"SINE DOCTRINA VITA EST QUASI MORTIS IMAGO"

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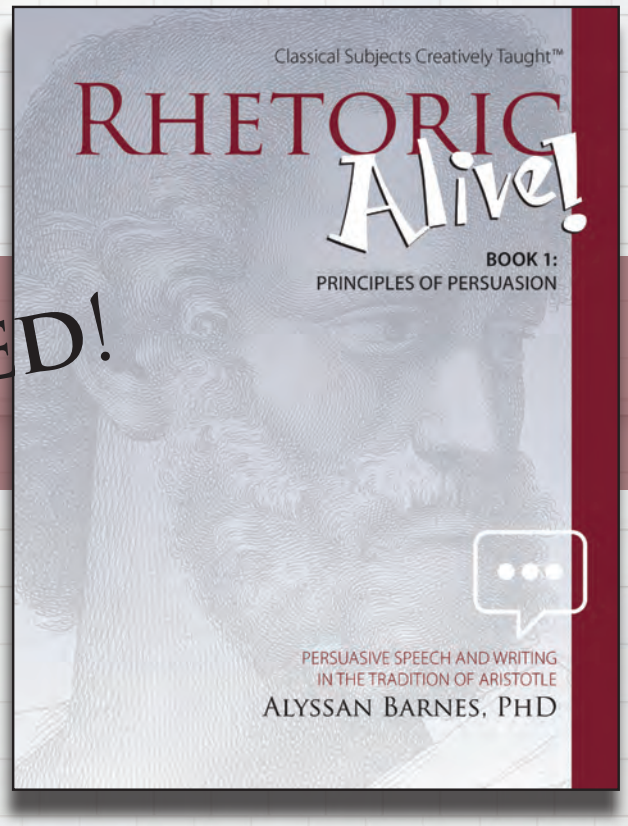

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RAISING A CHILD ACCORDING TO WORDSWORTH AND CHARLOTTE MASON

by Louis Markos, Houston Baptist University

Due to a torrential rainstorm that ripped its way through Houston, Texas, in the middle of April, 2016, my university shut its doors for two consecutive days. Not wanting to waste away my enforced leisure time, I took up two books, written thirty years apart, that had been gathering dust on my shelf. They had been gifted to me by a friend who shares my love for classical Christian education, whether conducted in school or at home; both books celebrate and elucidate the writings and educational theories of Charlotte Mason: *For the Children's Sake: Foundations of Education for Home and School* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay (1984) and *Consider This: Charlotte Mason and the Classical Tradition* by Karen Glass (2014).

The effect on my psyche was electric, rivaling the lightning bolts that flashed off and on outside my study window. How desperately our age needs to recover Mason's timeless insights into how to shape young people into good and virtuous citizens. How transformed our schools would be if they factored in her classically inspired view of the proper ends and methods of education. How wonderful it would be to see children thus taught wake up from the cold slumber of utilitarianism and the common core.

Working from a solid, non-denominational Christian worldview, Mason (1842–1923) rests all of her theories on the foundational principle that children are born persons and that they are equally capable of good and evil. Our job as educators is to guide students into a love of learning that will help order their affections, ennoble their conduct, and mold their characters.

Since children's minds, like their bodies, possess from birth all the tools they need to absorb and assimilate the nourishment they are given, the role of education should be to expose them to the right books and activities that they need to satisfy their mental hunger. Just as vitally, those books and activities must be offered up in their wholeness and totality, rather than in fragmented tidbits that do not nourish or satisfy.

At the core of Mason's educational theories lies the distinction between synthesis and analysis. Whereas our scientific, technological age puts all its focus on analysis, Mason's classical vision seeks after a more holistic grasp of God, man, and the natural world. Books are the prime vehicle for achieving that synthesis, but only if they are cherished, enjoyed, taken in as close friends. Rather than use the book merely as a tool for teaching the rules of grammar and syntax or for improving vocabulary, the

Louis Markos, *professor in English and scholar in residence at Houston Baptist University, holds the Robert H. Ray Chair in Humanities; he is the author of* From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians Should Read the Pagan Classics, The Eye of the Beholder: How to See the World like a Romantic Poet*, and* On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis. *These, and his children's novel,* The Dreaming Stone *(in which his kids become part of Greek mythology and learn that Christ is the myth made fact), are available on his Amazon author page.*

teacher must invite the student to feast on the book, to live through its characters, to participate in its struggles and victories.

How does one foster such an atmosphere? By making sure that student learning and discovery are vigorous and alive, part of that Great Conversation that links us back to the Greeks and the Romans, the early church and the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the birth of Romanticism.

I hope this brief overview of Mason's pedagogical vision will convey the sense of hope and excitement that I felt as I read Macaulay and Glass's assessments of Mason's theories. Here, at last, were real answers to the problems of modern education.

According to the twelfth principle of Mason's Twenty Principles of Education (which list of principles is easily accessible at a number of different websites):

> "*Education is the Science of Relations*"; that is, that a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we train him upon physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science and art, and upon many living books, for we know that our business is not to teach him all about anything, but to help him to make valid as many as may be of—"Those first-born affinities / That fit our new existence to existing things."

Given that I wrote my dissertation on Wordsworth's *Prelude*, it only took me a few seconds to realize that Mason was quoting from the first book of Wordsworth's poetic autobiography.

I consciously raised my own children in a Wordsworthian manner. That is not to say they grew up in the countryside, as Wordsworth did in the lovely Lake District of England, but that I encouraged them to interact in a direct and spontaneous manner with the stories I read to them and the environment around them. I wanted them to know, not so much through study as through participation, how they fit into the world and how the world fit into them. "The world is full of magic," I taught them, "—you just have to have eyes to see it and ears to hear it."

From an early age, I pushed my children to observe things closely, not so they could be tested on the knowledge, but so that they could, simultaneously, enjoy them fully and store them up for the future. Though I knew I was honoring Wordsworth in doing this, I was unaware that I was also honoring Charlotte Mason.

The Prelude, an epic-length poem that traces the growth of Wordsworth's mind, heart, soul, and spirit, is too long and complex to be tackled in an essay. Thankfully, however, Wordsworth himself provided his readers with a much shorter, more condensed version of that growth in Book I of *The Excursion*. Through what purports to be a chronicle of the education-in-nature of a character he calls "the Wanderer," Wordsworth presents his own natural education.

I would like in what follows to take the reader through that chronicle, not only as a way of elucidating Mason's theories, but to provide a more general guide to teachers and parents of the subtle, intimate, mystical way in which the mind is knit together and becomes whole. Whether you are a public or private school teacher, a homeschooling parent, or, like me, a parent who supplemented his children's education through activities at home, I believe that you will find in Mason-Wordsworth a compelling vision of how children's minds develop and grow.

Let me begin by quoting a well-known passage from the opening of Act V of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The lunatic, the lover and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact.

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

I quote this passage in full for the distinction it makes between apprehend and comprehend not only is key to Wordsworth's poetic education but overlaps, I would argue, with the distinction Mason makes between synthesis and analysis. Indeed not only is the distinction similar; both Mason and Wordsworth (and perhaps Shakespeare) insist that the former must precede the latter.

Unlike cold, rational comprehension, apprehension is passionate and unpredictable. Both the lunatic and the lover see things (devils, Helen's beauty) that cannot be contained in their respective receptacles (hell, brow of Egypt). Their seething brains do not stop to question or analyze the images that pass through their uncritical doors of perception. Likewise, the poet, as he glances wildly from heaven to earth, seeks to receive, not neat, compact, picturesque images, but airy nothings, things unknown to which he will later give a body, a form, and a name.

Through the power of apprehension ("seething brains"), the poet not only receives uncritically external stimulants that cannot be comprehended (contained) within rational confines; he allows himself to be penetrated and impregnated by forces and feelings without form or name. Through the power of comprehension ("shaping fantasies"), he then engenders and brings to fruition the implanted seed by, quite literally, bodying it forth into a unique, poetic shape. Thus, an apprehended feeling of unbounded, free-floating joy is comprehended into a single, concrete bringer of that joy. Or again, an intangible experience of fear is comprehended (given shape) by imaginatively transforming a bush into a bear and forcing this newly-created image to contain the emotional force of the apprehended fear.

This same distinction between apprehension and comprehension is worked out in detail in Wordsworth's account of the poetic education of the Wanderer:

While yet a child,
He had perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed
So vividly great objects that they lay
Upon his mind like substances, whose presence
Perplexed the bodily sense. (134–139)

Like Shakespeare's apprehensive poet, the Wanderer is so penetrated by external forces and feelings that they are said to "lay upon his mind *like* substances." But, of course, they are only like substances, for though they have substance, they have no form. And, although the impression they make is vivid and lasting, their effect is to perplex the bodily sense that feels their weight yet comprehends no accompanying mass.

It is exactly this experience that Mason desires for her pupils, an experience that can be expressed in numerous words, all of which combine the physical, emotional, and spiritual, and all of which produce that all-important humility that lies at the root of education: astonishment, wonder, awe, terror, fear. The child, Mason and Wordsworth both insist, has the ability to take in such experiences, even if he cannot immediately

understand them. And it is right for parents and teachers to allow him to have that experience without incessantly demanding that it be broken down, analyzed, and categorized under scientific-sociological headings.

In the lines that follow Wordsworth describes in greater detail this process by which the external world impressed itself upon the boy's mind. He then adds, by way of summation, that "thus informed" by his intercourse with nature, the Wanderer

> . . . had small need of books; for many a tale
> Traditionary, round the mountains hung,
> And many a legend, peopling the dark woods,
> Nourished Imagination in her growth,
> And gave the Mind that apprehensive power,
> By which she is made quick to recognize
> The moral properties and scope of things. (162–169)

Like the free-floating, bodiless joy and fear that are apprehended by Shakespeare's poet, these natural tales and legends are not contained in books but inhabit an unbounded world of mountains and dark woods.

They lack a definite form or shape, and yet, it is by way of his intimate connection with these bodiless tales that the Wanderer's "Imagination" and his "apprehensive power" are nurtured. This apprehensive power is defined as that power which allows the boy to recognize "the moral properties and scope of things." Again, it is not the form but the scope, not the external features but the moral properties that are apprehended. Furthermore, the power is said to manifest itself in the form of a "quick" recognition, an adjective that emphasizes the suddenness of the experience and its ability to penetrate deeply into the perceiving mind.

Mason was a Christian, as are the majority of parents and teachers who have revived her methods, and she was committed to nurturing students in a living and active faith.

This same kind of spiritual formation is evident in the education of the Wanderer. Through a baptized poetic language that is at once ordinary and deeply mystical, Wordsworth conjures the actively passive process by which natural forces and feelings are received into the psyche of the child:

> . . . his spirit drank
> The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
> All melted into him; they swallowed up
> His animal being; in them did he live,
> And by them did he live; they were his life.
> In such access of mind, in such high hour
> Of visitation from the living God,
> Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
> No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
> Rapt into still communion that transcends
> The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
> His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
> That made him; it was blessedness and love! (206–218)

As before, the mere forms of prayer and praise cannot contain the force of what is apprehended. However, in this restatement of the Wanderer's apprehensive powers, Wordsworth factors in an additional element, a poetic metaphor that is also key to Mason.

I refer, of course, to the metaphor of eating and drinking. In an elemental communion rite the Wanderer both swallows the spectacle and is swallowed by it. The experience is unmediated and thoughtless—or, better, it transcends thought. The child is no more conscious of it than he is of taking in food and water. But the experience is real and lifechanging; it is also profoundly spiritual. It fills him with the kind of love and gratitude that parents and teachers often fail to instill in their charges by forcing them to write formal thank you cards without first teaching them what it *feels* like to be thankful.

Apart from that feeling, the child will never grow fully into a moral being who loves goodness, beauty,

and truth. Still, his education must not end with feeling. If the child (or poet) is formed by a process of apprehension, then there must follow a complementary process of comprehension by which the power he has absorbed is transferred into action/poetry. Thus it is that, after describing in full the apprehensive power of the Wanderer and the blessed intercourse with nature upon which it fed, Wordsworth proceeds to speak of a second power:

> But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.
> All things, responsive to the writing, there
> Breathed immortality, revolving life,
> And greatness still revolving; infinite.
> There littleness was not; the least of things
> Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
> Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*.
> What wonder if his being thus became
> Sublime and comprehensive! (226-234)

Here for the first time we find a power contained within a form ("the least of things seemed infinite"). No longer does the poet merely feel, he *sees*.

For the first time, the poet takes a fully active role in the process: "his spirit shaped her [nature's] prospects." Slowly, progressively, the Wanderer begins to fashion the writing to which nature responds by breathing into it immortality and infinity. His spirit begins to shape, his eye to see and, nurtured by this newfound power, his being becomes "comprehensive."

The parent or teacher who follows Mason's advice and puts off heavy going analytical thought until the child is older need not fear that he will raise a simpleton. To the contrary, the student who has had his apprehensive powers nurtured and strengthened, who has learned to see the world synthetically in all its direct, unmediated beauty and wonder, will blossom naturally into comprehension-analysis when the time is ripe.

Let us, therefore, as educators not put road blocks in the way of apprehension/synthesis. Let us stop comparing our children/students to others and insisting that they not "fall behind" in the three "R's." True education is not a race or a contest; it is a love affair.

"Train up a child in the way he should go," Proverbs 22:6 promises us, "and when he is old, he will not depart from it." If we will pay heed to Mason and Wordsworth, we will realize that the training of a child does not begin and end with rote memorization and lists of facts, but includes, if not demands, the instilling of wonder, love, gratitude, and humility for the abundant gifts that lie about us.

The world is full of magic . . . even, so it seems, in the midst of a rainstorm!

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THE ART OF WORDS

by Sasha Decker, Providence Classical Christian School

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate . . .

Deep inside the tenth grader's mind, alarm bells started going off. *Oh no. Poetry! I'm not going to be able to follow this. I'm going to embarrass myself again with a stunning misunderstanding of what the poet is even talking about. Guess I won't be raising my hand today.* This dedicated, literature-loving, straight-A student was utterly baffled—and intimidated—in the presence of classic poetry.

Thankfully, I had a persistent English teacher in high school, and by graduation I had developed a deep love for poetry. Nowadays, as a fourth grade teacher in a classical Christian school, I hope to help my students avoid tenth-grade poetic panic by helping them learn to read and appreciate quality, time-honored lyric poetry while they are young. One of the things I love most about teaching is the opportunity—indeed, the honor—of guiding my students to love what is worth loving. And I believe that the art of words—the beauty and power of words in poetic form—is worth loving. So, how should we approach the teaching of classic lyric poetry to students in the later grammar years?

Most grammar school teachers already teach literature to their students. However, while lyric poetry is a genre of literature, it has several characteristics which make it uniquely suited for experiencing together in the classroom. Firstly, unlike novels, lyric poems are designed to be read more than once. They're conveniently short, and they are so packed with artistry and meaning that multiple readings are necessary to appreciate them fully. Secondly, they're meant to be read aloud. Many of poetry's most delightful elements—sound effects, heightened drama, verbal pyrotechnics—cannot be fully appreciated when reading silently. Take advantage of this! Read poems to your class—old poems, poems whose authors' names you recognize, poems that are worth savoring. Be dramatic. Good poetry is vivid, exciting, emotional. It can sustain your most dramatic rendition. Choose great poems, and read them with gusto. Give a printed copy to everyone so that visual learners can follow along. Then, once you've modeled a dramatic reading of the poem, have your students read it aloud too. Have a different student read your week's focus poem aloud each day. Remember, don't shy away from repetition!

Perhaps your students struggle to read poetry aloud. Oral reading of poetry is an art which must be taught, just as we teach oral reading of prose to

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younger students. It must also be practiced in the way we continue to practice oral reading in older grammar grades. Thankfully, the basic skills of poetry reading are easily grasped. Firstly, emphasize to your class that, just as with prose, they must read poetry in a natural style, and—this is key—they must follow the written punctuation. Is there a comma at the end of line 1? No? Then do not pause there. If you do, you may exclude an essential word from line 2, leaving you utterly mystified. Don't overemphasize the meter. Let the lines flow naturally. The meter will compel the words forward like the powerful current hidden beneath the smooth surface of a river. Model this for your students, then let them practice. Classically educated students are particularly prone to trip up here, since many of them are quite familiar with using jingles and rhymes as mnemonic devices. Those thudding iambs and galloping dactyls, while invaluable for memorization purposes, are frequently less than exemplary in artistry. Classic poetry calls for a different, subtler approach. A natural style will not only make your students' oral reading more appealing to the ear; it will also exponentially increase their understanding of the poem's meaning. Undistracted by overemphasized metrical lines and feet, your student's mind will focus on the grammar of the sentences and, thence, the actual meaning of the words.

Often in classic poems your students will encounter vocabulary words they do not recognize. Children are experts at assimilating new vocabulary through context, but sometimes in an older work the number of new words can be overwhelming. Occasionally I will have my students underline words they do not recognize as I read to them. Then we'll go back through the poem and see if we can deduce the meanings of these words from context. It's easy to pick apart a literary work too much in this fashion, so don't overdo it; but the ability to parse out the meaning of a challenging piece is a valuable skill, so practice it now and then.

Once you've trained your students to read classic poetry aloud with style while also comprehending its meaning, the fun part begins: helping them delight in the beauty of poetry for themselves. (A side note: because I am specifically discussing upper grammar school, the poetic techniques I highlight will be geared towards this level. However, secondary school teachers will find that older students are not immune to the charms of linguistic sound effects and simple imagery. If you have to make up ground in teaching older students to appreciate the art of words, start here.) The best poetry is packed with meaning. It doesn't have to be profound meaning, but each word in a quality poem is there for a reason. Helping your students appreciate what each word does will guide them on their way to appreciating the artistry of poetry.

Kids love sound effects. While upper grammar school kids may at least pretend that they've outgrown making their own sound effects, they still unapologetically love them in movies. Your students may be skeptical when you tell them that poets use sound effects like filmmakers do, but proving it is easy: read them some great poems. All quality poets choose words for maximum effect, and that includes sound effects. Just read your students these lines from the delightful poem "Opportunity" by Edward Roland Sills, in which the author briefly describes a battle scene (don't forget to pause only at punctuation):

> . . . There spread a cloud of dust upon a plain,
> And underneath the cloud, or in it, raged
> A furious battle, and men yelled, and swords
> Shocked upon swords and shields . . .

Read that to them several times; let them repeat it: "swords shocked upon swords and shields". Hear the rush of the air as the swords slice through it; hear the clash of metal on metal. The students will be impressed. (By the way, this poem is a guaranteed gateway to classic poetry for boys—not that the girls won't love it too.)

Alliteration and assonance are fun because they're easy to recognize, even for young children, but they're also fun because they, too, create sound effects when read aloud. I remember, five years ago, reading the poem "Sea Fever" by John Masefield with my students. I asked them to look for alliteration; they discovered that many of the words begin with either *s* or *w*. I asked if they had any idea why the poet chose those sounds. They didn't, but they began experimenting. Spontaneously, the entire room was filled with the sounds of half the students saying *sssssssss* while the other half said *wwwwwwwww*. We were transported: the classroom was suddenly filled with the rushing sounds of waves and wind. I referenced that moment recently to a student who was there that day, thinking she would certainly have forgotten it in five years, and her eyes immediately lit up. "That was so amazing!" she exclaimed. Quality sound effects stick in the mind.

Some sort of rhythm is almost a necessary ingredient of poetry, though its use is as varied as is classic poetry itself. Rather like sound effects, kids love rhythm. Indeed, their tendency, as I mentioned earlier, is often to overstress meter and lose track of its subtler, graceful artistry. However, you can counteract this by deemphasizing meter when necessary, while using it to advantage to enhance the meaning of certain poems. W. H. Auden's "The Night Mail" is one of my favorite poems to read to students. It's long, but you must read the entire poem—aloud—to get the whole effect. The entire journey of the train is evoked through the poem's varying rhythms—slow while the train works its way up hills, quick and steady as it chugs across meadows and grasslands, and increasingly frantic as it rushes downhill before pulling gradually into the station, where the lines become free verse without any discernable meter at all. Your class will love it when you read these lines at full speed and they hear the train chugging away:

> . . . Written on paper of every hue,
> The pink, the violet, the white and the blue,
> The chatty, the catty, the boring, the adoring,
> The cold and official and the heart's outpouring . . .

Did you catch where the train began to brake in the last line?

Sound imagery is just one of the tools at the poet's disposal. Some poems rely primarily on visual imagery, such as Emily Dickinson's "A Slash of Blue," in which she describes the sunset and sunrise. The imagery is startlingly visual—she seems almost to be painting with words.

> A slash of Blue—
> A sweep of Gray—
> Some scarlet patches on the way,
> Compose an Evening Sky—

And the sunset is painted in your mind. To help my students appreciate the way the poet paints pictures in our imaginations, we took out our watercolors and painted these scenes ourselves, both evening and morning. I am anything but a talented artist, but even my painting turned out okay. Dickinson told me exactly what to do, after all.

At first I thought that metaphors would be a bit of a stretch for fourth graders—more appropriate for fifth or sixth grade—but I've discovered that fourth graders really love them. They think it's fun to find them and enjoy their creativity. Luckily, metaphors are a poet's stock in trade, which means that you can introduce your students to plenty of quality ones. Show them how metaphors help them to understand a scene more deeply or picture it more clearly. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's simple, melancholy depiction of a traveler walking alone along the shore in "The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls" includes these graceful lines: "The little waves, with their soft, white hands, / Efface the footprints in the sands . . . " Close your eyes; picture it.

Do you see the scene more clearly than you would have if he'd skipped "with their soft, white hands"? Of course. The delicacy, the agency, the beauty and yet somehow the coldness of those gracefully destructive waves would entirely escape you without that simple metaphor.

Not all poetic art exists in small details like this, of course. The details, notable and appreciable in themselves, also add up to dramatic wholes which draw vivid pictures and narrate thrilling tales. Since children love stories, be sure to expose them to the best in poetic storytelling. Let them thrill to the rhythms and vivid, shocking images as Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" brings a scene of Old Testament temporal and spiritual warfare to terrifying life. Let them cheer for the prince as he "saved a great cause that heroic day" in "Opportunity." Let them feel for themselves the melancholy longing for home in Yeats' "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." Read poems for the details, and slow down to enjoy those details—but read them, too, for the overall effect, for the drama and beauty of the whole. Just remember: read them aloud. Always.

And lastly, don't forget that even young children are immensely capable. Classical Christian schools have a solid reputation for high academic standards, and our students have a well-deserved reputation for rising to these high standards while enjoying the process. The same is true in poetry appreciation. That Shakespeare sonnet I referenced at the beginning of this article? One of my proudest moments as a teacher was a few years ago when a fourth-grade student memorized and recited that poem, with a great deal of delight, at our year-end program. She was able to explain its meaning to anyone who asked her, too. Surely her appreciation for the poem will continue to grow over the years, but starting to love it at age ten certainly has given her an advantage. She has had a head start in appreciating the art of words, one which our students deserve and one which is within their reach.

FOUR SENSES

by Nathan Carr, The Academy of Classical Christian Studies

In teaching a New Testament course to eighth graders every year, I have a single goal in mind. It's not to teach them about genre and classification of books, as different as Gospels and Epistles may be. It's not even to attempt the whole "story" of the New Testament, though we spend an entire quarter in Acts alone. Above all, I want them to know and use the four senses of Scripture as the bedrock of their biblical sensibilities.

The project has largely worked. Earlier in the year, we found ourselves high-centered in Mark 1:12–13, Mark's two-verse description of the temptation of Christ. Following the teaching of the Fathers that St. Matthew's Gospel was written first, we had already worked our way through Matthew 4, a much more detailed description of those forty days in the wilderness.

Mark's account is as follows, "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."

Matthew had not mentioned any wild animals.

So we started over. I wrote the four "senses" on the board, and began asking for answers. "What's the *literal* meaning?" I asked. In monotone unison they answered, "Jesus was tempted in a desert somewhere in Israel." A few non-conformists mentioned other facts in the text that others had overlooked. "Angels ministered!" "Wild animals were out there!"

Little to no argument ensued.

On to the next. "What's the *moral* interpretation of this passage?" Though a harder question, a half-unified class declared, "We should fast just like Jesus fasted." A simple extrapolation, but one that has its own endorsement in the church calendar. With some pushing, they also arrived at deeper truths about fasting—that the highest thoughts and deepest affections for God often come in periods where we deny the flesh. They were pleased, but wanted to press on for the more controversial and imaginative "senses."

The students had figured out early in the year that without the first two, the other two have no basis; but without the last two, the first two have no fulfillment. Inevitably, this makes the *allegorical* and *anagogical* senses the most fun for the eighth grade mind; and in this case, the keys to unlocking this reference to "wild animals."

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"What is the *allegorical* sense?" I asked. A boy in the back row raised his hand, "It shows us how Christ fulfills everything in the Old Testament." "What clues do we have?" I asked. A girl in the front row, "The number forty is important in the Bible. Seems like this passage is one of those." The students then began rattling off every set of forty that they could remember, and decided that above all else, this was a fulfillment of Israel's forty-year wandering in the wilderness at the time of the Exodus. The two seemed to match in many ways. "What's a key difference?" I asked. Kid in the middle row, "Jesus is actually good at fasting."

Not bad.

"What about the animals?" I asked, thinking that the reference was too obscure for the eighth-grade mind. Heck, most eighth graders in this nation are cutting the teeth of their moral imagination on *The Hunger Games* without realizing the obvious allegory involved.

Without so much as batting an eye, a girl in the front row whose background has largely been shaped within a tradition of Messianic Judaism said, "Jesus is both a new Adam and a new Noah. He's offered food from Satan in a garden full of wild animals, which is exactly like the Garden of Eden. He is also with wild animals for forty days, just like Noah was with animals while it rained for forty days and forty nights."

Stunned into a few moments of astonished silence, I pushed further, "What does this show us about Jesus?" The boy in the back row jumped back in, "That he's better than both of them. He's a better Adam because he didn't take the bread, and he's a better Noah because he's the boat." A bit of an import from Matthew, but we'll take it.

Hoping that this moment will last forever, I push into the final question, "What is the *anagogical sense*?" "It points us to the New Heavens and New Earth," someone says. "So how do we interpret the passage from this perspective?" I asked.

Silence.

"I'm not sure," said one student who had yet to speak, "but it seems like you have to deny something before you can inherit it. Maybe this is the beginning of Jesus taking over the universe. Seems like that has something to do with a New Heavens and New Earth."

That normal fourteen-year-olds being taught by an average professor are capable of basic exegesis three months into the semester seems sufficient evidence that a spirit of inquiry and an allegorical imagination are not only possible and teachable, but worth pursuing as the primary purpose of education. The exchange above is par for the course in this class; it is in no way extraordinary. It has become their common "sense" as a class in approaching the Scriptures as a spiritual community. Parents have told me that the discussions are coming home with the students and showing up at their dinner tables. Other teachers have remarked at their increased ability to discern the meaning of books in their other classes. The four senses have captured their moral imaginations.

Perhaps the takeaway here is that a return to the Fathers is always for the good of the church. Or perhaps we could conclude that the proper study of Scriptures inevitably illuminates every other subject and enlightens the mind. I suspect both are very true in this instance, but shared between them is this: the full enculturation of children into the life of our Lord such that they have His common "sense" is essential to the formation of souls. As a mere bridesmaid of the One Church, schools should seek to give students the proper architecture of the soul such that the world is seen only in the light of Christ and His centrality to everything that exists, everything that they could ever think, and everything for which they ultimately long. For the eighth-grader, allegory and eschatology find their foundation in truth and goodness. But the real fun starts when truth and goodness find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ's fulfillment and comprehension of all things—a soaring thought made possible by the allegorical and moral imagination.

WHAT'S A GOOD QUESTION?

by Fred Sanders, The Scriptorium Daily

In his visionary book *Finding Common Ground*, Tim Downs noted that "because Christians tend to be answer people, we're not especially skilled at asking good questions; questions that aren't simplistic, leading, or downright insulting." Ouch.

In Biola's Torrey Honors Institute (http://academics.biola.edu/torrey/), we're answer people, but we teach socratically. That means our primary job as teachers is to ask questions, and they need to be good ones. What's a good question? That's a good question.

A good question evokes curiosity by exhibiting curiosity.

A socratic teacher can't hover above the discussion, occasionally hurling a thunderbolt of insight down toward the benighted students from the Olympian heights of clear understanding. A socratic teacher has to get down in the perplexities with the students, and find the way out using the same resources available to them.

When preparing for one of our three-hour class sessions, a socratic teacher can script about half of the major questions in advance. By reading the text with students in mind, the tutor can generate a dozen major questions and some supporting questions under each of those. But once class begins the dialectic takes unpredicted turns, leading out beyond the foreseen questions. Then the tutor has to set aside the scripted questions, and develop the skill of creating new questions on the spot.

A good question, in this sense, will be specifically tailored to the new situation. Here are some dichotomies to help in crafting questions.

Low-level questions only require students to repeat information, perhaps to rephrase it. But **high-level questions** require analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the information (I'm using "low" and "high" loosely, but see *Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloom%27s_taxonomy) for a widespread definition).

Information retrieval questions get short, factual answers. ("Who is Athena's mother?") **Information**

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evaluation questions presuppose information retrieval, and usually get the short, factual answer thrown in as the student hurries on to the evaluative task. ("Is Athena like her mother?") Info-retrieval questions are usually best used in a series that are leading somewhere.

Convergent questions imply one right answer. ("What is the main idea of this book?") **Divergent questions** suggest a range of possibilities. ("What are some of the most important things in this book?")

Unstructured questions do not indicate what form the answer should take. ("What did you think of Paradise Lost?") **Structured questions** dictate the right form of response. ("What is a new idea you got from Milton?" "What makes you mad in Paradise Lost?")

Multiple questions offer many questions at once, so the real question is, which of my questions do you want to use? ("Why does God choose certain people for His purposes? Was He not dealing with individuals before Genesis 11? What's special about Abraham? Does the text say why Abraham was chosen by God?") **Singular questions** present a sheer cliff by comparison. ("Why did God choose Abraham?") Singular questions usually produce some silence from students. Multiple questions are a way for the tutor to fill up gaps in the conversation, to seed the clouds, and to check several prospects at once.

Expected questions are smooth. ("Do the Federalist Papers throw any light on the U.S. Constitution?") **Unexpected questions** either approach the subject from a surprising angle, or play against student presuppositions. ("Would the Federalists be in favor of dividing California into three separate states?") Struggling with glib students and rapid answers? Deploy a few dramatically unexpected questions.

Some questions **focus on how the text itself presents ideas** ("Why does Bunyan compare the Christian life to a long journey with battles along the way?"); others look away from what the text presents by **exploring terms and categories the author did not present.** ("Why didn't Bunyan make this a sea journey with pirates? Why didn't he make it a cooking contest? Why didn't he make his characters talking animals?") When you use the second kind of question, make sure you're serving the author and not changing the subject or becoming impressed with your own, supposedly superior, ideas.

Close-ended questions require one short answer, usually yes or no. ("Had you ever read this book before today?") **Open-ended questions** require a complex answer. ("How many times have you read this book before today?")

An **obvious definition question** seeks categorization ("What is an epic?"); a **concealed definition question** presupposes that, but puts it off by one step. ("Is this an epic?")

Some questions clarify by **focusing on the intention of the student who has just spoken** ("Do you mean that having faith is a kind of work?"); others clarify by **focusing on the text.** ("Does Luther think that having faith is a kind of work?")

Some questions offer an **invitation to synthesis** ("How can mercy and justice be reconciled?"); others **force a dichotomy.** ("Would you rather receive merciless justice or unjust mercy?")

Some questions put the **tutor in focus**, requiring students to volley back to the authority figure ("Why am I asking about revenge, if Shakespeare doesn't use that word?"); other questions **encourage students to bat the discussion back and forth with each other.** ("Miss A, you seem to disagree with Mr. B.")

Some questions are really an exercise in **reflective listening in question form**, showing that you are actively listening right now. ("Do I hear you saying that Solomon was in fact one of the most foolish of men?")

Some questions are phrased in a way that aggressively **moves the class over one issue and hurries them on to the next issue**. These show that you have already heard (in the past tense) and are ready for the next step. ("Yes, having hundreds of wives is not exactly wise. But what I

want to know is, which of Solomon's actions show him to be exercising the wisdom we know he was given?")

Many of the best questions are so context-specific that they will emerge directly from close observation of the text or the conversation. Sometimes the tutor should simply ask how one sentence relates to the preceding one, or how a certain set of words is different from the diction used elsewhere in the same work. ("Why are all these courtroom terms being used on this page? Why is the vocabulary of a legal proceeding suddenly so prominent?") Other times a quick internal summary of how the conversation got to this point will suggest an incisive question. ("Then we asked about deceitfulness, and you said the king was a master rhetorician, and we started talking about the abuse of power. Was that a logical chain of thought, or free association?")

Finally, if you get into enough long, involved conversations, you're bound to reach a point where you're out of ideas and the good questions aren't coming to you fast enough, or when a student says something that you just can't get your mind around. Instead of saying "huh" or "what in the world do you mean?", do one of the following four things:

- Inquire into the assumptions behind what is being said
- Examine the reasons given, whatever they are
- Require evidence to be offered
- Ask about implications

Socratic teachers all experience those moments when they lose their bearings and can't figure out how to get to the next major topic, or even what that topic is. While you're waiting for the big idea to occur to you, or in an absolute emergency of mind-not-working-good-hood, you should memorize the following sets of syllables and say some of them out loud instead of saying "duh."

- Why do you say that?
- How does what you're saying relate to what we've said so far in this class?
- X, what do you think Y is saying?
- What is another example of what you're saying?
- If that is the answer, what was the question?
- What is it that convinces you this is true?
- What would it take to make you change your mind about this?
- Can you explain what makes you think this?

None of those are great questions. But in the right place and time, they can be good questions.

THE COMMON CORE AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

by Christopher Perrin, Classical Academic Press

When I first heard the Common Core discussed in a news report, I had a schizophrenic reaction. Being an ardent advocate for the classical tradition of education, I responded positively to its captivating name. Classical educators love and support the idea that there is a "core curriculum" —a core (even a canon) of great books, great ideas, and great arts that should be studied. We also support the notion that these great ideas should be the common study and treasure of the entire nation. Much of this thinking is embedded in E.D. Hirsh's Core Knowledge curricula, for example. But then I had another reaction: what I heard of this Common Core, turned out to be nothing like the classical tradition, but rather something quite uncommon to it. As I read and listened, it became clear that the Common Core Standards (CCS) were progressive education theory with a classical name. The name connotes or suggests something that it is not—at least to anyone familiar with traditional and classical education.

In this brief essay, I cannot address every point made by Common Core advocates and refute them all. There are hundreds (if not thousands) of proponents and critics debating the Common Core on a weekly basis. There are hundreds of books published, hundreds of websites in the fray. What can I add? Simply a response that looks at the Common Core through the lens of the classical tradition of education and its ongoing renewal in the U.S.

Let me offer from the onset what I think describes the entire exercise of the Common Core endeavor: educational fatigue and weakness. The entire proposal betrays our lack of vision, health and confidence to educate our children. Why do I think this? The Common Core focus is almost entirely on efficiency—the sure sign of weakness. We (they) do not talk any longer about the aims and ends of education—a cultivated, humanized, free human being and citizen. No, the extent of our vision of educational health is "career and college readiness." This, frankly, spells the end. With no robust vision for the end of education, education ends. What do we have in its place? Technical training. Technical training never was, and never will be, an education. Many of you will understandably scratch your head at this idea—naturally, because for 50 years we have been trained and not educated, and think training IS education. And most of us did not thoroughly enjoy our

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20 or so years of "education." I recall a friend of mine, a physician, standing up before a group of parents joining together to start a classical school and saying, "I am very highly trained and very poorly educated."

Traditionally, education is the cultivation and nourishment of a human soul on truth, goodness, and beauty by means of the seven liberal arts, such that students realize their *humanitas* and acquire wisdom, virtue, and eloquence. This is almost completely absent from the standards (and their associated goals) of the Common Core—and so what we have left is a program for educational training. We have the parts, not the whole; we have pearls (yes, some of the standards are good per se) without a string; we have analysis and numerical data and machine-readable assessments.

Without a vision for seeking after truth, goodness, and beauty, this is what is left—efficient training exercises of some sort. You have scholastic anesthesia. Watch the teachers become technicians. Watch the students go to sleep.

Let me appeal to someone greater than I (than us all) to confirm this point. Here is what G. K. Chesterton says about efficiency and health:

> When everything about a people is for the time growing weak and ineffective, it begins to talk about efficiency. So it is that when a man's body is a wreck he begins, for the first time, to talk about health. Vigorous organisms talk not about their processes, but about their aims. There cannot be any better proof of the physical efficiency of a man than that he talks cheerfully of a journey to the end of the world. And there cannot be any better proof of the practical efficiency of a nation than that it talks constantly of a journey to the end of the world, a journey to the Judgment Day and the New Jerusalem. There can be no stronger sign of a coarse material health than the tendency to run after high and wild ideals; it is in the first exuberance of infancy that we cry for the moon. None of the strong men in the strong ages would have understood what you meant by working for efficiency.

The Common Core program is likely the largest "process program" in the history of education. The apt metaphors for this program are not the apprentice, coach, guide, mentor, or master. The appropriate metaphors are the factory, the lab, technician, and the manager. We will talk now endlessly about efficiently attaining hundreds of standards, grade by grade, because we are weak and have forgotten what a healthy, educated human being is.

Are standards evil? No, they are not. *Some* standards are worth articulating to guide teachers that are masters of their art or discipline (best set by the master teachers themselves). But without a vision for education, standards are all that's left; they become our focus, and thus they subdivide and multiply. In another vein, Chesterton said, "When you break the big laws you do not get freedom. You do not even get anarchy. You get small laws." We have broken one big law of education. The big law says "you shall cultivate and nourish a human being on truth, goodness and beauty." We have said, "We shall train workers for the global economy" (career readiness), and "We shall train them to get further training" (college readiness). What do we get? Many, many small laws that we call "standards." Clipboard ready?

There are several important aspects to Common Core that can be stipulated, as they are well established. In all my recent reading, I did not learn much that was new that touched on the heart (yes, I wanted to say core) of the matter. I don't think I have much to add to the debate about many of the particulars such as

- The genesis of the CC: Private experts well-funded by the likes of the Gates Foundation worked

through trade associations like the National Governor's Association to create standards.

- The main political controversies: Education without representation, since no state legislatures approved the Common Core standards for any given state; the rush and incentive created by Race to the Top funds slipped into the stimulus package passed by Congress.
- The privileging of "informational texts" (non-fiction) over fiction and constructivist math in the standards.
- The fact that these standards have never been piloted, tried, or tested in any schools or school districts.
- The fact that these standards are copyrighted by a private group such that I can't post them, and such that a state must subscribe to every single standard and make no modification to them.

Whatever else Common Core is, it certainly is an attempt to institute a national and consistent set of standards amounting to a national curriculum. It is all legal, despite the fact that various acts of Congress expressly prohibit the enactment of a federal curriculum (see in particular the Department of Education Organization Act of 1979). How is this possible? It is possible because it was the states (via the states' departments of education) that adopted the standards. All this has been meticulously documented and hotly-contested, with "Stop Common Core" organizations working in almost every state in the union (only five states—Alaska, Virginia, Nebraska, Texas, Minnesota—have not adopted Common CoreS; about 30 states have pending challenges to all or part of CCS). As someone within the classical education renewal, I can only add a few observations springing from my ongoing study of the classical tradition.

- **Common Core is just the latest move by thoughtful, intelligent people who are not able or interested in educational solutions from the classical tradition.** They simply will not look to that treasury for aid; it has been ruled out and is off the radar. There are many reasons for this (its own story), but I believe this is a fact. Any solutions for these progressives—must be in the future not the past.
- **Common Core co-opts classical language about education.** A "core curriculum" is a hold-over concept from the classical tradition that assumes there is a "canon" of great literature and learning that has been handed down and should be preserved and handed down to the next generation. Ironically, while using "core" language, it refers not at all to a received collection of great books or traditional learning. The word common has similar overtones, as the "common life" of a great nation would normally assume a common set of books and arts to be known by all educated citizens. Like so many other moves to appeal to an esteemed tradition, it retains hallowed words with novel meanings.
- **Excessive analysis becomes an autopsy.** It is possible to analyze something . . . to death. Teachers who do relentless deep dives into the granular details of a subject they know well, generally bore their students to tears. Great teachers know how much analysis a student can take, and know when to switch back to the big picture that inspires students with beauty, purpose, and the point of it all. Endless dissections of the learning enterprise into minute steps of instruction turn teachers into technicians who must follow the manual, paragraph by paragraph (the standards). This is not what naturally gifted teachers imagined they would do—essentially act as educational

bureaucrats, checking off a list of standards before a class of bewildered and likely bored students. The standards themselves are highly analytical, and will therefore turn teachers into keepers of lists. What's lost, even if inadvertently? The love of math, history, literature, science—the love of these things in themselves and the ability to encounter them and experience them as wonderful facets of truth, goodness, and beauty.

- **Common Core assessment ensures anesthetizing, analytical teaching.** Standards are not bad in and of themselves, and I think many of the standards to be sensible and laudable. But regular standardized assessments (that prove teachers are teaching the standards) reduce teachers to technicians who will feel compelled to teach to the test and thus engage mainly (certainly far too much) in test-prep during class. Ask yourself—do you enjoy test prep? Do you think eighth graders are going to lean forward in their seats for more test prep exercises? No longer can the teacher (easily anyway) be the master of her craft, imparting her knowledge and skill to students according to the wisdom she has acquired as a master of her art. No, she will follow something much like a checklist of standards that will be embodied and scripted in Common Core aligned textbooks. No longer the coach, the guide, the mentor . . . no, she is the one with the clipboard, textbook, and checklist. It is harder now for her to inspire; she must inspect.

- **Too much poor teaching drives the push for CCS.** One legitimate cause for CCS: pervasively bad teaching in too many schools. For the last 30 years, there has been a decline in the quality of public schools (not all of them—some have managed to be admirable in many ways) largely related to yet other progressive educational policies (test prep being one of them). Our nation's teachers, for example, are not generally trained to be well-rounded masters of several disciplines, but specialists who cannot integrate, say, biology with history or literature with music. Fragmented themselves, they can offer only a fragmented education to their students, and to be honest, have probably not even imagined that education could be anything other than taking one unrelated course after another. Such teachers can't easily inspire students and some (too many) settle into moving through their curriculum in checklist fashion, with little accountability to anything else. The result—students don't learn well, and don't perform well on various standardized tests set up by the states themselves. Scores fall, hands are wringed. Something must be done. Common Core is the current thing that is being done to address poor teaching and student performance. We will have the same set of standards across the nation; teachers will be required to teach these standards; students will be assessed with the same (standardized) assessments across the nation to demonstrate that teachers are indeed teaching and students are indeed learning.

- **Implementation of CCS will produce less of what it seeks**. The great irony: while this response to increase learning and accountability seems rational and understandable, I believe it will produce precisely the opposite effect. Why? Because teachers as dissectors and inspectors cannot inspire learning, and without inspiration, students cease being students. More and more students must be compelled to academic work, because they lack an internal drive to seek after truth, goodness, beauty, and knowledge. Again, why? Because the Common Core architects do not understand what education truly is. Having jettisoned the classical understanding of education, they retain only a modern conception of education.

> Truth, goodness, beauty? They are not to be found in the Common Core standards. To them education is a science—the right application of a tested method to produce predictable results. We don't need a "master"—we just need someone who can apply the tested techniques consistently upon a group of humans (made up of the same stuff no matter where you find them) to "effect" learning. Teachers are technicians, the inspectors, and the more careful and consistent they are the better. The Common Core standards emphasize that they do not specify *how* teachers teach just *what* they are to teach. But that is verbal gobbledygook. When academic standards are as highly specified as the Common Core standards are, they in effect become a pedagogy. In addition, the mere fact that regular assessments will be used to verify the teaching of these standards will affect pedagogy—they will compel the teacher to engage in test prep. Test prep will become both the curriculum and the pedagogy, largely defining both what will be taught and the general methods of teaching.

All the important reforms of Common Core are characterized by a modern understanding of what education is. Given that understanding, these reforms are rational and consistent. Chesterton remarked that all reform has reference to form. What form of human being do the Common Core architects have in view? What form, therefore of education? I have said it already: they view education as the science of the right application of method and technique to effect predictable learning responses or results. They may not know nor may they care what the classical understanding of humanity and education is. For them, that understanding was discredited a century ago, and revisiting it is probably laughable.

For me, however, the classical conception holds true, and is a rock that the tide and waves cannot diminish. Human beings are above the animals as conscious beings capable of apprehending and knowing truth, goodness, and beauty as eternal realities. They are best taught by wise, eloquent, and virtuous teachers who have themselves been cultivated by a study of language, history, literature, mathematics, music, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, and theology. Teaching is an art and relationship (of love and kindness) in which a teacher imparts herself to a student, so that after being fully trained a student will become like his teacher. The standards and assessments of this relationship are largely personal, that of a master and apprentice. Is Common Core the roar of a tide coming in or going out? I am not sure, but classical education will remain steadfast and intact, as it has for 2000 years.

NINTH GRADE READING LISTS: 1922 VS. TODAY

by Annie Holmquist, Intellectual Takeout

2015–16 SAN ANTONIO HIGH SCHOOLS		1922 TEXAS HIGH SCHOOLS	
Book	Reading Level	Book	Reading Level
The House on Mango Street, Cisneros	4.5	*Captains Courageous*, Kipling	8.0
Artemis Fowl, Colfer	5.0	*Silar Marner,* Eliot	9.7
The Chocolate War, Cormier	5.4	*The House of the Seven Gables*, Hawthorne	11.0
Freak the Mighty, Philbrick	5.5	*The Deerslayer*, Cooper	11.2
To Kill a Mockingbird, Lee	5.6	*The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper	12.0
Beloved, Morrison	6.0	*Ivanhoe*, Scott	12.9
Harry Potter Series, Rowling	6.7 (Average)		

Having recently dug up a curriculum manual[1] for Texas high schools from 1922, I decided to explore this question (i.e., "Is it possible that falling scores [in NAEP Reading] are the result of diminished rigor in the high school curriculum?) by comparing its ninth grade reading recommendations with those the San Antonio Independent School District recommended for the 2015–16 school year.[2]

Both syllabi included recommendations for poetry, fiction, short stories, drama, and non-fiction. Both syllabi implied that the books on the lists were simply suggestions, which might not necessarily be used in their entirety.

To give an idea of the difference between the two, I plugged the fiction titles from both lists into a text analyzer[3] which measures reading difficulty. The results? Reading material in today's freshman literature classes measures around a fifth-grade level. In 1922, however, freshman literature fare often measured at an eleventh or twelfth grade level.

When we see how the difficulty of reading material has declined in the last one hundred years, is it any wonder that high school reading scores have been trending downward over time?

Notes:

1. Texas High Schools Course of Study, The Department of Education, State of Texas, July, 1922. From the National Achives, accessed online at https://archive.org/stream/texashighschools01texa#page/n1/mode/2up.

2. San Antonio ISD Curriculum Resources, High School Engish Curriculum, 2015–16 School Year. Accessed online at https://www.saisd.net/admin/curric/curricms/curriculum/high_school/hs_english_curriculum.html.

3. AR BookFinder. See http://www.arbookfind.com/UserType.aspx.

Annie Holmquist *is a research associate with Intellectual Takeout. This is a portion of the complete article published September 2, 2016, at www.intellectualtakeout.org and is reprinted by permission of the author.*

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