

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

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From the Editor...

Narration holds a special place in the world of Charlotte Mason (CM) education. Like many educational approaches, CM consists of both philosophy (what we believe about education) and practices (how we flesh out our philosophy in real life). Narration is unique because it is, all at once, both a tenant of our philosophy as well as a practice.

Narration describes how we come to know things and how we commit them to memory.

Narration is, therefore, the cornerstone of a Charlotte Mason education because it is the most indispensable practice.

This is why narration is the focus of Newbie Tuesday's first issue.

Narration opens the door to a Charlotte Mason education.

We cannot possibly cover all there is to know about narration, but we hope to help you lay a foundation on which you can build further understanding as you go along.



Grab a cup of coffee and prepare yourself to think about both the philosophical as well as the practical aspects of narration.

Brandy

Narration is telling back (in your own words) what you have read or heard or seen.

A Basic Philosophy of Narration

Why Telling Back Matters

BY BRANDY VENCEL

The act of a child reading and then responding with a “telling back” (i.e., narration) is sometimes called an “assessment.” Teachers view it as a way to test reading comprehension. And it’s true -- we do find out what a child comprehended when he narrates.

But narration isn’t only about comprehension. In her various volumes, Charlotte Mason mentions several other benefits and reasons for engaging in this practice:

- The child becomes a **careful, attentive reader**.
- Developing the ability to tell orally helps **develop the ability to write well**.
- Narration is the **simplest way to deal with a reading**.
- Narration **prepares students for public speaking**.
- Narration allows the mind to process the reading, to **sequence the events and solidify a memory of what occurred**.
- Narration allows the student to **visualize the whole of what he**

has read.

- In retelling, **what a student has read becomes a part of his personal experience**.
- Narration **gives an opportunity for poetic insight**.
- When they narrate their foreign language studies, it **gives the students command of the language**.

Narration is **assimilation**, a concept that also applies to the world of nutrition. It is not enough

Narration isn't only about comprehension ... Ms. Mason mentions several other benefits and reasons for engaging in this practice

to take a calcium pill, for example. If the body does not first absorb the calcium and then assimilate it into the tissues, the act of taking the pill is wasteful.

Similarly, requiring the narration maximizes the child’s act of reading. It is, in

fact, what causes the absorption and **assimilation of information**. Students with the expectation of narration are remarkably attentive to what they are reading. However, their expectation alone does not bring about assimilation. It is in the act of retelling that the student gives evidence of knowing and, more importantly, comes to know in the first place.

Narration takes the knowledge that has been offered and makes it a part of the student. Charlotte Mason went so far as to call it **a type of memorization**, and yet it is not the same sort of drill-based memorization with which we are familiar. This memorization is the sort that comes with intimacy, the way you know the face of your loved ones. This is why Miss Mason also said that **narration eliminates**



When children are trained to narrate (and it does take training), they are taught to harness the power of imagination for all of their studies...

any need for reviewing the material that has been studied.

Narrating drives the reading material deeper into the child than would rote memorization.

This is only possible because narration engages the imagination. [Charlotte Mason once wrote](#),

"Children cannot tell what they have not seen with the mind's eye..."

In this way, narration is, ultimately, the medium of ideas. We say of an idea that has enthralled our attention that it has "captured my imagination." When children are trained (and it does take training) to narrate, they are taught to harness the power of imagination for all of their studies -- to visualize the ideas, and retell them as if to describe an intimate acquaintance. This is knowing in its purest form, the sort of knowing that can give life, the sort of knowing that can grow into wisdom. 

Beginning Narration

A Primer on Introducing Narration to Your Students

BY BRANDY VENCEL

It's your first day of lessons with your first student. You've waited years for this, and now it's time to start. So, how do you begin? You know that you're supposed to read aloud and they're supposed to narrate back, but how do you teach them to do that? Well, first, you need to know the rules:

1. Children are [not required to narrate before age 6](#).
2. Children narrate after [only one reading](#).
3. Narration [directly follows the reading](#), so don't delay!
4. Narration [takes the place of writing](#) (composition) until the age of 9.
5. All readings are narrated ([even foreign language!](#)).
6. [Do not help](#).
7. [Do not make corrections](#) during the narration. In fact, [do not allow any interruptions](#) of any kind.
8. Narrations should be [15 minutes or less](#) at the younger ages.

Now that you know the rules, you are ready to learn the process. It's very simple, actually. I would suggest starting with an easy book to train your

student in narration. [Aesop's Fables](#) naturally lends itself to this, as do short Bible stories.

[Charlotte Mason said](#):

"So probably young children should be allowed to narrate paragraph by paragraph, while children of seven or eight will 'tell' chapter by chapter."

I have encountered children who could only handle half a paragraph at a time. The point is to start with small amounts -- no bigger than what the child can handle -- and then work up to bigger chunks over time. By age seven or eight, the goal is to have the child narrate whole chapters at a time.

Keep in mind that some children might need to revert to narrating paragraphs when you introduce harder, more complicated books.

For some children, it won't take long to graduate from paragraphs to chapters. For others, you might spend the entire first year training in basic narration. The best advice I can give is to be patient. The skill really does come in time and with practice. And, oh, the results are worth the wait. 

Becoming Seekers: Transitioning Older Students

Learning to Narrate at Age 14

BY KATHY WICKWARD

The day I decided to pull my 14-year-old son out of public school came after a long night of watching him apply himself to yet another late round of essay questions assigned to him by his 8th grade advanced U.S. history teacher. He told me this teacher liked it when he quoted sources beyond the text, with internet sources other than Wikipedia considered perfectly kosher.

Being the helpful mom that I am, I pulled out my older daughter's U.S. history book and kept it handy. From time to time he'd ask me a question, and I'd refer him to the book. He was having none of it. "Mom, please look it up for me. I don't have much time." As I started to pay closer attention, I realized that he entered his assigned question, nearly word for word, into Google. When a source or two answered the question, he composed his own reworded answer and

entered the site address into [EasyBib](#) for his Works Cited page. He never referred to the texts he'd been assigned to read, despite the questions being taken almost directly from them.

Despite being in the advanced program, he had not been trained to read for information, a habit described by Charlotte Mason as primary -- a habit that must be developed by age 12. Schools focus for a long time on reading for *entertainment*. The transition to non-fiction was abrupt and painful.

My son went from reading short one-page articles to test his comprehension to chapters of dry text with perhaps one adult-level non-fiction analysis. Teacher lectures made up the bulk of his education in middle school. And he liked it that

way -- until he started failing assignments.

Our first weeks of attempted narration were a complete failure. If he remembered what he read at all, I might get a sentence. However, by the end of one 12-week term, he was narrating in paragraphs -- a reasonable improvement. Here are some tips based upon how we made the transition:

Choose books wisely.

The reading level in the public school system is below the reading level a Charlotte Mason student attains. Even with an advanced student, I had to be careful about the books I assigned, and I had to switch out a difficult book.

Read more difficult books aloud. A child that likes to hear lectures will do much better at first if difficult books are read aloud. That was true of my son.

Begin with one page

Our first weeks of attempted narration were a complete failure...



Photo: Alejandro Escamilla

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Becoming Seekers: Learning to Narrate at Age 14

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at a time. New students may not be able to attend to more than a page at a time. My son transitioned out of this more quickly than I expected, but his progress was uneven.

Prepare the reading.

My son wanted me to ask questions before the reading, questions like the comprehension questions he was used to in school. To my surprise, it didn't necessarily improve the narrations. It *did* tell me that preparing the reading by going over what has been read before is vital. Part of that preparation can be having the student ask his own questions of the reading. When my son started doing this spontaneously, I knew I had his attention.



Use physical books.

I'm not revealing old-fashioned preference. The books my son remembered best were not necessarily the ones he liked; they were the ones he had as physical copies.

Be "hands on." My son could not be left alone with the book, even as an "advanced" teen reader, and I still have to counter his tendency to retreat to his cave. If they come through the transition quickly and

they love their reading, you can leave them to do their work more independently, but I'd plan for at least a term of work where you are directly involved.

Participate.

In school, education is in the context of relationship -- they discuss rather than narrate. There can be quite a bit of give and take in these discussions. My son prefers narration as conversation. This requires thought on my part to avoid just firing off more questions at him. It requires engaging him in conversation, and that requires me to be familiar with his readings.

What to expect?

After one term, my son continues to need my engagement, and still likes to be read to. I can start a chapter reading aloud and have him finish it on his own in the remaining time. His oral narrations are longer, and he transitioned easily to written narrations. He does not love an education based on books, but he prefers narration to comprehension questions and so attends to his reading. Should he go back to public school one day, his foundation is now much stronger for completing higher-level work. 

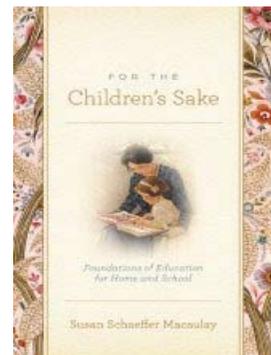
Kathy Wickward is learning and educating her children in the Pacific Northwest. She blogs at [Northwest by North](#).

Links for Thinks

Want to read more about narration? Here are some suggestions:

- [Narration](#) by Karen Glass
- [Some Thoughts on Narration](#) by Donna-Jean Breckenridge
- [Narration -- An Introduction](#) by Jennifer Dow

The Book Nook



This issue's book is [For the Children's Sake](#) by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay.

My favorite introductory book about Charlotte Mason, [For the Children's Sake](#) parallels [Charlotte Mason's sixth volume](#). In fact, I highly suggest you try reading them side by side! This book is wonderful for newly formed CM book groups, too.

Volume I ~ Topics

You can purchase the full Volume at a discounted price here

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