Scottsdale Preparatory Academy

Humane Letters 12: Rome to Modernity

**Instructor:** Mr Benjamin Minor

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**Office Hours:** By appointment

*Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.* –John Milton

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Twelfth Grade Humane Letters is devoted to the reading, discussing, and writing on thirteen great books from the late Classical to Modern era of Western tradition. It is through the critical and careful reading, honest and earnest discussion, and contemplative and precise writing that students will complete their study of the Humanities at Scottsdale Preparatory Academy and further their development into Great Hearted men and women. Students will enter into dialogue with the greatest thinkers of Western Civilization as they contemplate questions such as:

* *What is the nature and origin of human goodness and evil?*
* *To what extent is knowing the Good the same as participating in it?*
* *What is the connection between the Good and God?*
* *Can the extraordinary happiness and peace of all rightly be acquired by the torturing of “one tiny creature”?*
* *To whom, or to what, are men responsible?*
* *What are eternity and time and what real relationship do they have with Truth and Goodness?*
* *What is the relationship between body and mind, and can their existence be demonstrated?*
* *What is history?*
* *What is the divine?*

While many more questions such as these will certainly be raised daily, the student is expected to draw upon their readings from previous years to develop together a cumulative consideration of the enduring questions raised in the Western tradition.

Course Requirements:

1. Writing: Students ought to be close to maturity regarding the technical aspects of their writing. Essays will be directly responding to teacher provided prompts in a contemplatively organized, critically referenced, correctly formatted (in MLA style) manner with nearly zero mechanical or grammatical errors. Entire and partial class periods will be dedicated to the writing craft, and it is recommended that each student meet with Mr. Minor at least once during the writing process, and several times with trusted peers and advisors during this time to better develop their ideas.

*Essays must be submitted in typed hardcopy by the beginning of class on the assigned due date (handwritten or emailed papers will not be accepted).* ***One letter grade will be deducted for each day (not class), or portion thereof, by which the paper is submitted late.*** *It is your responsibility to plan ahead if you know you will be busy in the time leading up to a due date and extensions will only be granted in the case of unavoidable, extreme, and clearly documented mitigating circumstances.*

1. Seminar: Students are expected to come to every class having completely, carefully, and critically finished the assigned reading. Students will be expected to have begun thinking through the central claims, questions, dilemmas, or arguments of each reading prior to coming to class and should always be able to express, succinctly, the key idea and supporting details of each reading. Active participation in every conversation based on the readings will provide substantive demonstration of this reading.

Of equal importance with preparation, is the spirit of profound humility and gratitude that each participant (Mr. Minor included) must embrace in searching collectively for the truth. Reason and civility must be imbued in every syllable uttered during seminar. Students who consistently seek their inheritance of wisdom and truth from the Great Books during seminar discussions will not only find themselves much closer to said truth, but will earn excellent grades they certainly seek as a secondary consequence.

The Goals of Seminar are:

1. To foster clear, reasoned speech (no slovenly slang)
2. To teach logical thought – including analysis and synthesis
3. To develop a profound appreciation of the mystery and depth of the works of the Western tradition. To contemplate, as Matthew Arnold says, “the best of what has been thought and said in the world.”

**Ultimately the goal is to forge a habitual vision of greatness. To develop a taste for what is difficult and profound.**

The following are skills and behaviours are regularly expected from students:

* Read carefully, thoroughly, and in advance (Avoid reading in Lyceum).
* Speak clearly, cogently, concisely and precisely.
* Arrive in class with written notes (in a notebook or in the text) for easy reference during discussion.
* Exhibit the utmost courtesy, mercy, humility, and magnanimity in conversation.
* Encourage others to enter the conversation or to clarify or expand upon their ideas.
* Thoughtfully and productively help to craft the conversation and community.
* Address remarks to fellow students, carefully listening and querying, while demonstrating mutual respect, elevated formality, and proper civility.
* Justify comments by offering textual evidence. Evaluate an author’s or a peer’s position carefully and respectfully, acknowledge error and the limitations of one's understanding gracefully, and maintain an attitude of mutual endeavor.

COURSE TEXTS:

## First Semester

1. *Othello,* Shakespeare
2. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (selections)
3. *Paradise Lost,* John Milton
4. *Confessions*, Augustine
5. *On Law, Morality, and Politics*, Aquinas
6. *Inferno,* Dante

### Second Semester

1. *King Lear,* Shakespeare
2. *The Essays: A Selection*, Montaigne
3. *Discourse on the Method and Meditations on the First Philosophy*, Descartes
4. *Reason in History,* Hegel
5. *The Marx-Engels Reader* (selections)
6. *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche
7. *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky

GRADING:

Participation 50%

-Annotations are expected and will be randomly assessed

Formal Essays and writing assignments 40%

Reading Quizzes 10%

1st and 2nd Quarter grades will make up 45% of the semester grade, while the final exam will constitute the final 10%.

A FINAL NOTE

Humane Letters 12 possesses within it an overflowing wealth and trove of knowledge. One can acquire a good deal of information simply by passively reading and listening. However, to receive the inheritance of Western Civilization that is your due by right of existence, tremendous effort, curiosity, willpower, and inquisition are necessary. In my personal experience I always find the journey worth the effort. Please daily employ your most devoted effort in seeking truth and wisdom. It will exhaust you. Information is free, but truth and wisdom are costly. I do promise it is worth the cost.