- 1815-1901 including the American Civil War

Year 6 -- end of WWI to present day  
Year 11 -- 1900-present

Lining them up more historically chronologically would look like this:

Year 1 -- early history  
last 2 terms of Year 6 -- ancient history

Year 2 -- Middle Ages  
Year 7 -- Middle Ages

Year 3 -- 1400 - 1600 (Renaissance and Reformation)  
Year 8 -- 1400-1600's (Renaissance and Reformation)

Year 4 -- 1700-1800 up to the French/American Revolutions  
Year 9 -- 1688-1815 including French/American revolutions

Year 5 -- 1800 to 1920 up to WWI  
Year 10 -- 1815-1901; American Civil War, Term 1 of Year 11,  
1900-1940

Term 1 of Year 6 -- end of WWI to present day  
Terms 2 and 3 of Year 11 -- 1940-present

### **Can I schedule two of my children in the same Year, or do they need to be doing their own Year?**

Some parents put two children in the same Year to lessen the burden of keeping up with two different programs and keep their children in the same period of history, and in cases where children are at a similar stage of readiness, this can work fine.

However, in the interest of keeping each child in a Year that challenges without frustrating them, it sometimes turns out - to the surprise of even the parent - to be easier to keep each child in his own Year as soon as he can read some of his own books himself. A child trying to keep up with an older sibling doing the same work may be disheartened, whereas the difference in ability is less evident if they are doing separate work. Also, children who can "get by" with the same work in Year 1 may grow farther apart in their differences in progressive Years, and a parent may have to skip the older child ahead a Year or two later to keep him at his best level - meaning that he misses an entire Years' worth of books. Parents need to choose a plan that works best for them, but with caution and a consideration for all the options and issues. (read more at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/CombiningYears.shtml>)

### **What do I do with my toddler while I'm doing school?**

Generally, if toddlers are disrupting time, it's because the other children in the household are young enough to still need most of their work done with a parent's help - older children are usually working some on their own and can go to another room if necessary. If your children are all young, it may help to remember that this time will be short. And young school-aged children have less demands on what is expected or truly necessary for their formal schoolwork - it's okay to spend more time on family dynamics and let them "catch up" in a year or two when they're able to do more on their own. It's normal with demanding little ones to have days where very little gets done, and it may help to set realistic expectations. If undisturbed time is short, plan to focus on the basics (some reading, copywork and math) and use the year to instill good habits and family togetherness.

Many parents schedule school to coincide with naptime, even if this means that some of school is being done in the afternoon (or even in the evenings after the little one is in bed!). Depending on the ages/responsibility level of your other children, you might have one child entertain the toddler while you work with another student. There are school-related activities that can be done with a toddler, such as taking nature walks with a stroller, listening to classical music, or baking. Try doing some school reading outside while the toddler plays in the sandbox. Plan a schedule of daily activities for toddlers to do while the older children do school - you might find ideas in books such as "102 I-Can-Do-It-Myself Activities for Preschoolers." Some members suggested having a specific amount of time where your toddler is confined (maybe using a baby gate?) by himself with toys that can only be used at that time - perhaps Duplo

blocks. Some parents have trained their toddler starting with a few minutes at a time and stretching the time to as long as an hour. During that time, some school can be done.

Many members highly recommended the book *Managers of Their Homes, A Practical Guide to Daily Scheduling for Christian Home-School Families*, by Steve and Teri Maxwell, which has scheduling helps, forms and tips for setting priorities and organizing time. Other books by Teri Maxwell were also found helpful.

### **Is it too late to start this kind of education if my child is in middle school, or high school?**

No, it's never too late to benefit from the stretching of the mind that comes from a classical education. Even many adult list members report being able to read and comprehend books which they could not have managed just a few years prior - it gets easier with practice at any age. Charlotte Mason thought her methods would work well with children who began at age 14. Volume 6 of her original series includes sections about "A Liberal Education in Secondary Schools" that should be of interest to anyone wanting to try this kind of education with an older student. (You can read a little more about this topic at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/BeginningLater.shtml>.)

### **How do I keep school records?**

How parents keep records is their choice and may depend on the requirements of their state. Some people save a copy of their AmblesideOnline schedule into a word processing file, modify it to add things like math assignments, and then print out their customized list. Some just keep a journal. Others don't keep very detailed records, just noting which books they've finished and keep copies of written work for work samples. Some keep detailed notebooks of each separate subject, filling it with photos, projects, notes of field trips and samples of written work from that subject. This can fulfill the requirements of states needing portfolios. Core subjects might be met with written narrations from history, literature. Nature notebooks would fall under science and copywork samples would be considered language arts. Notes, pictures and drawings from field trips could fall under the subject most relevant to the place traveled. Those who do CM-style exams can write down their child's answers and keep them on file. CHASE SC has Forms for keeping records, reading logs, time line forms and other useful pages. A .pdf reader is needed for most of the forms, but they are all free for the printing. Free Homeschool Deals and Homeschool

Connections have downloadable forms for planning and keeping records.

### **How many of my child's books should I read to him, and when should he start reading his schoolbooks on his own?**

Reading aloud is a wonderful bonding activity and families are encouraged to share read-aloud time together even when children are into high school. But, for educational purposes, children are expected to become independent readers who can extrapolate information from their school books themselves. In families with children in multiple years, it would be impossible for the parent to do all of the reading aloud for each child.

It's normal for a child in Year 1, and even Year 2, to need all of their school books read to them. Children who are still learning to decode phonetics will not be able to comprehend their lessons unless they have help. Easy readers such as Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad books can be used additionally for phonics practice. (Easy readers have not been scheduled into the curriculum because the age/year at which a child will need such practice varies.) Parent and child should be working towards the goal of the child reading the majority of his own books by Year 4 or 5. A transition suggestion is buddy-reading, where parent and child take turns reading a paragraph at a time.

Starting in Year 2 or 3, a child should begin slowly assuming the responsibility of reading his books. Perhaps in Year 2, the parent might choose one of the school books for the child to attempt on his own. His narrations from that book will manifest whether the child is comprehending or not. Every term, it should be expected that the child will assume more and more of his own reading until the only books that are read to him are those that require parental editing or benefit from discussion, like Plutarch. (Shakespeare will always be read aloud because, being a play, it's more enjoyable to act it out together.) Parents will need to use discernment to decide how much of the reading the child is ready to handle on his own, considering comprehension and frustration levels.

It is expected that, even after children are able to do their own school reading, families will share regular read-aloud time for fun. You can read more about this topic at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/ReadaloudTexts.shtml>.

### **How do I do exams?**

AO offers CM-style exams for each Year. Exams are optional - nobody at this website will be checking or

grading your exams, but some list members have attempted doing CM-style exams as a way to gauge their child's progress. Charlotte Mason gave essay-type exams asking students questions like what they remembered of a particular book read earlier in the term, or to compare the qualities of two characters in a book, or to trace the travels of a journey they read about. There was no review before a term's exam in Charlotte Mason's schools - the child was assumed to have mastered the information after reading about it and narrating it. You can read more at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/ExamThoughts.shtml>.

---

## **Language Arts**

### **How does a Charlotte Mason curriculum handle language arts, including phonics, handwriting, copywork, grammar and composition?**

AmblesideOnline's language arts consists of reading instruction, transcription (copywork), narration, dictation and grammar. Creative writing consists of physically forming the letters, composing thoughts and, finally, transferring those thoughts to paper. Charlotte Mason's methods teach each of these steps separately - physically forming letters (copywork), composing thoughts (narrating) and transferring those thoughts to paper (written narration).

In grammar there's only a small body of knowledge to learn--it doesn't need to take years and years to learn it, and it doesn't need to start in first grade. Students will pick up grammar concepts without years and years of formal training if they read books. Trust the process! By the end of elementary school, students only really need to know two rules: (1) Capitalize sentences and proper nouns. (2) End sentences with punctuation (a period, question mark, or exclamation point).

It's also useful (but not vitally necessary) to be familiar with the following so that, when grammar is learned later, these concepts aren't totally new. This is only a suggestion. Don't worry if you haven't covered these, and don't feel pressured to rush out and buy a curriculum to teach them. They can be introduced naturally during routine school reading. All your child needs is to be able to identify these in a sentence: The four kinds of sentences (question, statement, command, exclamation) and the eight parts of speech (conjunction, noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, interjection).

When you begin written narrations, you can introduce more punctuation. Don't teach the mechanics of writing before students are actually writing! This might be around year 5 or later. Two years after beginning written narrations, you can begin to focus on style.

The most effective way to teach language arts is to get your child reading their school books themselves as soon as possible. When reading aloud, your child's mind may wander. Also, he isn't seeing the words on the page, so he's not seeing the spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and he isn't being challenged to push his reading levels. When you read all your child's school books to him, he isn't learning to spell, you are. So read aloud a fun story to enjoy together, but your student should be doing his own reading for school.

(Read AO's Language Arts Scope and Sequence at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/LangArtsScopeSeq.shtml>.)

Read our page about Language Arts at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/LanguageArts.shtml>.

### **Phonics and Reading Instruction**

Charlotte Mason's method included sight-recognition as well as phonics; Kathy Livingston wrote about that at <https://afterthoughtsblog.net/2014/10/myth-cm-uses-sight-word-approach-to.html>. AmblesideOnline mentions a few programs that have worked for Advisory members, but use whatever you like. Once children are able to read, they should be reading many or most of their schoolbooks for themselves. Read more about phonics and reading instruction at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Phonics.shtml>.

### **Transcription (Copywork)**

A child learns the physical skills of learning to write, first by perfectly forming each letter, and later by copying sentences or paragraphs. In the beginning, copywork is no more than letter practice - the child works on forming letters perfectly, with the emphasis on neat, accurate formation--quality rather than quantity. A Year 1 child should do only as much as he can do neatly in ten minutes, perhaps only a single word, or a few examples of one letter, such as "a." Some children may not have sufficient muscle coordination to begin writing until 7 years old.

It is through transcription that specific skills such as punctuation and mechanics (what a paragraph is, when to use capital letters) are picked up. Copywork done properly forces a child to slow down and absorb the punctuation details, notice capitalization, and internalize

sparkling, well-written prose. Copywork is usually done daily, but children who are exceptionally resistant to writing may do it two or three times a week.

What should be transcribed? Since modeling excellence in writing is important, children should copy literary examples - poems, scripture verses, passages from wonderfully written books, memorable quotes. For that reason, using a child's own creative writing for copywork is not recommended. Some members like to collect and prepare memorable sayings and advice for use as copywork, but that is not necessary - you can use poems and passages from the child's school books. Some parents choose copywork passages that include spelling words or punctuation examples that they want their child to learn. Many children like helping to select their copywork.

Shakespeare lines, Bible verses, morals from Aesop's Fables, proverbial advice or wisdom (including Proverbs), memorable quotes (some collect these and keep them in a jar for their children to pull out at random for daily copywork), hymns, The Preamble to the Constitution, George Washington's Rules of Civility, and/or phrases in a foreign language the child is learning - these are some resources parents have used for assigning copywork.

Access copywork assignments taken from AmblesideOnline readings by joining the copywork email list, which is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/AOCopywork/>

Copywork continues through all twelve years of a child's education, although an older child may do his copywork in a copybook of quotes and quips that he chooses on his own.

A formal handwriting program is not necessary, but may be used if desired. Some resources that AmblesideOnline members have enjoyed are:

A Reason for Handwriting is an excellent choice.

Handwriting Without Tears may be useful for a student who has struggled with handwriting.

Getty Dubay Italics workbooks

Getty Dubay-type free fonts

Create lined handwriting practice paper with your own text and choice of font, line sizes for free

Penmanship Practice Worksheets at DonnaYoung.org

StartWrite sells font software for printing out examples for children to copy and writing paper

Educational Fontware copywork fonts for sale

Print your own customized writing worksheets for free

Cursive and D'Nealian alphabet pages

Jan Brett alphabet samples shows children what the letters should look like

Vintage Handwriting books online for free viewing at IAMPETH, 'an international, non-profit association dedicated to practicing and preserving the beautiful arts of calligraphy, engrossing and fine penmanship.' They even offer video lessons.

Spencerian Penmanship Lessons  
Sample of a Copybook from 1845

To download the fonts, right-click and choose "save target as." Make a note of where they are being saved on your computer. Once you have downloaded them, you can right click on them and copy them. Then go to My Computer on your desktop, open the C drive, open the Windows folder, open the Fonts folder and then right click and paste the font into that folder.

Read more about copywork at  
<http://www.amblesideonline.org/Copywork.shtml>.

### **Narration**

Narration, or oral composition, utilizes many mental functions. Each time your child narrates, he is mentally composing his thoughts and communicating through words. Many specific comprehension skills are learned through narration - sequencing, main idea, details - and it's also good practice in listening and in speaking skills.

Written narration begins around age 10 or 11, starting with perhaps one written narration per week. The intent is to get the child putting his words on paper - spelling, writing, etc are taught with copywork and dictation, not narration. To de-emphasize grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors, it may help if the child reads his narration aloud rather than the parent seeing it and discouraging the child's efforts by noting mistakes. Written narrations will not be as long as oral ones - a child's first attempts may be only a sentence or two. But as he gets used to it, you can ask for longer narrations - five sentences, perhaps, and as you see ability grow, half a page. Editing and refining written work can be started after written narrations are easier - perhaps after a year or two of experience. Eventually, older children (high school) should be doing written narrations of a half page or more daily.

Written narration never completely replaces oral narration. Creative writing will be an extension of written narration. Current thinking says you have to write to be a writer, but Charlotte Mason's thinking was more along the lines of "you have to read to be a writer." Contrary to our culture's emphasis on self-expression, which often results in self-absorbed, imitative writing, she believed a child needed something inspiring from the

outside - in the form of his books - to spark his creativity and give him something worth writing about.

Some parents supplement (not substitute!) written narrations with Writing Strands or Excellence in Writing.

### **Why is narration so important and how do I do it?**

Narration - your child telling back what he's heard or read - is perhaps the most important key to making this kind of education work. Narration requires the higher-level mental activities of processing, sorting, sequencing, sifting and articulating information. Filling in blanks in a workbook can't match narration as a comprehension exercise. Oral narration is also the first step toward composition - the child becomes adept at articulating his thoughts in order, which is required in writing. Thoughts should be formulated in the mind before they are put on paper. Although simply 'telling back' is the most focused form of narration and probably the most challenging to the mental processes we are seeking to develop, some parents occasionally break up the usual routine by using other forms of narration, such as acting out, playing out, or drawing what children have heard. You can have a CM education without classical music, art, or Shakespeare--but you can't have a CM education without narration from living books. In fact, it isn't too extreme to say that a lesson that isn't narrated may be a wasted lesson! Because narration is so crucial in a Charlotte Mason education, it is recommended that parents learn as much as they can in order to gain confidence in this method of learning. You can read more (25 pages worth!) about narration at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Narration.shtml>. Also, Donna-Jean Breckenridge's thoughts on narration at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/DJBNarration.shtml>

### **Dictation**

Dictation, which reinforces spelling, is when the child writes something as the parent dictates. This is not for testing purposes - the child should be familiar with the passage or sentence being written. You can let them "study" for it first so that he knows how to spell the words. He might close his eyes and try to picture the passage accurately. He might practice words he's unsure about spelling. Only when he feels he is ready does the dictation exercise begin. This makes it more likely that the child will spell words correctly the first time. Some children are natural spellers and seem to effortlessly absorb spelling from their copywork and reading. For other children, dictation can help polish spelling skills because the child will have to memorize how to spell the word before the dictation exercise begins. The parent then reads the passage slowly and clearly while the child



writes it from memory. Some parents use dictation as a way to test their child's spelling, using misspelled words as a spelling list. But caution should be used because once a child sees or writes a word incorrectly, that incorrect spelling is recorded in his memory. (Sand, rice, cornmeal, salt or shaving cream, which allows misspelled words to be wiped out immediately, is a fun way to practice writing for young children.)

A child does not start dictation until he has mastered handwriting from copywork experience. His first dictation exercise may be a single sentence. By 10 or 11 years of age, he might be able to do a few sentences. Older children might do a paragraph or two once a week.

By 10 to 12 years of age, some children, especially those who don't learn visually or are dyslexic, will still be having trouble spelling and need extra help. Programs that AmblesideOnline members have used with success are Mary Pecci's Super Speller and DesignAStudy's Natural Speller. Sequential Spelling or the reading program "Seeing Stars" by Nanci Bell (\$) may be helpful for dyslexics. Spelling Workout, although popular and effective with some list members, does not follow CM's philosophy. Spelling Power is also used with success by some list members, but none of the Advisory members have seen it to assess its compatibility with Charlotte Mason's methods.

## Grammar

Charlotte Mason introduced grammar in her schools when the students were in fourth grade, or about ten years old and taught from a traditional textbook, going very slowly, covering perhaps only ten pages in her book in a term. We suggest that parents wait until age ten to begin a grammar program. Younger children will learn more about grammar from hearing it properly used. There is more to be learned from well-written books--reading them, listening to them, narrating them--adventures, Bible, poetry, and so on than filling in worksheets that drill such facts as what a synonym is. Students who speak well are already on their way to learning formal grammar by example. Ruth Heller's World of Language picture book series can be used for years 4-6 as optional fun reading if desired.

For later years, Charlotte Mason used a book she wrote herself; it has been reproduced and is sold under the title Simply Grammar. Some parents may prefer a book with more teacher helps. English For The Thoughtful Child may be easier to use for teaching the basics. We suggest spending one year in a good grammar book (such as Our Mother Tongue: An Introductory Guide to English Grammar by Nancy Wilson), no earlier than year eight,

then use the book as a reference when (if) needed. A grammar reference is probably available online.

Read more about grammar at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/grammar.shtml>.

---

## Mathematics

### How do I choose a math program?

"How do I fit math into short lessons? Math's not my favorite subject anyway, and I'm not comfortable without a textbook, but I read that Charlotte Mason didn't like textbooks. What did she use, and can I get a copy? Is there one best-of-all, most-CM math program out there that AmblesideOnline users like?"

If you're interested in reading more about CM and math, I'd recommend a couple of helpful sites. First, look up Lynn Hocraffer's CM site and check out her math section--she gives page references for all the mentions of math in Charlotte Mason's writings. Then, read Alice Horrocks' article "A Generous Education in Mathematics" at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Magnanimity/>.

It's true that Charlotte Mason did not want math to take over the time that could be spent on the humanities, so every minute of the time we do spend on teaching math must count. Many of us are comfortable finding literature and other language-oriented materials that fit our children's specific needs; we need to become as demanding with what we require of our math materials, and as purposeful in the way we use them.

There are a number of good math programs and approaches that can be used with CM principles, e.g. short lessons, manipulatives where appropriate, and a problem-solving approach vs. never-ending sums and long-division questions. Is one better than another? In the AmblesideOnline archives, there are posts from people whose children floundered with Making Math Meaningful and flourished with Math-U-See, and vice versa. Right Start and Singapore Math usually get great reviews; Miquon Math is popular for the early grades. All these programs have websites with helpful information that you can use in comparing one to another; but the best way of all seems to be to see the materials up close if at all possible before making a decision.

Charlotte Mason did use math textbooks in her schools. I don't think you'd find the particular math books the PUS

used too helpful, as besides being old and scarce, they're British (lots of pounds-and-shillings questions). If you want something very similar to these books, Ray's Arithmetic would be the American equivalent, and there are some AmblesideOnline users who do like Ray's because of its emphasis on mental arithmetic.

What about trying to fit math into short lessons? There is nothing sacred about having a 15 minute time period for math. Even in the lower grades, Charlotte Mason's schedule allowed about half an hour for math, although that did include oral drill as well as problem solving. If you need twenty minutes or thirty minutes, then do it! You know your child's needs and attention span. If you prefer, you could break up the math period (do some math, do something else, do some more math).

Finally, don't worry too much about finishing a math book in one year. Work with each concept until the child has mastered it. Take breaks where prudent, and work on something else for awhile between sessions of tackling a difficult concept. Or incorporate math games, math library books, some math history . . . and you can't do all that in 15 minutes a day and still finish the textbook!

For anyone who wants to read about math education in greater detail, there are two books that have been recommended by a CM math educator. One is *Math: Facing an American Phobia*, by Marilyn Burns; the other is *Math Power*, by Patricia Clark Kenschaft.

---

## Science

### **What is nature study, and what else does AmblesideOnline do for science?**

Charlotte Mason said that science should increase and feed our wonder and delight in the world around us. It should spark our admiration, both at the wonder of creation and the skill and wisdom of the Creator. It should put us on a first name basis, so to speak, with the natural world, which means we must know the names of the inhabitants and their surroundings, and it should introduce us to the laws that order our universe as well as the methods used to make scientific discoveries.

Charlotte Mason wanted students to have a broad base in topics such as botany, astronomy, and physiology, although her curriculum for the younger grades used mostly books on animals and other natural science, in addition to their own observations and collections. Most importantly, science was to be taught as something wonderful in itself, beginning with a sense of reverence

for God's world, rather than starting by tearing things apart. Science should lead to a knowledge of the properties of substances and of the forces in the world around us. This must be first-hand knowledge of the things and forces; not simply knowing about them. It must be obtained by personal experience. Some science teachers today note that their students don't "get" higher-level science concepts because they don't have the childhood experience of being outside doing things like collecting tadpoles, watching butterflies, skipping stones, seeing plants sprout from seeds - they have no sensory experience on which to "hang" those concepts. CM thought that a child's foundation of first-hand experience should naturally lead to scientific methods of thinking, accurate observation, careful comparison of results, and the formulation of general principles. It should introduce children to a world of absorbing interests that will enlist their sympathy or arouse their enthusiasm, a world of mystery that fascinates with promise of discovery and fuller knowledge, a world of wonder and beauty that we cannot explain, but in which we walk reverently with uncovered head.

In the early years, AmblesideOnline uses nature study - observing and recording nature - as the means to familiarize children with the wonders of nature in their immediate surroundings. Nature walks are encouraged, and children should record their observations in a notebook, preferably by making paintings in a Nature Notebook. For more information about the paint technique that Charlotte Mason's students used in their notebooks, read this tutorial on dry-brushing. Parents are to use *The Handbook of Nature Study* and field guides to provide correct names and information about what their children see. In the middle years, scientific properties are demonstrated with common items, using using Bob Friedhoffer's books (*Physics Lab in the Home*, etc) as a guide, and *Apologia Science* texts are used in Years 9-12 (AO's Living Science plan for Years 9-11 is in the works). Literary books detailing the intricate details and ways of animals and nature are used throughout, such as *Pagoo* (about a hermit crab), *The Sea Around Us* (about sea life) and *Madame How and Lady Why* (about earth science).

Read more at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/NatureStudy.shtml> and in the vintage Parents' Review article, *The Cultural Value of Science*, online at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/PR/PR31p651CulturalValueScience.shtml>.

---

## Social Studies/History

### What kind of history outline does AmblesideOnline use?

Charlotte Mason taught the history of her own country alongside world history, doing both side by side chronologically. It hasn't been practical for AmblesideOnline to duplicate that totally because Charlotte Mason's country (England) had a long, rich history, unlike the US, whose history is only known only vaguely before the 1400's. Rather, what AmblesideOnline has offered is closer to a history of western civilization, with an emphasis on America's roots in Western/British history. Every class in Charlotte Mason's schools followed the same period of history, covering that historical era for each level, every term. This is a mammoth task that the organizers of this curriculum were not prepared to undertake with each new term - it simply isn't practical for the advisory to schedule books for each historical period for every level. Therefore, an equally satisfactory method was developed whereby each AmblesideOnline student will study history in a chronological sequence.

". . . the history of the United States is tied more closely to that of England than of any other country. You cannot know American history well without knowing something of the history of England, for they are parts of the same story." (Gerald Johnson, *America is Born*, from his "History for Peter" series, pg 49)

AmblesideOnline schedules two rotations of history in a child's 12-year school career, starting with the early middle ages (year one) and progressing chronologically until year 6. At this point Greek and Roman history are introduced (mythology and ancient history are covered throughout the years, beginning in Year 2, via myths and Plutarch's Lives) This enables students to deal with meatier works suitable for older readers. The chronological sequence is continued in HEO (House of Education Online, AmblesideOnline's upper years) from year 7, and in Year 12 Greco-Roman ideas will be approached again as a backdrop to current thoughts and ideas. This, again, enables us to present the students with the really complex material necessary to really grapple with the ideas involved. Mythology and ancient civilizations are saved for later years rather than started in year 1.

Year 1 -- early history, focusing on people rather than events  
Year 2 -- 1000 AD - Middle Ages  
Year 3 -- 1400 - 1600 (Renaissance and Reformation)  
Year 4 -- 1700's up to the French Revolution and American Revolution  
Year 5 -- 1800 to 1920 up to WWI

Year 6 -- end of WWI to present day, then 2 terms in ancient history  
Year 7 -- 800-1400's Middle Ages (Alfred, King Arthur, Joan of Arc)  
Year 8 -- 1400-1600's (Renaissance and Reformation)  
Year 9 -- 1688-1815 including French and American revolutions  
Year 10 -- 1815-1901 including the American Civil War  
Year 11 -- 20th Century (1900-present)  
Year 12 -- Today; an overview of ideas from ancients to now as an antidote to postmodernism

Charlotte Mason said, "It is a great thing to possess a pageant of history in the background of one's thoughts. We may not be able to recall this or that circumstance, but, 'the imagination is warmed'; we know that there is a great deal to be said on both sides of every question and are safe from crudities in opinion and rashness in action. The present becomes enriched for us with the wealth of all that has gone before." It is with that vision in mind that history books were selected, looking for books that make people and places come alive rather than textbooks that attempt to cram dates into a child's mind. Many history texts were considered with the goal of finding books that were well-written rather than too simplistic and not rigidly one-sided as well as widely available to members. Books that are out of print but still copyrighted (and whose texts, thus, could not be posted online) could not be used. This *Country of Ours*, which was selected as the spine for US history in the middle AmblesideOnline Years, was written by H.E. Marshall, who wrote the English history book that Charlotte Mason used in her schools. *An Island Story*, by the same author, is beautifully written for a younger child, and thus was selected for the earliest AmblesideOnline Years. AmblesideOnline members voluntarily scanned both books and made them available in etext form for use in the curriculum, for which we are very grateful. *A Child's History of the World* by Virgil Hillyer and *The Story of Mankind* by Hendrick Van Loon have been found to meet the criteria of interesting children's imaginations.

"History is integrated with literature to some degree, but not obsessively. Children need to make their own connections to what they are learning, and these connections are stronger when they occur naturally instead of being artificially constructed, as can happen with 'canned' unit studies where all literature and other material are integrated. Prepacking a time period for a child can stifle relationship building by being just a little too 'pat'. That is not to say that including literature, or poetry or music from a time period that is being studied is wrong - it certainly is not, and provides a richer understanding of the culture and times. I am referring to 'closed loop' programs, where little crafts are done and little poems are included with little to no regard for literary value than because they are 'relevant'." (quote by Amy Toomsen)

Some parents like to supplement with books by Genevieve Foster or Landmark books, but AmblesideOnline's schedule is full enough that users find little or no need to enhance the historical period being studied with unscheduled books. We do not officially recommend supplementing more than two stories or biographies in a term, if at all. You can see listings of Landmark book titles in historical order online.

Let the Authors Speak by Carolyn Hatcher has listings of CM-friendly books for supplementing history.

If you wish to read additional English history, AmblesideOnline recommends Dickens' "A Child's History of England," although, as a caution, Dickens tends to be one-sided in his anti-Catholic opinions; boys will especially like its dramatic action.

If the AmblesideOnline history rotation does not correspond to your needs, you may choose to consider other histories that Charlotte Mason parents have successfully used. Beautiful Feet and Truthquest, and the "History For Peter" trilogy of books (America is Born, etc) by Gerald Johnson (out of print) and "The Landmark History of the American People" by Daniel Boorstin. AmblesideOnline does not offer support information about the use or integration of non-scheduled texts and programs; this information is provided only for those wishing to explore other options on their own.

[Note that "This Country of Ours" by H.E. Marshall has prompted some negative reviews challenging its accuracy. The reviews do not offer much on which to base their complaints; and in the opinion of the Advisory, who reviewed many possible books on this topic, This Country of Ours is accurate and well written enough to make it our top choice for American history at this level. You may take note of the Advisory's letter regarding "This Country of Ours" at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/TCOO.shtml> .]

Additional history links

<http://www.historyplace.com>

<http://www.history.com/>

U.S. Documents Archive

U.S. History and Historical Documents

Read responses to questions from the AO email list about chronological sequence, AO's focus on British history, why we chose the books we did, and more at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/History.shtml>.

Can children follow two consecutive threads of history at the same time?

Children studying two different streams of history concurrently typically do not experience difficulty keeping the events and eras straight in their minds. Keeping a timeline (either on a wall or in a century book - see links below for descriptions) provides a visual experience with the progression of history that helps immensely in this regard. We recommend that the student should also mark events on maps. Merely showing a child a timeline or map is passive; Charlotte Mason wanted the child to be an active participant by placing events and people on a timeline and map himself. Children should start keeping their own timeline from about ten years of age.

Parents Review articles that might be helpful include:

The Teaching of Chronology (making and using a century chart)

The Correlation of Lessons

The Book of Centuries

Teaching English and French History Concurrently

How-tos about timelines and Book of Centuries:

Laurie Bestvater's book The Living Page details timelines; her Book of Centuries is the one recommended by AO.

JoyfulShepherdess blog post

Brandy Vencel's Afterthoughts blog

<http://www.donnayoung.org/history/timeline-cw.htm>

History Through the Ages is a book of timeline images published by Amy Pak, but you can find images for your own timeline by doing a clip-art image search on your own. Type in a subject (Like George Washington) and it searches the web for any pictures with this name.

### **What does AmblesideOnline use for geography?**

Charlotte Mason wanted children to learn geography through literary language - using travel books that would bring foreign places and people to life for them. As they read, children use a map or globe to keep track and notice details such as which countries border the country being viewed, what river runs through it, whether there any mountains, volcanoes, lakes.

Other than Holling C Holling (Seabird, Paddle to the Sea) and travel books, AmblesideOnline has no systematic geography study. Parents are encouraged to make their children aware of the geography of places by following a map as they read books placed in various locales and when they travel, familiarizing them with places they've visited, having them map their immediate surroundings by counting paces between house and tree, fence to road, etc and then by trying to apply that to a map the child draws, forming islands, straits, mountains,

lakes in a tub of sand, and practicing tracking skills like the boy scouts might do, with landmarks, compasses and stars.

V.M. Hillyer's *A Child's Geography of the World* and Richard Halliburton's *Book of Marvels* are excellent geography books which some of the advisory have used with satisfaction; unfortunately, they are out of print and not widely available, so they could not be scheduled in the curriculum.

Outline Map links

<http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/>

17 Blank maps of the US and Other Countries

<http://www.50states.com/maps/> (one for each state)

National Geographic's Map Maker

World Atlas Outline Maps

---

## Fine Arts

### **What are handicrafts, and what are my children supposed to be doing for that?**

The handicrafts Charlotte Mason wanted children to do were more than arts and crafts projects - she wanted children to put time into creating something of real use, and she expected them to care enough about the project to take pains to produce well-done work. Making (and mending) real things like rugs, baskets, ceramic pots, doll furniture, and sewing on lost buttons, hemming pillowcases, cooking, woodworking, cross stitching and fixing plumbing were what she had in mind rather than worthless busy art projects that end up thrown away. She saw this as a way to encourage a productive will and develop skills that can be carried into adulthood, and perhaps a way to reveal and exercise talents or callings. Afternoons were left free for children to work on such projects.

The American Boys Handy Book by D.C Beard has ideas for boy projects; there is also an American Girls Handy Book. Another popular and well-illustrated resource is *Back to Basics: How to Learn and Enjoy Traditional American Skills*, published by Readers Digest. State fairs and art festivals with booths for spinners, weavers, woodworkers, etc. may also provide opportunities to find craft ideas. You can read more about handicrafts at

<http://www.amblesideonline.org/Handicrafts.shtml>.

### **How do I teach my children about art and classical music?**

"Speaking generally of both subjects, music and art, I have a strong feeling that . . . one of the chief objects . . . should be to cultivate the aesthetic sense . . ." from Parents' Review article, *Music and Art in Schools*.

AmblesideOnline has scheduled artists and composers for each term for the purpose of art and music appreciation, the focus being development of the child's sense of beauty. Parents are also encouraged to provide some kind of art classes and/or music lessons if they are able. The schedule of artists and composers is on the website and is offered as a suggestion. Members may choose to focus on different artists or composers for any given term (however, in doing so, one would sacrifice the shared support of fellow listmembers who are following the suggested schedule).

Members are encouraged to share resources pertinent to the current term's study that may help others with art/music appreciation - information about CD's containing scheduled music, websites, books and biographies appropriate for children are posted to the email list during the term. If you use a timeline, you should have your children add the composer or artist's life to the timeline.

Art and music appreciation is to be done by all your students together - the rotation schedule is for all years. Your level and depth of study will depend on how much time you have to invest your available resources. Those who are new to this kind of curriculum may find it easiest to begin by simply exposing their children to art by posting it in a prominent place (perhaps as computer screen wallpaper?) and playing the classical music sometime during the day. Some families make a practice of playing classical music in the background during school hours, or in the car as they run errands, or during lunch. Although it sounds too simple to be of any benefit, exposure alone will go a long way toward attuning your children's senses and tastes to the beautiful. The best education in music appreciation is listening to music.

Some members like to read biographies with their children; books that are mentioned regularly are *The Spiritual Lives of Great Composers* by Patrick Kavanaugh; *The Gift of Music* by Jane Stuart Smith and Betty Carlson; *Famous Composers for Young People* by Gladys Burch and John Wolcott; composer biographies for children by Opal Wheeler (some have been reprinted by Zeezok Publishing/The Book Peddler).

*Color the Classics* by Carmen Ziarkowski are coloring books that foster music appreciation

CD inserts often contain information about the composer and work of art that you might share with your children.

Many list members have used Classical Kids cassettes and CD's that dramatize a composer's life using his music as the backdrop throughout. Some titles are Beethoven Lives Upstairs, Mozart's Magic Fantasy, Vivaldi's Ring of Mystery, Tchaikovsky Discovers America, Hallelujah Handel. These are generally delightful and memorable, with the one caveat being that they only offer snippets of longer works which are better enjoyed whole, and therefore should be supplemented with complete recordings wherever your resources allow.

There are websites dedicated to public education in classical music, such as  
Naxos.com Classical Composers  
[www.classicalarchives.com](http://www.classicalarchives.com)  
[www.classicsforkids.com](http://www.classicsforkids.com)  
A Music Glossary

If you'd like to learn along with your children, these books might help - Classical Music for Dummies by Pogue and Speck; Milton Cross' Encyclopedia of the Great Composers and their Music

It isn't necessary to purchase resources for art/music. Many libraries have classical music CD's and large art books you can check out. If you can't locate or purchase CD's with the term's classical selections, you might use an inexpensive "Best Of" for that composer instead. If even that is not possible, you can still play classical music - either with CD's you already have by another composer, or on the internet with one of the streaming audios that some radio stations now make available.  
[www.wdav.org](http://www.wdav.org) 24-hour commercial-free classical music. An Advisory favorite.  
<http://www.kcme.org/> One Advisory member's favorite. No ads, wide programming, friendly announcers.  
<http://www.wrr101.com/> Dallas's first radio station  
<http://wcpe.org/> listener supported, commercial-free  
<http://www.king.org> Features helps for beginner (but has commercials, too)  
[Earlymusic.net](http://www.earlymusic.net) "supports and promotes early music and historical performance" and has free music to listen to.  
<http://www.classicalarchives.com>

The art can be found online; some members print out a copy, or even just display it on their computer screen.

Art appreciation, as mentioned above, can be as casual as putting the term's art in a visible place. An easy way to begin picture study are to show your child the picture for the first time and let him look at it for 5 minutes. Then, turn the picture over and see what kind of details he can

recall from memory. Some parents have their children attempt to recreate the major lines of the picture, or even draw or paint a copy of the picture. The goal of picture study is simply to become familiar with and enjoy the picture. The first volume of Charlotte Mason's Original Homeschool Series talks about picture study in more detail. Biographical information about the artist from the internet, encyclopedia or a book can be shared if desired.

More art resources  
[doverpublications.com](http://doverpublications.com) has coloring books that feature master works of art.  
Ducksters Art History

There are additional links and information on the pages where the art and music are scheduled.

### **How does AmblesideOnline handle art that includes nudity?**

On the rare occasions when AmblesideOnline schedules a work of art that depicts nudity, it will be tasteful rather than vulgar, and there will always be an alternate work of art offered. The final choice of which to use is left up to parents. AmblesideOnline leaves it up to each family to use their own discretion regarding what they place in front of their children.

### **What is solfa/solfege?**

Solfa, (solfege in French), is a method to train the voice to sing on pitch and to identify notes and intervals by sight and ear. Charlotte Mason utilized Solfege in her schools. A simplified version of the method can be glimpsed in the movie The Sound of Music when Maria teaches the Von Trapp children the do-re-mi song. Hand symbols are used to identify each note of the scale, as the notes are sung. (In another version of solfa, music with specially shaped notes is used rather than hand signals.) John Curwen and his son popularized what became known as "The Curwen Method" of solfa hand signal instruction in Charlotte Mason's era, and it was then widely taught in England's schools. Interest in the hand signal variety of solfa is again on the rise in the US and in Europe. Shape note solfa singing (more commonly called "Sacred Harp" singing) has been handed down through generations of traditional sacred music enthusiasts in the US, and recently there has been a revival of interest in the art in Europe.

Yamaha Music Schools, Kodaly classes, MYC (Music for Young Children) and Kindermusik utilize this method. You can find out more about the method online, and read Lynn Bruce's explanation at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Solfa.shtml>. The

Mennonite community still uses Solfa; they have affordable resources available through Rod and Staff.

### **I'm unfamiliar with Shakespeare, how am I supposed to teach it to my children?**

Those who are new to Shakespeare should start out reading just for enjoyment; it doesn't need to be analyzed, just appreciated. It helps to be familiar with the plot before tackling the real play, so that the language enhances the story rather than being a barrier to understanding it.

A scaled down version might be read first. Edith Nesbit's *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare for Children*, which has retellings of 20 plays, and is ideal for young children because it uses easy-to-understand language, although she simplifies some plays so much that sometimes it's harder to follow because fitting details are left out. Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales of Shakespeare* may be more of a challenge to those very new to Shakespeare because of its more advanced vocabulary, but some parents of even elementary-aged children prefer it to Nesbit's because it's more thorough and doesn't leave out crucial details. For high school students, Leon Garfield's *Shakespeare Stories* works well. There are also side-by-side paraphrases and online guides to Shakespeare at *Sparks Notes*.

Then, a play, either live or on video (most of the BBC ones are good) or even on cassette, might be enjoyed. After all, Shakespeare wrote his plays to be seen, not read. (We do advise that parents preview film productions of Shakespeare before viewing with their families.) And Shakespeare, like poetry, should be read aloud, not silently. After becoming familiar with the story, parent and child can read the play together, each taking certain parts, perhaps attempting a scene per sitting. It's not necessary to finish reading the actual play if the child has seen or listened to it acted out. It's also not necessary for the child to do a narration from Shakespeare.

Jim Weiss does an excellent one-man dramatization on CD - it includes *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. (\$) .

List members have used various props to keep track of characters: drawing stick figures with crowns or other identifying symbols on a dry-erase board, finger puppets, assigning each part to family members and pets, stuffed animals and toy figures, Fisher Price Little People, and paper dolls. Dover Books sells a book of Shakespearean paper dolls (\$), or they can be found online. (search Google images for Victorian paper dolls).

For most families, the order of "Read a retelling, listen to a tape or watch a video, then read the original" usually works very well.

---

## **Foreign Language**

### **What about foreign language?**

Which foreign language to learn, and how to learn it, are questions that arise frequently on the *AmblesideOnline* email list. Charlotte Mason advocated learning French first, and then adding other languages later, including Latin (at about age 10 or 12). Families may certainly make a different choice of which language - but the goals are the same: to be able to express ideas in another language, to communicate to others, to be able to 'think' in another language, and to be able to read literature - and narrate from it - in another language.

The selected foreign language should be presented orally at first, until the child knows an abundant vocabulary (including verbs and idioms). Seeing the words in written form while learning them is confusing to many children, since the phonics of another language will differ so much from English and create a hindrance. Charlotte Mason even said in volume 1, "The child should never see French words in print until he has learned to say them with as much ease and readiness as if they were English."

Charlotte Mason wrote of starting out by learning two to six new foreign words daily - while still keeping up with the ones already learned. At the end of a year, "the child who has that number of words, and knows how to apply them, can speak French." (volume 1)

It is the ear that learns the language, and the parallel is drawn between learning a foreign language and learning to speak as a child: it is done orally at first, with exposure to accurate (and preferably native) speaking of that language. Finding an available native speaker is the difficult part for many homeschoolers - though we do have the technological advantage today of using one of the many cassette or CD programs available to us. Brief discussion of programs can be found at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/ForeignLanguage.shtml>.

After the child is familiar with a large number of words and phrases, it is time to read a story to the child and have them listen to it. The child is to begin to attempt oral narration (in the foreign language) of the material.

And it is also time to begin to teach how the foreign language is written.

So how does a parent accomplish this when he/she has no foreign language experience? This is another of those areas in which the parent can learn along with the child, using cassette/CD/video pronunciations as a guide. Other suggestions are also given on our Foreign Language page to seek out further foreign language exposure.

There are three useful articles from Parents Review that explain the value and method of language study in more detail:

[Why Learn Greek and Latin](#)

[When and How to Begin Modern Languages](#)

[Plea for Teaching Greek](#)

and here are some beneficial links for teaching foreign languages (please note that the Advisory has not used all of these, and cannot vouch for their compatibility with CM).

Duolingo can be used on a PC or device. Their motto is "Learn a language for free. Forever." They offer 21 language options. Programs change all the time; find the most updated recommendations on the AO Forum. In previous AO email discussions, many members preferred Powerspeak (PowerGlide)'s program for older students and Rossetta Stone over Learnables, although every program was enjoyed and effective by some members. Muzzy was noted to be enjoyable, but repetitive and very expensive. PowerspeakPowerGlide for young children was reported to be fun, but not effective enough to justify its price. Songs in foreign languages, such as Teach Me Tapes. . . , were recommended, but only as supplements. The Springboard to. . . series is affordable and a nice first step in learning a new language. Phrase a Day, another nice beginning program, may be harder to find. Some think that Pimsleur is closest to the method CM recommended; Pimsleur is expensive, but very effective. Of special note for French, many list members highly recommended Nallenart's L'Art de Lire. More information about these and other various programs, and more links on our Foreign Language page at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/ForeignLanguage.shtml>.

---

## High School

**Does AmblesideOnline have anything for high school??**

Yes, AmblesideOnline goes all the way through high school; the middle/high school age (years 7-12) even has

its own name: "House of Education," or HEO. Hundreds of students have gone through AO's High School program. You can read information about using AO/HEO in the high school years, tallying credits, planning for ACT/SAT tests, college planning, and a few notes from moms who have graduated AO/HEO students on our High School page, which is at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/HighSchool.shtml>.

~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~.~

### More

You can read reviews, suggestions and experiences from Moms who have used AO at <http://www.amblesideonline.org/Reviews.shtml>.

We hope that this FAQ answers enough of your questions to get you started. If you still have questions, we invite you to join the forum and discuss the implementation of this curriculum with other parents who are using AmblesideOnline, many of whom have been using Charlotte Mason's methods for years and are quite knowledgeable. If you have any comments about AmblesideOnline or suggestions as to how this FAQ may be made more useful, you may send an email to the Advisory. Please keep in mind, though - we on the advisory are all busy homeschooling moms ourselves and may not be able to get to questions in a timely manner. If you have specific questions, you will stand a better chance of receiving an answer on the email list.

If AmblesideOnline does not meet your needs as is, we encourage you to adjust the curriculum as fits the needs of you own family, use the ideas or book suggestions found here in your own schedule, or to implement a Charlotte Mason education of your own from various other sources.

\* We have poured hours and hours of time into this curriculum, website and FAQ page, and every effort has been made to provide answers, resources and suggestions on our website. We hope that the information and materials we've compiled will be useful in your homeschooling efforts. Advisory members are unable to provide personal consultations about homeschooling, the Charlotte Mason method, book substitutions, scheduling, etc. via phone or email. If you have further questions, please bring them to the AO Forum. There are many experienced AO users there who will be able to help you.

*Last update: Mar 14, 2017*