



Hero Education

A Scholar Phase
Guidebook For
Teens, Parents
and Mentors

New York Times Best-Selling Author

Oliver DeMille

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AN EDUCATION TO MATCH YOUR MISSION

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Note to Readers

This book is written with two audiences in mind: (1) the parents and other mentors who work with youth in Scholar Phase, and (2) the youth who are the actual students doing Scholar Phase.

At times, the book speaks directly to adult parents/mentors. At other times, it switches voice, and speaks directly to the youth. At still other times, it simultaneously addresses both.

It is important for both Scholar Phase youth and their adult mentors to read all of these sections and understand both sides of the Scholar Phase mentoring relationship and process.



BOOK ONE

FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

*“Reading furnishes the mind only
with materials of knowledge; it is thinking
that makes what we read ours.”*

—JOHN LOCKE

INTRODUCTION

The 9 Skills

“We have forgotten what it means to be truly educated. Ideally, all students would be effective self-educators rather than dependent on experts. When each learner deeply owns his or her education, the quality and quantity of study and overall education increases. Great teachers and schools encourage and teach their students to be effective self-learners.”

—EIGHT WORDS FOR EDUCATION [TJED.ORG]

“Man’s habits change more rapidly than his instincts,’ the historian Charles Coulston Gillispie once wrote. That’s us. We have all the habits of a new age. The phones. The emails. The ADD clicking of our keyboards. The hand sanitizers. Now we need to develop the instincts... We need to understand that we’re not living at a normal moment... You can’t go back from Google to Britannica... What will replace the NYSE? What will improve on the post office? What will reshape entertainment...? Our educational order is not yet wired for this new age.”

—JOSHUA COOPER RAMO

*“The education bubble is about to pop—
are you prepared for the aftermath?”*

—MICHAEL ELLSBERG

HARDLY anyone gets a great education anymore. Strangely, it is not even the goal in most public, private or home schools around the world. Instead, literacy, credentials, or college prep now mark the high point of most educational ambitions. In fact, marketable test scores and good grades are frequently (and falsely) equated with quality education. The world has largely forgotten the ideal of a Thomas Jefferson level of education, of really understanding the great ideas, of becoming truly wise through exploring, reasoning, pondering,

and internalizing the best that humanity and God have offered. We've strayed from the knowledge that ***the main purpose of education is to prepare us to truly serve***, dismissing the admonition, "my people perish for lack of knowledge."^{1*}

As a result, we too often settle for mediocrity for our children and youth, instead of aiming for and working tirelessly to help them achieve greatness. Every young person deserves a truly great education. In fact, all people— young and old—deserve and need a great education. Moreover, the world desperately needs more men and women with an education designed for greatness, not just career placement. Yet too few schools, educators, or even parents conceive of this ideal, let alone making it a top priority. We have allowed things of lesser value to dominate our institutions of learning—and even many of our homes.

There is a very simple reason for this decline: Hardly anyone does Scholar Phase today. Yet Scholar Phase is the keystone of quality learning, and we can express it as an almost certain declaration: Those who do it, get a great education. Those who don't, always get an inferior education—something less than they could have.

And let's face the elephant in the room. Even among those who do TJEd, some earn a truly excellent Scholar Phase, but too many don't. This is also true of many homeschoolers and those in public and private schools as well—even many of those with high test scores and good grades.

It is time to change this.

What is Scholar Phase?

But what, exactly, is Scholar Phase? Put simply, Scholar Phase entails 5,000 hours or more of reading great books in all important fields from history and math to science and social studies, etc., and discussing them in depth (either verbally, or in written formats).

Reading great books and discussing them changes how people think. It drastically increases their *ability* to think—creatively, analytically, innovatively, deeply. It teaches the reader/discusser to have a mind that

1 * Hosea 4:6

is nimble, agile, sharp, sensible, decisive, creative. It gives readers the knowledge that facilitates depth, the time to acquire real breadth, and the skills that catalyze ability, bring out talent, enhance experience, and increase effectiveness. Great reading, especially when supplemented with ample discussion of such readings, naturally teaches the 9 Skills that are essential for success in the 21st Century. It changes how we think, and how we learn.

Since the 1950s our schools have offered the same basic kind of education. At one point, it was arguably what most people needed, in terms of preparation for economic security. In addition to teaching young people the Three R's of Reading, Writing, and 'Rithmetic, it also trained them to follow orders, be on time to class (and later to work), and do rote, repetitive tasks for most of the day.^{2*} These were exactly what was needed by most workers in the industrialized economy, and for those who wanted to go to college.

As a result, such schooling was an effective preparation for the jobs and careers most people experienced. But times have changed. We live in a new economy,^{3*} where technology is replacing, or gearing up to replace, many of the jobs people used to have—an economy where the competition for income is global, intense, and, to a large extent, unpredictable.

Failing Grades

A new kind of education is required if we want our young people to succeed and thrive in the rough-and-tumble economic environment of the 21st Century. Yet most high schools are still operating the old way—with largely unchanged goals, curriculum, or methods. Even homeschool parents—with the best intentions—often revert to the methods that were in place when they were in school.

The result of this scenario is nothing less than catastrophic for many American families, where workers are finding it harder to make a living, keep a job that really pays the bills, or get ahead. Few families are able

2 * See Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* and *Revolutionary Wealth*.

3 * For more on this, do an internet and social media search for Future of Work, Disruption, and the IoT.

of the past), and knowing how to learn and effectively apply new knowledge and skills as soon as they become useful.

Since this ninth skill is the most important of all those needed to succeed in the 21st Century, the agility and energy to be always learning and always mastering new ideas, knowledge, systems, connections and abilities means that we must all become effective “scholars.” This is what Scholar Phase is all about: being the kind of person who knows what is happening, understands why it is happening, and is consistently learning and applying whatever is needed to thrive, succeed, and help others do the same.

In other words, every young person today who wants to achieve his or her life purpose, accomplish a great mission to the world, and thrive in a changing economy, needs to experience an effective Scholar Phase. This doesn't refer to the kind of “scholar” we think of in the old Industrial Age, like a professor on campus or a researcher at the scientific think tank. No offense intended to either of those – it's just that when we say “scholar,” it has a whole different meaning. Scholar Phase is a 4-5 year educational experience of learning the lessons of the 9 Skills outlined above.

This kind of Scholar Phase is the key to a great education. Those who master the 9 Skills, get one. Those who don't, don't. And let's be clear: Every youth deserves a great education. Not mediocre. Not simply adequate. Not just enough to graduate or pass the exam. We can do better than such trifling goals. We *must* do better if we want our young people to succeed in the real-world economy. This is more than just a fad or trend in our time; it's an imperative.

Each young person can get a truly superb, top-rate, quality education, one that prepares him/her for lasting success in today's world. Anything less is the wrong approach.

Facing Reality

It is not a slight on teachers to say that our modern schools hardly ever teach things like the 9 Skills anymore. Even the best teachers find themselves with little room to make a difference in these areas, given the current system. In fact, they seldom did. If young people in the past learned such lessons, it almost always happened outside of the classroom.

As we already discussed, today's 18-, 19-, or 20-year-old needs to know *how to learn*—to master new things at the rapid pace of technology and change in the 21st Century economy, unlearn old lessons that become obsolete, and know how to learn and effectively apply new knowledge and skills as soon as they become useful. The time to learn these vital lessons is during the high school years.

Moreover, in many ways Scholar Phase is the most important part of education, yet it is frequently ignored by many modern schools, parents, teachers, and youth. The modern high school no longer provides what young people need. The class sizes alone make classroom management a priority over content. The result is too much mediocrity in education, even for the students who get high marks. Great education is seldom found in our current schooling environment. It is time for this to change. Indeed, as a society we desperately need the rising generation to engage Scholar Phase. As we effectively teach the 9 Skills, our future is bright.

1

The Keystone

“All across America, our 2nd graders score higher on CQ tests than our high schoolers. Evidently, compliance and conformity come at a price. . . . Creativity Quotient is 3 times more reliable as an indicator of career success than IQ.”

—ROY H. WILLIAMS

“Parents should be wondering, ‘Who are the business mentors for my child?’ And right now they’re putting them in an environment where they have zero business mentors.”

—SCOTT BANISTER^{5*}

At the apex of an arch rests the keystone – a central piece, often enlarged and specially designed for aesthetic appeal. It is this keystone that locks all the rest of the stones in place and allows them to bear weight. In terms of one’s lifelong education, there is a keystone that locks all the rest in place: It is Scholar Phase.

To make Scholar Phase a reality for most students, we need to change our views about six major issues in modern education. Shifting all of them is essential.

First, great education is not only about getting a job or training for a career, and it is not about mere literacy—it is about preparing a great soul to live his or her great purpose in life. Every person is born with potential greatness inside, with a certain embryonic genius. Such genius is unique to each individual, and when a young person gets a great education it prepares him to do great things.

5 * Cited in Michael Ellsberg, 2016, *The Education of Millionaires*, 256.

Mark Zuckerberg: Virgil's *Aeneid*

This classic book seems particularly appropriate as a favorite for the founder of Facebook. Virgil's major theme is that the world of his time was in a period of significant change between the old era and the new—and his message of warning was that Rome's leaders needed to embrace the best of the old and the new, and simultaneously reject the worst elements of both.

Virgil wrote of an epic time where the right kind of leadership could nudge the world in the right direction—while the wrong leaders could do the opposite. The connections not only make sense, but they are also instructive to all living in our time. Each child today, and every youth, has the potential to influence the world in striking, even epic, ways.

Richard Branson: *Wild Swans*

This history of three generations of a Chinese family is one of the best books I've ever read. I can see why Branson likes it. It shows how the changing of laws and traditions in a society drastically shift a family's values and adds to their struggles, like an Asian *Fiddler on the Roof*.

It also teaches that certain values remain through many generations, like family relationships and trying to make life economically better for the next generations. *Wild Swans* is a truly great book. In fact, in a world where China is becoming increasingly important to the rest of us, this book should be on most people's classic reading list.

Elon Musk: Asimov's *Foundation* series

This classic sci-fi series causes the reader to see things well beyond the present. In fact, for me this series was one of the most important teachers of how to recognize societal trends and forecast them for not just decades but for centuries ahead. This skill was highly valued in historical French education (for example, in *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville accurately predicted the U.S. Civil War decades before it came, and the Cold War between the U.S. and Russia over a century before it arrived; both Montesquieu and Rousseau were effective forecasters as well). Such skills of long-term thinking are also very important in many Asian educational models.

But the same skill is not often a significant part of British-American education. Fortunately, the *Foundation* series teaches readers to think in big, long-term ways that most Europeans and Americans seldom attempt. Musk clearly followed this longer-term approach in his career—taking on such grand projects as developing totally new energy sources, drastically different transportation for the world, and colonizing Mars, for example.

Dee Hock: the *Rubaiyat*

Hock is the father of the credit card and founder of Visa, and he made a lifetime study of a favorite great book, the *Rubaiyat*. While this classic is little known in some circles, its English translation is actually the most popular long-form poem in the English language. It is written in poetic stanzas with four-line hidden codes, which seems appropriate for a favorite book of the founder of the credit card era—who set the stage for a world run by algorithms. Quatrain-based poetry and financial algorithms somehow seem naturally connected.

But beyond this, the content of the poem is powerful and moving. It deals with the purpose of life—what our time here on earth is really about. The book questions whether the real purpose of our lives is money, success, love, family, or something else. Then it discounts each of these, and outlines what its author, Omar Hayyam, believed life is really about—like a shorter and more poetic version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

It is a truly great read, one deeply worthy of a lifetime of study. For anyone who wants to be happy, the *Rubaiyat* is worth re-reading and pondering over and over.

Just knowing that Dee Hock spent many hours in his life studying and deeply thinking about the *Rubaiyat* made me want to read it. Over the years, it has become one of my favorite books. It has taught me so much about what it really means to be happy, and what success in life actually entails. I am so glad Dee Hock “discussed” this truly important book with me. While I've never met him personally, I feel so blessed that his words about this great book introduced me to it and inspired me to take it seriously.

These billionaire-recommended classics—and so many others like them—illustrate the power of the Discussion Method of learning. It's not just about reading a book—it's about who suggests it, why they recommend it, and what you and others say about the book and all it contains. All of these things are part of the “discussion.” Mortimer Adler, founder and editor of the Great Books series, called this ongoing discussion of the greatest ideas and principles by an interesting name: “The Great Conversation.”

To get a great education, it is important to join this great conversation/discussion. It has been going on for millennia, and it is still progressing today. The only question is whether you will be part of it. And it starts with Scholar Phase.

Read and Discuss

Of course, the discussion of books can also be simple, literal, and direct. Whenever you read something you consider great, moving, or powerful, find a way to discuss it with someone. If nothing else, write about it online—and reply to the responses. Or make a meme or YouTube video to share the most important lessons you learned from the book. This adds to the Great Conversation.

If possible, set up a book club with family members or friends—read a book a month, or more, and meet to discuss what all the participants learned from each book. Just listening to what other people have to say about a book you've recently finished reading will drastically increase how much and how well you learn from it. Not only will you gain new insights into the reading and the tangential rabbit trails that inevitably ensue by discussion with your companions, but you will gain special insights into yourself as you interact with others on this level. You will learn more about the limitations of your assumptions; the uniqueness of your perspective; your strengths and gifts, your deficits and blindspots. Taking part in discussions boosts reading and learning to a whole new level.

Scholar Phase consists of at least 5,000 hours of reading great books and *discussing* them with other people. It is vital to understand that the discussion is just as important as the reading. Indeed, reading without discussing isn't a Scholar Phase. Both are essential.

Simply put: One of the most effective ways to get a truly great education is to read the greatest books in all fields of knowledge, and discuss what you've learned with other people—including peers, parents and teachers, and, when possible, experts who have deep experience in the topics you are reading about. This combination is where the idea of high schools, colleges, and universities originated. And even though too few schools still use this original learning format, it is actually one of the best ways, one of the most ancient, tried-and-true ways, to get a truly superb education. It is the best way to learn the 9 Skills, and to get a true Scholar Phase.

Specifically, there are three essential personas to discuss a book with:

1. You
2. Peers
3. Mentors

Let's address each, one at a time.

Discussions with You

At first blush, it might sound strange to discuss a book with yourself, but this is actually one of the most important types of discussion. Put simply, each time you read, take notes. Write notes in the margins, in a separate notebook, or on your computer or smartphone.

Take notes of things you want to learn, remember, or study more deeply. Moreover, ask questions in writing. For example, if you are reading a great book (say, something by Aristotle) or story (such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*), and you aren't sure what a word or phrase means, circle it with your pen and draw a question mark in the margin. (Of course, don't do this with a library book or one you've borrowed from someone else—at least not without the owner's permission.)

By taking notes as you read, you begin a discussion with yourself about the things you are learning from the book. Years ago a mentor suggested that I write the main new lesson I learned on each page in the top margin of that page in every book I read. Today I can go back to books where I used this approach, pull them off the shelf, and skim through them—reading my notes at the top of each page, page after page. I quickly remember what I considered the most important things on each and every page.

3

The Mini-Workshop

*“I know who I was when I got up this morning,
but I think I must have . . . changed several times since then.”*

—ALICE IN WONDERLAND

*“O excellent device! Was there ever heard a better?—That my master,
being scribe, to himself should write the letter.”*

—SHAKESPEARE



THE purpose of this chapter is to start changing the way you read. I'm going to make this as easy as possible, so that every reader starts developing deeper reading skills. This will be very basic, not complicated at all. But it is also very effective. All you have to do is read the chapter and answer the questions. Answer them in writing. Note that the questions aren't difficult; in fact, they're actually fun.

That's it. The reading and answering (which is a form of discussion when you write down your answers) will put you on the track of great reading.

There are only a few short exercises in these workshops. I recommend you do each of them, and have fun with them. I hope you won't skip anything in this chapter. Getting these skills is vital for Scholar Phase (and for teaching Scholar Phase). While the exercises are simple, they are powerful. You'll be different when you've completed them.

Workshop #1: Answer the *Alice in Wonderland* Questions

In this enjoyable classic by Lewis Carroll, young Alice jumps down a rabbit hole and ends up experiencing a number of adventures. As she travels from place to place in Wonderland, meeting many different characters, she faces

- With at least 90 minutes left, end the discussion and have students turn in the one-page papers they wrote, with enough copies made for everyone in the group. Distribute 1 copy of each student's paper to each person in the class—both students and mentors. Everyone should also have a pen in hand.
- Ask for a volunteer to share his or her paper with the whole class. Have everyone turn to the volunteer's paper, and have the volunteer begin reading aloud what he/she wrote. Tell him that you'll interrupt **a lot**, but to read aloud until you interrupt.

This begins a powerful method of learning—to write, to think, and to analyze as well as increase one's creativity. As the student reads aloud, politely interrupt any time you have a suggestion. Invite the rest of the class to do the same. Politely!

Teach them to say: "Oh, that needs a comma..." "I think 'expection' is misspelled. It should be 'exception,' right?" The whole class carries on a dialogue, suggesting changes to the volunteer's paper. "I really love the way you said..." "I don't get what this sentence means. Can you clarify?" "Oh, that's what you meant. It's a bit unclear. How could you write it so it's more clear?"

As a group, edit and upgrade the paper. Go slowly. Make suggestions. Fix any typos or grammatical errors. Make suggestions for organization, flow, tone, voice, word choice, audience, etc. Let everyone participate. Rule: Polite, fun, and positive!

- Have the following books on hand for reference, so when people aren't sure of a certain grammatical rule they'll be able to look it up. Have the students look things up in these books (rather than you doing it for them). Make it a fun class exercise to check things, if needed. This easily (and in a fun way) teaches them to look up grammatical rules when in doubt. The books are:
 - *The Elements of Style (Strunk and White)*
 - *The Elements of Grammar (Shertzer)*
- Keep having the volunteer read her paper aloud, and have the group give feedback and recommendations. For example, point out when something in the paper feels confusing, or not quite

effective. Ask for suggestions on how to fix it. Everyone should take handwritten notes on their own copy of the volunteer's paper, practicing fixes as they go. Another example:

- *Class Member: "I think this character is... kind of fake. I just don't understand him."*
- *Mentor: "I don't know. I like that character. But maybe you can strengthen him. Does anyone else find him a bit fake?"*
- *Different Class Member: "I do. I just don't like this character..."*
- *Mentor: "How can Carrie (the Volunteer) make this character more authentic? So he connects better with the reader. Any ideas?"*
- *Class Member: "Well, she could have him say more—more dialogue, less of the author telling us about the character and more of him talking. That way, we get to know him for him."*
- *Carrie: "Ah. Great idea..." (Her voice trails off while she's taking notes on her page.)*

This kind of writing mentoring is modeled and taught in depth and detail in our How to Mentor Course (TJEd.org/html) — including group editing sessions recorded live, and successive drafts of papers worked on in the sessions.

- For the rest of the class period, go through the paper and engage in many conversations like this: Discussing the volunteer's paper and suggesting problems, ideas, fixes, edits. Again, keep it polite and positive. And get people involved. If one student says nothing, eventually ask him if he has any thoughts on the volunteer's paper. If not, don't push. But give him a chance.
- If you finish the volunteer's paper, ask for another volunteer. If feedback on the first paper was helpful and polite, you'll probably have lots of volunteers who want to go next. Pick the first to volunteer and start on his/her paper—using the same method.
- This method is incredibly effective. It very quickly teaches deeper thinking, the rules of punctuation and grammar (in a fun, non-rote way), and the skills of analytical, creative, and persuasive thinking and writing. And it benefits not only the person whose paper is being analyzed, but everyone who has put themselves in the mind

1786? ••

1787? ••••

1788? ••••

1789? ••••

Next time you come back to this card, practice memorizing the answers for 1781 and 1786. Skip the rest.

At any given point, you might have a stack of 30 cards, but only be memorizing 36 total items—because you already know the rest of the answers on all the cards. Or you may need to memorize more, or less. The important thing is to keep memorizing, and keep making more cards.

As you practice, sometimes use the answer side of each card to ask yourself questions, and see if you get the dates right (or whatever is on the question side of the card). Also, at times start questioning yourself from the bottom of the card, instead of the top, or from the middle of the card. And at times have someone quiz you by picking questions randomly from each card, in no particular order. This helps you learn the answers without relying on the normal order.

The Cards work for studying chemistry, biology, math formulas and proofs, history, grammatical rules, and so on. It works for pretty much anything. If you are preparing for an essay exam, for example, you can put Part I as the question on one side of a card, and a list of things you want to write in your essay on the other side of the card. Then make a card for Part II, Part III, and so on. This system allows you to quickly and simply memorize a great deal of information.

You can even list your question as “Memorized Shakespeare Quote #1”, and have the quote on the answer side of the card. This allows you to memorize many things, and be ready with quick recall whenever you need it. Save your stack of cards, and at the end of this learning Year you can pull them all out and quickly review them. Put a mark by any answers you don’t remember, and spend more time memorizing those answers. You’ll very quickly recall everything in your stack of cards.

Again, this system allows you to amass great amounts of factual knowledge—and almost everyone gets better at it as they do more of it.

You can literally stuff your mind with a great deal of knowledge, facts, and details that you’ll remember for a long time. Don’t cram. Memorize over time so you’ll remember the things you learn. And keep your cards, long-term, in a card file so you can go back and review past cards from time to time, on a planned schedule – say, once every month you pull out the oldest x-number of cards and review them.

During the Fourth Intense Reading Year, fill your memory with as many bits and bytes of knowledge as you can. *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* makes this even easier by putting thousands of factoids all in one easy-to-access place.

As I mentioned previously, in modern education we too often overemphasize memorization, but that doesn’t mean that we should ignore it. We shouldn’t make it the focus of 12 years of rote schooling, but putting some real effort into memorizing a number of important things during this Year will greatly boost the quality of your learning. Knowledge matters. Not as much as being able to think—but you can have both, if the balance and process are executed thoughtfully and in harmony with your big-picture goals for Scholar Phase and beyond. The Cards make this simple and relatively easy.

Use The Cards on every topic, and learn the important information that will prepare you to better understand the world and things you will experience in adult life. Knowledge is power—and memorization with The Cards is a powerful technology. It really works.

Test Prep

As you become increasingly proficient with The Cards and memorize more and more facts, along with continued great reading and discussions, you’ll eventually see how useful The Cards can be in test prep. When it is appropriate, take several sample SAT or ACT exams, or equivalent for your nation, and see how you do. Use practice guides (available in print and online) to find out how you can improve your test scores, and use The Cards to easily and quickly boost your vocabulary, mental reservoir of factual knowledge, and testing abilities.

Do as much as you need to repeatedly score very high on the practice exams. The Cards will help, if you use them.

them better. It is important to resist this tendency, and to discuss this kind of pressure with each youth. She should know that “doing it younger isn’t better.” The truth is that “better is better,” and doing things at the best time for a specific student will always bring better results. It’s not a race.

Quality is the goal, not speed, or even timeline.

In short, teach young people to go at their optimal pace. Once they are in Scholar Phase, teach them to push themselves, but even pushing themselves is most effective when done at their own pace. In practical terms, this means that if a student begins The Cards earlier than the Fourth Intense Reading Year but starts to dislike the project, it’s okay to back off. It’s often wise in such circumstances to put off The Cards until a later date.

Most 17- or 18-year-olds are excited to really push beyond their comfort zone, but a few aren’t. In truth, if a 17- or 18-year-old is struggling this way, he probably hasn’t done the 5,000 hours of great reading and discussing.

In such cases, his best focus is to keep working on his 5,000 hours. Once he has the hours under his belt, however, it’s time to push hard and memorize a lot of knowledge. The Cards make this easier, and while they are hard work, the rate of increased learning makes the process fun for almost everyone. If it isn’t fun (for such a student), he usually needs to work harder at it. He can do hard things.

As always, individualize, taking into account important factors such as learning styles, interest levels, developmental anomalies, etc. Great education is personalized.



IMPACT ON SOCIETY

“...we were born yesterday, but the world wasn’t. All that we learn as we grow up is selected from what was discovered or invented in the past, sometimes the very remote past. Our most cherished ideas and social attitudes were formulated by those who lived before us.... The American twenty-five cent piece bears the inscription ‘Liberty,’ a Classical [Greek] ideal, on the same side of the coin as the Hebraic ‘In God We Trust.’”

—ROD W. HORTON & VINCENT F. HOPPER

“My father had talked to me as though I were a grown man, discussing not only our bookish interests, but others....talk of politics in foreign lands, of wars, battles, and courtly intrigue, of music, art, and letters.... He read me from the writings of Homer when I was very young, and from Virgil too. He taught me much of history, and not of our country only, but others as well. We talked much together, and he instructed me.... We also talked with visitors....”

—TATTON CHANTRY (LOUIS L’AMOUR)

9

The Multiple-Choice Test

“Many different meanings have been given to the word poetry. It would weary my readers if I were to discuss which of these definitions ought to be selected. I prefer telling them at once that which I have chosen. In my opinion, Poetry is the search after, and the delineation of, the Ideal.”

—ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

*Is Star Wars poetry? Is it a search for the Ideal?
Is that what our TV shows and movies are all about—
and one of the reasons they are so popular?*

—EMMA COX (HANDWRITTEN MARGIN NOTES IN DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA)

I was halfway through the meal in a crowded Los Angeles restaurant when it happened. I glanced up and noticed a man staring at me from the next table. I wondered what he was staring at, so I smiled. He grinned back, then began scrutinizing his napkin. Yes...his napkin.

I was so surprised that I watched him for a minute, and I soon realized what was going on. His napkin was spread out on the table like a large place mat. In fact, his whole family had their napkins arranged as place mats, with their plates, cups, and utensils all on top of the napkins. Together their napkins covered the whole table in a makeshift tablecloth.

The man had seen me using my napkin on the corner of my mouth—and it had shocked him. I imagine him thinking: “What kind of people use their place mats on their mouth?”

By this point he was explaining the situation to his family members, all of whom were pointing around the room at other people using their napkins

as...well, napkins. Not place mats. They were speaking in a language I didn't understand, so I couldn't tell what they were saying about their new discovery.

Soon they began laughing, and somewhat sheepishly they lifted their cups and plates, moved the napkins from their position laid out on the table, and put them in their laps like napkins. It was clear that they considered this a very strange custom.

The same day my wife asked me what I would say to people who wonder why elementary and high school age homeschoolers who take standardized exams often test way above average in some areas but below them in others. I thought it was a poignant question, and it brought to mind a friendly conversation I once had with a school principal.

Culture Shock

We served on a charitable committee together, and one day in a moment of waiting he mentioned that homeschoolers in his district who, for whatever reason, take the district's standardized tests nearly all test "off the charts" high in Language Arts and Social Studies, but under the curve in Science and Math.

Then he cocked his head to one side and said, "Except for two homeschooling families in the district whose kids test the exact opposite—very high in Math and Science, and quite low in Language Arts and Social Studies." He wondered why this trend was so prominent. Why didn't they test to the averages, like most of the students?

I had just about the same reaction to him that I did to the man in the restaurant with his family's napkins under their plates. How do you tell somebody from one culture what a very different culture is like? Certainly not easily, simply, or quickly. There's more to it than that.

Still, I tried. First I referred him to national statistics that show the average of public school students (tested across the board on academic topics) in the 50th percentile, private school students in the eighties, and homeschoolers in the nineties.

As I remember it, he shook his head and said: "I've researched all those statistics, and they don't hold up because the public school numbers represent all students in public school while not all homeschoolers decide to take such tests. If we made the same tests voluntary in public schools, we'd get much higher results too—because most of those who would take them would be well prepared."

That made sense to me, so I tried another response. "Good point. The truth is that many homeschoolers don't really respect multiple-choice testing. It's not the best way to know what students have really learned. Essay exams are much better. And oral exams are even more effective. You can really explore a student's learning with oral exams."

He nodded his head vigorously. "I agree. But that isn't an option for most public schools. We are required by law to use standardized tests, most of which are multiple-choice. Parents, teachers, and administrators have little say about that. And we spend a lot of our time teaching to the mandated tests."

I asked, "Do you think you could greatly improve testing and learning if you and your teachers could design the tests yourselves instead of having to teach to those mandated?"

"Absolutely!" he suddenly got passionate about the topic.

I replied: "Well, that's exactly what many homeschooling parents are doing. They are designing the kind of assessment they think best measures what they want to emphasize in their kids' education. That's why some families excel in Math and others in Language Arts, because they have different values, goals, interests, and objectives."

He pondered, then nodded. "That makes sense. But what about the students who don't do well in certain important subjects? What do homeschoolers do about this?"

"Well, each homeschooling family does its own thing. There's not one universal way. But what do public schools do with students who don't do well in Writing, Math, Science, or some other topic?" I asked. "Or do *all* public school students excel in *every* subject?"

Thinking vs. Rote

The elite classes have traditionally taught their offspring how to think; the masses too often teach their children what to think (and the “what” is determined by experts who are funded by elites). This is an effective model for maintaining a class system with a few elites running things from the top, but it’s not good for democracy and it’s a direct attack on free enterprise and opportunity for everyone.

This was Allan Bloom’s biggest concern when he wrote *The Closing of the American Mind*. John Taylor Gatto, former New York state public school Teacher of the Year, wrote about the same problem, and he titled his book by the apt name *Dumbing Us Down*. Indeed, our dumbed-down education model has created a perpetual class system—exactly what the American Framers worked so hard to overcome. The crux of this modern American class system, at least at the educational level, is nationalized multiple-choice testing.

Again, we need more than one kind of testing to get it right, because not every student is the same—any more than your 1 apple is the same as any other 1 apple. And while the number 1 can be used numerically in theoretical mathematics, when we are talking about a human teen’s life potential and goals, we need something much more accurate, more relevant, more informative. We need to help each one of them get a superb education, and that means one size doesn’t fit everyone.

Let there be many kinds of schooling, and many kinds of tests. Some will prove beneficial to great learning, while others will not. And over time those most effective will flourish and grow. But all will be available to the individual student who needs one or two of them to really flourish.

This kind of educational buffet only thrives in a free system. Let there be as many kinds of tests as there are children with different educational needs, goals, talents and dreams. Yes, this makes *schooling* more challenging, but it is great for *learning*. And it is necessary to maintain a truly free society.

Let the variety of tests grow so there is a truly excellent testing model to match each student. And, most importantly, let there be many discussions

about math, and every other field of learning. Not just “right answer” in a multiple-choice test. But real discussion, so each student understands everything we’ve discussed here—and more.

That’s great education. Nothing else comes close.

Is this kind of Discussion-Based, truly personalized education and testing for every single student even possible at a national level? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But it is certainly possible in most homes and families. Starting with yours.

When the fundamentals of education fall short, as they do in the Lecture-Based model where youth are graded and sorted based on how well they measure up to the hidden expert-designed code (all for the continuing benefit of the elite class), rather than learning to truly think, initiate, create, innovate, and lead, we have a serious problem.

The Discussion-Based model of great books and great ideas is the solution. Note that this is precisely why through history the elite classes have delivered this very kind of learning (in what is almost exactly what we call Scholar Phase) to their own children.

Postscript: The Cards 2.0

What about students who want to excel in the multiple-choice exam system? Sure, it might not be the best model for every student, and it is a bad overall system for the nation because it is designed to drive a further wedge between elites and their middle- and lower-class “underlings.” But if Johnny wants to be a doctor or an accountant, he’s going to need to find a way to succeed in the system—however good or bad it may be.

To thrive on multiple-choice exams, become very good at using The Cards (as discussed in the last chapter). And use them to prepare for exams. This is incredibly effective. It really works. To do this, review the details in the previous chapter and apply the system to test prep.

10

Virgil's Prophetic Message for Today's Parents and Youth

“Teach me, thy tempted subject...”

—SHAKESPEARE

*“Being in love with learning is a real passion,
a temptation to the right things, a fire of fun and learning.”*

—HANDWRITTEN NOTES ON TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

“Do, or do not. There is no try.”

—YODA



THE great Roman thinker Virgil has a lot to teach us. Most people don't read Virgil these days, or think about his suggestions, and that's a shame.

Virgil had a great deal to say that is directly relevant to our current world, societal, and family challenges. He lived at a time when Rome was the most powerful nation in the world, but he understood from the trends, cycles, and current events that the great superpower of his era was in serious decline—even though most people in “the Establishment” didn't want to admit it.

So he wrote about how his powerful nation could reverse its decline and get back on track. Win back its freedoms and virtues. Be the kind of example everyone in the world would want to follow. Reboot its morals, families, and educational system while spreading prosperity and true principles.

Sound familiar? We live in the same kind of situation right now in modern America.

Of course, Rome didn't listen much. But Virgil's writings remain. The American founders saw them as a timely commentary on the coming decline of the British Empire, and they acted accordingly. In our day, his messages are incredibly relevant. Let me share just one example.

Four Kinds of Education

As I said, Virgil watched Rome losing many of its freedoms, and he saw how the educational system had a direct impact on this decline and loss. In Virgil's view, education should be based on the interactions of four kinds of learning: the epic, the dialectic, the dramatic and the lyric. Knowing how these all fit into our modern world is both interesting and important.

1. *Epic Education* means learning from the greatest stories of humanity in all fields of human history and endeavor, from the arts and sciences to government and history, from math to technology, and from leadership and entrepreneurship to family and relationships. Epic education is education from the great classics—and other works of similar quality.

By seeing how the great men and women of humanity chose, struggled, succeeded, and sometimes failed, we gain a superb epic education. We learn what really matters. The epics include all the greats—from the great books of world religions to the great classics of philosophy, history, literature, mathematics, art, music, etc. Epic education focuses on the great classic works of mankind from all cultures and in all fields of learning.

2. *Dialectic Education* uses the dialogues of mankind, the greatest and most important conversations, discussions, and debates of history and modern times. This includes biographies, original writings and documents that have made the greatest difference in the world. It is also very practical and includes on-the-job style learning. Again, this tradition of learning pulls from all cultures and all fields of knowledge. It emphasizes mentoring.

Dialectic learning especially focuses on areas where debating sides and conflicting opponents came to resolution and taught humanity more than any one side could have without opposition—from wars and negotiations to debating scientists, to arguing preachers and the work of artists, inventors, etc. Most of the professions (medicine, consulting, finance, law, accounting, engineering, etc.) use the Dialectical learning method—also known as the Discussion Method of learning.

3. *Dramatic Education* is that which we watch. This includes anything we visually experience in dramatic form, from theater to cinema and movies to television and YouTube videos, reality TV programs, online tutorials, gaming, etc. In our day, this has many venues, unlike the two or three dramatic forms of learning available in Virgil's time. There is a great deal to learn from Dramatic Education in its many classic, modern and current modalities.
4. *Lyric Education* is that which is accompanied by music, or sound, which has a significant impact on the depth and quality of how we learn. It was originally named for the *lyre*, a musical instrument that was usually accompanied by a song during a play, poetic or prose reading. Some educational systems still use classical (especially Baroque) and other types of music to increase student learning of languages, memorized facts and even science and math. And, of course, most Dramatic (media and entertainment) learning is presented with music. Lyric Education also includes audio learning, anything we listen to. Note that the Lecture Method of most modern schools is based on the Lyric model.

The Current Battle for Education and for Our Future

With Virgil's outline of these 4 kinds of education as our background, let's remember that the future of education is very much in debate today. My reasons for addressing this here are:

1. Too few people are engaged in the current discussion (The Great Conversation) that will determine the future of education.

To purchase this
book, go to:

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