

# Rooted Childhood

CREATE & CONNECT THROUGH THE SEASONS

## HANDICRAFTS FOR HOMESCHOOLERS



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“...THE HUMAN HAND IS A WONDERFUL AND  
EXQUISITE INSTRUMENT TO BE USED IN A  
HUNDRED MOVEMENTS EXACTING DELICACY,  
DIRECTION AND FORCE;

EVERY SUCH MOVEMENT IS A CAUSE OF JOY  
AS IT LEADS TO THE PLEASURE OF EXECUTION  
AND THE TRIUMPH OF SUCCESS.”

~ CHARLOTTE MASON



# Introduction

*Rooted Childhood* offers ways to connect with your child and celebrate the seasons through songs, stories, and meaningful craft projects. A childhood rooted in simple pleasures and connection isn't rushed, hectic, or hurried. Connection happens best in the slow hours of a day. A lull in the busyness of a day when we can sit with our child in a quiet moment is often when the greatest conversations and heartfelt moments happen.

This *Handicrafts for Homeschoolers* guide aims to provide a starting point for creating more of these precious opportunities for connection through the wonderful gift of handicrafts.

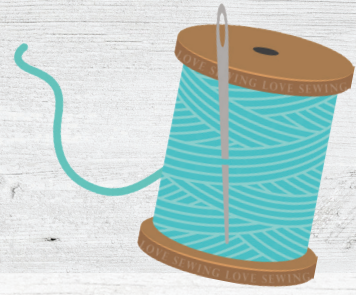
Every child has their own special gifts, and each family operates with unique circumstances. Know that these ideas should be taken as inspiration and adapted to fit your child's needs and abilities and within your family's rhythm.

May your days be filled with magic and wonder and your heart filled with joy as you rediscover childhood through handicrafts.

-Meghann



# Handicrafts



## WHAT IS A HANDICRAFT?

Excerpt from *L'Umile Pianta* (pg. 11) by E.R. Tetley, September 1912

The word handicraft covers a multitude of "works." It includes needlework of all kinds, knitting, crochet, netting, tatting, basket-work, cardboard and wood sloyd, cartonwork, leather-work, bookbinding, and many other arts, useful or ornamental.

Almost the first thing babies instinctively learn to do when they are a few months old is to use their fingers, and I suppose one of the chief objects of most handicrafts is to train those fingers to further usefulness. If mothers and nurses would encourage little ones to use their fingers in drawing, sewing, knitting, paper folding, etc., how much easier it would be later to teach them to write?

I really think it is a mistake to teach children any handicraft in which they cannot produce satisfactory results. If they are conscientious and like to do good work, they will do well. But if not, they grow careless and contented with bad results.

## WHAT MAKES A HANDICRAFT?

While there are many, many options for handicrafts, there are some common traits:

- » Handicrafts are useful and/or beautiful.
- » Handicrafts are taught slowly and carefully.
- » Handicrafts can bring joy to others.
- » Handicrafts should suit a person's abilities.

Handicrafts are useful skills that can turn into a hobby, be used to give as gifts to others, or contribute to the home atmosphere.



## THE VALUE IN HANDICRAFTS FOR CHILDREN

One of Charlotte Mason's 20 principles is that "Education is the Science of Relations." This method is built upon the idea that a child naturally has relations with a vast number of things and thoughts, and that a curriculum isn't complete without exposing children to ideas beyond books: physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science, and art, among other things.

It is through hands-on experiences that book learning can eventually come alive inside a child. Without those experiences, there would be no relations for the child to draw upon to make sense of what he learns in his book lessons.

Mason says that it is not our business to teach a child all about anything, but to help the child validate their natural curiosity and joy in experiencing the world. When we look at the world "through the eyes of a child" we are capturing a small piece of that joy, and that is what any curriculum should aim to nurture and expand upon.

Humans have worked with their hands since the beginning of time. The act of creating is innate within children and adults. When children are given proper tools and education surrounding these creative endeavors, they are developing skills, patience, accuracy, perseverance, dexterity, and artistic appreciation.

Handicrafts engage the whole child—the head, heart, and hands with an impact that goes far beyond any curriculum. We see the value in handicrafts because they:

- » turn fine motor exercises into real-world life skills;
- » engage areas of the brain required for decision-making and planning ahead;
- » allow for artistic expression in design, color, and form;
- » provide balance in an increasingly technological world;
- » encourage freedom of expression;
- » become a source of pride, boosting a child's ego and self-esteem in a healthy way;
- » require attention to detail and following instructions;
- » encourage mindfulness and bring awareness to senses and feelings without judgment;
- » create a safe space for growth and improvement;
- » remind us to appreciate objects for their simplicity and usefulness; and
- » provide time for the mind to internalize and process academic lessons and ideas.

## HANDICRAFTS AS PART OF A CHARLOTTE MASON EDUCATION

A Charlotte Mason education is one that has both breadth and depth. Students are invited to feast on ideas set forth through living books and digest those ideas through the process of narration. The simplicity of reading high-quality literature and having a student tell back what they heard or read works remarkably well today just as it did more than 100 years ago in Mason's time.

But Mason didn't believe that an education was to be only learning from books. In *School Education Vol. 3*, Mason declares that "education should be by *Things* and by *Books*."

What are the *things* in a Charlotte Mason education? The things are what make a Charlotte Mason education not just based in books, but also a hands-on education.

### SOME WAYS TO INCORPORATE HANDS-ON LEARNING:

- » Get outside in nature and experience the joys of the natural world with all five senses.
- » Allow children ample space for movement and play, especially outdoors.
- » Incorporate maps and scientific instruments such as a magnifying glass, microscope, or compass to expand and solidify ideas discovered firsthand or through living books.
- » Train the eyes and the hands to create art through regular sketching in a nature journal and drawing lessons as well as many opportunities to draw from the imagination.
- » Work with a variety of materials such as wool, leather, paper, and wood as the children are taught specific handicraft skills.

### SCHEDULING NOTE

In general, Mason encouraged a morning spent doing formal lessons with books and an afternoon allowing students an opportunity for more experiential learning through *things*.

At Mason's Parents' National Education Union (PNEU) schools, all students would begin school at 9:00 a.m. Form I students finished morning lessons by 11:30 a.m., Form II students finished by 12:00 p.m., and all other students finished by 1:00 p.m.

After morning lessons, students enjoyed being outdoors until 3:45 p.m. This time was for unstructured free play, games, nature study, sketching in nature journals, and taking nature walks. Art, music, and leisure reading may have been included in this time as well.

The hour before teatime (3:45-4:45 p.m.) was set aside for handicrafts.

## INCORPORATING HANDICRAFTS INTO YOUR HOMESCHOOL

When it comes to incorporating handicrafts into your homeschool, there are two basic methods. You may choose to use one method or both methods in combination. For most families, use of these methods will likely ebb and flow with the different seasons of life.

### ***Method 1: Teach handicrafts as a standalone subject (for school-age children 6+).***

When teaching handicrafts as a standalone subject, it is wise to choose just one skill to work on per term or semester. Choose one day a week to spend 20-30 minutes on the lesson plus ample time in the afternoons for the child to continue working and practice.

An outline for the term might be:

Week 1: Introduce the child to the handicraft by looking at samples of finished works, discussing terminology, and demonstrating proper use of tools.

Week 2: Allow the child to practice the skill.

Weeks 3-4: Continue to practice the skill by doing a small project that can be completed in one to two lessons.

Weeks 5-6: Continue practicing the skill and begin planning for a larger project that will take several weeks to complete. Create a design, outline the necessary steps, estimate the time to complete, and gather materials before beginning.

Weeks 7-12: Work on a larger project, and repeat if time allows to focus on improvement.



As an example, for a term focused on knot tying/macrame, an outline of projects might look like this:

Week 1: Discuss the value of knots and think about where knots have been useful in history and today, learn the four different knot categories, and present practice ropes for tying with ends taped in two contrasting colors.

Week 2: Use practice ropes to tie a variety of small knots. Use a large rope outside to tie large knots around trees, buckets, stones, etc.

Week 3: Introduce and practice half-hitch knots by making a friendship bracelet.

Week 4: Practice more knot tying by making macrame feathers. Once the skill has been mastered, the child can make a variety of feathers to hang on a stick as a wall decoration.

Week 5: Research and begin planning final project. Sketch out designs, create a materials list, and create a rough timeline to ensure the project will be completed in time. Also, create a simple macrame plant pot holder.

Week 6: Gather all of the materials, and write/sketch out a final plan. Projects might include a macrame bunting, wall hanging, pillow case, or table runner.

Weeks 7-12: Work on the final project. If the project takes less than the remaining weeks in the term, the child can repeat the project, noting any improvements or lessons learned, or design and create a new project.



**Method 2: Use handicrafts as an illustrative method of teaching whenever the opportunity arises.**

With this method, we substitute the idea of teaching handicrafts for the idea of teaching *through* handicrafts. This method works especially well in the younger years, though it has value throughout a child's education.

A key tenet of this method is that the need for the thing-to-be-made must appear to the child and must be recognized by him as genuine.

Reading *Blueberries for Sal* and then embarking on creating a paper plate bear because you saw it on Pinterest serves very little, if any value. On the other hand, if you were reading through the book with your preschooler and she showed an interest in the process of canning blueberries, you might decide together to go pick blueberries, can them together, and even bake a blueberry pie with the fruits of your labor. The need for canning and preparing for winter is a genuine need that even a preschooler can recognize.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the work must appeal to the child's nature. As children are constantly growing and changing, this means that over the course of a year or many years, the handicrafts a child produces will be quite varied. If we are allowing a child's interest to guide the work, this method requires flexibility, creativity, and trust on the part of the parent. It also requires a range of high-quality supplies to be kept on hand for projects.

There is beauty in the simplicity of handicrafts used as an integral part of learning through any curriculum. A great number of these types of handicrafts will not require the parent to have specialized skills or knowledge before embarking on projects. Gentle guidance and encouragement along with a few books from the library or video tutorials will allow your child to create many wonderful things.

Examples of using handicrafts as part of teaching:

- » Your child builds a bluebird nesting box after spotting a pair of birds on a nature walk.
- » You bake a *Buche de Noel* after reading about French holiday traditions in a book.
- » Your child creates a coat of arms for your family while studying English history.
- » Your child creates story stones to retell a favorite fairy tale.
- » Your child whittles a spoon after learning about hardwoods and softwoods.
- » You plant tulip bulbs after studying the Netherlands.
- » You practice napkin folding while preparing for a family party.

## HANDICRAFTS IN THE REAL WORLD

Every child can benefit from the inclusion of handicrafts in a homeschool curriculum. Handicrafts can be universally appealing, though each child and each family will approach this area of study in their own unique way. When planning for handicrafts as part of your homeschool, there are a few questions you may want to ask yourself:

- » When can we schedule handicrafts into our days?
- » What handicrafts do I want to learn alongside my child?
- » What types of handicrafts is my child interested in?
- » What supplies do I need on hand complete handicraft lessons and impromptu projects?
- » How are my child's fine motor skills compared to other children her age?

If you or your child has special needs, find opportunities to stretch and grow when you plan for handicrafts that optimize strengths instead of focusing on weaknesses or the inability to do a task.

Handicrafts should tuck neatly into your homeschool days without adding extra stress. Be realistic when planning your handicrafts, allowing plenty of time for free exploration of craft materials in addition to any lessons or structured work.

In seasons when you can't fit in formal handicraft lessons, there is no need to worry, as most homeschool families live a rich, full life and allowing a child to participate in the inner workings of a home is a wonderful experience. Folding laundry, doing dishes, mending clothes, cooking dinner, changing the oil on your car, and so many other routine tasks can be considered handicrafts.



## LEARNING BY DOING

We not only learn to do by doing, but we come to know through *trying* to do. And we often learn more through our failures than through our successes. We defraud the children if we deprive them of this important factor in their development.

Learning through handicrafts should not require perfection according to *your* standards. The standard for measuring the quality of a child's work is only such a degree of perfection as is possible through a child's unaided efforts.

If we provide a child with projects that capture his interest, he will do his best work. This work will please him best when it is well done, and this pleasure will cultivate a habit of doing good work.

Care must be taken to provide work that is on the level on a child's abilities. Handicrafts should broaden a child's experience and lift it to a higher level, but it should not frustrate a child because he lacks the physical ability to complete the task.

Handicrafts allow a child to develop great independence as a master of his tools. While students must be taught how to handle tools properly and certain handicraft skills, allowing a child the freedom to create without patterns and definite directions is ideal.





# Handicraft Ideas

## NEEDLEWORK

- » embroidery
- » needlepoint
- » cross stitch
- » hand sewing on burlap
- » hand sewing on felt
- » quilting
- » machine sewing
- » plastic canvas needlework
- » sewing buttons
- » appliqué

## YARN CRAFTS

- » finger knitting
- » arm knitting
- » knitting
- » punch needle
- » spool knitting
- » lucet fork knitting
- » braiding star
- » weaving
- » spin with a drop spindle
- » crochet
- » yarn tassels
- » yarn pom poms
- » yarn dyeing
- » rug hooking

## PAPER CRAFTS

- » decoupage
- » paper mâché
- » quilling
- » handmade cards
- » crepe paper flowers
- » origami
- » paper sloyd
- » cardboard sloyd
- » papermaking
- » scrapbooking
- » pop-up books
- » embossing paper
- » bookbinding
- » calligraphy
- » collage

## HANDMADE TOYS

- » dollhouse construction
- » doll making
- » balloon animals
- » puppet making
- » cork compass
- » clock making
- » beanbags
- » toy boats
- » spinning top
- » DIY board games

## HOMEMAKING

- » baking
- » cooking
- » candy making
- » planting seeds
- » candle making
- » cake decorating
- » floral design
- » wreath making
- » napkin folding
- » braiding hair
- » cloth dyeing
- » bow making
- » wrapping presents
- » soap making
- » fire building
- » loose leaf tea mixing
- » natural salves
- » bath bombs
- » houseplant care

## WOOD

- » woodworking with hand tools
- » wood burning
- » whittling
- » spoon carving
- » bird house
- » bug hotel
- » derby cars
- » paint peg dolls

## TACTILE WORK

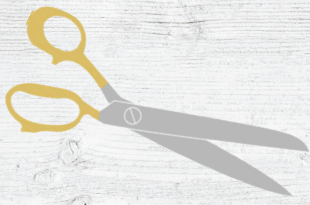
- » polymer clay
- » modeling clay
- » wet felting
- » salt dough
- » beeswax modeling
- » homemade play dough

## SEASONAL CRAFTS

- » egg decorating
- » corn husk dolls
- » pressed flowers
- » bird feeders
- » banner making
- » flower crowns
- » leaf crowns
- » suncatchers

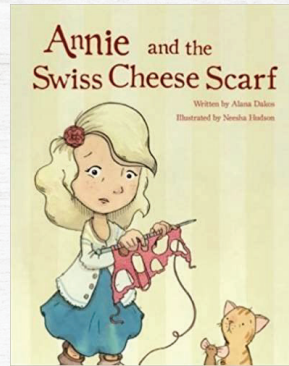
## MISCELLANEOUS

- » basic knots
- » friendship bracelets
- » string art
- » beaded jewelry
- » rope baskets
- » needle felting
- » mosaics
- » leather carving
- » block printing
- » robotics
- » macramé
- » carving soap
- » wire sculpting
- » paracord bracelets
- » map making
- » Perler beads
- » fly tying
- » metal casting
- » pot holder loom
- » photography



# Picture Book Recommendations

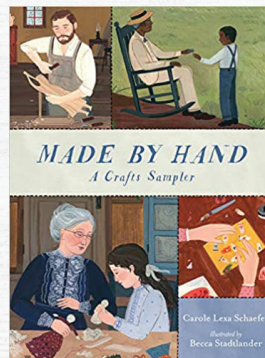
**ANNIE AND THE SWISS CHEESE SCARF**  
BY ALANA DAKOS



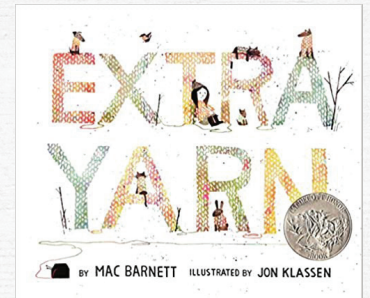
**I HAD A FAVORITE DRESS**  
BY BONI ASHBURN



**MADE BY HAND:  
A CRAFTS SAMPLER**  
BY CAROLE LEXA SCHAEFER



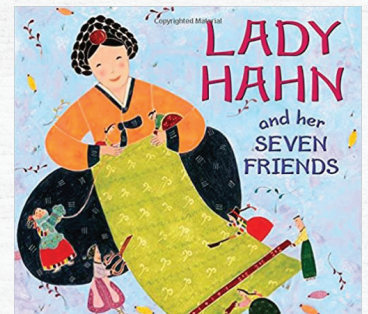
**EXTRA YARN**  
BY MAC BARNETT



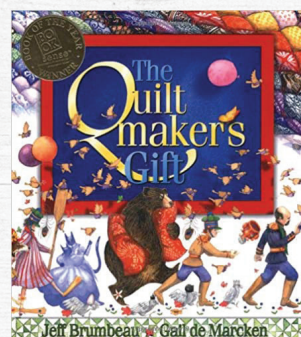
**THE PAPER CRANE**  
BY MOLLY BANG



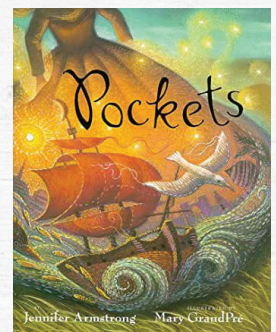
**LADY HAHN AND HER SEVEN FRIENDS**  
BY YUMI HEO



**THE QUILTMAKER'S GIFT**  
BY JEFF BRUMBEAU



**POCKETS**  
BY JENNIFER ARMSTRONG



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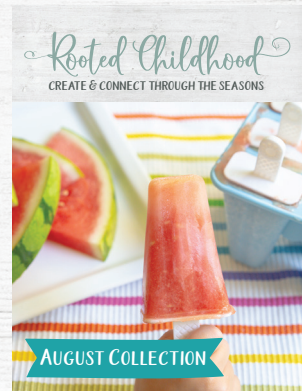
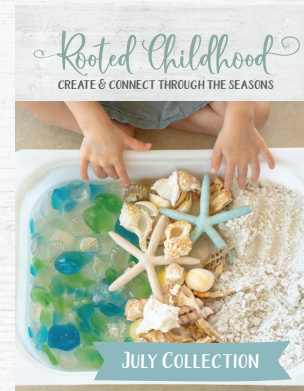
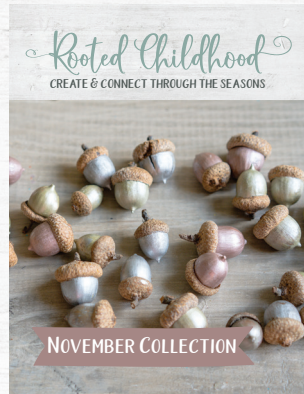
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# About The Author



My childhood wasn't a fairy tale. From the moment I became a mother, I knew I wanted something different for my own children.

I poured my heart into mothering and creating a peaceful, loving home for my first baby. When we started preschool at home, I traded the sweet rhythms of our days for a rigorous schedule and genuine moments of connection for marking things off of a list. We were doing school, but our hearts were longing for more. I knew there had to be more to learning than the ABCs and cut-and-paste crafts, but I wasn't quite sure where to look.

I stumbled onto the Charlotte Mason educational philosophy and discovered the beauty of delaying formal academics. I started making our homeschool more about home and less about school. We got out in nature, started doing real work and creating meaningful arts and crafts, and found the joy of connection and a simple, slow childhood. It's the childhood I didn't have, but the one my children, and yours, deserve.

I'm Meghann: a wife, mother of three, and proud lefty who lives in the Texas Hill Country on seven acres with a large garden, two dogs, and a flock of too many chickens. *Rooted Childhood* is a love letter to my children and a celebration of the sacred days we spend together. I am humbly honored to share it with you and families across the globe.



*Keep in touch!*

[ROOTEDCHILDHOOD.COM](http://ROOTEDCHILDHOOD.COM)

[CONTACT@ROOTEDCHILDHOOD.COM](mailto:CONTACT@ROOTEDCHILDHOOD.COM)

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