

MARJORIE LANG

# A Quiet Growing Time

CHARLOTTE MASON WITH YOUR  
3 TO 6 YEAR OLD



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Charlotte Mason with Your Three- to Six-Year-Old

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# PREFACE

Hi! I'm Marjorie Lang, one of the creators of Wildwood Curriculum, a secular and inclusive Charlotte Mason homeschool curriculum.

I've homeschooled since 2001, mostly using Charlotte Mason's methods.

My husband and I have a blended family. At the time of this writing, we've been married just shy of 24 years. He brought three sons to our marriage, the oldest of whom moved in with us when he was 15 years old. That son now lives a mile down the road with his wife and two kids.

My husband and I also have two daughters together. We decided when I was pregnant with the older one that we would homeschool her, and we successfully graduated her in 2015. When she was 14 years old, we found out we were pregnant with a surprise blessing, so we've begun our homeschool journey anew.

When that little one hit her preschool years, I floundered. I knew all the theory, knew how fast time goes and how short these precious years of childhood are, but I still felt the pressure to be "doing" something with my little one. I felt like she needed...*more*.

Thanks to hours of online research and support from others, I discovered that what my child needed more of was a daily rhythm and more interaction with our daily household tasks. She needed me to lean into the simple joys of childhood, not try to create something perfect.

I searched for an easy-for-a-tired-mommy-brain-to-understand guide to Charlotte Mason early years, but I always felt like there was something I was missing. This guide is my attempt to fill that hole.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

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Who was Charlotte Mason?

Charlotte Mason was a late 19th/early 20th century educator who believed wholeheartedly in giving children of all backgrounds the benefits of a liberal (broad) education. She also educated what we now refer to as "the whole child." Not only did her students learn math and history, but also how to knit, sew and cook; how to model and paint; how to sing and play an instrument; and how to become naturalists. She believed in strengthening the body and will, in being a good citizen, and in having loads of fun while crawling through vegetation to stalk birds.

Why a preschool guide? Because one of the most frequent questions I am asked as a Charlotte Mason homeschooler is, *"What curriculum should I use for my 3/4/5/6-year-old?"*

While my usual answer is, *"None. Just play and be outside. Paint and sing, catch butterflies and watch ants, and encourage your kids to run and jump and shout outside,"* I find that many parents who are new to the Charlotte Mason method have a difficult time wrapping their head around what this actually looks like.

There are very few resources on-line for this age group that follow this method, and fewer still that come from a non-religious viewpoint. Many that I found are either academic with letters of the week, scientific and guided nature study, or, if they are not academic, they come from a different educational philosophy.

That is why I wrote this guide. Not because a Charlotte Mason education requires one, but because so many of us want a handbook, something to reassure us that we are on the right path.

Something in an easy to use format that will help give form to our days.

We must still remember that Charlotte Mason's recommendations for the before-school years consisted mainly of a healthy home life, with plenty of time for free play, and participation in real work with the grown people who love and care for them.

If you are confident in delaying academics, creating a rhythmic day and week, encouraging your child to help you with real work using real tools, and providing plenty of free play and nature experiences, you don't need this guide.

While most of your child's day should be spent outside, Miss Mason does give us many insights into what we can be purposely doing with our young children.

My hope is that this guide will not only give you enough background information that you can feel confident that you are following Charlotte's methods for your young one, but also give you ideas for how to implement it.

Why would we follow ideas of a 19th century educator, which must surely be outdated simply owing to how old they are?

Because Charlotte Mason was observing in children of her day the same things that we observe now. Truly, things have changed very little!

Consider:

*"That children should be trained to endure hardness, was a principle of the old regime. 'I shall never make a sailor if I can't face the wind and rain,' said a little fellow of five who was taken out on a bitter night to see a torchlight procession; and, though shaking with cold, he declined the shelter of a shed. Nowadays, the shed is everything; the children must not be permitted to suffer from fatigue or exposure.*

*"That children should do as they are bid, mind their books, and take pleasure as it offers when nothing stands in the way, sums up the old theory; now, the pleasures of children are apt to be made of more account than their duties." Home Education, p 7*

Does this sound familiar? The more things change, the more they stay the same.

## CROPS AND FIELDS

If you live within an easy distance of farm lands or other fields, make your children familiar with all the crops, pastures, and meadows in all stages, from ploughing the land to the harvest.

One way to do this is to simply pull over on a rural road. It goes without saying that the car should be well off the road, and the road should not be a busy one for safety's sake. What crops are grown locally? What is planted when fields are allowed to go fallow (not planted for a season or year to replenish the soil, or planted with a cover crop for the same reason).

Visit the same fields over and over again, so the children can see the same crop in all its growth stages.

The area of Arizona I live in is known for its cotton production, yet when I brought a cotton plant in to our local park day, not one of the kids or parents had ever seen a cotton plant. Why? There are fields all over the area, but none had ever stopped and looked, or gone a few roads out of their way to explore.

If you aren't sure where fields might be, try looking on Google Earth, or Google Maps satellite view. Even if you do know where there are, look anyway. You might be surprised like I was at just *how many* are nearby.

If you have an organic farm nearby, so much the better. Or perhaps you can make contacts at your local farmer's market and ask to visit a farm or community garden on a regular basis.

## TREES AND FLOWERS

While you are out, begin drawing your children's attention to particular plants and trees. If you don't know the names of them, don't fret. It's more important that the children learn to recognize the plant and how it grows than to know its name. The name will come in time.

Point out how this plant's leaves grow on the stem. Have your child feel the leaves. Are they smooth? Rough? Pokey edges? Soft and fluffy? Do the leaves grow in a circle on the



ground, or come out up the stem? Do they grow opposite each other like a person's arms sticking out, or are they like steps alternating sides?

You don't need to teach your children terms like "basal rosette", "alternating leaves", "stamen" and "pistil", but you can point out these features.

Play a game where you concentrate on one plant for the day, finding it wherever you can. Start first with a plant that is relatively unique -- if you have multiple plants with yellow flowers in your yard, first start with the one plant that has a purple flower.

As you find as many of this one type of plant that you can, occasionally go to an obviously wrong plant, maybe one of the yellow-flowered types, and ask if this is the same one. Your child might immediately say no and be able to tell you why. He might say no but not be able to tell you why. He might say yes, they are the same.

No matter which way your child answers, take this opportunity to point out a few of the major *differences* between the two plants. Again, don't go in depth here. Perhaps just point out that this flower is yellow and "our" plant's flower is purple, or maybe that this plant's leaves are soft and fuzzy while "our" plant's leaves are pokey.

This should not be a long lesson. As a matter of fact, it shouldn't feel like a lesson at all, but rather you simply interacting and noticing with your child.

As time goes on, add more plants to your repertoire, and supply your child with a name for the plants that she knows well. I smiled when one neighbor girl picked a yellow flower and said, "*It's a dandelion!*" while my own then-4-year-old said, "*No, it's a desert marigold.*" The third neighbor girl said, "*It's a sunflower!*" while my own impatiently sighed and told her, "*No, it's a **desert marigold.***"

We were able to do an impromptu nature observation sneaky lesson with the two neighbor girls that day. The older one, 8 years old at the time, said, "*Wow! I thought all yellow flowers were dandelions.*"

Another important tip is to do this throughout the seasons. Don't identify the purple flower with pokey leaves one day and leave it at that. Notice with your child when the purple flower starts to change and become a seed, then what the plant looks like after the seeds/fruit are gone. Pay attention again the following year when the plants start peaking

their leaves above ground, and watch which ones develop into your flowers from the previous year.

This is how you learn plants in all seasons.

Trees are done the same way. Starting in winter is nice because they usually don't have leaves to cover the skeleton. Get to know a tree by bark and structure, the way the branches are shaped and what form they take. Just as with plants, the name is not the most important thing.

Find as many trees with the same bark and branch formation as you can. Do this on your walks around your neighborhood, or perhaps even while you walk store to store shopping.

Once your child can pick out "your" tree by bark and branch formation, give the name. There is no shame in needing to use field guides to do this, either. As a matter of fact, modeling using field guides is a wonderful way to get your children excited about different plants, trees, and animals.

Do the same with trees as you do with plants. Watch them in all seasons, watching their leaves come out of their cases, pointing out their flowers, then their fruits, then their seeds. Children should make the connection that all plants flower and have fruits and seeds (with few exceptions that they don't need to know yet).

Resist the urge to correct your child and download information to them. If they tell you that this plant is the same as that one when it's not, approach it with a questioning attitude rather than one of an adult providing facts. *"Hmm, these leaves are narrow and those leaves are thick."* Don't ask them if they still think they are the same plant because young children will often give the answer they think will please you. Simply model observing one or two differences and leave it at that.

## NATURE JOURNALING

Children can begin keeping a nature notebook as soon as they are interested. Encourage them to make brush drawings (paintings) of flowers that appeal to them. Don't limit them to flowers though; my daughter is currently going through a rock phase and will paint page after page of them.