The Afterthinker’s Guide
TO CHARLOTTE MASON’S
HOME EDUCATION

A Study Guide For Group Leaders

by
BRANDY VENCCEL
The Afterthinker’s Guide to Charlotte Mason’s Home Education
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Please note: these pages are extracted from the original and complete study of The Afterthinker’s Guide to Charlotte Mason’s Home Education available at Afterthoughtsblog.net.
# Table of Contents

**Leader’s Guide Intro**
- How to Be a Great Group Leader ......................................................... 6
- How to Use this Book in Groups .......................................................... 11
- How My Group Works ........................................................................... 11

**Meeting #1**
- Discussion Ideas: [Questions to Consider](#) ........................................... 17
  - Some Preliminary Considerations ......................................................... 17
    - I. A Method of Education ................................................................. 18
    - II. The Child's Estate ...................................................................... 18
    - III. Offending the Children ............................................................... 19

**Meeting #2**
- Discussion Ideas: .................................................................................. 20
  - IV. Despising the Children ................................................................. 20
  - V. Hindering the Children ................................................................. 20

**Meeting #3**
- Discussion Ideas: .................................................................................. 23
  - I. A Growing Time ............................................................................ 23
  - II. Sight Seeing .................................................................................. 23
  - VI. Field-Lore and Naturalists’ Books ................................................. 25

**Meeting #4**
- Discussion Ideas: .................................................................................. 27
  - VII. The Child Gets Knowledge By Means Of His Senses ................. 27
  - VIII. The Child Should Be Made Familiar With Natural Objects ....... 28
  - IX. Out-Of-Door Geography ............................................................ 28
  - X. The Child And Mother-Nature ...................................................... 29
  - XI. Out-Of-Door Games, etc. .............................................................. 29
  - XII. Walks In Bad Weather ............................................................... 30
  - XIII. ‘Red Indian’ Life ...................................................................... 30
  - XIV. The Children Require Country Air ............................................ 30

**Meeting #5**
- Discussion Ideas: .................................................................................. 31
  - I. Education Based Upon Natural Law .............................................. 31
  - II. The Children Have No Self-Compelling Power ......................... 31
  - III. What Is ‘Nature’? ..................................................................... 32
  - IV. Habit May Supplant ‘Nature’ ....................................................... 32

**Meeting #6**
- Discussion Ideas: .................................................................................. 34
  - V. The Laying Down Of Lines Of Habit ............................................ 34
  - VI. The Physiology Of Habit ............................................................. 34
  - VII. The Forming Of A Habit—‘Shut The Door After You’ ............... 35
  - VIII. Infant ‘Habits’ ....................................................................... 36
  - IX. Physical Exercises .................................................................... 36

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### Member’s Guide differences shown in red

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting #7</th>
<th>Discussion Ideas:</th>
<th>37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Material</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Habit Of Attention</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Habits Of Application, Etc.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Habit Of Thinking</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #8</td>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. The Habit Of Imagining</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The Habit Of Remembering</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. The Habit Of Perfect Execution</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Some Moral Habits—Obedience</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Truthfulness, Etc.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #9</td>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Matter and Method of Lessons</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Kindergarten as a Place of Education</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Further Considerations of the Kindergarten</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #10</td>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Reading</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. The First Reading Lesson</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Reading By Sight And Sound</td>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #11</td>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Recitation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Reading for Older Children</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. The Art of Narrating</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #12</td>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. Writing</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. Transcription</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII. Spelling and Dictation</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII. Composition</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #13</td>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV. Bible Lessons</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XV. Arithmetic</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVI. Natural Philosophy</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #14</td>
<td>Reading Assignment:</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Ideas:</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XVII. Geography</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVIII. History</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #15</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Ideas</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIX. Grammar</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX. French</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XXI. Pictorial Art</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #16</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Ideas</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Will</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Conscience</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting #17</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Ideas</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix:</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Idea</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narration Immersion Lesson</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Canute on the Seashore</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictation Immersion Lesson</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plutarch Immersion Lesson</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboard Grammar Lesson</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial Art Immersion Lesson</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Appendix only appears in Leader’s Guide*
Leader’s Guide Intro

How to Be a Great Group Leader

Let’s begin with something Nancy Kelly once shared, written by Essex Chomondeley, that says it better than I can:

The attitude of all present, including those who conduct the meetings, should be one of finding out together what is best for children. The leader must have faith that the most “ordinary” father or mother has much to contribute. Be “in the chair” rather than “in the pulpit”; determine that each talk shall give real opportunity for meeting, mind to mind, experience shared. A sense of hostess-ship and hospitality is needed, giving a welcome, making everyone at ease, introducing them to ideas and thoughts courteously, keeping a happy orderliness in proceedings. A kindly sincerity encourages discussion and kindles initiative in individual listeners.

Let’s break this down a bit so that we don’t give in to the temptation to rush over it.

“…finding out together…”
A study group leader is a co-learner. Yes, it is good to Know Some Things. It is good to out-prepare anyone else in attendance. But you don’t have to know it all.

In a Charlotte Mason education, the teacher is not the fount of all knowledge. The teacher helps to guide the students through the source of knowledge: the books. The teacher gives structure in the form of pacing of reading assignments and guidance for discussion. But the teacher doesn’t seek total control. She doesn’t even want total control. She trusts that ideas will do what they do in the souls of all persons: grow and bear fruit. It’s a mystery, and it doesn’t need our assistance.
Seven Steps to Organizing and Managing Your Study Group

1. The first thing you need to do is make sure each group member has a copy of this study and a copy of *Home Education* by Charlotte Mason. There is a bulk buy discount (for groups buying five or more copies), so fill out the application before you start. Each member can purchase a copy on my website using a code that will be emailed to you after you apply. (Please do not email copies of this study to others. I thank you for respecting my copyright.)

Prior to the first meeting, send an email like this:

In [MONTH], we will begin a new study of *Home Education: Training and Educating Children Under Nine* by Charlotte Mason. Before we meet, you need a copy of the book. Here are your options:

- Read the paperback in the original language:
  - Published by [Living Book Press](https://www.livingbookpress.com)
  - Published by [Simply Charlotte Mason](https://www.simplycharlottemason.com)
- Read the Modern English version by Leslie Noelani
- Read the original online for free
- Read the Modern English version online for free

You also need the study guide we’ll be using. Click here to purchase your copy of *The Afterthinker’s Guide to Charlotte Mason’s Home Education* by Brandy Vencel using our group’s coupon code. (DON’T FORGET TO INCLUDE YOUR COUPON CODE!)

2. Choose a location. For years, we met in one of our homes. There was a lovely sense of fellowship and warmth that was fostered because of our location. It didn’t matter whose home, but the fact that it was a home was special. The host was responsible for tea and coffee and
Meeting #1

Reading Assignment:

Read a few sections of Part I:

- Some Preliminary Considerations
- I. A Method of Education
- II. The Child’s Estate
- III. Offending the Children

It’s only about 17 pages, but it is plenty to talk about in one short evening!

If you are unfamiliar with Charlotte Mason, please also read Who Was Charlotte Mason?

Discussion Ideas: Member’s Guide will include this to read: Questions to Consider

Some Preliminary Considerations

- Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?
- (pp. 2-3) The first 6 years should be trusted to no hands but our own. Therefore, we mothers will “take [motherhood] up as their profession – that is, with the diligence, regularity, and punctuality which men bestow on their professional labours.” What do you think about viewing motherhood the way a professional would view their career? Does this change your perspective? In a good way? What do you think about this? Does it describe you? Should it?
(p. 3) What does she mean by “making provision” for the task of child rearing? Have you done this? Should you?

(pp. 4-5) Can you describe “masterly inactivity” in your own words? Are you willing to “let him be”? Do you think this approach is good? How does it compare with the approach you have taken thus far?

(pp. 5-6) This part about children being a “national trust” builds on what she said on p. 1: “Children are a public trust.” What do you think about this assertion? Does it make you uncomfortable? Do you think Charlotte Mason is right or wrong about this? Why?

I. A Method of Education

- Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?
- (p. 8) “Method is a way to an end.” Do you know what end you are aiming for? Or do you feel scattered? Do you think it would be helpful to have a settled end?
- (p. 10) “This easy satisfaction arises from the sluggishness of human nature, to which any definite scheme is more agreeable than the constant watchfulness, the unforeseen action, called for when the whole of a child’s existence is to be used as the means of his education.” Are you tempted to rely on a system rather than doing the work of “constant watchfulness” that this approach requires? Even if sloth IS a temptation, does this method-based approach appeal to you? What does it mean that “the whole of a child’s existence” can be used to educate him?
- (p. 10) “… a few broad essential principles cover the whole field.” Does this provide comfort?

II. The Child's Estate

- Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?
- (p. 12) It seems the chief thing we learn in this section is to do no injury. What do you think of this? Reflect a bit on what this means to you, or how this changes what you think about your position as a parent-teacher for your children.
III. Offending the Children

- Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?
- (p. 13) Notice the definition of OFFENSE: doing by them that which we ought not to have done. How many of you have done this very thing this week?
- (p. 14) Here Miss Mason tells us that children are born with an internal moral sense and we adults corrupt it from the start. Do you tease or make light of small moral infractions? Do you take the trespasses of small people seriously? What messages are you sending to your children?
- WARNING: The alternative isn’t to yell, scream, or get down on the child. The examples here are to inform us to not MAKE LIGHT, so the alternative is simply to take them seriously.
- (p. 15) Are we under the Law, too, and is this evident to our children? Is our “Law” natural or political? What’s the difference?
- (p. 16) Do you pay attention to the “laws of health”? Are you careful that your children get the sleep and nutrition they need to thrive? What, do you think, are the basic and simple rules for health? (Note: here we are looking for a few basic principles and not an extensive list of rules to follow. Ensuring basic health ought not place huge burdens on the mother.)

This is a complete excerpt of Meeting #1. The Member’s Guide only includes the questions found in the Leader’s Guide that are bold.
Meeting #10

Reading Assignment:

Read three more sections of Part V:

- IV. Reading
- V. The First Reading Lesson
- VI. Reading By Sight And Sound

Here’s a little something you might add to your regular group email:

In the reading sections, Miss Mason gets into some of the nitty-gritty details on teaching reading. We're not going to go over every little detail unless you really want to. For that section, make sure you come with questions. Otherwise we’ll just cover the basic principles.

Discussion Ideas:

IV. Reading

- **Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?**
- (p. 199) “Reading presents itself first amongst the lessons to be used as instruments of education, although it is open to discussion whether the child should acquire the art unconsciously, from his infancy upwards, or whether the effort should be deferred until he is, say, six or seven, and then made with vigour.” Anyone have an opinion on this?
- (p. 200) “It is much to be wished that thoughtful mothers would more often keep account of the methods they employ with their children, with some definite note of the success of this or that plan.” Do any of you keep any sort of journal that you could pass on to your daughters or daughters-in-law in the future?
Meeting #12

Reading Assignment:

Read four sections of Part V:

- X. Writing
- XI. Transcription
- XII. Spelling and Dictation
- XIII. Composition

Discussion Ideas:

X. Writing

- Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?
- (p. 233) Are you comfortable with perfect execution? What is the key to pulling this off? (Hint: It’s only asking the child to do that of which he is capable.)
- What are Miss Mason’s basic steps for teaching writing? (And by “writing,” we mean the mechanical skill.)
- Invite group members to share their favorite writing resources. Are they using certain programs or fonts that fit with Miss Mason’s recommendations?

XI. Transcription

- Look through your notes on this section. What did you underline? What were your favorite parts? What did you have questions about?
- Note: “Transcription” is often called “copywork” by CM homeschoolers.
- (p. 238) How does transcription connect to spelling?
- Is there anything in this section that you find confusing? (As the group leader, don’t be afraid to NOT KNOW the answer. Look it up online and either send out an answer via email later or bring an answer to the next meeting.)

In this meeting, we’re doing a whirlwind of CM Language Arts! If you want a big-picture view, I recommend the AmblesideOnline Language Arts page.

This is a partial excerpt of Meeting #12.
This is a partial excerpt of the Appendix, available only in the Leader's Guide.

Appendix:

Activity Idea

(Meeting #3, p. 23) (choose at least one):

1. Try playing the game CM suggests on pp. 45-46 ("an exploring expedition") and report back how it goes.

2. Ask for volunteers to plan an outdoor day for the group.

3. Challenge your group members to do as Miss Mason suggests on p. 49 and learn 2-3 landscape scenes. Ask for volunteers to recount one to the group at the next meeting.

4. Choose either a calendar or nature diary as explained on p. 54 and begin. Bring it to the next meeting for Show and Tell.
To prepare for a Pictorial Art immersion night (or more often known as Picture Study or Picture-Talk on page 308 in Home Education), print out good quality copies of the picture on the next page for the members of your group to use for this study. Follow the steps in your reading to lead this immersion for your group, or, if one of your group members is willing, have her lead the immersion instead.

This painting is called Ince Hall Madonna and it was painted by Jan van Eyck. Click here for an interesting article on this painting, if you desire a little background information.

You may wish to include in your regular invitation something like the following:

This month’s meeting will include a brief immersion Picture Study lesson. Come prepared to have a hands-on lesson of how simple and enjoyable picture study can be.