

THE GREAT BOOKS ENCHIRIDION:

*For those who know the difference between
Erasmus and a hole in the ground*



Edward N. Gosuphal, Editor

Congratulations and welcome Great Books Polymathic Confirmand! This Enchiridion will be your membership guide to the western world's most inclusive and exclusive club, with the rights and privileges thereto appertaining.

People have sought to codify and pass along the ideals and ways of living meaningful lives for at least 3000 years. The Jews have the Mosaic Law; Babylonians have Hammurabi's Code; Christians have the Bible, the Nicene Creed, the Augsburg Confessions, and 95 Theses. The English have the Magna Carta; Americans have the Declaration of Independence, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Constitution. The Freemasons and Scientologists have their secrets; the Cub, Girl, and Boy Scouts have their Motto, 12 Laws, and Handbook. The French have liberte, egalite, fraternite, as well as crepes, croissants, and champagne. And now Great Books students/acolytes/confirmands/padawans have their Enchiridion.

Ex astris, scientia.

PRINTING STATEMENT:

DUE TO THE VERY OLD AGE AND SCARCITY OF THIS BOOK, MANY OF THE PAGES MAY BE HARD TO READ DUE TO THE BLURRING OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT, POSSIBLE MISSING PAGES, MISSING TEXT AND OTHER ISSUES BEYOND OUR CONTROL.

BECAUSE THIS IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT AND RARE WORK, WE BELIEVE IT IS BEST TO REPRODUCE THIS BOOK REGARDLESS OF ITS ORIGINAL CONDITION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING.



The Enchiridion:
For Those Who Know the Difference between
Erasmus and a Hole in the Ground



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. THE GREAT BOOKS ENCHIRIDION

The Exciting Discovery of the Original Great Books Enchiridion	9
Dedication	11
Forewords	12
What is a Great Books Student?	15
A Dad's Eye View	16
The Code	18
The Oaths	19
The 12 Laws	23
The Command; The Motto; Physical Fitness	24
The Handshake; the Uniform; the Official Song	25
More Songs	28
Insults to Hurl at Insufferable Sophisiths	42
Demerit Badges; Major Awards; Minor Awards	44
What Is and What Is Not Socratic Dialogue	51
The History in 100 Words	58
Who's Who	59
Great Truths/Quotations	60
All of Western Civilization is a Footnote on Plato and Aristotle	62
The Great Sentence Puppet Show	64
The 100 Dollar Words and Terms	71
From the Trenches	75
A Practice Exam	76
A Great Books Inventory	85

II. TO GREAT BOOKS OR NOT TO GREAT BOOKS, THAT IS A QUESTION.

The Mathew Arnold Quotation	89
What Former Students Say about Great Books	89
Why Take or Not Take Great Books?	93

III. THE STUDY GUIDE: SKILLS

Creating the Right Attitude	98
Writing an Academic Essay	110
Reading	138
How to Contribute to the Great Books Conversation	146
Analyzing vs. Judging	149
Charting by the Stars of the Greats and the 10 Great Ideas	154
Asking Quality Questions	167
Informed Opinions	177
Listening and Speaking Skills	177
Creating an Impression	178
Study Aids	179

IV. THE STUDY GUIDE: ABOUT "GREAT BOOKS"

The History -- Updated	181
What Great Books Is and Is Not	187
Criteria for Choosing the Great Books	197
How to Become an Acolyte: Getting Started	200
Finding or Creating a Great Books Program D.I.Y.	203

V. POSTNOTE

The Rationale for this Enchiridion	209
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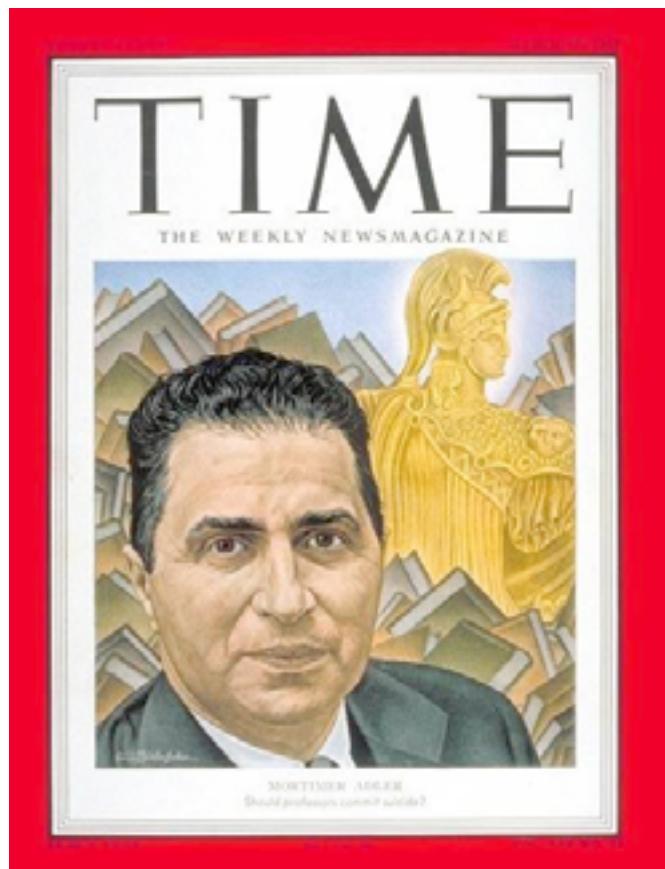
VI. MEMBERSHIP CARD

213

VII. APPENDIX

Expectations for The Enchiridion	215
Taxonomy of Engagement	216
Ten Great Ideas	218
Links	219

*This reproduction of the original circa 1929 and the updated
Enchiridion is dedicated to the memory of Mortimer Adler.*

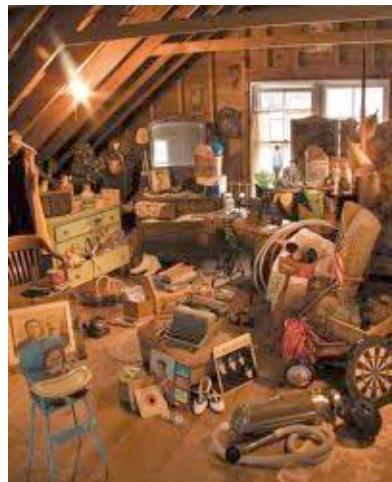


CHAPTER I: THE GREAT BOOKS ENCHIRIDION

THE EXCITING DISCOVERY OF THE ORIGINAL, CIRCA 1929, GREAT BOOKS ENCHIRIDION

The story has been so frequently misrepresented in the media perhaps this true account will set the record straight. I was pointedly not looking through any archives for such a treasure. I discovered the Mortimer Adler *Great Books Enchiridion* when I happened to find it in a large stowage case that looked like it could have been on the Titanic in Nama and Boppy Ellis' attic at their home in the Highland Park section of Chicago. What I was really hoping to find while I was rummaging through their attic was an original Honus Wagner baseball card.

I cannot be absolutely sure about *The Enchiridion's* original publication date or even whether it is something that their friend Mortimer Adler wrote, or if it had been given to him by Robert Hutchins. Clearly by writing style the work seems to have come from sometime around 1929, the year Adler taught his first Great Books class at the University of Chicago. If Adler is the author, the work reflects a writing style associated with the kind of newspaper writing from when Mortimer dropped out of high school to write for the Sun Newspaper before he went (without even a high school diploma) to Columbia, and assuredly before he had discovered Thomas Aquinas and that extremely annoying scholastic style of writing

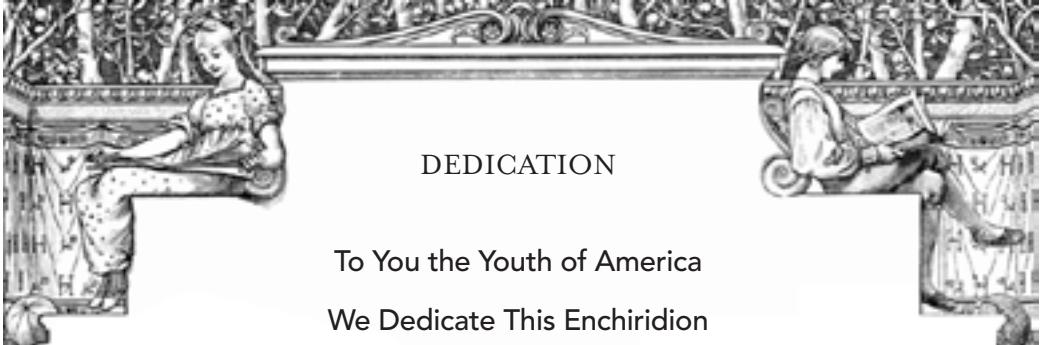


that characterized the hundreds of books and articles that Adler wrote following his graduation from Columbia.

Since we have been unable to find any copyright holder, The University of Baylor Press has taken the risk of republishing *The Great Books Enchiridion* almost in its entirety, although I/we have taken the liberty of adding editorial comment here and there, especially with regard to the more dramatic changes made in *The Enchiridion* in its better known later versions, especially the major revision completed in 1977.

While I will readily admit here that I would have much preferred to have found the Honus Wagner baseball card, the truly classic baseball card of all time, I do feel that Maimonides was looking over me in this obvious instance of Providence, and I am delighted to get my own 15 minutes of fame, thanks to the largesse of the University of Baylor Press, by being able to pass on to the reader the original *Great Books Enchiridion*. I do believe that I now better understand the kind of thrill those monks of the Middle Ages must have felt when their own quests turned up yet another ancient Greek manuscript (and I am especially glad that due to modern technology that I did not have to spend the inordinate time that it took to transcribe such a manuscript in the hopes of preserving it for posterity)...again, thank you Baylor and Xerox.

Sincerely,
Edward N. Gosuphal, Ph.D., A.D.D., Q.E.D.



DEDICATION

To You the Youth of America
We Dedicate This Enchiridion

In it you will find something about the ancient lore.

In it are the Oath, Law, and Motto.

In it you will find why Great Books rule.

In it are the age-old secrets for learning how to "do" Great Books.

In it are Fun and Leadership, Knowing and Doing, and Being and Becoming

Read it, enjoy it, live it as you build yourself into full Great Bookedness—

hit the line hard—"Be Dialectical".

FOREWORD

The Enchiridion will make increasing sense with more experience with the Great Books, and that's why this is an *enchiridion*; a handbook, guidebook, primer, for repeated perusal and help.

THE ORIGINAL FOREWORD, CIRCA 1929

Boys! (sic)

1977

The cave-boy who peered out from the cave wondered how long it would take his family, who were busy watching the shadows on the wall to try to kill him, for mentioning to them that there was a brave, new world out there?

Great Books students, acolytes of the Great Books tradition, legacy, heritage...the *Enchiridion* brings you the gleanings of the things that the great minds have discovered across the centuries, life's as big as we make it.

Great Books is a happy trail, with Good Turns around which are big things.

May this volume help you discover yourself and the Good—then may you help someone else discover.

FOREWORD

Editorial note: Here in the second decade of the 21st Century new Great Books acolytes, now more commonly referred to as padawans, seem to prefer the 1977 version of *The Enchiridion*. For example, from its front page:

"So, you wish to become a padawan. First, you must prove yourself worthy by training as a novice. The path will be difficult. Many before you have studied this manual and put themselves to the test...only to fail.

This training manual, *The Enchiridion*, will be your guide, my young apprentice. (Editorial note: this version was certainly not written nor approved by Adler as it uses the word "training" whereas Mortimer always pointed out that seals are trained, people are educated, and he would have been unlikely to use the second person ("you") instead of the third person objective discourse expected in scholarly writing.) Each section will teach you an important part of the Padawan Way. If you pass all the tests, you will become a Great Books Padawan.

This *Enchiridion* will reveal secrets that should never be shared with the evil Sophisiths. Keep this book in a safe place, and never leave it out in the open where some unscrupulous wannabe can find it and photocopy it, violating all copyright laws and the publishers' rights to fair recompense.

Beware! If you try too soon to use the Force on your own you may lose your way.

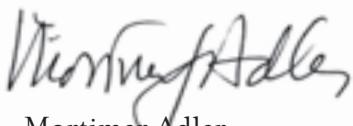
Good luck, Padawan-In-Training. And may the force be with you.

A word from our founder, Mortimer Adler

Padawans, I am your intellectual father. I have written more books than you have ever read, and I did not have a word processor, Dictaphone, personal computer, or ghost writer to help me with my labors. (I do resent, however, the recent insinuation that I am so old that I used quill and ink, and would want you to know of my deep appreciation for the ingenuity of man and my portable Underwood typewriter.) Further, I want to assure you that I take great pride, and not umbrage, at the accusation that I have profited mightily from the vigorous sales of the Great Books sets, so finely done with the leather-bound covers and gold gilded pages. I profited from reading the Great Books beyond my imagination and from their sales beyond my dreams.

I will take this occasion to report to you dear junior Padawan that the good people at the Encyclopedia Britannica have taken it upon themselves to plan their next major Great Books event and fittingly have determined to issue my collected books, and I am happy to report that this set will be one more volume and one inch longer than the 54 volume set of Great Books that you have so richly, or should I say I have so richly, appreciated. Further yet, the set will come in an optional alligator cover with platinum edged pages. This set should prove to be yet another great addition for your home decorating needs.

Live long and prosper,



Mortimer Adler

From the 1990 Edition of *The Great Books Enchiridion*

WHAT IS A GREAT BOOKS STUDENT?

What fun s/he finds hiking into the wilderness that is Great Books! S/he tells the relativist from the absolutist, the essentialist from the existentialist, the pedant from the sophist, dialogue from the dialectic. S/he can talk to any other acolyte with sesquipedalian erudition. S/he can recognize the nebulous clouds that tip toe on little cat feet. S/he knows a priori principles and translates "cogito ergo sum." S/he can find the way by the stars of the western tradition, as did the pioneers before.

When s/he speaks to anyone, s/he tries to ask hard questions. When someone mentions that a Platonic relationship is play for him and tonic for her, s/he looks askance and mutters that such a person obviously has spent too much time in the cave. S/he guards the tongue from loose speech, but does admit that "The Three Stooges" are funny.

S/he has many friends and categorizes them by the Aristotelian three rubrics: utility, pleasure, and true. The motto is: "Be rational," which is uttered quite passionately. In Great Books discussions s/he sometimes thinks through what is to be said, and at other times resorts to blurting out just anything. When someone is injured, s/he quotes Aristotle, that the good is better when it is harder, and says so with an Emersonian shock of rude truth. S/he always intends to be a useful citizen, sometime after the Great Books are finally finished. S/he helps the school community by raising the class curve so that mere pretenders have no chance. S/he finds fun in games, especially when s/he wins. S/he would find friends under the trees, under the stars, or

by the campfire, except that s/he spends too much time in the library.

S/he dreams out her/his great TOMORROW, mainly because s/he finds it almost impossible to stay in the present.

A DAD'S EYE VIEW

I told you not to take Great Books. I sent you to college to find a career, not an education. How can I explain to my friends that I've raised such an egg-head?

Fortunately you will be reading mostly dead white guys. (I don't mean by that "mostly dead".) (Nor did I necessarily take pleasure in their deaths.) Keep in mind that it is not their fault that they created the ideas that spawned the American Revolution, Women's Suffrage, and Civil Rights.



Each year new thousands (or at least dozens) join Great Books. They find not only fun, but a lot of headaches, sleep deprivation, and normal people looking at them funny. While every boy (sic) really wants to make Good, the Great Books student would prefer that that boy define his terms and what he means by "the good," and what is the relationship of Forms of the Good with particularity?

The ideals of our great Americans like Washington and Lincoln and

Roosevelt and Wilson and Babe Ruth and Mother Teresa stir us all to ambition and the desire to be REAL, except that there's the worry that only the Forms are REAL, so becoming REAL shouldn't happen until sometime after the last final exam.

At least you won't be subject to the three big problems faced by me and faced by my father:

1. mastery of his own powers, getting them keen and ready for use.
2. getting along with other people.
3. finding a worthy use for those powers.

You won't be subject to those concerns because you will always have your nose in a book, and probably will never pay off your college loans.

Alas, how did your acorn fall so far from the tree? But your mother and I still love you, really we do.

You tell me that "Great Books helps the student to value the great conversation which the past has brought in the life and ideals of Western Civilization, and Great Books points the way of good citizenship through service."

Ah, well, make it so.

Yours most sincerely,

Dad

From the 1977 *Enchiridion*



THE CODE, OATH AND PLEDGE

THE PADAWAN CODE

Padawans are the guardians of peace in the galaxy. (Editor's note: the use of the term galaxy serves as the first indication that the Great Conversation of Western Civilization might open itself to wider perspectives.)

Padawans use their powers to defend their academic arguments and to protect, never to attack others except on occasions when it is a fool who should not be suffered.

Padawans respect all life, in any form, including those who are taking majors outside of the traditional Liberal Arts.

Padawans serve others, rather than ruling over them, for the good of the Republic (Editor's footnote: the relationship of this use of the term "Republic" continues to remain controversial over whether the Great Books movement is democratic by being open to all, that "the best" should be made available equally to everyone, or whether the term refers to a Platonic preference for the hegemony of dead white men.)

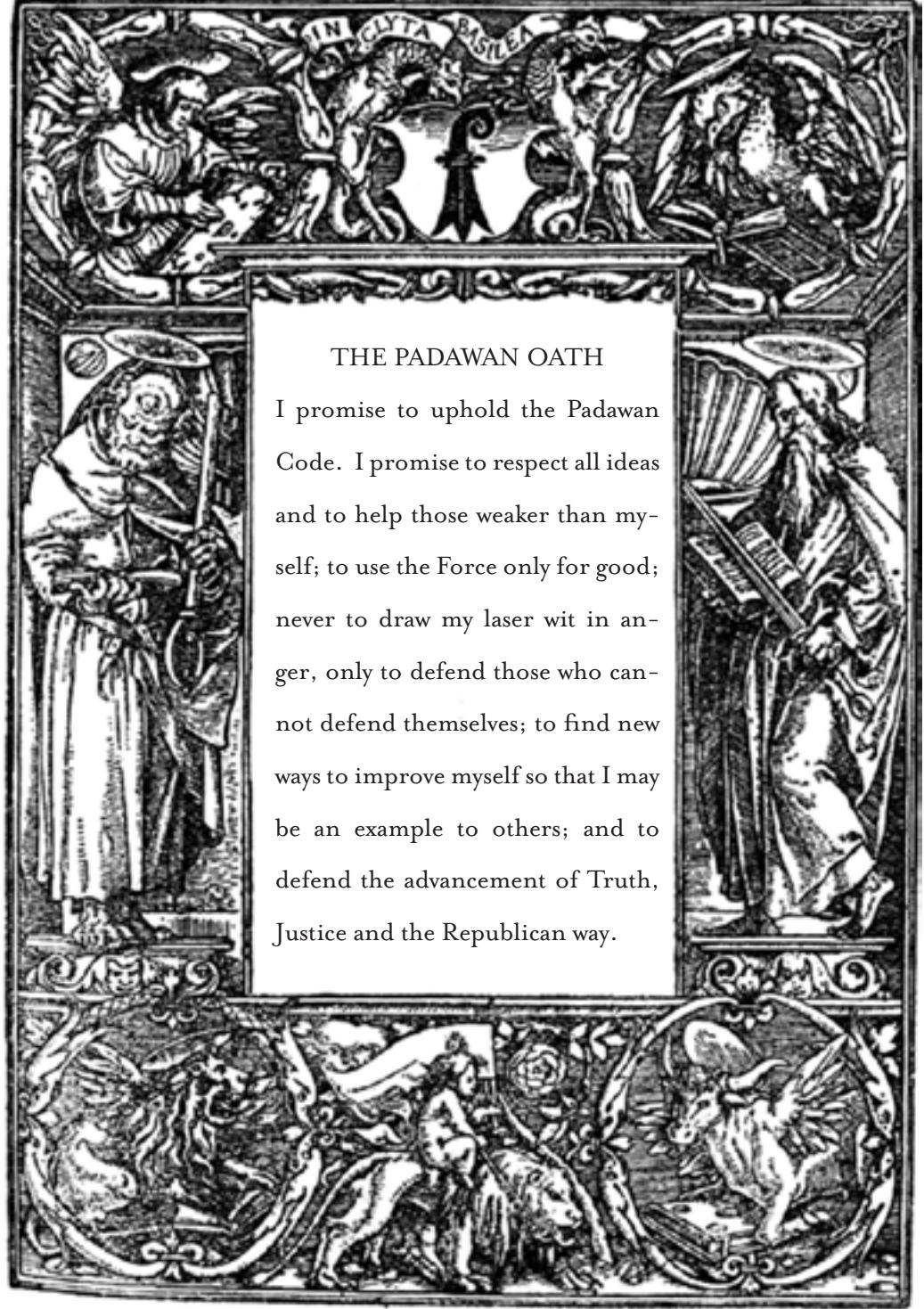
Padawans seek to improve themselves through knowledge and training whether or not fate may lead them to careers as Samurai Warriors or Philosopher Kings.

Once you have studied the Padawan Code above and understand what it means to be a Padawan, it is time to take the Padawan Oath. Now with your left hand on the Syntopicon and your right hand raised in the general direc-

tion of "The Good," repeat the words, then sign your name with the promise that you will uphold the Padawan Code.

THE ATHENIAN YOUTH OATH

This oath was taken by the young men of ancient Athens when they reached the age of seventeen: "We will never bring disgrace on this our City by an act of dishonesty or cowardice. We will fight for the ideals and Sacred Things of the City both alone and with many. We will revere and obey the City's laws, and will do our best to incite a like reverence and respect in those above us who are prone to annul them or set them at naught. We will strive increasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty. Thus in all these ways we will transmit this City, not only not less, but greater and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."



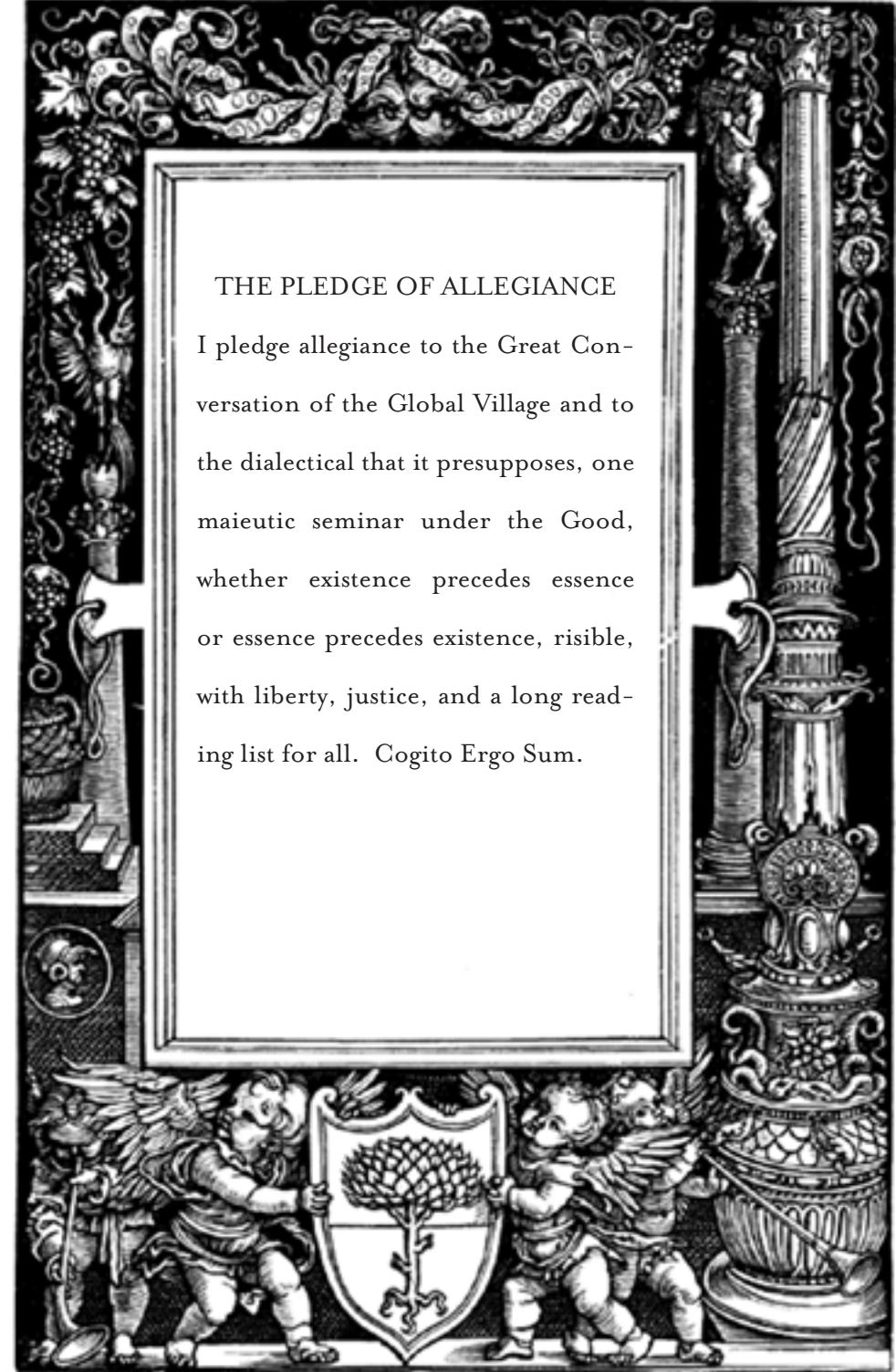
THE PADAWAN OATH

I promise to uphold the Padawan Code. I promise to respect all ideas and to help those weaker than myself; to use the Force only for good; never to draw my laser wit in anger, only to defend those who cannot defend themselves; to find new ways to improve myself so that I may be an example to others; and to defend the advancement of Truth, Justice and the Republican way.

WARNING ALERT

You must never underestimate the power of the dark side of the force, young Padawan. The dark side of Cliff Notes, bought term papers, uninformed opinions, and multiple choice exams may appear quicker and easier, but once you start down the dark path, forever it will control you. The dark side is the way of the evil Sophisiths, the sworn enemies of the Great Books Padawans. Their only purpose is to obfuscate, to destroy the Great Books Padawans, and to impose a life absent of the Liberal Arts. Remember your oath, and may the Force be with you!

(signature)



THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

I pledge allegiance to the Great Conversation of the Global Village and to the dialectical that it presupposes, one maieutic seminar under the Good, whether existence precedes essence or essence precedes existence, risible, with liberty, justice, and a long reading list for all. Cogito Ergo Sum.

THE 12 LAWS

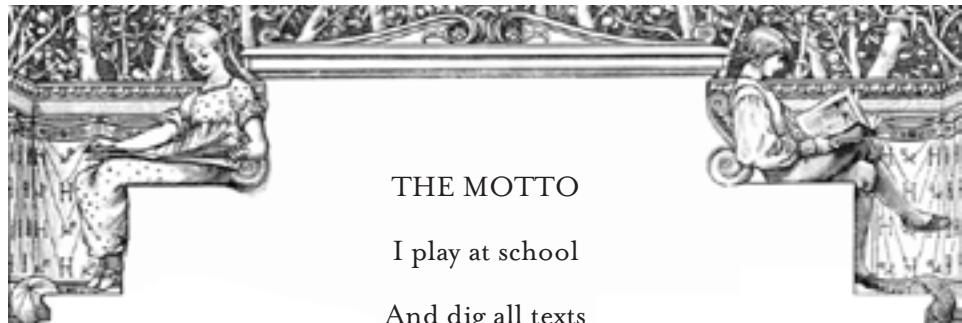
The Great Books student:

1. is inquisitive and truthful with intellectual curiosity, consistently asking annoying questions
2. is responsible to others engaged in the dialectic, and irritates them by being constantly over-prepared
3. finds that even when Homer nods, the great ideas are exciting, especially over a cold tall one
4. is an engaging team player who knows that while there is not an "I" in team, there is a "me"
5. rises to elevated standards, ruining the class curve for others
6. entertains other perspectives while maintaining a flexible cognitive style that makes her/him hard to pin down on anything
7. is challenging, and may sometimes seem insolent without being so, except that s/he is
8. appreciates irony, wit, humor, but is overly prone to puns
9. tolerates ambiguity and works well with abstract language to ensure confusion
10. is courageous in meeting limitations and challenges and shows up to class even when unprepared
11. handles failure and success with aplomb, by being obnoxious regardless
12. respects the Great Books and Monty Python, not necessarily in that order*

* reflects 1990 update

THE COMMAND; THE MOTTO; PHYSICAL FITNESS

"Study to show thyself approved before God,
a workman who needeth not to be ashamed..."



THE MOTTO

I play at school

And dig all texts

Can hardly wait for what comes next

My motto as I live and learn

Question and answer in return.

Howard John Hughes

PHYSICAL FITNESS

The Greek Ideal is “sound mind, sound body.” That relationship does not necessarily hold up under scrutiny: think Stephen Hawking. Nonetheless, ample research indicates that for most everyone a proper breakfast makes for better study, and proper rest makes for maximum performance. Perhaps one of the most important lessons college students learn are the limits on their physical capacities, but tackling the great books requires a freshness that cannot co-exist with inadequate rest and diet and be made up by cramming. Unfortunately this is entirely speculative as no Great Books student has regularly had a good breakfast, or averaged 6 hours a sleep per night, much less the 9 hours that are recommended.

THE HANDSHAKE; THE UNIFORM; THE OFFICIAL SONG

THE HANDSHAKE

Archaeological ruins and ancient texts show that handshaking was practiced in ancient Greece as far back as the 5th century BC; a depiction of two soldiers shaking hands can be found on part of a 5th century BC funerary stele on display in the Per-



gamon Museum, Berlin (stele SK1708) and other funerary steles like the one of the 4th century BC which depicts Thraseas and his wife Euandria handshaking. (Editor's note: Adler was not on public record as preferring the handshake with either of his wives or any of his paramours.) Thus Great Books students eschew the kissy-face Neo-European nonsense, preferring instead the ancient and Greek and American and Great Books traditional handshake.

THE UNIFORM:

A toga, only to be worn at toga parties and to exams



THE OFFICIAL SONG FROM THE 1968 ENCHIRIDION
(To be sung as a prayer before each Great Books class)

The Meaning of Life

Why are we here, what is life all about?
Is God really real, or is there some doubt?
Well in class we're going to sort it all out,
For today it's the Meaning of Life.

What's the point of all [these hoax?]
Is it the chicken and egg time, are we all just yolks?
Or perhaps, we're just one of God's little jokes,
Well ca-ca c'est the Meaning of Life.

Is life just a game where we make up the rules
While we're searching for something to say
Or are we just simple spiraling coils
Of self-replicating DNA?

What is life? What is our fate?
Is there Heaven and Hell? Do we reincarnate?
Is mankind evolving or is it too late?
Well today here's the Meaning of Life.

For millions this life is a sad vale of tears
Sitting 'round with really nothing to say
While scientists say we're just simply spiraling coils
Of self-replicating DNA.

So just why, why are we here?
And just what, what, what, what do we fear?
Well in class, for a change, it will all be made clear,
For this is the Meaning of Life - c'est le sens de la vie -
This is the Meaning of Life.

Monty Python

The Philosopher's Drinking Song :

Immanuel Kant was a real piss-ant who was very rarely stable.
Heidegger, Heidegger was a boozy beggar
who could think you under the table...
Darth Adler could think, but preferred to drink
With Great Books crony toffs.
He'd raise his glass, a bit of an ass,
And toast them mazel tov.
David Hume could out-consume Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.
And Wittgenstein was a beery swine
who was just as sloshed as Schlegel.
There's nothing Nietzsche couldn't teach 'ya
'bout the raising of the wrist.
Socrates, himself, was permanently pissed.
John Stuart Mill, of his own free will,
after half a pint of shandy was particularly ill.
Plato, they say, could stick it away,
half a crate of whiskey every day!
Aristotle, Aristotle was a bugger for the bottle,
And Hobbes was fond of his Dram.
And René Descartes was a drunken fart:
"I drink, therefore I am."
Yes, Socrates himself is particularly missed;
A lovely little thinker, but a bugger when he's pissed.





The Great Books dance, the Great Books sing,
The Great Books up to ev'rything,
And while the Great Books are a bore,
They're not so easy to ignore.
Long row, the 5' row,
Buy the set; heide-ho.
O read all night till the broad daylight
And go home to study in the morning.

Then dance the Great Books dance,
O dance the Great Books dance,
O read all night 'til you ruin your sight,
And go home to study in the mornin'.

Hi-ho, the five foot row
Hi-ho, the five foot row
O read all night till the broad daylight
And go home to study in the morning.

I bought a set the other day
To see what the Great Books had to say
There I let my passion loose
Wasted my money like a silly goose.
Hi-ho the five foot row
Hi-ho the five foot row
Sit on the shelf; collect so much dust.
Sit on the shelf; collect so much dust.

Feelings

Feelings, anything but feelings,
Trying to preserve my reason
Teardrops rolling down on my face,
Trying to preserve my reason

Feelings, nothing more than feelings,
Trying to forget my feelings of doubt.
Teardrops rolling down on my face,
Trying to forget my feelings of doubt.

Reason, for all my life, I'm thinking
I wish I'd never met Great Books;
You want to be read over and over again.

Feelings, for all my life I'll feel it.
I wish I've never met you, Great Books;
I think I need an aspirin.

Feelings, wo-uh-oh feelings,
Wo-uh-oh,
Feelings, wo-uh-oh feelings,
Wo-uh-oh, you go against all reason.
Feelings, feelings like I cannot lose you
And feelings, is Dickens right there is
Knowledge of the heart?

Feelings, for all my life I'll reason.
I wish I'd never met Great Books;
I think I need an aspirin.

Feelings, feelings like I cannot lose you
And feelings like i'll never have feelings
Again in my life.

Feelings, wo-uh-oh feelings,
Wo-uh-oh, feelings you go against all reason.

Feelings...

(repeat & fade)



Climb Every Mountain

Climb every mountain,
Search high and low,
Follow every byway,
Every path you know.
Climb every mountain,
Search high and low,
Follow every line of inquiry,
Every discourse you know.

Climb every mountain,
Ford every stream,
Follow every rainbow,
'Till you find your dream.
Climb every mountain,
Ford every stream,
Follow the dialectic
Only to find yet another question.

Climb every mountain,
Ford every stream,
Follow every rainbow,
Till you find your dream.
Climb every mountain,
Ford the River Styx,
Follow the dialectic,
Till you earn your "A."



My Old Man

My old man's a Platonist,
What do you think about that?
He wears a Platonist collar,
He wears a Platonist's hat.
He wears a Platonist's raincoat,
He wears a Platonist's tunic
And every Saturday evening,
He engages the dialectic.
And some day, if I can
I'm going to be a Platonist
The same as my old man.

My old man's an existentialist,
What do you think about that?
He wears an existentialist's collar,
He wears an existentialist's hat.
He wears an existentialist's raincoat,
He wears an existentialist's shoes
And every Saturday evening,
He reads Sartre or Camus
And some day, if I can
I'm going to be an existentialist
The same as my old man.

My old man's a pussy-footin' pusillanimous pink pacifist puke
What do you think about that?
He wears a pusillanimous pussy-footin' pink pacifist puke collar,
He wears a pusillanimous pussy-footin' pink pacifist puke hat.
He wears a pusillanimous pussy-footin' pink pacifist puke raincoat,
He wears a pusillanimous pussy-footin' pink pacifist puke shoes
And every Saturday evening,
He reads the Daily Worker news
And some day, if I can
I'm going to be pusillanimous pussy-footin' pink pacifist puke

The same as my old man.

(Spoken)

Alexander: What do you think about that? Boy you gotta be pretty sharp witted, slippery tongued to say things like that.

Aristotle: I tell you Alexander, you're very glib.

Alexander: I certainly am.

Aristotle: Well, here, I'll tell you what my old man does.

My old man's a Cotton Pickin' Finger Lickin' Chicken Plucker,
What do you think about that?

(Alexander: You better not make a mistake. Milton argued against censorship in Areopagitica, but Socrates argued for censorship in The Republic.)

Aristotle: Whatever.

He wears a Cotton Pickin' Finger Lickin' Chicken Plucker's collar,
He wears a Cotton Pickin' Finger Lickin' Chicken Plucker's hat.

He wears a Cotton Pickin' Finger Lickin' Chicken Plucker's raincoat,
He wears a Cotton Pickin' Finger Lickin' Chicken Plucker's shoes.

And –

(Alexander: You're lucky)

every Saturday evening,

He reads the Cotton Pickin' News.

And someday, if I can,

I'm gonna be a Cotton Pickin' Finger Lickin' Chicken Plucker just like
my old man.





Drink life, drink life,
Oh come drink life with me
Cuz I don't give a fig for any old man who won't
drink life with me
Come on and break out the grail with an icon on it
 Toast the immortality of the soul, of the soul
For its not for knowledge that we come to college
 But to suck marrow while we're here
And we will drink, drink, drink to the Great Books
 And we will drink and raise our mugs on high
And we will drink to our fraternity (and sorority), so
 raise your mugs up to the sky and drink them dry,
and we will drink to sacred brotherhood (and sister-
 hood) and when our last song is sung,

We will drink once more to the colloquia we adore
And the brothers (and sisters) of Socratic dialogue. Hey!

The Lumberjack Song

BARBER:

I want to be Adlerian!

Leaping from point to point, having my 3000 years of history from Homer and Plato to Diderot and Wittgenstein. The Great Iliad, The Republic, Trojan Women, well maybe not Trojan Women. The Song of Solomon! The mighty City of God! The lofty Divine Comedy! The plucky Aeneid! Machiavelli's limping Prince. The towering Paradise Lost! The maidenhead Second Sex! The naughty James Joyce's Ulysses! The flatulent Praise of Folly! Academia, the symposia, the colloquia.

With my best discussant by my side, we'd carp! Carp! Carp!

[singing]

I'm Adlerian, and I'm okay.

I read all night, and I study all day.

MOUNTIES:

He's Adlerian, and he's okay.

He reads all night, and he studies all day.

BARBER:

I cut down fallacies. Proof not hunch.

I go to the library.

On Wednesdays I go to class,

Engage the dialectic.

MOUNTIES:

He cuts down fallacies. Proof not hunch.

He goes to the library

On Wednesdays goes to class

Engages the dialectic

He's Adlerian and he's okay

He reads all night and he studies all day.

BARBER:

I cut down fallacies. I ratiocinate.

I like to press arguments.

I entertain other points of view

And hang around egg heads.

MOUNTIES:

He cuts down fallacies. He ratiocinates.

He likes to press arguments.

He entertains other points of view

And hangs around egg heads?

He's Adlerian, and he's okay.

He reads all night and he studies all day.

BARBER:

I cut down fallacies. I wear on others,

Cuz I won't suffer fools

I wish I'd been Socrates,

Just like my dear Plato.



MOUNTIES:

He cuts down fallacies. He wears on others,
Won't suffer fools
(talking)

What's this? Wants to be Socratic? Oh, My!
And I thought you were so smart! You are nothing but a Sophist!

[singing]

He's Adlerian, and he's okaaaaay.
He reads all night and he studies all day.



Tom Dooley's Mortimer Adler

Spoken: Throughout history
There've been many songs written about the great ideas
This next one tells the story of a Mr. Erskine, a beautiful set of great
books

And a condemned man named Mortimer Adler...
When the sun rises tomorrow, Mortimer Adler will be defamed...

Sung: Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Hang down your head and sigh

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Poor boy you're bound to cry

I met them in the ivory tower

Read them all in my life

Met them on the mountain

Didn't expect so much strife

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Hang down your head and cry

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Poor boy, you're bound to vie

This time tomorrow

Reckon where I'll be-o

Because of Professor Erskine

I'll be in Paradis-o

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Hang down your head and cry

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Like all other men but Jesus, you were sure to die

This time tomorrow

Reckon where I'll be

Down at the Chez Paree

Judging a spelling bee

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

Hang down your head and sigh

Hang down your head, Mortimer Adler

To your critics, simply tell them "Fie"

Poor boy you had to sigh

Poor boy you had to cry

Poor boy you had to vie

Poor boy you had to die

Poor boy you had to ask Why?

Mercedes Benz

O Lord won't you buy me Adler's Great Books set?
Everyone else has one which makes me upset,
Work hard all my life to pay my college debt,
O Lord won't you buy me Adler's Great Books set?

O Lord I want the wisdom of the sages
Culture's best of the best from all the ages
I'd buy them but I just don't have the wages
O Lord I want the wisdom of the sages

O Lord I'm in want to get a Great Books start,
I'm begging you Jesus, please just do your part
All sixty volumes; I beg with all my heart
O Lord I'm in want to get a Great Books start?

All together (repeat first verse)



By Jimminy

Listen here my dear,
don't jeer what's clear.
The ear has to hear
Not leer or fear.
By Jimminy the acrimony
'bout hegemony
Ain't light, nor blight,
nor sight, nor right.
Any phony testimony
about the patrimony-
SoKrates was a brother,
not other.

The Massage by Grand Blaster Smash

It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder How I keep from going under
It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder How I keep from going under

Paradox everywhere

Nihilists doing anything cuz they don't care
I can't take the illogic can't take it no more
Got no categorical imperative to make me move on
Sophists in the front room, commies in the back
anarchists in the alley with a Bakunin hat
I tried to get away, but I couldn't get far
Seized by the dialectick, har, har, har.

Chorus:

Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head, ah huh-huh-huh
[2nd and 5th: ah huh-huh-huh]
[4th: say what?]
It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under
It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under

Standing on the first premise, what'll be the second?
Watching all the diatribe, snoring as the theses blow
Crazy Platonist, what's his bag?
Jammin' syllogisms, needs to be gagged.
He said he danced the tango, skipped the light fandango
The Philosopher King in good form in the ivory tower,
Watching all the geeks so she can ratiocinate with the girls back home
So she went to the source, bought her Great Books set
She had to get a tutor, couldn't make it on her own

[2nd Chorus]

My brother's doing bad on his Great Books grades
Not enough proof texts, it's just not healthy
The Republic in the daytime, Ethics at night
Can't even see the game or the sophists fight
The bill collectors they ring my phone
And scare my wife when I'm not home
Got a bum education, double-digit inflation
They repossessed my Play-Station
Bad Socrates standin' on my balls
Can't turn around, chained to the wall
A mid-range migraine, can't use my brain
Sometimes I think I'm going insane, no pain, no gain
Can't turn around,

[3rd Chorus]

My son said: "Daddy, I don't wanna go to school
Cause the teacher's a jerk, he must think I'm a fool
All the kids read textbooks, I think it'd be cheaper
If I just understood dialectic I'd be a keeper
I'd dance to the beat, shuffle my feet
Wear a Che t-shirt and run with the geeks
Cause it's all about epistemology, if not pharmecology
You have to have game in this land of 'ology
They pushed that girl in front to the train
Took her to Virginia, amputated her brain
Skewered that man right in the heart
Gave him a transplant for a new start
I can't read through the Great Books, cause I get funny looks
Keep my hand on my dictionary to understand the Word
I feel like an outlaw, will I quit? Naw, Naw!
Hear me say: "I want some more of this livin' on the seesaw.

[4th Chorus]

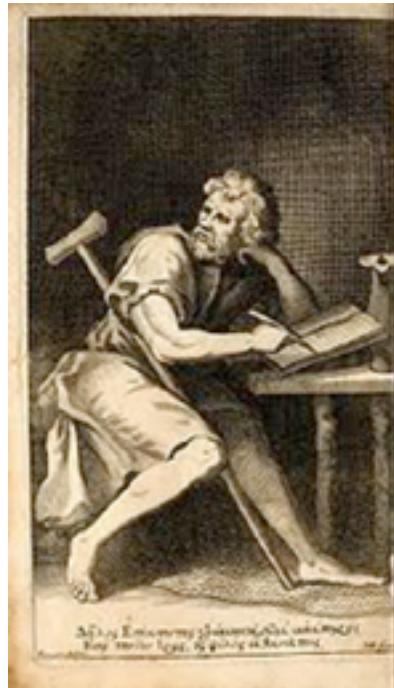
A child is born with no state of mind
Blind to the ways of mankind
God is smiling on you, but he's frowning too
Because only God knows what you'll go through
You'll grow in the college, living second rate
And your eyes will close, what a boring fate
The places you play and where you stay
Looks like one great waste-away

You'll admire all the classic book takers
Deans, Profs, Tutors and textbook makers
Driving big egos, truly sesquipedalian
And you wanna grow up to be just like them, huh,
Pedants, fascists, geeks and tyros
Pretenders, dissemblers, but hardly heroes
You say: "I'm cool, I'm no fool!"
But then you wind up flunking out of school

How you're unemployed, all non-void
Walking 'round like you're Pretty Boy Floyd
Turned sophist kid, look what you've done did
Got sent up for a eight year bid
Now your manhood is took; you're a shadow on the wall
All because you did not heed inspiration's call
Being used and abused worse than Dante's Hell
'Til one day you was found brain dead in your cell
It was plain to see that your mind was lost
You was cold and your brain wave swung back and forth
But now your eyes sing the sad, sad song
Oh how you lived so fast, got it all wrong.

Io Truimphe

Io Triumphe! Io Triumphe!
Haben shwaben, rebeka le animor
Whopty whopty, shelerdy veridy,
Boomdy raldy idee-pah
Honeka-heneka whacka-whacka
Hobdob boldebara-boldebara
Com-slomidy hob-dob-rah!



INSULTS TO HURL AT INSUFFERABLE SOPHISITHS:

I do desire we may be better strangers.
As You Like It (3.2.248)

More of your conversation would infect my brain.
Coriolanus (2.1.91)

The tartness of his face sours ripe grapes.
Coriolanus (5.4.18)

Take you me for a sponge?
Hamlet (4.2.13)

'Sblood, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's tongue, you bull's pizzle, you stock-fish! O for breath to utter what is like thee! you tailor's yard, you sheath, you bowcase; you vile standing-tuck!
1 Henry IV (2.4.227-9)

Thou mis-shapen dick!

3 Henry VI (5.5.35)

You are strangely troublesome.

Henry VIII (5.3.112)

You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!

Julius Caesar (1.1.36)

You are a tedious fool.

Measure for Measure (2.1.113)

Some report a sea-maid spawn'd him; some that he was begot between two stock-fishes. But it is certain that when he makes water his urine is congealed ice.

Measure for Measure (3.2.56)

Thou art a Castilian King urinal!

The Merry Wives of Windsor (2.3.21)

Thou lump of foul deformity!

Richard III (1.2.58)

Out of my sight! thou dost infect my eyes.

Richard III (1.2.159)

Thou subtle, perjur'd, false, disloyal man!

William Shakespeare (The Two Gentlemen of Verona)

Thou art so leaky

That we must leave thee to thy sinking.

William Shakespeare

Anthony and Cleopatra (3. 13)

Let's meet as little as we can.

William Shakespeare

As You Like It (3. 2)

DEMERIT BADGES

for having relentlessly learned any of the following gerunds:

1. working the teacher—most able to get the teacher off the subject, get the teacher to clarify the assignment to the extent less is expected, gets the teacher to give the class an undeserved benefit of doubt
2. fawning—laughs at the teacher's jokes, constantly nods knowingly at the teacher, compliments the teacher directly and indirectly
3. snowing—whether oral or written or both; can say much about little, rattle on and on, cite support that either does not exist or does not fit, and does this with great confidence; rarely has one spoken so badly with such confidence
4. dominating—has learned to dominate the discussion by any means necessary, whether by a rambling personal story, long self-serving monologue, non sequitur, redundancy, oxymorons...
5. interjecting—interjects comments without raising one's hand, spouts off the humorous aside
6. dodging—demonstrates ability to change the subject, gives an answer to a question that was not asked, replies with a rejoinder, passes the buck to someone else
7. making a mountain out of a mole hill—can take umbrage at any insignificant issue, can get all worked up, and put others on the defensive



8. trampolining—instead of sticking to the subject at hand can respond “that reminds me of” and leap onto a completely different subject; sees the relationship of ideas as being dependent upon associations rather than logic
9. proselytizing—turns conversations into political and/or religious discussions that, then, prove that discussant’s political party or religion has the answer to all of life’s issues, emphasis “all”
10. joking—can say things funny or say funny things; may write an underground newspaper; play dekes or practical jokes in or outside of class
11. sesquipedalianing—can use a big word when a small word would do; does not actually need for the multi-syllabic words to be used accurately, knowingly, or pertinently
12. smoking—knows the difference among Cohibas, Monte Cristos, and Trinidads; knows all the synonyms for marijuana
13. stifling—now recognized as a separate demerit badge from dominating, stiflers can kill a conversation by saying something untoward, by being so insufferable as to make no one likely to respond, by going on and on, by making others feel either pity and/or uncomfortable
14. lying—makes up facts, sources, misrepresents authors’ points of view, tells personal stories that fit even though they aren’t true
15. annoying—over repetitive, predictable, clawing, wants everything repeated ad infinitum, too obviously flirting with one or more other discussants, rude, thoughtless

16. spacing out—often stares at ceiling, seems privately bemused regardless of what is actually happening, seems to have just arrived on the planet, misses ordinary social cues, spacey
17. avoiding—needs frequent potty breaks, tardy, absent, “my dog ate the homework”, “I thought that was the assignment”...
18. challenging—doubts what the teacher says for doubting’s sake, consistently breaks the class’s rules, argues for complete personal autonomy, but is not an anarchist because if left in charge would be a fascist
19. obsessing—demands detailed directions that will, then, not be followed
20. dazzling—gets by on charm, good looks, compliments, and often by being flirtatious
21. being nice, if not kind—seemingly does not want to offend anyone, say anything wrong (or candid), wants to be liked by everyone, invites being walked upon

Non-gerund demerit badges:

22. The hat trick--cell phone goes off in class for the third time
23. Scored 3,000 points on “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Game Boy Adventure”
24. Uploaded Ovid in class
25. Text messaged George Lucas in class
26. Sent your computer to class and your smiling face participated in the dialectic via Skype
27. Modelled Resourcefulness: found the scene mentioned in class where Bill meets “Sokrates”

28. Created a facebook page for Hugo Grotius
29. During an especially slow and painful class managed to write your own obituary
30. MVP (Most Versatile Player)...skyped, tweeted, twittered, e-mailed, text messaged, sent a photo all in one class period
31. Became First person in Great Books class history to take a sedative to calm down instead of caffeine to stay awake.
32. In class twice managed to say what the previous person had just said
33. Got some fake blood and went to class "bleeding" as the excuse for being tardy
34. Got to class early and set the clock ahead five minutes so that class was let out five minutes early
35. Brought a shopping cart to class full of all previously read Great Books for ready reference
36. Wore vines and leaves to the class on Rousseau

MAJOR AWARDS

1. The Richard Winslow Award for graduating with the lowest grade point average in the graduating class
2. The Dimmest Bulb on the Tree Award (clear future candidate for the Darwin Awards)—did something unbelievably stupid except for this winner it wasn't even surprising

3. The Larry Keats Award—earned an “A” with the very minimal effort, and was a pest, but still got the ‘A’
4. The Stan Kuder Award (comparable to baseball’s Mendoza line) offers the minimal performance necessary to remain a member of the class
5. The Patrick Quinn Award—for painting a private part green for St. Patrick’s Day, and proud enough for the great reveal to any doubters
6. The John McCosker Award—worst offense to the environment, whether turning the entire bank of showers on for an hour sauna or eating corn nuts in class
7. The Kiki Olivas Award—best classroom farts
8. The Will Sully Award—the best Machiavellian hypocrite, i.e. makes others think that s/he is a stand-up guy while being completely self-serving
9. Pete Horstman Award—for the equivalent of reading Ovid aloud publicly to lower classmen
10. The John Belushi Award—for starting the food fight in the cafeteria
11. The John Belushi II Award—best passing of the buck: “you f---ed up, you trusted us”
12. The Leo Award—had sex afterhours in the Great Books classroom
13. The Adam and Eve Award—stark naked under the graduation gown
14. Semester’s Best/Worst Writing Mistake (e.g., from a student paper: “The



similarities shared by these two characters are very similar.”)

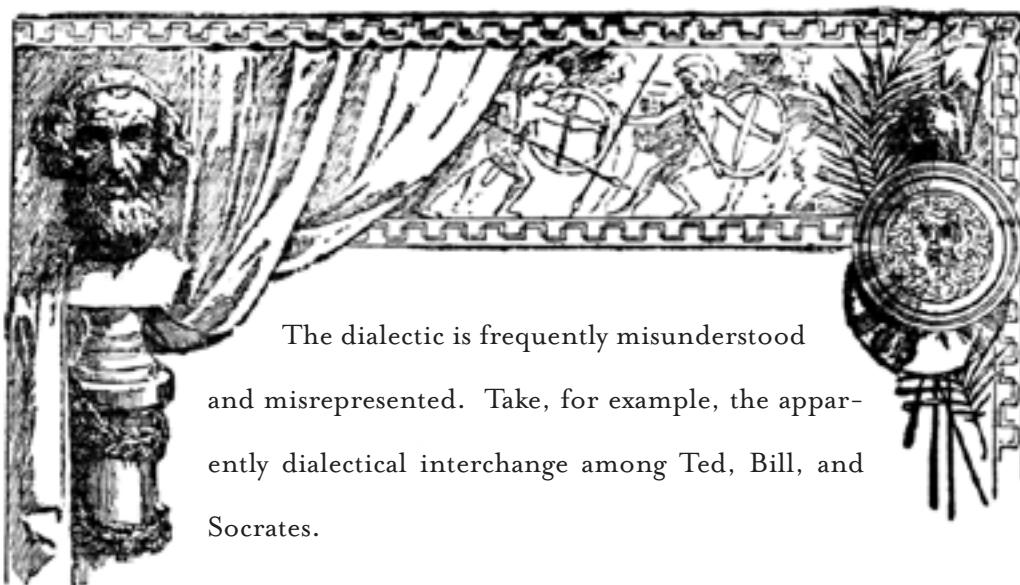
15. The 95 Theses Award for longest list of complaints by a single undergraduate
16. The Rob Miller Award for Best Writing with Least Content
17. The unflappable Andy Washburn Award for finally having the teacher get his/her goat
18. The Strident Feminist Award for Redundancy
19. The Chairman Mao Award/Kathy Bristow award for the student who best tweaked the others in the class, whether it was by wearing a communist hat, a Che t-shirt, or professing love for Ayn Rand
20. The Male Chauvinist Pig Award for being Anachronistic
21. The Nietzsche Award for taking the trouble to espouse that nothing has value
22. The Single-minded Award for Impenetrable Obtuseness (every other year it is called The Crawled Out from under a Rock Award)
23. The Doug Phillips Space Cadet Award—in honor of its creation when he was an hour late to the bus on a field trip in Germany because he had been “watching the ducks”
24. The Dane Manes Award for getting the otherwise unflappable teacher’s Goat
25. The Shannon Brady Award for having gone to the most classes for a course in which not enrolled

MINOR AWARDS

1. Fell asleep in class (with or without snoring)
2. Smoked the most Cuban cigars in a term
3. Convinced teacher you were tired from studying all night, not hung over
4. Distinguished use of malaprop (e.g. "demonic device" instead of mnemonic device")
5. Proved there really is a stupid question
6. Issued the most sophomoric remark in the sophomore year
7. Turned in a term paper with triple spacing and 1 1/2 inch margins
8. Sang to the teacher "we're all in our places with sun shiny faces"
9. Brought the teacher an apple
10. When in trouble did not try to "explain or complain"
- II. Didn't say "sorry" when tardy because s/he had read Kant and knew that such an apology was at best based in prudence and not regret (and that the teacher likely knew this)
12. Understood Locke's distinction when queried "Liberty or license?" knowing that liberty assumed a responsible use of freedom, and license an irresponsible use.
13. The Great Books Award - did not accept the dictates of a question
14. Actually found a relevant passage that supported a particular point
15. Actually remembered something from what had been read previously



WHAT IS AND IS NOT SOCRATIC DIALOGUE; EXAMPLES OF DIALOGUE AND THE DIALECTIC



The dialectic is frequently misunderstood and misrepresented. Take, for example, the apparently dialectical interchange among Ted, Bill, and Socrates.

1. This episode contains two fundamental problems. First, the dialogue and thesis start with the thought that the days of our lives are like the sands of the hourglass, but then end with that very conclusion. Thus the dialectic has not in fact been extended. Second, at the end they walk off laughing. Aristotle, not Socrates, was the father of the peripatetic walk, and there is nothing funny about Great Books.

(Athens, Greece, 410 BC)

(Bill is sitting by the booth playing with a Nerf ball. Bill and Ted go over to where an older man is giving a speech. They watch him from a distance.)

Bill: Socrates. Hey, we know that name.

Ted: Yeah. Hey, look him up. (Bill takes out a book) Oh, it's under Socrates.

Bill: Oh yeah. So-crates: The only true wisdom consists in knowing that you know nothing.

Ted: (thinks) That's us, dude!

Bill: Oh yeah. Let's bag him.

(They walk over to where Socrates is giving his lesson.)

Socrates: (in Greek) So you see, our lives are but specks of dust falling through the fingers of time.

(Bill and Ted walk up and Socrates stops talking to look at them.)

Bill: How's it going? I'm Bill, this is Ted. We're from the future.

Socrates: Socrates...hmmm.

Ted: Now what?

Bill: I dunno, philosophize with him.

Ted: All we are is dust in the wind, dude.

(Socrates obviously doesn't understand.)

Bill: (picks up some dirt out of a pan) Dust. (makes a motion with his hand to mean wind) Wind.

Ted: (points at Socrates) Dude.

Socrates: (in Greek) Yes, like sands of the hourglass, so are the days of our lives. (laughs)

Bill: Let's get out of here, dude.

(They walk off with Socrates laughing.)

2. The second episode for consideration comes from *Annie Hall*. Alvy and Annie, thinly disguised versions of Woody Allen and Diane Keaton, who reprise their real life roles for the film, are apparently engaged in dialogue, but in fact the subtitle on screen reveal that they both meant something entirely different from what they were saying. A frequent Great Books event as students apparently engage in the classroom dialectic whereas they are really trying to get a better grade or a date, not necessarily in that order.

ALVY

(pointing toward the apartment after a short pause)
So, did you do shoot the photographs in there or what?

ANNIE

(Nodding, her hand on her hip)
Yeah, yeah, I sorta dabble around, you know.

Annie's thoughts pop on the screen as she talks: *I dabble? Listen to me—what a jerk!*

ALVY

They're ... they're... they're wonderful, you know.
They have ... they have, uh ... a ... a quality.

As do Alvy's: *You are a great-looking girl*

ANNIE

Well, I-I-I would—I would like to take
a serious photography course soon.

Again, Annie's thoughts pop on: *He probably thinks I'm a yo-yo*

ALVY

Photography's interesting, 'cause, you know, it's—it's a new
art form, and a, uh, a set of aesthetic criteria have not emerged yet.

And Alvy's: *I wonder what she looks like naked?*

ANNIE

Aesthetic criteria? You mean, whether it's, uh, good photo or not?

I'm not smart enough for him. Hang in there

ALVY

The—the medium enters in as a condition of the art form itself. That's—

I don't know what I'm saying—she senses I'm shallow

ANNIE

Well, well, I ... to me-I ... I mean, it's-it's-it's all instinctive, you know. I mean, I just try to uh, feel it, you know? I try to get a sense of it and not think about it so much.

God, I hope he doesn't turn out to be a shmuck like the others

ALVY

Still, still we- You need a set of aesthetic guidelines to put it in social perspective, I think.

Christ, I sound like FM radio. Relax

They're quiet for a moment, holding wine glasses and sipping. The sounds of distant traffic from the street can be heard on the terrace.

3. The third episode for scrutiny comes from *Saturday Night Live* and an interchange between Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin (now this is a real classic). Together they demonstrate how very difficult it is to synthesize a thesis and antithesis, and how most such pretenders to the potential dialectic of point and counterpoint are in actuality simply trying to out-compete the other towards a resounding win(d).



Dan Aykroyd: I'm station manager Dan Aykroyd. During the past few weeks in Los Angeles, actor Lee Marvin and his former live-in companion Michelle Triola Marvin have been in court to settle her claim that he owes her half his income from the six years they lived together. That is a subject of tonight's Point-Counterpoint. Jane will take the pro-Michelle Marvin point, while I will take the anti-Michelle Triola counterpoint.

Jane Curtin: Dan, times change and so does the nature of relationships. People are reluctant to get married these days and looking at divorce statistics, who can blame them. But the lack of a piece of paper does not necessarily mean a lack of total commitment. A woman in this modern-day relationship may well give up all her personal pursuits, as Michelle Marvin claims she did, to give her full support to her man's career. And Michelle Marvin is just asking that the courts recognize that reality. Dan, there's an old saying: "Behind every successful man there's a woman." A loving, giving, caring woman. But you wouldn't know about that, Dan, because there's no old saying about what's behind a miserable failure.

Dan Aykroyd: Jane, you ignorant slut! Bagged-out, dried-up, slunken meat like you and Michelle Triola know the rules. If you want a contract, sign on the dotted line. Oh, but let's shed a tear for poor Michelle Triola. There was only testimony that she had sexual intercourse over forty times with another man while living with actor Lee Marvin. But I suppose that sort of fashionable promiscuting means nothing to you, Jane, who hops from bed to bed with the frequency of the cheap ham radio. But hell hath no fury like a woman's scorn, and Michelle Triola, like a screeching, squealing, rerapacious swamp sow is after actor Lee Marvin's last three million dollars. I guess what you and Michelle are saying is that when you're on your backs, the meter is running. Well, please spare us, gals, and tell us the rates at the top. Then we can choose which two-bit tarts and bargain basement sluts to shack up with.

4. The fourth example of apparent Socratic dialogue involves Strepsiades and Socrates. This is a very tricky one. It would seem to be an ideal example because it involves Socrates. It would seem to be an ideal example because it comes from a classic work, *Clouds*, by Aristophanes. But it fails the test because this Socrates confounds the dialogue by asserting that "water-cresses also suffer the very same thing." Socrates was not much concerned by particulars like "water-cresses," a fault for which Aristotle criticized him severely, which reared its ugly head centuries later when Aquinas, sick and tired of

Christians quoting Augustine quoting Plato, quoted Aristotle, leading to, among other things, Mother Teresa spending her time in the streets of Bombay instead of in a nunnery where she could have gotten closer to Augustine, Plato, and God, not necessarily in that order.



Strepsiades. Then you will weep for it.

[Looking up and discovering Socrates.]

Come, who is this man who is in the basket?

Disciple. Himself.

Strepsiades. Who's "Himself"?

Disciple. Socrates.

Strepsiades. O Socrates! Come, you sir, call upon him loudly for me.

Disciple. Nay, rather, call him yourself; for I have no leisure.

[Exit Disciple.]

Strepsiades. Socrates! My little Socrates!

Socrates. Why callest thou me, thou creature of a day?

Strepsiades. First tell me, I beseech you, what are you doing.

Socrates. I am walking in the air, and speculating about the sun.

Strepsiades. And so you look down upon the gods from your basket, and not from the earth?

Socrates. For I should not have rightly discovered things celestial if I had not suspended the intellect, and mixed the thought in a subtle form with its kindred air. But if, being on the ground, I speculated from below on things above, I should never have discovered them. For the earth forcibly attracts to itself the meditative moisture. Water-cresses also suffer the very same thing.

Strepsiades. What do you say? Does meditation attract the moisture to the water-cresses? Come then, my little Socrates, descend to me, that you may teach me those things, for the sake of which I have come.

[Socrates lowers himself and gets out of the basket.]

5. Finally, the fifth episode for the crucible of critical analysis involved Socrates and Simmias. Have confidence that this example must represent the dialectic at its finest because Epictetus chose it from Plato's dialogues to represent the dialectic. This is the real McCoy, the actual dialogue in an exchange between Socrates and Simias from the *Phaedo*:

'I think we shall make some progress in our inquiry if we start like this: Do you regard it as befitting a philosopher to devote himself to the so-called pleasures of, let us say, food and drink?'

'No indeed, Socrates,' Simmias replied.

'What about the pleasures of sex?'

'Certainly not.'

'And what about all the other ministrations to bodily needs? Does that type of man set a high value on them, do you think? The possession of elegant clothes and shoes, for example, and other such bodily adornments: does he value them, or does he despise anything beyond the absolutely necessary minimum of such things?'

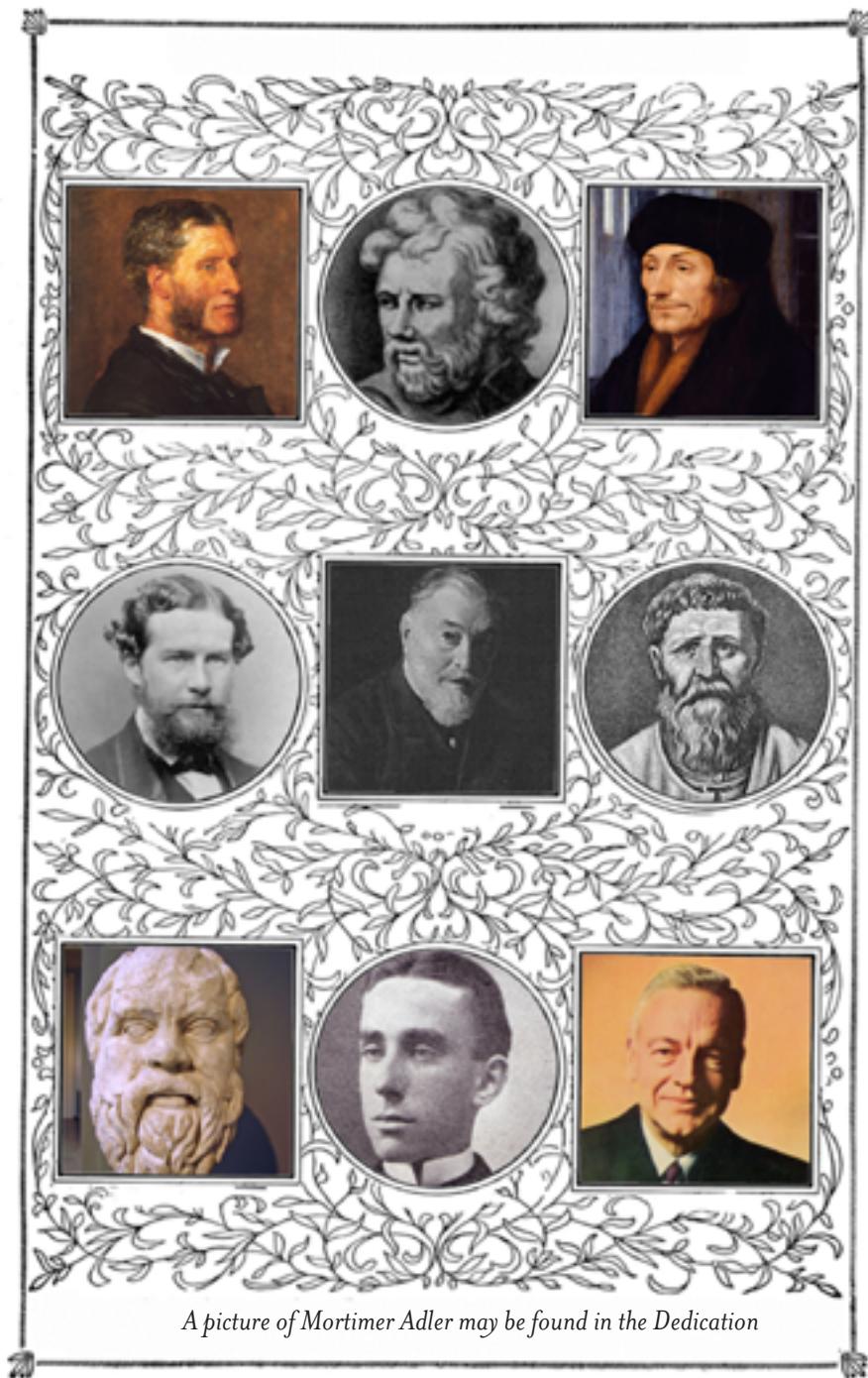
'The true philosopher, I should say, despises them.'

THE HISTORY IN 100 WORDS

Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap centuries in a single bound. Look! Up in the clouds! It's the Great Books tradition!

The following modicum of carefully selected words contains your academic pedigree, educational family tree, intellectual history, and your noblesse oblige, that comes with your willingness to accept your inheritance of the most important of all the legacies that have been handed down to you, guaranteeing, as Goethe observed, that you no longer have to live hand to mouth, with all this vital information and perspective presented in the Master Plot version, capturing the plot and etiology of your birthright and blessing into just 100 words, which, as it turns out, is but one word less than this pithy but pregnant title:

In the 4th Century B.C. Plato and Aristotle started the 'great argument' about whether Homer had written a great book. In the late 19th Century Matthew Arnold grasped that culture was 'the best that has been thought'; Frederick Harrison dubbed all that best written thought as the "great books"; Sir John Lubbock created the first list of 100 presumably Great Books. John Erskine taught soldiers and then Columbia students the classics as part of a "great conversation". University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins invited Mortimer Adler to start a Great Books program in 1929. The rest is history.



A picture of Mortimer Adler may be found in the Dedication

WHO'S WHO

IDENTIFY THE TEN GREAT BOOKS SUPERSTARS (PICS)

Mortimer Adler—Great Books' greatest evangelist

Robert Hutchins—brought Adler to Chicago to start a Great Books program
Matthew Arnold—"the best which has been thought and said in the world"
democratizing and expanding minds

John Erskine—started the Great Conversation program at Columbia where he
taught Mortimer Adler

Socrates—the 500 pound Great Books gorilla

Erasmus—wrote an Enchiridion (and Praise of Folly)

Epictetus—wrote a Stoic Enchiridion

Augustine—wrote a Christian Enchiridion

Frederick Harrison—appears to have been the first of the British to use the
term "Great Books" in 1886

Sir John Lubbock (created the first list of 100 Great Books to read)



GREAT TRUTHS/QUOTATIONS

Curiously, critics associate Mortimer Adler with the cultural hegemony of the dead white guys. While Adler lived long enough, 98 years, to warrant plenty of opportunities for criticism he did not believe any one of the Great Books authors' spouted Truth...it was about the dialectic, about the historical Great Conversation. The Great Conversation simply sought truth, which was very Platonic of this very Aristotelian thinker. Nonetheless, Adler may have very well been wrong about this because who could quarrel with the authoritative truth of such passages as the following from some of the most renown Great Books writers.

Socrates:

- I confess I no longer know what I said.
- When the poor are victorious, I suppose, a democracy emerges.
- We have already said that the good man should have more wives than the rest; moreover, he will often be sought out by others for love affairs.
- They imagine they are reasoning together when, in fact, they are only picking quarrels.
- The whole scene would resemble the behavior of those zealous old men who still persist in going off to exercise in the gymnasium despite all their wrinkles and ugliness.
- Shameful that the body should come to emit waters and winds like a marsh and that the doctors should respond with a display of ingenuity by dreaming up new names for new diseases like flatulence and flux.

Aristotle:

- Little people may be neat and well-proportioned but cannot be beautiful.
- Hence a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science.

Augustine:

- I had no love for reading books and hated being forced to study them.
- My father had more enthusiasm than cash.
- I was afraid you (God) might hear my prayer quickly, and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy rather than suppress.
- Yet if the present were always present, it would not pass into the past.

Aquinas:

- But the end of the divine government is God Himself, and His law is not something other than Himself. Therefore the eternal law is not ordained to another end.
- The vegetative part has three powers.

Who can argue with such obvious brilliance and classic wisdom?

All of western civilization is a footnote on Plato and Aristotle.¹ Adler identified 102 ideas that had pre-occupied Western authors for 3000 years and determined that by that standard “they” had not, at least yet, contributed to that great conversation.² Simone de Beauvoir understands Adler speaking of African-Americans as “they” as an example of the human’s tendency towards bi-modal thinking with the unfortunate result of whites making blacks “other” and men making women “other” to ill effect.³ De Beauvoir’s understanding owes much to her understanding of Aristotle.⁴ Aristotle concluded that women were other because of his dedication to bi-modal thinking.⁵ His teacher, Socrates, understood that women had the same capacity for rationality as men.⁶ Feminist thinkers have argued that there is a lot more to thinking than mere rationality.⁷ Charles Dickens distinguished knowledge of the head and knowledge of the heart, and that knowledge of the heart was more dependable.⁸ Charles Dickens had a Romanticized understanding of human nature based in Rousseauian ideals.⁹ Rousseau’s “ideals” were highly influenced by Plato.¹⁰ In contrast to Plato Sartre concluded that existence precedes essence.¹¹ His comrade Albert Camus concluded that no one should have any truck with injustice.¹² Despite being an existentialist, his conclusions were inescapably influenced by Locke.¹³ Locke concluded that all had the right to life, liberty, and property.¹⁴ De Beauvoir argued, subsequently, that those who had been treated as “other” had the right to differences in their equality.¹⁵ African-American authors presumably had the right to change the nature of the great conversation.¹⁶ Racial prejudice and discrimination are

not well covered by Adler's list of 102 ideas, and thus are they not terms of the Forms?¹⁷ If they are not based in recognizable Forms, does that dispute the existence of Forms?¹⁸ Plato argued that only the Forms were "Real" but Aristotle argued for an intimate relationship between the forms and examples of the forms (or the existence of a corresponding Form was to be doubted).¹⁹ Descartes argued that because he doubted he must exist, and that was a first principle on which to build a philosophy.²⁰ Feminists (female and male) have disputed such an emphasis on pure reason.²¹ Existential feminists have argued for the responsibility for all mankind.²² Was Adler's observation about no African-American writer having yet written a good book responsible, or something that should have been self-censored or censored in terms of protecting the stability of the State?²³ Such a statement by Adler is typical of the hegemony of dead white men.²⁴ Adler agreed, democratically, with Matthew Arnold that the best that had been created was to benefit each and every one.²⁵ Maya Angelou knew why the caged bird sings and was America's poet laureate.²⁶ Maya Angelou's first white boyfriend was William Shakespeare.²⁷



THE GREAT SENTENCE PUPPET SHOW

The New Great Sentence Program: Essentials to Great Discussions and the Meaning of Life—“The” One Act Play

				
Einstein	Shake-speare	Freud	Camus/ Sartre	Woolf
				
Buddha	Jesus	Darwin	Plato	Austen as De Beau- voir
				
Elizabeth I	Jefferson	The Devil	Jung	Marx
				
Nietzsche	Dickens	Truth	Dosto- evsky	Kierke- gaard
				
Kant	Hegel	Machia- velli	Melville	

The Cast

Mortimer Adler here. The driving force for Great Books programs in America. Students call it the Heavy Big Books Program, and complain interminably that it's just too much work. Therefore, I am creating for them the *New Great Sentence Program*. ('Cymbals' clash—pun intended.)

(The Finger Puppet Theatre has a Stage Right and a Stage Left. Buddha starts stage left, says his name, birth and death dates, and great sentence line, departs stage left as Plato enters stage right and begins to talk. Successive characters then alternate entering the scene right and left under the same direction, starting with name and dates.)

1. Buddha (563-483 B.C.)

Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.

2. Plato (428/7 to 348/347 B.C.)

Sid, you're stuck in the present; no wonder you never wrote a great book. Besides yours is Eastern thought; you have to wait for a non-western class to make an appearance. Counter to your view, I'm partial to my own idea that, *Happiness is an activity of the soul in conformity to perfect virtue.*

3. Jesus (5 B.C. to 30 A.D.)

Too abstract for my shekels. How about, *Love as I have loved?*

4. The Devil

Yeah, right, Son of God, disqualified from the competition because of nepotism. Fun though to hear Dante's (1265-1321) elegant lines about your Dad: *The greatest gift that God in His bounty made in creation, and the most conformable to His goodness, and that which He prizes the most, was the freedom of will, with which the creatures with intelligence, they all and they alone, were and are endowed.* Sounds "nice", but when all is said and done, students invariably prefer reading about Me and the Inferno a lot more than Paradiso...how "cool" is: *All hope abandon, ye who enter in.*

5. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527)

Exactly, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be given up. For it can be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, talkative, tricky, and deceitful, eager to avoid dangers, anxious for gain.

6. Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1609) Alas dear Nicky, you men are far too impressed with your own hot air. I actually ruled for 45 years and my people actually believed me when I said, "*Let tyrants fear! I have always so behaved myself that under God I have placed my chief strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects.*" It ain't just talk when you do it.

7. William Shakespeare (1524-1616)

Ah, Lizzy, *To be or not to be, that is the question*, your royal highness.

8. The Devil

Will, I am speaking for John Milton—1608-1674 since he had the audacity to speak for me. So, Will, I'd like to point out that that's actually a question instead of a sentence and thus does not qualify for our program. Nonetheless, I am impressed that Virginia Woolf argues that yours is the most incandescent mind, but because of that we really don't know anything about your state of mind, thus you've no persuasive ideas. If you will permit me to play the Devil's Advocate, John Milton explained the ways of God to men.

*That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound.*

But as I explained with regard to Dante, Hell's a far more interesting place. Milton's most memorable line was:

Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav'n.

9. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

The Devil it is. Enough of all this justification of wrong doing; we need even those who do not believe in God to do the right thing. What we need is a *categorical imperative*.

"Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end."

For God's sake that American Revolutionary rascal, Thomas Jefferson, was having children by his slaves.

10. Thomas Jefferson

Yeah, what if I was. I was taking my role as the *father of freedom* very seriously. *Man being born with a title to perfect freedom and an unrestricted enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of nature equally with any other man or number of men in the world, has by nature a power not only to preserve his property—that is life, liberty, and estate...I suppose you will next complain about my having plagiarized John Locke (1632-1704) in the Declaration of Independence as well?*

11. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

Relax Tommy. *The two elements (matter), the first the Idea, the second the complex of human passions; the one the warp, the other the woof of the vast tapestry of world history.* Clearly your lust implies passion, and my idea of God will make all of your sexual improprieties work towards perfection for the benefit of American history and culture, culminating with the western movement, and the establishment of Pepperdine University.

12. Simone De Beauvoir—(1908-1986)

Typical Aristotelian bi-modal thinking, Georg—idea/passions. Same basic reason all you male chauvinist pigs got it entirely wrong about women. Now, *what peculiarly signifies the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other.*

13. Charles Darwin (1809-1882)

That's odd; you look more like Jane Austen, than Mademoiselle Beauvoir. Move, adapt or die. *And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection.*

14. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Wishful thinking Charlie; you've confused perfection and the absolute. *For faith is just this paradox, that the single individual is higher than the universal, though in such a way that, having been in the universal, the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular above the universal.*

15. Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

Soren, Soren, Soren, the last thing you got right was when you said, "What huge heads everyone must have in order to have such huge thoughts." *There is a wisdom of the Head,*

and...there is a wisdom of the Heart...it rests with you and me whether in our two fields of action, (what) shall be or not.

16. Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Chuck, even Sissy Jupe would have to agree with my, *From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.*

17. Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881)

How well did that work out for you Karl? You failed to understand human nature.

Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone, but only to his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored away in his mind...and so hurrah for underground!...any-way the underground life is more advantageous.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Nicely done Fyodor...ignore the rules that we are looking for one sentence...but go ahead, assert yourself...submit a whole paragraph, after all...*All truly noble morality grows out of triumphant self-affirmation.*

19. Sigmund Freud (1855-1939)

Friedrich, you are probably right, the lambs and the bird of prey will try to kill each other.

According to (my) hypothesis human instincts are of only two kinds: those which seek to preserve and unite...and those which work to destroy and kill...neither of these instincts is any less essential than the other.

20. Karl Jung (1875-1961)

Sigmund, and to think I was your student, alas, your problem wasn't with your toilet training. *Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional unconscious identity with natural phenomena.*

21. Albert Einstein (1879-1951)

Karl, you go out into nature and ticks will bite you and give you Lyme disease. *I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and with the awareness and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be*

it ever so tiny, of the Reason that manifests itself in nature... (man) wants to experience the universe as a single significant whole.

22. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Albert, no wonder you were such a lousy husband, but as to your general cluelessness,

...it made me ask whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness...

23. (Munch's The Scream puppet representing Sartre so do not say aloud)
Jean Paul Sartre here, (1905-1980)

All this angst is making me want to scream. *Existence precedes essence... Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself...*

24. Harriet Tubman (1820-1913)

Easy for you to say as a privileged white male. As my main man, Martin Luther King Jr., said, *I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."*

25. (The Scream-this time representing Albert Camus)

It's the angst ridden Albert Camus here this time (1913-1960); while I probably do look a lot like my bon ami, Jean Paul Sartre, we existentialists are necessarily different. One of the inheritors of the Mortimer Adler mantel, Michael Gose, has left the final great sentence to me. As the Reverend Jesse Jackson says, a text without a context is a pretext. Here's the last context and the last great sentence:

(Three speakers: Scream/Camus/narrator; Joseph Grand; Dr. Rieux)

(Joseph Grand speaking), "Happily I've my work."

"Ah yes," Dr. Rieux said, "That's something, anyhow." He asked Grand if he was getting good results.

"Well, yes, I think I'm making headway."

"Have you much more to do?"

"I don't know. But that's not the point, Doctor; yes, I can assure you that's not the point...you see, it's got to be flawless...I'd like you to understand...I grant you it's easy enough to choose between a 'but' and an 'and.' It's a bit

more difficult to decide between 'and' and 'then.' But definitely the hardest thing may be to know whether one should put an 'and' or leave it out."

"Yes," Rieux said, "I see your point." Rieux was bending over the manuscript. "No, don't look," Grand said. "It's my opening phrase, and it's giving me trouble, no end of trouble."

"Sit down," Rieux said, "and read it to me."

"Yes, I think I'd like you to hear it."

"One fine morning in the month of May an elegant young horsewoman might have been seen riding a handsome sorrel mare along the flowery avenues of the Bois de Boulogne." ... "What do you think of it?"

Rieux replied that this opening phrase had whetted his curiosity; he liked to hear what followed. Whereas Grand told him he'd got it all wrong. "That's only a rough draft; there's lot of hard work to be done." He'd never dream of handing that sentence to the printer in its present form. "Just wait and see what I make of it."

People like to have examples given them, men of the type they call heroic... (Thus we) commend (with) perfect justice.....this insignificant and obscure hero who had to his credit only a little goodness of heart and a seemingly absurd ideal.

"One fine morning in May a slim young horsewoman might have been seen riding a glossy sorrel along the flower-strewn avenues of the Bois de Boulogne."

ONE HUNDRED DOLLAR WORDS AND TERMS



Because if you are getting a Great Books education, you need to talk like it.

1. Polyfocal conspectus—Joseph Schwab described the polyfocal conspectus as a view affording on doctrine. The polyfocal represented the many perspectives from which one might view a particular example of reality; conspectus referred to the selection of an appropriate or limited number of appropriate perspectives chosen to explicate that example of reality in a meaningful way.
2. Paideia—represents the Greek spirit of culture and was the title of Mortimer Adler's proposal to infuse America's schools with the "great books"
3. Enchiridion—a guidebook, handbook, manual, primer and dagger...Augustine, Erasmus, and Epictetus (a Stoic) wrote Enchiridions, so there is a connotation that such a handbook inculcates a specific educational identity.
4. Maieutic seminar—a synonym for Socratic seminar, but is more fun since it has four vowels in a row.
5. Colloquium—basically synonymous with seminar, but has a stronger connotation as a meeting of the minds.
6. Heuristic—denotes learning through experience, but has a connotation of being a richer and fuller sense of being educational.
7. Symposium—also a meeting of the minds, but with a greater sense of experts focusing on one particular issue.
8. Trivium—three of the original seven liberal arts: grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

9. Quadrivium—four of the original seven liberal arts, and held to be the more important arts: arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.
10. Dialectic—the back and forth of conversation headed towards a clearer understanding of Truth.
11. Ontological argument for the existence of God-- The ontological argument is, roughly, the argument that God, being that which no greater can be conceived, must exist, for if he did not then it would be possible to conceive of an existent God, which would be greater than that which no greater can be conceived.
12. Cosmological explanation of God-- The first cause argument takes the existence of the universe to entail the existence of a being that created it. It does so based on the fact that the universe had a beginning. There must, the first cause argument says, be something that caused that beginning, a first cause of the universe.
13. Teleological explanation of the existence of God—the existence of order, apparent design, and purpose in the universe must have had a source of creation.
14. Ratiocination—one of William Faulkner’s favorite words entailing reasoning, but perhaps more logically and methodically than is characteristic of most purported thinking.
15. Sesquipedalian—can be used as an adjective or as a noun, and means given to the use of long words.
16. Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanokoniosis—the longest word in the Random House dictionary...means Black lung disease, which isn’t very funny in Appalachia, but draws a snort from everywhere else for its peculiar length, and thus worth memorizing to use here and there...
17. Dialectical materialism—Karl Marx rather appreciated the dialectical ideas of Plato and Hegel, but didn’t think there were any Forms, Spirits, or a priori truths...he just thought that downtrodden people would take a look at the materially advantaged and having thought about the haves and the have-nots, would eventually realize that life wasn’t fair.
18. The Hegelian dialectic—Hegel figured humankind must be good for something, otherwise why would there be a Columbus Day celebrated in America where he saw to the deaths of untold thousands of Native Ameri-

cans? Well, we wouldn't have Brittany Spears or iced animal crackers except for the fact that the humans provided the passions which the Spirit used in a dialectical relationship to further history towards such perfection.

19. Dialogue – unlike the dialectic this term connotes two monologues with inter-punctuation.
20. Nihilism—sometimes pronounced “neel-ism” but more commonly “nihilism,” takes Nietzsche’s idea that because there are no a priori values, noble values should prevail, but which has been subverted to its basic connotation that nothing has value so humankind can wallow in what is least noble.
21. Existentialism—Sartre defined existentialism by noting that existence preceded essence. Since there are no a priori values at all, Sartre argued for considering the responsibility for all mankind, but since by definition no existentialist would agree with any other existentialist, it is easier to ignore the premium on responsibility.
22. The malaise of existential humanism—Edward N. Gosuphal’s grasp for an original insight, observed that those consistently choosing obvious pleasure seem to have some underlying sense of regret and purposelessness that countermands the sanguinity of the perspective.
23. Metacognition—the thought that one can think about thinking, and a safer term than “critical consciousness” since it is not associated with that commie Karl Marx, and his crass lack of appreciation for the effects of capitalist materialism (see “dialectical materialism”).
24. Peripatetic—take a walk; philosophize along the way; allow that it is a very Aristotelian thing to do.
25. Syntopicon—Mortimer Adler made the word up so that there would seem to be some greater, and even historical, purpose to his long, dry, boring essays that take up a full two volumes of the fifty-four volume set of the Great Books of the Western World.
26. The lightrapier—The lightrapier wit is the weapon of the Padawan. It is far more elegant and precise than what you commonly hear from the man (sic) on the street. Anyone can pull the trigger with an uninformed opinion. But Padawans go through years of training to learn how to handle

their own rapier wits. During that training, Padawans learn to use rapier wit only for defense, never to attack. For true warriors, fighting is only the last resort, and they recognize that battling a lesser enemy is beneath them. Rapier wits use their three thousand years of history to create a powerful beam of laser light. This laser is so powerful it can cut through bull and almost any other object in the galaxy except bureaucratic red tape.

27. The Force—the mysterious power that some associate with the three thousand years of history, others with the Tao, others with the Collective Unconsciousness, and still others with the hegemony of dead white folk. The Force gives the Padawan their strength and knowledge, for knowledge is power. Using the Force, Great Books Padawans can change the world, and on occasion still graduate in four years. The Force is created by all living things, or, alternatively, was created by God, according to whom is right, the existentialists or those who believe in such things. The Force surrounds us and protects us. It connects all things. The Force guides your action, but it also obeys your commands.
28. The Hegemony of Dead White Men—Have the Great Books been canonized so that they have an authority that excludes other voices? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. They have been penetratingly influential, but not even Mortimer Adler concedes any authority to any of their conclusions.

THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF HISTORY;
DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT IT.

From the trenches, Timothy Hugh O'Brien

captured the Great Books experience:

"How do you generalize?"

"Great Books is hell, but that's not the half of it, because Great Books is also mystery and terror and adventure and courage and discovery and holiness and pity and despair and longing and love. Great Books is nasty; Great Books is fun. Great Books is thrilling; Great Books is drudgery. Great Books makes you a man (sic)..."



The truths are contradictory. Great Books is punishing, but in truth Great Books is also beauty. For all its horror, you can't help but gape at the awful majesty of classroom combat. It's not pretty, exactly. It's astonishing. It fills the mind's eye. It commands you. You hate it, yes, but your mind does not.

To generalize about Great Books is like generalizing about sex. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true. Any Great Books student will tell you, if he tells the truth, that proximity to intellectual death brings with it a corresponding proximity to intellectual life. After a firefight, there is always the immense pleasure of aliveness. The trees are alive. The grass, the soil—everything...and the aliveness makes you tremble. You feel an intense, out-of-the-skin awareness of you living self—your truest self; the human being you want to be and then become by the force of wanting it. In the midst

of evil you want to become a good man. You want justice and courtesy and human concord; things you never knew you wanted. There is a kind of largeness to it, a kind of godliness... You recognize what's valuable. Freshly, as if for the first time, you love what's best in yourself and in the world, all that might be lost... You are filled with a hard, aching love for how the world could be and always should be, but now is not."

PRACTICE EXAM:

- I. Identify the source of each great question below and then rank them according to their historical importance:**
 - a. Who's on first?
 - b. What, me worry?
 - c. What is your favorite color?
 - d. What is the air velocity of an unladen swallow?
 - e. African or European swallow?
 - f. Is that a gun in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me?
 - g. Who killed Cock Robin? (and was Robin a rooster?)
 - h. Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?
 - i. Where in the world is Carmen Sandiego?
 - j. Where's Waldo?
 - k. What gets wet as it dries?
 - l. If a tree falls in the middle of a forest, and no one is there to hear it, did it make a sound?
 - m. If a man is alone in the middle of a forest, is he still wrong?
 - n. You want me to hold the chicken salad?
 - o. Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?
 - p. Do you feel lucky?
 - q. Where's the beef?
 - r. Just what do you think you are doing Dave?
 - s. To be, or not to be?
 - t. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?
 - u. Are we there yet?

2. Mortimer Adler's greatest contribution was:

- a. The Encyclopedia Britannica
- b. The 60 volume set of Great Books
- c. Revamping the curriculum at St. John's
- d. The Great Books Foundation
- e. The Great Ideas Foundation
- f. The Aspen Institutes
- g. His prolific writing
- h. The Chez Paree strip Club

3. The following syllogism is True or False?

A cat has one more tail than no cat.

No cat has nine tails.

Cats have ten tails.

4. The following syllogism is True or False?

All men are philosophers.

A philosopher was Socrates.

Socrates was a cross dresser.

5. When the Chicago Sun News reported in 1929 that University of Chicago President Robert Hutchins and Professor Mortimer Adler felt quite gay about their great undertaking of the Great Books the reporter meant that:

- a. Adler and Hutchins felt that the Great Books series would make them millionaires
- b. Adler and Hutchins thought that they had secured their places in posterity
- c. Adler and Hutchins were in a committed relationship
- d. Adler and Hutchins had come out of the hegemonious closet

6. The Philosophy Department at the University of Chicago forced Hutchins to move Adler to the Law School because Adler:

- a. was a curmudgeon
- b. was a pedant
- c. thought Philosophy belonged to everyone
- d. believed in the antiquated quadrivium and trivium
- e. was a pusillanimous, pussy-footin', pink, pacifist, puke

7. **Which is the best particular example of the Form “Cigar”?**

- the Cuban Monte Cristo
- the Cuban Cohiba
- the Cuban Trinidad
- the Cuban Churchill
- sometimes a cigar is a phallic symbol

8. **Which of the following is the best particular example of the Form “Champagne”?**

- Korbel
- Dom Perignon White Gold
- 1893 Veuve Clicquot
- 1825 Perrier-Jouet
- the city in Illinois 133 miles from Chicago

9. **Why did Mortimer Adler observe that there had not yet been a great book written by an African-American writer?**

- African Americans did not write about his 102 ideas
- African Americans had not yet written a book boring and tedious enough to make the canon
- no African American had written a book long enough to be in the canon except the Autobiography of Malcolm X, but that didn't count because it was mostly written by Alex Haley
- what he meant to say was that he had not yet read a book written after the late nineteenth century, or any book by an African American

10. **Why weren't there any women writers in the original set of Great Books?**

- Adler was going through a divorce
- Adler had a difficult relationship with his mother
- Adler was over influenced by Aristotle instead of Plato
- It would have been inappropriate for the Old Boys Club to patronize women

11. **Which is the most redundant expression:**

- Eureka, I've found it.
- It's déjà vu all over again.
- A riddle wrapped in an enigma
- Great Books of the Western World

12. What kind of friends were Hutchins and Adler?

- a. utilitarian
- b. pleasurable
- c. true
- d. back office cronies
- e. like Mutt and Jeff; Lou and Bud; Dean and Jerry; Tommy and Dickie; Bing and Bob

13. True or False?

All of Western Civilization is a footnote on Hutchins and Adler.

14. How many books did Mortimer Adler write?

- a. 97
- b. one book 97 times

15. St. John's College honors Mortimer Adler by

- a. a four year curriculum devoted entirely to the Great Books
- b. drunkenness most weekends

16. Who brought Plato into Christian thought?

- a. Augustine of Hippo
- b. Auguste Rodin
- c. Caesar Augustus
- d. De gustibus non est disputandum
- e. Mortimer Adler

17. Who brought Aristotle into Christian thought?

- a. Thomas Aquinas
- b. Thomas á Becket
- c. Dylan Thomas
- d. Tom Tom the Piper's Son

18. Who first said, "existence precedes essence?"

- a. Simone de Beauvoir
- b. Albert Camus
- c. Jean Paul Sartre
- d. None of the above, they all wrote in French

19. Translate “cogito ergo sum.”

- a. I think therefore I am.
- b. I think I owe \$100,000 sum on my college loans.
- c. How should I know?
- d. The unexamined life is a zero sum game.

20. Who said “know thyself?”

- a. Socrates
- b. Laertes
- c. Mr. Hyde
- d. Hugh Hefner

21. What is the Western Tradition?

- a. a genre of Hollywood movies
- b. the oeuvre of John Ford
- c. an omelet
- d. a Middle Eastern movement that owes its success to Arabic translations

22. Size matters, so which one is bigger?

- a. the Great Books shelf of books
- b. the Harvard Classics shelf of books
- c. the Encyclopedia Britannica shelf of books
- d. Ben Franklin's Poor Richard
- e. Mortimer Adler's ego

23. At the end of his life at age 98 Mortimer Adler converted to:

- a. Catholicism
- b. Anarchy
- c. Existentialism
- d. An imaginary life form

24. Hutchins brought Adler to Chicago:

- a. So he'd have one friend at the University of Chicago
- b. To cause trouble
- c. Because he didn't know any better
- d. to raise the average IQ for New York and Chicago

25. Homer is:

- a. a blind Greek poet
- b. a four base dinger
- c. Bart Simpson's father
- d. Someone who gives preferential treatment to the home team

26. True or False?

Great Books administrators tend to pick the most boring professors to ensure students' allegiances are to the texts.

27. The best way to read a Great Books text is:

- a. on an otherwise sleepless night as a soporific
- b. with a pen in one hand, an espresso in the other
- c. at a desk so you don't develop arthritis in your hands
- d. with a grain of salt and a smidgen of dubiousness

28. Great Books essay exams and papers are meant to be:

- a. ponderous
- b. impersonal, objective discourse
- c. like a skirt
- d. the kind of writing never practiced by anyone who wrote an actual great book

29. The best way to seem intelligent at a Great Books discussion:

- a. ask a smart aleck question
- b. quote the author being discussed but from another of his books
- c. ask someone to define her/his terms
- d. announce that you need to leave early for your interview with Harvard

30. The best way to show you are listening keenly to the Great Books discussion is to:

- a. develop the habit of nodding knowingly
- b. refer back to something said much earlier as if you had been paying attention all along
- c. cite a passage from near the end of the book, as if you had read the entire thing
- d. ask someone to clarify what they just said, since you hadn't listened in the first place
- e. recognize and laugh at the professor's jokes

31. The best dress for a Great Books discussion is:

- a. something sexy that will distract the other discussants
- b. whatever clothes you last slept in
- c. a toga
- d. a fig leaf
- e. Harry Potter glasses, a Mao or Che T-shirt, Levis, Birkenstocks

32. Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins had a:

- a. Homosapien relationship
- b. homeopathic relationship
- c. homeopathetic relationship
- d. homeostatic relationship

33. The best place to find a set of Great Books:

- a. eBay
- b. The Great Books Foundation
- c. Ex Librus
- d. In someone else's library

34. Rank in importance the following great finds:

- a. the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947
- b. the Huck Finn original in the Hollywood Attic in 1990
- c. gold in California June 24, 1848
- d. Schliemann's discovery of the ancient city of Troy in 1873
- e. The original Van Gogh in an attic in Milwaukee in 1991
- f. The finding of the original Great Books Enchiridion in 2012

35. Who all wrote Enchiridions?

- a. Erasmus
- b. Augustine
- c. Epictetus
- d. Alfred E. Newman
- e. Mortimer Adler
- f. Anon

36. Which is the greatest satire of all time?

- a. Animal Farm
- b. Gulliver's Travels
- c. Praise of Folly
- d. Dr. Strangelove
- e. Monty Python's The Meaning of Life
- f. Plato's The Republic

37. Most oaths start:

- a. I swear...
- b. I pledge...
- c. I do hereby...
- d. I promise...
- e. With the "F" word

38. College graduates were found unlikely to read a book during their first two years after college graduation because:

- a. they couldn't afford to buy a book while they were paying off their college loans
- b. they were always at work when the public libraries were open
- c. they were resting
- d. they had been taught and had learned that books were hurdles, not friends

39. Match:

- a. first list of 100 books to read
- b. first use of the term "great books"
- c. the first professor to offer a "great books" class
- d. the professor who started the great conversation program
- e. the great books evangelist

with: Sir John Lubbock; Frederick Harrison; John Erskine; Mortimer Adler

40. Mortimer Adler was:

- a. Jewish
- b. Christian
- c. Aristotelian
- d. Aquinian
- e. A Philosopher
- f. All of the above
- g. Covered his bases

41. Mortimer Adler was:

- a. conservative
- b. liberal
- c. reactionary
- d. radical
- e. all of the above

42. Maidenform is:

- a. the presumed Form of a woman, belied by feminists who argue any Form would be of a human without regard to sexuality
- b. the commercial product with the slogan: "you never know where she will turn up"
- c. like the term "maiden journey" represents the first life form
- d. an uplifting experience

43. The best thing to tell a friend in trouble:

- a. there is misery and there is annihilation
- b. the good is better when it is harder
- c. curse God and die
- d. the Force be with you

44. When getting slaughtered in a Great Books discussion the best retort is:

- a. a pox upon thee
- b. get thee to a nunnery
- c. my kingdom for a horse
- d. it's only a flesh wound

45. Essay exam: Comment.

A GREAT BOOKS INVENTORY: WHO WOULD YOU WANT...

1. Who would you want most for your father?

- a. Plato
- b. Aristotle
- c. Augustine
- d. Aquinas
- e. Atticus Finch

2. Who would you least like to be your father?

- a. Richard III
- b. Machiavelli
- c. Iago
- d. Hannibal Lecter
- e. Donald Trump

3. Who would you want to take to the Oscars?

- a. Helen of Troy
- b. Cleopatra
- c. Medea (pre-Jason)
- d. Angelina Jolie
- e. Mother Teresa

4. Who would you want to take to the Oscars?

- a. Achilles
- b. Hektor
- c. Aias
- d. Aeneas
- e. Henry IV
- f. Launcelot
- g. Denzel Washington

5. Who would you take home to mother?

- a. Ophelia
- b. Antigone
- c. Ruth
- d. Jennifer Aniston

6. Who would you take home to dad?

- a. Hektor
- b. Roland
- c. Aias
- d. Odysseus

7. Best friend forever?

- a. Ismene
- b. Sissy Jupe
- c. Jane Eyre
- d. Buffy

8. Who to be your grandfather?

- a. Priam
- b. Gandalf
- c. Dumbledore
- d. Don Corleone
- e. Yoda
- f. Aristotle

9. Your grandmother?

- a. Cinderella's fairy godmother
- b. Juliet's Nurse
- c. Maya Angelou
- d. Simone de Beauvoir

10. Least want for your step-mother?

- a. Medea (after Jason)
- b. Hamlet's mother
- c. Lady Macbeth
- d. Glenn Close

11. Who would you want for your mother?

- a. Achilles' mom, Thetis
- b. Hekuba (mother of Hektor)
- c. Hamlet's mother, Gertrude
- d. Marge Simpson

A RECORD OF MY PERSONAL HISTORY WITH THE GREAT BOOKS:

My first Great Book (after Dr. Seuss) was _____.

My first great Great Books discussion was at _____
with _____.

By pages, the longest book I ever read was _____,
but _____ seemed much longer.

5 Great Books that I've read:

My "to read" list includes:

I finished a Great Books program at _____
on _____.



CHAPTER II: TO GREAT BOOKS OR NOT TO GREAT BOOKS: THAT IS A QUESTION

“Culture is to know the best that has
been said and thought in the world.”
Matthew Arnold

“You can teach someone the facts, but if they don’t have the intellect to draw
their own conclusions, there’s very little point in them being at Oxford.”

Jane Casey

WHAT FORMER STUDENTS SAY ABOUT GREAT BOOKS

Great Books Alumni tend to be especially gracious in their effusive
praise of the Great Books program, but that does not belie the seriousness
with which they have taken the program.



Who should take a Great Books program? On the one hand a former student observes: “*I was a very average English student in high school so I was glad I could participate—it should be open to whoever desires to learn.*” But on the other hand another former student wrote: “*It’s not for everyone, however. Those not committed to opening themselves up and doing the work won’t get anything out of it—and worst of all, they drag the rest of the group down.*”

In a similar, forewarning way potential students should realize that the alumni who found the Great Books so meaningful (and that seems to be virtually the across-the-board experience) also found the program: “*Scary; it was tough; challenging; demanding and intense; daunting; at first I was just blown away, I was thinking, ‘holy smokes what is gonna happen to me?’; I wasn’t really getting it at first; you have no idea what you are getting yourself into; I would walk out of Great Books with massive headaches; terrified.*”

In terms of trying to categorize what students say about Great Books, two separate concerns are not mutually exclusive. The general experience of Great Books does not negate that these are differential effects. What students tend to write about Great Books suggests that what was most important to them varied, while the general experience remained similar.

Great Books students love the program: *Greatest class sequence I took in college; fun; extremely fun; made my education different than I would have received at any other school; I remember thinking in my first Great Books class that this is exactly what I thought college would be like; the most influential in my educational career; the best class I ever took; best thing I did; enjoyable; it’s what college is meant to be; College isn’t for practical trade skills, it’s to learn how to think; I finally got to read the books everyone had told me about.*

Great Books students find the program challenging: *most exciting and challenging experiences of my undergraduate career; the intellectual challenge is something you don't find in other college courses; the Great Books series was probably the most difficult, but definitely most rewarding course I took; my most formative classes; most thought provoking class I took.*

Great Books students appreciate how the program broadens their perspectives: *I really learned to appreciate other points of view; opens minds to many new ways of seeing and viewing concepts that all humanity continues to struggle with; expands horizons for life; opens and broadens one's mind; provides such a strong, broad base; the general edification of digesting and wrestling with thousands of years of human thought; enriched my conversations and gave me a deep appreciation for literature and philosophy; taught me to think deeply about ideas.*

Great Books students appreciate the variety of skills in which they improved: *the one place where I learned to write; I was clearly thinking on another level; refines your writing skills and your thinking skills; critical thinking and analysis of a great work has been instrumental in my graduate career; Great Books taught me to think and analyze; teaches students how to interpret the underlying meanings to provide a richer reading experience; the analytic reasoning and the different philosophical perspectives that are covered will remain with students for life; (in recommending the program to undergraduates an alumnus observed): one can't afford to be a fuzzy thinker, otherwise they'll [sic] get eaten alive out here!; truly the power of the Great Books is it teaches you to listen more than it teaches you to speak; helped expand my awareness of literature, history, and ideas; develops critical thinking, communication, writing skills; you learn how to read and mark a text; something that I really got was to be comfortable with ambiguity; (an*

alumna who teaches observed about her students that): *they don't know how to take a concept, apply it to a situation, and get insights from it. That's the thing that we honed in Great Books every single class; my ability to draw out and digest critical ideas from a text was enormously improved...being able to discuss the substance presented rather than 'the author said this, this author said that,' led to dynamic exchanges; the ability to communicate complex ideas; I've felt equipped to challenge my students to struggle with the implications of the ideas they're encountering.*

Great Books students appreciate the transformative possibilities of Great Books: *broadens one's mind and soul; Great Books is the last connection to learning for the sake of self-improvement; it is a class where the students are responsible for the learning process which makes it much easier to remain attentive and take an active role in one's education; has caused great ripples throughout my life; I went from thinking I knew it all to knowing I knew it all to knowing I knew nothing to figuring out that 'hey maybe I know a little bit', and that was okay; set me up as to how I wanted to approach learning throughout the rest of my life; you start to become much more comfortable with the ambiguities of life; Great Books is getting addicted to the ah-ha moment...you know you have that sort of insight and it's so exciting when you get it, and suddenly your world looks different and you just got something; it's really helped me to know about life; it's a way of pursuing life; Great Books gave me the ability to be a teacher; Great Books gave us the vulnerability to not only be better readers and better college students, but I honestly think to be better human beings...we do listen to other people...we've learned to be better citizens.*

Great Books students very often remark on the relationships established in Great Books: *the dynamics between the student group itself and the students and teachers*

provides a memorable experience; I found it to be a group bonding type of class; great way to make a close group of friends; but I think for me Great Books is really about the relationships.

Great Books students occasionally remark that they find that the Great Books Program gives them a competitive edge: *I definitely feel like I had an advantage over those who didn't participate in Great Books.*

WHY TAKE OR NOT TAKE GREAT BOOKS?

Students constantly rise to the challenge of their encounters with the Great Books. While the Great Books authors do not need praise, having been so time-proven, students almost invariably complain initially about the difficulty of the endeavor but eventually laud the personal growth made possible from having been virtually forced to raise their levels of expectation and performance.

First year, non-Great Books students ask their Great Books friends why they are taking such a challenge to the workload and the grade point average, but then wonder at graduation four years later if they have not somehow wasted their education because they did not have their degrees based in such a substantial tradition.

10 REASONS TO TAKE GREAT BOOKS

1. You get credit for reading books you realize that you really should read anyway (and you get to read real books instead of textbooks).
2. Without your 3000 years of history you are living hand to mouth (Goethe).
3. Great Books tends to change lives in unexpected (but mostly good) ways.
4. It's a great way to develop or enhance "serious academic intent" and to pursue intellectual curiosity.
5. Also, in sometimes unexpected ways, Great Books tend to give students a competitive edge in their educations and careers.
6. Despite the struggle, the student somehow tends to develop both confidence and humility.
7. Improves one's basic skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and gives one the opportunity to exercise one's work ethic.
8. Definitely enhances critical thinking skills (which is mostly a good thing).
9. Most Great Books classes create opportunity for camaraderie.
10. Any amount of discussion is preferable to yet more lecture.



10 REASONS NOT TO TAKE GREAT BOOKS

1. Even Homer nods: sometimes even the Great Books, or especially the Great Books, can be boring.
2. Grade point average may be affected, although GPA has not been found to predict anything other than future grade point averages, and even a good grade in Great Books usually means you sacrificed some other class.
3. The workload is ordinarily much greater.
4. Related to the workload issue, but different: the Great Books offer so much that they can at times be simply overwhelming.
5. The Great Books raise fundamental questions about humanity, which can be at times unsettling.
6. Talking with non-Great Books students becomes more tiresome as you become more aware that many people have a difficult time holding an idea in their heads.
7. It's not the immediate intention of Great Books but you will likely become much less tolerant of uninformed opinions and have more difficulty suffering fools.
8. You may become too rational at the expense of emotional growth? There is the real possibility that if you become more idealistic, you will subject yourself to much more self-criticism and become less satisfied with your own efforts.
9. In the short term you may experience the paralysis of analysis, although that seldom remains a problem as graduates become even more confident

in their opinions having weighed the alternatives much more judiciously.

10. Ignorance is bliss.

Tim Lacy explains advantages to taking Great Books.

"What then do today's learners gain by studying the Great Books, the great works of the West and the world in general? For starters, they encounter excellence and permanent, universal values. Even if the excellence of a particular work is not appreciated, readers sharpen their understanding of what they believe excellence to be. While objective criteria, or standards, do exist in art and literature, the Great Books can support a more subjective, diverse view of culture – so long as excellence is the aspiration. Permanent, universal values must be encountered in the context of the promotion of a common good, a common culture. A few Great Books promoters, Adler and Stringfellow Barr, the former president of St. John's College in Annapolis, have used the analogy of a puppy gnawing on a bone: 'our minds are continually sharpened and strengthened through contact with the bone that is the Great Books.'"

Once again, as Goethe says, "Without your three thousand years of history, though, you are living hand to mouth." If you could leave college with the keys to understanding Martin Buber, or the keys to a Ferrari, you'd have to take Buber.

CHAPTER III: THE STUDY GUIDE: SKILLS





CREATING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

While perhaps accused of being arrogant in terms of an attitude taken during class discussion where only the most exacting standards are applied, the padawan recognizes with humility the legacy of both the Great Books and the teachers offering the opportunity to study them. Thank will the padawan even the least of teachers for such an opportunity as the class has provided, and the legacy that has been preserved at great cost so that the best may be perpetuated.

Rather than being intimidated by Great Books, the student need take something of a Monty Python approach, going into the essay exam with an attitude of "I am Ted Williams and I am the greatest hitter in the world."

Taking on the Great Books challenge as a part of one's education is an arduous quest, a demand of intellectual curiosity, the development of a thirst for something beyond knowledge, and even beyond a search for truth,

but also a discovery of meaning. Whatever else might be said of humankind, the best and brightest minds have demonstrated that despite the great advancements in some kinds of knowledge, the daunting mysteries of life have remained much the same for these past three thousand years. When Goethe observes that without that legacy we are living hand to mouth, he meant much more than advances in agriculture and the culinary arts.

Were *all* the great minds of history compelled to write, and fortunate enough that their words escaped the many ravages of time? Thus what about credit to the generations who recognized particular and unusual worth and somehow managed to preserve at least some of the best parts for heritage? With that legacy comes great responsibility. Even from the presumably great texts, the thoughtful reader need sort out the possible wisdom from the inescapable ignorance. The classics do not demand agreement. Quite the contrary. They offer heuristic ways of thinking. Was Plato even serious about his imagining of *The Republic*, or was it a mental exercise to think through the implications of Justice as differentiation? Do his arguments prove the immortality of the soul? What would constitute proof of such an idea? If modern Singapore offers many parallels to Plato's idea of a Republic, and the United States exhibits many of the follies he associates with democracies, which would he have actually preferred?

From Adler's perspective on Great Books, that question is irrelevant. It cannot be answered by the text of *The Republic*. Further, Adler would argue that the best way of understanding



Plato would be to read him, not to depend upon what he considered to be secondary minds that commentate on him, nor on history to better understand Plato. From the Adlerian perspective it would be best to understand the history of Athens by reading Plato, rather than reading history to understand him. Certainly there are limitations to those Adlerian assumptions, but inherently his set of assumptions creates great appreciation for the original source, the text itself. One of the greatest strengths of Great Books programs is the careful attention they draw to understanding a text on its own terms.

Undertaking a text as complex, elaborate, complete, as *The Republic* challenges both the novice and experienced scholar. The book has vast and seemingly unlimited possibilities for further understanding. For example: if Truth is so important to Plato, why did he propose censorship within the just State? Perhaps it takes several readings to come to terms with his idea that if, after all, a town is greater than a man, and that Justice will be more complete in the full complexities of the town, then censorship may be necessary to preserve the stability of that town. When push comes to shove, Justice has a greater claim than even Truth (which remains, nonetheless, another Form of the Good). Both beginners and advanced readers of Great Books will find challenging food for thought as they study the Great Books.

The beginning Great Books student takes on the classics, only to experience a greater sense of inadequacy and ignorance. Such frustration does not, at least superficially, seem to be the stuff of sound educational practice.

*The Harvard Classics bookshelf measures 5';
the Great Books of the Western World measures 5'2".*

Confidence and knowledge are the presumed bulwarks of sound schooling. So, why do Great Books students talk like they have experienced the harrows of war, only to sound like missionary zealots in proclaiming that whatever number of Great Books they were taught was the most important aspect of their education?

Philip Jackson distinguished between the transformative role of school and the instructional role. Presumably the preponderance of, if not all, students do hope that school will leave them with better skills and a better future career. Nonetheless, after three thousand years of history, and almost a thousand years of the existence of universities, students also have some hope that education can help make for a more meaningful and complete life. Very often proponents of the Liberal Arts are among the strongest voices for the transformative possibilities of education that the study of the arts can help liberate people from the drudgery of life.

Plato offers a tremendous challenge simply to understand him, but he soon becomes a mentor for thinking about complex and intellectual issues. Daily modern headlines demonstrate Thrasymachus' idea that justice is the interest of the stronger, but the undercurrent to those same news articles is that something more is somehow possible. Agreement with the ideas of *The Republic* is not required. As Adler frequently points out, of course, most of what's in *The Republic* is not true per se. However, Plato puts competing and compelling ideas of Justice in such brilliant juxtaposition that over time he can become a companion, not just a mentor. With so little in common, one

might come to wonder when Plato became a friend. Yet after having spent so much time together, someone with whom one has shared a long, common, and meaningful conversation becomes amicable.

Some of the Great Books will resonate, some will probably alienate, some will be critical to understanding one's world, while others simply will not stick. Even Homer nods, but one of the many virtues of the classics is that having read widely among them, the odds are supremely higher that something of value will be found as compared to most other ways of finding substance and worth, whether self help books, academic textbooks, or best-sellers. Great Books will test a student's mettle and seem like hurdles that were set too high, but with time the humanity seeps through, and the legacy will be internalized and made real.

Taking Great Books can create a lot of personal doubt and stress. There is something very peculiar about you, about your teacher, about your class. Other than it actually "works," how can you possibly justify the time and effort it takes to become a Great Books student? And be assured, your teacher/professor/sophist/friend is equally suspect. Certainly s/he cannot be trusted. How else to explain that s/he has trashed her/his academic career by eschewing specialization and delimiting his/her publication probabilities? How does one account for how irrational it is to study a tradition for the most part so caught up in rationalism? And what is the meaning of life, such that one risks sounding like a book instead of a person?

J.K. Rowling suffered 12 publisher rejections for Harry Potter;
Dr. Seuss was rejected 27 times.

Other students do not exactly make fun of Great Books students. Those dubious students are not necessarily afraid of Great Books students because they do go ahead and speculate in front of them. "Why would you work that hard for the same amount of credit?" Around due dates and test times, that does become a great question. Great Books students often refer to the program as The Big Books Program, or the Heavy Books Program. The key for them is in understanding gratification. Successful people are recognized for their acceptance of delayed gratification (rather than immediate gratification). However immediately challenging Great Books courses may be, there is every reason to believe in the long term payoff and the courses' contribution to lifelong learning.

Retired Marine Corps Colonel, Princeton graduate, and Honors History teacher, John M. Daly, told his classes repeatedly, "the classics do not need your praise." Recognizing that they do not need praise helps establish the necessary distance so that they can be criticized. Students profit by taking the attitude: "I am a Great Great Books student; I have the advantage of history. The authors have been dead long enough for all of us to figure out the limits of their thought. I can do this!"

Hall of Fame baseball player Ted Williams, thought by many to be the best natural hitter in history, thought that hitting a baseball was sport's greatest single challenge. He was great, yet he still failed better than 60% of the time. To offset dwelling on the failure, he says that he would go to bat saying to himself, "I am Ted Williams, and I am the best blankety-blank hitter in the

world. And most days he would live up to what was as much a wish as a claim.

Such it is for the Great Books student.

Monty Python, a group comprised of mostly graduates of Oxford, Cambridge, and Occidental, capture the necessary distance by having fun with Great Books authors. Such irreverent behavior actually helps make the great authors more accessible, more appreciated than revered.

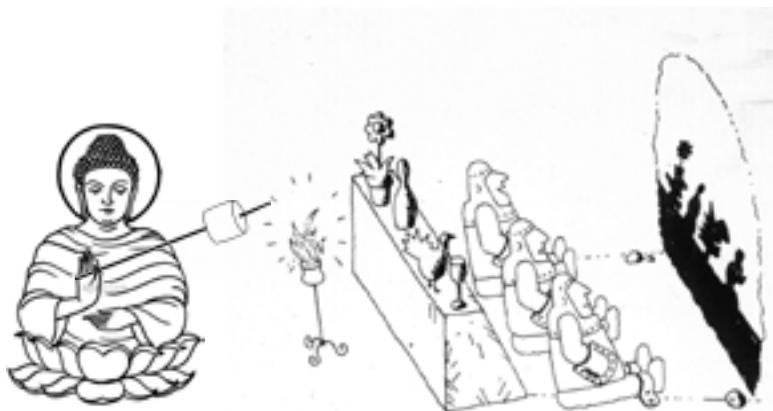
The Python Drinking Song

Immanuel Kant was a real pissant
Who was very rarely stable.
Heidegger, Heidegger was a boozy beggar
Who could think you under the table.
David Hume could out-consume
Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,
And Wittgenstein was a beery swine
Who was just as schloshed as Schlegel.
There's nothing Nietzsche couldn't teach ya
'Bout the raising of the wrist.
Socrates, himself, was permanently pissed.
John Stuart Mill, of his own free will,
On half a pint of shandy was particularly ill.
Plato, they say, could stick it away--
Half a crate of whiskey every day.
Aristotle, Aristotle was a bugger for the bottle.
Hobbes was fond of his dram,
And René Descartes was a drunken fart.
'I drink, therefore I am.'
Yes, Socrates, himself, is particularly missed,
A lovely little thinker,
But a bugger when is pissed.

(You will come to learn that Great Books demands definition of key terms;
"pissed" means drunk in England.)

A certain irreverence may be indispensable to making Great Books one's own.

Great Books does seem to create what are widely perceived as "monsters." You will likely become insufferable, asking your mates probing questions about the movie you just went to see. You will become irritated and irritating when you so clearly recognize, then become impatient with, students in other classes straying without discipline from the argument and the text. With Camus you will increasingly have "no truck with injustice." Deep inside you will know that you are only scratching the surface (that you have had barely a glimpse outside of Plato's cave), but since your critical thinking is likely becoming superior to that of your peers, you may as well accept now that the normal people will be very suspicious of where you became so sure about your "informed opinions."



The brain of Albert Einstein weighed 2.71 pounds (below average for males).

Great Books requires serious and rigorous work, but if you begin your quest with trepidation instead of courage, awe instead of respect, and focus on what you do not know instead of what you do learn, you have minimized your chances for success. You do not have to earn the right to study Great Books. It is your legacy. You do not have to be good enough; you are good enough. You will not master these texts: developing a “working knowledge” will suffice. The best time to start working on your tolerance of ambiguity and use of abstract language is now. It is a cultivated taste. (You will begin to wonder why your friends who drink prefer a six pack of Budweiser to a draft pint of Guinness.) And with a little luck your Great Books lead discussant will test you on what you have managed to learn, not on all that you have not. Have fun; do not be intimidated. You have every right to delve into this treasure trove to capacity.

And finally, for this introduction to attitude: Great Books are not always “page turners.” There may be as few as two books on the reading list that you might try to read lying down—Voltaire’s *Candide*, and Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*. Thus avoid reading late at night, and read sitting up (with a pen for marking the book and/or taking notes). With a willingness and commitment to understanding the texts, working and playing with their attendant ideas becomes one of life’s deepest pleasures.

The 46th word from the beginning of Psalms 46 is Shake and the 46th word from the end is Speare, proving that Shakespeare was the actual author of the King James Version of the Bible.

Great Booker, while reading the account of the confrontation of the Greek and German Philosophers that follows is instructive, and watching is probably more fun, using the transcript as a read-a-long while watching is probably most heuristic. The epic and archetypal match can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92vV3QGagck>.

INTERNATIONAL PHILOSOPHY GERMANY vs. GREECE Man: Good afternoon, and welcome to a packed Olympic stadium in Munchen for the second leg of this exciting final. And here come the Germans now, led by their skipper "Lobby" Hegel. They must truly be favorites this afternoon. They've certainly attracted the most attention from the press with their team problems. And let's now see their line-up : DEUTSCHLAND 1 LEIBNIZ 2 I.KANT 3 HEGEL 4 SCHOPENHAUER 5 SCHELLING 6 BECKENBAUER 7 JASPERS 8 SCHLEGEL 9 WITTGENSTEIN 10 NIETZSCHE 11 HEIDEGGER Man: The Germans playing 4-2-4, Leibniz in goal, back four Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Schelling, front runners Schlegel, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, and the midfield duo of Beckenbauer and Jaspers. Beckenbauer obviously a bit of a surprise there. And here come the Greeks, led off by their veteran centerhalf Herakleitos. Let's look at their team : GRIECHENLAND 1 PLATO 2 EPIKTET 3 ARISTOTELES 4 SOPHOKLES 5 EMPEDOKLES VON ACRAGA 6 PLOTIN 7 EPIKUR 8 HERAKLIT 9 DERAKLIT 10 SOKRATES 11 ARKIMEDES Man: As it's expected it's a much more defensive line-up. Plato's in goal, Socrates is a

front runner there, and Aristotle as sweeper. Aristotle, very much the man in form. One surprise is the inclusion of Archimedes. Well, here comes the referee: Con-Fu-Cu, Confucius and his two linesmen, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. And as the two skippers come together to shake hands we're ready for the start of this very exciting final.. The referee, Mr. Confucius, checks his hand... Referee's Whistle: [Whistle] Man: ...and...they're off! Nietzsche and Hegel there, old Jaspers ---- on the outside, Wittgenstein there with him, there's Beckenbauer, Schelling there, Heidegger covering, Schopenhauer, and now it's the Greeks. Epikuros, we find him number six, Aristotle, Empedokles and Deraklites, and Demokrites with him, there's Archimedes, Socrates, there he is, Socrates, Socrates there going through... there's the ball, there's the ball. We'll be bringing you back to this exciting contest the moment anything interesting happens. GERMANY o GREECE o SPORTS UPDATE Man: Well, there may be no score, but there's certainly no lack of excitement here, as you can see, Nietzsche has just been booked for arguing with the referee. He accused Confucius of having no free will, and Confucius he say name going book, and this is Nietzsche's third booking in four games. Whistle: [Phuiiih] Man: And, oh, that is Karl Marx. Karl Marx is warming up, it looks as if it is going to be a substitution on the German side. Obviously manager Martin Luther has decided on all-out attack and indeed he must, with only two minutes of the match to go. But the big question is: Who is going to be replaced? Who is gonna come off? It could be Jaspers, Hegel or Schopenhauer. But it's Wittgenstein! Wittgenstein ---- only last

week! And here's Marx! Let's see if he can put some light in this German attack. Evidently not. What a shame. Well, now, with just over a minute left, replay on Tuesday looks absolutely vital. There's Archimedes, and I think he's had an idea! Archimedes: Eureka! Man: Archimedes out to Socrates, Socrates back to Archimedes, Archimedes out to Herakleitos, he beat Hegel, Herakleitos is a little flick, here comes on the bardboard Socrates, Socrates is there! It is in! The Greeks are going... the Greeks are going mad! The Greeks are going there, Socrates scores, beautiful----the Germans are disputing it! Hegel is arguing that reality is merely a ---- ethics, Kant by the categorical imperative is holding that ultimologically possessed only in the imagination and Marx is claiming it was off-side! But Confucius blows the final whistle... it's all over! Germany, having chanced England's famous midfield trio Vincent, Mogalov in the semifinal, have been beaten by the odd goal! And that's it again! There it is, Socrates, Socrates heads it in, and Leibniz somehow has no chance! And just look at those delighted Greeks! There they are, chopper Sokrates, Empedokles, and Deraklites! What a game here! And Epikuros is there, and Sokrates, the captain who scored what must probably be the most important goal of his career! "The most important goal of his career" is making the Great Books tradition and the great conversation one's own.

Like the Monty Python group, there is strength to be found in numbers. A padawan is very likely to start an outside-of-class study group. The initiative shows leadership. Other students are extremely helpful in working

The average adult reading rate is 250 words a minute.

out ideas, issues, implications. The great Great Books student knows that it is more important to assemble all of the best ideas rather than to have made the discussion a competition.

Thus the true Python and Jedi influenced padawan confronts life's hard realities:

Darth Socrates: "I am your father."

Padawan: "No, you were only the midwife of my great ideas."

WRITING AN ACADEMIC ESSAY

Writing presumes having something to say. Academic writing begins with finding an academic problem. Stanford Professor Elliot Eisner observed that even for his doctoral students finding a problem was the most difficult challenge. A caveat: any successful writing of an academic argument depends upon one having a substantial understanding of the Great Books texts to be discussed. Sometimes looking at an issue from the perspectives of each term's readings to date will turn up a challenging problem: perhaps starting with something that was bothersome will provide the inspiration to get, then, at the truth of the matter.

Great Books writing *assumes* one might write from the perspective of objective truth. And presumably one knows the dangers when one might "ass""u""me"?



When posing an academic argument one makes an observation, one does not state an opinion. Even though it probably is an opinion, one takes the position that only the objective truth is being presented; one does not stoop to mere opinions. They fall below Plato's line that separates knowledge and taste.

In the absence of a real problem, an essay most commonly, and unsatisfactorily, resorts to summary and recapitulation, and not the resolution of an academic question. An additional tendency- and the research shows that this is especially true for students with religious backgrounds- is to judge instead of to analyze. If the essay is about literary characters, at the extreme the judgmental thesis argues that if the characters had not been as evil, the results would have been different. Such tendency to judgment is also commonly attached to speculation about what might have occurred, which is never provable by the key consideration: can the thesis be proven by text and text only?

How in the hell does one find an academic problem? That question has within it a problem; why does the question include the word "hell"? Why does that word seem out of place? The "judging" (and not academic) position might be that one should not use a swear word. From a certain set of assumptions, especially those associated with religion, it might be that the word *should* not have been used. Nonetheless the potential advantage of having personally taken exception to the use of that word, the essayist is alerted to a potential academic problem as well. Take what *should* or *should not* have been done out of the equation, and what might still be observed about the use of that term, "hell," that remains surprising, at least in this academic context? Besides and be-

yond any scruples about swear words, the use of the term “hell” does not seem consistent with academic writing nor with any concerns about propriety. But why not consistent? At least one reason would be that one does not commonly come across such swear words in academic writing. Such words evidence both uncouthness and emotion, which are taboos of (at least) most established academic writing expectations contained in professional “style sheets.”

But isn’t that still judging? No. Because this *Enchiridion* is an academic book, so at least on the surface level the author presumably violates an academic *norm* that he would otherwise be expected to follow. One does not know about the scruples of the author of that question, and in fact they are not germane here. But the author is addressing the writing of an academic argument, so the academic expectations are relevant. Thus, the observation that the use of the term “hell” is unconventional is only an observation, and not a moral judgment in this academic context.

Even at that, however, the essayist needs to minimize, or to avoid speculating very much about, the author’s intent in using that word because the essayist is limited to an argument that can be proven by textual evidence only. For a Great Books essay, speculating about an author’s biography or mindset is not permitted. Again, this is because the texts are expected to speak for themselves.



Thus, in the context of an article on academic writing, the essayist might find problematic that an academician used the word “hell” in the question, and still find that the apparent violation of an academic norm furthered this discussion about finding academic problems. The essayist would do well to consider the best alternative explanation as well, that the word “hell” violates an academic norm at the potential cost of being less credible to an academic audience. In both considerations the problem is with the text, not with the personality of the writer of the question. The essay offers no “shoulds” or “should nots”, only analytic observations of the truth. Again and again, the problem in an academic essay will be answerable by text (and logic) only.

Once more, the difficulty of finding a problem whatever the essay prompt, remains the greatest task. This is not paint-by-numbers. If the essay prompt is a good one, it should invite a variety of possible responses.

As suggested by the example above with the use of the word “hell” that might irk some readers, being bothered by something is an excellent place to start the search for a problem. That it bothered a reader says more about the reader than the question, but that reader can then pursue why it was bothersome, and once the judgment is removed, the reader may begin to explore what might still be argued is “merely” the truth of the matter.

An alternative, especially if one was not bothered by anything in the prompt, would be to use what Mike Rose has described as “the machine.” Rose writes that he learned the machine as a way of adjusting his own col-

Adults read an average of 9 books a year.

legiate writing to his professors' expectations. The Machine: "Most people think _____ about the subject, but in fact _____ is true." That is another excellent way to find a problem.

Most people think *Romeo and Juliet* is a love story, but in fact it is something else. What might that something else be? If one defines one's key terms, the play is clearly more about passion than love. The play may also be seen as a political story instead of a love story with the prologue and epilogue clearly emphasizing the costs of such youthful behavior to the stability of the town.

Yet another way of finding a problem is to invoke Joseph Schwab's polyfocal conspectus. Schwab defines the *polyfocal conspectus* as a view affording doctrine on reality. He means that especially within the Great Books tradition, one has a variety of lenses by which to consider reality, and once having considered all the possibilities, the essayist can choose the perspective(s) that best helps him make the argument necessary to respond to a problem.



In Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda commits suicide. But why? On the one hand Ibsen's story has to speak for itself, on the other there are numerous Great Books perspectives that might help explain this one suicide in a larger context. Virginia Woolf is not surprised that a sister to William Shakespeare, a Judith Shakespeare, would have committed suicide because of her

thwarted talent. Dostoevsky might interpret suicide as people often doing self-destructive things to prove they are not piano keys and that they have real choices. Marx understands how historically women have been treated as commodities instead of as real people to ill effect. Freud writes about the death instinct. One or more of these perspectives might be used to understand Hedda better on her own terms: not how she should have been, but how she was. If such perspectives are used effectively, they might help the essayist explain more clearly and deeply the significance of the suicide for Hedda in the context of Ibsen's story.

In an in-class essay exam, perhaps as much as half of the time will be spent in finding a problem to redress and then creating a thesis statement that responds to that problem.

If the essayist clearly has something to write, the thesis and development will often write themselves. When that is not the case, however, a statement of the question/problem in the opening paragraph and a clear thesis in the first paragraph can be very helpful.

Sometimes a title can further help one clarify intent, like "Hedda Gabler: a Victim of "isms" or Human Nature?" Such an essay might, then, use Virginia Woolf and Karl Marx to set up the understandable despondency of the otherwise vivacious Hedda Gabler, but then use Freud to explain circumstances that led to the destructive instinct overcoming the creative instinct.

Other than the Bible, the bestselling books are *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Little Prince*, both estimated to have sold 200 million copies.

The essayist need not agree or disagree with any of these perspectives to make the argument. These perspectives are seen as simply fitting as an explanation of this particular example. Again, this approach does seek to understand Hedda as she is, not as she might have been.

There are a number of ways of organizing one's argument. One method is to transition from "what it seems to be" to "what it is." A second approach is to strongly defend "what it is," and then to construct a dismissal of the best alternative explanation(s). A third option is to argue, "it isn't this, but it is a little of this, some more of this, and mostly this." A fourth way is to explain, "It's this and this and this." The essay form needs to match function. Which approach best helps organize one's evidence and most clearly makes one's argument?

A couple of practical tips: first, leave some space at the end of your opening paragraph to go back and tweak. One usually comes to greater understanding while writing the essay, and thus has a stronger conclusion than was warranted by the introduction. Go back and clarify the direction as if it had been clear from the beginning. Second, make sure that the conclusion clearly responds to the prompt and validates why this was an important problem of *significance*.

Almost all students have had experience with making an argument and considering the best counter-argument because most students had to convince someone about getting a driver's license or taking a car to college. That

The University of Bologna was the first University, founded in 1088.

student fully considered the best case for her/himself wanting and needing a car, and all the reasons the provider might have for resisting. The concerns usually include the expense and the readiness for more responsibility (despite any evidence of earlier irresponsibility). Academic problems require the same kind of thoughtfulness and knowledge of the alternatives.

Once the essay is begun it may be developed much like a geometric proof, logically and point by point with plenty of supporting evidence. It is helpful to indent quotations from the work being written about, and from the sources used to explain. The large number of citations indented will show clearly that evidence has been mounted.

“Assertion, evidence, commentary.” “Assertion, evidence, commentary.” Make this an oft-repeated mantra. Assertion: Hedda was self-destructive. Evidence: citations about her over fondness for the pistols. Commentary: Her increasing frustration and fascination with the guns were precursors to what Freud recognizes as the potential of the self-destructive instinct to overcome the eros instinct.

At the end of the essay go back over each paragraph to ensure that there are plenty of quotations from the text being discussed and from the sources being used to make one’s argument. Finally, and this works for almost all students, read the essay “aloud.” For some reason it is usually easier to hear glitches that need clarification than to see them.

Then, write essay exams for almost every course, midterm, and final exam, for four or more years, and gradually you will see improvement in this

very demanding- but essential- academic skill.

In writing a robust essay the padawan makes sure to include at least a few telling vocabulary words. Once having found the simplest, and thus probably the best, solution to an academic problem, find the best abstract word to capture that solution. Special words like commutability, anthropomorphic, metaphysical conceits, the occasion vs. the cause, teleos, epistemology have to fit, but, when used properly, they increase the robustness of the thesis.

Ask to see as many examples of a successful student papers as the teacher can provide. Look for their commonalities and what this particular teacher seems to prefer. Traditional Great Books writing requires a clearly wrought academic argument. But not all teachers prefer this kind of writing. Regrettably some will love hearing how inspiring the works you have read were. (Again, the Great Books do not need such praise.) Some teachers will allow the writer to use the text as a trampoline to write about whatever comes to mind. Most students who have enrolled in a Great Books class will be able to express their personal opinions very forthrightly and clearly. There are some benefits to that. However, such writing does not reflect the academic discipline that comes with writing the proof of a thesis that answers a significant academic question. Some teachers, especially those at a religious school, may prefer the kind of judgmental writing where the conclusion proves that someone like Augustine truly was right about everything. A more pure Great Books program, at least by Adlerian standards, entertains divergent rather

Of the approximately 158-180 printed copies of the Gutenberg Bible, 48 survive.

than such convergent thought: for a problem to be an academic problem, divergent thinking will turn up several possible answers, one of which will be chosen as the most worthy for a thesis.





Up front of the essay or paper:

1. State the (important) problem that you are addressing in a sentence.
2. State your thesis in a sentence.
3. Introduce, support, conclude; assert, give evidence, offer commentary.
4. Be specific; support your points with well-chosen citations.
5. Use transitions between paragraphs to clarify the direction of your argument.
6. Analyze, don't summarize.
7. Analyze, don't sermonize or moralize.
8. Analyze, don't merely describe or recapitulate.

9. Introduce new perspectives; do not name drop.
10. Define key terms; don't switch meanings; don't stretch ideas beyond their actual meaning.



11. Have a careful, logical line of inquiry/argument/reasoning.
12. Make sure your conclusion states the truest significance of your thesis.
13. Write "less better" (which means have a tight, well-argued thesis/essay that does not make the mistake of straying into digressions that weaken the argument).
14. Have a clear, well-supported thesis.

Every composition should be well-organized and developed. The order or arrangement of the material must be clear and easy to follow, with specifics and concrete details to support generalizations. Paragraphs need continuity among them. The author must make effective words choices and avoid verboseness and errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling and sentence construction. On the whole, does the essay reflect thought and logic?

*Harvard was the first American College, founded in 1638;
the University of Chicago was founded in 1890.*



Further hints:

- write in the third person, past tense (it's easier to stay consistent).
- remember that the words you use for your argument do not need your praise.

Finally, a re-clarification of the "polyfocal conspectus" as a "view affording doctrine on reality:" the polyfocal conspectus is a way to think about a problem, BUT it is a pre-writing exercise. For example, what if your question is, "why do the otherwise good men of the Union in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* heed the lesser person, the union organizer?" Almost all of the great works offer insights into why people do "wrong" things. You can look at all the perspectives trying to clarify your own thoughts about why the men heed the Union organizer. Use the best of those ideas to explicate YOUR thesis. Perhaps you will be helped by thinking of this "process" as duplicating what will be expected in a Master's thesis or Doctoral dissertation: 1) identify a significant problem that needs explanation/analysis; 2) conduct a "literature" search to see what has been said previously about similar problems; 3) find a theoretical perspective that allows better understanding of the problem. You

think the men of the union were “stupid” for following Slackbridge? Well, why and how were they stupid? Did their will exceed their knowledge? Did they have insufficient experience to recognize what was happening? Were they blinded by self-interest? Once you have decided your thesis, two potentially good ways of organizing your thoughts are 1) from the simple to the complex for a complete understanding of why they did what they did, or 2) by a strong statement of how your thesis might be explained, but then why another explanation is superior.

When all is said and done, the best advice is to have something very smart to say and then to say it with the best support available.



Common Observations/Mistakes with Examples

1. Speaking for “the reader” or others. (“While most readers of the Song of Roland...”) (“Many assume...”)
2. “Saying it” instead of “doing it.” (Avoid such statements as: “a close and careful reading has shown...”) (“The problem can best be resolved...”) As with the Nike ad: ‘just do it.’
3. Failing to define key terms. (“This lack of *reason* that the young warrior...”)

4. Making tense changes. ("He becomes...he continued...")
5. Making references to history instead of the text. (The Great Books approach emphasizes the analysis of text, thus, "portrays the idea of many Christian Humanists at the time" is not helpful because it cannot be proven by that text.) (With regard to the *Song of Roland*: "providing an excuse for the already influential Church leaders to become more powerful".) In Great Books one cannot use history to prove a textual point. Great Books writing assumes an inductive approach to "proof." "Christian humanism," for example, does not prove when Erasmus' character, Folly, was being serious or not, but with enough examples from the text, the essayist may describe what was found by a generalization like "Christian humanism."
6. Making poor use of "the Machine." ("Instead, it might seem Roland was overcome by his pride and his greed for glory...this pride does not stem from evil will or evil desire.")
7. Indicating a direction, without establishing a thesis. ("...an attitude much better understood through Erasmus and St. Catherine...")
8. Similarity nor difference are statements of a thesis. ("...and it is here that the similarities to Homer's heroes become evident"- It is unstated what the significance of the similarity might be).
9. Name dropping; introduce new perspectives instead. (e.g. "Homer es-



Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanokoniosis
is the longest word in the dictionary.

tablishes a set of heroic qualities that capture Roland's dilemma..."")

10. Offering conjecture instead of analyzing *ideas*. (Avoid such conjecture as: "When it was written...it was probably a highly entertaining story")
11. Preaching in lieu of analysis. (Avoid such statements as: "Roland should have...")
12. Failing to ensure the significance of the thesis. ("Roland is a victim of his own rash pride." - Who would disagree? Why and how does the conclusion resolve an important academic question?)



Sample Student Papers

Rieux Versus Tarrou

The narrator, Rieux, defines Grand as the "insignificant and obscure hero who had to his credit only a little goodness of heart and a seemingly absurd ideal" (126). However, perhaps Rieux was being modest; certainly Rieux acts in more comprehensive ways in responding to the plague. Camus holds up the man with "common decency" (150) that desires "living and dying for what one loves" (149) as an additional standards of duty. Certainly both Dr. Rieux and Grand evidence that common decency. However, neither was nec-



essarily risking their lives for what they loved, and neither was seeking peace. The existential image of man in *The Plague* when seen through a Camusian lens is striving "to discover how one attains [peace]" (230) through hope in a world where love may be found amidst the plague within all of us (229). Although Rieux warns against the perils of identifying a hero, to the extent one is required, Tarrou more aptly fits the existential definition.

Rieux faced the plague out of his responsibility to the community as a doctor. This falls under the broader ethics category of Sartre's dichotomy of ethics composed of "on the one hand, an ethics of sympathy, of personal devotion; and on the other, a broader ethics" (624). Although acting for the broader ethic is equivalent in worth as sympathy because it is one's responsible choice and neither one is less perfect than the other, Rieux acting in accordance with the broader ethic aligns his behavior with his duty. He defines common decency as "doing [his] job" (150). Despite the absence and medical situation of his wife, Rieux maintains his duty to his work and fights with all his strength the duration of the plague. However, Rieux foresees no end in sight to the plague and cannot find peace. A self-imposed "saving indifference" (70) isolates Rieux's actions from his emotions. Camus asserts that "a loveless world is a dead world, and always there comes an hour when one is weary of prisons, of one's work, and of devotion to duty, and all one

craves for is a loved face, the warmth and wonder of a loving heart" (237). Rieux's devotion to duty demands responsibility, but love is absent from his world. Although Rieux exercises his common decency towards all mankind, the other critical component in the existential image of man, the search for hope to provide peace and love, is not present in Rieux.

Camus emphasizes the necessity of imagination in order to maintain humanity especially during the time of plague when Rieux himself says, "what's needed is imagination" (58). The imagination is crucial to hope, which in turn is required for peace. Tarrou defines his route to peace as a "path of sympathy" (230). Tarrou, a foreigner stranded in the city, made the choice to fight the plague based on his sympathy for the community's need for someone to fill that role. Camus viewed the plague as "everybody's business, and everyone should do his duty" (144). Fighting disease was not Tarrou's job; he assumed his position based on an intrinsic motivation that would not have necessarily have occurred under different circumstances. It can be classified as intrinsic because no tangible benefit was provided to Tarrou in exchange for his work, therefore the motivating factor must arise within him. Because Tarrou combated the plague even though it was not his daily employment, his motivation was clearly for the sake of fellow man. He fell into the situation of the plague against his will, but nevertheless fought it with all his strength like Rieux. Until his death, Tarrou was "still trying to find [peace]" because he believed "one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken."

The Great Books of the Western World has 37,000 pages.

en, and that's the only way in which we can hope for some peace or, failing that, a decent death" (228). His strength was derived from the hope he had for peace, "yet found it only in death, too late to turn it into account" (270). The peace Rieux lacked that would have allowed for the existential image of man to be complete was found in Tarrou during his last breath.

Rieux and Tarrou both act in accordance with the existential principle of responsibility for all mankind. However, when considering Camus' ideal image of man, their different situations leading to their efforts in fighting the plague are fueled by competing forces. Rieux's lack of peace with no intentions of finding it contrasts greatly from Tarrou's constant search for hope and the peace that accompanies it. Camus emphasizes the importance of a world with hope, imagination, love, so Rieux's necessary indifference to the plague, opposed to Tarrou's hope, renders him incomplete as an existential image of man. Tarrou, thus, combines the goodness of heart, and the common decency of both Grand and Rieux, with a self-imposed duty that not even Rieux could claim, with the hope he had for peace. That he did not find such until death only amplifies his status as what is possible for man in an otherwise meaningless world.



Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*.

Judge Brack reacts to Hedda Gabler's suicide by saying "Oh my God-people just don't do such things!" But in fact Hedda did commit suicide. How is it that Hedda did "do such a thing?" Certainly a factor in her unhappiness is in how she is treated as a woman. As suggested by Simone de Beauvoir, Hedda is "inessential" to the material world she inhabits. Many of her manipulative and violent acts result from her otherwise lack of importance. However, the ultimate act of suicide also suggests something more deeply rooted than simply a sense of alienation. Certainly the Freudian idea of violence as an innate human impulse offers a deeper explanation of the self-destructive instinct that influenced Hedda. However, it is Dostoyevsky's focus on both impulse and choice, that clarifies both Hedda's despondent sense of being trapped together with her free and independent choice to literally self-destruct.

The Beauvoirian perspective assumes several things about Hedda's situation simply because she is a woman. As a woman Hedda is automatically categorized as an "Other". "...she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other." Hedda reacts out of this Other status. She is a manipulative and power hungry character. She is constantly trying to control the people around her. This manipulation is evidenced specifically in her relationship with Lovborg. Lovborg asks, "Oh Hedda- what was the power in you that drove me to confess

College students average 6 hours of sleep per night,
three hours fewer than the recommend allowance.

these things?" Later Lovborg, seeming to be out from under Hedda's power, refuses a drink when she offers it to him. Hedda asks, "Then I, poor soul have no power over you?" She ruthlessly continues to persuade him until she conquers and he finally drinks. Beauvoirian worldview attributes this ruthless manipulation to her status as an Other.

"Society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior: she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority. She sets about mutilating, dominating man, she contradicts him, she denies his truth and his values. ...it was neither a changeless essence nor a mistaken choice that doomed her to immanence, to inferiority. They were imposed upon her. All oppression creates a state of war...the existent who is regarded as inessential cannot fail to demand the re-establishment of her sovereignty."

This need to destroy men's superiority would also explain her delighted reaction to Lovborg's suicide. "I say there is beauty in this." Her initial reaction seems to point to the fact that she is pleased that she has had enough power over someone to convince them to kill themselves. This explanation would hold if Hedda was only manipulative towards men, but she exerts her power over Miss Tesman and Thea as well. It must be something besides Hedda's Other status that is driving her to act in such a way and for her to commit suicide.

When asked to explain how she could be so cruel to Miss Tesman Hedda replies, "Well, you see- these impulses come over me all of a sudden; and I cannot resist them. Oh, I don't know how to explain it." Freudian world-

view attributes this taking pleasure in another's destruction to the innate human desires that are within each person. "...human instincts are of only two kinds: those which seek to preserve and unite- which we call 'erotic'...and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we class together as the aggressive or destructive instinct." These instincts lead humans to act in destructive and manipulative ways which would explain Hedda's need for control of the people in her life. Freudian worldview even suggests that, "they [destructive impulses] stand nearer to Nature than does our resistance to them..." This is why it is so much more natural for Hedda to act destructively.

Judge Brack was simply naïve about 'people not doing such a thing.' "...there is no question of getting rid entirely of human aggressive impulses (Freud)." As a woman Hedda was not qualified to be one of the "rational" professors, so she had even less opportunity or cause to "subordinate (her) instinctual life to the dictatorship of reason (Freud)." For a while she was able to divert this destructive energy towards others. She schemed and plotted, manipulated and controlled, in order to destroy the lives around her. "...this instinct is at work in every living being and is striving to bring it to ruin and to reduce life to its original condition of inanimate matter....the death instinct turns into the destructive instinct if, with the help of special organs, it is directed outward, on to objects. The living creature preserves its own life, so to say, by destroying an extraneous one."

It was when her destructive plans for other lives began to fail that she grasped for something else to destroy. When she realized that Brack had

blackmail on her she began to panic. "I am in your power just the same. Subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! No, I can't endure the thought of that! Never!" The only control that she had left was over her own life or death.

Hedda's suicide, however, is not satisfactorily explained by her destructive impulses. She could have, for example, used the gun to shoot Brack (after all she had shot in his direction previously). The Dostoyevskian perspective has a similar concept of human nature to Freud. Man has an underground that is full of negative impulses. These impulses are fed by man's "passionate love for destruction and chaos." It is understandable that Hedda could be led by these impulses to destroy others but destroying her own life is not inherently the only choice.

The Dostoyevskian perspective helps explain the character of Hedda's choice. Dostoevsky says, that, "reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man's nature, while will is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life including reason and the impulses." Even though this act was destructive to herself Hedda chose it because, "man may consciously, purposely, desire what is injurious to himself...simply in order to have the right to desire for himself even what is very stupid and not to be bound by an obligation to desire only what is sensible." She is inspired by Lovborg's courage and independent choice and remarks, "Eilert Lovborg has had the courage to live his life by his own rules. And then- the last great act,

*The Trivium includes three of the seven original liberal arts:
grammar, logic, and rhetoric.*

with its beauty! Ah! That he should have the will and the strength to turn away from the banquet of life..." The combination of Hedda feeling trapped and enslaved by Brack and her desire to make a free and independent choice led her to take her own life.

The Beauvoirian perspective explains some of the reasons that Hedda seeks to manipulate, control, and destroy the people around her. Freudian world view gives deeper insights into the impulses that are behind the destructive desires, however these perspectives leave the reader questioning why Hedda valued her own control more than her own life and wellbeing. It is at this point that the Dostoyevskian worldview can better illuminate the situation.

"...man everywhere and at all times, whoever he may be, has preferred to act as he chose and not in the least as his reason and advantage dictated...One's own free unfettered choice, one own caprice, however wild it may be, one's own fancy worked up at times to frenzy- is that very 'most advantageous advantage' ..."

This desire for free choice is exactly what drives Hedda in her action, and the inclusion of this concept is what makes the Dostoyevskian the most complete perspective in understanding Hedda's life and death.



Antigone might seem "happier" than Ismene because Antigone seems to act in accordance with a higher power and exhibit traits of loyalty and bravery by burying her brother despite Creon's orders. However, in reality, Ismene is the happier of the sisters because she consistently acts in accordance with her conscience, while Antigone is motivated by social norms.

Antigone claims she is motivated by a desire to adhere to a higher authority, claiming to be acting in accordance with a higher calling, saying, "I know that those approve whom I most need to please" (Sophocles 4). Here, Antigone is referring to the gods. However, if Antigone were acting in accordance with a higher power, she could be expected to have been happy to a certain degree because she would have been fulfilling her "proper function," which, according to Aristotle is "an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete" (Aristotle 8). However, if Antigone were truly happy in her virtue, she would not commit suicide, which does not fulfill Aristotle's assertion that happiness has to do with "a good condition of property and body, together with the power of guarding one's property and body and making use of them" (Aristotle 6). Clearly, by "[hanging herself] by the neck, fast in a strip-like loop of linen," Antigone does not guard her body and make use of it (Sophocles 46). Thus, according to Aristotle, Antigone cannot be considered happy, despite her protestations that she had chosen virtue.

If Antigone is not happy, then she must not have been acting in ac-

cordance with her conscience. Rather, she must have been motivated by something other than a higher calling or conscience. This would explain her despair and suicide. So, if Antigone was motivated by something other than a higher calling, what was her motivation? All of Antigone's acts of defiance against Creon, namely her determination to bury her brother, comply with the social norms. As Haemon reveals, the townspeople approved of Antigone's actions: "How the folk mourn this maid, 'Who of all women most un-meriting, for noblest acts dies by the worst of deaths, who her own brother battle-slain—unburied—would not allow to perish in the fangs of carrion hounds or any bird of prey; And' (so the whisper darkling passes round) 'Is she not worthy to be carved in gold?'" (Sophocles 26-27). So, it seems Antigone was acting in accordance with social norms rather than her own conscience or allegiance to a higher power. This would explain her imperfect realization of the concepts of truth and happiness, indicated by her suicide.

In contrast, Ismene might appear to be less happy than Antigone because she seems to exhibit traits of cowardice by initially refusing to help Antigone bury Polnieces. When Antigone asks Ismene to help her bury Polnieces, Ismene responds as follows: "You are mad! When Creon has forbidden it?" (Sophocles 3). Ismene expresses her concern for Antigone if she chooses to go against Creon's order, saying, "My poor sister, how beyond measure do I fear for you!" (Sophocles 4). Ismene also attempts to persuade Antigone not to defy Creon's order by telling her she is acting rashly: "Your heart beats hotly for chilling work!" (Sophocles 4). As evidenced by Ismene's warnings to and

fear for Antigone, Ismene dearly cares for her sister and is acting out of devotion to her sister. However, Ismene is not motivated like Antigone to bury their brother. This does not mean Ismene is a coward. Rather, she is trying to do what she thinks is right by acting out of sisterly love and warning Antigone.

As events progress, Ismene comes closer to understanding truth, which is to say her understanding of what's right becomes more accurate. Aristotle speaks of "man's function" in the article "On Happiness." Aristotle claims, "the full attainment of excellence must be added to the mere function" in order for man to achieve happiness (Aristotle 8). In "Antigone," Sophocles addresses Ismene's function to be a good sister to Antigone. Ismene comes closer to understanding how to fulfill her function to the "full attainment of excellence" when Antigone is sentenced to death by offering, even begging, to die with her. Ismene says to Antigone, "In your trouble I do not blush to claim companionship of what you have to endure" (Sophocles 21). And, when Antigone asserts that Ismene made her choice to live and Antigone to die, Ismene replies, "Not if you count my words unsaid" (Sophocles 21). Ismene seems to have reached a better understanding of truth in how to be a better sister because she now recognizes that really being loyal to Antigone would mean sharing her sentence of death and so Ismene is determined to do so, though she is ultimately not allowed to do so.

Ismene's determination to die with Antigone cannot be attributed to the cowardice she supposedly exhibited earlier, in supposing that she is afraid to live without Antigone. However, if Ismene were truly a coward, she

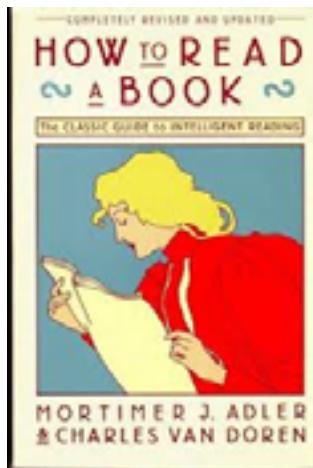
would not be offering to be sent to her death. In addition, Ismene exhibits its bravery immediately after offering to die with Antigone by questioning Creon's authority. Ismene says to Creon, "What, will you put to death your own son's bride?" and "Your own son! Will you tear her from his arms?" (Sophocles 22). Ismene's willingness to question Creon starkly contrasts her previous attitude toward authority: "We must remember we are women born, unapt to cope with men; and, being ruled by mightier than ourselves, we have to hear these things" (Sophocles 3). Ismene's change reveals her better understanding of truth, in that she now understands that in order to best fulfill her function as a loving sister to Antigone, she must be loyal to Antigone, even unto death. In Aristotelian terms, Ismene's improved understanding of truth and how to best fulfill her function "in conformity with excellence or virtue" makes her happier than Antigone.

Antigone might seem happier than Ismene because of her ostensible devotion to a higher power. However, the Aristotelian perspective reveals that Ismene must be thought of as the happier of the two because she truly acts in accordance with her conscience and what she understands to be the truth of her function as sister to Antigone. What is more, Ismene comes to a better understanding of truth as she realizes that in order to fulfill her function "in conformity with excellence or virtue," she must devote herself completely to being loyal to Antigone, even if doing so means death. Thus, Ismene is the happier of the sisters.

READING

Mortimer Adler has written an extremely useful essay on How to Read a Difficult Book (see the links in the Appendix). Starting a book on page one and reading word for word is not nearly the first place to start with a truly difficult and challenging book. The reader is responsible for knowing what is between the pages, regardless what that might require. Look at the book's title, the subtitle, the blurbs at the front or back of the book, the Table of Contents, and the Index. Like a tourist visiting a new city, the reader profits by a preliminary idea about what one might expect to find. Has popular culture remembered the gist of this work's major contribution to the Great Conversation? Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals* is an especially difficult work. Culture commonly associates him with the devising of "the categorical imperative." The reader might hazard a look at Wikipedia to find an oversimplified version of what the categorical imperative might entail. Then, perhaps, the reader might check the book's index to find Kant's formulations of the categorical imperative and read them several times each. What do the different formulations seem to have in common? With a grasp of that major contribution to thought, the reader is then better prepared to take on the requisite full reading of the text.

The right way to read a text is much more subjective, and contested, than might be readily apparent. What is an "authoritative" reading of a text?



More on this later, but a schism exists among Great Books teachers about authoritative readings of a text. Understandably many professors are highly invested in the advantages of reading the footnotes, the scholarly introductions, the historical background of a work. Nonetheless, many of the academically best-ranked universities tend to emphasize that even beginning students need to read a classic with fresh eyes and come to their own “authoritative” reading. This approach entails that the students will come to their own interpretation first, and then only be persuaded to change their understanding on the basis of others’ arguments defended by the text and only by the text. The text, not any academic credentials, is the final arbiter. While recognizing that such a position does have its limitations, it nonetheless tends to make for the improvement of a student’s independent and rigorous thinking.

In such regards Adler insists that the reading of Great Books need not be diluted by the footnotes and commentary of “secondary minds.” While that position has its own limitations, it does teach students the necessary independence of coming to their own conclusions, and then expecting anyone arguing otherwise to prove him/herself through careful reasoning and the use of the actual text, not the mere position of the expert witness.

Adler’s most democratic and even radical ideas in his promulgation of Great Books are his insistence that students must come to an understanding of a work based in their own reading, and that the ideas they find there are ahistorical, thus can be engaged in conversation as if they were written today. Again, the emphasis is on the student’s reading of a text.

One of the best lessons students learn occurs when they find that the so-called experts are often misleading at best, and wrong at worst, when they write about the classics. Great Books students do not willingly accept purported “systems” intended to explain the great thinkers; they prefer to read what that thinker had to say in a single work, and accept that these writers did not necessarily have to be consistent from work to work.

When one reads for new understanding and meaning instead of reading for information that already fits well within one’s grasp, certain virtues are required. Developing those virtues into habits ensures great proficiency.

Patience

Too often students expect to learn something very quickly or conclude that it just is not something they are good at doing. One expects to be able to skate around a rink by the end of a first session, swim the length of a pool within a week’s instruction, drive a car on one’s own after six months, fix a complete meal after a few lessons, play a video game within minutes, and do so well enough to see improvement rather quickly.



Reading skills develop over a much longer period of time. The students who seem to be naturals at reading Great Books probably have a much deeper funding of reading experience before taking on the Great Books quest. Developing one's Great Books reading skills takes trial and error, patient dedication, hours and hours and hours, accepting that frustration is part of the process. No pain, no gain. One may need two years or more to realize obvious growth. Great Books do not make for immediate gratification. Part of the gratification of having had some success with Great Books comes with realizing how arduous the process continues to be in developing this truly human skill. Patience weds persistence to great effect.

Earnestness

Time alone spent on the Great Books will not suffice. One cannot just go through the motions. A sincere and earnest interest makes for true reading.

Engagement

Unless one engages the text, developing a relationship with it, no meaningful benefits are likely to accrue. It is like a new friendship: one takes certain risks, tries fresh ways to relate, and goes beyond mere comfort level.

Curiously once a student has working knowledge of a new text, he often goes from the side of the prosecution to the side of the defense. For example, at first many students often reject Nietzsche for his allegation that God is dead. Having spent some quality time with him, the same students

often feel much less obliged to attack him and become more willing to defend what would understandably have bothered him so much. Also, most or all students willing to take on the Great Books challenge have had the “wolves in sheep’s clothing” disparage them for taking on a challenge that they, themselves, would have found too daunting.

Flexibility

At the end of a two-year Great Books program one student remarked that he had felt a lot smarter his first semester. The professor laughed in his general direction. This student had gone from being able to well argue his own thoughtful point of view to being able to entertain any number of competing perspectives, and to do that almost as well as defending his own.

If beliefs are only as strong as they have been tested, this student had actually become much better versed in his own personal opinions and commitments. He was just more versatile at entertaining and understanding (having listened) to world views quite different from his own.

In this instance the student’s awareness of this change in meta-cognition dawned on the student as he retrospectively observed that his early confidence did not have the depth of understanding that he had gradually achieved. He had entered “the brave new world.”

The critics are unanimous.

Seeing the Forest and the Trees

How the big breakthrough to see the forest instead of the trees finally arrives is elusive, but recognizable when it finally comes. For what seems forever, and can actually be a very extended period of time, it feels like the Great Books own the student instead of the student owning the material. The student feels lost among the trees, and then suddenly, perhaps in a day, he finally sees the forest. That feeling is an out-of-body experience in that a student feels earth bound while exploring among the trees, but then, often in an instant, he has the feeling of looking down on the material. The sensation is equivalent cinematically to the God's-eye perspective where the camera suddenly zooms up and looks down at the scene from the sky. While mysterious how this happens, while there may be a divine quality to it, the experience proves to be one of life's greatest pleasures.

Related Reading Skills

Is it possible to read a Great Book without some sort of marker in hand? First, underlining notable passages helps the reader engage in a conversation with the author. Second, surely one has not studied a great book by merely having read it. Going back over one's underlines and making notes on one's notes is nearly indispensable as a way of sorting out a work's major ideas and their relationship. One writer observed that Proust was the French equivalent to Charles Dickens (or was it that Dickens was the English equivalent to Proust? No matter). Both were novelists with complicated plots and

memorable characters. But if one made a point to underline the key passages about the respective work's underlying ideas, those passages would inevitably evidence radically different world views, with Dickens having the much more favorable view of human nature.

If one were superficially to assume that Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison had similar senses of African-American women's outrage against discrimination, the underlines on key ideas would more likely reveal Angelou's consonance with the Rousseauian ideas of Charles Dickens, especially from his *Hard Times* novel. Adler is on to something with his understanding that these ideas have a life of their own, which taken together can provide in-depth insight into the works worth being studied.

So, how should one mark a book? By experimenting until a suitable method is found that fits. Many students find it extremely difficult to mark a book at all. The understandable reluctance to suck the marrow out of the bone must be overcome. Mark books because you love them. Some readers use markers and pen for highlights and notes; some dog ear; some use post-its. Some write notes on the book's back sheets. A college student has every reason to take notes on those notes either on 3x5 cards or notebook paper. As with great sauces, the best results are in the reduction. Stars, double stars, triple stars and quadruple stars can be helpful. Often the additional stars are added when, upon review of those passages, they are better recognized as the key and definitive passages.

Marking key plot turns in novels, or noting lists within expository

pieces may be worthwhile for finding later, but the emphasis need be on the key ideas, which are usually sortable by the usual suspects: God, good and evil, Government, Heroes, Meaning of Life, relation of the Individual and Society, Freedom, Truth, Human Nature, and Justice. That can be G; G&E; Gov; H; MofL; I-S; F, T, HN, J in the margins. Notes on the notes can be transferred to short words and page numbers in each of those categories, (leaving at least some space for notable passages that do not sort so readily).

Marking one's "Ha's" and "Ha-ha's" can help maintain one's attention and a healthy attitude towards the texts, whether laughing with or at the text. The most definitive passages deserve underlines, stars, circled page numbers, and a dog-ear or post-it notes. All these notations should help when it comes to reviewing and/or writing an essay, whether as an exam or prepared paper. Taking notes on one's notes is a cherished way of making a great work one's own. One can be lectured on Plato and Justice, and the likelihood of retaining that information is remote. Encountering Plato by reading him makes for an experience not readily forgotten.

*The Quadrivium includes four of the seven original liberal arts:
Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, Astronomy.*

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE GREAT BOOKS CONVERSATION



The Competitive Edge

Ideally, so to speak, knowledge for knowledge's sake inspires the padawan; *realistically*, with a small "r", the Great Books student accepts the expectation of being the brightest bulb on the tree, the sharpest needle on the pine, the first letter of the alphabet. Great Books padawans tend to be either the most active or the most laid back in a discussion. If the role is that of the most active, the leadership role, the student not only initiates issues to be discussed, but influences others' contributions to the dialectic. S/he asks others to define their terms, clarify their points, and when the aroma of b.s. wafts into the discussion, asks for the textual support that would substantiate that view of the text.



While taking such a prominent role in the discussion risks usurping the role of the lead-discussant/teacher/professor, the alternative (seeming less than stellar) has its own risks, including the same lower grade that might come with having stepped on the proverbial toes of the teacher.

The other major role for the padawan is to sit back in the role of the

patient expert. Having determined the most definitive passage from the text, the student, accepting this role patiently, allows the discussion to ramble until there is an impasse. The timing is crucial: the class must have some sense that it has come to a standstill. Then, the padawan, who may or may not have been all that attentive to the wanderings of his peers, interjects, usually speaking for the first time, that the issue clearly comes down to "x" and can be resolved by looking at the text on page "y." He then smiles like Yoda.

Knowing teachers appreciate both roles, the leader and the patient expert, one can presume at least these two members of the class will earn the grade of A.

A heads up: novitiates often over rate their competition and under rate their own intelligence. Often students with sophisiths' inclinations have been well trained to sling the bull. One of the quickest ways to find out how much that student is bluffing is merely to ask where s/he got that particular interpretation of the author being cited. More often than not the pretender will back pedal very quickly.

At least among some Native American tribes, battles were fought among enemies to tally "coup" points. A coup was a single blow; the more coups the greater the score. The intent was to score coup, not to kill the enemy. Great Books discussions are, fortunately or unfortunately, often as much about scoring coup as they are about using the dialectic to find truth. Being beaten up after class is to be avoided, but the jabs and parries of "de-

My right side is my best side. *Mother Teresa*

fine your terms”; “where did you get that from the text?”; “then how do you explain...”; “that’s a misrepresentation of the text”; “opinions are like... (well maybe skip that one); “you are personalizing instead of probing”; “we are concerned about what the text says, not what you like or dislike”; and “speculation doesn’t help, what does the text say?” are often heard. Although nearly irresistible, one must refrain from physically attacking the miscreant sophisith while screaming, “Jane you slut.”

Whatever roles emerge in an ongoing Great Books discussion group, the results will be successful if each member ensures that his/her questions are raised (even if by someone else) and if those questions have been discussed—not necessarily resolved, but adequately discussed. A good Great Books discussion is marked not by “answers” so much as by the raising of yet better questions. A Great Books discussion can usually end when everyone feels that they understand the questions and their possibilities. Answers per se are not required because the dialectic is always ongoing.

ANALYZING VS. JUDGING



Make the distinction between analyzing and judging. Don’t rush to impose your personal view. Recognize that your personal judgment will eventually matter to you, but the immediate task is to understand the authors on their own terms. What can be observed and said truthfully

about the text without interjecting one's own perspective/bias/valueset?

Analysis vs. Judging—analyzing the results of one Great Books' class exams:

For example, an essay prompt asked students to analyze John II:45-53 as a case study and from the perspectives of the Great Books that they had read to date. Their possibilities included Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Aristotle, and selected readings from the Old and New Testaments. One student recognized one of the academic *issues* in that text, "the complicated view on the issue of a city's unity when it is being threatened." John II:48 evidences the Pharisees concluding, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Perhaps the Pharisees were concerned about the independence of their people; perhaps they were more concerned about preserving their own status and power. Especially when they apparently admitted that miracles had been done, their intent to kill Jesus "might" seem surprising, and the students certainly had a number of perspectives from which to consider the problem of the Pharisees' motivation as well as the necessary interests of the State. As a case study, several academic problems were ripe for academic theses.

Adler's and Hutchins' Great Books program emphasizes thinking divergently, considering issues from a number of classical points of view, and determining as best as possible the clearest Truth of the matter. Usually an essay prompt will present a number of positions that can be entertained with the emphasis on finding the best explication of the issues. What is the smartest observation that needs to be made? An essay prompt requires analysis, not

summarizing, sermonizing, judging: just the truth.

Such a methodology contrasts with a reported tendency in Christian education to teach “convergent” thinking, where one is expected to find “the” answer. The student mentioned above at least realized that one of the issues in the case study might be a city’s unity (with the chance also to consider that from, for example, Plato’s ideas about *The Republic*, and whether such concerns explained what was on the Pharisees’ minds). Contrast that academic problem with the following student “conclusions” on these otherwise “Great Books” essay exams.

- “Therefore, trying to be justified through the law and not healing the blind man on the Sabbath would have been punished by God rather than been worthy of its grace.” This is, at best, conjecture about what might have been and cannot be proven by the text.
- “If moral choice is voluntary then we need wisdom to know what to do. Freedom from the law and sin calls us to serve one another in love, live by the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit, through heavenly wisdom, humility...anyone who knows the good he ought to do and who doesn’t do it, sins.” This is summarizing instead of analyzing, finding the message about what should be instead of an analysis of what is.
- “By these standards Jesus was not a ‘sinner’ as referred to by the Pharisees.” This is judging Jesus by a standard instead of trying to analyze what actual standard prevailed.

Let the dead bury the dead. *Billy Graham*

- “Jesus is just in disobeying God’s old commandment because he is God... God places the law of love over the Old Testament law to observe the Sabbath, meaning that Jesus’ actions to heal the blind man were just.” This is literally “just”ifying instead of analyzing.
- “Truth requires such harder things such as faith. People such as the Pharisees could not see Truth because they did not have faith... Truth is more important than law and must never be concealed.” This is pontificating instead of analyzing.
- “Therefore they are unable to follow the one true Savior because doing so requires too much sacrifice on their part.” Instead of analyzing why, the writer opines about what they did not do.
- “Jesus Christ is justice, and therefore, justice is perfectly maintained.” This is yet another example of convergent thinking where the writer’s world view is proven without regard for analyzing the issue of why others acted differently from the Christian expectation.
- “The entire law is summed up in one command: ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ This is not the law of man, but a higher law from the true form as shown through Jesus.” This writer judges what “should have been” instead of the lessons behind what did, actually, happen.
- “...and kept them from the freedom promised in Christ.” Again, this is judgemental and about what did not happen instead of what did.

I'd rather have made the cover of The Rolling Stone. Oprah

- "...the blind man becomes a representative for the form of man, showing how the New Testament meaning of life is to love as an instrument for God's glory." This sermonizes instead of analyzing: Great Books students want to understand the blind man, not make him a representative.
- "Even if a sinful man worked in faith through love on the Sabbath, he would be justified by John and Paul. So Christ's qualification for justification is augmented in this situation because he is a perfect being." This is judgemental, justifies instead of analyzing, and becomes a sermon instead of the analysis of an academic issue. The argument here is not that such moral positions lack worth, but they are not the stuff of an analytic pursuit of the truth of the matter.

While such observations might (or might not) be appropriate in a church setting, they are not proper conclusions to a thesis making an argument about a significant academic problem. Each of the student statements above is more of a sermon or a judgment than a strict analysis of an underlying academic issue. Perhaps each example reflects the student's personal beliefs, but the intent of a Great Books essay is at least to accept the pretense that one can simply observe the most truthful analysis that can be made, objectively (as if that were possible) and without revealing one's own personal belief system. The evidence and the argument are simply the truth, regardless of what one might prefer to believe. The argument here is that this is a worthy academic discipline and skill to develop, and it need not interfere with one's personal beliefs or commitments.

CHARTING BY THE STARS OF THE GREATS
AND THE 10 GREAT IDEAS



Chaldean shepherds, ranging trackless fields
Beneath the concave of unclouded skies
Spread like a sea, in boundless solitude,
Looked on the pole star, as on a guide
And guardian of their course, that never closed His steadfast eye.

William Wordsworth, *Excursion*

The Cultural Context of the Great Ideas

The great ideas are the “attendant” ideas to a person’s world view that presumably influences all of his choices. Many of the patterns of the relationships one forms among these ideas are informed by the Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Christian aspects of one’s heritage. For example, by having been “the chosen of God,” part of the Jewish tradition stresses socially responsible programs that evidence God’s love for the world. The Greek tradition associated with Homer emphasizes the value of family and honor. The Greek intellectual tradition of Plato and Aristotle emphasize the a priori values of forms of the Good, like Justice, Happiness, Truth. The Western Christian tradition has tended to emphasize individual moral choice. The Roman tradition has an implicit presence in patriotism, in being a nation of laws, and in a sense of administrative duty.

Such clarifications of world view assist in practical applications. For example, should you find yourself on a “jury” (whether an actual jury, an ethics committee, a grievance committee, etc.) or having to make a judgment in a leadership position, to what extent do you make allowances for positions different than your own?

P.S. Are Grace and Mercy great ideas? If so, how do they apply to the adjudication of secular issues?

“He who cannot draw on three thousand years is living hand to mouth.” Goethe

We hope to see the movie version. *John and Styles White*

The Great Questions

Mortimer Adler identified 102 ideas that had preoccupied western writers throughout history. Each of those ideas has a worthy claim, and can be explored over time with the aid of Adler's *syntopicon* essays on each idea in the first two volumes of his Great Books set. For the purposes of the *Enchiridion*, however, a primer list seems more prudent. Adler himself recognized the utility of focusing first on the most essential group of ideas in his book, *Six Ideas*. He cited the critical six as: Liberty, Equality, Justice, Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Years of Great Books discussions has found that a slightly longer, and slightly different set of "issues" (closely related to specific ideas) consistently come up in the classroom conversation about the Great Books.

Great Questions

Of course there are other questions that do not fit easily within the classification of ideas. For example, is this really a face that could have launched 1000 ships?

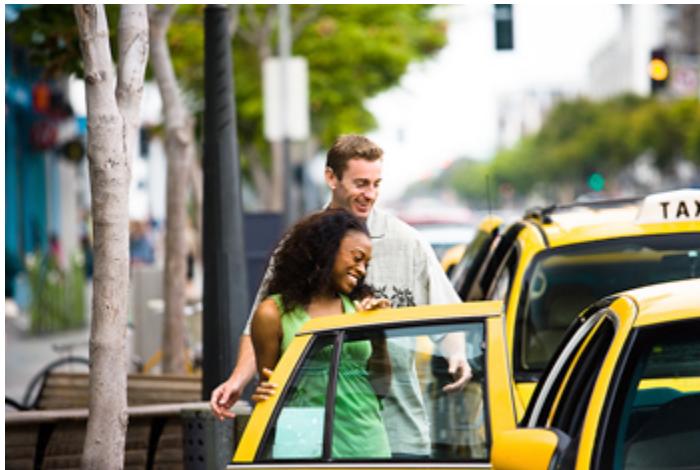


Another great question: What, Me Worry?



The Ten Essential Questions/Issues are usually less specific:

1. Who is the “hero”? What does that have to say about human capacity? What does that have to say about the admirer? Who might one want to emulate? Who is the man who could teach Shakespeare? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the hero? How is this hero archetypal?
2. What does human nature entail? Is it basically good or evil? What is the inherent relationship of reason and emotion? What is the relationship of nurture and nature? To what extent can someone else be likely trusted? To what extent is man seen as an animal who evolved vs. a spiritual being? What are the roles of gender and sex? Is a sense of humor a part of human nature?



For example:

The sight was ordinary enough; what was strange was the rhythmical order with which my imagination had invested it; and the fact that the ordinary sight of two people getting into a cab had the power to communicate something of their own seeming satisfaction. The sight of two people coming down the street and meeting at the corner seems to ease the mind of some strain, I thought, watching the taxi turn and make off. Perhaps to think, as I had been thinking these two days, of one sex as distinct from the other is an effort. It interferes with the unity of the mind. Now that effort had ceased and that unity had been restored by seeing two people come together and get into a taxicab.

3. God? How is "God" to be defined, termed, and discussed? What is the relationship of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious? Does essence precede existence, or existence precede essence? What about teleological, cosmological and ontological arguments for the existence of God? What is the relationship of God to Nature? To Fate? To Providence? To Luck? To Beauty? To Man?
4. Good and evil? What is good and what is evil? Whence came evil? Is it a lack of true knowledge? Disobedience? Is it based in pride?

A missing of the mark? Does evil have a separate and independent existence? Based in pride, boredom, greed, need? How does one know if something is right or wrong? What is the source of conscience? Are there "lesser evils?" Is the only thing necessary for the forces of evil to prevail, enough good men (sic) to do nothing?

5. Freedom and Liberty? What is the difference between liberty and license? Freedom of thought? Expression? To vote? To choose? To walk safely? To dissent? To civil disobedience? Of the Press? Religious? What are the limits of freedom?
6. Truth and Knowledge? Is truth relative or absolute? What is true? How does one know? What constitutes evidence? Proof? What constitutes valid knowledge? What kind of knowledge is more important than other kinds of knowledge? What is the relationship of knowledge of the mind and knowledge of the heart? What is the relationship of instinct, intuition, reason, logic, empirical evidence, revelation? What is the relationship of the universal and the particular? What constitutes a cause and an effect? Is it a matter of opinion or truth?
7. What is the relationship of the individual and society? Like Socrates, "after all isn't a town greater than a man?" Or, like Emerson, "after all isn't a man greater than a town?" What is the proper relationship between selfish and unselfish; personhood

and individuality; internal vs. external locus of control; duty to self or to others?

8. Government and Authority? The various forms of government have what advantages and disadvantages? Conservative or liberal? Horizontal or vertical? Consolidated or diffuse? Egalitarian or hierarchical? Republican or Democrat? Whose vested interests are being most served? Obey, question, disobey? Whose call is it? Who is responsible? What is the source of authority? Is man to serve the law, or the law to serve man?

9. Justice? Is it a case of differential (earned difference) or rectificatory (a case in which everyone should be treated exactly the same) justice? Equity or equality? Should Justice be blind? Is fair to be equal or proportional? What is the purpose of punishment?

10. The meaning of life? What is the meaning of life? What is the relationship of "meaning" and "truth?" Time: rich and money: poor or vice versa? What are the respective claims of Justice? Truth? Happiness? Love? God? Is it based more in "being" or "becoming?" Is it found in the journey or the destination? Quality or quantity? Based in individuality or community? Nice or candid? For what would one sacrifice one's life?



Larger Questions

While these ten have been found to be the issues that drive most Great Books conversations (and contributions), such dialogue benefits from the context of metacognition, the thinking about the thinking. What's missing from the conversation? What is being overlooked? Are the issues being oversimplified or made overly complicated? Different emphases among responses to the great issues may be due to a certain dynamic tension between compelling alternatives. These larger questions have their own special importance, but for coming to a deeper understanding of a text's implicit world view and contribution to the great conversation, the ten questions are consistently helpful.

Identifying a given work's assumptions about each of the ten ideas above helps one grasp the author's implicit world view. In this context it is helpful to grapple with the author's most basic emphasis. With this working knowledge of the text, looking below the surface, what is the kernel of the author's main idea? A great sauce needs to be reduced to its most essential flavor. For all the complexity of Plato's *The Republic*, it is a worthy academic exercise to try to reduce it to its most fundamental idea. Arguably for Plato that idea comes down to the implications of Justice being the highest form of the Good. One could argue that his more fundamental idea was his conception of the Forms of the Good, and that would not be wrong. However, it is his understanding of Justice that leads to the ins and outs of everything within his

I don't know. Jeff Spicoli

conception of *The Republic*, from why the Philosopher Kings should rule and the idea that women have the same capacity for rationality, to the ideas that Justice is found most completely in Differentiation, and that censorship is necessary. One wants to discover as best as possible that kernel of an idea that allows one, then, to reconstitute the whole of the work.

Make no mistake; the Great Books are overwhelming. Academic careers are sometimes made on research into just one of the great works. Only a handful of people have probably read them all, and presumably some professor could write an exam on some aspect of the works yet another professor might not pass.

The goal especially in undergraduate education is simply to develop working knowledge of the most select texts. Even with that more modest goal, the key is to simplify, simplify, simplify. In more academic terms, to delimit, delimit, delimit.

In educational terms, the student requires some scaffolding to help organize and make some sense of the whole. Holistic educational psychology suggests the great value to first deriving a meaningful overview. With such a perspective the student might spend a lifetime seeking wisdom from Great Books, occasionally tweaking the overview, but always with a sense of the widest possible perspective.

Adler recognized this need for a meaningful overview in emphasizing that six from his list of one hundred and two ideas of Western Thought have

Perhaps the greatest academic work since
Yale's Eric Segal's *Love Story*. Jay Mathews

had preeminent importance. As mentioned, Adler identifies the special importance of Beauty, Goodness, Justice, Equality, Truth, and Liberty. Again, this Enchiridion borrows from that list, but finds a list of ten ideas and issues are more inclusive of the primary concerns of the Great Conversation, and are helpful in coming to understand the implicit and respective world views that form the fundamental basis for each and every Great Book. A work like Machiavelli's *The Prince* may emphasize Government/Authority/Power with little reference, for example, to God. A work like Plato's *The Republic* may specifically address each and every one of these ten ideas/issues. In either case it is extremely useful, even necessary, for the Great Books student to come to an understanding of which idea or combination of ideas to which that work makes the greatest contribution in the Great Conversation AND what the implicit assumptions of that work are about each and every idea as it forms the work's basic world view.

Although Machiavelli does not write specifically that the ends justify the means, his *The Prince* does seem to establish that to be the case when it comes to the Prince doing what is necessary to protect the stability of the State. The work makes an important contribution to the historical western conversation about Government.

Plato's *The Republic* had much to say about Government, but eventually has much more to say about a particular understanding of Justice.

Again, the key is for the student to come to a defensible argument about a work's major contribution to the Great Conversation, and an appre-

ciation of the work's underlying world view. This is a monumental task, but becomes somewhat easier with persistent practice, especially over a series of Great Books courses.

While one may profitably start with Adler's list of six ideas, or the Enchiridion's list of ten ideas/issues, the preferable plan will be for the student to develop a personal list of comparable ideas that can be used to get at the most basic meaning of a text. Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine that any list will not have included consideration of the ten major ideas/issuues and their attendant basic questions.

One essential feature of these questions is that they are also all essential to a personal quest for meaning. As Goethe is quoted and paraphrased multiple times herein, without one's three thousand years of history one is living hand to mouth.

The ideas/issues and the Great Books themselves become more memorable when informing one's own search for meaning.

Meanwhile, a good place to start: what does Plato contribute to the conversation about each and every one these ten ideas?

The student must find the most definitive texts, but arguably Plato associates God with what he refers to as the forms of the good; that good includes Justice, Truth, Beauty, and evil occurs when one lacks true knowledge; Justice is the highest form of the good and in a word is characterized by "differentiation" (i.e. where everything has and performs its suitable role in The Republic; his Republic has little in common with the American mean-

ing of that term, and might seem totalitarian except for his confidence in the philosopher kings who are to rule the Republic; perhaps the philosopher kings are the implicit heroes, but only in terms of being the most advanced, everyone is valued for contributing to the Republic what they do best; doing the best for the republic seems to be the key to the meaning of life for most people, but the greatest joy is for those who philosophize; freedom has little in common with modern understandings of the term, with the thought that one is free to do what one ought; truth is to be sought through the dialectic, but since Truth is a Form, cannot be fully realized in the world.

With regard to the relationship of the individual to the State, Socrates takes the extreme of "after all isn't a town greater than a man?" The key to human nature is man's ability to be rational. On the one hand these short statements about Plato's ideas and world view are oversimplifications; on the other hand holistic educational psychology suggests the critical importance of first coming to an overall understanding, then going back repeatedly to test that understanding.

The enormous detail and complexity of the Great Books can be overwhelming. When they seem more than one can take in, it is highly recommended to back track to an initial, basic, working knowledge of the text.

With such an emphasis on Truth, how is it that Plato proposes censorship? Truth is an important form of the Good, but when push comes to shove, a way of thinking about this issue is that because Justice is seen as a

Would be more useful printed on Charmin. *Bill Murray*

higher form of the Good and that Justice can best be represented in the full complexity of the State, and that State must be stable, Justice may require censorship as necessary.

With a basic grasp of the overall world view, one can then better understand, for example, why Plato is so critical of democracies. From his perspective on Justice only the best and brightest would be most suited for determining the best interests of the State.

KISS (Keep it simple, Stupid). At least for a first reading of a text one must be careful to see the forest and not get lost among all the trees. Read especially for the key ideas, the relationships of those ideas, and how they form an implicit world view. Always keep the mind's eye looking for the particular contribution to the Great Conversation. (And recognize and accept that one will most likely retain any passages that answered a question one already had: accumulated knowledge has its own value, it is just more idiosyncratic to that particular reader.)

Find a great books program and send your kids there;
they need something obvious to rebel against. *Paul Shuttleworth*

ASKING QUALITY QUESTIONS



Asking quality questions is an integral aspect of Socratic dialogue and the Great Books Colloquia. Great Books teachers notoriously ask quality questions, but it is probably even more important for students to learn to generate their own. The following is Taxonomy for recognizing students' advancement with this skill.

The Five Levels of Quality Questions (Holistically)

Level One: The beginner asks only factual questions or gives the asked-about definitions. Perhaps the student does not understand the reading. Perhaps the questions do not communicate what the student intends. Perhaps the question goes unfinished. But the student asks questions, and this is a place to start.

Level Two: The students show a willingness to engage the text, but often personalize the questions, reacting to issues the asker has, rather than the issues raised by the text itself.

A Level Two Question shows interest in the ideas of meanings of the text, but as compared to Level Three questions, may do one or more of these things:

- jumps to the “moral,” “lesson,” “application” prematurely, i.e., before grappling with the deeper intent and meaning of the text
- is too global, too open ended, too general, and often in a way that does not clearly relate to the actual positions in the text
- evidences the trampoline effect, i.e., are a “the text made me think of____” kind of question
- places exterior values on the text, but towards a personal opinion, not towards clarifying the text
- asks about external issues to the text that cannot be answered in discussion of the text (questions about the author, history, etc.)
- prejudges the accuracy or truthfulness of the text
- if a comparison/contrast question, looks for agreement or disagreement, yes or no, similar or dissimilar, either/or, instead of probing the significance of any similarity or disparity
- asks a question not truly answerable by the text, often speculating on what might have been or be, for an opinion rather than an interpretation, and is tangential to the text itself

- more likely raises a question of fact or basic comprehension rather than interpretation
- is likely unclear, vague, and even incomprehensible, not focusing on important content

Level Three: The question evidences a concern for both the explicit and implicit ideas of the text. It avoids many of the pitfalls of Level Two. The students may not yet ask interpretive questions with the kind of precision and insight of Level Four, but they do identify basic textual issues that need to be addressed.

A Level Three Question avoids the problems of Level Two Questions, but falls short of the clarity and insight of the interpretive questions associated with the Great Books Foundation. A Level Three Question:

- may use apt text in posing the question
- obviously looks for possible inconsistencies and contradictions within the texts
- deals with the immediate implications of the text, not the speculative
- suggests a pattern of thought about the text's content
- looks for connections among the ideas of the text
- probes, gets at assumptions, at meaning, looks for the basic, core meaning
- seeks close understanding before judging any moral, lesson, or application

Now I understand why I didn't take Great Books. *Rodney Dangerfield*

Level Four: At this level, the student asks clear, interpretive questions about the parts and the whole of a text. (The model for Level Four is set by the “Interpretive Questions” of The Great Books Foundation, and can be found in *An Introduction to Shared Inquiry*.) Characteristics of a Level Four Question include:

- provides thought provoking inquiry; often involves character motivation
- indicates surprise at how the author has used language
- relates to a prominent detail of the reading
- identifies a passage that can be read more than one way
- establishes connections between passages, characters, incidents, ideas
- creates genuine doubt about the answer
- gets at the text’s deeper meanings

Level Five: The questions have a rare and remarkable level of sophistication with a sure sense of the text’s most fundamental issues. The questions may build on each other or may come at the basic issue from more than one vantage point. A Level Five Question is clear, consistent, and meets most of the usual qualifications of a good question without being wed to any such list.



As a whole, Level Five Questions represent the generative questions that help unpack the text.



Asking Quality Questions

The following materials may (emphasis on “may”) help you improve your skill at generating higher quality questions. The last paragraphs below are also extremely important in emphasizing that these are not the only kind of questions to be asking about the works you read.

Question Stems: The following question stems may help you jump start your quality questions about your reading (from Walsh’s review of the work by Rosenshine, p. 118, *Quality Questioning*) (slightly adapted):

How are...and...alike?

What is the main idea/purpose/intent of...?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?

How does...affect...?

How does...tie in with what we already know?

How is...related to...?

What is a new example of...?

What conclusions can you draw about...?

Why it is important that...?

(additionally, p. 113, Alison King, "Facilitating Learning Through Guided Student-Generated Questioning", *Educational Psychologist*, 27(1), 111-126.)

How would you use...to...?

What would happen if...?

What do we already know about...?

Explain why...

Explain how...

What is the meaning of...?

Why is...important?

What is the difference between...and...?

How are...and...similar?

What is the best..., and why?

What are some possible solutions for the problem of...?

Compare...and...with regard to...

How does...effect...?

What do you think causes...?

Do you agree or disagree with this statement...? Support your answer.

Generic Questions: Perhaps these generic questions will help you identify patterns in the reading:

How does this idea/proposal/question relate to what I already know about the topic?

What is the main purpose/intent of this idea/proposal/question?

What are the five important ideas that relate to the main idea?

What is the logic of the question, proposal, document? The organization?

What are the key words/terms? Do I know what they all mean?

What special things does the issue make me think about?

The question stems and generic question are only devices to help you find your own generative questions. What do such generative questions entail? They help you to:

- assess the landscape
- discover core questions
- create images of possibilities
- evolve workable strategies

The search for great questions is never completed.

Walsh's criteria of "generative questions" (based on work by David Perkins, p. 58) may help you recognize when you have asked one. Her criteria include:

Centrality—Does the question focus on content that is central to the subject matter or curriculum?

Accessibility—Does the question enable students to make connections by, for example, relating new ideas to prior knowledge, finding personal examples,

A man after my own heart—he failed gloriously. Cornel West

or looking for patterns?

Richness—Is the question robust enough to encourage a wide variety of connections and extrapolations?

Finding the generative questions requires “big picture” thinking, and working on your metacognitive anchoring (your thinking about how you think) may help. The following prompts may help with Metacognitive Anchoring (first seven from Frank Lyman, p. 120, *Quality Questioning*):

What does this remind me of, or how is it similar to something else I know?

Why did this happen, or what caused this?

What evidence supports this?

How valid are these assumptions?

Is this ethical or right? How should I evaluate this?

Do I believe what is being said here?

What point of view is guiding these statements?

What assumptions are made about human nature? (good or evil, relation of emotion and rationality?)

Are there implicit or explicit religious or spiritual beliefs, or understanding of God? If so, do they tend to include or exclude members of the organization?

What makes something “good” or “bad”?

What is most valued, most valuable? What are the presumptions about the “meaning of life” as lived out during the working day?

What is most unique? What, potentially, is its most valuable contribution?

Who or what has "authority"?

Is there anything or anyone "heroic"? How and why?

What is the most valued way of "knowing" (logic, reason, emotion, intuition, empiricism, emotion, authority, etc.)? Is there a presumption that truth is absolute or relative?

Is the individual or group/society valued more highly?

Are there "issues of Justice"? If so, is the emphasis on "differentiation" or "equality"?

Is there anything about freedom and responsibility? What?

THE SET OF CRITERIA ABOVE ARE NOT INTENDED TO DETRACT FROM THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF THE "METACOGNITIVE" QUESTIONS THAT THE READER/THINKER/QUESTIONER USES WHILE READING/STUDYING A TEXT OR ISSUE. These questions used in process includes such queries as 1) What does this remind me of, or how is it similar to something else I know? Why did this happen, or what caused this? What evidence supports this? How valid are these assumptions? Is this ethical or right? How should I evaluate this? Do I believe what is being said here? Is the writer trying to persuade me? What point of view is guiding these statements?

THE SET OF CRITERIA ABOVE ARE NOT INTENDED TO DETRACT FROM THE GREATER IMPORTANCE OF THE LARGER QUESTIONS.

Reading teachers have described these as “reading beyond the lines.” Walsh and Sattes describe them as “create” questions, where students “use their imaginations to go beyond what they have learned or been told.” Mark Edmundson describes these larger questions: “... (I) could describe, analyze, interpret literature with no little flair...I was failing...to take (the) second step. All well and good to ask ‘what does this book mean?’ But one also needs follow-up questions: ‘Is it true?’ ‘Can it be the basis for a life?’...It’s a technique for causing trouble, this kind of questioning...But I’m convinced--and experience has borne me out--that if reading of secular books is going to matter, we need to look at them...not just as occasions for interpretive ingenuity, for showing how smart we might be, but as guides to future life, as occasions, sometimes, for human transformation.” Mark Edmundson, Teacher.

Such questions become the most important questions. However, we think 1) that such questions will be more genuine if based on a deep understanding of the relevant texts or issues, and 2) that such questions are so personal, that it is more appropriate to base our “measure” on the more academic questions of interpretive and generative knowledge. As the Great Books Foundation writes, “Interpretation (and deep learning) is the main purpose

He could have at least mentioned me. Donald Trump

of a Great Books discussion, so most questions raised...will be interpretive. But factual questions can bring to light evidence in support of interpretation and can clear up misunderstandings.

Questions of evaluation can introduce a personal dimension to discussion once interpretive issues have been resolved...Answers to evaluative questions are as individual and as varied as the participants themselves." Thus with the Great Books, academic emphasis is on the interpretive and generative questions, but only in the context of Metacognitive questions, factual questions, imaginative questions, evaluative questions, and transformative possibilities.

INFORMED OPINIONS

Two random sermonettes:

- Simply eschew uninformed opinions. They are not worth expressing or listening to. Spend some quality time thinking about controversies you have found interesting, and spend time with someone more knowledgeable about these topics, before hazarding a relatively informed opinion, that will remain open to change forever.
- Don't rush to judgment. Some one detail often remains elusive for a long time, that consequently changes the entire perspective. How fortunate for Achilles that he stayed his sword and listened to Priam.

LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

Adler has written an entire book about speaking and listening skills. They are counterpoints to his ideas about writing and reading. As with read-

ing, one wants to listen until one has a good understanding of the speaker's essential idea, which is more often than not premised on one of the ten great ideas and issues discussed elsewhere. As with writing, one wants to speak when one has recognized a problem that deserves to be addressed.

CREATING AN IMPRESSION

When a padawan recites from memory a relevant Great Books quotation, others often marvel that that student seems to know everything. This is curious because citing one thing is just as likely to mean that the student knew nothing else. But as Vonnegut says, "and so it goes." The key is to find about a dozen such quotes that can almost be guaranteed to work somewhere along a discussion line, and never to repeat one. Here are some potentially good ones that can often be slipped into a pregnant moment in a Great Books conversation.



As Aristotle says, the good is better when it is harder.

As Emerson says, who is the man who could teach Shakespeare?

As Nietzsche observes, the lambs will gang up to take down the bird of prey.

As Lord Acton (not Machiavelli) observed, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

As Dostoevsky observes, man will choose against self-interest to prove he has a choice.

As Camus says, there is much more in man to admire than to condemn.

As Sartre prefers, existential decisions can be made with the responsibility of all mankind in mind.

As Aristotle says, we are studying virtue to become virtuous, not merely to understand it.

The first time the novitiate quotes such luminaries, s/he may feel a bit self-conscious. Get over it.

STUDY AIDS

Even a classic like *The Iliad* has its slow places. So do not get lost. The Master Plots offer in a page to a page and a half a list of the major characters and plot points. This can be a great study aid helping the reader to fight through the more tedious pages while looking for the main ideas that drive the text. Master Plots are pointedly not Cliff Notes. Never ever use Cliff Notes; they tell one what to think about a text, and in that regard are almost

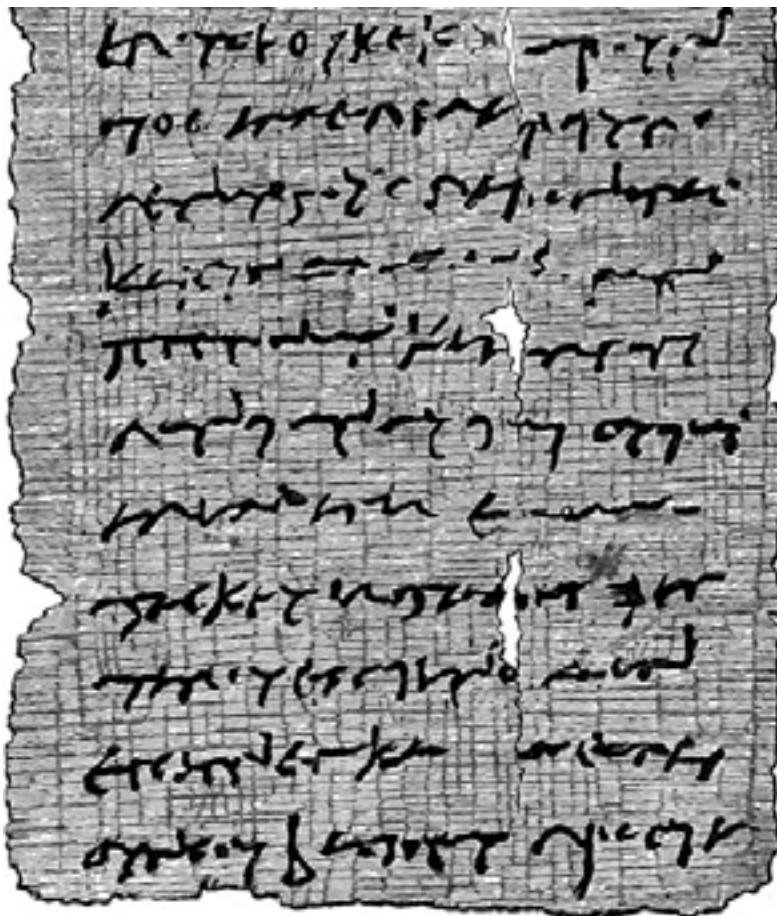
Terry Gilliam, Jack Kemp, Edward N. Gosuphal and
I went to Occidental College. President Obama

always wrong. The Master Plots do not do that; they simply help one make sure they are staying en route.

If the teacher/professor does not grade anonymously, impressions do count. The padawan would never ever leave an exam saying anything other than, "Excellent exam!" Do not give the teacher a cue to give you a lower grade. The padawan never asks the teacher a question that can be found out somewhere else nor asks the teacher what happened in a missed class, but consults someone else in the class. The padawan may do very well to find a problem that was not discussed in the class, come to a strong idea about the solution to that problem, and then compare notes with the teacher; such a meeting of the minds is not only a good reality check on understanding, but an astute way of making a strong impression.

Gosuphal could explain the A,B,Cs to Einstein.
The Reverend Jesse Jackson

CHAPTER IV: THE STUDY GUIDE:
ABOUT GREAT BOOKS
THE HISTORY--UPDATED



Who, What, When, Where, Why, How
(Editorial update, 2012)

Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins developed the original Great Books program at the University of Chicago in 1929. Besides their four course sequence and other educational programs, together in 1954 they created a

54 volume set of Great Books based around 102 separate ideas thought to be central to the great conversation of Western Civilization. While various Great Books programs in United States colleges and universities share some common interests and backgrounds, no formal relationship exists among them.

What they do share in common might be characterized by the notion that all of Western Civilization is a footnote on Plato and Aristotle, never mind that minimally the Hebrew, Roman, and Christian influences have had comparable influence on Western culture. Thus, even though, for example, Cicero was once much more central to higher education than Plato, probably all Great Books programs in the United States include Plato and Aristotle and then engage in heated, but poignant and relished, debates about what other books should be included in a finite amount of reading time.

The most commonly told story of the Great Books movement begins with John Erskine starting a Great Conversation program at Columbia, and one of his early students, Mortimer Adler, accepting a subsequent offer from University of Chicago President, Robert Hutchins, to take the program to Chicago in 1929.

Together Adler and Hutchins were responsible for the resurrection of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the 54 (later 60) volume set of *The Great Books of the Western World*, the set's Syntopicon which in two volumes traces 102 ideas like "Justice" through the works included in the set, the Great Books Foundation, the Great Ideas Foundation, the Aspen Institute, Jr. Great Books, Adult Reading groups, the transformation of St. John's College into a Great Books

college, and a host of other educational innovations.

Hutchins and Adler brought a missionary (and profit-making) zeal to their effort of keeping classical books central to a collegiate liberal arts education at a time when higher education had become increasingly specialized (overly specialized?) and career-oriented.

Hutchins and Adler saw their efforts as motivated by a democratic thrust to preserve the best in culture and to make it available to everyone. Others responded enthusiastically to this Great Books tradition because it was conserving heritage. Whether conservative or liberal, Adler's and Hutchins' ideas especially challenged professors and administrators in higher education. On the one hand, probably most professors expected students to be familiar with the likes of Plato and Aristotle. On the other hand, the list of 102 ideas that had presumably influenced all of higher education and Western Civilization was anathema to the expectations and dictates of academic disciplines. Great Books was not even inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary; it was non-disciplinary. One could not earn a Ph.D. in Great Books. No professional organizations existed to perpetuate Great Books. Hutchins' and Adler's ideas



were provocations. Without being based in an academic discipline, under what authority did they fall? Great Books may offer great tools for teaching citizenship, but what about helping students to get a job and/or into a specialized graduate program?

Despite such potential downsides, Great Books pro-

grams did spring up here and there, often due to the popularizing influence of Mortimer Adler. Although only one of several conflicting conceptions of curriculum (discussed later), Great Books did capture sufficient educational imagination to find a collegial home at places like Columbia University, University of Chicago, Baylor University, St. John's College, Pepperdine University, and others.

Most of these programs offer four or more Great Books classes, usually taught chronologically, most emphasizing some combination of works most often thought to have been the most influential on Western history. Adler argued, however, that great books should be chosen which remained relevant and worth any number of re-readings.

While Adler emphasized reading the Great Books without regard to secondary sources, existing Great Books colloquia may or may not emphasize footnotes and commentaries. While most of the Great Books programs emphasize small discussion groups, some curricula include lecture, and there is wide variance in what may be thought of as Socratic dialogue, Socratic pedagogy, shared inquiry, etc.



Proponents of Great Books programs do not necessarily follow Adler's preferences, but understanding the range of possibilities from which Great Books curricular decisions are made elucidates the preferences and biases of all such programs.

Those with intellectual curiosity have been reading the best works they can get their hands on for as long as there have been written books. In terms of the most recent historical emphasis on the “great books,” the Victorians of the late 19th Century England put a premium on great books as the key to a liberal arts education. Matthew Arnold expressed the seminal idea that culture is defined as “to know the best that had been said and thought in the world.”

In terms of the visibility of a Great Books approach to higher education, John Erskine started a “Great Conversation” program at Columbia in the early 20th Century. One of his students was Mortimer Adler, who was asked in 1929 by University of Chicago President, Robert Hutchins, to start a Great Books program at Chicago. Together they were the major proponents and popularizers of Great Books through the Great Books Collection and numerous related programs, books, television appearances, speaking engagements, discussion programs.

Great Books programs are not the same from place to place. The reasons for offering such programs can be dramatically different. While preserving the classics is a conserving undertaking, any Great Books program challenges the historical trend in education to emphasize careers and specialized knowledge in favor of a Liberal Arts education of the whole person for a meaningful life as a citizen.

Even Adler and Hutchins had major disagreements about how Great Books should be run. Adler especially emphasized the work done by the students on their own. The students were not asked to, and were in fact

discouraged from, reading attendant scholarly interpretations, encyclopedias, or works that delved into the historical circumstances of the work's production. The students were to confront authors of Great Books face-to-face.

As Tim Lacy observed, "This is one of the great apparent ironies in the history of the Great Books idea: academicians seemingly undercutting the academic world through the reading of Great Books without scholarly aid. These men believed that the excellence of the Great Books was best absorbed while one tried independently to uplift one's mind to the level of the text."

Lacy went on to say that, "Adler and Hutchins expected their students to encounter excellence and permanent, universal values. Even if the excellence of a particular work is not appreciated, readers sharpen their understanding of what they believe excellence to be."

Lacy finds a metaphor to capture what helps all Great Books students, regardless how much specific information they retain. "While objective criteria, or standards, do exist in art and literature, the Great Books can support a more subjective, diverse view of culture – so long as excellence is the aspiration. Permanent, universal values must be encountered in the context of the promotion of a common good, a common culture. A few Great Books promoters, Adler and Stringfellow Barr, the former president of St. John's College in Annapolis, have used the analogy of a puppy gnawing on a bone: our minds are continually sharpened and strengthened through contact with the bone that is the Great Books."



WHAT GREAT BOOKS IS AND IS NOT

While Great Books adherents sometimes rhapsodically talk like Great Books is the only way to the light, historically Great Books represents but one of several competing and conflicting conceptions of Curriculum. For example, five concepts of curriculum (see Elliot Eisner's *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum*) have vied for pre-eminence as a model for America's schools: the Rationalist; the Cognitive Processes; the Personal Relevance; the Social Adaptation or Reconstruction; and Curriculum as Technology.

Those advocating Curriculum as Technology believe that every learnable skill can be broken down into components and taught step by step. Everything from reading to golf can be managed by breaking the skill down into its constituent parts and then learned step-by-step.

The Social Adaption defenders identify all that the society needs, and help students learn accordingly. Whether Driver's Education, Career Education, Consumer Education, or Education for Citizenship, social needs are to be analyzed and the appropriate curricular strategy devised to meet those needs.

The Social Reconstructionists are not so sanguine about Society as it is and devise the curriculum around topics meant to change the world accordingly. Women's rights, Peace Education, and Cultural Pluralism inform curricular changes to meet those social needs.

The Personal Relevance curriculum developers worry much less about social, political, and economic needs and much more about person-

al affect, growth, self-realization. From this perspective “know thyself” means to understand one’s own emotions, emotional growth, and personal relationships with others.

The Cognitive Processes advocates care less about content and more about learning how to think. What a student reads matters far less than that the student learn to read, whether reading a classic or a comic book. Learning the scientific method, regardless the significance of the content of the experiment, matters most.

The Rationalists, then, resist the curriculum as technology because they argue complex ideas do not readily break down into a series and set of discrete skills. They resist the activity mind-set of Social Adaptation and Reconstruction, emphasizing instead the necessity of being grounded in one’s three thousand years of history first.

The Rationalists resist the Personal Relevance emphasis because it places an undue emphasis on emotion and affect rather than reason and logic. They tend to “fart in the general direction” of the Cognitive Processes defenders as trivializing education by their thought that content can be divorced from process.

Thus, in terms of conflicting conceptions of curriculum, the Rationalists argue that because the capacity for rationality is mankind’s greatest asset, reason must be developed, and in no better place than in a thorough study of the greatest books.

Great Books programs are often recognized as the challenge to the

status quo that they are (despite the study of Great Books being thought of as a “conservative” response to the world) because of the extremely different orientation to what Philip Jackson described as school’s “hidden curriculum.” The hidden curriculum includes the lessons taught in the students’ socialization process. The hidden curriculum entails the implicit lessons being learned while the ostensible subject matter is being delivered. For example, Jackson describes how schools teach “power” via obedience to school authority. Great Books students are often quite annoying when coming to the belief that some virtue like Truth or Justice claims a higher authority than the mere caprice of an individual teacher or individual school.

Jackson finds that schools are most likely teach the student to work for the teacher’s praise instead of self-realization. Once Great Books students get over the initial intimidation of the Great Books, they are often much more intellectually curious, and then more prone to work towards answers to their own questions, than for the approval of a teacher.

With regard to the hidden curriculum Elliot Eisner observes that schools most ordinarily teach compliance. For programs that teach Great Books from one particular perspective, for example an Augustinian viewpoint, compliance may be an undergirding value. Nonetheless, most Great Books readers find themselves thinking independently, and thus are very often less susceptible to an emphasis on compliance with things as given.

Bernice McCarthy developed 4MAT as an approach to developing

The Dude abides. *Jeff Bridges*

curriculum. She found that students' learning preferences tended to be classifiable by one of four different quadrants. Like the Personal Relevance conception of Curriculum, Quadrant One students tended to prefer classroom experiences that are personally and emotionally meaningful. Quadrant Two students are those most consonant with the assumptions of Great Books: these students want to understand ideas. Quadrant Three students want to know how things work. Auto mechanics and scientists are usually in this quadrant. Quadrant Four students want to make something new, and emphasize activity.

While Great Books often have much to say about emotion and affect that can be personally relevant, and are not necessarily anathema to learning how something works or in creating change because one comes to understand, the most sanguine Great Books students are most often those who would be typified by Quadrant Two.

While Great Books may be found in schools in all social classes, they are most likely to be found and appreciated in the schools that Jean Anyon describes as the social elite. Students in working class schools are more likely to experience a curriculum in which they supply pre-specified answers to teacher questions, often distributed on work sheets. Middle Class students are given a bit more latitude; they are more likely to be tested, for example, by multiple choice exams. Affluent-professional teachers most often give students the opportunity to produce creative projects in response to whatever was ostensibly contained in the official curriculum. The social-elite students

Is it true that Gosuphal bought his set of Great Books for only \$300?
Suzie Orman

read original works, discuss them, write essays on them. Most Great Books programs emphasize the sort of curriculum associated with the social elite schools.

While many Great Books teachers persist in the staircase approach to a reading, working page by page, chapter by chapter, canto by canto through an entire work, Great Books remains the citadel for those teachers who prefer what Eisner has identified as the spider web approach. A work is tackled first as a whole, and since there are interstices that connect all parts of the web, any treatment or discussion of the text need not be sequential. One looks for the inter-connections.

As suggested above except for those Great Books programs taught from a very specific perspective, for example the Augustinian one, reading the Great Books tends to teach divergent rather than convergent thinking. The range of perspectives from the Great Books and the Great Conversation makes for being able to look at any issue from a variety of points of view. Divergent thinking also has particular value at the presumably elite American universities. For example, a study at the University of Chicago into why some students did much better than others, even when matched with incoming grade points average and SAT scores, found that those who did best were those most comfortable with tolerating ambiguity and manipulating



abstract language. While one's cognitive style is a separate issue from virtue, America's top schools are thought to emphasize the flexible cognitive style that tends to come with a Great Books education.

In terms of values, Edward Spranger found that individuals tended to emphasize one of six competing values. He identified six value vectors: economic, religious, social, aesthetic, political, and theoretical. While particular Great Books emphasize each and every value on his list, the students most consonant with the Great Books approach to education tend to be those most oriented to the theoretical. The *theoretical* emphasizes the search for the truth. (This need not mean that the Great Books programs need to be limited to those who emphasize that value. All students need to have some level of success with each value: one outstanding Great Books student oriented towards the personal relationships suggested by the social value simply wanted to understand better the egg heads with whom she associated.)

The Adlerian approach to Great Books differs from virtually all other approaches to curriculum with its emphasis on ahistoricity. For example, the St. John's Johnnies successfully discuss the Great Books in the present tense. Plato describes, not described, Justice as differentiation. The difference in tense is extremely important because it represents Adler's notion that ideas and the great conversation have a life of their own that exists outside of time and space, and thus, are always relevant and engaging in the here and now.

The Great Books tendency to emphasize works associated with Literature and Philosophy tends to be something of a disservice to the aesthetics

of Literature. Mortimer Adler observed that Literature is Philosophy taught by example. When Antigone violates Creon's edict and buries her traitor brother citing the command of higher laws, she becomes the fodder for much meaningful ongoing discussion about Justice. While that emphasis may do some injustice to the aesthetic success of Sophocles, it does, nonetheless, make for excellent discussion of ideas. As with any paradigm, its strengths are best appreciated in the context of the best criticism. Great Books tends to create moments of scintillating discussion because of the meeting of ideas and literary characters, but at least privately, a Great Books student is well advised to remember to pause and smell the roses.

While Plato and Aristotle are fundamental to any consideration of Western Civilization, and while it has been said all of Western Civilization is a footnote on Plato and Aristotle, it is fairer to say most of Western Civilization is a footnote on the Greek, Roman, Hebrew, and Christian intermingled legacies. On any given day on a United States school campus these four traditions remain undergirding presences. A Greek sense of honor, family allegiances, and a belief in a priori truth; a Roman sense of administration, leadership, and duty especially to the country; a Hebrew sense of showing God's will to the world through social programs; and a Christian sense of right and wrong: all pervade ongoing value discussions. Even existential and nihilistic perspectives reference that tradition to which they react. While the Great Books come out of a number of different influences, the emphasis on

Some things don't improve with thyme. Wolfgang Puck

Socratic dialogue inherently emphasizes those Greek antecedents.

Finally, for this discussion of what Great Books is and is not, Great Books tends to rely upon more discussion than is usual in most teacher dominated classrooms. While various Great Books programs offer from none to some lecture on those Great Books, presumably any curriculum thought to be a Great Books program acknowledges some sort of debt to the dialectical process and Socratic dialogue. Research on learning suggests that students learn at least as much by talking as by listening, so this must be a good inclusion to the teaching-learning process.

However, what exactly Socratic dialogue entails is not nearly as clear as the wide use of the terminology would suggest. Some, especially in certain European programs, believe that Socratic dialogue should work towards consensus among discussants. Most American programs tend to be satisfied with surfacing salient divergent points of view about any issue being discussed.

Law Schools notoriously use the IRAC method as its form of Socratic dialogue: Issue; Rule; Analysis; Conclusion. The professor asks the student a question; the student gives an answer; the professor asks a subsequent question. The process establishes the issue inherent in a case study, the recall of precedent cases, and then leads to the analysis and a conclusion about the particular case. However, this can also become an incidence of "guess what's in the teacher's mind." If the student is only providing a set answer to a teacher's question, this is not truly Socratic dialogue.

Even in programs within the Great Books tradition as influenced by

Adler, there is a pointed difference in how discussions are led. The Great Books Foundation offers programs in “shared inquiry.” With shared inquiry the lead discussant generates interpretive questions, and discussants work with these questions towards a deeper understanding of a studied text. Such methodology can be used to great effect in leading Great Books discussions. However, Socrates himself never led a “shared inquiry” per se. Sometimes Socrates seemed to lead his discussants to pre-conceived places; other times a new idea or perspective seemed to emerge. Always the emphasis was on a dialectical process that got the discussants closer to the Truth, and since that Truth was a Form, it could never be fully known. In any instance Socrates did not merely ask questions. He was invariably the discussant who spoke the most, engaging all the other discussants in a manner that fleshed out the issue being considered. Socrates was sought out for these discussions. In that context Great Books students can, understandably, be interested in how the lead discussant approaches intellectual problems, as long as those results are organic, related to the ebb and flow of that discussion, and not a thinly disguised lecture.

For all those variations of Socratic dialogue, probably no Great Books discussion is ever truly Socratic simply because Socrates and his discussants discussed Truth strictly among themselves. Great Books students, by contrast, engage both the lead discussant and the mind of the author they are reading. Also, the discussions are likely to focus first on understanding that book, and then on what insight it lent to the discussion of Truth. Mortimer Adler is not

nearly the only one who believes that the Great Books tradition has something to say to everyone, not just the songs of 'mostly dead white men.'

In response to a question about conflicting conceptions of curriculum, noted educator and writer, Ralph Tyler, observed that schools had to accomplish the full variety of educational possibilities, of which a Great Books approach is just one. And except for a very few places like St. John's College, Great Books is but one program among many. Yet the Great Books have been shown to be able to illuminate an entire education because of the thoughtfulness and rigor that they bring to the consideration of an entire education.

Tim Lacy cites a number of non-white-male students about their experience of Great Books (Lacy: 369). Unless one attributes their conclusions to "false consciousness", he observes that "the Great Books can relate to everyone"; "I'm here to make myself a more intellectual person, regardless of my race, regardless of my background"; "look at the ideas behind them"; "From many students of color, learning about Western culture was a kind of multiculturalist experience"; "It could be argued that depriving students of color of this knowledge unintentionally results in a kind of racism"; "A primary concern is energizing students to read, and to read well." While the Great Books and the teaching of the Great Books and Great Books teaching need be scrutinized constantly for ways in which they might be unjust, the existence of the influence of these Great Books seems incontrovertible. Curiously most of those criticizing the Great Books of the Western World are well

Merely a shadow of reality. Caleb Clanton

versed in all the works included and simply want to make substitutions in what might be included within the limited set of volumes.

The truth remains that the Great Conversation has been an insulated conversation. The inevitable biases of the approach have historically favored some groups over others, including those who put a premium on reason, logic, argument, and abstraction over other competing values. Nonetheless, the ideas of the Great Conversation have, ironically, paradoxically, or inevitably, given rise to Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights, Environmentalism. And even if one believed counter to every premise of supposedly Western Thought, one might well study the Great Books if only to understand how any hegemony got this way. Further, it would seem patronizing to make assumptions about anyone else's interest in and purposes for reading the Great Books.

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING THE GREAT BOOKS

Adler's criteria

While it is commonly understood that the Great Books set was developed as either a cure for insomnia or to identify obsessive compulsive behavior, Adler mastered what George Orwell called doublespeak.

Mortimer Adler had several ideas on the criteria for selecting the Great Books (from *The Great Conversation*, 1952). Three criteria governed the selection of the works included. In the following condensed form he explained:

The first was their contemporary significance. Though the works chosen were written in different epochs or eras, they are not included here as

monuments of historical importance, but only by virtue of their dealing with issues, problems, or facets of human life that are of major concern to us today as well as at the time in which they were written. They are thus essentially timeless and universal, not confined to interests or circumstances that change from time to time and from place to place.

The second criterion was their re-readability. Most of the 450,000 to 500,000 books published in the West each year are not worth reading carefully more than once, if they are worth even that. In any year, there are not likely to be more than a few hundred intended for the general public that are worth reading carefully once; and, among them, few are worth reading carefully twice.

What distinguishes the Great Books from all others is that they are books intended for the general reader that are worth reading carefully many times or studying over and over again. Not all of them are endlessly or inexhaustibly re-readable in the course of a lifetime, as for example, the Homeric epics are. Also consider: the Greek tragedies, the dialogues of Plato, the treatises of Aristotle, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Plutarch's *Lives*, *The Confessions* of St. Augustine, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the plays of Shakespeare and the comedies of Moliere, the essays of Montaigne, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Dickens' *Little Dorritt*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. All the others not here mentioned approximate that high standard of being indefinitely re-readable for pleasure and profit or of being worth returning to again and

again for close examination and study.

The third controlling criterion was the extensive relevance to the great ideas of the thinking and writing done by the authors chosen. Readers will discover for themselves that, with few exceptions, each author selected has had something of significance to say about a large number of great ideas. This is what distinguished them from authors who either have nothing significant to say about any of the great ideas or else contribute significantly to only one, or at most, two, of the Great Ideas.

Two considerations did not enter into the choices made in the editorial process of constructing this set of books. One was the influence of an author or a book on later developments in literature or society. This factor alone did not suffice to merit inclusion in this set. Scholars may point out the extraordinary influence exerted by a certain book, but if that book did not meet the three criteria for selection, it was not chosen. The books chosen in terms of those three criteria were, in addition, also likely to have been influential in the course of history, but that by itself was never the basis of selection.

The second consideration not operative in the selective process was the truth of an author's opinions or views, or the truth to be found in a particular work. *It is mistakenly thought by many that the Great Books are recommended for reading and study because they are a repository of truth.* On all the fundamental subjects and ideas with which the Great Books deal, *some truths will be found in them, but on*

What, Me Worry? Alfred E. Newman

these very same subjects and ideas, many more errors or falsities will be found there (emphases added). The authors not only contradict each other; they often are guilty of contradicting themselves. No human work rises to the perfections of being devoid of logical flaws.

On any subject being considered, the relation between truth and error is that of one to many. The truth is always singular, while the errors it corrects are manifold. This fact should not be thought as invidious to the worth of reading the Great Books. On the contrary, it is of the greatest positive importance. No truth is well understood until and unless all the errors it corrects are also understood and all the contradictions found are resolved. It is in the context of a plurality of errors to be corrected and of contradictions to be resolved that the brilliance of the truth shines out and illuminates the scene.

HOW TO BECOME AN ACOLYTE: GETTING STARTED

While Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins did not invent "Great Books," they were the 20th Century's most tireless promoters of reading them. Consequently the prospective Great Books student has many places to find a place to start.

The public library probably has a classics section that includes most of the Great Books that can be checked out for free (with the obvious problem of not being allowed to mark them up...which becomes an irresistible habit). Dover Press has reprinted many of the classics, many available for two dollars or even less. The Great Books of the Western World are available in 54 and

60 volume sets and can be found on EBay at tremendous savings. The same is true of the slightly shorter and older Harvard Classics set.

Experience suggests that having someone with whom to discuss these books is either exceedingly important, or absolutely necessary. Reading partners, book groups, and programs established like those of the Great Books Foundation offer other places to start. A number of colleges and universities offer colloquia ranging from year-long programs to four year programs in the Great Books (see Appendix for a partial listing). The two campuses of St. John's College offer bachelor's and master's degrees in Great Books.

Requirements

The Republic was the best seller of its time. Although it is not currently on the best seller list, most Great Books students seem to have good reading skills, and to have previously found at least a few books that were a cut above that captured their fancy. Eventually a Great Books student who has been influenced directly or indirectly by the Great Books movement associated with Mortimer Adler will most likely line up some of the most basic readings chronologically.

Western Civilization has been said to be a commentary on Plato and Aristotle. More accurately, Western Civilization has been impacted by the Greeks, The Romans, The Hebrews, and the Christians. Homer, some Greek plays, perhaps Antigone, or Medea, or The Trojan Women, Plato, Aristotle, some of the Pentateuch, some of the New Testament, Virgil, and Cicero, are the Greek/Roman/Hebrew/Christian foundation of most of Western Culture.

Thus Great Books students generally join in on those historic aspects of the "Great Conversation."

But Adler also emphasizes an ahistoricity to the conversation. The Johnnies at St. Johns discuss the classics in the present tense. The ideas of the Great Conversation are thought to exist outside of time. Plato's and Aristotle's ideas about Justice, for example, have been relevant throughout the centuries.

Thus the requirements: read enough to be intrigued, get a stack of books, start in, and have the good luck to find someone with whom to discuss the meaning of the Great Books.

Great Books deserve repeated readings; the first task is to develop a working knowledge of the text (more on how to both mark and read a book elsewhere); all Great Books students and teachers are novices. Adler presumed that wisdom was not even possible until a very late age, but only possible with diligence in the earlier decades.

You must not be intimidated. You are the rightful heir to the best that has been previously thought. And "even Homer nods," an expression that recognizes that even the classics are boring at times. With a sense of humor, a desire to pursue excellence in thinking, a commitment to pursue excellence, and persistence, you are not likely to find that the quest becomes easier. You are likely, though, to find it increasingly meaningful.

Truly un-disciplined. *David Holmes*

FINDING OR CREATING A GREAT BOOKS PROGRAM

Anyone can become a Great Books student, even without enrolling at St. John's for an undergraduate education. While one might be able to manage by undertaking an independent reading of the Great Books, the Socratic interchange necessary to develop a working knowledge of the Great Books texts really depends upon being engaged in a dialectical relationship with at least one other person. As great as it would have been to have had Socrates for that person, the evidence of the Socratic Dialogues is that he needed a small group to ensure that the variety of useful viewpoints on a subject would be raised.



Fortunately, most colleges and universities in the United States probably have enough teachers and classes where one could cobble together the bedrock of a Great Books foundation.

Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins were able to help students establish life long commitments to the Great Conversation with four Great Books courses based in reading original texts and studied by Socratic interchange in two two-hour classes a week. Especially at the community college level, finding a course that meets for at least an hour and a half, and preferably for two hours, is one of the difficult challenges given how frequent the one hour block is at so many colleges and universities. However, night classes often are scheduled for two hours or longer, so that is an especially promising

place to look for a class that might include a fair amount of class discussion.

What Else to Look For

Faculty from the Ivy League schools, or the elite liberal arts schools, like Swarthmore, Oberlin, Pomona, Occidental, Grinnell are much more likely to offer the most common approaches to a Great Books education. Look for courses that have, besides a fair amount of class discussion, and hopefully some amount of Socratic dialogue, essay exams and that assign at least half of the required reading as original works, preferably classic works, in lieu, or at least in complement, to the traditional textbooks. A 'traditional textbook' is one in which someone else has interpreted the works in that field for the reader, and from a Great Books perspective, that is untrustworthy. A Great Books student prefers primary sources. (In fact textbooks can be helpful as study guides, but only with the expectation that they be resources, and not to be relied upon, or ever depended upon.) Even the inclusion of essay exams do not mean does not necessitate that the course truly has a Great Books orientation. Is the teacher in fact expecting the student to regurgitate information? Such is not the stuff of a solid Great Books class, but at least with the opportunity to write an essay, the Great Books student has the chance to write the analytic paper associated with independent thought. Perhaps that teacher will prefer the characteristically Great Books essay, even if such was not expected.

Neither is reading an original work a guarantee that a Great Books

reading will be appreciated. Perhaps a limited teacher will expect only a limited reading of the text. Even if summary of what is in the book suffices for that teacher, again, it is at least an opportunity to do much more, to do a Great Books reading into the deeper issues raised by that text. And, again, there is a great chance such a teacher will appreciate the student who demonstrates the ability to go above and beyond what may characterize less ambitious students.

Even in a lecture class, if there are at least essay exams and original readings, the Great Books student can take every opportunity to ask the quality question. Waiting for and recognizing the apt opportunity to ask that question will likely make it easier to pay attention in class. Even the teacher has an implicit point of view, a set of assumptions that can be analyzed to good effect.

In a class that purportedly has discussion, but relies upon the inane sharing of uninformed opinions and idle chatter, a Great Books student can take the opportunity to practice questions of the dialectical (and to get used to being sanctioned for being smart). One can ask others to define their terms, to clarify their opinions and the assumptions behind them, to cite textual evidence for their interpretation, to consider some passage that has thus far been ignored. By asking such questions, the Great Books student can influence the discussion into becoming more dialectical.

James Joyce Scholar and Occidental College professor, Robert Ryf,

And here I thought the Great Books were boring. *Bart Simpson*

observed that he preferred the word dialectical to dialogue. He said that he resisted the word "dialogue" because it usually meant two monologues with inter-punctuation. That distinction may help the Great Books discussant work to move the discussion group in a more profitable direction.

Thus, to create your own Great Books program at a college or university, look for the courses that allow some amount of discussion, where you can learn to insert your great ideas question into the conversation. Look for a course that offers essay exams. Look for a course that offers course readers in lieu of, or at least in conjunction with any course texts. Look for teachers from elite school backgrounds where they may be more receptive to a Great Books way of doing things.

Then, try to find a small group of like-minded peers with whom to engage in study groups. If one brings the critical questions - the analytic methods of the Great Books approach to education - to this study group, the meetings can provide the critical discussion of the material that may not have been possible during the classroom hours. Finding even four such courses may be enough. If your four year college does not have even four, look around for summer programs at other colleges. Numerous community colleges have adopted Great Books courses (see the Appendix) and may be an affordable summer school opportunity.

Within any college curriculum, two of the most likely academic areas to find classes whose reading lists are primarily in original works are in Literature and Philosophy. Check the required reading lists. If the college has

a book store, and most do, peruse the shelves looking for the courses with the most original works. College students will often offer their opinions at the drop of the proverbial hat. Ask around on campus. Keep in mind that unfortunately the representative student is most likely as their first response to indicate merely whether they liked the teacher, based on a standard of whether it held their attention. More pointed questions are required to find the probably rare class that emphasizes essays, discussion, and the reading of original works.

While reading chronologically has advantages in becoming familiar with the Great Conversation, the learner can readily reorganize any readings into such an historical pattern. Because the Conversation is supposed by Adlerians to be timeless anyway, chronological order is not a requirement. As mentioned elsewhere, at the most foundational level the Great Books student would expect to become grounded in the Greek, Roman, Hebrew, and Christian readings. *The Iliad* and/or *Odyssey*; Plato's *Republic*; Aristotle's *Nicomachaean Ethics*; *The Aeneid* and some Cicero; selected books from the *Pentateuch/Talmud*/*Old Testament*, especially from *Genesis* and *Exodus*, at least some of the *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, *Amos*, *Hosea*; selected books from the *New Testament*, and one of the four Gospels must be on the list. Which sources are the most foundational makes for lively, and hopefully not pedantic, debate. But since this short list has clearly been among the most arguably great, a Great Books student reads them if only to understand the argument for their inclusion.

The downside of taking such personal responsibility for your edu-

tion is that you won't turn out like your teachers expected, but you weren't going to anyway. Grade point averages have not been found to correlate with anything other than future grade point averages. Becoming better educated has the prospect of paying off better than the mere GPA. Better schools academically are more open to recognizing exceptional students who have proven that excellence in special ways.

Wish he'd found the Honus Wagner card. Christopher Kresch

CHAPTER V: POSTNOTE

THE RATIONALE FOR THIS ENCHIRIDION

- A. Epictetus
- B. Augustine
- C. Erasmus



Augustine wrote an Enchiridion for Christian living based on Faith, Hope and Charity. Erasmus wrote one for the Christian Knight (aka Christian Warrior), and Epictetus wrote one on behalf of the Stoic lifestyle. This is a nice lineage for the overall concept of such a guidebook and this Great Books Enchiridion in particular. The word *enchiridion* means handbook or guidebook or manual, but according to Erasmus it also can mean a dagger. An Enchiridion needs a sharp edge.

The Great Books Enchiridion borrows from Erasmus' Enchiridion militis Christiani, The Handbook of the Christian Solider (1503). In that book Erasmus complained about adherents who were going through the mo-

tions instead of being inspired by the teachings of Jesus. Erasmus wanted the clergy to act as teachers, all Christians to place more emphasis on Christian living than in merely receiving the sacraments, and for the church to place a renewed emphasis on the Scriptures. This Enchiridion similarly invites the reader back to the basics of primary texts and Socratic dialogue.

Many of the Great Books programs are at Christian schools that share such ideals with Erasmus, and seemingly all Great Books programs share a similar attitude of the need for some reformation within the school experience, a similar approach in emphasizing a return to the original, seminal works, and in doing this with enthusiasm, never simply going through the motions. Whereas school may often be seen as a system to be beaten, gotten around, or accommodated, Great Books programs are seen as too much and too difficult to undertake for any other reason than an earnest search for the truth. Great Books are vital to students' education because they do inspire, motivate, and transform.

The Influence of the Three Prior Enchiridions

While Epictetus' Enchiridion has less obvious influence upon the Great Books Enchiridion, implicitly this book esteems his idea that "some things are up to us and some are not up to us." As Epictetus recognized so clearly, a handbook only helps one respond accordingly to those events that can and cannot be controlled.

The Great Books Enchiridion has more in common with those of

Erasmus and Epictetus than with Augustine's *Enchiridion*. However, Augustine's view that Faith, Hope, and Love inspire Christian piety, suggests a Great Books substitution. Isocrates identified three spirits of Greek life, that also fit as descriptions of the graces that informed Mortimer Adler's promulgation of Great Books, and seem apt considerations for the Great Books student, especially in the context of a handbook/guidebook/dagger/*Enchiridion*. Isocrates identified those spirits of culture as: *Paideia*, *Arête*, and *Agron*.

Curiously Adler took that Greek word, *Paideia*, as the title for his proposal to reform schools on a Great Books model. Democratically he insisted that the Great Books spoke to everyone, and that the best should be available to everyone. The spirit of *Paideia* has the sense of the spirit of culture. Explicitly and implicitly the search for the very best books to read, the very best approaches to teaching them, the emphasis on the importance of each and every student as a co-discussant, and the need for them to take their work very seriously, reflects that emphasis. The Great Books, the teachers, and the students, together exemplify culture at its finest.

Arête was the original title of the Great Books program at Pepperdine University. The Greek word connotes "excellence." Perhaps it takes four generations (100 years) to know whether a work is a classic. Not only must a Great Book have important content and deserve many readings, it needs to speak across the ages, finding what is most common to the human experience. Because the Great Books are at least as difficult as they are profound, the bar of excellence is already set quite high in terms of expected quality.

Finally, in terms of this Enchiridion, the spirit of Agron represents the spirit of competition. For all the words written about Great Books programs, this spirit seems one of the most evident and least observed. While Mortimer Adler was noted for his great combativeness, and while he may not have always lived up to the idea of Agron, some observers were surprised that Adler asked Jacques Barzun to be one of the editors of the second edition of the Great Books after one of Barzun's reviews of the first set of Great Books had contained pointed criticism. The Greek spirit of competition, Agron, emphasizes that the purpose of competition is to improve one's individual performance.

The competitive issue with Adler and Barzun was not about winning or losing; the point was finding a worthy opponent such that the competition would bring out the very best performance. The actual winning and losing were not the major goal of the competition. For nearly 100 years Mortimer Adler sought out, found, and skirmished with worthy opponents. No wonder he lived to be nearly 100 years (99), and wrote so many books and articles, among other significant life achievements. He managed to hone his skills against the best minds of his era(s).

That sense of competition best informs the Great Books student who takes on the rigors of the Great Books discussion. The Great Books Conversation does make for respectful conflict of ideas, and the rational assumption is that the best ideas should prevail, because they have proven themselves over worthy challengers. Great Books students must not be faint-hearted, whether

taking on a Great Book or a co-discussant: “No pain, no gain.” Intellectual progress comes most effectively when pitting one’s best against a worthy opponent.

Thus this Enchiridion hopefully has an edge, and will serve as a primer for engaging a Great Books tradition that especially values heritage, excellence, and healthy competition. Hopefully this Great Books Enchiridion honors its tradition while setting forth its ins and outs. Live long and prosper!

VI. MEMBERSHIP CARD

VII. APPENDIX

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE ENCHIRIDION



- it will provide some chuckles, snorts, laughs, mirth, folly.
- it will be something that students and alumni can go back to several times, "getting it" more and more...the joy of recognition surpasses the joy of surprise...like when watching Monty Python, students will suspect that there are even more jokes than one first gets...
- it is heuristic...students will put together the strengths and weaknesses of the Great Books approach to education, and better understand the controversies Mortimer Adler has caused...
- it combines two traditions, both used to great effect especially by Erasmus: satire and the dagger of the Enchiridion...
- it implicitly associates itself with the 1929 Boy Scout manual and the post 1977 manual for the Jedi Knight to honor a certain innocence in the approach, and to acknowledge that the Great Books concept does socialize one to a fairly specific educational identity...
- it provides understanding of what a Great Books program is not, which may prove nearly as important as understanding what it is...
- it organizes the "skills" necessary to meet the particular academic expectations of Great Books such that they are necessarily subservient to the honest search for the truth.
- it uses a satirical approach to foster students' own refinement of their "crap detectors" and the development of their meta-cognitive skills...
- it lends any and all humor to a sense of being a part of a whole and fosters a sense of camaraderie...
- it encourages students to be virtuous. As Aristotle says, we study virtue to become virtuous...
- as suggested by the "The New School of Athens" poster/insert, it emphasizes that the Great Conversation must be open to each and everyone within the global village, all rights thereto appertaining...



TAXONOMY OF ENGAGEMENT
A Formative Evaluation for Great Books

What # characterizes your level of engagement at the first week of Great Books? ____

What # characterizes the highest level of engagement that you have reached now that we are mid-semester? ____

#1. Interest. Students are *paying attention, albeit perhaps in a passive way. They are not sleeping, off-task, or totally ignoring the topic being presented. They may be paying attention for different reasons—because they like the subject, they want to please the teacher, they're willing to give it a try, and so forth.*

#2. Engaging. These students are *listening actively (to a presentation, for example) or participating in a discussion; they are completing work as assigned by the teacher; they are co-operating and "on task."*

#3. Committing. Students are *"really involved with it" at this level. They are accepting responsibility for learning, may be totally "absorbed" in the content—sometimes finding it hard to move on to something different.*

#4. Internalizing. Crucial to long-term learning, at this level the light bulb is turning on for students; they really *"get it."* Students may seem excited or perplexed as their concentration is focused; they begin to see the connections between this new learning and what they already know and understand.

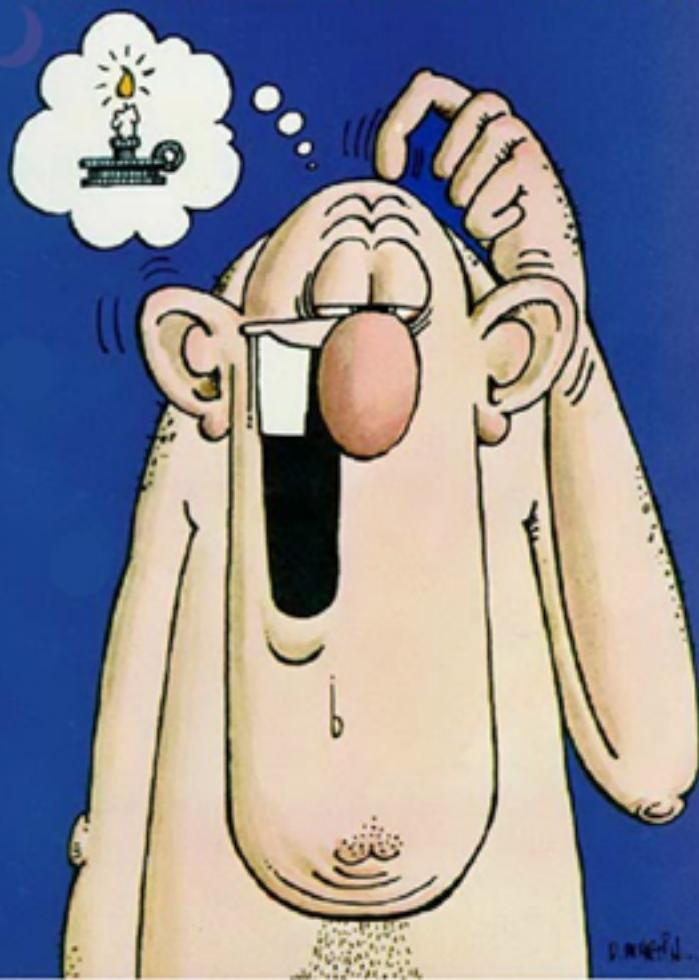
#5. Interpreting. These students want to talk about what they're learning—they want to hear what others think; they're developing confidence in their own opinions and understandings about the topic—they're re-thinking it even as they talk about it, and they are beginning to think about the implications.

#6. Evaluating. Students at this level "own" the knowledge but may need to confirm it by talking about it with people who have not been engaged in learning with them—for example, at home, with peers outside the classroom, or in another classroom.

(This "Taxonomy of Personal Engagement" was developed by Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton, Asking Better Questions, and summarized in Jackie Walsh's, Quality Questions, pgs. 124-5.)



THINK



TEN GREAT IDEAS

KNOWLEDGE/ EPISTEMOLOGY/ TRUTH HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW? IS TRUTH ABSOLUTE OR RELATIVE? OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE?	
WHO ARE THE HEROES? WHAT IS THE IMAGE OF MAN?	
JUSTICE. IS THE EMPHASIS ON "DIFFERENTIATION" OR "EQUALITY"?	
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE? HAPPINESS? LOVE? DUTY? DUTY TO WHAT OR TO WHOM?	
GOOD AND EVIL	
HUMAN NATURE. IS IT BASICALLY GOOD OR EVIL? WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF EMOTION AND REASON? BODY AND MIND/SOUL?	

GOD	
GOVERNMENT/POWER/ AUTHORITY CONSERVATIVE OR LIBERAL? HIERARCHICAL OR EGALITARIAN?	
LIBERTY/FREEDOM. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP OF FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY?	
WHAT ARE THE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY?	

LINKS

Various Lists of the Great Books:

Columbia's list of Great Books:

https://faculty.pepperdine.edu/mgose/Gbooklist_Columbia.html

The L.A. Times list of Great Books:

https://faculty.pepperdine.edu/mgose/Gbooklist_LATimes.html

The Great Books Foundation Faculty Reading List
https://faculty.pepperdine.edu/mgose/Gbooklist_foundation.html

The Wall Street Journal list of Multi-Cultural Great Books:
<https://faculty.pepperdine.edu/mgose/gmulti2.html>

The Harvard Classics Books List:
<http://aseriousreader.blogspot.com/2009/09/harvard-classics-book-list.html>

Adler on:

The rationale for selecting the Great Books:
<http://books.mirror.org/gb.sel1990.html>

How to Read a Difficult Book:

<http://jonathanjordan.squarespace.com/journal/2009/2/22/how-to-read-a-difficult-book.html>

How to Mark a Book:

<http://www.maeb Russell.com/Articles%20and%20Notes/How%20To%20Mark%20A%20Book.html>

Why We Should Read the Great Books:

<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/adler/adler.html>

Resources:

For help with writing an academic article, Harvard and the University of North Carolina:
<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/resources.html>

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/argument/>

The Malaspina Great Books web site:
<http://www.malaspina.org/home.htm>

The Great Ideas Foundation:
<http://www.thegreatideas.org/>

The Great Books Foundation:
<http://www.greatbooks.org/about/>

Timothy Lacy's History of the Great Books Idea:
<http://www.nationalgreatbooks.com/cirriculum/background.asp>

The National Great Books Curriculum Academic Community
<http://www.nationalgreatbooks.com/>

With appreciation and acknowledgement:

The early Boy Scout Handbooks circa 1929:
http://www.troop97.net/bshb_ed3.htm

Timothy O'Brien and his book The Things They Carried:
<http://www.amazon.com/The-Things-They-Carried-OBrien/dp/0767902890>

The Smothers Brothers:
<http://www.smothersbrothers.com/>

Monty Python:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty_Python

The University of South Florida and clip art:
<http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

Karen's Whimsy:
<http://karenswhimsy.com/public-domain-images/>

