

An Introduction to Trinity Classical Academy's Reading Lists for 7th-11th Graders
2010-2011

Level of Difficulty

Looking at Trinity's reading lists, it is easy to be both impressed and daunted. Some may wonder whether the material is too difficult for junior-high and high school students. It is undoubtedly true that every student will be challenged by these texts. TCA students who have studied Latin, history, and literature in the grammar stage will, generally, find these texts more easily accessible than those who have transferred from non-classical schools. Some students have a natural aptitude for understanding this kind of material. Some will have great difficulty. But it must be remembered that a classical education is rigorous and demanding. There is much to learn and a limited time to do it. We know that in every discipline, whether it is sports, music, or whatever, much effort is needed to achieve a level of competency and even greater effort to achieve excellence. Trinity's curriculum was written with the secondary school student in mind and with the assumption that a capable teacher will guide the student in his reading. Like the Bible, which contains parts that a young child can grasp and parts which are inscrutable and baffling to learned adults, these classical works will benefit the students in varying degrees. We caution parents not to have the idea that a course is too hard if some of the students are struggling. If all the students are struggling, then this would be an indication that the course is too difficult and the teacher is failing in teaching the material. But in any given class, there will be students who will 'cruise' through the material, some who will 'work their tail off' to get a B-minus and a few who may get a D or F. This is realistic and this is how God made the world. Often a student struggles not because of inability but because of attitude. He has not yet learned the virtues of discipline and hard work. These virtues have to be developed in tandem with his studies. While the school assists the parents in inculcating these virtues in the students, the primary agents for fostering these virtues fall upon the parents and the home life they have built. In addition, to instilling good work habits, we recommend that parents accompany their child in reading as many of the books on the reading list as possible so as to educate themselves and also to interact with their own child about the ideas that he is learning.

Objectionable Content

Many of the Great Books were written by pagans and, thus, they contain objectionable, offensive or unsettling content, e.g., irreverent and obscene language, violence and sexual acts. The study of history is by its very nature, the history of sinful man and his sinful acts. The heart of most literary masterpieces is the struggle of good versus evil. There is often an attitude among Christians that exposure to sin will produce sin. If students read a story about a sinful act, so it is believed, they will be corrupted. Such thinking is fallacious and unbiblical. If it were true, the Bible itself would have to be condemned as a corrupting influence.

We recognize that some books are so salacious or so hideous that they are unfit for anyone to read. Such books are avoided in Trinity's curriculum. What are included, however, are well-written or historically important books, some of which include graphic portrayals of sinful acts, others of which blatantly attack core doctrines of Christian truth. We believe that upper-school students at Trinity, guided by godly and discerning teachers and parents, are ready to grapple with such important works of literature and history. In so doing, we are equipping our young scholars for the spiritual warfare that they will surely face when they enter the marketplace of ideas in college and beyond.

In addition to making history interesting and relevant, the books on the reading list are designed to help our students become strong and competent readers. First of all, the Read-Aloud books are to develop the student's ability to listen well. As a child listens to a story read to him, he learns to sit quietly, to focus on hearing the words and comprehending their meaning, and to visualize the story in his mind's eye. As he becomes adept at listening to books read, he will be better skilled at listening in general. The Reader List is meant to develop the student's ability to read independently. These readers are for the student's enjoyment. Beginning at the third grade, students get to choose books from a longer list that corresponds to their taste and ability. The Literature Units are meant to develop the student's ability to analyze and evaluate literature with the guidance of the teacher. In these units, students learn how to examine story elements, analyze its characters and evaluate its themes.

Our reading lists serve the dual purpose of teaching history and developing reading skills. But that is not all; the reading of good books brings with it a myriad of other benefits. It fosters vocabulary development, inculcates patterns of good writing, extends sequential thinking and reasoning, and develops reading comprehension. Last, but not least, it also brings parents and their children together.

Summer Reading

_____ Summer is a good time either to catch up on reading that was not done during the previous school year or to get a head start on the upcoming school year. If parents decide to get a head start, it is advisable to read off of the summer reading list first because this list has books on it that either bridge history from year to year or which introduce new history the student will be studying in the coming year. It is not necessary to begin the school year reading list during the summer. A good reader may wait for the fall to start, focusing instead on choosing books of his own liking, which is also very profitable for the developing reader.

The Need to Read

No one doubts the importance of learning to read, but many doubt the importance of reading in order to learn. In education, there are two main vehicles for communicating knowledge: teachers and books. While good and excellent teachers are sources of wisdom and knowledge to students as well as being mentors, they alone are not sufficient for educating our children. Books are necessary. Books can be viewed as non-living teachers. None of us has access to an Aristotle or Augustine, but we have their books. At Trinity Classical Academy, we want to train students to learn through books. To do that, they must become much more than adequate readers; they must become competent readers. Mortimer Adler says in his classic *How to Read a Book* that the average reader never gets beyond a 6th grade reading level. This reader cannot read a densely worded text with complicated sentence constructions and complex argumentation with understanding. We don't want our students to be average. We want them to be able to digest the great books of the past and absorb their ideas. To achieve this, we must teach students well in the grammar school years so that they are ready to attack the difficult books in their logic and rhetoric years with confidence. This is why we emphasize the reading of good and great books at every grade.