



## Women in the Liberal Arts Tradition: with Amy Snell

### Lecture 10: Charlotte Mason

#### Outline:

##### Charlotte Mason

- People in Mason's time were clamoring for an education for their children to qualify them for life rather than merely earning a living.
- Who was Charlotte Mason?
  - Mason was a British educator in the late 1800s.
  - She began as a teacher at the age of 15.
  - She was self-taught.
  - She began training governesses in her ideas until parents decided that they wanted to do the same things.
- The Parent's Union Schools were founded in 1880.
  - At her death there were over 300 schools in Britain and 80,000 students in her schools and homeschools around the world.
- How do we learn of Mason's ideas?
  - The six volume home education series and her final essay "An Essay towards a Philosophy of Education," is where we find her thought.
  - Her provocative claim, "We are giving children stones when they ask and need bread."
- Mason principle was that a child is born a person with the spiritual requirements and capabilities of a person.
  - Few educators actually put this idea into practice.
  - Children are not little objects, lump of clay to mold, or buckets to be filled. They aren't robots that we program through technologies and techniques.
  - We should spread a feast for our children, allowing them to read widely in many fields (nature, art, handicrafts).
  - We don't digest information for them, true education is self-education according to Mason.
  - Children love knowledge for its own sake. They should have direct access to great books and great things as well.
- The **method of narration** is how students assimilate ideas.
  - The student works at the highest levels of interest, attention, focus, and can tell back what they have read (of things they know and care about).
  - Mason says that the teacher's role is to become their guide, philosopher, and friend to the student (not just the mere instrument of forcible intellectual feeding).



- What is narration?
  - Narration is not only for the whole of a child's schooling but for the whole of their life.
  - It is a process where the students feed on the text, and assimilate what is true, good, and beautiful, so that it becomes a part of who they are.
  - We communicate to the child that they need to become who they are meant to be.
  - Narration is an art like poetry making or painting.
  - Narration is the children telling back what they read, hear, and see.
- Modern research has confirmed what Mason recognized so long ago (narration/retrieval practice).
- Steps/pattern of the **general structure of a narration lesson** to see how ideas are sown in the fruitful soil of the mind:
  - **Recap:** Begin every lesson by having the student facilitate a connection about what was learned the last time. "What did we read the last time?"
    - The students bring what they read at the beginning of the year all the way through the course of their entire school year.
    - This allows children to focus, reflect, and ponder.
    - They often have a new thought about their text.
  - **Offer an inspiring thought** (a seed thought or an awakening idea): This commonly initiates a relation, an orienting idea.
    - It rests with the teacher to give the awakening idea.
    - This part happens without the explanation of the teacher. Allow for the mind to mind meeting.
    - The materials/books must be living and beautifully written. The Great Books fit here.
  - **Narration:** This is the child's opportunity to think and share their thoughts.
    - "Every power of his mind comes into play."
    - He knows. He has assimilated what he has read.
    - Is the child looking for information or ideas?
  - **Brief talk:** The teacher may give a brief talk after the narration.
  - **Notebook work:** Pictures are illustrated and diagrams could be drawn.
    - The actual work is done by the scholars.
    - This gives the students the chance to ruminate, and be left alone with their thoughts.
- "Ourselves, Our Souls, and Our Bodies," Mason's volume addresses aspects of right living.
  - This book lends itself well to discussion and debate.



- This book covers the habits of the good life. What is reason? What is the will?
- This is written at the level of the students and incorporates so much of her best thoughts on education, habit formation, atmosphere, discipline, and life.