

**DOLLAR HOMESCHOOL'S**  
*Guide to the*  
**MCGUFFEY**  
**READERS**  
*And Other Eclectic Series Books*



With history, philosophy and practical helps  
and charts, written by Sherry K. Hayes,  
homeschooling mother of 15 children.



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## *Introduction*

Precious—*that is what these children are*. They are in my care, they are relying on me to train them, to love them, to show them the way to live, and to point them to life with God in Christ.

This is why I began to homeschool. It wasn't about convenience or gaining prestige. It certainly was not about money. It was about the responsibility I had before God and men to diligently raise my children, "In the fear and admonition of the Lord".

Over the last 23 years of actual homeschooling experience I have tried just about every curriculum and method available, from textbooks to unit studies to Charlotte Mason to the *unschooling* methodology.

The first curriculum materials I received in the mail included a copy of the original *McGuffey's Primer* (published by Mott Media). I used it infrequently, not quite understanding what I was supposed to do with it. Eventually it found its way to the bottom of the toys' bin, decorated with crayon and tattered almost beyond recognition.

Today, not only the McGuffey Readers Series, but just about every primary subject in our homeschooling is based on or benefited by these dear old volumes and the time-honored practices they promote.

Here are some of the foundational reasons I have decided to place these books in a prominent place in our homeschooling core curriculum:

- ◆ They were written during a time in our history when Biblical Christianity was practiced and endorsed throughout America. Both Professor McGuffey and Dr. Ray, the most well known names in the Eclectic Series, were God-fearing men, committed to the furthering of the Christian faith and morality through education within the United States. The Bible is referred to in Ray's Arithmetics, the grammars, history books, and especially in the readers, which contain frequent Bible passages as dynamic and practical lessons.

- ◆ They were written chiefly by men, and intended for a pioneering people. There is a rare manly certainty about these materials. Children are taught to stand for what is true, and to do what is right even if it means leaving behind one or two ill-mannered companions. A central theme in these manuscripts, hard work, was regarded as a *manly* pursuit!
- ◆ They were formulated for one-room school houses with a specific focus on independent study, which is perfect for the homeschooling family with children of various ages and at different learning stages.
- ◆ They are extremely affordable. The books on these discs can be printed and copied up to four times for family use. They are also non-consumable, which means they can be used repeatedly for quite a number of children.
- ◆ They are uncomplicated, yet extremely intelligent. These are not “dumbed-down” texts filled with boring and frivolous, nonsensical stories. All of these narratives are interesting and meaningful. They instruct children in morals and pragmatic wisdom while teaching reading, writing and arithmetic.
- ◆ They prepare children for both real life and the academic world. If a child can read and understand these materials, with their wealth of descriptive language and proper grammar, and learn to write and do mathematics from them, they will be able to understand any written or spoken verbiage in any sphere of life—whether in the business world or while preparing for a career at a university. They will actually be far above and beyond their peers in their ability to calculate and think on a more advanced level.

Besides all this, they don't take up a lot of time. Students of the past, especially children of pioneer families (William H. McGuffey was the son of pioneers), didn't have much time to spend in school. The lessons are short, but complete. These consistent, quaint lessons will turn out far better students than modern methods could ever produce in twice the time!

For our family, this means more time available for other key endeavors, such as additional in-depth Bible study time, learning practical life skills such as home and auto repair, cooking, or even beginning a home-based business!

In our race to become contemporary and relevant, even the Christian church in America has lost its “saltiness”. Many of us have gone our own way and become secular and humanistic in daily life practice. In the imperfect writings of the past we may find elements that have been inexcusably absent, or forgotten, which, had they remained intact, could better prepare us for the work God has for the current and even succeeding generations.

Many families struggle to find the added time and money to homeschool, especially since they are forced to live on a single income. Utilizing the Eclectic Education Series not only saves time and money, but it ensures that children are gaining an education which fulfills a parent’s godly responsibilities towards his/her children.

This is why I am so convinced that my “extra” time is well spent (I am currently homeschooling nine children myself) in researching and helping folks understand how to use these wonderful materials in their homes, cottage schools, and wherever they can make a significant difference!

*Sherry K. Hayes*

October, 2011

Visit my website: *Large Family Mothering*, [www.ladyofvirtue.blogspot.com](http://www.ladyofvirtue.blogspot.com)

## *Philosophies of learning*

I can't begin to tell you how enamored I am with the McGuffey readers. They have been literally an answer to my prayers.

You see, I have been all across the homeschooling curriculum landscape. I have forged ahead when there was no support and little or no money. I have blazed through the vast wilderness of reading instruction and battled the bear of *learning delays* and *disabilities*. I have fought through the storms of *math phobia* and witnessed the sun breaking through the clouds of confusion in all its glory and clarity.



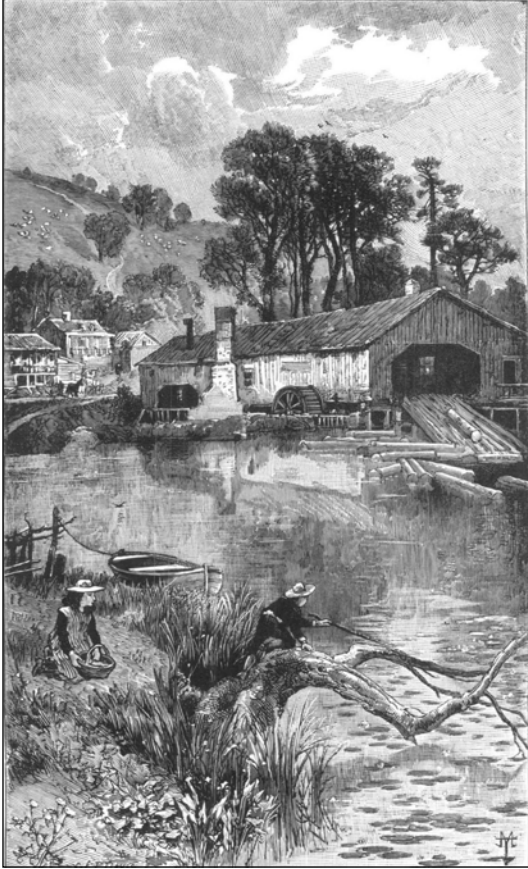
### *The pioneer woman*

I have now been officially homeschooling since 1988 and have thus far “graduated” six of my children all the way through high school. While teaching my own family I experienced anew how stimulating learning actually is, and definitely how godly and wonderful true scholarship can be.

*“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”*

**Jesus Christ**  
*Matthew 9:42*

As my mind was clearing, and while I was discovering for myself new things about learning (new to me) I became much more aware of how modern methods, even the so-called “Christian” ones, were not compatible or even in agreement with a truly Christian education and worldview.



Among the influences which have caused me to think along these lines were the celebrated writings and materials available focusing on the Charlotte Mason method of learning.

Miss Mason's methods were very well developed and poignant; she advocated short lessons for children, and the use of real books for their education. What is more, she wrote directly to the home educating mother, with wisdom far beyond her years. Mothers were to create an "atmosphere" of learning, with the best of literature and the arts. She found a way to apply her strong Christian faith to the instruction of children.

Narration, oral and written, was the cornerstone of her language instruction. It was her understanding that when students retell in their own words, their minds are processing on a higher level, and all sorts of learning is taking place. Proper grammar and sentence structure, along with vocabulary, memory and clarity of thought, are altogether engaged and encouraged by this discipline.

*"Let them once get in touch with nature and a habit is formed which will be a source of delight and habit through life."*

**Charlotte Mason**

*"But one who tries this method on himself will find that in the act of narrating every power of his mind comes into play."*

**Charlotte Mason**

Nature study and outdoor exploration were also fundamental to a good education. Her students were to be engaged in "book learning" for only a few hours each day, and the rest of the time was to be spent in the enjoyment of the great out-of-doors.



By reading about and practicing many of her ideals in our home, I have been set free from the workbook/textbook/scope-and-sequence mentality so prevalent and responsible for the failure of modern education.

After having raised six children, I have to say I can heartily recommend Charlotte Mason's techniques, but with one slight caveat—they weren't always practical for implementation for the large family, with so many students at so many stages and learning levels.

*"It's the child you are teaching, not the book. Bend the book, or find another; make the studies fit the child."*

**Ruth Beechick**, *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*

I have also been influenced by many other thinkers and teachers. Ruth Beechick is one in particular who comes to mind. This dear woman also advocates the teaching of language arts through literature. I have read her guides and been blessed by them as well (she is a great fan of the McGuffey's readers and has written a guide for the original ones, published by Mott Media).

*"...if you are loving and can read, write, count, and speak clearly, you are a master teacher."*

**Dr. Raymond Moore**,  
*The Successful Homeschool Family*

The teachings of Dr Raymond and Dorothy Moore were also foundational to me. Their emphasis on allowing children to live real lives, not just to sit in front of a stack of workbooks, was liberating. They advocated delaying learning for some children who may

not be mature enough for close book work. Their writings are full of actual examples of children who have thrived learning with their "formula":

- 1) **Study** from a few minutes to several hours a day, depending on the child's maturity,
- 2) **Manual work**, at least as much as study.
- 3) **Home and/or community** service an hour or so a day.

The Moore's were also great fans of the McGuffey readers.

Marilyn Howshall, who emphasizes self-education through Bible study and personal interest, has also been influential. I use her notebooking ideas in our other areas of study.

*“I believe the true purpose of the homeschool movement is the turning of parents’ hearts toward God, allowing Him to mature them in a deeper grace and a pervasive faith in their daily lives. It is our own character and heart that must be trained and then that of our children. This is best done in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ where there are absolutes for living found in the Bible, power and grace for the journey from the Holy Spirit, and a higher level of wisdom and understanding from God above to all those who ask.”*

**Marilyn Howshall,**  
*The Science, Art, and Tools of Learning*

*“When children are given whole lives instead of age-graded ones in cellblocks, they learn to read, write, and do arithmetic with ease, if those things make sense in the kind of life that unfolds around them.”*

**John Taylor Gatto**

Still, with all of these wonderful minds influencing mine, there was a great gap—I even struggled with finding a way to pull it all together so that it would work for my large, busy family.

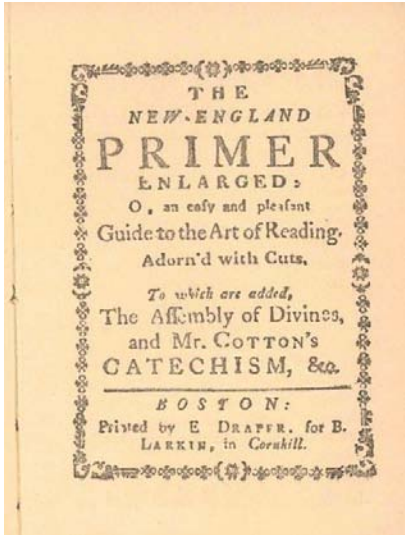
John Taylor Gatto, former New York State and New York City teacher of the year, has taught me more about what education *isn't* than I ever thought I needed to know! He made me stop and think carefully about methods of teaching which were really birthed out of desire for hierarchical control rather than motivated by the needs of the child or his family.



This is when I began exploring the McGuffey readers.

## Some History

Professor McGuffey lived at an unprecedented time in human history. Not since the first-century had so many been persuaded to follow Christ. The Second Great Awakening in America is said to have begun in 1800, the year of McGuffey's birth, and lasted until the beginning of the Civil War.

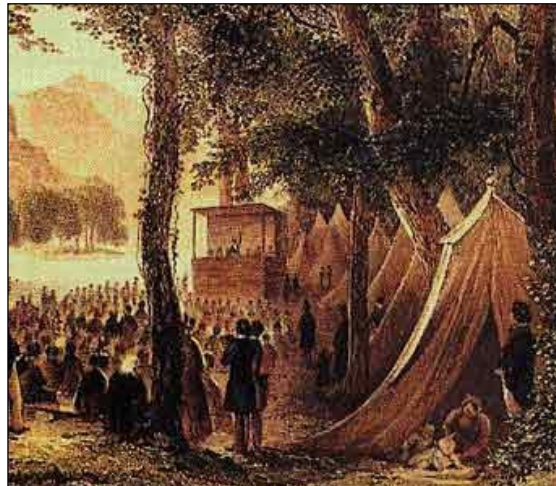


The New-England Primer

During this time there were so many revivals and camp meetings that even Christian publications could not track them. The population was convinced, as never before, that their greatest need was to submit to a Holy Creator and receive forgiveness for their sins through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

From the very start of our country, the Holy Bible had been used as the foundational textbook for reading and language instruction. The New England Primer was also a standard text, both in the original 13 colonies and later on the new frontier. Besides a pictorial alphabet and lists of words to be read, it also contained prayers and the Shorter Westminster Catechism, which was a list of questions and answers explaining all the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. One could say that orthodox Christianity was the “curriculum” of our country.

McGuffey himself was the son of Scottish pioneers. His own schoolhouse education was a result of his mother's supplication in prayer, overheard by a roving minister. The Professor was so well educated that he became a teacher himself at the age of 14, with a class of 48—ranging in age from six years old to 21!





WILLIAM H. MCGUFFEY

It is said of McGuffey that educating the young mind and preaching the Gospel were his two passions. Besides teaching young people how to read and write well, he was also a Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Virginia.

He desired to use great literature to sharpen the minds of his students. Truman and Smith needed a man of his intellect and moral caliber to produce textbooks that would appeal to such a godly population and sell

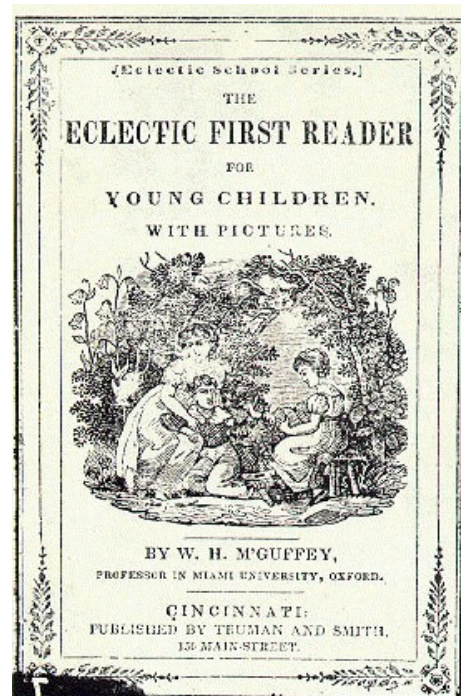
*120,000,000 copies of the McGuffey readers were sold from the 1830's until 1920!*

in great numbers.

Within the pages of these readers can be found passages from the Bible, Shakespeare, Alcott and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Included are the great poets such as Tennyson and Emerson, Whittier and Bryant. There are short rhymes encouraging moral living, and documentaries of nature as well as wildlife.

*"The Christian religion, is the religion of our country. From it are derived our prevalent notions of the character of God, the great moral governor of the universe. On its doctrines are founded the peculiarities of our free institutions."*

**W. H. McGuffey**





The vocabulary is extraordinary—far beyond that of any text found even in private schools today. The sentence mechanics employed are challenging yet rich and eloquent. These books are respectful of the learner—not at all dumbed-down. My children *like* reading their lessons—they feel as though they are being addressed, not as subjects to be lectured “to”—but as young *people!* One of the main ideas of these books is children are individual, moral agents, entrusted with the magnificent gift of life, able to make decisions that will not only affect them personally, but also those around them. This is the spirit of what Miss Charlotte Mason taught—that children are not the commodities of humanistic political theory, but unique *persons*.

Although the books included on these discs are not the originals actually written by McGuffey himself, they still carry his spirit. I own the originals produced by Mott Media, and I dearly love to teach my children with them—there is a genius in them all. But I also deeply love the revised editions (published from 1879-1881) which you will find here.



Work while you work,  
Play while you play,  
One thing each time,  
That is the way.

All that you do,  
Do with your might,  
Things done by halves,  
Are not done right.

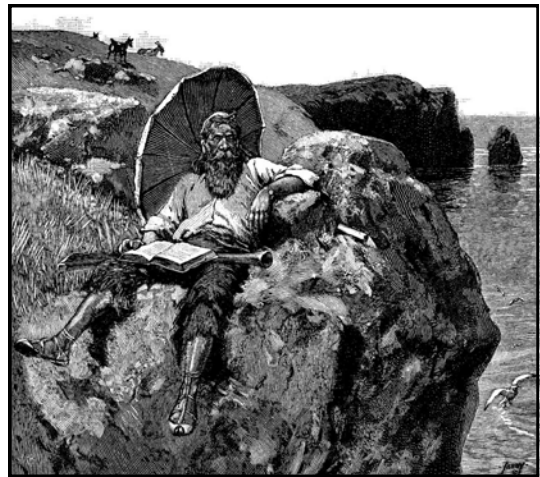


The engravings in the revised versions are so charming, and the stories so engaging. Although the overt Evangelicalism is absent, there are numerous references to God as Creator, with whole passages of scripture as lessons and numerous moral anecdotes meant to teach young children Biblical living.

As I began to explore further and understand these renowned books, I was convinced they were what I needed to use as the core of my homeschooling program.

With these lessons as the trunk of our daily learning “tree”, we could branch out to explore other areas of

There, shall no tempests blow,  
Nor scorching noontide heat;  
There, shall be no more snow,  
No weary, wandering feet;  
So we lift our trusting eyes  
From the hills our fathers trod,  
To the quiet of the skies,  
To the Sabbath of our God.



For one thing, I don't have to search around and keep track of all types of poetry and prose for

copying, narration and memorization on a variety of learning levels. There is a book appropriate for each of my children. And these are not “graded” according to modern school ranks, meaning that a child who is the age of nine but reading at a high-school level will feel just as comfortable in the 5th reader as a 13 year-old who has been struggling will feel in the 3rd reader.





These lessons do not take up a lot of time; each one is exactly short enough to occupy only about 15 minutes of a child's day. Even so, they are so replete with learning material that I like to think of them as learning "vitamins".

Seriously, spending only 15 minutes a day in these excellent textbooks has done a great deal to improve the vocabulary,

reading level, and writing capabilities of every one of my children more than anything else I have ever tried!

The children of the past did not spend a lot of time in school—especially in rural communities and those on the frontier. The formula which the Moore's have asked us to super-impose on our modern lifestyles was the natural flow of living for Americans of the 1800's; besides "getting their lessons" they had to milk the cows and feed the chickens! Manual labor and service were part of their daily way of life.



The wonderful side-effect of learning with books from the more literate past is how the door then swings wide to any other book written in a less-than-modern way. For instance, none of my children have any problem reading and understanding the King James Bible, or any other worthy author of by-gone days. Even my own reading and writing abilities have greatly improved!