

Flourish

at Ambleside

THE NEWSLETTER OF AMBLESIDE SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

Spring 2014



Created to Flourish

The long awaited spring is here! In these first weeks of rising temperatures, the earth breaks forth in newness. The daffodils dance in the wind and the fragrant hyacinth color the beds in hues of blue and red. The flowering redbud, dogwood, and Bradford pear crown the landscape, bringing color both far and near. Resurrection is before us each day as another harbinger comes forth exclaiming life. Nature is flourishing.

In the same way, human nature can flourish. Human flourishing is an age-old concept explored in texts such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Scriptures, and Charlotte Mason's series on education. These references speak about the full development of humanity in terms of striving for the ideals that characterize persons as living full and free lives - lives of virtue.

Classically, virtues are divided into four categories: human virtues, moral virtues, cardinal virtues, and theological virtues. They range from attention to self-mastery, from chastity to integrity, from fortitude to prudence, and from faith to love. A life of virtue is a life which flourishes. Virtues are the habitual dispositions to do good that enable persons to give the best of themselves.

Educators have used a variety of means to instruct in the virtuous life. Yet, Charlotte Mason saw, that not all means would be proper to use in the bringing up of children. "We are limited in our methods by the respect due to the personality of children. There are but three educational instruments – the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas." Mason speaks about prohibitions in these domains as well as principles applied deliberately and indirectly by the educator. In other words, there are things we

must do and things we may not do, if we are to provide children with both the respect and the guidance that is their due.

Ambleside schools are committed to providing these fundamentals for each student. A teacher may use a gentle touch and active participation to redirect attention, clear instructions and habit training to bring forth worthy work, a challenging text and attunement to provide inspiration, instruction in right relationship with one another, and opportunities for service through participating in household chores (cleaning the school) and visiting with the elderly or homeless.

It is here that flourishing happens. Teachers and students alike are experiencing optimal relationships in a range of human endeavors, "bringing about healthy belonging, receiving and giving, recovering and growing; gaining access to an identity, which is both personal and coherent for human beings to thrive." (E. James Wilder)

Charlotte Mason's life's work was built on the premise, that children possess the "wonderful capacities to enter upon the world as a great inheritance, which exist in every human being. All its beauty and all its thought are open to everyone. Everyone may take service for the world's use, everyone may climb those delectable mountains from whence he gets the vision of the City of God." Ambleside Schools International exists for this expressed purpose to provide an education, which will allow people to grow. We welcome you to the first issue of *Flourish*, a quarterly newsletter, written to bring insight and inspiration to you from the community of Ambleside Schools. All are heirs. Come and partake.

Maryellen Marschke St. Cyr
Founder of Ambleside School of Fredericksburg and Ambleside Schools International.

And this, our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything. William Shakespeare



Seeds of Growth

atSchool

What has inspired me most in my five years as an Ambleside teacher at RiverTree School is the incredible potential found in all students of every perceived ability level, if we but only hope for them and act in faith upon that hope. I don't know if I can cite any one child, experience, or event that most struck me with this revelation.

Was it the student who carried so many diagnostic labels a few years back and struggled greatly in all subjects and is now thriving with his classmates in most of them?

Was it the first grader, who in spite of great fatigue, gave his all in class the other day, running dutifully and beautifully along lines of habit at such a young age?

Was it the academically strong student who recently broke out of the prison of self and was able to show genuine compassion toward a weaker student?

To keep such faith and high expectations requires a great labor of love and continued commitment. We have high expectations of those we love. We only have low expectations of those we pity and despise. And though pity can be one of the highest forms of love, it is too often misused in the realm of education to limit children, or to absolve ourselves of responsibility.

Is the challenge of such hope difficult at times? Absolutely. But is not this true of anything that is worthwhile?

Brian Brostrom, Teacher at RiverTree School

"The children that come into our classrooms are fully persons, created as God intended. They will get older on their own. What we help them with is ignorance and weakness - by informing ignorance and supporting weakness."

Rodney Nelson, Founder and Principal of RiverTree School.

atHome

My eight-year old son cried in school this week. Like an arrow aimed by a skilled archer, like a ray of sun on a ripe seed, like the voice of God to a needy heart, an idea struck him from an Ambleside text. The idea arose from a statement by a mistress to her slave in *I, Juan de Pareja*:

"there is a law in Spain which forbids slaves to practice any of the arts. The crafts, some manual skills, yes. But not art. However, do not grieve. Move back now, and do not let your tears fall on this taffeta; they will spot it."

My grieving son exclaimed,
"To never draw! That is so sad!"

And a quiet sadness settled over each of us as we silently contemplated being forbidden to express oneself through an artistic medium. Then my ten-year old son asked why a law like this existed. We exchanged thoughts about the empowering nature of art, the very nature of personhood required to create art (property does not express itself), the judgment of some that art is useless (slaves must be useful).

As I have reflected on this exchange, I have considered the origins of the beliefs that undergird my sons' grief. A clear origin is the fact, that my sons have studied renowned artists, their lives and their works since kindergarten through Ambleside's curriculum. They know that masters such as Cassatt and Rembrandt expressed their deepest beliefs, affections, and experiences in their art.

My own education undervalued the arts. Such education shrinks one's world to only the mechanical, the objective, and the logically analyzable. It can readily value conclusions over relationship with God, self, and others. (As a lawyer, it strikes me that it was a law that forbid slaves to practice the arts!) An Ambleside education has enlarged our family's world, including bringing us into relationship with worthy ideas. I never cried tears like my sons have in school, and for that I grieve. And then I plan our next Ambleside lesson...

Sarah McOwen, Homeschool mom, law partner, and co-director of Ambleside Homeschool Silicon Valley.



Shakespeare at Ambleside School of Ocala

Ambleside in South Africa



At The Vine School in Cape Town, South Africa, we have come to understand that when we expose pupils to great ideas, strive purposefully to help them develop good life habits, and create a growth mindset in which they sense the expectation and belief that growth is possible, they will flourish. After only eighteen months of implementing Ambleside education, we have been truly encouraged by the growth we have seen.

When a pupil who has been diagnosed with a condition which, according to specialists, “causes social ineptness, which causes him to refrain from shaking people’s hands and looking them in the eye”, actually shakes my hand and looks me in the eye in my office while apologizing for bad behavior, I am filled with hope.

When a teacher says that she now comes to school with real purpose as she is now part of ‘growing’ rather than ‘packaging’ people, and when other teachers report that they themselves are growing intellectually because of their exposure to great ideas, I am inspired.

When a current parent shares during an Open Day meeting about how the Ambleside educational philosophy and teaching method are indeed inspiring and have brought about positive change even in her home, I am encouraged.

Romans 12:2 reminds us, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” As I look to the future, I do so with purpose and hope. Purpose because we know that when we expose children’s minds to the good, the true, and the beautiful, we expose them to the mind of God. And hope, because when we do so, children will grow and change and know the will of God.

Ian Smith, Principal of the Vine School in Cape Town, South Africa.



2nd grade student art from Ambleside School of Colorado

aParent’s View

A two o’clock a.m. Emergency Room visit reminds me how interconnected our human bodies are. I’m an ER doctor, and a middle of the night trip to the ER usually means you’re pretty miserable. Good health seems a distant memory when you have something in your eye that’s keeping you up. Many times I’ve ferreted out a speck of metal in a mechanic’s eye. With squinted eyes he glares at what I removed from his eye and is shocked to see that the source of his great discomfort and distress was just a small speck.

Yet, that same eye, when healthy

enables the whole body to flourish. Connected to the body, it spots the unexpected hole in the ground and protects the ankles from harm, and at the same time sets off the brain’s chemicals as it surveys a beautiful sunset.

Ambleside has fostered health and vitality in our family in our three years at Ambleside School of Colorado. Though it is only our children who attend the school, we as parents have blossomed by this experience as well.

Too many parents send their children off for their school day with a prayer that their parenting work will not be “undone” in the six to seven hours while their children are at school. Gratefully, Sandy and I have not only grown accustomed to our parenting not being undone, but our children come home from school further along the path that we desire for them. That’s life giving to a parent.

The Ambleside approach

to education keeps drawing families who agree with and are keen on pursuing our school’s motto, “Excellence with Humility Centered on Christ” in all of life. The result is the fostering of a vibrant community among the parents. I regularly find myself inspired by the example of excellence in other moms and dads at our school – at the same time bolstered by the “humility” exhibited by their honesty in relating the challenges and failings they sometimes experience in their parenting.

A couple of years ago, a mom grew tearful as she thanked me for investing in her son in the prior months. At the time, the depth of emotion in her gratitude surprised me for one reason - her son was 31 years old. However, thinking back on this, I’m no longer surprised by her tears. The teachers and staff at Ambleside routinely elicit that same gratitude in me.

Bentley C. Tate, Director of Colorado Plains Medical Center Emergency Department and Board Member of Ambleside School of Colorado



The Masque of the Four Seasons, Walter Crane

summer institute
 SUNDAY / AUGUST 3RD / 6PM
 TO SATURDAY / AUGUST 9TH / 10 PM

Come and experience a one week intensive immersion mastering Charlotte Mason's "method of a lesson".



Hosted by:
 Ambleside Colorado
 1510 East Phillips Avenue
 Centennial, CO 80122
 (855) EDU-LIFE
 institute@amblesideschools.com

Spring has Sprung!

at Ambleside School of San Angelo

With the faithful help of students, staff, and families, we enjoyed another success at our annual Artspring. Approximately 300 guests attended this year's event, held in a giant tent in the backyard of our school. The decorating, underwriting, and auction item committees combined their talents and organizational skills to help raise awareness and funds for the school in an annual event, which has become one of the community's most anticipated soirées of the year.

Patricia Aylor, Ambleside San Angelo's longtime art teacher and local artist, assisted students in creating individual paintings, combining student art to form group pictures, and producing a composite lily pond made up of contributions from each student and staff member, designing the largest all-school painting the school has ever fashioned.

The Lily Pond is composed of paintings from pictures taken from The International Water Lily Garden in San Angelo's Civic League Park (one block from the school). The students engage in field studies at the water garden several times during their school career to learn and capture the beauty of this garden. Each student has the opportunity to paint, draw, and study the varied water lilies consisting of new hybrids, tropical day and night bloomers, Australians, aquatics and marginals, and more as part of their nature study experience. The Lily Pond is a celebration of The International Water Lily Garden and its premier collection.

To explore what we see, visit:
<http://www.internationalwaterlilycollection.com/collection.html>

Chris Sloan, Principal of Ambleside School of San Angelo.

Spring

Antonio Vivaldi

*Springtime is upon us.
 The birds celebrate her return with festive song,
 and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes.
 Thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar, casting their dark mantle over heaven,
 Then they die away to silence, and the birds take up their charming songs once more.*

*On the flower-strewn meadow, with leafy branches rustling overhead,
 the goat-herd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him.*

Led by the festive sound of rustic bagpipes, nymphs and shepherds lightly dance beneath the brilliant canopy of spring.



A violet by a mossy stone, Half hidden from the eye; Fair as a star, when only one Is shining in the sky.

William Wordsworth

a Student's Reflection

Knowing the Fruit of One's Labor

"Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:4. Every year at Ambleside School of Herndon, the students would memorize a new verse in physical conditioning that inspired us to push on, not only physically but also mentally and spiritually as well. Ambleside did not limit Christ-centered teaching to the classroom but integrated it in every area of each student's day, 'watering' his life, so that he might flourish.



In my 'bud' phase, when I was a second grader, I began learning the relatively simple but important skill of cursive handwriting, a skill that would manifest itself as a great asset when note taking became crucial in high school. Daily I worked in class to accomplish this feat as I copied lines over and over in my *Spencerian Penmanship* book. This was not a task I welcomed, but my teacher and parents consistently encouraged me to push forward. I was inspired and encouraged by the words displayed on the classroom wall: "I am, I can, I ought, I will." This motto was instilled in me as a small child as I labored over my task at hand, the little brown handwriting book. With this skill improved upon throughout the years, I arrived at the place where I am, and I can write with great ease. This young bud was tended to by my dedicated teachers and parents to develop into something beautiful—to flourish and become all God made me to be. These adults taught me a determination to strive toward a worthy end goal.



Third grade arrived, and with it came arithmetic and my struggle with learning how to divide. This challenge caused the little bud to grow in perseverance. My teacher and parents understood I was having difficulty as tears spilling onto my little blue math book tended to be a frequent occurrence. They faithfully and cheerfully worked with me using different techniques to find a solution to my difficulty. When I crossed a threshold of understanding, and the 'light bulb went on,' my teachers and parents aided me in daily practice until I was able to do all the work independently. From this persistent practice and nurturing, I realized the important lesson that I could overcome struggles with hard work, persistence, and practice, and I developed a love for math and helping other students who experienced similar challenges. The patience that was modeled to me inspired me to extend that same patience toward others.

This nurturing and inspiring education continued, coming not only from teachers and my parents, but also from all the parents in the school. This community and extended family cultivated a love for learning and a desire to nurture qualities God calls us to develop. From my first to my last day at Ambleside, I was taught to face all situations and circumstances with confidence and perseverance.

Esther James, High school junior, attended Ambleside School of Herndon kindergarten through eighth grade.

Student nature study from Ambleside School of Boerne.



In fact, they are looking forward to getting to that subject where they can learn about that person, idea or concept. They are excited because there is a living connection between them and the rich material that is being presented to them. That's what we talk about, that's what we mean when we talk about the relational life at Ambleside.

Mike Bruce, Board member of Ambleside Schools International

Art *at* Ambleside

Art instruction at Ambleside begins with the knowledge that all children (and adults!) can learn to draw well through the mastery of a few basic techniques. For many, the thought of drawing an object with accuracy and likeness brings forth uncertainty and dread, particularly in the presence of a talented instructor and on-looking classmates. Yet we have found, through the practice of a method developed by Mona Brookes, founder of Monart® School of the Arts, that children do learn to draw beautifully through learning how to see.

As a young artist and aspiring art teacher, Mona developed a method using “5 Basic Elements of Shape” that, when applied, define every line in contour drawing. These Elements of Shape serve the artist as musical notes serve a composer, and are discussed in-depth in her book, *Drawing with Children*. Students learn to see these “elements” in the contours of ordinary objects found in the room. A water bottle has straight and curved lines on the sides, a circle and dot at the opening. A ruler has straight lines on the edges, angled lines at the corners. As students learn to see these elements, a foundation is formed from which to they can begin to draw. Habits create a supportive atmosphere: classroom silence allows students to focus and work without distraction, while the use of pen or marker calls forth careful, precise drawing.

In February, a group of art instructors from Ambleside Schools participated in a four-day internship with Mona Brookes at her studio in Berkeley, CA to learn how to apply her method



of art instruction at Ambleside. We practiced the method with Mona and took turns teaching lessons. The on-site application of techniques proved challenging to all of us! “The role playing was invaluable (even though I was not looking forward to it). Teaching an entire lesson in the company of peers and then getting feedback, was extremely helpful.”

The lesson begins with a little talk that introduces the lesson, new vocabulary, and techniques to be practiced and is followed by warm-ups which offer an opportunity to practice challenging components of the drawing: the eye and bill of a bird, a banana leaf and a fern. The instructor asks, “What part was difficult to draw? How might we solve that? Let’s go back to where it became difficult. Remember, asking for help is an important step in learning to see shapes.” As one of our instructors remarked, “Mona emphasizes that students not ask the teacher’s opinion of the students’ art, but rather

the teacher should be a source of help to solve a problem.”

The drawing lesson begins with “finger planning,” which allows students to carefully think through the space on the paper while giving thought to the final drawing before the first line is drawn. Students are instructed to “make the first mark” on their papers. Element by element the subject is discovered, variations offered, lines drawn. Techniques of creating perspective are practiced. Slowly the form is revealed and the background is created, giving careful thought to color, texture, and pattern. Variation, being an important aspect to this method, requires teachers use two charts: one displays the lesson itself, step-by-step; the second shows options for variations. A rhythm of short instruction followed by student practice is established and creates a lot of “space” for students to work independently. The diverse, beautiful work created by every student is evidence of the excellence of this method.



One of our teachers sums up our week with Mona: “I loved my experience with Mona Brookes. After years of using her books on teaching art to children, taking a workshop with her really taught me so much more. Now I have better tools to work with and a clear vision and a direction to build. I am so grateful for having had the experience that no book could have ever given. It was a once in a life time experience.”

*Leslie Voorhees, a Founder of Ambleside School of Herndon,
Ambleside Schools International trainer and curriculum developer*