



## Are There Any Ideas In Your Children's Books?

When Charlotte Mason discussed the spiritual life in relationship to ideas, she identified spiritual life as the life of thought, of feeling, of the soul, of that which is not physical. This very human life needs food, and

“this life is sustained upon only one manner of diet: the diet of ideas—  
the living progeny of living minds.”

She uses this framework—the spiritual life is sustained only by a diet of ideas—to answer the perennial question, “What manner of schoolbooks should our boys and girls use?”

She characterized school publishers' books as “drained dry of living thought, abridgement of an abridgement, dry bones of a subject denuded of soft flesh and living color, of the stir of life and power of moving.”

Now, as then, schoolbooks are often designed to fit an interest level, a subject, or a grade level. And they do just that. They provide information to a standard that publishers prescribe to equalize learning. As my husband often says, “No one would buy these books if they were sold at bookstores; they aren't very interesting.” Publishers sell them to schools instead.

In the early 21st century, students only infrequently mention books; they instead focus on letter and number grades, AP and honors classes, and all their homework. The conversation has changed. They seldom encounter or discuss the ideas in history, mathematics, science, or literature because ‘order is of things to an end,’ says Aquinas. And the end is no longer knowledge but information.

Books rich in ideas present in history, mathematics, science, and literature, however, present a different vision. Page after page, ideas stir readers' hearts and minds with the beauty of language, the wonder of humanity, the description of laws and principles, the awe of God, and questions of humankind.

The reader of such books reads more and more. His mind and heart are satiated. Long after the class ends or the light grows dim, he thinks, dreams, wonders, believes. He lives.