

¶¶ for Parents

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Twaddle-free Homes and Hearts

We recently had yet another "Twaddle purge" of our school library. These are not evil books, just pleasant books which do not need to take up space on our library shelves. I remember when my own children were elementary age the shocking realization that I had one day that youth is finite, and children will only have time to read so many books while they are young. If they fill the time with silly books, when will they get to all the good ones?

I always enjoy telling prospective parents who are taking a school tour what "twaddle" is. Charlotte Mason, in *School Education*, has this to say:

"We need not ask what the girl or boy likes. She very often likes the twaddle of goody-goody story books, he likes condiments, highly-spiced tales of adventure. We are all capable of liking mental food of a poor quality and a titillating nature; and possibly such food is good for us when our minds are in need of an elbow-chair; but our spiritual life is sustained on other stuff, whether we be boys or girls, men or women."

Here are some indicators that Maryellen St. Cyr tells us should mark books that we at Cornerstone consider to be "twaddle-free:"

- Well-written and not dependent upon illustrations for the story to unfold
- Literary language that appeals to the mind, stirs the imagination, holds the child's interest
- Enjoyable! ...makes a sudden, delightful impact on the mind, causes an intellectual stir that marks the inception of an idea
- Not too easy or too direct, telling the reader to explicitly what he should think
- Able to be narrated; something the child can recall with clear sequence and colorful details

I review here today these concepts of "twaddle" and "living" books to make a point about more than just reading. In a recent conversation with some girls at lunch, someone happened to use the phrase "two straight lines" and I chimed in "The youngest one was Madeleine," assuming girls of elementary age would be familiar with the classic children's book of that name. The girls *did*

recognize the line, but the ensuing conversation was entirely about their chagrin that the cartoon version of that book no longer appears on the Saturday morning television lineup. "Now we'll never see Madeleine again," one of them moaned.

I assured them that Madeleine is accessible in our school library and they can visit her there any time and even take her home with them for tea if they like. I'm not sure I made much of an impression.

George Grant likes to say, "The good is the enemy of the best." I hope that Cornerstone families will not let the media in their home become the enemy of reading, an incomparable experience for covenant children.