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THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF CLASSICAL & CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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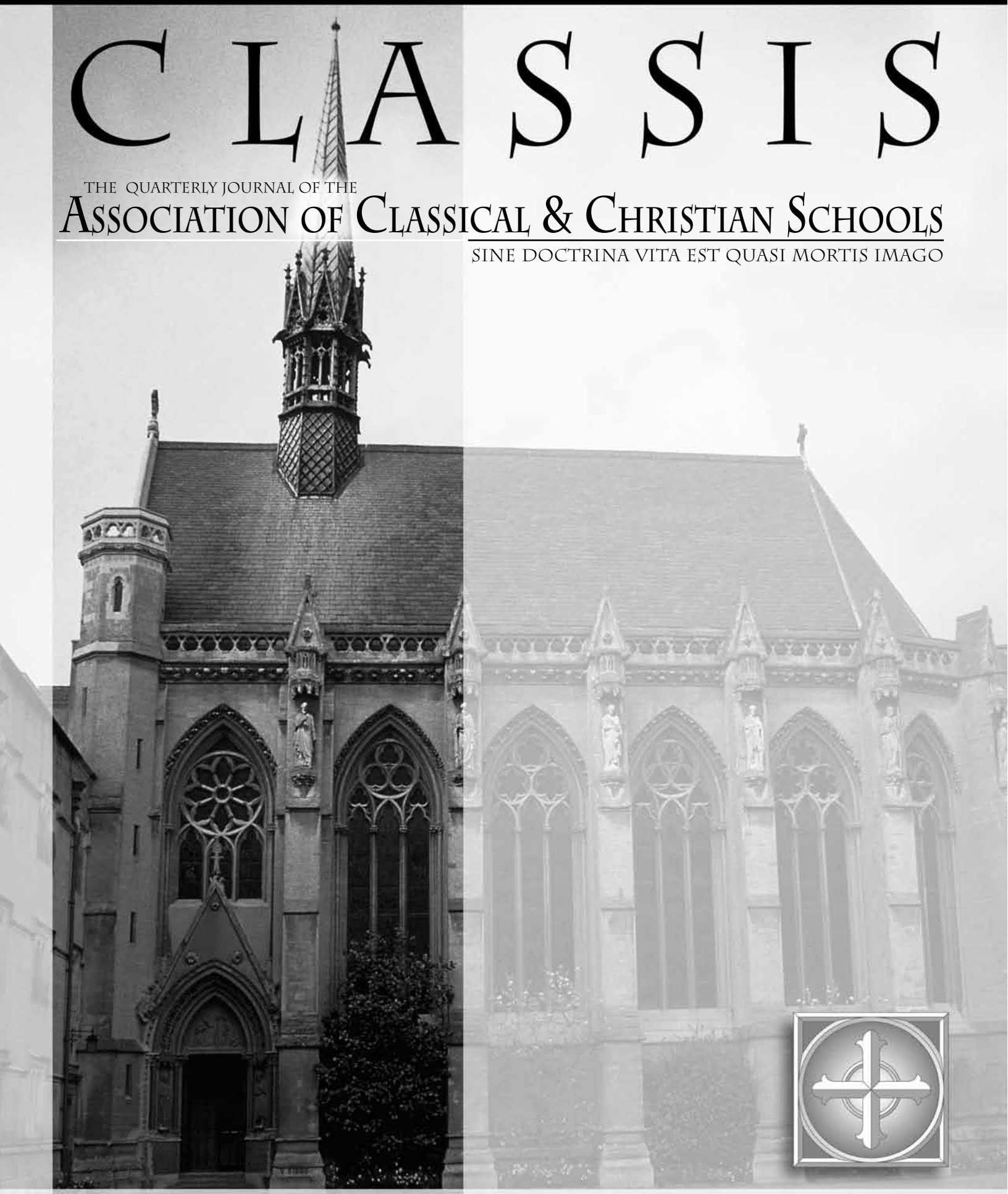

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ACCS

CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR THE WORLD

CLASSIS IS A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTICLES AND BOOK REVIEWS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE SCHOOLS AROUND THE WORLD WHICH ARE RECOVERING CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. HARD COPIES ARE AVAILABLE TO ACCS MEMBERS AND BY SUBSCRIPTION.

MISSION STATEMENT

THE PRIMARY MISSION OF THIS ASSOCIATION IS TO PROMOTE, ESTABLISH, AND EQUIP SCHOOLS COMMITTED TO A CLASSICAL APPROACH TO EDUCATION IN LIGHT OF A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW GROUNDED IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES.

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Words and Writing

by Patch Blakey

Words are an incredible creation. We frequently take them for granted. But they are so powerful for both good and for evil. The *sine qua non* in such a discussion is Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The Apostle John wrote (via words) that all things were made by Jesus Christ, and without Him, nothing was made of all that exists (John 1:3). This parallels the first chapter of Genesis in which it is recorded that all of creation came about through God speaking it into existence.

King David wrote, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11).

Isaiah recorded this about God's word, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

In responding to Satan during His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus stated three times, "it is written" (Matt 4:3-11) and then quoted Scripture to resist the devil's temptations.

Yet James wrote to the twelve tribes which were scattered abroad and also to us with regard to our sinful use of words, "And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell" (James 3:6). But as we all know, speaking is not the only means to abuse others with our words.

In his discourse, *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine wrote,

"Now, the art of rhetoric being available for the enforcing either of truth or falsehood, who will dare to say that truth in the person of its defenders is to take its stand unarmed against falsehood? For example, that those who are trying to persuade men of what is false are to know how to introduce their subject, so as to put the hearer into a friendly, or attentive, or teachable frame of mind, while the defenders of the truth shall be ignorant of that art? That the former are to tell their falsehoods briefly, clearly, and plausibly, while the latter shall tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and, in fine, not easy to believe it? That the former are to oppose, to melt, to enliven, and to rouse them, while the latter shall in defense of the truth be sluggish, and frigid, and somnolent? Who is such a fool as to think this wisdom? Since, then, the faculty of eloquence is available for both sides, and is of very great service in the enforcing either of wrong or right, why do not good men study to engage it on the side of truth, when bad men use it to obtain the triumph of wicked and worthless causes, and to further injustice and error?"

Classical Christian education seeks to train generations of godly rhetoricians; men and women who are competent at using words well to the glory of God. While it is absolutely necessary to speak fittingly in every situation, it is even more important to write in such a way that one's words can be read, properly understood, and applied over the constraints of distance and time. If we want our children and subsequent generations to positively influence the world for Jesus Christ, they must master the use of words, not only in their speech, but also in their writing.

We are very thankful for those authors in this issue of *Classis* who have graciously offered their thoughts and experiences on teaching students to write. My sincere hope is that ACCS teachers will find these articles to be thought-provoking and beneficial.

***Patch Blakey** is the executive director of ACCS.*

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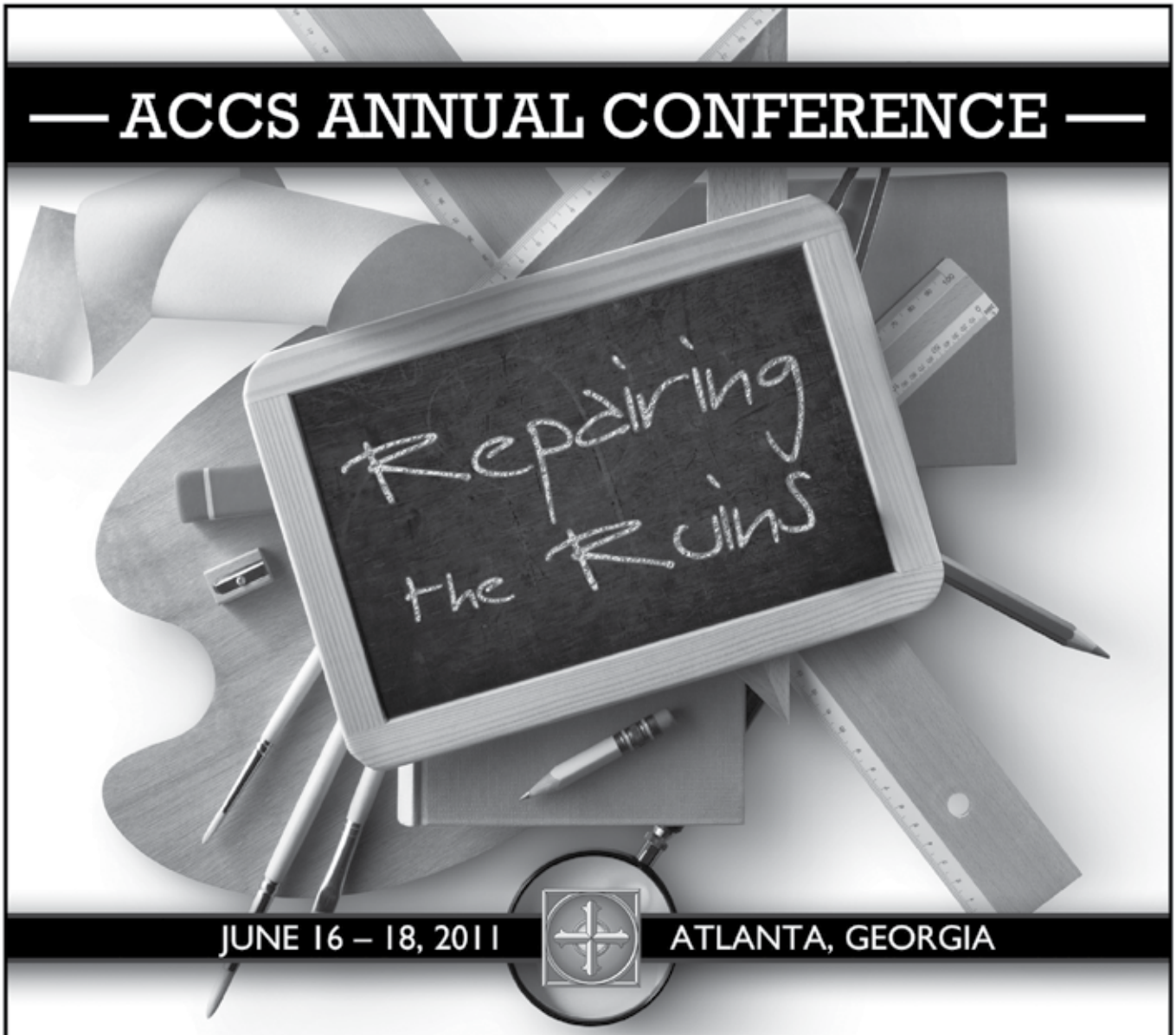

JUNE 16 – 18, 2011 ATLANTA, GEORGIA

FEATURED SPEAKERS

VODDIE BAUCHAM

Dr. Baucham is the pastor of preaching at Grace Family Baptist Church in Spring, TX, where he resides with his wife and seven children. He is strongly committed to Christian education and the importance of the family. Voddie is a pastor, church planter, author (*The Ever Loving Truth, Family Driven Faith*), professor, husband, father and . . . chef.

GEORGE GRANT

The author of more than five dozen books, George Grant is pastor of Parish Presbyterian Church in Franklin, Tennessee; founder of Franklin Classical School; chancellor of New College Franklin; and president of King's Meadow Study Center. He is an ex-officio member of the ACCS Board.

MATT WHITLING

For the past seventeen years, Matt has taught elementary and secondary classes at Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, and currently works as both secondary and elementary principal there. He also coaches boys' basketball. He is the author of the Imitation in Writing series. A member of Christ Church, he serves as a parish elder.

DOUGLAS WILSON

Douglas Wilson is the pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. He is a founding board member of both Logos School and New Saint Andrews College and continues to serve as an ex-officio member of the ACCS Board. He has authored numerous books on classical Christian education, the family, and the Reformed faith. He also plays in the Jenny Geddes band.

A Classical Approach to Writing Instruction: The Progymnasmata

by Jim Selby, The Whitefield Academy

Most teachers want to do a good job teaching writing. Most would also admit that they do not so much "teach" writing, but rather they "assess" the end product. A subjective and mysterious process, some students seem to get writing while most do not, and we cannot by conscious action seem to do much about it. Writing teachers[1] have "learned" to write through experience—trial and error—not by mastering a vertically integrated, discrete set of skills and sub-skills that make up the craft or art of writing. None of us were taught under classical composition theory and its foundation, the progymnasmata, which is arguably the best curriculum that fully prepares students for tackling the art of rhetoric.

This article will focus on the pragmatic effectiveness of the progymnasmata but I will take the liberty of digressing into language theory, albeit in the broadest strokes, before launching into the heart of the theme. Current writing curriculums derive from one of three theories of language—classical, modern, or process theory—each a product of a particular worldview. Classical discourse theory argues that communication is an art that can be taught through the pedagogy of imitation and repetition[2] — explicit instruction, multiple contexts, and deep cognitive engagement. Modern composition theory affirms communication as art, but its progressive roots produce an abbreviated, ineffective pedagogy that abhors imitation and repetition because of the belief that the child is perfect, needing only to be interested in something to learn. Consequently, it radically gutted classical methodology, eliminating the six to seven years of the progymnasmata, slashing the forty plus "topics of invention" to five "modes of development,"[3] and elevating the four types of composition[4] to ends in themselves, subsuming arrangement and style within these four purposes. The sterile failure of modern theory gave way to process theory in the 1970s. This pedagogy which has dominated writing instruction in our classrooms for the last thirty years notoriously defies logical analysis.[5] Process theory abhors categories of any kind, seeking its essence in an author's "voice" and in the subjective encounter of a reader with a text. Under the tutelage of process theory only 22% of college bound high school graduates who believe themselves equipped to write have been able to write a coherent and cohesive essay upon demand.[6] As classical Christian educators we understand that worldview affects curriculum. This truth holds for writing curricula as well. We must give serious consideration to the only writing curriculum derived from a classical view of language–the progymnasmata.[7] What follows is a brief analysis of the pragmatic genius of Aphthonius' vertically integrated progymnasmata.[8]

The first two stages, **fable** and **narrative**, impart the basic skills of inventing stories. Aristotle identified the *enthymeme* the "substance of rhetorical persuasion."[9] A general story or demonstration shares with the *enthymeme* the fundamental substance of rhetorical argument—the innate ability to engage the imagination by requiring the audience to infer in order to create meaning. Aesop's *Fables* do so with great effect. Through explicit instruction, multiple contexts, and deep cognitive engagement students learn the three components of plot: reversal, recognition, and suffering (Aristotle, *Poetics)*. They also learn the six categories of narrative structure: agent, action, time, place, manner, and cause. In addition to these components and categories of plot that lay a foundation for the canon of invention, young writers learn the skill of creating stories by mastering subskills. These subskills include sequencing—beginning a story at the end or in the middle and retelling it coherently; point of view—retelling the story from the perspective of

Aphthonius Progymnasmata

1. Fable
2. Narrative
3. Chreia
4. Maxim
5. Refutation/Confirmation
6. Common topic
7. Encomium
8. Invective
9. Comparison
10. Characterization
11. Description
12. Thesis
13. Proposal of Law

Jim Selby *is the dean of students at the Whitefield Academy in Kansas City, Missouri. He teaches rhetoric, Great Books, English literature and logic.*

A Classical Approach to Writing . . .

different agents; condensing—using as few words as possible while maintaining coherence; and expanding though figures. These initial stages begin to train the mind to think compositionally, to generate ideas, through that most effective of pedagogies—imitation and repetition. Students, gifted or not, practice and master a discrete set of manageable subskills. Teachers do not overwhelm and frustrate students by assuming these critical subskills.

The **chreia** and **maxim** stages build directly upon skills acquired in fable and narrative. Students develop or exposit a short, pithy statement or proverb through eight heads of development. The ability to "invent" four story types: general affirmative (cause), general negative (converse), general comparison (analogy), and particular affirmative (example) and to state the same idea in different words (paraphrase and testimony) are the foundational skills learned in these exercises. In addition, students learn an introduction that includes a rudimentary thesis statement and several praise statements meant to lure the reader on as well as a brief epilogue. The ability to create a story through the use of the plot components and structure lays a foundation in the mind for the full-blown skill of invention to be taught next.

Refutation/confirmation teaches students to invent arguments through using a limited number of six topics. As juniors and seniors, our budding writers will master thirty or forty topics in their formal rhetoric classes but these "progym" stages actually train the mind to use these tools to generate arguments. Though the most difficult stages of the curriculum, refutation and confirmation complete the previous four stages and lay a foundation for the most difficult task of writing—invention.[10]

Common topic follows with a delightful experience for junior high school students who seem to relish contradiction and conflict. The heads or categories of composition in this exercise introduce youngsters to the skill of arrangement. Students craft effective introductions which include a thesis statement, and two arguments or heads of purpose supporting the thesis. Six heads or categories follow, three narrative in form and three argumentative in form. A concluding head uses all six heads of purpose mastered in refutation/confirmation. Previous skills are reinforced and varied through a specific focus or narrowing of thought around a new thesis each week. The students find this popular exercise a creative, expansive experience.

The next three stages of the progymnasmata—**encomium**, **invective**, and **comparison**—deal with epideictic communication—persuading as to what is or is not. The introduction in these stages, the most sophisticated yet, includes, as the previous exercise did, a thesis and two arguments, but then it reaches back to the chreia/maxim stages and uses encomiums with the application of "heighteners."[11] Each head or section serves to develop both the invention and arrangement of arguments covering the full scope of epideictic speech.

The eleventh and twelfth stages introduce the skills of style. The **characterization** stage models for the students "a style that is clear, concise, colorful, unconstrained, not intricate or figurative."[12] This particular style is achieved through paraphrase and an abbreviated word count. "**Description** is an expository discourse which brings the object exhibited vividly into view . . . one should adopt a free, relaxed style and ornament it with different figures, and in general hit off the objects being described."[13] This particular style is achieved through a multitude of details, never dwelling upon an object but moving quickly, and the use of as many figures as is necessary to reach an expanded word count.

The thirteenth and fourteenth stages of exercises serve as a capstone to the six plus years our students have been learning to write with the progymnasmata. **Thesis** and **law** hone the reasoning skills through the introduction of counterpoints or qualification. These stages provide the students with a plethora of opportunities to create arguments using the heads of purpose (invention) and to demonstrate these arguments using the heads of development.

With the completion of these final stages, next year's rhetoric teacher will find a group of skilled, competent writers ready to tackle the canons of rhetoric. No other curriculum has as its purpose the preparation for rhetoric. The "before exercises" or progymnasmata equips students with a basic ability to invent, arrange, and employ style which rhetoric now takes to a height we have not seen from our adolescents since the eighteenth century. The progymnasmata originated in a classical worldview and as classical Christian educators we should give the curriculum serious consideration for adoption in our schools.

A Classical Approach to Writing . . .

NOTES

1. Whether learning through process theory or modern composition theory.

2. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book II, Chapter 5, http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/home.html.

3. Comparison, contrast, cause and effect, description, and explication.

4. Narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative.

5. Donald M. Murray, "Teach Writing as a Process, Not Product," in *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Victor Villanueva (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003).

6. The essay portion of the ACT is optional. Only those students who think they can write spend another hour completing the essays.

7. I am aware of at least one writing curriculum that extends the rhetorical canon of invention down into the logic and grammar stages.

8. http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm

9. Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Rhys Robers and Ingram Bywater (Columbus, OH: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 2.

10. Cicero, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), II.I.1

11. Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, Rhys Roberts (New York: Modern Library / Random House: 1984), 62 (Book 1, ch. 9, 1368a.10ff).

12. Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata*, trans. Malcolm Heath, http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm

13. Ibid.

Pro-gym-nas-what?

by Amy Kim, The Oaks: A Classical Christian Academy

When I first began teaching at the Oaks Academy, I was not only transitioning from twelve years at home with my children, but also transitioning from teaching in the public school system. Some parts of my newfound job description were familiar to me: grammar and literature would be taught similarly to my previous experience. On the other hand, when I was told that I would be teaching writing by utilizing the progymnasmata, I was at a loss. What exactly was progymnasmata?[1] My department head gave me a list of the fourteen steps of the progymnasmata and their respective elements, which was *somewhat* helpful, but I still struggled to understand these writing exercises. What did they look like in "real life"? Where could I find examples of them? How could I incorporate them into my teaching in a comprehensive fashion? Why should writing be taught this way? I had no idea how to tackle this strange "new" approach.

What followed included hours spent on the internet, trying to find examples of the progymnasmata and examples of teaching materials. I endeavored to incorporate into our literature study the steps of the progymnasmata which I had been assigned to teach my seventh and eighth graders. I began to understand the place of the progymnasmata in the Trivium as a tool for building skilled rhetoricians.[2] And yet, I still found myself struggling to make writing instructions with these forms meaningful and effective. The exercises seemed difficult, if not impossible, to tie to the literature, and any examples I had were either clunky and formulaic or difficult to comprehend because of their ancient language conventions.

Over the next year, my colleagues and I spent a considerable amount of time rethinking our goals for writing education at the Oaks as well as the best means to accomplish those goals. At what ages, we wondered, would the different steps of the progymnasmata be most effective? At what grade should the process begin? How could we develop fluency with the progymnasmata in our secondary scope and sequence? A watershed point came when we began conferencing with Mrs. Cindy Marsch (Writing Assessment Services, ACCS member since 1997) and commissioned her to help us adapt her progymnasmata materials for use at the Oaks. As a result of this philosophical and practical refining, the Oaks writing curriculum now includes progymnasmata instruction in grades three through ten, with eleventh- and twelfth-graders employing the progymnasmata as needed for rhetoric assignments. Formal writing instruction begins with third- to sixth-graders focusing on fable and narrative. In grades seven through ten, we introduce the remaining exercises along with outlining and traditional five-paragraph essay form. In each grade we review the previous progymnasmata exercises in order to help students become fluent with them. We have also decided to teach some of the progymnasmata "out of order" to better coincide with other

Amy Kim *teaches 7th & 8th grade language arts at The Oaks: A Classical Christian Academy in Spokane, WA. The Oaks is an ACCS-accredited school.*

Pro-gym-nas-what? . . .

elements of our instruction as well as student development.[3] For instance, since our students begin logic instruction in eighth grade, we postponed confirmation/refutation instruction until ninth grade. Here is an abbreviated look at our scope and sequence across the grades, focusing on the placement of newly taught exercises:

Grades 3-6: Fable, narrative
Grade 7: Maxim, chreia, characterization (as a speech-in-character
Grade 8: Encomium/ invective, comparison, description
Grade 9: Confirmation/ refutation,common topic
Grade 10: Thesis, for/ against laws

Along with teaching the progymnasmata forms, Mrs. Marsch's approach also incorporates classical tools like imitation. For example, when writing fable or narrative, students are given excerpts from excellent literature as source material. Utilizing the principle of imitation, students first condense the original narrative passage, working to retain its narrative core (the *who*? *what*? *when*? *where*? *why*? and *how*?), then expand their condensed versions, adding in meaningful details. After completing those steps, they might use one of various narrative slants to rework the text.[4] In this example, the student writer retells a biblical narrative (Gen. 37:2-11) from the perspective of Joseph's older brother Reuben:

"My dear brother, Joseph, is my younger sibling and the favorite of my father, Israel. I have always loved him and have ignored the many gifts that have been showered on him, although about a week ago Joseph made me a little jealous. As we walked to my father's tent, Israel came running out of the purple cloth that served as a door. He held a magnificent robe of various colors and all our eyes were drawn to it. To our dismay, Israel gave Joseph the robe. I envied him, but I think my brothers despised him. They began whispering horrible things about him and almost started a riot."

In another instance, after condensing and expanding the fable, "The Fox, the Ass, and the Lion," students retold it in another setting, using human characters instead of the original animal characters. In the following sample, the fox and the ass become juvenile pranksters, while the lion is the boys' school administrator:

"Monster Moor and Goblin Fester haunted the halls of Evergreen Elementary School for six long years. Their partnership had proved to be a troublesome problem for Mrs. Pratt, Evergreen's principal. Somehow the boys always managed to evade detection, although they traumatized the school with constant pranks."

Through these kinds of processes, students learn to adapt the elements of the progymnasmata to suit different rhetorical goals.

We also endeavor to connect progymnasmata and literature instruction. For instance, when teaching maxim (proverb amplification), I have found it helpful either to draw a proverb from literature we are reading or to use the literature selection as the example within an amplification. Here is a portion of a student's maxim from *Macbeth*, written after we read Shakespeare's play:

" 'What's done cannot be undone.' Lady Macbeth, 5.1. Lady Macbeth, though insane, shows Shakespeare's godly wisdom when she says that one's deeds cannot be changed, no matter how much one regrets having done them. Lady Macbeth knows that things like murder cannot be reversed once committed and knows so because her conscience, even in her sleep, has been afflicted by her murder of King Duncan: she says this while sleepwalking."

Last spring, our end-of-the-year culminating activity found students writing and delivering speeches-in-character as the various characters from the year's literature. This required students to attend to the plot details and to consider the character's speech patterns (word choice) as well as that character's particular perspective within the story. When they gave their speeches orally, students also practiced rhetorical elements of delivery. Here is an excerpt from an eighth-grade student's characterization of Bertie Wooster from PG Wodehouse's *Joy in the Morning* (which he delivered in a suit and tie while using a British accent):

"Engaged?! Again?! And to Florence Cray of all the pie-faced females?! Now, mind you, I did not ask for this, but due to an unfortunate set of past events, she finds it necessary to bung to my side and announce our engagement. The old heart bleeds for all the men she has lured in, and I squirm like a worm on a hook at the thought of a man actually going through with the marriage."

As I grow in my comfort with the progymnasmata, I continue to see more ways to integrate them with literature instruction and comprehension. Description can be used to draw out the details from a particular scene in a novel or play and to emphasize the

Pro-gym-nas-what? . . .

importance of "showing" versus "telling" language. Encomium/invective (praise/blame) is useful for highlighting the admirable or negative qualities of particular characters in literature, while comparison can be used to consider two different protagonists or antagonists from different works, or the protagonist and antagonist from the same work. Here is the beginning of an encomium speech for Aragorn from JRR Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring:*

"My comrades, we have gathered for the coronation of his soon-to-be majesty, Aragorn II. We have come from the corners of Middle Earth: the grassy Shire, the cold Dwarves' mines, the mysterious Elves' forests, the massive Plains of Rohan, the halls of Gondor, and as far away as the palace in Dunadain. Every one of us recognizes this man standing before us as the honest, valiant warrior, Strider. Even his mere name lifts our spirits and makes us proud of our hero and friend."

At one point I could not have used "comfort" and "progymnasmata" in the same sentence, but I am becoming more comfortable with these exercises. Three primary factors have contributed to this. First of all, I read every example of the progymnasmata exercises I could find. Along with that, I received instruction in the progymnasmata by taking Mrs. Marsch's tutorial myself. My personal examples and experience from this have been invaluable to me on a couple of fronts. Becoming a student not only required me to carefully work through my understanding of the exercises,[5] but my written pieces have also served as a classroom resource, providing a model for my students and authenticity for me as students see that I have actually done what I'm asking them to do. The final factor that has increased my comfort with teaching progymnasmata has been the use of Mrs. Marsch's curriculum. Even in places where I haven't been able to directly apply her material, it has given me ideas for developing my own assignments.

Along with growing in understanding the practical application of progymnasmata, I am increasingly grasping the philosophical underpinnings of the progymnasmata as a vital component of developing skilled rhetoricians. Additionally, I am coming to realize the ways that the progymnasmata are the basis of the composition forms (description, narration, exposition, and argumentation) taught to me as a student. Even though, as a seventh/eighth-grade teacher, I work with students who haven't yet reached the rhetoric stage, I labor in the hope that the skills students develop through the progymnasmata will be tools for them to use later on when they are inventing and delivering persuasive essays and speeches. As D'Angelo states in his preface to *Composition in the Classical Tradition*, "These exercises embody a familiar way of teaching and learning writing, preserving its advantages, while harking back to and obtaining additional advantages from a venerable rhetorical tradition whose practical usefulness has proved itself over many centuries and that remains relevant today."[6]

Resources: The following include some of the resources we perused while developing goals and materials for progymnasmata instruction.

- Cindy Marsch, "Writing Assessment Services," www.writingassessment.com
- Frank J. D'Angelo, *Composition in the Classical Tradition* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000).
- Gideon O. Burton, *Silva Rhetoricae*, rhetoric.byu.edu/
- Lene Jaqua, et al., *Classical Writing*, www.classicalwriting.com/index.htm
- Susan Wise Bauer, *Writing with Ease: Strong Fundamentals* (Charles City, VA: Peace Hill Press, 2008).
- Andrew Pudewa, Institute for Excellence in Writing, www.excellenceinwriting.com/

NOTES

1 "The word *progymnasmata* is Greek for 'preliminary exercises.' These exercises were taught in ancient Greece and Rome to educate young men in rhetoric, in effective and persuasive public speaking and writing." Lene Jaqua, et al. http://www.classicalwriting.com/Progym.htm

2. Frank J. D'Angelo, *Composition in the Classical Tradition* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000).

3. Even the ancients did not entirely agree on the order of the progymnasmata exercises.

4. For examples of narrative slant, see D'Angelo or Marsch.

5. An idea which D'Angelo echoes in his preface to *Composition in the Classical Tradition*.

6. D'Angelo, *Composition in the Classical Tradition*.

Dr. Louise Cowan—a True Teacher

by Ben House, Veritas Academy

Only twelve percent of adult Americans read poetry, according to a recent statistic.[1] Several of my students, my eleven-year-old son, and I fit into an even smaller minority: the number of Americans who travel three hours one way on a rainy night to hear a poetry lecture. The occasion was a lecture series called "Poetry and the City" sponsored by the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture. The lecturer was Dr. Louise Cowan.

It was the desire to see and hear Dr. Cowan that drew my students and me from Texarkana to Dallas. Dr. Cowan holds the Louise Cowan Chair of Literature at the University of Dallas and she is a key figure in the founding of the Dallas Institute's Teachers Academy. She received a doctorate from Vanderbilt University and is the author of many articles on literary criticism and two volumes on Southern literature, and she edited or co-edited several other volumes on literature for both scholars and general readers. Her credentials and scholarly accomplishments are impressive, but that alone would not have drawn a homebody like me out so far and late into the night. Louise Cowan is one of the most important literary scholars of our time. Now in her late eighties, Dr. Cowan is still lecturing, teaching, and inspiring students in the field of literature. Dr. Cowan is important because of her role in the Southern Literary Renaissance as both scholar and participant, her understanding of literature and scholarly accomplishments in that field, and her achievements as a teacher.

First, Louise Cowan has played a vital part in the Southern Literary Renaissance, which has had a major impact on American literature since the 1920s. The geographical center of this literary renaissance was Vanderbilt University. In the 1920s and 30s, a number of young scholars developed a literary community in the Nashville area that spawned dozens of books of poetry, fiction, literary criticism, politics, and history. From this same circle of writers came at least three major movements that impacted literature and culture. These American Southern writers in several ways resembled the Inklings of England, which was the literary group including C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and other friends. These Southerners shared a common heritage and intellectual excitement about applying that heritage to the modern world. Lots of writers participated in the movements emanating out of Vanderbilt University, but four poets were the key members of the original group. They were John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. As young men, they gathered together on Saturday nights to read and critique their poems and discuss literature, philosophy, and other topics. Soon they began to publish a literary magazine called *The Fugitive* and they came to be known as the Fugitive poets. All four men went on to successful careers in writing and teaching literature. By the late 1920s, feeling that Southern culture, the agrarian values of rural America, and the importance of family and faith were all under attack, they responded by contributing articles to *I'll Take My Stand*. This book, made up of essays by twelve Southerners, is a classic work on localized politics, heritage and culture, and the importance of the traditional agrarian community. The essays were attacked in their day by critics now forgotten, but *I'll Take My Stand* has remained in print.

Dr. Cowan is important because of her role in the Southern Literary Renaissance as both scholar and participant, her understanding of literature and scholarly accomplishments in that field, and her achievements as a teacher.

Louise Cowan wrote her doctrinal dissertation on the Fugitive poets, titled *The Fugitive Group: A Literary History*. This study contains a history of the movement, biographical sketches of the poets, and literary analyses of their poetry. Dr. Cowan also wrote a book called *The Southern Critics*, which introduces and examines the literary criticism of the Vanderbilt literary circle. Other key writers in the Southern Renaissance include Flannery O'Connor, Caroline Gordon, and William Faulkner, who have all been

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Dr. Louise Cowan . . .

subjects of Dr. Cowan's studies.

While Southern writers do not fit into a nice neat mold, they do seem to share more than just upbringing in the South. A sense of geography and history, an attachment to the agrarian community, and a respect for older codes and truths—what William Faulkner called the "old verities"—tie the writings of these Southerners together. In her book *The Southern Critics*, Dr. Cowan wrote, "…the Fugitives learned that they were gentlemen, Christians, and—if the egalitarian world forced them to admit it—clearly aristocratic, at least in their attitude toward literature, education, and culture."[2] She goes on to say, "Their discipline was poetry; their mode of study was the apprehension of the poetic form; their outlook was classical and Christian; their concern was the welfare of human culture, to the extent that it could be furthered through literature."[3]

She is not simply a scholar who points to details the reader has missed. She is a romancer of the classics. Her lifelong love of great literature is quite contagious.

Dr. Cowan is an authority on Southern literature. She learned Southern literature directly from the Fugitive-Agrarians. She was a colleague of such renowned Southern thinkers as novelist Caroline Gordon, who Dr. Cowan brought to the University of Dallas as a teacher when Ms. Gordon was 78, and scholar Mel Bradford, whose writings on Southern literature and history are quite brilliant. In Dr. Cowan's lecture, she quoted Davidson, Ransom, and Tate freely and often. Even though the Fugitive-Agrarians lived until the latter half of the twentieth century, many of their ideas and books are neglected. Donald Davidson, for example, was an excellent poet, yet his poems rarely appear in anthologies. Perhaps it may not be politically correct to reference these Southern authors in some circles, but their achievements are still being heralded by Dr. Cowan and her students.

I had a second reason for wanting to hear Dr. Cowan. Not only has she studied Southern literature extensively, but also she has developed literary approaches to all genres of literature. Much of her work in the area of literary genres can be found in a series of books she has edited and contributed to called Studies in Genre. The three volumes available in this series are *The Epic Cosmos*, *The Terrain of Comedy*, and *The Tragic Abyss*, with a fourth volume on lyric poetry remaining to be finished. These genre studies by Dr. Cowan and others are quite scholarly and extensive. Her essay in *The Epic Cosmos*, titled "The Epic as Cosmopoesis," is one of the most brilliant, yet difficult, writings I have ever read. I read it each time when I am teaching Homer and Virgil, with the hope and expectation that each new reading will deepen my understanding of both epic literature and this essay.

In another key work on literature, titled *An Invitation to the Classics: A Guide to the Books You Always Wanted to Read*, Dr. Cowan and Os Guinness compiled short introductory essays written by themselves and others on literary classics. These essays, which are more than summaries of the works, are much more accessible and understandable for students and reference purposes. In fact, *An Invitation to the Classics* is one of my most often used books. The contributors to the volume occupy literature positions in key universities across the country, and many of them are Dr. Cowan's former students. Each selection takes a major classic piece of literature and analyzes the main themes and contents and provides biographical or historical information about the author and the time period of the writing. My literature lectures and discussions in class are filled with my borrowings from this book. Dr. Cowan's introductory essay gives a useful description of what makes a book a classic.

My favorite personal experience in teaching in a classical Christian school has been discovering literary classics I either had never read or had never read deeply. Since I began teaching in a classical Christian school, I have read more and better books and read and taught them in a deeper sense than I ever did in college, in graduate school, or in teaching in public school. Homer and Milton, Shakespeare and Melville, and other great writers are unsettling and unsatisfying. When you finish their works, you want to start over and read them again. And you want to read what others have noticed and observed about these classics. Since Dr. Cowan is so well-versed in literary classics, listening to her is quite a thrill.

Dr. Louise Cowan . . .

She is not simply a scholar who points to details the reader has missed. She is a romancer of the classics. Her lifelong love of great literature is quite contagious.

This leads to the third reason I wanted to see Dr. Cowan. She is a great teacher. Her students have transplanted her approach to teaching literature to schools and colleges across the land. Many of them are quite capable scholars and authors themselves. As Dr. Glenn Arbery has said, "Directly or indirectly, her ideas have influenced thousands of undergraduates, graduate students, and secondary school teachers, as well as tens of thousands of their students."[4] Most of my gleaning from Dr. Cowan's insights has been from reading her books, listening to a few "taped tapes," and attending a couple of lectures, yet, thankfully, I am one of those secondary school teachers who has been able to echo her insights and hopefully imitate her enthusiasm in my classroom.

In her essay, "The Importance of the Classics,"[5] Dr. Cowan describes how her study of Hamlet reawakened her understanding of Christianity in Shakespeare's writings and then her study of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamozov* led to her "rediscovery of Christ in His fullness." Literature is a great means of expounding a Christian worldview. Not only are there a host of great Christian writers—ranging from St. Augustine to Flannery O'Connor—but also the themes of great literature invariably reflect Christian issues. Not all literature professors see or apply this and not all approaches to literature are open to Christian interpretations. But God is gracious, both to individuals and to whole cultures. Isn't it amazing that in a world so often described as post-Christian, post-modern, skeptical, and unbelieving that God not only raised up a C.S. Lewis and a J.R.R. Tolkien in Britain, but He has raised up whole ranks of literary scholars in our age, including Dr. Louise Cowan.

NOTES

1. Statistic found in the Spring 2005 catalog of courses and events at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

2. Louise Cowan, *The Southern Critics* (Dallas: University of Dallas Publications).

3. Ibid., 75.

4. Glenn Arbery, *The Tragic Abyss*, editor's preface (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 2003), i.

5. Louise Cowan and Os Guinness, *An Invitation to the Classics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

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Writing at Regents School of Austin

by Dr. Carol Blosser and Josh Simmons, Regents School of Austin

One of the main challenges faced by teachers in classical Christian schools is the challenge faced by teachers everywhere: how to teach students not only to think clearly and critically, but also to express those thoughts and ideas in writing that is itself clear, organized, well developed, and elegant. At Regents School of Austin, the senior thesis presentation—our culminating project for seniors—draws upon all of the skills in speaking and rhetoric that we have tried to cultivate in our students from the time they are small. At its heart, however, the senior thesis is also the largest and most complex writing project these students have ever tackled. As their teachers, we must make sure that we are equipping them with the skills they need to conceive of, plan, and finally execute what is for them a massive undertaking.

With this end in mind, over the past five years the School of Rhetoric humanities faculty at Regents has undertaken a systematic revision of our writing curriculum and classroom practices. This has been a daunting task. Not only must we sort out, examine, and finally revise our curriculum, but we must always be mindful of how that curriculum translates into everyday practice for teachers and students. A beautifully constructed writing curriculum is useless if it does not help each student become a better writer.

But what makes a student a better writer? Conventional wisdom says that the more students write, the more practice they will get and the better they will become. To a certain extent, there is a bit of truth in this assumption. Even five years ago, our writing curriculum was notable for the amount of writing our students had to do. At Regents, "theme" is the designation for a writing assignment, usually longer than a five-paragraph essay, that requires time outside of class. The number of themes a student writes increases as they advance through high school. Ninth graders write one literature theme and one history theme per semester; tenth and eleventh graders write two literature themes and one history theme per semester. Seniors write two literature themes and one history theme in the fall semester, and one of each in the spring semester. In addition to humanities themes, students also write a theme in one of our math classes, as well as the usual lab reports in their science classes. In short, Regents high school students do a lot of writing.

Simply assigning a paper and then collecting and grading it several weeks later, however, does not teach a student how to approach a writing project. While crafting a purposeful, focused assignment is important to ensuring student success, writing instruction requires a more hands-on approach. We have kept all of the core assignments, the themes and in many cases the in-class essays, but over the last several years we have radically changed how we guide students through those assignments.

> *Our main aim in this practice is to train students that writing is a process, one that takes time and effort, and that sustained effort produces results that are not always immediately tangible.*

Perhaps the most visible feature of our writing program is the amount of time we spend on writing instruction in class. Rather than assuming that students arrive in the high school with "the basics," ready to approach ever more complex assignments, we instead assume that each writing experience is a fresh and new one for students. This means that for research papers, we spend class time with freshman and sophomores helping them navigate the print and electronic resources at their disposal. We work through with them how one gathers resources, evaluates their usefulness and credibility, puts them in the service of supporting an argument, and cites them responsibly. We do not do this because we think that teachers in the lower grades have failed to instruct the students in these "basics," but rather, because we realize that in the context of a new and more difficult assignment, even the "basics" can seem daunting for a student writer. Since students must face increasingly complex

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Regents School of Austin . . .

assignments, they need help applying the skills they have acquired in lower grades to a world of research that is ever expanding.

For non-research assignments—and in addition to researching for other assignments—we walk students through a drafting process. As a class, we analyze model thesis statements and craft our own, then workshop student examples on the board. The emphasis is always on revision, even in the early stages. Each writing assignment requires a rough draft, which students bring to class and peer review. We have borrowed the concept and practice of peer review from the model of university writing centers, whose student-centered and process-oriented approach to writing marries nicely with the classical Christian emphasis on student-directed learning. Reading and constructively critiquing a peer's paper helps a student writer to see the strengths and weaknesses in his or her own paper.

In most humanities classes, only the final paper of an assignment receives a grade. Our main aim in this practice is to train students that writing is a process, one that takes time and effort, and that sustained effort produces results that are not always immediately tangible. Because each instructor teaches multiple grades, we often have the benefit of watching student writers grow over the years, and we urge them to view their own development long term. To borrow a phrase from contemporary composition theory, we aim to produce better writers, not better papers.

It is difficult to say whether the changes to the Regents writing curriculum originated from theory or practice. It is clear that they came about as a result of a team effort between teachers from kindergarten through high school. After completing an intensive documentation project, gathering and reporting on all goals, purposes, and lesson plans, the team leaders of the lower grades met as a committee with the teachers of the School of Rhetoric to discuss our curriculum. We adopted a new base-level curriculum, the Jane Schaffer Writing Program, which is used primarily in the lower grades but is also referenced at the high school level. Using a uniform curriculum gives us a vocabulary for writing that stretches across the grade levels and makes communication with students and among faculty easier, but the curriculum is merely the starting point. We still assume that the teacher has a great deal of flexibility and autonomy in the classroom, and that good writing instruction requires an active and sustained effort on the part of the teacher.

As our school grows, the challenge becomes adapting the classroom practices we have developed to larger class sizes and a more diverse faculty. The growth in class size has required that we hire more new faculty members, not all of whom have been trained in the Jane Schaffer method. Larger class sizes also make it more difficult for teachers to give students the kind of individual attention that promotes student ownership of their own writing and accountability for their work. Such new challenges, however, have the positive effect of requiring that we constantly question our practices and reshape them according to the needs of the class.

Each new teacher brings unique experiences and knowledge to our faculty community and the use of a common school language allows us to integrate new people and ideas while at the same time keeping a constant that everyone can build upon. Then, we teachers work with the students to craft their own individual voice to the issue at hand while using a common vocabulary across the grade spectrum and curriculum. Each student brings a different writing issue and needs to be approached as a unique person in order to get the best from them. This also encourages them to see their own potential and other ways various writing problems can be addressed as they see us model these with them. While the writing is uniquely theirs, their teachers have helped them begin to grasp the effort necessary to craft sentences and paragraphs into a cohesive whole that expresses exactly what they want to say and nothing more. This is a long and arduous task at times, but the result, students who are capable of writing well and understanding how they arrived at a well-written paper, are a harvest well worth the effort.

Answering Back: Thoughts on Reading and Writing in the Literature Classroom

by Christine Perrin, Messiah College

Growing up, I was fortunate to have parents who liked language and who recited poems, quotes, and phrases in different languages to me as a matter of course. This, along with the tradition of reading Scripture aloud and memorizing it, gave me an early sense of the pleasure and power of language, but also the instinct that it was there to live with, to engage, to use. Another early memory is of my parents speaking French when they wanted to exclude me from their conversation. They weren't particularly fluent so I knew instantly why these conversations were underway and could usually intuit my way to knowledge—perhaps we were going to read another book before bed or have an unexpected treat. I loved the play of their voices and the sense of possibility which entered the room on those beautiful liquid sounds. I attended the local public school in all of the many places we lived during my formative years and I always loved language arts, reading, and English classes. In tenth grade I slept over at a friend's house and couldn't sleep, so spent the night reading her commonplace book. She wouldn't have called it that at the time but it was a map of her delights as a reader. She was an expert field hockey player who went on to become a nurse, and we never really discussed literature together but that night my heart leapt in response to her cartography. For the first time, I wanted to respond in kind—to answer words with words. Conversing with other people's language is the highest form of reading, be it a critical response (an essay) or a creative response (a poem or story). Polymath and literary critic George Steiner (read *Real Presences*) believes that the best critical response to a literary work is creative—write a story that includes your way of seeing the world, that revises the one you have read, he urges. He sees Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* as such a response to Eliot's *Middlemarch*. While we cannot all play Tolstoy to Eliot, writing in response to reading that has captured our imaginations is a useful and delightful classroom habit.

When I teach the classic American poets such as Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman (Robert Frost, Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams too), we spend time reading the poetry aloud, studying closely a handful of their poems, investigating their biography, making a list of characteristic gestures and traits, and writing poems that employ aspects of the writer's own style and content interests. We talk about the fact that there is a spectrum of reading: on the lowest end of the reading spectrum is speed reading or skimming in the midst of noise, distraction, and technology (cell phone, facebook, etc.). On the other end stands writing in full engagement—in conversation, if you will—with the writer, using all the knowledge and skill that he or she has shared with you, their reader, to answer back. The history of literature takes this shape: writers responding in love, hate, euphoria, angst to their predecessors and writing or rewriting their work. This is the reason that we call literature the "great conversation" and the reason that we have such awe for those, such as Homer, who began it seemingly *ex nihilo*. But even Homer, as an epic poet, was more of a scribe writing down the long-told song-stories of his tribe. The most compelling compliment I have ever received in a review of my text *Art of Poetry* was that it felt like I was introducing readers to my friends, the poems. Likewise, the writers of those poems have become companions for me; their difficult lives, their particular nature worked out in words, lines, and images are prized possessions that instruct, delight, encourage, and sober me. Most of the living poets that I know write as readers responding to their beloved dead brothers and sisters. Most of the

Likewise, the writers of those poems have become companions for me; their difficult lives, their particular nature worked out in words, lines, and images are prized possessions that instruct, delight, encourage, and sober me.

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Answering Back . . .

readers I know are looking for language adequate to experience, for companionship on life's way, for access to thoughts and minds different from their own.

To foster this engagement in your student's lives you have to get close to the work at hand. I recommend beginning with reading aloud which allows the language to play through the instrument of the body and aids us in encountering it the way in which we were made to hear it. Literary language in general, and poetry in particular, engages the senses and we must honor that in our practice of it. Teach students how to read aloud, show them how to savor the words, use the silences between stanzas, finish the sentences according to their syntactical integrity. If they are reading Langston Hughes' poem *Harlem* which ends on the word "explode" don't let them say it without some form of emphasis. Read the poems closely, take time with them. Poetry makes us slow down; rapidity does not yield "results." Poetry challenges our American value system of pragmatism, speed, money. Teach them to support their interpretation and encourage multiple interpretations as long as they are supported with particulars that make sense (beginning with the elements of the poem, moving on to knowledge of that writer's body of work and of the period, etc.). Even after you have exhausted the poem's reading, refer back to lines, phrases, and images that you have studied in class as a way of understanding something complex compactly, and as a private classroom language. Have students keep commonplace books that copy down important poems, phrases, words, images. Keep one yourself! Take some time to read them to each other (preferably with tea). Have a reading at the end of a unit or semester where each student performs a poem that has influenced him and a poem he has written in response to the influence.

Poetry makes us slow down; rapidity does not yield "results." Poetry challenges our American value system of pragmatism, speed, money.

Writing and reading are skills that acquire layers the longer you practice them. As teachers, we have to be developing in our relationship to these skills if we want to help our students to acquire them. We have to be human next to them. Reading literature is a great leveling tool because all of us are human, all of us approach the text with our own experience in our hand and heart interrogating the experience of the human being speaking to us about life. When Dickinson describes remorse as "Memory—awake—" and "cureless" and "The Adequate of Hell," we have to ask ourselves if this squares with our experience; we have to peer into the cave of our experiences and remember our own moments of remorse. In the same poem (744) she suggests that remorse is God's institution—that He uses it in our lives with a purpose. What a fascinating discussion this demands from us to do justice to the poem. She links the feeling of deep regret to a picture of our blighted past being lighted with a match, burning whenever we return to look at it. When I read this poem, I say *yes, that's it*; my pain at my failure is not an isolated experience, it is one we share. With this knowledge I am more prone to empathy. "Be kind, everyone is fighting a great battle," is a quotation that attends my experience of the poem. But the poem is an experience of remorse, not just a reference to it. That's the nature of poetry and reading it—we dwell in the moment with the poet's voice in our ear and mouth and our hearts astir.

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Remorse—is Memory—awake

by Emily Dickinson

Remorse–is Memory–awake–
Her Parties all astir–
A Presence of Departed Acts–
At window–and at Door–

Its Past–set down before the Soul
And lighted with a Match–
Perusal–to facilitate–
And help Belief to stretch–

Remorse is cureless–the Disease
Not even God–can heal–
For 'tis His institution–and
The Adequate of Hell–

A Writing Road Trip

by Ty Fischer, Veritas Academy

A few years ago, I had the distinct privilege of flying out to Louisville, Kentucky, and sitting in on a few writing classes at the Highlands Latin School there. I was going to see the teacher of these classes, the agrarian poet/farmer/philosopher and essayist Wendell Berry. A few years ago, I stumbled unto Berry's writing, listening to an old cassette tape version of Ken Myers reading Berry's "The Work of Local Culture."[1] The essay stuck me like a thunderclap. I listened to the tape so many times that I burned it up. I bought another and the same thing happened. My wife hid the third tape from me, so I bought Berry's *What are People For?* Berry is one of my favorite authors and getting to sit in on a few of his writing classes was a blessing. It got even better. After his first class, he had a two-hour break. I was traveling with my board chairman Bruce Gingrich.[2] We implored him to have lunch with us. The conversation ranged from the Scriptures, to politics, to the reading habits of the plain sects in Lancaster County, to ethanol (not a favorite of his), to classical education and writing. He was gracious and lively. Often I remember that day and smile.

I have tried to bring some parts of that day back to my school and to the curriculum-writing work that I do—particularly in the area of writing. We are in the process of revising our scope and sequence for writing. We have been blessed to produce some good writers, but we want to do even better. Revising writing standards has been more difficult than many other areas of our curriculum. We are all deeply interested in producing excellent writers. We all know that a school that teaches rhetoric should have students who are able to communicate effectively and winsomely. We have found, however, that making writing practice consistent has been challenging. As we work through these issues as a school, we need the patience to both attempt and fail, to retool and move forward. We have a lot to learn. We also need to share (amongst our schools) our insights and struggles in search of sound principles upon which good curriculum (in the broadest sense) can be employed and classical methodology can be faithfully implemented in order to produce excellent writers whose work glorifies Christ and calls people to deep reflection, repentance, faith, and faithfulness. We could say that the entire success of the movement of classical Christian education will stand or fail based on the writers that we produce.[3] Here are some of the good principles that I have discovered through reflection on the work that we have done (both our successes and failures) and upon reflection from watching others, like Berry, teach and talk about writing:

We could say that the entire success of the movement of classical Christian education will stand or fail based on the writers that we produce.

1. Pride is the great enemy of good writing and the enemy of making progress toward becoming a good writer. In his poem *Damage*, Wendell Berry says, "Good work finds the way between pride and despair." Becoming a good writer is immensely hard work. We should (at the first possible opportunity) help our students murder the myth that good writing is some sort of magical ability that descends on some and not others.[4] Good writing comes through practice—painful practice. Pride often keeps people from becoming better writers. Teachers should note that two of the first steps that they will need to take if they want to encourage better writing have to do with environment and toughness. Teachers must create a classroom environment in which risk taking in writing is encouraged, in which vulnerability is protected (because reading your own writing to others is the epitome of being vulnerable). Also, teachers must help their student gain the maturity and strength that will enable them to hear the truth from others about their writing. There is nothing harder for the young writer to hear than comments from others like "that

Ty Fischer *is the headmaster at Veritas Academy and serves on the ACCS board of directors. Read his blog, "The Leaky Bucket" on the Veritas website at www.VeritasAcademy.com.*

part did not make sense," or "what are you saying anyway?" Pride places us above the opinion (and help) of others. Humility shows us the world and our work for what it really is. Improving as a writer begins with the renouncing of pride. Often it is our best students who struggle most at this point. They are used to getting high grades and pats on the back. This will not happen immediately when they draft papers. If they cannot or will not hear the criticism of others they will never have the opportunity to improve.

2. Writing excellently can best be done in community. If we need others to help us see our writing for what it is, then writing is best done in community. As believers, we all benefit from these sorts of writing communities. The Inklings were just this sort of group. They criticized each others' work vigorously. Tolkien reportedly thought that *The Chronicles of Narnia* were silly. He criticized them vigorously. From that tiny group we have *The Space Trilogy*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and many other works. Community and criticism helps us become better writers. Berry's wife, Tanya, serves as his chief editor—typing, correcting, and critiquing his work.

3. Good writing is what remains after editing scours away the dross (painfully). When our community (and especially our teachers) gathers to help us with our writing, they will need to edit our work. This, especially initially, will be quite painful. In Berry's class, he would read each of the student's writing out loud to the rest of the class and then make comments. Some comments were lauding good work—most were not. They were suggestions on how a piece could be improved or criticism concerning how a particular piece was not best. As an editor myself and as a writer who submits work to others, I know how this hurts. Help your students understand that this pain is necessary. (One practical way to do this is by saving an initial draft and having them read the draft and the final product after editing and see how the pain has improved the work.)

4. Short assignments that are highly edited provide more practice at producing good writing. Too often, we give writing assignments that are far too long—at least initially. I noticed that the work that the students, juniors and seniors, turned in to Berry were very brief. Most were handwritten on one side of a sheet of paper. I believe that they were not allowed to exceed one page. These short assignments allow for more and heavier editing to be done by the teacher. Too often, we make assignments that we only have time to grade once. This, more often than not, means that very little learning is done. Too often no correcting is possible. I have begun to give my students shorter assignments that are heavily edited. They can turn the assignment in three times. I grade it and mark it up. Often the initial grades are uniformly very (very) low, but the advice that I give should enable them to improve their work substantially.[5] Also, shorter assignments help the teacher have more time to grade and edit. The editing done on longer papers too often outstrips a teacher's time constraints. This leads to sloppy editing and less improvement.

5. "Write about what you know . . . and you don't know much." This quote, uttered by Berry (which was uttered with a loving grin) during his writing class points back to humility and the first of Gregory's laws.[6] Gregory tells us that we need to know that which we teach. Berry echoes people like Jane Austen who command and, by their writing, inspire us to both live deeply and then write about what we know. Too often students disobey this sensible sanction to the ruin of their writing. After giving the students a few brief readings in the Scriptures and the Great Books on the topic of freedom, Berry had the students write about freedom. After reading through their work, he encouraged them to be less abstract and more concrete. He said something like this: "Write about the freedom you experience when your father gives you the car keys. You probably know a lot about that." The closer we push students to write about their own experiences in believable ways, the better their writing can become.

These are just a few principles that can help us encourage better writing amongst our students. A few, I say, because there are many more. Writing and encouraging good writing is more an expedition and journey than checklist. As we venture down the path, we venture in hope, knowing that we serve a God who communicates to us in words and who sent us His Son—calling Him the Word.

Road Trip . . .

NOTES

1. This audio anthology entitled "Place, Community, and Memory" is available (now in MP3 format so that you will not burn through 3 or 4 tapes) from Mars Hill Audio and can be found at http://www.marshillaudio.org/catalog/antholog.asp.

2 This was another blessing. How many school administrators have board chairman who would make a trip like this with them?

3. In fact, we have said something like this. See Douglas Wilson's essay "The Why and How of Literature" in *Repairing the Ruins*, ed. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996) which says, on page 169, "Christian schools which cannot produce great writers are failures as schools."

4. This is not a denial of the fact that great writing (not just good writing) does come, I believe, from and through a person's unique personality. Some perspectives and persons are more interesting than others. The Spirit does bestow gifts. Even for those of gifting, however, pride can restrain, retard, or diminish the usefulness of the gift.

5. As the managing editor of the Veritas Press Omnibus Project, I have worked this same pattern into many of the writing assignments in *Omnibus IV, V, and VI*. The instructions for writing assignments are as follows: Remember, quality counts more than quantity. You should write no more than 1,000 words, either typing or writing legibly on one side of a sheet of paper. You will lose points for writing more than this. You will be allowed to turn in your writing three times. The first and second times you turn it in, your teacher will grade it by editing your work. This is done by marking problem areas and making suggestions for improvement. You should take these suggestions into consideration as you revise your assignment. Only the grade on your final submission will be recorded.

6. This refers to John Milton Gregory's *The Seven Laws of Teaching*.

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