

volume, and so on. In turn, the child develops more than a notebook...they develop their own character! They develop their initiative, attentiveness, perseverance, excellence, diligence, and patience. The child learns that the standard is determined by their own improvement...by their obedience...by their own excellence of quality!

Quick How-to's of Notebooking...

- ◇ **Begin with one notebook for each child.** We buy 3-ring binders for our notebooks. We use plastic sleeve protectors, which nicely protect each page whether the children are using notebook paper or sketch paper or acid-free cardstock paper for their page. This allows versatility in what goes into our notebooks...ALL goes in ours whether sketches, Copywork, samples of nature specimens, or photos...we find that our notebooks can include whatever we want to add for that subject! For things needing mounting, we use mounting tape or archival safe glues for mounting. When beginning to use binders for Notebooking, just keep one general notebook with all you're various work in it.
- ◇ As you see a subject **developing into its own notebook of interest**, take it from the general notebook and make a notebook of its own. Matthew divided his binders this year into many different topics...Poetry, General History, Military History, Civil War History, Bible Verses, Book of Centuries (timeline), Science, Scouts, God's World Papers...so on! This is as a result of many years of Copywork and study on these areas of interest...child-led not teacher-directed. He does not work in each notebook each day...just one passage of Copywork per day and it adds up. The focus is not on volume of notebooks or on topics for the notebooks. The focus is on learning to use skills and learning tools to encourage a lifestyle of delight-directed learning. The purpose is to learn skills so that the writing delight will grow naturally!
- ◇ Allow your children to **work back and forth on different notebooks**. "Real" writers need this change of pace and so will your children. If they seem to get frustrated with one topic and a breather does not bring back the passion, encourage them to bring the notebook to a quick completion. The children need to develop delight but not at the expense of their character. The habit of boredom and dawdling results when the child is forced over and over to do work that is not from the heart. Teach them to complete all that they start in an excellent way while doing their work from the heart! This habit will run over in all areas of learning therefore encouraging a love of learning.

We will have more on Notebooking in future issues...maybe this quick start will get you Binderizing! May you instill in your children a love of learning by capturing their areas of interest. Allow binders to set you free to allow your little ones to pursue a lifestyle of learning!

Encouraging Our Young Writers

*"Let all of us who are writers give God all the glory,
for it is only His work and His way that will bring lasting blessings.
We are just the pen and paper in His hand."
Amy Woolf Garner*

Teaching writing in the homeschool always seems to be a challenge to the parents. We want for our children to have the best education that we can provide for them. We want for them to have a passion for learning. We want for them to have the advantages that we did not have time to develop in our school years. But, we come into homeschooling basing so much of what we expect and do on the basis of our own education and educational models. Writing is no different. We immediately begin to make it more complicated than God intends for it to be. As Amy Woolf Garner shares in the above quote, our writing is ultimately for God's glory...we are actually His pen and paper sharing to the world His Work and His Way. With this in mind, we are going to learn how to encourage our young writers with a different approach to writing.

What Makes a Great Writer?

Think for a moment...What sets apart the great writers from the others? What really makes a great writer? As I have taken a look at all of my favorite authors, it seems that they all have a deep passion for the topic that they write about. It is usually the topic that is their life passion! There are a few of my favorite writers who seem to have a passion just for the art of writing. It is their hobby of addiction, and they can confidently write about anything, it seems, and everyone loves it. I think it is the **passion** that is the key! Whether it is passion for the subject or just for writing!

Confidence is another trait of my favorite writers! Yes, a great writer is confident that someone would want to read his or her thoughts. They are confident that what they have to share is valuable. They really believe that others will love their angle. They dig in there and tell it like they like to learn it or like they like to read it. Whether they cloth their writing in literary language...simply teach how to...or inspire others, a great writer will confidently share their work knowing that others will love their way of sharing!

Take a moment to think of a few of the greatest writers...Shakespeare, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, C. S. Lewis...What sets them apart? One key thing that I see is that they each wrote in a style which was their very own. They were just being themselves... whether formally or conversationally they each demonstrated their own personality and showed their heart in their writing. Their very own style showed through their writing to make them one of our favorites.

One thing that you may not have thought about that I see in my favorite writers is that they seem to all use their Spiritual Gifts in writing. As a matter of fact, most writing fills a need in the spirit of the reader. The greatest writers throughout time have demonstrated their Spiritual Gifts in their writing. They have used those gifts to encourage, inform, tell how, give help, correct, or evangelize. Yes, the greatest writers of all time are those who have detected the desires and the needs of the reader...To know facts. To get advice. To find comfort. To be assured. To relax for a moment of encouragement. To find answers for their very real problems. To learn truth. The greatest writers are those who have answered the call of God to willingly yield themselves as God's pen and paper...to become a message that answers the needs of others!

Tips...

- ✓ Teach your children to dedicate all of their writing to the Glory of God...100%! The pen wields a mighty power. As we teach our children that writing carries a mighty responsibility, they place importance in their own creations. As our children see their challenge to be faithful to share truth with the our hungry society, they will find a purpose for their writing. Teach them to be faithful to write all they write for God and His glory!
- ✓ Encourage your children to become great readers. Encourage them to read as much as possible! One cannot know what others like to read unless they themselves are avid readers. Plus, reading will give lots of ideas to write about, which will blossom into great works of their very own!
- ✓ Beware of criticism! Criticism will steal the joy and life in writing. Most critics are the ones who never get anything done for themselves because they constantly over-analyze every little detail. These "critics" stifle the child from writing with a heart of delight. Instead, let's teach our children to write what God leads them to write (just like "real" writers do!) in firm conviction and let God do the critiques. By coming beside your children as their encourager, you will find their desire to write will grow!
- ✓ Beware of the "editor" and "pickiness" mindset! Both of these can be within you or within those you allow to influence your child's writing. This mindset frustrates, disheartens, discourages, exasperates and sets up the writer for failure.
- ✓ Set a standard of excellence instead of perfection. There is a big difference!

Excellence:

Encourages Neatness
Encourages Best Work
Searches for Interest of the Writer
Focus is attentiveness to topic/writing
Encourages productiveness
Unleashes creativity

Perfection:

Focuses on Error
Establishes unreachable Goals
Dictates Topic
Forces work without concern for heart
Just wants it done
Slams and destroys creativity!

- ✓ Encourage your children to take a look at different authors. What is it that they like about their writing? Is it meaty, deep, funny, light, short, long? What do they want to imitate...Conversational, peppy, serious, teaching, intelligent, formal, informal? Teach them to model their writing after their favorite writing! Teach them to become a student of the great writers. Copywork helps in this area...see the ideas for Copywork later in this issue.
- ✓ Begin keeping journals! Journaling tempers writing, brainstorm ideas for writing projects, gives logical flow and order, eliminates the fluff in writing, develops thoughts fully, and challenges the thinking process! In Journaling, the writer has an outlet for their heart as it fills with emotion and spirit. The Journals help the writer to continue thinking so that great thoughts can be developed. Journaling always pays off as it teaches our young writers that they have many great thoughts that need to be written down to preserve for the future!
- ✓ Encourage your young writers to develop a deep interest in one area. I always suggest that children be encouraged to develop a deep area of study which brings them the greatest interest and joy. My son loves to study all about Marines, Military, and the Civil War. I dearly love studying and writing on Homeschooling/Writing/Sewing/Bible Studies. Often the area of special interest is the one that God uses in writing to minister to the hearts of others! As the subject area of interest is pursued (collecting information, studying intensely, gathering interesting information), sharing that knowledge and love through conversation or writing will come naturally.
- ✓ Focus on getting what they *do* know on paper. The alternative is what we commonly find in writing courses...testing to see what the children do not know! Professional writers are told continually to write what they know or want to know. My personal standard is to only write what I feel is OK for others to quote me on. I want to really *know* what I am talking about so that my work offers answers. This passion for the topic gives me confidence and anoints my writing. I would die if I were given a topic such as those most commonly given to children such as *“What I Did During Summer Vacation”* or *“My Family.”* Although I love life, I would not love those topics. I also do not like looking at a blank piece of paper without a thought on my heart. I think it is only right to require that our children do, as we would be able to do. Just as I do not write on anything that I am not fully convinced about, neither can our children. Just as we cannot write with confidence and boldness if we do not know enough about a topic to “write what we know,” neither can our children. The best way to help your children to have plenty to put on paper is to simply read widely on lots of topics, copy great models, narrate and discuss great literature, and spend lots of time Journaling ideas and writing outlines. It may take a lot of input over time, but you will find the output worth the time spent in waiting! It has taken 5 years of study before Matthew detected a need to write about. After this time, he was overflowing with a passion on that topic!
- ✓ Help you children to find a purpose for writing. If writing is taught artificially with pages and pages of diagramming...filling in the blanks...writing fake letters, you

cannot expect your children to see a point or purpose in writing! The key to encouraging your young writer is to find a natural motivation...a product to make for themselves (booklet, book), a market (to sell as a home business), to better learn a topic, to write on an issue, to critique a book, to share a message...encourage your children to find a purpose for writing their own ideas!

- ✓ Produce! If you want for your children to become great writers, then you must begin by requiring them to write. Even if it is letters, articles, book critiques, research, notebooks, stories, how-tos, booklets, books, tip sheets, so on. Write something every day! We require our children to write every day, all year round. Matthew began when he was ten to write a full page each day of Copywork...Elisabeth, seven years old, writes about 2-3 lines. Not only do I require them to write daily, but I also model this same discipline before them. If I am not busy around the house, I have a book or notebook and pen in hand! Another thing we encourage is for our children to keep Bible Journals with thoughts, verses, and notes from their quiet times. Again this is modeled in our home as we have our quiet times. My children love to pour over my journals and read my notes. I think this shows them personally the importance of writing daily so those thoughts are recorded for others.
- ✓ Teach them to always test their writing for excellence by asking...Is it current? Is it accurate? Is it dependable? Is it in a logical order? Is it smooth? Does it have any quirks (repeated words or phrases)? Does it answer all of the reader's questions that it can answer in this space? Does it cover the subject? Does it keep interest? Is it specific? Does it sound professional and confident or does it sound schoolish (like they are trying to follow ALL the rules...too simple...boring...without passion!)? Does it sound defensive about convictions or thoughts? Does it sound preachy or whiny? Let them test their own writing as they proofread so they can learn to measure their own writing by their own standard...one of excellence!
- ✓ Teach your children that others may not know about their topic and would really love to! My son has a passion for history. IF there is one thing that I believe has encouraged him to put what he knows on paper, it is that we have taught him that he has too much valuable wisdom about too many areas to keep it to himself. He now considers himself to be a historian and a writer...at 10 years old! Teach your children to share what they know. This will serve them all of their lives!
- ✓ Teach them to write from the heart! Write with passion in an area that they want to be or already are a pro. Write on those types of topics letting their heart just flow!

Ok...you now have the practical tips to get you on the road to encouraging your young writers! The harvest is plentiful, but the field is empty...who will write for the glory of God?

Copywork...Answers to Your Questions!

Copywork? What is that? How do you use it at home? What do I use? Where do I start? Copywork has been an answer to my prayers! I felt in my heart that workbooks were definitely not the answer for teaching grammar, writing, spelling, and appreciation of wonderful literature. What would do the job while doing it more naturally?

We stumbled upon the idea of Copywork when reading Ruth Beechick's small but mighty little book *A Strong Start in Language*. It seemed too simple! Certainly teaching Language would need to be more difficult, right? Well...hear ye, hear ye! ! Language can be taught as naturally when teaching Written Language as when you, as a mother, taught your little ones Oral Language!

Only Ruth Beechick herself can fully explain why to use Copywork. In her book *A Strong Start in Language* she shares the following: *"This method is not new or experimental. It is an old and proven method, probably as old as writing itself. Great writers have used it and you have already used it with your child. But once children reach school age, we tend to shed the natural method for a slower, artificial method. Our society thinks grammar books or Language books somehow carry the secret of good writing, but few of them do."*

I have been just as guilty as many of you by equating learning with a number of workbook pages completed and a good "test" score. Does this really insure a great writer? I am afraid not! As matter of fact, very few writing techniques can be taught by filling in the blanks. So how do we teach writing? Well, the key is how we taught the Oral Language. Ruth Beechick shares that there is a "parallel." She says, *"Listening and speaking are to spoken language what reading and writing are to written language."* She also says, *"Children learn to write by writing."*

Our Story...

When I began teaching my little boy, I tried to mimic my educators. The problem was that this method was laborious and when given opportunities to write, his work was difficult and very messy. The spelling was atrocious! I really saw this one-year at Christmas. When copying poems and writing letters, there were no blanks.

I decided to pull out Mrs. Beechick's book and use her method of copying to supplement my workbooks. It was not very long until Matthew (who was known to have a strong distaste for even holding a pencil!) fell in love with his work. He had a reason to write and it became a pleasure! Also, he was sure that the work was correct because it was taken from great literature--good examples to pattern after. He took great pride in his work and soon began to keep special quotes and poems in his school notebook.

There was a change in me too. I looked at his workbook with new eyes. This work was monotonous and did not really apply to what we were studying. I began to feel that all skills would be better learned if we could somehow make them apply to his studies because of his strong interest in them. So, here is what we are doing and how you can do it yourself!

For the younger child, you will want to start by letting them copy their letters and later their name. Just print neatly then encourage them to make theirs look like yours. I remember doing this with my mom when I was only a few years old. She would write names or words on paper in church for me to copy. Mom did this naturally...without any idea that this was a teaching approach.

I was amazed at how much little ones learn from this. My little girl began on her own to teach herself how to write by copying signs and words on trucks as we would go down the road. She would copy from her storybooks, or even her brother's schoolwork. I was utterly shocked when this brilliant child of four years began on her own to do Copywork. We were riding as a family to town when I looked back to see what was keeping her attention in the backseat. She was sitting there with a copy of *Charlotte's Web* copying the letters on the page. She had copied the title of the chapter and even several sentences without any prompting or even instruction. The only possible idea for this would be from this little genius catching the excitement from her brother's Copywork assignments!

This was how painless it was to begin Copywork with a child. Now 4 years later, I continue to copy her work in a model that I want her to copy. She will often choose the selections that she wants to copy, but most of the time I copy several weeks' worth of work for her to copy from. I hand-write her models at this time because she is still struggling with the mechanics of letter formation. I expect this year to transition her into copying her own work directly from the original source by typing her models on the computer using a font like Lucida Handwriting. I can type on the computer in a larger font and leave lines for her to copy on underneath the model. We will do this for a bit until she is ready to copy those models on her own paper in her Copybook. Then, she will be unstoppable!

As I shared earlier, I began Copywork with Matthew when he was in the Second Grade. It took watching the Copywork begin to produce fruit before I would trust it and throw away my workbooks! We used Ruth Beechick's little book *A Strong Start in Language* to supplement our workbooks for the Second Grade. It did not take very long for me to see that it was going to really work for Matthew!

I ripped out the pages that he had finished in the workbook, put them in his Copybook, then only used Copywork for the rest of the year. He made improvements in every area immediately! The neatest area was the transition from pencil resistant to loving writing! As he began Third grade, I often wrote an example of how to write the passage as I do now for Elisabeth. We also used *Learning Language Arts through Literature* for formal grammar instruction. Matthew loved the nice, large print models to copy from their book. He also copied poems, Bible verses, and passages from his library books. His

handwriting, spelling, and even grammar all improved so drastically that Copywork sold me!

In Fourth grade, I focused real heavily on Oral Narrations. The children would orally narrate their stories back to me while I took down dictation. I would re-copy the passages as a model for them to use for Copywork. It only took about 6 months of this before Matthew realized that *HE* could create his own writing. He wrote his first essay that year without having to have a formal class in grammar. I was so proud. It sounded as if an adult had written the essay...only an adult would not possibly have had all of the humor and imagination that this wonderful little boy poured into that essay. I saw this wonderful fruit and realized that we were not only improving the basic mechanics but we were also instilling a love of writing in this child! He was not scared of writing a bigger work like an essay! He considered it just as much of an adventure as curling up with a book, going back in time with an author's work. He had spent so much time gleaning from these wonderful authors that he was ready to pour his heart out on paper!

This time of oral Narrations and continued Copywork brought us into the next phase of writing for our family. Matthew was then ready for longer passages of Copywork, which gave him a deeper discipline of writing each and every day. My husband casually mentioned one evening that it looked as if he were trying to skim by and copy the least amount he could. That was all it took for my 10-year-old to begin on his own to copy a full page a day!

He also was skilled enough to begin one of his greatest projects all on his own. One day he confided in me, *"Mom, have you ever noticed that these Marine books never have a complete history in one book? That information is in all of these books. There needs to be a book on the complete history of the U.S. Marines."* I listened as he went on, *"I guess I will have to write that one!"* I about fell out on the floor! I encouraged him to begin studying, that he would do a wonderful job with that! He began to take every minute of his free time to compile information for his book. His notebook was getting filled up more and more by the day! This was in addition to the regular Copywork he did each day.

As Christmas break neared, he began to write the story. During the Christmas break he finished the rough draft for the book in his notebook and typed it into the computer... all completely on his own without any help from either of us! I was so proud to read such a nice piece of work! We went back through with me reading it to help teach about editing. I showed him how to use Microsoft Word's Spelling and Grammar, which has a built in help function which tells you the rules that apply to your errors.

I also shared with him about how to develop a story by asking all of the questions that someone would want answered. I casually taught him that I was reading it as a novice (very ignorant mama!) wanting to know all about the Marines before I ended my time in his book. I shared some questions about common words that he did not realize were not common to those who did not read as widely on that topic as he himself did. I also shared questions that I had as I read. He was then off again writing his little heart out!

As Matthew is now beginning Sixth grade, he is self-directed in his learning in Language Arts. He does look to me for basic how-to's as he is creating his own projects. For instance, he has been reading and studying *my* articles. He hopes to begin writing for children's magazines this year. He wants to do biography sketches of men and women in history. He also hopes to compile another book on the great men of the Civil War. As a homeschool mom and writer, this thrills me! Do I sound like I would hesitate to brag?

Copywork is still a daily discipline...but it is also a personal discipline! I can brag as much on the Copywork as my darling child because I know that Copywork took the artificial out of learning language! Now, Language is alive with purpose!

What's So Special About Copywork?

There are a few things that happen when children copy passages. They are able to see their own mistakes and correct them without it being a judgment about their personal work. It absolutely crushes my children if they think that I am not pleased with their work just as it would crush me for someone to critically take their red pen through my writing that I pour my heart into. Checking it and finding grammatical and spelling errors, still insults them. When they copy a passage, they can find the errors as they proofread the copy. Plus, they are learning the skill of proofreading their work until they have excellence.

Another big plus for the Copywork is the good example. The writing style of the author contributes greatly to expanding your child's own style. Wouldn't you love for your child to have the benefit of sitting at the feet of Robert Louis Stevenson, William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Martha Finley, or Mark Twain? Well, they can! By reading, copying, and-later even narrating their great works, your child can be educated by the masters!

My favorite thing about Copywork is that my child is taught correctly from the start. The work reinforces correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Chances are that if they SEE things done correctly, they will repeat it in their own work. I love what Ruth Beechick has to say about this, *"Children who know the most grammar are not necessarily better writers."* She adds, *"...Students who are good writers can learn grammar better than students who are poor writers."* She finally says, *"You can teach the parts of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, sometimes grammar, and numerous other matters day by day in the dictation and copying lessons. Some of them you will consciously teach. Many others the child will learn without your conscious effort."* Isn't this far superior to learning what things are but not learning how to use it?

Looking at Matthew's progress can see this superiority. It really has been so natural for me to teach him what good writing looks like. No, we have not been diagramming sentences, but he can write a fantastic essay! No, neither he nor I can still figure out what a split infinitive is, but he loves to compile books! Yes, I do think this is superior to using these years laboring over the parts of speech before putting the pen in his hand!

How to use Copywork:

First, begin with teaching the child to copy their name or the alphabet.

Next, copy short one sentence phrases-Bible Verses, Quotes, etc.

Work up to longer passages. Lengthy passages will take several days to complete.

For challenging writers, you may assign passages longer than a standard paragraph such as dialogues, letters, news stories, etc.

You may collect passages for copying from biographies, letters, Scripture, novels, poetry, history texts, classics, and so on.

It would be best to prepare the night before and prepare some work for each day, as writing should be a daily assignment. Just read through your favorite Living book that you plan to use for your family reading time. You can take a small quote and copy exactly as you would have your child write. After reading your selection the next day, allow time for your child to copy and check his work. It is that simple!

If you would like to have grammar lessons, you may want to explain why it is written that particular way, for example, today we might notice why all letters in the passage are capitalized and look up rules in a grammar text such as ***Learning Grammar through Writing.***

As your child grows older and more accustomed to writing, you will want to take the passages and dictate them to the child. This will give them the added challenge of placing punctuation marks correctly, spelling and setting up the work without a model.

After much practice with years of Copywork, dictation, and more difficult Copywork, the child will competently move to creative writing. It will be as natural as when they learned to talk...and **you** will have guided them along the way!

Narration Beyond the Test!

He was only two years old...but if you were to ask his grandparents or me, we thought he was the most brilliant child on the earth. If you took out any of his storybooks, you would find that he was able to retell every single word of the stories with perfect execution, exactly as he had heard it read so many times. *“When I Get Bigger by Mercer Mayer...When I get bigger I’ll be able to do lots of things. I’ll go to the corner store by myself...”* He would go on and on with the exact story line, the exact characters, the exact vocabulary, and the exact tone that I would use when reading it to him. If I read the book and tried to skip a page, he immediately responded with, *“Oh, Mommy you missed I’ll have my own watch and I’ll tell everyone what time it is...”* I would have to go back and read it just as I had all the times before!

At five, we tried to bring home the standard approach to teaching language arts. I, like so many moms, felt that I needed to pattern our learning after the model that had been set before me during my education. We brought out desks, chalkboard, and flags...but soon, found ourselves finishing our work quickly so we could get back to those wonderful stories! I felt a lot of failure and frustration those first few years...surely learning would not have to be such a dull experience. But what was there to do? That was when I ran across the Whole Book Approach. After much study, I gave up my thoughts of trying to emulate my public school education in my home. I traded it for the tried and true approaches for teaching Language Arts that had worked all throughout time to create wonderful writers. The swap was worth it! I swapped the busy fill-in-the-blanks and grammar texts for Copywork. I swapped the twaddly readers for real, living books. I swapped Dictation for spelling tests. I swapped Narration for grading and tests!

Now you may say, “That is great, but how do you do tests...grades?” Well, Narration is the key to being sure that your children are learning from read-alouds. Narration shows that the child is using his whole mind. The children must pay very close attention to the reading using their whole mind to remember the specifics from the material presented. They use their entire mind to visualize the story setting, characters, and details that are described in the story. They take what is shared and use their mind to comprehend and synthesize (see the whole from the parts) the information. Then, after using all these faculties of the mind, they communicate in their own style what they have learned. An example of this mental process is seen in the following narration by Matthew, when he was only 9...

Christopher Columbus

From *America Begins* by Alice Dalgliesh...Narrated by Matthew Rushton, 9 years old

“When Christopher Columbus was a boy, he dreamed of sailing on the sea and being a sailor. He heard stories of Marco Polo’s travels that made him convinced that he wanted to sail. Soon, he decided that the world was round and that he could sail straight to the Indies (China, now).”

When he was old enough, he asked the King and Queen of Portugal and England if he could use a ship to sail to the Indies but they did not let him. So, he asked King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain if he could use a ship. They gave him three ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. He set sail for the Indies.

When he was on the journey, his men got tired of storms and all of the work. When he was just about to give up, the ship sped up and he found sticks with grapes on them floating in the sea. Then, he knew he was not far from land. That night he saw a light far off, but he did not know if it was land or not.

In the morning of October 12, 1492 when it was about 2:00, the spotter of the Pinta said "Land Ahoy!" All the sailors woke up and looked. There was land. The next morning they got in their rowboats and sailed for land. They met friendly Indians on the land. Then, with the help of the Indians, they found many birds, trees, and snakes that were not in Spain. Christopher and his men traded goods with the Indians such as glass beads, bells, shirts, and pants. The Indians traded furs, gold, and many other goods.

Soon, they had explored the whole island. They packed up and left to find India. They found more land and explored it. They lost sight of the Pinta and the Santa Maria struck a reef. They used the wood from the Santa Maria to build a fort. Some of the men had to stay behind in the fort. The rest of the men sailed back to Spain in the Nina. Then, they found the Pinta and started back together. A storm came and the two ships lost sight of each other.

The Nina reached Spain first. He showed King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella all of the treasures he had found.

Christopher Columbus set out three more times for America. He and his crew got tired of sailing and soon returned to Spain to live there."

Can you see the thorough presentation of facts that were taught through this real, living book? The knowledge became Matthew's own! He picked up the vocabulary from the text naturally without the need of a separate lesson on vocabulary. As matter of fact, there are many words in that narration that are directly from the story that he was narrating! He presented the story in his own style and in his own point of view! This simple narration can show you the interest and attentiveness that were involved as we read this simple passage from this book. He not only was learning lots of details, but he made them his own possession as he retold the story in detail in his own words and manner! As Matthew retold this story, I could see the delight in his eyes as he relived this adventure of exploration. He was able to travel back in time to see with his mind's eye the travel over sea...the first site of land...the meeting with the Indians...the great swap of treasures...the fear of the ship-wreck...and the trial of the travels back home! This adventure through the eyes of the author captivated Matthew and helped him to learn more than he would have ever learned by reading only a small passage of text in order to take a test. Yes, he really knew this story and there was no need to test this child in order to prove that!

By using Narration, we can see all of the process of learning take place. First, the child collects information through reading the selection. They process this information by allowing their mind to ask its own questions and discern the answers to those questions in contrast to boring, dull questions that are teacher contrived which is so common in most writing programs. Then, they complete the learning process by sharing their own version through communication...the actual narration. This process insures

that the child not only takes in the information at hand, but they must immediately deal with it. They must think it out if they are to communicate it back. The need for tests is eliminated as the thorough narration shows that the child understands the information at hand enough to put it into his own words. This process ensures that the child not only learns the knowledge at hand, but they also learn the valuable skill of relating their knowledge back in their own words! We are then assured that the child truly comprehends and has a relationship with the information that has been shared.

Let's back up and look at what Narration really is. Narration is simply telling back what the book or story is about. In Narrating, the child is able to naturally relate back the information that they deemed as important. The reason that there is no need for tests is because you hear them tell back what they learned. You know that they understand what has been read because they are able to put it into their very own words to tell you.

Some other benefits of Narration are that the children are able to learn to create stories without the toil of making one up because they already have the characters, plot, vocabulary, and story line. All that they must do is articulate the story! What is neat about Narration is that the greatest writers and thinkers are actually tutoring your children! They gently teach the art of Composition through their great books. The children pick up their own style naturally through years of sitting at the feet of their favorite writers. Their writing skills become more advanced quicker because they have had non-threatening experience with composition. Plus, they find writing to be easy, natural, and fun!

The following is an example of my son, Matthew's first essay. It was written after several years of Copywork and Oral Narration and only one year of Copying Narrations that he dictated first to me. I think you will see how he wove his skill of narrating into this story...

The Electric Light Theft
By Matthew Rushton, 9 1/2 years old

I heard on the radio one day about something that had happened. Carmen had stolen the light bulb! She had gone back in time to 1879 to steal the light bulb! When I heard this case, I knew it was the only one unique for me. So, I immediately began to make preparations to take this long and serious journey to Thomas Edison in 1879. I knew that I must pack up immediately with some of the things that I needed to take. I asked my Dad for his handcuffs. I asked Mom for some food for my long journey. She gave me a package of Twix candy bars and a large bottle of Lemon-lime drink (Sam's Choice!). Also, I needed to know about Thomas Edison. First, I went to my library. I found a couple of books and encyclopedia articles about Thomas Edison and his life so that I could get a little bit of a grasp on how he lived. I found some old pictures and even a few maps of where he lived during this time. Then, we began a meeting with me and my favorite investigators to plan when to leave for the serious journey. For this journey was not just any ordinary journey, it was a very unique journey...back in time!

Once I had gathered all of my necessary information and supplies, I went on my journey. The first thing that I saw was Mom's childhood. Could you ever believe it? She was once a baby! Then, I went further back in time until I saw World War II, a very serious war. Then, I saw Papaw George's birthday in 1916, a long time ago! I still knew that I had to go further back in time. So, I kept on going back in time. The next thing I knew, there were no cars! What would someone be able to do without a car? I

looked up and I was there! I could not believe it. There were no boys after supper washing dishes like I do for there was no light to see by! They were all in bed. There were no computers, no televisions, no microwaves. There was no electricity at all!

I was so tired that I found a house. I knocked on the door to see if they would let me in. To my surprise, the man who opened the door was Frances Jehl! Frances Jehl was one of the many men who assisted Thomas Edison in making the electric light bulb. When I looked in the house, I noticed that it was very dark. There was just a faint light of the fireplace to light the room. I noticed a small group of people, his family, gathered around the fireplace. He finally invited me in. We sat by the fireplace as they discussed the important affairs of the day, Oct. 19, 1879. They said that after two years of researching and trying to find the proper filament, Mr. Edison had finally found a filament that he thought would shine. He was about to try carbonized thread. Carbonized thread is cotton sewing thread burned to an ash. He was still trying to put the carbonized thread in the bulb when Mr. Jehl left for the day. After many hours of talking, there was a loud beat on the door. Someone was very upset, knocking frantically on the door! I went to answer the door and to my surprise it was Thomas Edison! His first words were, "Where is Frances?" I spoke up saying, "Mr. Jehl is in the living room." Immediately, Mr. Edison ran to Mr. Jehl and said, "I cannot find the filament, the light bulb, or any of my supplies!" Mr. Jehl said, "Did you look everywhere?" Mr. Edison said, "Yes, I did, but I just can't find them!" I suggested that we take a walk over to the laboratory.

Mr. Jehl, his oldest son, Mr. Edison, and I walked through the woods to the laboratory. We went into the laboratory and took a look around. I went over to the window and saw a woman running through the woods. I ran out there and said, "Stop, Carmen!" I took off running into the woods after her. After a while, she ran into a dark house. I did not really want to go after her, but I knew I had to catch her. I ran into the house and searched everywhere until I found her hiding in a closet. I quickly handcuffed her with the handcuffs that I had taken from my Dad's gun belt...by the way, he just so happens to be an Alabama State Trooper! I walked back through the woods with Carmen tightly cuffed, not wanting for her to get away. When I finally reached Mr. Edison's laboratory, I questioned Carmen. After a while, she reluctantly confessed that she had hidden the bulb, the filament, and his tools under the steps in front of the laboratory. I took Carmen out to my time shuttle and locked her up.

I could not just leave without saying good-bye. I went back to the laboratory. They invited me to stay and see if this filament would work. It was now October 19, 1879. Mr. Edison gently put the carbonized thread in the bulb. The bulb shed a good light. It had worked! I got to see it with my very own eyes! I had the wonderful honor of witnessing this wonderful event! I stayed all night the 19th and the next day the 20th. The light bulb was still shining a very good light! The next day, October 21, 1879, Mr. Edison increased the voltage of the light. Not until then did it go out. It shined for forty hours! This was so wonderful that I got to see this with my own eyes!

I knew that it was time to go home, so I went over to Mr. Jehl. I said, "Good-bye and thanks for welcoming me to your home." I turned around and walked over to Mr. Edison. I said, "Thank you." Before I could say anything else, Mr. Edison said, "Thank you for bringing back the electric light bulb from Carmen." I said, "Thank you, I am glad that you are such a good inventor and wonderful friend. Goodbye." I returned to my time shuttle and left for home...1997!

So many people are concerned that if we use natural approaches such as Narration or Copywork that our children will never be able to compose their own original work. This essay proves that not only will they be able to write, but also they will write well from early ages. They confidently share their hearts without feeling as though what they share is not going to be criticized or picked apart. They write with passion on the topics of interest giving their own special twist! They learn to write in their own style, which is far superior to any which could be forced upon them. All it takes is going back to the natural, tried, and true methods of the past. It takes waiting upon the fruit that is bigger and better...and well worth the wait!

Take a moment to think back to when your children were little. Was their experience similar to my son's that I described in the beginning of this article? Did your children have that one little book that you had to read over and over? Could they just look at the pictures and tell it word for word? If you were reading it and missed one word did they know it? Well, guess what? That is Narration in its simplest form. You were reading the book and they learned the story and could retell it!

It is amazing how we trade in the natural for the artificial! If you will think back, your children were learning vocabulary without the dictionary...grammar without a grammar text...how to tell a story without a lesson on how to write...how to love books without a word of instruction by you!

May I challenge you to go back to the old ways...trust those natural methods of long ago! Then, you will find your little ones with plenty to share! In time, they will become the great writers that you so desire for them to become! Happy Narrating!

In Charlotte Mason's Dictation Class

There seems to be a mystery about the gentle process of teaching the children Dictation. I was digging several years ago and found these easy to follow steps by Charlotte Mason in her Home Education Series. Hope that they help take the mystery out of Dictation! Here are the steps...

- ◇ The child prepares himself. You give him a model to study. Then, he familiarizes himself with words, punctuation, and form.
- ◇ Before beginning, ask if there are any words or punctuation that needs attention or explanation.
- ◇ Point out any words or punctuation that you feel needs attention.
- ◇ Put any words on the blackboard for them to see and let them erase when they feel that they know them.
- ◇ When the child is ready for dictation, give out clause by clause--**only repeating each clause once!** Dictate even the punctuation and spelling for the very young. (Do so after you have read the entire sentence in order to give them time to get it correct.) The older child will be able to take dictation without giving them the punctuation or spelling.
- ◇ For evaluating work, allow them to read back the selection to you and then edit as they do their Copywork (use model to make correction, so on!)

Tips for Making History Come Alive!

History has become a passion in our home! Was it all of those read alouds about the great men and women throughout history? Was it those stories that have been told over and over while sitting at the knees of Papaw? Was it the hours of play outside of our home as they set sieges...attacked the enemy...fought on the side of their greatly admired heroes? I am not quite sure what is to “blame” for the passion we have for history, but we certainly do approach history differently in our home. Our focus is on giving our little ones plenty of time and opportunity to make history come alive! The following are some tips on how you can also make history come alive in your home. Come join the adventure!

**** Read Lots of Biographies!** I read a while back a neat quote by Charlotte Mason, which confirmed our approach for learning about others. She said in her book *Home Education* the following profound quote, *“Let him...linger pleasantly over the history of a single man, a short period, until he thinks the thoughts of that man, is at home in the ways of that period. Though he is reading and thinking of the lifetime of a single man, he is really getting intimately acquainted with the history of a whole nation, for a whole age. Let him spend a year of intimacy with Alfred, ‘the truth-teller,’ with the Conqueror, with Richard and Saladin, or with Henry V. —Shakespeare’s Henry V. —and his victorious army. Let him know the great people and the common people, the ways of the court and of the crowd. Let him know what other nations were doing while we were at home doing thus and thus. If he comes to think that the people of another age were truer, larger-hearted, simpler-minded than ourselves, that the people of some other land were, at one time, at any rate, better than we, why, so much the better for him.”* Take the time to focus on the lives of men and women throughout history! This puts the story back into history and makes it come alive!

**** Get Out to See History as Much as Possible!** Our children simply devour Living History Days that are so common in our area. They beg to go to historical sites and museums! They will spend hours just listening to the stories of the guides or in reading the little signs! Their idea of real fun is to go to history reenactments and plays! Our area is rich in living history. We can go to Civil War reenactments or to plays about our own natives such as Helen Keller! We also can go to festivals in our area that celebrate time periods and events in history such as The Renaissance Fair and The Trail of Tears. This living history brings the past alive for my little history buffs!

**** Keep a History Notebook!** We have notebooks for almost every subject but history is perhaps one of our favorites! My son had so much in his History Notebook that he had to divide it up into specific notebooks of information about General History, the Civil War and our Military. You can easily keep a History Notebook as well. All you need is a three-ring binder, plastic sleeve protectors for the pages to be slid into, and lots of memorabilia! We keep narrations of books that we read for History. We copy favorite

quotes and poems from our history read alouds. We keep pictures of men and women throughout history. We keep our mementos from historical sites and reenactments. We even have postcards sent to us from others who live near historical sites! In other words, our History Notebook is full of gems that keep history alive for all of us!

**** Tap into Grandparents, Elderly, Family, and Friends!** Our family and friends have been a key source of finding out neat stories that are not recorded in the history books! Sitting at their feet, we have learned many details from history that would be long lost without the gift of story telling! The key to making this come alive is to listen and record their stories for your History Notebooks. Keep this part of history alive for you and for generations to come!

**** Find Treasures at Antique Stores!** I am amazed at the little treasures that we have come across at old antique stores. We have found wonderful journals, uniforms, books, money, so on, which all belong in museums. Antique stores are wonderful places to find dress up clothes and play gadgets to make history come alive!

**** Let the Little Ones Make up Their Own Costumes!** My children have always loved to make up costumes for their play as they read about various men and women in history. I used to make many of their costumes when they were little for times such as Frontiersmen, Knights and Queens, and Civil War. Now, they will go to real sources like GRANDPARENTS, Rummage Sales, and Friends to help them all clean out their closets! Anything will do for children thinking of adventures of long ago! They love old jewelry, strips of material, old uniforms, bonnets, aprons, dress clothes...anything is game! As they pull out the treasures, they pull out the imagination, which keeps history alive for them!

**** Let Them Make Doll Clothes!** We began a passion with my daughter several years ago that has continued for 4 years and will probably continue until she has her own grandchildren. I made her a wardrobe of clothes for her Kirsten doll from the American Girl Dolls. This started a collection and a tradition! Now, her Christmas wish list each year is the next doll with a wardrobe! Since we are now working on teaching her to sew, these doll clothes will be the perfect projects for her to practice on. This year she learned to smock by making her Itty Bitty Baby a bib. She had so much fun! This is unlimited since so many patterns are now available to put those little ones to work creating period costumes for their dolls! Try it and see if the passion does not hit as they make history come alive!

**** Make a Timeline!** We have had two different kinds of timelines in our home. We had a huge one that took up an entire wall in our old home. It was fascinating to watch the little ones as they would “review” and “test” each other on history as they went by! When we built our home, my husband had one request...NO MORE WALLS COVERED WITH TIMELINES! Simple request, huh? Well, what we did was even more fun and personal. We made up a *Book of Centuries* to include all of our history facts! Our Book of Centuries records key events, people we study and their key events, and even our family’s key events! The children have made it their own with illustrations which remind them of those historical figures and events, pictures that they have collected from books and trips that we have taken, information from our Computer Encyclopedias and Internet

Sites, and even charts we have collected or made ourselves! This has been our way of making history more than just a bunch of dull facts...rather it has come alive for us!

I pray that this will help to give you some ideas that you can use in your home to bring history alive! Keep in mind that all of this works as we give our children time to get alone with those in History! Yes, it will work as they have time to lay sieges, carry on adventures, and live side-by-side their heroes as they go back in time! Let your children have those moments to drink in history deeply and you will find History coming alive for them! Happy History!

Nature Studies the Natural Way!

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world!” Psalms 19: 1-4

Our dear Charlotte Mason so believed these truths of our Lord that she made Nature Studies a vital part of her schools around the turn of the century. Charlotte Mason in her book *Home Education* wrote 53 pages devoted to the topic of Out-of-door life for the children...17 more references to Nature Studies... Nature Studies! Amazing! Yet, this area is usually our most neglected area of study...it is for me! However, as we take time daily for out of doors...and weekly for Nature Walks...we will soon find all fitting into place in the homeschool. Perhaps this is the very reason that we find Charlotte Mason devoting so much of her writing to this one area.

Charlotte Mason was not the only propagator of the benefits and necessity of Nature Study. Anna Botsford Comstock, the author of *Handbook of Nature Study*, which was published first in 1911, devoted her whole life to teaching the Nature-study approach for educating children (and adults!) in this vital area of science. Both Charlotte Mason and Anna Comstock knew the delight in Nature Studies for all partakers...children and adult! We are surprised to find the simplicity of long ago being the answer for educating our children with a liberal education today. Let's take a look at many of their ideas mixed with some easy how to's of bringing Nature Studies into our homeschool the Natural Way!

As we homeschoolers look at the methods used in most curriculum, we immediately see a problem with Science but often we are left not knowing what to do about this area of study. It seems that Nature-study would be too simple...certainly so unplanned...difficult to document...and, if you ask me, a little too “natural!” So, which way do we go? I have always been completely uninterested in the typical scope and sequence of modern curriculum since I took a look at just how little is really taught throughout the years from a typical curriculum. Here is an example of the scope and sequence of one of the major homeschool/private school curriculum companies...

Kindergarten...God's Plan for Seeds; God's Plan for Animals; God's Plan for the Seashore; God's Plan for Me; God's Plan for Weather; God's Plan for Seasons
First Grade...The Human Senses; Weather; Classifying Objects; Pets; The Mystery of Sound; God's Plan for my Teeth
Second Grade...Discovering Plants; Discovering Animals; Discovering Insects; Discovering Myself; Discovering my Toys
Third Grade...Exploring the Plant World; Exploring the Vertebrates; Exploring the Invertebrates; Wonderfully Made;

Exploring the Ocean; Exploring the Weather; Exploring the Desert; Exploring the Pond; Exploring the Farmer's Field; Exploring the Forest
Fourth Grade...*Plants and Seeds; The Insect World; Wonders of the Human Body; Food for Growth; Matter; Force and Moving Things; Machines and Power; Consider the Heavens; Causes of Weather; Earth, Moon, and Space; Climate and Living Things; Water and Living Things*
Fifth Grade...*Groups of Living Things; Plants of the Earth; Animals with Backbones; Animals without Backbones; Wonders of the Human Body; Matter and Energy; Mechanical and Heat Energy; Chemical and Nuclear Energy; Electricity; The Weather Forecast; Earth and Space Navigation; Treasures from the Earth; The Fossil Record; Groups of Living Things; Using our Natural Resources Wisely*
Sixth Grade...*The Scientific Method and Measurements; All about Matter; Classes of Matter: Elements; Compounds, Mixtures; Matter is Made of Atoms; The Bohr Model of Atomic Structure; Energy and Chemical Laws; Understanding Processes in Chemistry; Plastics: the World of the Giant; Molecules; Work and Simple Machines-Energy; Waves of Energy and Sound; Two Sides of Light-Man's Wings; How Vast the Universe; Stars; Sun; The Planets; The Moon; Man in Space; The Origin of the Universe*
Seventh Grade...*What is Science; Three Orderly Kingdoms; Animal Wildlife in America; Growth and Structure of Trees; Forestry in America; The Conditions which Support Life on Earth; Order in the Structures and Functions of Life; Modern Farming and Science; The Origin of Life; Science and God's Laws for the Physical Universe; Magnets and Magnetism; Electrons and Electronics; Radio; Television; Order and Reality in the Age of Science*
Eighth Grade...*Astronomy; Through the Telescope; The Conquest of Space; How We Use Astronomy; Matter in Motion; The Movement of Matter; The States of Matter; The Physics of Fluids; The Physics of Heat; Your Wonderful Body; Chemistry and The Human Body; Metabolism; The Physics and Chemistry of self-preservation; How Medical Science Uses Chemistry and Physics; The Effects of Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drugs; Biological Principles and How They Were Developed; Science Vs Evolution*
Ninth Grade...*General Science (Chemistry, Physics, Earth Science)*
Tenth Grade...*Biology*
Eleventh Grade...*Chemistry*
Twelfth Grade...*Physics*

OK...So your children are ready to go on into High School by 1st grade at home with you as well?? I looked at these Scope and Sequences a several years ago and my only thoughts were that this must be what Charlotte Mason meant when she said that textbooks were “twaddle” and written by those who had never chanced to meet a child. Yes, we all know that before a child is even beginning to be educated, they are able to learn these things naturally in their play. The twaddly scope and sequence alone made me scrap the textbooks...but what to do??

Anna Comstock said in her wonderful book *Handbook of Nature Study*, “*If Nature-study as taught does not make the child love nature and the out-of-doors, then it should cease. Let us not inflict permanent injury on the child by turning him away from nature instead of toward it.*” I never caught a love of nature from all those years of taking the teacher’s word for what happened in nature, from all of that tedious memory work, boring reading, and very few times with hands-on study. I made a comment a few years ago to my husband that I only knew one tree, the one so prolific in Mississippi, the Pine Tree. He teasingly asked me which kind of Pine Tree did I know...OOOPPPS...You mean there was more than one kind? Yes, somewhere in the midst of all those years tucked away in a school, I had developed a BIG hole in my vast and wonderful education.

The key for our family has been to turn to learning about God’s beautiful creation. I believe that most of our ignorance about nature is a ploy from satan to keep us from truly having the full revelation of our Lord, God Almighty. It is to keep us away from the riches of wisdom that are awaiting us just outside our door. Let us boldly shed our textbooks, plug the holes, and get out doors!

Out-of-Doors Daily!

Charlotte Mason advocated short lessons finished early into the day just so that the children could have plenty of time out-of-doors. She felt that children needed several hours each and every day just to do the things that simply cannot be done inside...explore, climb trees and mountains, exercise, hike, run, jump rocks, watch clouds, learn about weather, collect nature (rocks, flowers, leaves...), sing, shout, paint, watch animals, hunt tracks, learn natural geography, so on! Charlotte recommended that the parents and teachers take a blanket outside along with a project to do (needlework, books, writing, and sketchbooks...) while the children explored around them. She wanted for this time of the day to be a leisurely time for children and adults. This time was not meant for lectures or lessons per say...rather for the children to have access to mom as they leisurely brought back their finds...or described the intricate details of what they saw outside. The focus was to be simple recognition of nature all throughout the year in all different seasons, to learn the life cycle of plants and animals informally as they go along, and to grow in appreciation and attentiveness to the tiny details of God's creation!

Weekly Nature Walk...

In the PNEU (Parent's National Education Union) schools set up by Charlotte Mason, the students were taken each week on a nature walk. Anna Comstock writes in her book about what she called a field excursion (try that one for your record keeping!), "*It is a mistake to think that a half day is necessary for a field lesson, since a very efficient field trip may be made during the ten or fifteen minutes at recess.*" Perhaps this has been my major folly in the past. In the busyness of our daily lives, I am often the very one to put off Nature Walks and hikes because I simply do not always have a whole afternoon each week. Comfort of all Comfort...Nature walks can be just as simple or just as complex as we have time and energy for!

The Nature walk is meant to be leisurely. Again, it is not a time for lectures or lessons by the parent. Rather, it is a time for parents and children to break away from the ole-grind to get out in God's beautiful world. Today, we only took 20 minutes to walk down the road and collect some Queen Anne's Lace and Poison Hemlock. We brought them back home, discussing and comparing them all the way. At home, I brought out my Handbook of Nature Studies while they were looking at the two flowers. I simply asked them to notice more carefully the differences such as the leaves on the stems...what made them look like lace far off...the roots...and the tiny flowers, which make up the entire cluster. We read about this gorgeous "weed" and were thankful that it was brought to America from Europe! Although our walk resulted in a lesson, lessons are not necessary. In fact, ours only resulted from our quest for more knowledge. I know I shared above about my complete ignorance in the area of nature. This is actually all for the best. It limits my lectures and my explanations while teaching the children how mom finds out what she wants to know...I look it up! You know it is really much, much better as I am forced to disciple my children in how to learn as we go!

Hindrances to Nature Walks...

Just as this ignorance is strength, it has also been a hindrance. I have often felt so overwhelmed by Nature Studies. I have read so much about Nature Notebooks which all seemed to terrify me...SO much work! My mother always seemed to just “know” all about trees, flowers, animals, and birds! I felt so dumb that I just could not get interested in this one area that I so much wanted to learn about. So, my one hindrance has now become my biggest plus as I have learned that it is perfect that I am learning with the children. This whole process is showing them where to get facts, how to learn, and at the same time developing deep bonds with them as we learn all of these treasures together for the very first time!

This first hindrance leads me to another hindrance...too much planning! I know you are saying, “Did I read this right? Too much planning?” Yes, I do believe that this is one of my greatest hindrances. With a true Nature Walk planning is difficult. I always think of the scripture, ***“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.”*** (Proverbs 19:21, NIV) This seems to be my life lesson! The struggle between my plans and God’s best is no less of a struggle in the area of Nature Studies than the rest of my life! For the greatest benefit, we simply must have random, teachable moments in our study of God’s Creation! Planning gets in the way of learning as we go. I know what a stickler I am for going by the plan that is in motion. Want to knock me off my rocker...test my character? Change the plan to look at a bug rather than collect leaves! (Hehe! I am really getting better you all!) We have simply put away the plans in exchange for letting the children discover the treasures of God that are to be our study! So far, this is bringing more than just delight in learning; we are learning recognition while becoming attentive to the little treasures in life! God’s best is truly better than all of my best “laid” plans!

Another major hindrance has been my time! I have been so busy for the past year on the go that my time for the beautiful has been lacking. Plus, I have always thought that I needed to plan for an afternoon set aside just for our hike. This is just another hindrance from getting in touch with God’s creation! We do need a slow pace in order to have time for anything beautiful in our homes but it really does not require a planned outing to get the benefits of a Nature Walk. We can simply take the children along on our daily walk around our neighborhood (Good news! I read the other day that we can shape up just as well if we take a leisurely stroll through our neighborhood as we can if we do a power walk! Why not develop relationships while developing those legs!).

We can also go to the local park. We love our local parks here in the Quad Cities. The Spring Park (Tuscumbia) has gorgeous ducks, geese, birds, and squirrels, which are very eager to take all your scraps off of your hands. The Gatman Park (Muscle Shoals) and Veteran’s Memorial Park (Florence) both have a wide variety of plants, trees, and birds. We saw a very rare (in our area!) Woodpecker and his sweetheart courting at the Gatman Park last summer! Don’t be fooled by the traffic of humans, these animals hardly notice all of us for all the goodies they find after we leave! We often take a picnic lunch or even fast food for a moment out of doors at our parks! All that is really needed for Nature Study is consistency in using time wisely so that we can see all of the beauty as the season’s change before our eyes! Whether a walk around our neighborhood, a picnic, or a

formal hike, we can have the benefits as we consistently take the time to get out-doors with God's Creation!

As much as we enjoy our times that we have taken away for a Nature Break, I really think that the biggest hindrance has been my heart. In my heart, I have really not thought that Nature Studies were as vital and important as all of the other things which we "make" time for! I now believe that Nature Study is vital to all of us if we ever want to get to know God intimately. I shared above that Satan would love to keep us from nature...I think it is because he knows that God reveals so much of His Character through His creation.

I thought about this a couple of weeks ago as I watched our hen with her baby chicks. One of the names of God in Hebrew is El Shaddai or in our language, Almighty. This name teaches us of God's quality of taking us under the shadow of His wing much like a hen does with her chicks when in danger or just to nurture them as they grow safely. This name also means "*breasted one*" much like a mother taking her little infant to her breast for sustenance, nourishment, and comfort. As we take time to ponder God's creation, we are able to see a part of God that is revealed not by mighty words or lectures or sermons, but rather in the quietness of the natural. We miss a powerful message by not taking time to ponder creation...we miss that message that when we are weary God is our Sustenance. When storms of life are raging, God is our Protector from the winds and rains and dangers. When we are hungry and do not know where to turn, that God is our Provider giving total provision of our every need. Yes, my heart was the hindrance from being able to access the very revelation of the heart of God!

Ideas for Nature Study...

OK...Hindrances aside, you are fully convinced and now want to know how to do it? Let's jump into some ideas for Nature Studies. Keep in mind that you might want to begin with just ONE thing...the rest are here just for an abundance of many ideas! Have fun!

**** Find a spot to observe Nature that all of your family will enjoy...**Your Neighborhood, A Biking Trail, Zoo, Botanical Garden, A Canyon, A Mountain Trail, The Local Park, The River, Planetarium, Aquarium, Wild Life Refuge, Arboretum, Vacation Spot, Living History Museum, A Friend's Neighborhood, Grandma's Back Yard... Just start small. You can start with your own yard, a local park, an arboretum, hiking trails, or vacation spots. The public places usually have a hiking map or have the trees marked so there is no guesswork for novices! Don't forget to always ask for any teacher lesson plans wherever you go. Our local aquarium gives wonderful handouts with coloring sheets, information pages galore, and actual study lessons just for the asking! We also acquired fantastic booklets, books, posters, and information pages from local, state, and federal agencies. They are thrilled by the interest and will even tell you about (or take you!) to wonderful trails or sites in your area! The foresters are always looking for little helpers to go plant trees or help with their projects! All of these are wonderful outlets but it is just as fun to start in your own yard because there are millions of treasures there just for the noticing!

**** Develop a Nature Notebook...** This need not be difficult. We struggled for years with the desire to have beautiful sketchbooks like Edith *Holden's A Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*. Finally, we decided to just keep a Notebook that is much like a cross between a scrapbook and our copybooks. (Look in the back of this issue for more about the How-to's of a Nature Notebook!)

**** Start a Collection!** Collections teach much informally. They teach how to organize, label, display, and date materials gathered! This is a natural project that you will find the children doing on their own! Your collections can be of anything! You may like to collect rocks, leaves, butterflies, flowers, pictures of the sunset or sunrise, feathers, nature poetry...the list is unlimited! You can also swap or sell extras from your collection to friends or family long distance! They may not have the same treasures in their back yard that you have!

**** Set up a Seasonal Table.** There are some great ideas in *Victorian Family Celebrations* By Sarah Ban Breathnach. This is a MUST for Mother Culture!!! For your seasonal table...just set up a table or a shelf in your home that is just for the display of treasures found outside throughout the various seasons, books that are favored read alouds each year during that particular season, or special crafts made especially during that season! Decorate the table in different colors to go along with the seasons! Let this be a project for the children to keep up throughout the year!

**** Keep a Nature bag/backpack ready to go!** Essentials are your nature notebooks, field guides, paints, pencils, camera...and snacks!

**** Do a Tree Study!** Trees are easy to begin with. Pick a tree and sketch the tree, its leaves, and its blooms into your sketchbook. If you are like me and not so good at sketching, just take a picture! In your notebook add special details like the date, where you found it, common name and Latin name for the tree, and a description of the tree. You may want to describe the branches, bark, birds/insects living in the tree, and the purpose of the tree!

**** Do an indoor terrarium or aquarium! *Pets in a Jar*** By Seymour Simon has lots of ideas for how to set up a home and care for special pets such as Hydras, Planarians, Pond Snails, Water Bugs, Tadpoles, Newts, Toads, Earthworms, Ants, Crickets, Praying Mantles, Butterflies, Moths, Brine Shrimp, Hermit Crabs, and Starfish. You can find it at your local library! We currently have a caterpillar and two BumbleBees in captivity! These critters are so neat to watch that you hardly know you are learning!

**** Learn out of door Geography!** Get to know firsthand about rivers, forests, mountains, beaches, streams, wetlands, pastures, creeks! This will come as you simply get out-doors!

**** Keep lists!** As you go along, you will see many things only once. Keep lists of animals, birds, life cycles, observations of animals, times for the rising and setting of the sun, temperatures, weather, records of experiments. Just keep each list in the back of your nature notebook.