As we continue to promote the expansion of K-12 classical, the Institute is developing more of the content that you have come to know and trust. And, our website is evolving to make those resources ever more accessible.

SCHOLARSHIP & RESEARCH

- National Classical Education Symposium (to be held online, February 2021)
- Scholarly lectures (videos) and essays on classical content from Fellows
- Research and institutional partnerships with higher education, including case studies of classical schools

COMMUNITIES & NETWORKING

- Virtue magazine, with quarterly articles on state-of-the-art practices
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RESOURCES & LEADERSHIP

- Curated content for school leaders, teachers, and families, including regional and national media spotlights
- Interviews, blogs, and podcasts from school leaders, master teachers, authors, alumni et al.
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WHAT THE CLASSICS STILL TEACH US

Good teachers help students discover the larger world and discern their place in it, chiefly by honing students’ capacity for thought and expression. Teachers who artfully employ the “classics” (from across the centuries) introduce students to a much larger world of masterful models—and thus help students to think independently. As Kevin Clark points out, “the goal of instruction is to equip students to make free and creative application of the arts of learning, and to take part in the joy of discovering truth for themselves” (see article on pages 13-14).

For classical teachers, pedagogy must continue the perennial quest for truth through active participation in the Great Conversation.
THE Director’s Take
BY ROBERT L. JACKSON, PH.D.

Even as our nation continues its struggle with a global pandemic, we find ourselves in the midst of national turmoil, the type of unrest that reveals deep-seated frustration among the citizenry. Protesters and rioters have given voice to a profound dissatisfaction that articulates itself in angry slogans and screeds against injustice. They demand immediate changes to public policy—believing that a change of policy will obtain greater equity for all Americans.

But, I’m unconvinced for two reasons.

First, because human minds and hearts are not changed by fiat, but by reasonable, winsome persuasion. Moreover, the collective minds and hearts of society will not be changed overnight, but through consistent, thoughtful, compelling arguments from men and women of goodwill. Such arguments are the inspiration we need to produce a national conversation that spans the political spectrum.

Second, because genuine social change in our free Republic involves the acceptance of limitations: namely, the responsibilities that accompany the rights of citizenship. While we are all quick to claim rights, there seems far less awareness of the many responsibilities we bear as citizens. Consider for a moment the infrastructure that provides for us; the moment the support of ordinary citizens who contribute taxes, the laws that protect us; and the communities that sustain us. All of these undeserved benefits come at a price: the support of ordinary citizens who contribute taxes, abide by the rule of law, and participate as productive members of their local communities. Such essential responsibilities must be carried by every citizen of this American experiment. “We the People” must renew our commitment to the Republic, generation after generation, lest it be lost. As Benjamin Franklin so famously quipped following the Constitutional Convention, “It’s a Republic, but only if you can keep it!” Keeping it requires those civic virtues that sustain a free people. This is where classical pedagogy enters the conversation, for it is in our methods and manners that we develop the habits of a virtuous citizenry.

In that vein, this issue of VIRTUE highlights the work of scholars, practitioners, and an alumnus of a classical academy, all of whom speak to the relevance of classical pedagogy in the formation of good humans and faithful citizens.

Dr. Gregory Roper walks us through an ancient form of argumentation, called Stasis Theory, that provides the essential tools for opposing sides to disagree effectively. Every good policy debate (which is what we must recover) requires these foundations of argument. Otherwise, the opposing sides simply talk past each other.

Good arguments follow good men and women. Which is why Dr. Daniel Coupland encourages us to pursue good, sound teaching, based on mission, manners, instruction, and resources—all developed under the watchful care of good mentors.

We are also pleased to have a short excerpt from Dr. Scott Newstok’s most recent book, How to Think Like Shakespeare (Princeton University Press), showing us how to apply the genius of the Bard to our children’s education: developing the craft at the heart of every liberal art.

Author and experienced K-12 classical teacher, Dr. Kevin Clark, challenges us to move beyond the surface by exploring the deeper sources of classical education, essential to sustaining our work.

By its distinctive approach to human development, K-12 classical is shaping the minds and hearts of the next generation: recovering the lost tools of argument that can renew and improve civic discourse; enlisting and training good men and women to serve as models for our children; exploring the craft of language, number, science, and the arts, in the development of creative intelligence; and constantly deepening our understanding of the wisdom of the ages.

These features of classical pedagogy are equipping the next generation to take on the rights and responsibilities of well-trained citizens. This pedagogy will prepare them to join the great conversation about justice, truth, and the foundations of our Republic—and to take up the centuries-long pursuit of “a more perfect Union.”

Dr. Robert L. Jackson is the chief academic officer of Great Hearts America and the founding director of the Institute for Classical Education.
Arguing Agreeably

BY GREGORY ROPER, PH.D.

A
rgency can be a negative word in our culture, creating images of raised voices, strained faces, and slammed doors. In our day of media wars, Facebook flames, and Twitter bashing, it might seem that the one thing we need less of is arguing. But since ancient Athens, one of the signal achievements of a genuine education was to make the student proficient in making arguments and analyzing others’ arguments in a calm, thoughtful, rational, fully human way. Becoming proficient in Rhetoric, the art of building such persuasive statements, was the crowning achievement of a liberal education. Our greatest statesmen and leaders—think Washington, Madison, Jefferson, and Lincoln—spent many years perfecting the art of rhetoric, and deployed it in service of their communities.

Recently, we have begun to re-discover a rather neglected part of the history of rhetoric—Stasis Theory. Begun by Hermagoras in the 2nd century BC, taken up by Cicero and Quintilian, and perfected by Hermogenes, whom Marcus Aurelius called the greatest rhetorician in the entire Roman Empire in the second century AD, Stasis Theory is a way of working through arguments, seeing what is at issue, and figuring out how to organize an effective argument for a particular situation.

All arguments, Stasis Theory says, run along a pattern: from arguments about Fact, to Definition, to Causes, to Evaluation, and finally to Policy. Finding where in this pattern the two sides are really arguing is the key to making a good argument.

Let’s take a situation: a man ends up outside of a convenience store lying on the ground with a bloody nose and a broken arm. Another man has been apprehended by the police for the attack. (All of this is fairly obvious. Then we might want to Evaluate whether this was a good thing or a bad thing. This might seem obviously a bad thing, but perhaps the injured man was threatening a young woman, and it was a good thing he was deterred, even violently, from a worse crime. Finally, the court would have to decide Policy: what should we do about all this? Punish the aggressor, or give him a medal for stopping a crime from being perpetrated?

And here is the interesting thing. Each of these kinds of arguments is going to need a different kind of organization, and different kinds of evidence, or proof. Stasis Theory teaches us—teaches our students—to approach each kind of argument with different methods and tools and examples. Rather than one size fits all, as many classrooms tend to do with writing, Stasis Theory teaches students to tailor their work to the situation—and to analyze others’ arguments on how well they do the same.

Stasis Theory can even help us understand why so many of our arguments in modern life have become so problematic. Take global warming, or climate change, for example. One side says that the facts are clear (fact)—the earth is warming—and that

So, is there an issue with the Facts? Perhaps, but let’s say no: five different people saw the suspect smash his nose and break his arm. Well, then, perhaps we need to Define what happened: was it simple assault, aggravated assault, or self-defense? If we cannot decide, then we have reached stasis: we know what the issue is, and what we’ll need to argue. But perhaps we determine it was aggravated assault. Now we must move on to the question: what caused it to happen? Often that will be the real issue. Or perhaps not—maybe there was a surveillance camera, and “how it all went down” is fairly obvious. Then we might want to Evaluate whether this was a good thing or a bad thing. This might seem obviously a bad thing, but perhaps the injured man was threatening a young woman, and it was a good thing he was deterred, even violently, from a worse crime. Finally, the court would have to decide Policy: what should we do about all this? Punish the aggressor, or give him a medal for stopping a crime from being perpetrated?

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we all know what it is (definition), and what causes it (causal)—human activity. We all know further that this is a bad thing (evaluation), this side says, so all we really need to do is talk about the right ways to combat it (policy). The other side says, wait a minute: we don’t agree with your facts; we aren’t sure what this is—“global warming” or “climate change” or something else—and we don’t buy your evidence that you so readily believe that this is androgenic, or caused by human activity. Thus, we aren’t so sure everything is so terrible, and we aren’t about to move towards making enormous policy changes involving massive amounts of funds. The two sides are so split because they can’t even reach the beginnings of stasis over what in fact the real issue is.

Or take abortion, or education, or immigration. Can you see, by working through Fact, Definition, Cause, Evaluation, and Policy, why the two sides are so deeply split on these issues in our culture? If we can’t even decide what it is we are arguing about—what is at issue, where we can find stasis—we are often talking past one another, not really engaging in rational argument at all. But if we can see this, we can begin to think creatively, analytically, rationally—and achieve that freedom of thought which is the hallmark of the liberally-educated person.

So, Stasis Theory can be a wonderful tool, and a helpful model, not just for teaching our students to write more clearly and effectively on their academic papers; it can be a fundamental art of the free woman or man. And for that, we should offer a big thanks to Hermagoras, Cicero, Quintilian, and Hermogenes, four ancient Romans who still have a great deal to teach us today.
Q: HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE A CLASSICAL EDUCATION, AND HOW DOES IT COMPARE TO OTHER APPROACHES TO EDUCATION?

A: Education is the formation of a human being, and the classical liberal arts are the method by which that is done. A classical liberal education draws from traditional texts to guide students through a way of thinking that is meant to free the human person. That’s what the word “liberal” means: to be free. It is liberating in that it teaches students how to recognize what is really true—not just what people are saying is true. Education that is not classical doesn’t quite accomplish that, because that isn’t the goal. Much modern education focuses on knowing the facts and possessing certain skills to do something practical, oftentimes for the sake of making money—which is good and important. But that’s not the end of human life. The question of what makes us human is something that classical education really strives to answer.

Q: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THAT CLASSICAL EDUCATION IN TODAY’S WORLD WHERE YOU DO NEED THOSE PRACTICAL SKILLS?

A: Everyone needs to learn about the world in order to live in the world. But what classical education brings to the table is how you approach understanding the world. There are principles of how things work and logical ways of thinking, which apply to all sorts of things. When you are learning mathematics at a classical school (like Great Hearts), the focus is less on memorizing the formula and more on logically deriving the formula. With literature, classical schools are not just concerned with who is doing what in this book, but why they are doing it. Does it make sense that this character is behaving in this manner?

Q: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE WHO SAYS THAT A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION CREATES A JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES, MASTER-OF-NONE TYPE OF PERSON?

A: If you choose a certain trade, it’s because you either love it or you think there’s something valuable there and you want to be good at it. In order to do that, you should understand what is involved in that trade, along with the position of that trade in its larger social context. A business major would do well to take a biology class, for example, because there are rules of life in biology, and understanding the operations of the natural world is important to understanding human commerce. You also have to learn how different types of systems work and what is good about those systems—and what parts of the system tend to break down. When you are in the business world, you want to conduct your business in a systematic way to accomplish your goals. You will want to understand where the business world fits into the rest of the world.

Q: HOW DO WE RELATE A TEXT LIKE PLATO’S REPUBLIC TO THE CULTURE OF OUR DAY?

A: A book expresses certain thoughts and ideas, some of which will be true. True thoughts about the way things really are. Some of those thoughts are particular to the time, place, and culture of the author. Classical schools look at classic texts and teach students to make distinctions between what is always true and what is bound by time or culture. But, when you read through numerous texts from different time periods and cultures, you begin to see what’s timeless and always true, what’s eternal. You see the progression of specific social and political thought. Classical education shows students how to make the distinctions between what is always true and needs defending today—like justice—and what deserves a conversation in the public square on how to prudently approach a particular issue. Practice making those distinctions is a very important skill to bridging the gap between the past and the present—and giving due credit to our predecessors.

Pictured above: A recent graduate of Thomas Aquinas College, Morgan Simms will be returning to her alma mater, Anthem Preparatory Academy, to teach 6th grade natural science and 9th grade Euclidean geometry. Anthem Preparatory Academy is part of the Great Hearts school network.
GOOD TEACHING

Over the past two decades, I have taught, observed, and evaluated hundreds of future and practicing K-12 educators. When observing these teachers in classrooms, I often look for certain elements, indicators, or practices during the lesson that I know from history, research, and personal experience will more than likely lead to a successful teaching/learning experience. Here are those features:

MISSION

Good teachers demonstrate in their instruction a knowledge of and commitment to the mission of the school. Additionally, they exhibit the value of learning for its own sake and cultivate a sense of wonder and delight in their students and in themselves.

MANAGEMENT

Good teachers manage their classrooms by precept and example. They dress, act, and sound like professionals, and they serve as model adults for what the students will one day become. Although good teachers have clearly stated rules for general classroom behavior, they manage the daily activities of the learning environment by means of classroom routines/procedures that they have presented, practiced, and reinforced. Good teachers arrange the classroom thoughtfully and purposefully so that the environment is consistent with the philosophy of the school and effective methods of instruction.

INSTRUCTION

Good teachers lead classroom instruction. In their lessons, they demonstrate knowledge of their content and how best to teach it. They offer clear, engaging lessons that are informed, organized, and focused. Good teachers use all class time purposefully and effectively. They keep a healthy pace to their instruction—not too fast and not too slow, and they recognize and break up the lulls in lessons. Good teachers rely on time-tested instructional methods including thoughtful questions, orderly discussions, and engaging lectures. They use models, examples, illustrations, and stories to reinforce ideas, and they regularly check for student understanding. When asking questions, good teachers purposefully use a variety of question types—from more closed-ended questions (e.g., what, when, and where) to more open-ended questions (e.g., how and why), and they prime all students to answer. They give students appropriate time to think (“wait time”) before calling for an answer, and they provide (or they allow other students to provide) quality feedback to students’ answers. Good teachers rely heavily on whole-class instruction, and in cases when they use group work in class, good teachers keep the number of students per group low and the assignments as focused as possible. Good teachers are often mobile, engaging with students throughout the entire class period.

RESOURCES, ASSIGNMENTS, AND ASSESSMENTS

Good teachers use textbooks, technology, and other resources prudently to support their instruction and to enhance student learning without allowing these resources to undermine or replace their role as instructional leader. They assign purposeful work that effectively enhances students’ understanding. Good teachers use both formative and summative assessment effectively to inform instruction in the classroom and to communicate academic progress to both students and parents.

PREPARATION

So how can we prepare people to teach well? First, attract good people to the profession—people who know about important things and have a passion and ability to share those things with others. Second, give these new educators a basic description of good teaching (like the one above) and help them to understand how they can do these things in their own classrooms. Third, give these new teachers support from experienced mentors who exhibit good pedagogical knowledge and skill in their own classrooms. Schedule times for the inexperienced educators to observe their mentors teach and vice-versa; then create opportunities for regular discussions about pedagogy between them. And finally, be patient. Anything worthwhile and noble takes time to develop, so don’t be surprised when new teachers struggle in the classroom.

Of course, we can hope for great teaching in every classroom, but it would be much wiser to get those who are newest to the profession to focus first on good teaching.

Daniel Coupland is the chairman of the education department and professor at Hillsdale College. He is the coauthor of Well-Ordered Language: The Curious Child’s Guide to Grammar, a curriculum that presents the study of language in a way that enhances children’s capacity to perceive the world in an orderly way. He is also an advisor to the Barney Charter School Initiative as well as the Institute for Classical Education.
Of Craft

BY SCOTT NEWSTOK, PH.D.

Nowadays, “craft” tends to evoke either products targeted for niche markets or projects made by hand at home. The former can be abused for marketing ends by corporations whose methods resemble nothing like artisanal practices; the latter conveys a diminutive, often gendered, sense of isolated production.

Yet neither connotation captures the scope of the collective practices that suffused skilled labor in Shakespeare’s world, where craft was not merely a mechanical process, but also communal, intellectual, physical, and emotional. Craft entailed discipline, enforced by people as well as by the object itself. Its emotional. Craft entailed discipline, enforced

The etymology of “craft” reveals that centuries before it becomes a trade or profession (defended by associated guilds, companies, and unions), it was first a strength, a power, a force. That is, craft involved a physical transformation of some material, as in the earliest instances of resourceful tool-making. Soon, this capacity to transform becomes isolated as a skill or art, a dexterous ingenuity.

Only later does “crafty” come to mean full of guile—thereby yoking, as Virginia Woolf pointed out, two incongruous ideas: making useful objects out of solid matter and cajolery, cunning, deceit. Shakespeare deploys “craft” most often in the sense of being wily; the only time he uses the word “craftsmen” appears in his works in King Richard II’s scornful dismissal of Bolingbroke’s

Woing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles.

Robert Armin, the actor who played Shakespeare’s clown roles in the 1590s, toyed with these overlapping senses in the same repeated word (the technical term for which was antanaclasis):

Craftsmen, whose craft in cleanly covering
Is to be crafty in your kindest cunning

This cunning sense of craft and crafty rub[bing] shoulders still hints at the cognitive dimension to making. There’s an intimate, immersive relationship to material, whether physical or conceptual. The material resists, pushes back, in a kind of dialogue with the materials and means of execution. Craft practitioner Caroline Broadhead calls making

an exchange with materials—what you give to a material, and what it gives back.

Ben Jonson provided a definition of poesy that harkens back to the word’s Greek roots as “maker”:

A poem, as I have told you, is the work of the poet; the end and fruit of his labour and study. Poesy is his skill or craft of making; the very fiction itself, the reason or form of the work.

Craft of making—that’s how to think like Shakespeare and his fine filed phrase.

Or, even better: craft of will, a finely filed phrase that distills the maker’s mark with both aim and name.

*NB. Italicized quotes are direct quotations, either from Shakespeare or the authors cited in the text.

Scott Newstok is director of the Pearce Shakespeare Endowment and professor of English at Rhodes College. He is the author of How to Think like Shakespeare: Lessons from a Renaissance Education, a guide to the habits of effective thought and creative writing, as embodied in the works of Shakespeare.
ODE: INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

EXCERPT BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The child is father of the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.
—William Wordsworth, My Heart Leaps Up

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe’er I may,
By night or day.
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
For many teachers, classical education is a surprising discovery. Finding the liberal arts as the tools of learning, the great books as a truly integrated curriculum, and wisdom as the desired educational outcome, is like happening upon an educational oasis in a desert of test preparation, vapid content, and concern for status and material gain. Weary teachers come to the source and drink deeply, and, for a time, they think they have simply uncovered a new perspective. Refreshed, they return to their work as modern educators, only with a more effective approach to math and language arts, a richer curriculum, and a more noble educational vision. They are content, to change metaphors, to fill the old wineskins of modern teaching methods with the new wine of the classical curriculum. As both wine and teacher begin to mature, however, the old skins threaten to burst. Teachers must either spoil the vintage or else adopt teaching practices capacious enough for the robust curriculum of the liberal arts and the great books.

To grasp the logic of classical pedagogy, it is necessary to focus upon this moment of crisis. For at the beginning of our tradition, Aristotle reflects on the fact that the love of wisdom (philosophy) at first began and everywhere continues to begin, with wonder. Since the goal of classical education is to cultivate this love of wisdom, classical pedagogy must begin by awakening wonder. Importantly, this requires no expensive technology, no clever techniques, and no educational theatrics. Rather, the classical educator awakens wonder by directing students to these inexhaustible sources of wonder, beckons students to these inexhaustible sources of wonder, bidding them to drink deeply.
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