

# EXCELSIOR NEWSLETTER

Excelsior Classical Covenantal Community

*Raising the next generation of leaders.*

October 2007

[www.excelsiorclassical.org](http://www.excelsiorclassical.org)

## PSAT Reminder:

The annual **PSAT** test will be taking place on **Wednesday, October 17th** at **7:45 am**.

You **must** sign-up by September 28th.

**10th** graders can take the test for practice.

**11th** graders can take the test **this year only** to qualify for **National Merit** and compete for **extensive scholarships**.

Contact Tammy Wheeler (room 113) in the THS Counselor's Office. There is a \$12 fee to sign-up which must be paid at the high school.

You must also meet with Brandie Harris (room 123) to sign-up.

## MATHNASIUM

has extended their hours for homeschoolers to **11am - 1pm Tuesday and Thursday**. They will also be open **Saturday from 9am - 12pm**. Contact Emily at 823-6416 if you are interested.

They are located at: 1715 McCullough Blvd, right next to GO gymnasium.

## MATHCOUNTS

If you have a 6th-8th grade child who has a mind for math and is willing to meet once a week, you may want to join MATHCOUNTS. The competition is in February. For more info contact Suzie Fahling at 840-8969 or [bfahling@comcast.net](mailto:bfahling@comcast.net) A.S.A.P.

## Mom's Night In / Prayer

Monday, October 22nd, 7:00 p.m.  
at the Moeller's House

We'd like to get together for a time of fellowship and prayer.

## OLDER Student Dinner / Discussion Night

Friday, October 26th, 6:00 p.m.  
at the Moeller's House

A fun time to get together and hang-out and have a chance to discuss what you've learned, outside of the classroom.



## How Should Christians Approach the Great Books? by Mary Jo Tate

“What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?” asked church father Tertullian, and many Christians today have the same question. Specifically, how should Christians deal with the ungodly content of many great books, particularly as we study the ancients?

This is a complex issue, and I can give only the outlines of an answer here, but I hope to spark your thinking and direct you to useful resources as you ponder your own response to this question.

All great literature involves conflict. (No conflict, no plot.) Conflict involves sin. Every family has a different standard for what level of depiction of sin is acceptable. For example, I am willing to have my high schooler study Jane Eyre, The Great Gatsby, and The Odyssey, but not Lolita or Lady Chatterley’s Lover (both of which are considered “great” literature by some academics).

Classical education requires the study of great books. Whether or not we find them personally appealing and whether or not we agree with the worldview they depict, these books are important both for the literary achievement of the writing and for the profound impact they have had on subsequent culture and literature.

Ancient literature is full of war and other violence, such family members killing one another, usually in vengeance for another violent action. For example, in the Oresteia cycle of plays by Aeschylus, Agamemnon had sacrificed his daughter to obtain favorable winds for sailing to the Trojan War. When he returns, his adulterous wife Clytemnestra kills him, and then their son Orestes kills her to avenge his father’s death. In one myth, Agamemnon’s father Atreus kills and cooks Thyestes’ children and serves them to him, unaware, in vengeance for some evil. These horrifying actions are often reported secondhand rather than depicted in detail.

Wes Callihan explains: A “convention in Greek drama is keeping action offstage, especially violent action. . . . Although Greek drama does not shy away from telling stories involving horrific violence, it does not show it, because the violence is not the important

thing in the play; it is the ideas that are most important, and the Greeks believed that ideas are best conveyed through words, not images” (A Guide to the Great Books, p. 17). The Greek dramatists would probably be horrified by modern culture’s prioritizing images over words.

There is also a great deal of immorality in ancient literature (as in modern literature and in life in any age). The supreme god Zeus fathers children by dozens of women, and his wife Hera’s jealousy is often a main factor in the plot of the story. Warriors are given women as battle prizes, and gods sweep women away against their will. For example, the god Hades carries Persephone to his realm of the underworld, where he marries her and makes her his queen. This myth, by the way, is how the Greeks accounted for the changing seasons—winter comes during the season when Persephone lives in the underworld.

In the Oedipus plays by Sophocles, Oedipus is fated to kill his father and marry his mother . . . and despite everyone’s attempt to thwart the prophecy, he does both (unknowingly). (Centuries later, Sigmund Freud, unquestionably one of the most powerful forces of modernity—albeit a negative one—made the Oedipus story one of the central features of his psychology.) Again, these are terrible things, but the physical relationship is usually not described.

There is no way to study the great books of antiquity without encountering violence and immorality. The terrible consequences of sin are evident. This literature generally provides examples to avoid, not models to emulate.

There are some excellent resources to help us evaluate ancient literature from a biblical perspective, including Peter Leithart’s Heroes of the City of Man, the Veritas Omnibus I, and Wes Callihan’s Guide to the Great Books, a Veritas Press resource which preceded the development of the Omnibus curriculum.

Another great resource is Leland Ryken’s introduction to Realms of Gold: The Classics in Christian Perspective. That excellent introduction

covers topics like why the classics matter, how to recognize a classic when you read one, five fallacies about literature, how to misread the classics, and a defense of classic books.

The five fallacies (misconceptions) about literature which Ryken discusses are:

- (1) We should read something true rather than something fictional.
- (2) Everything in a work of literature is offered for our approval.
- (3) We should read only literature with whose viewpoint we agree.
- (4) A literary work written by a non-Christian cannot tell the truth.
- (5) Old literature is irrelevant to us today.

(pages 3-6)

In *A Thomas Jefferson Education*, a wonderful book about raising a generation of leaders through mentors and studying the classics, Oliver Van DeMille classifies literature into four types of stories: bent, broken, whole, and healing:

A. Bent stories portray evil as good, and good as evil. Such stories are meant to enhance the evil tendencies of the reader, such as pornography and many horror books and movies. The best decision regarding Bent stories is to avoid them like the plague.

B. Broken stories portray evil as evil and good as good, but evil wins. Something is broken, not right,

in need of fixing. Such books are not uplifting, but can be very inspiring. Broken stories can be very good for the reader if they motivate him or her to heal them, to fix them. The *Communist Manifesto* is a broken classic; so are *The Lord of the Flies* and *1984*. In each of these, evil wins; but they have been very motivating to me because I have felt a real need to help reverse their messages in the real world.

C. Whole stories are where good is good and good wins. Most of the classics are in this category, and readers should spend most of their time in such works.

D. Healing stories can be either Whole or Broken stories where the reader is profoundly moved, changed, significantly improved by his reading experience.

I recommend three rules in coming face-to-face with greatness through the classics:

Avoid Bent stories.

Develop a personal canon of Healing stories.

Spend the majority of your studies in Whole works, but don't neglect Broken stories that you ought to be fixing. (*A Thomas Jefferson Education*, pages 73-74)

I encourage you to grapple with the great books. Read and discuss them with your children, particularly your high-schoolers. They are too important to neglect.

## Upcoming Field Trips

Susanne Dye is planning a field trip for her science classes to the **Pink Palace Planetarium**. The dates that they are deciding on are November 3<sup>rd</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>. She is opening this trip up to all Excelsior families. There are two IMAX films that will be playing – Hurricane on the Bayou and Deep Sea Adventure. If you would like to attend, please email Susanne at [resurfacingconcepts@msn.com](mailto:resurfacingconcepts@msn.com)

**Creation Museum** - ?????

We are planning a day trip to **MSU** to visit their **Archeology and Meteorology Departments**. There is an amazing archeologist that specializes in Assyria who would give us a tour. If you are interested in traveling please contact Shelley Crampton.

We would like to plan a field trip to the **Parthenon** in Nashville. If interested, would you prefer going in December, early spring, or late spring? Please contact Janna Crowe if you would like to attend.

**Pumpkin Patch** – we are looking for someone that would be interested in organizing a trip to a local pumpkin patch toward the end of October. Please contact Penny Moeller if you would like to volunteer.

# Preparing for October...

## October Headmasters

**October 5th** — Tom Thompson  
**October 12th** — Glen Fradenburg  
**October 19th** — Brain Fahling  
**October 26th** — Charlie Hardin

## October Clean-Up

**October 5th** — Thompson family  
**October 12th** — Tate family  
**October 19th** — Moeller family  
**October 26th** — Hardin family

## Lunch:

**October 5th - Connie's**  
**October 12th - Wendy's**  
**October 19th - Pizza Dr.**  
**October 26th - Danver's**

Please leave your completed order form and money in the box labeled "LUNCH" in the foyer of Bldg A. a week before the lunch you're ordering.

## Cross Country Dates:

**Oct 6th - NA Sportsplex** (Union County Invitational)  
**Oct 13th - Tippah Lake** (Ripley Invitational)  
**Oct 20th - Tupelo Invitational**  
**Oct 27th - Race for the Cure**  
 (open to all - it would be great if any Excelsior families wanted to participate and walk or jog)

