

# GRACE CLASSICAL ACADEMY

•• Κατανώμεν ••

Let us consider...



## Entering the Great Conversation by Jennifer Morris

If I asked you if you had a responsibility to educate yourself, would you agree? Or is education sort of a luxury that is nice to have if you want to work indoors and avoid heavy lifting but not really necessary outside of that? Maybe we ought to define education before we answer that. The Oxford Dictionary defines education as “the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university.” Boo. Far be it from me (although apparently not very far) to disagree with the nice people at the Oxford Dictionary, but I hate this definition. I want better than just systematic instruction for my students. One of Merriam-Webster’s definitions is “the knowledge and development resulting from the process of being educated.” This one is better since it at least implies that there should be growth of some kind, but it is still not my favorite. The best one I have found says that education is “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.” Yes. This one. For myself, for my students, for everyone in the world—developed powers of reasoning and judgment are essential. Acquired general knowledge is fine too, but mostly it is the reasoning and judgment that matters, especially for us as Christians (see 1st Thess. 5:21-22).

The mission of Grace Classical Academy is to provide an education designed to help our children know the love, grace, truth, and holiness of our glorious God and, from this understanding, strive for excellence in knowledge, wisdom, and service.

*continued on pg. 2*

Inside  
*Katanomen:*



*Entering the Great Conversation*  
(pgs 2-4)



*A Culture of Defeat?*  
By Genna Tlustos  
(pgs 5-6)



Pictures from *Fiddler on the Roof, Jr.*  
(pg 7)

## … Κατανόμεν …

It is almost as though we can talk to those who came before us by reading and thinking about what they wrote...It is a conversation among all people throughout all time, about all things.

Don't we have a responsibility to be able to look at a situation, determine how it lines up with what we believe, then figure out what our reaction to it should be? If we cannot do that, we are Christians that are easily blown about. It seems like a simple thing, and perhaps for us as adults, it might be easier than for the kids that we are raising. But our teenagers have always lived in a world that constantly bombards them with information without them ever having to go seek it out. If the bulk of knowledge that has been pelted at you is nonsense, you might not know just how much has actually gotten stuck to you along the way—shaping your ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Our job as parents and teachers is to help kids determine how to see the information being thrown their way, keep from it what is true, and be confident in saying “No, thank you” when people look at them suspiciously for leaving the rest. Reasoning and judgment—that is what a good education is, and Christians are duty-bound to obtain it.

We have established that reasoning and judgment might be easier to learn for some more than others. Is there some exercise in developing these skills? Actually, yes. One great way is to engage in the Great Conversation.

If you ever have the privilege of attending a classical Christian school conference, you will quickly learn that we classical educators are smitten with the term, “The Great Conversation.” Perhaps you have heard it before and know all about it, but the first time I heard it, I remember thinking, “Is that a book? Maybe I can find it on Amazon.” In case you are unfamiliar with it as well, let me give you a CliffsNotes run-down. For thousands of years, people have been interacting with the people around them, thinking, making discoveries, and debating their views with one another. They knew that people of future generations might somehow benefit from hearing their thoughts, their stories, and the events of their day, so they wrote them down. That is how we know much of the history of our world. It is also how we can be inspired toward the things of God through the writings of people like C.S. Lewis and Martin Luther. It is almost as though we can talk to those who came before us by reading and thinking about what they wrote. Then we can join the conversation by discussing our thoughts with others, debating our views, and writing these down for those who come after us. It is a conversation among all people throughout all time, about all things. The conversation causes us to think about the problems experienced in times long ago and how to avoid them as well as how they apply to us today. This “Great Conversation” is not just words on a page, it is a way for us to learn and grow, to develop reasoning and judgement. We see ourselves in the characters on the page, and we are changed because of it.

Adolf Hitler knew the power in the pages of literature, which is precisely why the Nazis burned books. They knew that if people read them and engaged with them, they would reason and judge, then start railing against the atrocities that were happening around them. As Ray Bradbury put it, “A book is a loaded gun in the house next door...Who knows who might be the target of the

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Editor: Luke Shawhan

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well-read man?” Hitler knew he could be that target.

To put it succinctly, engaging in the Great Conversation involves reading good literature. It sounds simple and like it would just not be powerful enough to develop the skills we are talking about, but the pages of the written word are purely magical. Don’t get me wrong, reading is not the only way anyone is ever going to develop reasoning or judgment, but it does go a long way in helping. Yes, reading helps us learn vocabulary and comprehension, and the stories are often wonderful and entertaining. But that is only part of it. Reading a story causes us to have to engage with something outside of ourselves. It causes us to have to think and reason and judge situations and the actions of characters. It is practice for what we are supposed to be doing in our actual lives. I am not just referring to non-fiction either. Biographies and histories are fascinating, and there is much to be gained by reading them. But, let us not discount what we can gain from fiction as well.

Take *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example. It is one of my all-time favorite works of fiction. It is widely considered a classic, and it is read in classrooms all over the country. Why is this? Not only can we understand the climate and history of that time period better for reading it, but when we read and engage with Scout and Atticus, even though they didn’t actually exist, we come away more empathetic people. We are changed for the good because from the outside, we can see how blind the people of Macomb County were, and we do not want to be the same way.

In reading stories, we see ourselves. We can learn lessons without having to experience them the hard way. Even stories like *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is about pagans and their sinful ways, show us just how much we are in need of a savior. It is why our ninth graders read it every year.

It is for these reasons that the classical model of education leans so heavily on classic literature. When we teach about the Civil War, we read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It is a piece of fiction that rocked the world so radically at the time that when Lincoln met the author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, he told her that she was “the little woman who wrote the book that started [the Civil] war.” It was fiction, but people knew that the injustices that were portrayed in the book were the same kind of injustices that were actually happening around them. Reading the story forced them to think about the state of the world on their own instead of just hearing their neighbors’ opinions and assuming they were correct.

Albert Einstein said that “Somebody who only reads newspapers and at best books of contemporary authors looks to me like an extremely near-sighted person who scorns eyeglasses. He is completely dependent on the prejudices and fashions of his times, since he never gets to see or hear anything else.” Lord, help us if we are solely dependent on the prejudices and fashions of our times because we are not in the habit of picking up older literature that makes us think for ourselves.

Of course, the greatest piece of literature and history in one is the Word of God. It is the greatest part of the Great Conversation. And yet, in the current climate of our world, reading and engaging with any written word, including *The WORD*, is becoming outdated. We feel like we can accomplish the same goal by listening to today’s version of the verse-of-the-day podcast in the car for a few minutes on the way to work, and we will be all set. We have forgotten that the Word of God was written so that we could know the everlasting Father and gain wisdom to live with

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every single reading. That is the ultimate in education, and it is not something we can short-cut our way through.

In a lesser way, our forefathers left us their wisdom to ponder. What an incredible disservice we are doing ourselves and our children if we choose to ignore it. We know that there is wisdom to be gained in the writings of the people who came before us. Yes, it takes discipline to dive into Homer or Plato. New habits are not easily formed, and Homer and Plato do not always say things as simply as what we might like. But it will be harder for us than for our children. They have not had time to reject it as long as we have, and if we encourage them early and often to engage with literature, they will develop a life-long love of reading and engaging.

I am not suggesting that our first graders read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Gilgamesh*, but they can start building their reading habits with Dr. Seuss and the *Magic Tree House*. Not only will these habits benefit them in every aspect of their school career, but just imagine what would happen if a family curled up in the living room together in the evenings and read together. Read the Word, read *The Chronicles of Narnia*, read tales from history, just read. Getting children to become readers can solve many of the troubles they have at school and will offer some much-needed down time from all the crazy busyness of life.

There are many great things about the authors of the past, but one of them is that those authors don't judge you for picking up a book a little too late in life. It is never too late to glean wisdom from them by joining in the Great Conversation. And maybe, when you join in, you will have something to contribute to the people who come after you.

## Great Books List

We try to fill our literature classes with books that are considered 'Great Books.' Here are some of the books that our high school students read. More "Great Books" can be found through the St. John's Great Books list.

*The Age of Alexander: Nine Greek Lives* by Plutarch

*The Epic of Gilgamesh*  
translated by David Ferry

*Foxe's Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe

*Hamlet* by Shakespeare

*Hard Times* by Charles Dickens

*Henry V* by Shakespeare

*The Histories* by Herodotus

*The Inferno* by Dante

*The Last Days of Socrates* by Plato

*The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper

*Moby Dick* by Herman Melville

*The Odyssey* by Homer

*The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway

*The Oresteia* by Aeschylus

*Paradise Lost* by John Milton

*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

*The Prince* by Nicolo Machiavelli

*The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane

*The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Emma Orczy

*The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens

*The Taming of the Shrew* by Shakespeare

*The Three Theban Plays* by Sophocles

*To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

*Utopia* by Sir Saint Thomas More

# A Culture of Defeat?

By Genna Tlustos, class of 2020

There's a term people often use when talking about Native Americans: "The culture of defeat." It doesn't require much explanation. The Indians had everything taken away from them, including their dignity. They wound up barely surviving, hanging on by their fingernails, eking out a sparse living on parcels of unwanted land that by and large were, at best, marginally arable; land that no sensible white person, at the time, had any interest in owning. American Indians to this day have the highest per capita rates of poverty, illiteracy, and alcoholism of any ethnic group in North America. They were, and to a large degree still are, a defeated people.

What if the Church today might not be suffering from a culture of defeat? Lately, several Christian leaders have fallen away from the faith, disheartening Christians across the country. One of these was Joshua Harris, the author of a famous 1997 book called, "I Kissed Dating Goodbye." Over this summer, Harris divorced his wife of 21 years and said that he no longer is a Christian. Just weeks later, Marty Sampson, a member of the popular Christian band Hillsong, said he was "genuinely losing his faith." Many of the people who do claim to be Christians present a watered-down, secularized version of Christianity. For example, Rachel Hollis' #1 New York Times best-selling book, "Girl, Wash Your Face," claims to be Christian. However, the book contains very little about God and a lot of quotes like, "You should be the very first of your own priorities." With all these Christians publicly renouncing their faith or presenting self-help as the Gospel, today's church is confused and defeated. How did it get in this state and how can Christians keep from feeling defeated?

First, Christians need to consider why so many people are falling away from the faith or conforming the Gospel to secular standards. According to the Pew Research Center, 65% of American adults call themselves Christian in 2018, which is 12% less than 2008, a decade earlier. Sampson, the former Hillsong member, cites his reason for leaving the church as being that no one talks about the Bible's contradictions, or pastors falling away from the faith, or how a loving God could send people to Hell. However, if you've been in the church for any significant amount of time, you know these issues have been addressed time and time again. Instead, Sampson's issue may be that he is listening to the secular voices who say the church doesn't address these issues. This theory can be confirmed by Harris' comments in his announcement that he was leaving the faith; he apologized for not supporting marriage equality and for his views about women in the church. These comments again make it seem like Harris has succumbed to the pressure of the world instead of staying strong in his faith. The church is not making its voice loud enough, it is not staying strong enough, and it is becoming more and more divided.

How can we address the state of the church and what can we do to bring revival and renewal? It seems like the reason so many are falling away is that the voice of the world is overpowering the voice of the church, causing some of the seemingly strongest Christians to doubt and falter. This especially seems true when it comes to issues like evolution, LGBT rights, and even the existence of Jesus. The obvious solution is for the Church to raise its voice. Not in a way that caters to the world or is tailored for non-Christians, but in a way where the solid truth is made clear. The Church needs strong leaders strongly voicing God's truth. John Cooper from the Christian band "Skillet" said in August, "We must STOP making worship leaders and thought leaders or influencers or cool people or 'relevant' people the most influential people in Christendom..." We need to elevate the voices of seasoned Christians telling the truth: the Bible does not support evolution, the Bible does not support abortion, the Bible does not support homosexuality, and the Bible does not support self-help or you being the first of your priorities. The clear truth of the Gospel has been

diluted and made cloudy by wolves in sheep's clothing. The reason so many are falling away from the faith is simply that the world's voice is drowning out the voice of Christians.

So, what can you and I do to combat this? First, elevate the voices of others who are speaking truth, and be fearless about the consequence. Secondly, raise your own voice and stay rooted in the truth: Give a speech in your class about why abortion is wrong. Share your testimony with your friends. Tell your coworker that you support them as a person, but not their actions. Live like Jesus. Speak the truth in love. If we do this, the world may come a little closer to believing and those considering leaving the faith will come closer to staying.

If we want to change the Church's spirit of defeat to one of victory, we need to proclaim the truth of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Only then will hearts be loved, minds be changed, and souls be saved. Are you going to listen to the world's lies or God's truth? Are you going to stay silent, or be bold? Choose carefully.

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## Matching Gift Opportunity

It has been and continues to be an amazing thing to watch God bless this school! I could fill hours (no exaggeration!) telling you stories of how God's provision has been a faith-building, ever-present reality in my life and the life of this school, and I want these stories to glorify Him while encouraging others. He has provided teachers and families and students and a building and finances. He continues to show that He is Jehovah Jirah—Our Provider.

This year, I have once again received a matching gift challenge for the 2019-2020 school year from one of our grandparents at the school. God has given him a vision for GCA to be debt free, and he has generously agreed to match every dollar that is given up to \$10,000. This would allow GCA to receive \$20,000 total if another \$10,000 is given by the end of the current school year.

If you feel led to give to this cause, please let me know and put "PAY DOWN DEBT" in the memo of any check given for this purpose.

All of these blessings (both past and future), I do not hesitate to acknowledge as coming from the gracious hand of our Lord Jesus through His faithful and obedient servants. We offer our praise and thanksgiving to Him and pray His blessings on those who obey His leading.

Thank you for allowing me to be part of this great adventure!

With a grateful and overflowing heart,

Jedidiah Moss

# Fiddler on the Roof, Jr.



This school year, GCA performed its first musical, *Fiddler on the Roof, Jr!* The students and drama and art staff worked incredibly hard, and the musical was performed in front of a packed auditorium—twice. Congratulations on an excellent production to all involved!



## Staff Birthdays

### December

12/5—Robin Harrison  
12/26—Tracy Mercer



### January

01/06—Judy Daugherty  
01/20—Lisa Loyd  
01/30—Jedidiah Moss

### February

02/01—Jeanette Johnson  
02/04—Phil Mendenhall  
02/15—Dustin Bush  
02/24—Janelle Schriver



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*January 2020*

- 1 Tuition Due
- 6-7 Teacher Training and Work Days
- 8 First Day of Third Quarter
- 20 MLK Jr. Holiday: No School
- 23 High School History Day: 9:00 am. (No evening performance)
- 31 Favorite Food Dress Day

*February 2020*

- 1 Tuition Due
- 5 Progress Reports
- 10-11 Optional P/T Conferences: 4:00-6:00 pm
- 17 Presidents Day Holiday: No School
- 20 Skating Party
- 28 Lively Locks & Lids Dress Day

*March 2020*

- 1 Tuition Due and Last Day for Reenrollment Discount
- 5 End of Third Quarter
- 6-13 Spring Break
- 16 Beginning of 4th Quarter
- 19 Tri-Math-A-Lon: 1:00 pm
- 26 4th-7th Grade Battle Grammatica: 9:00 am
- 27 Divisions of Ditto Special Dress Day
- 27 High School Soccer Intramural