



Living books — the best that can be found in every area of study regarding vital and transcendent ideas of goodness, truth, and beauty. ¹

— MARYELLEN ST. CYR —

The Great Human Relationships — Perhaps the main part of a child’s education should be concerned with the great human relationships, relationships of love and service, of authority and obedience, of reverence and pity and neighborly kindness; relationships to kin and friend and neighbor, to ‘cause’ and country and kind, to the past and the present. History, literature, archeology, art, languages, whether ancient or modern, travel and tales of travel; all of these are in one way or other the record or the expression of persons; and we who are persons are interested in all persons, for we are all one flesh, we are all of one spirit, and whatever any of us does or suffers is interesting to the rest. If we will approach them with living thought, *living books*, if we will only awaken in them the sense of personal relation, there are thousands of boys and girls to-day capable of becoming apostles, saviors, great orientalists who will draw the East and the West together, great archeologists who will make the past alive for us and make us aware in our souls of men who lived thousands of years ago. ¹

Living books contain living thought, the kind of thought filled with ideas which deeply strike us, impress us, seize us, take possession of us, and rule us. Such thought seized an Ambleside seventh grade student. Upon entering his class, he said to me, “Sit next to me. I’ll share my book with you, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*; it’s really good.” Chapter 7 told of Douglass at the shipyard in which he learned the letters L, S, and F; as the shipbuilders hewed and marked timbers for the different sides of the ship. After succeeding in reading, Frederick took on writing and copied in the blank spaces of his master’s son’s copybook. He soon learned all 26 letters.

What living thought moved Douglass to painstakingly learn reading and writing? And what was the living thought this seventh-grade boy received from a boy his age who was enslaved? And what were their shared common affections?

Questions to Consider

- Are the books you and your children read characterized as twaddle or living? Why?
- Why not gather a multi-aged community and read a living book, gaining access to the great human relations?

¹ Charlotte Mason, *School Education* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1989), 180-181.