AMERICAN HERITAGE CHARTER SCHOOLS

FUNDAMENTALS READER

A COMPILATION OF WORKS THAT CAPTURES THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF OUR ORGANIZATION

AHCS

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OUR MISSION

IS TO **DEVELOP** THE **HEARTS AND MINDS** OF OUR STUDENTS THROUGH A **RIGOROUS CORE CURRICULUM,** WITH A PERSPECTIVE THAT CHERISHES **TIMELESS VIRTUES** AND THE **AMERICAN SPIRIT**.

DEFINITIONS

- **Classical Learning:** Our approach; The lens through which we view education (see Big Ideas)
- **Cultural Literacy:** The stories and ideas that will create the common language and cultural structure of AHCS.
- **Truth:** That which corresponds to the way things actually are.
- **Goodness:** That which fulfills our purpose as human beings.
- **Beauty:** The experience of goodness and truth through our senses.

BIG IDEAS (ASSUMPTIONS)

of Classical Learning

- **There is an order** to the world students encounter
- **People can achieve great things:** students are able to recognize order, analyze the past, look forward to the future, and strive to better themselves.
- **The journey of education is never finished:** educators are life-long learners.
- **Educators are mentors,** who guide students in living good and meaningful lives.
- The goal of education is to help students recognize what is **good, true, and beautiful** and guide them in bettering themselves.

AHCS CULTURAL LITERACY

is built from the following:

- Amplify Curriculum/Core Knowledge Sequence
- The Great Conversation (Junior High/High School Humanities framework)
- Common language, skills, and expression of problems or ideas

LEARNING STAGES (TRIVIUM)

Goal: help educators recognize the role they play and how we've organized the curriculum in the overall mission of AHCS.

- **Grammar**; *the foundation of learning* (TK-5): learn raw material; the symbols of language/math, memorize (not analyze) important stories and ideas
- **Logic**; *the organization of learning* (6-8): order the raw material of language and math; use logic in thinking processes, practice higher order thinking, expression, and analyze important ideas.
- **Rhetoric**; *the application of learning* (9-12): take the raw material they've learned in the Grammar Stage and have ordered in the Logic Stages and use it to solve difficult problems, become self-aware, and express their own ideas through speech, papers or in groups.

LITERACY

Definition: The ability to independently and competently use knowledge and skills in a particular area.

- **We are teaching Cultural Literacy:** AHCS has a core body of ideas and stories that will create a cultural commonality for our students, both for this immediate community and as American citizens.
- **We are teaching Language Literacy:** Reading and Writing are fundamental skills for all subject areas, since mastery of the written word is the mastery of language, and students become full participants in society through language literacy
- **We are teaching Math Literacy:** The ability to understand and apply mathematical and scientific concepts reinforces one's ability to communicate in a coherent and logical manner.

VIRTUES AND WISDOM

form students' hearts as well as their minds

- **Virtue** is living in accordance with what is good.
- **The pursuit of virtue begins with formational habits.** We provide character education for students that is reinforced through opportunities both inside and outside of the classroom.

ON
TEACHING

What Teachers can Learn from the Greatest College Coach

Andrew Zwernemna, Cana Academy

Every teacher needs regular re-fueling: insights, inspiration and encouragement that maintain our heart for the work and shine fresh light on how we teach. Among the sources I recommend are writings and videos by great sports coaches; after all, among the most successful coaches are some of the greatest teachers around. How they guide, motivate, evaluate, and unite their players can be a wellspring for those of us who practice the art of teaching and seek to mster it.

Teaching has a lot in common with coaching. For one thing, teachers and coaches are leaders. They lead everyone in their charge to learn. In fact, etymologically, to educate means to lead out—that is, to lead out from ignorance and deficiency to knowledge and skill. All good teachers and coaches accomplish that with their students or players.

When I was seventeen, I met the greatest coach of the 1960s and ‘70s, and maybe of all time: the late John Wooden. There were other great coaches at the time, but no one matched his success. The proof? Between 1965 and 1974, he coached the UCLA Bruins men’s basketball team to ten national championships. What is especially relevant to this reflection is that Wooden was a master of the art of teaching. He was renowned for how he broke the game down into a hundred or so crucial pieces, training his players to perfect each one—from tying one’s basketball shoes in a way that prevented blisters to making the exact pass necessary to start a successful fast break. By all accounts, his mastery as a teacher was the key to his students learning the game of basketball, uniting as a team, and accomplishing great things together.

In 1976, just over a year after his retirement, Coach Wooden spoke at a conference for high-school students. I was fortunate to be there. Shortly after he presented, he was standing alone. Nervously, I seized the opportunity to express my admiration. He

UCLA after the 1971 NCAA Championship

turned the moment around and seized the opportunity to have a real conversation. For the few minutes we met, he was kind and interested. It meant the world to me. Always the teacher of life, Coach Wooden encouraged me to work hard, study hard, play hard, and to stay close to my family and faith. I drank it all in and took it to heart. He was understated, mild-mannered, and remarkably short, but there was a force of character in him forged, no doubt, by decades of teaching and competing. On that day, I glimpsed why former Bruins—some of them counted among the all-time greatest players—still praise the man who led the most storied basketball program in NCAA history.

Years later, his books helped me be a better teacher—a better leader of students. Here are a few tips from his book, ***Wooden on Leadership:***

"I believe that leadership itself is largely learned."

Among other things, this means that we ought not rely only on our natal gifts. If any of us is given charge of a group of students, then we must learn how to lead them. I know that I had to grow in order to teach. Although I had two university degrees when I first started, nothing had quite prepared me for leading seminars, teaching writing, and directing plays—my main teaching duties. For each area of teaching, I had to learn new skills. In other words, the pedagogies I knew were not enough to the work at hand; I had to learn more to do my job, to bring the most out of my students. Closely linked to learning how to lead is the need to learn in a certain way. As Coach Wooden puts it:

"Whatever coaching and leadership skills I possess were learned through listening, observation, study, and then trial and error along the way."

For teachers, this means that we have to actively master the art of teaching. A few years ago, my wife and I were invited to a school where the faculty wanted help learning how to teach literature. The teachers were wonderful men and women, and they were all smart and earnest. They just needed training in the best practices for teaching effectively. To help, we directed seminars with the teachers: this was a way of modeling how to teach and a way to give the teachers a top quality experience of participating in a seminar. We observed them teaching their students and gave them coaching on what went well and what did not. On top of that, we took turns teaching their students—a second way to model for them. Finally, we stayed in touch and made ourselves available by phone and email in order to continue the coaching. Regularly, we sent them titles of articles or books to read as part of their development. Because they listened, observed, studied, gave their newfound way of teaching a good hard try, noted their successes and mistakes and learned from each, our colleagues made progress as leaders in the classroom.

What about for those of us who have been teaching for a number of years? What of the teacher who is tenured, or even the principal or headmaster—the lead teacher in a school? Here is what Coach Wooden has to say about the long run:

"For me, the process of learning leadership continued for 40 years until the day I walked off the court for the last time as head coach—March 31, 1975—following UCLA's tenth national championship. In truth, my learning continued even after that."

That convicts all of us to keep learning, to never stop learning. I have been teaching in classical, liberal arts schools or training colleagues to do the same for thirty-six years, but I still read works on how to interpret or teach great texts. Every week I listen to podcasts or watch videos by scholars and educational pioneers. Every chance I get, I attend a museum, concert, or acting performance on stage or screen in order to expand my experience. Every time I teach a group of students, I keep a yellow legal pad by my side. It never fails: no matter how many times I have taught a text, I always learn something fresh from my students and make a note of it.

Sometimes an entire faculty needs to change their mode of leadership. One year, when I served as headmaster, I realized that our faculty was increasingly teaching to the test. They and I took a good, long look at the situation, evaluated what was going well and where improvement was needed in the learning culture of our school. Then, we set a course of change that took more than a year to effect. It had to be done. It was difficult, and many of the teachers had to significantly adjust their practices. In the end, it was worth it, since we all deepened our commitment to the role of performance—seminars, writing, labs, reports, recitals, models, stage productions, computer coding, and other expressions of student learning. We also sharpened our use of tests—not teaching to them, but using them more strategically as one useful means among many by which we afforded the students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skill.

Let's look at one more gem from the greatest college coach in history, and this one is at the heart of teaching or any form of leadership. According to Coach Wooden, the most important quality a leader must have is this:

"I believe you must have love in your heart for the people under your leadership. I did."

Students are not under our charge chiefly for our sake; we lead

them for their sake. True, we are better for the work and for contributing to a mission. Teaching is a great calling. It ennobles us. Still, what should motivate us above all is the genuine good of our students; and for that drive to be maintained, we must have love in our hearts for them.

What are some practical ways to love our students? One way I practiced love was to make sure my students had at least one good laugh during our time together. Laughter builds joy, and joy binds us together, sustains us through the challenges of learning, and gives us a brighter look towards the next day of working together.

I also shared my love of books, not just by leading seminars on great texts but with gifts as well. I noticed that the staff at the local public library regularly took older books out of circulation and sold them for a dollar each. At that price, I was able to buy each of my students a good read at Christmas or at the end of the school year.

Finally, and this is perhaps the most important practice I developed, I coached each student one-on-one. That means I set time aside to listen to each member of the class, to encourage what the student was doing well, and to gently but clearly guide each to improvement. Students want to be heard. They thrive under kindness and genuine interest. Personal attention builds trust and opens the way for further coaching opportunities.

These insights are only a few of what America's greatest college coach has to offer. But if you take to heart just these four things, that will fuel your teaching. In a nutshell, here is what John Wooden holds out to teachers as leaders:

Learn to lead. Learn actively. Never stop learning. Love the ones you lead.

That is a great game plan for all of us who teach.

Coach John Wooden

ON
CULTURAL LITERACY

Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (Excerpt)

E.D. Hirsch. New York: Vintage Books. pp. xiv–xv, xvii, 20–21, xiii, 115, 21, 23–24.

In 1988, E. D. Hirsch, a professor at the University of Virginia, wrote a bestselling book which argued that progressivist education with its focus on experience had let down America's students by neglecting knowledge in the form of a shared body of information. The book included a list of 5,000 facts, dates, famous people, works of literature and concepts that every American should know. Hirsch was later to call this 'core knowledge'. Hirsch makes a contemporary case for the teaching of canonical knowledge.

"The theories that have dominated American education for the past fifty years stem ultimately from Jean Jacques Rousseau, who believed that we should encourage natural development of young children and not impose adult ideas upon them before they can truly understand them … He thought that a child's intellectual and social skills would develop naturally without regard to the specific content of education … In the first decades of [the twentieth] century, Rousseau's ideas powerfully influenced the educational conceptions of John Dewey, the writer who has most deeply affected modern educational theory and practice … Dewey strongly seconds Rousseau's opposition to the mere accumulation of information: 'Development emphasizes the need of intimate and extensive personal acquaintance with a small number of typical situations with a view to mastering the way of dealing with the problems of experience, not the piling up of information' …

Dewey assumed that … education need not be tied to specific content. [However, in so doing he] placed too much faith in children's ability to learn general skills … and too hastily rejected 'the piling up of information'. Only by piling up specific, communally shared information can children learn to participate in complex cooperative activities with other members of their community …

[It is a] universal fact that a human group must have effective communications to function effectively, that effective communications require shared culture and that shared culture requires transmission of specific information to children. Literacy, an essential aim of education in the modern world, is no autonomous, empty skill but depends upon literate culture. Like any other aspect of acculturation, literacy requires the early and continued transmission of specific information. Dewey was deeply mistaken to disdain 'accumulating information in the form of symbols.' Only by accumulating shared symbols, and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community …

Cafeteria-style education, combined with the unwillingness of our schools to place demands on students, has resulted in a steady diminishment of commonly shared information between generations and between young people themselves. Those who graduate from the same school have often studied different subjects, and those who graduate from different schools have often studied different material even when their courses have carried the same titles. The inevitable consequence of the shopping mall high school is a lack of shared knowledge across and within schools. It would be hard to invent a more effective recipe for cultural fragmentation …

To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world … That children from poor and illiterate homes tend to remain poor and illiterate is an unacceptable failure of our schools, on which has occurred not because our teachers are inept but chiefly because they are compelled to teach a fragmented curriculum based on faulty educational theories. Some say that our schools by themselves are powerless to change the cycle of poverty and illiteracy. I do not agree. They can break the cycle, but only if they themselves break fundamentally with some of the theories and practices that education professors and school administrators have followed over the past fifty years …

It is true that, under our present curricular arrangements, academic achievement is heavily determined by family background. But we cannot conclude from the present sate of affairs that deprived children would be predestined to low achievement under a different school curriculum …

Literate culture is the most democratic culture in our land: it excludes nobody; it cuts across generations and social groups and classes; it is not usually one's first culture, but it should be everyone's second, existing as it does beyond the narrow spheres of family, neighborhood, and region.

To withhold traditional culture from the school curriculum, and therefore from students, in the name of progressive ideas is in fact an unprogressive action that helps preserve the political and economic status quo. Middle-class children acquire mainstream literate culture by daily encounters with other literate persons. But less privileged children are denied consistent interchanges with literate persons and fail to receive this information in school. The most straightforward antidote to their deprivation is to make the essential information more readily available inside the schools."

ON
AMERICAN ORDER

The Many Roots of American Order

Lee Edwards

Nearly four decades ago, Catherine Bowen wrote a delightful little book about the Constitutional Convention of 1787 entitled Miracle at Philadelphia. The "miracle" was that a diverse group of strong-willed, political leaders could, within a few months, produce a document that has served as the foundation for the most successful and enduring experiment in democracy in human history. British Prime Minister William Gladstone described the American Constitution as "the most wonderful work ever struck off, at a given time, by the brain and purpose of man."

America itself is a miracle. While other nations have declined or fallen over the centuries, America has survived economic upheavals, civil wars and world wars, racial and ethnic divisions, and a virulent counterculture to become the most powerful and envied nation in the world.

What is the source of America's strength and endurance? Its abundant, natural resources? Its educated, highly skilled people? Its fortuitous geographical location midway between Europe and Asia? Its national will? Whence comes our limited government, individual freedom, free market system, and fundamental values? In The Roots of American Order, first published in 1974, Russell Kirk provides a convincing answer: America is not only the land of the free and the home of the brave but a place of ordered liberty, which made its freedom and prosperity possible. Using the device of examining five cities—Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, London, and Philadelphia—Kirk traces the roots of American order to long-standing traditions in human history.

First came the Hebrews, who recognized "a purposeful moral existence under God." For the prophets, the hill-town of Jerusalem was the eternal city for salvation. Next came the Greeks who strengthened the roots with their philosophical and political self-awareness. Athens was where Western philosophy was born, and from it came the Western views of science and the conviction that all areas of knowledge are within the ability of the mind of men. There followed the Romans, with their emphasis on law and social awareness. Rome was the seat of a great empire, and its political administration and stability echoed down the centuries. The roots of these cities were intertwined "with the Christian understanding of human duties and human hopes" and were joined by medieval custom, learning, and valor.

The roots of order were then enriched by two great political experiments in law and liberty centered in London and Philadelphia. But they did not come to pass overnight. Indeed, the British contribution was made possible by six-and-a-half centuries of political experimentation from the Magna Carta in 1215 through the Glorious Revolution of 1689.

The first part of the British experiment took place during what are so often called, erroneously, the Dark Ages. In The Roots of American Order, Kirk lists the contributions of the Middle Ages: our system of common law, the essentials of representative government, our language, our social patterns, and the foundation of our modern economy. Too often forgotten today, they illustrate Kirk's view that political order reflects custom, mores, and belief. According to the French political philosopher Montesquieu, the only "grand change in the art of government" since Aristotle was representative government. And its first sign was the Great Charter, the Magna Carta, which the English barons extracted from a reluctant King John. Its lasting principle is simple and yet profound: The law is supreme and must be obeyed by all, even the King.

The Middle Ages was followed in swift and often chaotic succession by the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Counter-Reformation. Man proposed a new "humanism," Kirk writes, driven by ego and enlightenment. Protestant reformers returned to the stern teaching of St. Augustine: man loving himself above everything can only be saved by the grace of God.

Out of the Protestant Ethic, Kirk says, came self-reliance, self-examination, endeavor in the secular world, and democracy. England, thanks to Richard Hooker and others, found a middle path between warring factions on the continent and passed it on to America: It consisted of law, liberty, and tolerance. But the passage was not an easy or swift one, in part because of the conflicting ideas of philosophers like Hobbes and Locke.

Hobbes has been called the father of modern political philosophy (although not by Kirk), but his is the politics of authoritarianism. Hobbes argued that the individual's motives in society are not love and loyalty but self-interest and fear. There is little in Hobbes, Kirk says, of Madison's idea of carefully calibrated checks and balances. Hobbes would have rejected the moral precepts that Madison and other Founders insisted were essential for a Republic. Locke is a more relevant influence on America, Kirk writes. His Second Treatise on Government is really an attack on Hobbes' Leviathan. Locke emphasizes the Social Contract between the governed and the governors and stresses the natural rights of life, liberty, and property. But Locke was an ardent apostle of individualism, Kirk points out, and had no deep affection for the Christian concept of a "community of souls." There is no

warmth in Locke, no sense of consecration. "Utility, not love," Kirk remarks, "is the motive of Locke's individualism." And the Founders of the American Republic, Kirk insists, had a vision beyond mere self-interest and utilitarianism.

The last Englishman that Kirk mentions, and with obvious affection, is the Anglo-Irish statesman, Edmund Burke. Burke, he says, went far beyond John Locke's utilitarian Social Contract to talk of an eternal contract between the dead, the living, and the unborn. Burke argued that we all participate in this spiritual and social partnership because it is ordained of God.

Before leaving London and traveling to Philadelphia, Kirk underscores the importance of the Bill of Rights drawn up in 1689 and the fruition of English constitutional development during the preceding four centuries. Much of the language of the English Bill of Rights appears in the first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

The author then takes up the first of America's founding documents—the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was a revolutionary document, Kirk says, a bill of particulars for going to war against George III, but it was not an open-ended justification of revolution under any and all circumstances. It was, in fact, primarily a political document, meant to set forth grievances against the King and the justifications for the political separation of the colonies. Among its 27 specific complaints, not one touched on social and economic conditions.

The Declaration was a conservative document in that it spoke of changing the "government" but not the "state." As Kirk points out, "government" implied the ministers and other temporary possessors of political power while "society" meant the establishment of civil social order. Still, the Declaration was a radical document in the sense that it reasserted a political autonomy rooted in the North American continent ever since the landings at Jamestown and Plymouth.

Eleven years later and now citizens of a new nation, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia met to revise the Articles of Confederation. They wound up producing a whole new constitution. It was a practical document, says Kirk, attempting to resolve the conflicting demands of freedom and order. Its composition demanded balance, firmness, and yet a willingness to yield because the delegates had to (a) uphold order but not reduce true liberty, (b) produce a reasonably strong national government while not reducing the states to mere provinces; and (c) provide for an effective chief executive who could not, however, become a king or dictator.

Montesquieu would have applauded America's brand of federalism, Kirk writes, and its careful separation of powers within the national government. The delegates assembled in Philadelphia had formed a government of laws, not men.

The Declaration and the Constitution are complementary, not conflicting, documents. In Martin Diamond's words, the combination of the Declaration's "heady rhetoric of revolution and freedom" and the Constitution's "necessary forming, constraining and sustaining system of government" produced our uniquely successful form of government.

"Whatever the failings of America in the eighth decade of the twentieth century," Russell Kirk wrote thirty years ago in The Roots of American Order, "the American order has been a conspicuous success in the perspective of human history." As he summed up: "Under God, a large measure of justice has been achieved; the state is strong and energetic; personal freedom is protected by laws and customs; and a sense of community ensures."

Would Kirk be so generous, so optimistic today? I am not certain, as the heritage of these five cities has been badly battered. But I know he would draw strength and confidence from the lessons of Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, London, and Philadelphia and from the observation of a president he much admired, Ronald Reagan, who once said to a group of student leaders:

"My young friends, history is a river that may take us as it will. But we have the power to navigate, to choose direction, and make our passage together."

ON

FINDING WISDOM

The Wisdom Deficit in Schools

Michael Godsey, writing for *The Atlantic*

When I was in high school, I chose to major in English in college because I wanted to be wiser. That's the word I used. If I ended up making lots of money or writing a book, great; but really, I liked the prospect of being exposed to great thoughts and deep advice, and the opportunity to apply them to my own life in my own clumsy way. I wanted to live more thoughtfully and purposefully. (Also, I hoped literature would help me understand girls.) Now I'm a veteran English teacher, reflecting on what's slowly changed at the typical American public high school—and the word *wisdom* keeps haunting me. I don't teach it as much anymore, and I wonder who is.

As a new teacher at San Luis Obispo High School in California more than a decade ago, I asked my principal about his expectations for my students' Advanced Placement scores. He said, "Just make sure the kids are ready for the next part of their lives. They're going to be on their own soon, and forever. Prepare them for that. Literature can help." His idea of how to prepare kids for their futures was significantly different, in both meaning and tone, from how teachers are now being informed by the Common Core State Standards—the controversial math and English benchmarks that have been adopted in most states—and the writers and thought leaders who shape the assessments matched to those standards. It all amounts to an alphabet soup of bureaucratic expectations and what can feel like soul-less instruction. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—referred to in education circles simply as "SBAC ''—is the association that writes a Common Core-aligned assessment used in 25 states, including mine. The consortium has established four of what it calls "major claims"; the first purports that students are "college and career ready" if they "can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of complex literary and informational text." The word *wisdom* keeps haunting me. I don't teach it as much anymore, and I wonder who is.

That's hardly what my principal was talking about. The Common Core promotes 10 so-called "College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards" for reading that emphasize technical skills like analyzing, integrating, and delineating a text. But these expectations deal very little with ensuring students are actually appreciating the literature at hand—and say nothing about the personal engagement and life lessons to which my principal was referring. Kate Kinsella, an influential author who consults school districts across the country and is considered "a guiding force on the National Advisory Board for the Consortium on Reading Excellence," recently told me to "ditch literature" since "literary fiction is not critical to college success." Kinsella continued, "What's represented by the standards is the need to analyze texts rather than respond to literature.

As a teacher working within this regimented environment, my classroom objectives have had to shift. I used to feel deeply satisfied facilitating a rich classroom discussion on a Shakespearean play; now, I feel proud when my students explicitly acknowledge the aforementioned "anchor standards" and take the initiative to learn these technical skills.

But as a man who used to be a high school student interested in pursuing wisdom, I'm almost startled to find myself up late at night, literally studying these anchor standards instead of *Hamlet* itself. I'm making plans to teach the students how to "evaluate the sufficiency of the evidence" instead of asking them, "Who here sympathizes with Hamlet, or Ophelia, or any character, and how so? It's not a personal shift—I'm still me, still interested in wisdom for the same reasons. And my principal cares deeply about the spiritual well-being of our students. It just feels like a very slow, gradual cultural shift that I don't even notice except for sudden moments of nostalgia, like remembering a dream out of nowhere. Eighty students making a long trip to see live theater—a rather adult-themed Tom Stoppard play. A long session of students complaining about Briony from *Atonement*. A courageously deep discussion on Hamlet's strangely reasonable musings on suicide. Teenagers feeling a peculiar affinity for Meursault; teenagers expressing a deep, deep hatred of Meursault. A lesson on both love and education from *Wuthering Heights*.

I get it: My job is to teach communication, not values, and maybe that's reasonable. After all, I'm not sure I would want my daughter gaining her wisdom from a randomly selected high-school teacher just because he passed a few writing and literature courses at a state university (which is what I did). My job description has evolved, *and I'm fine with that*. But where are the students getting their wisdom?

One might argue that the simple solution is religion—namely, biblical texts. The problem, though, is that I doubt religion is on most kids' minds. When I recently shared a poem that included the phrase, "Let there be light," hardly any of my students, who are high-school juniors, could identify the allusion. As a staunch believer in the separation of church and state, I don't feel comfortable delving into the Bible's wisdom. Even if I did, the environment is far from conducive to these discussions—students are generally embarrassed to reveal their spiritual beliefs. A fellow teacher recently cited a biblical reference in a standardized test as "evidence of institutional bias," and the community was

generally shocked; some people, meanwhile, were outraged a few years ago when a valedictorian's speech personally advised his peers to "love God above self."

With all this in mind, I recently read the line "Fools will be destroyed by their own complacency" in *The Book of Proverbs,* and I thought of my students at the cusp of young adulthood. I considered how deeply profitable this kind of advice could be for those about to be on their own—and I don't mean profitable in the way that the advocates of "career readiness" generally conceive it. I'm not saying teachers should include the Bible in their classes in any way, but it feels strange to bite my tongue and instead teach simple skills like "interpreting words and determining technical meanings." Meanwhile, research suggests that a significant majority of teens do not attend church, and youth church attendance has been decreasing over the past few decades. *This is fine with me*. But then again, where are they getting their wisdom?

My job description has evolved, and I'm fine with that. But where are the students getting their wisdom?

I'm not talking about *my* child, or *your* child. I'm absolutely positive that my daughter will know the difference between Darcy and Wickham before she's in eighth grade; and it's likely that people who would gravitate toward this story would appreciate this kind of thinking. I'm talking about American children in general—kids whose parents work all day, whose fathers left them or whose mothers died. These could be children whose parents are unwise or don't read any literature because they're proudly working with their hands instead, assuming trained humanities teachers are responsibly and professionally inspiring their kids to appreciate literature. And even for the parents who do prioritize the humanities in their households, I'm not sure that one generation is actually sharing culturally relevant wisdom with the next one—not if the general community doesn't even talk about what that wisdom specifically means. Each family can be responsible for teaching wisdom in their own way, *and I'm fine with that*. But then, does the idea of cultural wisdom get surrendered in the process?

Secular wisdom in the public schools seems like it should inherently spring from the literature that's shaped American culture. And while the students focus on how Whitman's "purpose shapes the content and style of his text," they're obviously exposed to the words that describe his leaves of grass. And that's good. But there is a noticeable deprioritization of literature, and a crumbling consensus regarding the nation's idea of *classic* literature. The Common Core requires only Shakespeare, which is puzzling if only for its singularity. (A respected colleague recently called this stipulation "offensive," immediately rejecting "the audacity of elevating any of [Shakespeare's] plays over anything ever written by anybody else.")

The country's disregard for the institutional transfer of cultural wisdom is evident with this single observation: None of the state assessments has a single question about the content of any classic literature. They only test on reading *skills*, so teachers now prioritize these skills over content. This arrangement, in theory, allows students to read the literature on their own, when they get their own time—*and I'm fine with that*. But then, where are they getting the time and space to appreciate the deeper lessons of classic literature, to evaluate its truth and appropriately apply it to their own lives?

This year I introduced my students to *Serial*, a podcast recently produced by the public-radio show *This American Life* that told a riveting story over 12 episodes. I used the series as a primary text instead of anything written by Shakespeare, and the feedback was 98 percent positive. *Serial* was great for teaching the Common Core anchor standards (better than Shakespeare), but the lessons in wisdom were not as apparent. The protagonist at one point finally admits, "I never should have let someone hold my car. I never should have let someone hold my phone. I never should have been friends with these people. Who can I blame but myself?" That's a nice collection of lessons—but it doesn't seem to pack the same punch as one of Hamlet's soliloquies. I remember when, 10 years ago, my students spent an hour sharing their favorite lines from Father Zossima's sermon in *The Brothers Karamazov* and how and why it affected their own lives. One student was visibly moved by the idea that suffering for a loved one might be a blessing available only in a life on Earth, not in heaven. A few different students called it "their favorite class ever." This morning, my student-teacher—a college student I'm training to be a classroom educator—used a hip-hop poem as a primary text and started the class by saying, "Today we're going to practice Reading Standards 1, 2, and particularly 4" in reference to the anchor standards that the students had on their desks. If this sounds a little dry, I'm partly to blame—for a month, he's been watching me ask the students to explicitly reflect on their progress in each of these technical areas. In any case, with habits like these, he's sure to land a permanent job in the fall.

Admittedly, nothing about the Common Core or any modern shifts in teaching philosophies is forbidding me from sharing deeper lessons found in Plato's cave or Orwell's *Airstrip One*. The fine print of the Common-Core guidelines even mentions a few possible titles. But this comes with constant and pervasive language that favors objective analysis over personal engagement. Achieve the Core, for example, an organization founded by the lead writers of the standards, explicitly encourages schools to teach students to "extract" information so they can "note and assess patterns of writing" without relying on "any particular background information" or "students having other experiences or knowledge." This emphasis on what they call "text-dependent reading" contributes to a culture in which it's not normal to promote cultural wisdom or personal growth; in fact, it's almost awkward.

Inspired by what can only be called Writing Standard 6 ("Use

technology to collaborate with others"), I did a mini-lesson about Twitter; a few students started following me, and I rewarded them with a follow-back. As a result, I knew why one sophomore girl looked so exhausted, empty, and hungover one morning. As I prepared to give a lesson on "determining where the text leaves matters uncertain," she looked at me miserably, and I had a feeling she knew that I had read her tweets from the night before. I felt like my silence was somehow condoning her choices, but I didn't know what to tell her. With nothing to say, I knew I would have to quietly unfollow her.

Later, a kid who reminds me of the teenager I was in high school—a boy who is at different times depressed, excited, naive, and curious—asked me why I became an English teacher. I smiled in self-defense, but I was silent again, not knowing what to say anymore.

ON
RESILIENCE

In Defense of Stress

Tim McIntosh

Dear student,

I heard that you believe that the assignment I gave you is too difficult—that it is beyond the training you've received in class and could even result in your failure. In short, the assignment "stresses" you.

People often use the word "stress" for unfocused anxiety. For example, much of ordinary American life is driven by a frenzied sprint to accomplish an innumerable series of economic tasks without relational or emotional resources. I googled the word "stress" and discovered that mention of stress in letters, newspapers, and books has skyrocketed since 1800. Stress is on the rise in modern life. And no one likes to be stressed.

My assignment is not intended to create anxiety. (You probably have enough of that already.) If I wanted to increase your anxiety, I'd hand you a screaming baby and six-figure debt.

My assignment is intended to create a very specific stress. By "stress," I mean a state of mental or emotional strain that comes from adverse or demanding circumstances but which is intended to promote growth. My assignment was designed to create a specific, focused stress that can be overcome. If you overcome this stress with industry, intelligence, and courage, you will receive a high grade. Furthermore, you will expand your ability to overcome future stresses.

Think of my assignment like a trainer adding five pounds to a weightlifter's maximum lift. Adding this weight creates a new goal that, with training, can be accomplished. But without adding those five pounds, the weightlifter will remain in "homeostasis"—that is, his ability will tend to remain at the same level.

Mark Rippetoe, one of the most decorated strength-training coaches in the United States, is fond of repeating a simple truth: The only way an organism grows stronger is by overcoming stress. Stress "disrupts homeostasis" and demands that the organism "adapt to the new requirements imposed by change." Rippetoe reminds his weightlifters that they will only get stronger by attempting to lift more weight than ever before. A weightlifter with a maximum deadlift of 200 pounds will remain in homeostasis unless he attempts to lift more than he has ever lifted. To move from homeostasis—to get stronger—the lifter must add weight to the bar.

My assignment adds weight to the bar. Your past assignments have proven you are strong. Now it's time to grow stronger. By attempting to lift slightly more weight, you will. Indeed, receiving and overcoming stress is the basic transaction behind all quality education.

If overcoming stress is the basic task of learning, homeostasis is the biggest obstacle that stands in the way of a meaningful education. And what is a meaningful education? It is not accumulated knowledge; rather, it is knowledge that leads to a life of good action. David Hicks, a leading light in the world of classical education, is right to argue that "the end of education is not thinking, it is acting." As your teacher, my hope is that you will not just believe true things, but that you will become a first-class learner and that your knowledge will manifest itself in good actions: you will love your neighbors, pursue justice, and resist evil.

And so, I do not hesitate to put a stressful assignment into your life. I recognize, however, that the stress I have described is uncomfortable. Homeostasis—that tendency toward a stable equilibrium—is comfortable. We all prefer to remain in homeostasis. In homeostasis, the water isn't too cold or too hot. The world is predictable, comfortable, known. But homeostasis suffocates a basic principle of life: If you are not growing, you are fading. The only time an organism achieves lasting homeostasis is by dying.

Do not mistake homeostasis for harmony. Harmony comes from the Greek word harmos, meaning "joint." Living "in-joint" with others and yourself is one of the great joys of human life. Singing in harmony with family, friends, or even enemies, results in a beautiful sound. But those who have achieved harmos have learned from stress, not avoided it. The husband and wife who live in harmos have faced the truth that they are different people with conflicting temperaments, hopes, and wounds. The husband and wife achieve harmos by avoiding homeostasis and learning from the stress caused by conflict. Likewise, the violinist fails many times before achieving harmony with the cellist. If the violinist remains in homeostasis, she will not achieve harmos.

You've told me that you don't like my assignment because it requires you to make your work public. Your paper will not just be seen and graded by me. It will be seen and assessed by others. This means that if you fail, others will see.

Because my assignment is harder, you are in greater danger of failure. Based on your past performances, I do not believe you will fail. But you might. Any time you attempt something new and more difficult, the risk of failure increases. I'd love to assure you that you won't fail, but I can't. By risking failure and working hard, however, you can succeed and grow.

Public failure hurts, and I recognize how scary risking failure is. I still recall my own public failures. In college, the basketball coach publicly posted a clipboard listing the team roster. My name wasn't on the clipboard. Not only did I not make the team, but I was embarrassed that everyone knew it.

Few things frighten like the possibility of failure before others. Some people believe that all our moral stances are actually attempts to be accepted in the eyes of our peers. They say that we tell the truth, not because it's what God wants or because it creates harmony in the soul, but because our moral actions are driven by a deep-seated need to justify ourselves among networks of allies. In Plato's Republic, Glaucon argues for this very point. He claims that virtue and justice are social-constructions. Instead of pursuing true, eternal norms of goodness, humans are motivated only by a deep desire to maintain their reputation.

Public failure on my assignment could result in disapproving whispers among your friends. I recognize how deeply these disapproving whispers might hurt you, but if you seek to achieve peace by constantly negotiating your reputation, you will not achieve the deep harmony you desire. Although Glaucon's philosophy rightly describes much of human moral behavior, it does not lead us toward peace. Without a peace that springs from deep inside you, Glaucon's philosophy will create greater anxiety by locating the source of your peace in the gaze of other people. In other words, if your value is dependent upon others, you will be their slave and will only feel free when others think highly of you. No matter how spotless your record, your reputation ultimately lies beyond your control.

The world's great teachers align with Socrates, not Glaucon. Socrates recognizes that genuine harmos cannot be found by seeking to preserve our reputation. Likewise, Marcus Aurelius warns against "the emptiness of applauding hands" and the people "who praise us," because they are "capricious" and "arbitrary." Jesus teaches against being like the Pharisees who "pray on the street corners to be seen by others."

My assignment calls for your work to be seen and assessed by others. If your value depends upon that assessment, you will only feel at peace if others approve of you. But this peace will not last. Life is a series of ongoing grades, public tests, and trials issued by other people. Many of these people will be fickle. Others will be confused. Some will be evil. Why would you depend upon them? …

…..I designed my assignment to produce a stress that can bring about growth. If you rise to the challenge of the assignment, you will earn a good grade, and, more importantly, you will grow in knowledge and skill.

But there is a lesson deeper than the assignment's lesson. It is this: Life will present you with a constant succession of distractions—a constant series of bribes. These bribes are intended to move your gaze toward homeostasis, toward your reputation, toward your performance—anywhere other than a harmos of soul. As your teacher, I write against these bribes and in support of seeking peace through your soul's disposition..

This article first appeared in "Colloquy" (formerly News and Views) Vol. 37 No.2, published by Gutenberg College in March of 2017. Tim is a former tutor of Gutenberg College, and is currently a playwright, a lecturer for Circe Institute and a professional speechwriter for both for-profit and non-profit organizations.

HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE CLASSICAL TEACHERS

GEORGE GRANT, recipient of the 2017 Russell Kirk Paideia Prize, founder King's Meadow Study Center
Start afresh—every year, every semester, every day, every class. Because the best teaching is simply loving what I love in front of my students, it is vital that whatever it is I'm teaching is fresh in my heart and mind. Though I have taught some of the same courses again and again and again over the past quarter century, I really never look back at old notes (except perhaps to find specific quotes or illustrations). I want my reading for each class to be fresh. I want my research to be fresh. I want my lesson plans to be fresh. I want my heart to be fresh. Of course, I build on what I've learned over the course of the past several years. But, there are so many new things to learn—and if my students sense that I'm learning right along with them, the impact will be all the more fruitful, both for them and for me. So, I try to set aside the tyranny of the urgent and maintain the long, slow habit of starting afresh.

DAVID HICKS, author of *Norms and Nobility*, recipient of the 2002 Russell Kirk Paideia Prize
Begin each class or reading assignment with a provocative question geared both to the age and interests of your students and to the work at hand. (If you can't find the question, you have the wrong work or shouldn't be teaching it.) If your question is one that intrigues your students and to which they'd like to find an answer, you have assured the success of your lesson and placed yourself in a position not to give them the answer, but to help them find an answer. Their answers, of course, provide the basis for the critical discussion that follows and turns your classroom into a symposium.

TIM MCINTOSH, former Provost of Gutenberg College, co-host of the Close Reads Podcast
"The relationship between the teacher and students is the tide that causes all ships to rise." My first teaching-mentor told me that. And I promptly ignored him. But after a semester of floundering, of wondering, "Why aren't my students listening to my lectures?", I remembered my teaching-mentor's advice and changed my approach: I lectured less. I listened more. I prayed for my students. I think that the students sensed the change. They took more ownership and they transformed from a classroom into a community of fellow-learners. That's what I see. Great teachers invest in relationships.

ANDREW KERN, President of the CiRCE Institute, author of Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America
A good teacher masters the following habits: For every lesson he teaches, he knows the context of the lesson. He also grasps the point he is trying to make, the question he wants to explore, or the skill he wants to coach. To that end, he does the necessary research, orders what he collects in appropriate ways, determines the most suitable means to express it, remembers what he needs to remember, and delivers the lesson in the most effective way. He is able to weave anything that arises into the lesson, and keeps his heart wide open to the students in front of him. He assesses student work in ways that sustain and bless the student without distracting him from the ends contained in the lesson. The whole cosmos is his curriculum.

PETER VANDE BRAKE, leader of the CiRCE Institute Atrium program
Of course there are many habits that good teachers have, but if I can only talk about one, I will settle on curiosity. Curiosity renews a teacher's excitement and joy for teaching because a curious teacher continually has new information to present to his or her students. There is nothing that a teacher loves more than being able to get a student excited about the subject matter that he or she loves and has made a career out of teaching. It leads a teacher to constant discoveries about the world and the Creator of that world. Curiosity compels a teacher to ask good questions about what he or she wants to know which fosters a sense of inquiry that the teacher can then pass on to students. Students will learn to be inquisitive about their world by imitating their teacher. It is this spirit of inquiry that drives education according to David Hicks who says this:

"Classical education is not pre-eminently, of a specific time or place. It stands instead for a spirit of inquiry and a form of instruction concerned with the development of style through language and of conscience through myth. The key word here is inquiry. Everything springs from the special nature of the inquiry. The inquiry dictates the form of instruction and establishes the moral framework for thought and action" (Hicks, 18).

So then, the habit of being curious is one of the essential habits of a good teacher. Curiosity leads to inquiry, and inquiry is at the very heart of education itself.

BRIAN PHILLIPS, Director of CiRCE consulting
Given the likely readership for this list, it may be preaching to the choir to say it, but one habit of a great teacher is ongoing learning. We all say we want our children or students to be "lifelong learners," but if a teacher is to survive the grind of successive school years, they must "take in" more than they are giving out. And this is not just for the sake of a teacher's sanity and energy – it is also a blessing to the student. In Norms & Nobility David Hicks wrote:

"Schools are places where students learn because they are places where teachers learn. Only a school (and by extension a curriculum) that encourages teachers to be always learning will keep its teachers fresh and fearless and its students happy and motivated in their studies, ready to test their lessons against life."