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Literature and the Arts in Catholic Education

Catholic education seeks to “bring human wisdom into an encounter with divine wisdom,”¹ cultivate “in students the intellectual, creative, and aesthetic faculties of the human person,” introduce a cultural heritage, and prepare them for professional life and to take on the responsibilities and duties of society and the Church.² Literature and the arts³ are essential tools of Catholic education, helping impart “a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture, and of history” and an ordering of “the whole of human culture to the news of salvation.”⁴

This document presents principles, standards, and resources to help Catholic elementary and secondary educators select literature and other works of art that are formative for a student’s mind, body, and spirit. This guidance is for Catholic K-12 schools; higher education assumes a different level of maturity, aesthetics, intellectual depth, and complexity. Nevertheless, the principles are the same, and it is our hope that this document can assist educators at all levels as they seek to determine how to select literature, music, films, paintings, and other works of art that are best suited to accomplish the mission of Catholic education.

Principles

Principle 1: Literature and the arts “strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems and his experiences in trying to know and perfect both himself and the world.”⁵

Because Catholic education strives for the perfection of its students and the world, literature and the arts are a natural and important part of that mission. At their best, they invite truthful exploration of the human condition and development of the aesthetic sense of the soul.

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 57.

² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007) 12.

³ For purposes of this paper, “the arts” include painting, sculpture, music, poetry, and the performing arts.

⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) 53.

⁵ Saint Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) 62.

Catholic education does not teach reading simply for reading's sake or for its utility, such as learning to follow written directions and work a job. Catholic educators teach reading so students can access and evaluate the knowledge, wisdom, creativity and insights of others. Truths distilled from this information can then be applied to their individual quest for truth, holiness, and salvation and shared with others in pursuit of the common good.

Similarly, Catholic educators do not expose their students to the arts of music, dance, movies, and paintings simply for entertainment or to fill time. The arts can serve a higher end of exploring the complex human condition, delighting the human soul, and facilitating transcendence to and understanding of God through His creation. Training in the arts can also unleash individual artistic insights and powers allowing students to share in God's creative work.

Literature and the arts provide rich material for reflection on essential questions such as: "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the nature of my relationship, rights, and duties to God and to others?" "Is this a thing of beauty or value?" "Is this representative of good or evil?" In this way, literature and the arts are foundational to Catholic education's culture and faith-based mission.

Principle 2: Literature and the arts are selected to advance the mission of Catholic education through a "critical, systematic transmission of culture"⁶ guided by a Christian vision of reality.⁷

Catholic education seeks to critically and systematically transmit culture, and so it turns to works of literature and the arts that explicitly or implicitly transmit and form culture and values. The academic community, inspired by a Catholic vision of reality, must thoughtfully and deliberately craft a complete program that provides the right literature, music, art, and drama at the right time and integrates it with the cultural and idea-shaping materials students encounter in all academic areas, moving students to see the beauty and inner harmony of all knowledge as ultimately coming from one transcendent Truth, Christ Himself.

Additionally, in Catholic education "the critical and systematic transmission of culture" occurs "in the light of faith."⁸ This requirement precludes simply presenting a wide variety of literature, arts, and music based simply on staff idiosyncrasies and whim. All literature and the arts, including secular selections, are to be carefully chosen and analyzed from a Catholic understanding of reality. Catholic educators should not simply expose students to various books and arts without expert guidance by simply letting them try to figure it all out on their own or studying only those works that might attract an immature fancy. Such an approach can lead to confusion, error, indifference, and despair as a student is fooled into thinking he has created his

⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977) 49.

⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) 36.

⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) 49.

own standards when in fact he may be at the mercy of personal whims and desires, or worse, may be manipulated by outside forces. Young people encountering weighty issues through these complex media, especially if presented in literature and the arts in ways antithetical to the faith and without proper guidance, may succumb to untoward views due to ignorance, youthful presumption, impertinence, or prejudice.

It is the role of a Catholic educator to suggest and model a response to the critical questions being provoked in carefully chosen works, in order to provide a coherent and consistent Catholic understanding to help youth manage their shifting viewpoints and come to a mature and freely-chosen understanding of reality and its faith-based moorings.⁹ The Catholic teacher is model and mentor, not an aloof and uncommitted purveyor of unevaluated content. All literature and the arts must be critically and systematically evaluated and transmitted in the light of faith.

Principle 3: Because Catholic education’s mission is different from that of secular schools, its libraries and its selection and use of literature and the arts should reflect these differences and serve the higher aims of Catholic education.

The mission of Catholic education is uniquely focused on the integral formation of students’ minds, hearts, and bodies in truth and holiness. Catholic education is committed to the pursuit of truth and seeks to explore the harmony between truth and beauty. Catholic education is also concerned with the eternal salvation of its students and Christian service to promote the common good.¹⁰ Catholic educators should approach literature and the arts with an eye toward the impact they have on its mission and the right ordering of the intellect, will, imagination, and spirit.

The exploration of literature and arts in a Catholic education must never effectively work against the mission by leading students into sin, driving them to despair, or impairing their ability to understand and serve the common good of humanity. This concern is greatest at the youngest ages, and older students are increasingly expected to make right choices and judgments while reading increasingly complex and even false material, but care should always be taken to avoid confusion and scandal. Catholic educators should place priority on publications of substantial quality and educational value, including Catholic spiritual formation. Great care must be exercised as older students grow in their awareness and exposure to man in his fallen state. Such knowledge can then be used to better serve the redemptive and evangelical role that Catholic education also serves.¹¹

⁹ The general educational approach in this section is proposed by Luigi Giussani in his book *The Risk of Education* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001). See esp. pp. 55-65.

¹⁰ *Code of Canon Law* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983) 795.

¹¹ Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) 66, 69.

In Catholic education, curricula, libraries, and art programs ought not simply replicate their secular counterparts. Their mission is not to present uncritically all possible human thought and viewpoints, but to present the best literature and arts critically and in the context of a Catholic worldview. Students, in a developmentally appropriate way, need to be exposed to seminal works of literature, drama, poetry, and the arts.¹² Catholic educators can make use of non-Christian sources and of books and arts which present non-Catholic understandings of critical human issues, but these should not remain unchallenged or leave students spiritually or humanly damaged in the process. Accounts of the human experience that are opposed to a Christian understanding of the world can be appropriate for older students who are well-formed and have a good foundation. Such accounts may at times be edgy and uncomfortable but must not be extreme; they should not go left unchallenged; and they should not put a student at spiritual or emotional risk. A Christian humanism, founded in the Catholic intellectual tradition that focuses on the best in literature and the arts, can provide for a balanced approach in forming students to critically examine their contemporary experiences.

However, it must also be remembered that both literature and arts, and western literature in particular, are not just tools of personal and spiritual formation but also fields of study in themselves. Especially at the upper high school and collegiate level, works of art and literature need to be considered as distinct elements in particular academic fields, with their own specific logic and methodologies of creation, study, and evaluation. Students should learn to appreciate the works' historical development and interactions. Great works of literature and arts are not only tools of human formation and artifacts helpful in the development of academic knowledge but also works of artistic merit. Students should be taught to interpret and value a work of literature or art on its own terms.

Standards for Policies Related to Literature and the Arts

- Literature and the arts are selected to make known the proper nature of humanity and help students perfect themselves and the world in accord with Catholic virtues and values.
- Literature and the arts are carefully selected to systematically transmit culture and uncover authentic reality through the light of the Catholic faith and a Catholic worldview.
- Literature and the arts support the mission of Catholic education and do not lead students to sin, despair, or confusion about basic human goods or the Catholic faith, with

¹² There are many lists of literature and spirituality which might be considered part of the "Great Books" in general and the Catholic Intellectual tradition in particular.

appropriate attention to the age of students and their preparation for complex or false material.

- Literature and art selections assist in the development and fulfillment of students' aesthetic capabilities as people who "share" in God's creative work.¹³
- Literature and art selections enable one to move from the world of senses to the world of the Spirit, to that of the transcendent and invisible God.¹⁴
- Library and bookstore holdings are selected in accord with the principles and priorities of faithful Catholic education, with emphasis on materials that are of substantial quality and educational value, including Catholic spiritual formation.
- All literature and the arts are critically and systematically evaluated and transmitted to students in the light of the Catholic faith. Teachers provide a coherent and consistent Catholic viewpoint to help students come to a mature and freely-chosen understanding of reality.

Operationalizing the Standards

Policies and procedures for the selection of literature and the arts in Catholic education should be written to ensure that the selections:

- support the mission of Catholic education;
- have enduring value and educational significance and are selected more for intellectual, moral, inspirational, and artistic weight than for entertainment, popularity, appearance on reading or award lists, or enticing students to read;
- assist the student to a right ordering of the intellect, will, imagination, and emotions in the pursuit and understanding of truth, beauty, and goodness;
- include evaluation of themes and events in terms of Catholic norms, values, and worldview so as to provide insight into a Catholic understanding of the human person in his redeemed and unredeemed state and in his relationship to God, family, and others;
- are free of significant and shocking profanity;
- are free of explicit discussion, presentation, or description of sexuality, sexual activity, or sexual fantasy;

¹³ Saint John Paul II, *Letter to Artists* (1999), 1.

¹⁴ Saint John Paul II (1999), 6, 12.

- are not a proximate cause of sinful thoughts or actions, or a pathway to the occult;
- are not contrary to truth;
- are not a temptation to despair or a diminishing of faith; and
- are read under the guidance of a knowledgeable and spiritually formed adult particularly when controversial, emotional, or otherwise sensitive material is presented. If assigned for summer reading, parents are made aware of any sensitive material and agree to take on this role.

Because a student is generally not able to opt out of major literature assignments, and because there is a myriad of possible materials that can meet a Catholic school's literature goals (see the Newman Society's recommendations),¹⁵ there are many selections that satisfy educational objectives and the recommended policies contained within this document. If exceptions are made, they should be limited to extraordinary circumstances, with primary concern for the students' purity and formation and with approval from top administrators.

Possible Questions

Question: We want our library holdings to be broad and varied, not limited by Catholic sensitivities or by only weighty content. Shouldn't we let students read and view what interests them, not what we pre-determine for them?

Response: Educators do not take this view when a school provides lunch or snacks. We give students a choice of healthy options suited to the conditions. If the goal is just to get kids to put something in their mouths, then cotton candy and soda will undoubtedly serve this end better than carrots and grapes. But if the goal is to teach them to appreciate healthy, natural food and build their physical well-being and strength, then candy and chips (which are not bad in and of themselves) may get in the way of something better like juice and crackers.

In the same way, we want rich and varied literature and art which will help build the health of students' minds, souls, and imaginations. Cynical, dark, titillating, disordered, vain, bitter, or completely frivolous fiction may get in the way of an encounter with more difficult but meaningful and formative materials, which serve a higher end. There are more good and great books and art to experience than any one student can handle, so there is no shortage of material to take the place of the mediocre, meaningless, or malformed material flooding much of the market today.

¹⁵ See the Cardinal Newman Society's Recommended Reading List, retrievable at <https://newmansociety.org/selected-reading-list-for-catholic-k-12-schools/>.

Question: Shouldn't we let the English teachers decide for their classrooms, and the librarian decide for the library? They are the content experts, after all.

Response: Curriculum and library holdings should be driven by the mission of Catholic education, not by varied teacher strengths and interests or a librarian who may or may not be intensely knowledgeable of the curriculum and mission. The curriculum transcends departments and teachers. It is a function of the whole academic community, in service to the school's Catholic mission.

The administration and faculty must work together to ensure mission integrity and the complete Catholic nature of the institution. They must also ensure that it is effectively imparting a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture, and of history, which transcends all departments and individual disciplines. They cannot in false humility assert lack of competence or vision, but must engage both the academic and faith communities in open discussion about the curriculum and library holdings in light of the Catholic mission.

The administration and faculty must also ensure the necessary integration among the various academic disciplines which, because they all seek knowledge and truth, comes from God and finds perfection and truth in their unified source. As St. John Henry Newman observed, the various disciplines "have multiplied bearings one on another, and an internal sympathy, and admit, or rather demand, comparison and adjustment. They complete, correct, and balance each other."¹⁶

Question: Shouldn't teachers design their own courses and teach books they like and are familiar with? This will help make teaching stronger and more engaging.

Response: Teachers should model the "life-long learning" that is the goal of all schools. As discipline experts they are well-trained to examine and deliver new content (whether of their choosing or not) within the discipline. This content should be set by the school as a whole in line with its Catholic mission. Most Catholic English teachers were trained in secular English departments and are most familiar with works encountered there. The Catholic school must not shy away from asking teachers to master and skillfully teach works that are outside of the purview of modern secular university English departments. They must be trained and prepared to deliver rich works from the Catholic cultural and intellectual tradition and ensure that classic works from outside that tradition are nevertheless critically examined from a Catholic worldview. The Catholic intellectual tradition includes works of literature and art (e.g., *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, the works of Milton and C.S. Lewis) that, while not Catholic and even containing

¹⁶ St. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 75.

problematic elements, have been found to foster authentic cultural, spiritual, and social development for Catholics and indeed all of humanity.

Question: Many schools stock library books that are recommended by major library associations, have won Newberry awards, or are very popular right now according to major publishers. Don't the kids need to read these?

Response: No, they do not. Each of these sources of influence have their own agendas, viewpoints, and culture that they are advancing—some even in direct opposition to the Church's goals. Especially in young adult fiction, book awards are given to works promoting abortion and homosexuality (e.g. *Skim* and *This One Summer* by Mariko Tamaki).

To advance the Catholic mission, librarians can carefully select among thousands of books. They should do so thoughtfully with mission in mind, not slavishly based on fashion, popularity, or dubious authority. Catholic librarians' criteria are how well the holdings serve the Catholic mission, knowing that students have access to virtually all these books on their own through the internet or public library, should they be so inclined to actively seek them out. Catholic education should develop in students a Catholic sensibility, so that they can make good judgments about what is worthwhile. But it takes time and focus to do so.

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Appendix A: Examples from Specific Schools

This Appendix includes examples of policies in use at the time of publication. These are presented in alphabetical order and are not necessarily exemplary in all possible areas.

Ave Maria Academy (Ave Maria, Fla.)

Books, media and movies must:

- Be free of significant or shocking profanity.
- Be free of explicit discussion, presentation or description of sexual activity or sexual fantasy.
- Assist the student, under the guidance of a faithful and committed teacher, to a right ordering of the imagination, passions, and emotions.
- Not be a likely proximate cause of leading students to sinful thoughts or actions, leading to a diminishing of faith, leading students astray of truth, or leading them to fall into despair.
- Characters either undergo positive growth in virtue or their vices show to be detrimental and contribute to their downfall.
- Have enduring value and educational significance, selected for intellectual, inspirational and artistic weight rather than for entertainment, recent popularity, faddishness or titillation in an attempt to “get them to read.”
- Be of high-quality writing and artistic value promoting creativity and a Catholic imagination.
- Be content and ability appropriate for the age.
- Assist the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness.
- Discussion of texts and materials should include evaluation of themes and events in terms of Catholic norms, values and worldview to provide insight into a Catholic understanding of the human person in his redeemed and unredeemed state, and in his relationship to God, family, and others.
- Movies may not be rated “R.”
- Any summer reading or outside of class reading assigned by the school should present unambiguous moral themes and characters. The author should clearly resolve all crises within the context of a Christian worldview.
- All books and movies are to be listed in the course of studies/class syllabus.
- Teachers may not remove a book from the course of studies without prior approval of the principal. Any new/additional chapter or book added to grade 4-12 must have the approval of the Principal.

If showing a movie:

- Movies shown during instructional time are to be for pedagogical and not entertainment purposes.
- Showing an entire movie should be a rare event in class. If searching for rewards for students or things to do during a celebration, games and other social or physical activities are to be preferred over movies.
- Watching carefully selected scenes rather than entire works can be a very efficient and effective way of maintaining focus and ensuring effective discussion.
- If the movie is available online (Netflix, YouTube, internet, etc.) consider having the students watch the movie as homework, possibly with their parents or fellow students, and complete a study-guide or reflection questions, which can then be discussed in class, and through the use of snippets shown to the whole group.
- Movies, if shown in their entirety during class time, should be stopped at frequent intervals for analysis and discussion.
- The instructor should be actively engaged in watching the movie as well and not attempting other work.
- Students should be seated to ensure their ability to focus on the film and engage in discussion. Theater type seating as opposed to sitting behind a desk can assist in ensuring the student is not sleeping, accessing social media, or doing other work during the movie.
- Any brief scenes with foul language, temporary nudity, or other offensive content must be skipped over or blocked from view or hearing.

Frassati Catholic High School (Spring, Tex.)

English Department Philosophy and Mission:

“...A selfless desire for a commitment to calling, a sense that honor is far more valuable than life—these are aspects of the soul that must be awakened by a vision of the high and the noble. And herein lies one of the great values of studying the classics: our poetic heritage gives imperishable form to the heroic aspiration.”

-Dr. Louise Cowan

By placing before us examples of the high and noble, the classic works of literature ignite in us the desire to reach such heights of greatness as well. While distinct from philosophy and science, literature as an academic discipline is comparable to both in its breadth and depth of imparting knowledge. Moreover, as the ancient Roman writer Cicero pointed out, “nothing is sweeter and more useful than the study of literature” because of its power to illuminate the beauty of the truth about the human person. For these reasons, the English program approaches literature as a vehicle of truth that imparts wisdom.

Thus, the English curriculum seeks to cultivate the students’ ability to understand, appreciate, and respond to the great works of our literary tradition. Students search out the wisdom of the poets and refine their judgment by taking part in seminar discussions focused on the chief works of major authors. Students are encouraged to learn what the best of the writers understand about human

nature and the human experience throughout the ages. In doing so, they also follow in the footsteps of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who so loved Dante's great epic *The Divine Comedy* that he committed large passages to memory and would spontaneously recite them for his friends.

Throughout the English course of study, students develop their ability to read and think critically, and then to express themselves orally and in written form. Special emphasis is placed on mastery of the written word through an intensive writing program that is carefully woven into each course.

The course sequence parallels the Ethics and Culture department courses. The freshmen English course is organized thematically around the question of the human person's search for identity, thus dovetailing with the Ethics and Culture course, *The Human Person*. In the sophomore English course, the literature explores the question of man's search for happiness, complementing the Ethics and Culture course, *Principles of Ethics: The Search for Happiness*. The study of logic, rhetoric, and analytical writing in the junior and senior courses also helps students as they address the more complex issues in Bioethics and in their senior writing project.

The mission of Frassati Catholic High School's English Department is twofold: 1) for students to achieve excellence in writing, interpretive, and critical language skills and 2) for students to achieve a certain excellence of soul, by learning to integrate the knowledge to be gained from great literature not only into their other courses but into their own lives.

Seton High School (Manassas, Va.)

When choosing literature for classroom use, we generally consider a number of criteria. Using *The Odyssey* as an example will help to clarify those criteria. First of all, is it worthwhile as literature? Here we are often guided by the experience of the ages: if a work is a "classic" of western literature and has been part of its culture for many years, it is likely to have enduring value. The quality of the writing is likely to be high, the story to be appealing, and the themes to be those of universal importance. This is all certainly true of *The Odyssey*, one of the staples of western education for hundreds of years and an essential point of reference for educated persons for at least as long.

A second consideration is the work's appropriateness in a Catholic school at the level being considered. While students just beginning high school may have been previously sheltered from certain more adult topics in the past, most do know at least in general about serious problems of morality such as violence and unchastity. While they may be surprised at first to find them in assigned literature because of this sheltering, they realize that immorality is a part of life and that the struggle between good and evil is a universal theme. So, beginning in high school, unchastity may be seen in a number of the classics students' study (i.e., *The Scarlet Letter*, *Hamlet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Tale of Two Cities*).

Any books with explicit descriptions of unchastity, or which could possibly lead a young person to sin, are eliminated. Most books clearly portray sin as sin: where there could be any doubt in the mind of the student, classroom discussion led by the teacher clarifies the matter. For example, at the very beginning of our study of *The Odyssey* we explain that ancient Greece was a pagan society, and that the people did not have Revelation to guide them or sanctifying grace to strengthen them. Part of our ongoing discussion is a consideration of the differences between this pagan society and one guided by Christian principles. They discover that the Greeks had a remarkable natural understanding of virtue in some ways but lacked virtue in other ways because their religion was unable to provide them

with the Way, the Truth and the Life. In spite of the depiction of the sins of the Greeks (somewhat graphic in violence, not at all graphic in unchastity), we believe that none of our Seton students could possibly be led into sin by the contents of *The Odyssey*, especially when they are explained by Catholic teachers in the context of a good Catholic education.

St. Augustine Academy (Ventura, Calif.)

From its founding Saint Augustine Academy has endeavored to pass down to our students the most important works of literature in the Western tradition. Given the constraints of time in the school year and the maturity of the students, we very carefully select our class offerings from a variety of genres from across the centuries. We identify important themes and topics by examining the theological, moral and intellectual virtues in various works. We make note of important themes expressed in key passages by organizing them into three columns THEOLOGICAL, MORAL and INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES and by placing these citations along with their location in the text. In this way we can more easily trace the development of these three values and determine whether there is sufficient intellectual, moral and theological content to merit inclusion in our curriculum. By INTELLECTUAL we mean that the work deals with philosophical, historical and political issues. MORAL VIRTUES involve the ethical questions most often centered on Christian and Greco-Roman virtues. THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES refer to Judeo-Christian questions of our relationship to God both as individuals and as a community, and, most specifically, to Jesus Christ as our risen Savior.

In this way we can examine whether our favorite works go beyond the level of a heart-warming tale or a hard-hitting history and moves into the realm of the morally gripping story that is also instructive of the commandments of our faith, of our Lord's love for us and of our struggle to love and be faithful to Him. If the work contains clear passages of moral and theological content that our students may discover for themselves, then we know that the work will afford the students a chance to reflect and consider these great questions over time in their own lives.

The Lyceum (Cleveland, Ohio)

Because teaching literature effectively would seem to follow from a coherent and true philosophy of literature, we take this opportunity to set forth some general principles that we hope the teacher will agree with and find useful.

1. Students should read many wholesome works of imaginative literature. Literature addresses itself primarily to the imagination and the emotions of the reader, and therefore is an important tool by which those faculties are formed rightly.
2. Because of its unique influence on the emotions and imagination a school cannot be too careful in its own selection of literature that it "requires" students to read.

With regard to the first point, we must remember that a work of imaginative literature is not a work of philosophy, nor is it a work of theology. Though imaginative literature would appear to be all-embracing in its ability to include anything and everything ("Homer wrote a cosmos in verse"), nonetheless there is a distinction between a work that addresses itself primarily to the faculty of reason and a work that addresses itself primarily to the "heart" or emotions. As Aristotle points out about the purpose of tragedy in his *Poetics*, we maintain that imaginative literature is a great tool for

disposing the passions rightly; literature has a great power for inclining the passions with moderation towards goodness, truth, and beauty.

On the other hand, a tool which has such a great power for good also has a great power to the opposite, and therefore we note that just as good literature (like good music) has an immediate good effect on the reader, bad literature has an immediate bad effect on the reader. But a school, like a good physician, must above all abide by the words of the Hippocratic Oath when it says, “never do harm.” In other words, a school must keep an especially strict standard about what literature it requires students to read.

Unfortunately, because of differences in human judgment and the difficulty of measuring works of literature, it very well might follow from this “principle of strictness” that students will not encounter certain great works of literature because they have been erroneously cut from the canon because of some “doubt” about their appropriateness.

This leads us to the next three principles by which we select books at The Lyceum:

3. Texts chosen should be undeniably good or excellent.
4. Every text must be chosen keeping in mind its suitability for the particular age level for which it is chosen.
5. Some little regard to “literacy” should play a part in the selection of texts.

Of course it may be impossible to find a single text that is “undeniably excellent” insofar as the poet maintains: “More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise” And so we might most assuredly find someone to deny that any single text is “excellent.” We will, consequently, stipulate that every text in The Lyceum canon of literature be “excellent” in the eyes of most who are liberally educated. Even so it would seem unimaginable that there might be someone who would deny the excellence of *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*.

That every text ought to be suitable for a particular age level is self-evident with regard to the “readability level” of a text. It is more difficult to know which texts are suitable for various maturity levels with regard to the ideas and content of particular works. For example, experienced educators know that Jane Austen’s marvelous *Pride and Prejudice* can stir the heart and passion of the junior and senior in high school, but very often proves to be a dismal failure for the ninth and tenth grade student. At the same time depending on a particular literature teacher, a work which is arguably more suitable for the 12th grade student with respect to content (e.g. the *Iliad*) might, in fact, work very well with a younger student.

In general, we believe that works of literature should be just enough advanced for a particular age level to provide a challenge and an opportunity for vocabulary building as well as an opportunity for increasing a student’s individual ability to read with understanding – but not so advanced that the text will prove frustrating and ultimately produce the intellectual fatigue which we call “Great Books Burnout.” This fatigue is especially prone to happen at the small classical school precisely because of the high standards and lofty aspirations that are the hallmark of such a school. On the one hand The Lyceum honors its students by offering the greatest works of the western world, (the school does not insult the minds of its students by giving them unworthy works written by mediocre minds); on the

other hand it takes pains to avoid the opposite danger of presenting great works that are simply inaccessible to developing minds.

Needless to say, choosing appropriate works of literature that meet all of these requirements is therefore not an easy task!

Appendix B: Selections from Church Documents Informing this Topic

Catholic schools help form a Catholic culture which is “critical and evaluative, historical and dynamic.”

Numerous Church teachings, especially in the Second Vatican Council and in subsequent Magisterium, have reflected on *culture* and its importance for the complete development of human potential. The Second Vatican Council, in considering the importance of culture, asserted that there is no truly human experience without the context of a specific culture. In fact, “man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture.” Every culture is a way of giving expression to the transcendental aspect of life; this includes reflection on the mystery of the world and, in particular, on the mystery of humanity. The essential meaning of culture consists “in the fact that it is a characteristic of human life as such. Man lives a truly human life thanks to culture. Human life is culture in the sense also that man is marked out and differentiated by it from all that exists elsewhere in the visible world: man cannot exist outside of culture. Man always lives in accordance with a culture that belongs to him and which, in turn, creates among men a bond that is also proper to them, determining the inter-human and social character of human existence.”

Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013) 30

Moreover, the term *culture* indicates all those means by which “man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates, and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family.” Therefore, this includes both the *subjective* aspect—behaviors, values, and traditions that each person takes on—and the *objective* aspect, that is, the works of individuals.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013) 31

A school uses its own specific means for the integral formation of the human person: the communication of culture. It is extremely important, then, that the Catholic educator reflect on the profound relationship that exists between culture and the Church. For the Church not only influences culture and is, in turn, conditioned by culture; the Church embraces everything in human culture which is compatible with Revelation and which it needs in order to proclaim the message of Christ and express it more adequately according to the cultural characteristics of each people and each age. The close relationship between culture and the life of the Church is an especially clear manifestation of the unity that exists between creation and redemption. For this reason, if the communication of culture is to be a genuine educational activity, it must not only be organic, but also critical and evaluative, historical and dynamic. Faith will provide Catholic educators with some essential principles for critique and evaluation; faith will help them to see all of human history as a history of salvation which culminates in the fullness of the Kingdom. This puts culture into a creative context, constantly being perfected.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982) 20

Students will be helped to attain that synthesis of faith and culture which is necessary for faith to be mature. But a mature faith is also able to recognize and reject cultural counter-values which threaten human dignity and are therefore contrary to the Gospel. No one should think that all of the problems of religion and of faith will be completely solved by academic studies; nevertheless, we are convinced that a school is a privileged place for finding adequate ways to deal with these problems. The declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, echoing *Gaudium et Spes*, indicates that one of the characteristics of a Catholic school is that it interpret and give order to human culture in the light of faith.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 52

The social and cultural context of our time is in danger of obscuring “the educational value of the Catholic school, in which its fundamental reason for existing and the basis of its genuine apostolate is to be found”. Indeed, although it is true to say that in recent years there has been an increased interest and a greater sensitivity on the part of public opinion, international organizations and governments with regard to schooling and education, there has also been a noticeable tendency to reduce education to its purely technical and practical aspects. Pedagogy and the sciences of education themselves have appeared to devote greater attention to the study of phenomenology and didactics than to the essence of education as such, centered on deeply meaningful values and vision... There is a tendency to forget that education always presupposes and involves a definite concept of man and life. To claim neutrality for schools signifies in practice, more times than not, banning all reference to religion from the cultural and educational field, whereas a correct pedagogical approach ought to be open to the more decisive sphere of ultimate objectives, attending not only to “how”, but also to “why”, overcoming any misunderstanding as regards the claim to neutrality in education, restoring to the educational process the unity which saves it from dispersion amid the meandering of knowledge and acquired facts, and focuses on the human person in his or her integral, transcendent, historical identity. With its educational project inspired by the Gospel, the Catholic school is called to take up this challenge and respond to it in the conviction that “it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.”

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997) 10

Making use of a systematic framework, such as that offered by our philosophical heritage, with which to find the best possible human responses to questions regarding the human person, the world, and God. Lively dialogue between culture and the Gospel message. The fullness of truth contained in the Gospel message itself, which embraces and integrates the wisdom of all cultures, and enriches them with the divine mysteries known only to God but which, out of love, he has chosen to reveal to us.

With such criteria as a basis, the student’s careful and reflective study of philosophy will bring human wisdom into an encounter with divine wisdom.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 57

While respectful of surrounding cultures, a school's culture must be distinctly Catholic.

The transmission of a culture ought to be especially attentive to the practical effects of that culture and strengthen those aspects of it which will make a person more human. In particular, it ought to pay attention to the religious dimension of the culture and the emerging ethical requirements to be found in it.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 108

As the Council points out, giving order to human culture in the light of the message of salvation cannot mean a lack of respect for the autonomy of the different academic disciplines and the methodology proper to them; nor can it mean that these disciplines are to be seen merely as subservient to faith. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that a proper autonomy of culture has to be distinguished from a vision of the human person or of the world as totally autonomous, implying that one can negate spiritual values or prescind from them. We must always remember that, while faith is not to be identified with any one culture and is independent of all cultures, it must inspire every culture: "Faith which does not become culture is faith which is not received fully, not assimilated entirely, not lived faithfully".

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 53

Catholic schools are called to give dutiful witness, by their pedagogy that is clearly inspired by the Gospel—a *fortiori* in a culture that demands that schools be neutral and removes all religious references from the field of education. Catholic schools, being Catholic, are not limited to a vague Christian inspiration or one based on human values. They have the responsibility for offering Catholic students, over and above a sound knowledge of religion, the possibility to grow in personal closeness to Christ in the Church.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating in Intercultural Dialogue in the Catholic School: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013) 56

Indeed, culture is only educational when young people can relate their study to real-life situations with which they are familiar. The school must stimulate the pupil to exercise his intelligence through the dynamics of understanding to attain clarity and inventiveness. It must help him spell out the meaning of his experiences and their truths.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977) 27

Catholic schools strive to relate all of the sciences to salvation and sanctification. Students are shown how Jesus illumines all of life—science, mathematics, history, business, biology, and so forth.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2005) 233

Literature and the arts are carefully selected to allow students to reflect on man’s successes and failures, his miseries and joys.

Literature and the arts are also, in their own way, of great importance to the life of the Church. They strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems and his experiences in trying to know and perfect both himself and the world. They have much to do with revealing man’s place in history and in the world; with illustrating the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths of man and with foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus they are able to elevate human life, expressed in multifold forms according to various times and regions. ...Thus the knowledge of God is better manifested and the preaching of the Gospel becomes clearer to human intelligence and shows itself to be relevant to man’s actual conditions of life.

May the faithful, therefore, live in very close union with the other men of their time and may they strive to understand perfectly their way of thinking and judging, as expressed in their culture. Let them blend new sciences and theories and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and the teaching of Christian doctrine, so that their religious culture and morality may keep pace with scientific knowledge and with the constantly progressing technology. Thus they will be able to interpret and evaluate all things in a truly Christian spirit.

Saint Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) 62

Literary and artistic works depict the struggles of societies, of families, and of individuals. They spring from the depths of the human heart, revealing its lights and its shadows, its hope and its despair. The Christian perspective goes beyond the merely human and offers more penetrating criteria for understanding the human struggle and the mysteries of the human spirit. Furthermore, an adequate religious formation has been the starting point for the vocation of a number of Christian artists and art critics. In the upper grades, a teacher can bring students to an even more profound appreciation of artistic works as a reflection of the divine beauty in tangible form. Both the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Christian philosophy teach this in their writings on aesthetics—St. Augustine invites us to go beyond the intention of the artists in order to find the eternal order of God in the work of art; St. Thomas sees the presence of the Divine Word in art.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 61

The mission of the Church is to evangelize, for the interior transformation and the renewal of humanity. For young people, the school is one of the ways for this evangelization to take place... Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) 66, 69

Finally, the Church is absolutely convinced that the educational aims of the Catholic school in the world of today perform an essential and unique service for the Church herself. It is, in fact, through the school that she participates in the dialogue of culture with her own positive contribution to the cause of the total formation of man.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977) 15

Appendix C: Holistic Rubric for Selecting Literature in a Catholic School

Compare the literature selection to the description provided in each box and circle the score that most closely applies to your selection. Compelling reason must be given for Scale Score 2, along with supports to mitigate areas of concern.

Score	Description
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>Excellent Choice</p>	<p>There are multiple or significant timeless themes presented which: transcend culture and politics, allow for a richer and deeper understanding of humanity, and lend themselves to profound discussion about authentic truth and reality from a Catholic worldview. The work powerfully provokes a deeper understanding of virtue (or the destructive consequences of the lack thereof) and its effects on human flourishing. The work is uniquely suited to assist the student to a right ordering of the imagination, passions, and emotions. The work has significant artistic weight and strong intellectual merit. The writing is very well crafted and can serve as a model for student emulation. The work has been read for generations. There is no profanity. There is no blasphemy. There is no description of sexual activity or sexual fantasy. The content does not diminish the student's faith or innocence or lead the student to sin or despair. The instructor is expertly equipped to provide a Catholic perspective on content and themes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>Good Choice</p>	<p>There are themes presented which: transcend culture and politics, allow for a deeper understanding of humanity, and lend themselves to discussion about authentic truth and reality from a Catholic worldview. The work allows for discussion of virtue (or the destructive consequences of the lack thereof) and its effects on human flourishing. The work assists the student to a right ordering of the imagination, passions, and emotions. The work has artistic weight and intellectual merit. The writing is well crafted. The work is likely to be read by future generations. There is no shocking or significant profanity. There is no blasphemy. There is no description of sexual activity or sexual fantasy. The content does not diminish the student's faith or innocence or lead the student to sin or despair. The instructor is effectively equipped to provide a Catholic perspective on all essential content and themes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>Fair Choice</p>	<p>Themes are primarily cultural and political, somewhat limiting discussion about transcendent concerns. Discussion about authentic truth and reality from a Catholic worldview is possible but not forefront. The work allows for discussion of virtue (or the destructive consequences of the lack thereof) but its impact on human flourishing is ambiguous and/or ambivalent. Disorder in the work may somewhat confuse the students' passions or emotions. The work is currently popular in some English or liberal arts courses but has not yet proved its staying power over time. There is no shocking or significant profanity. There is ambivalence or neutrality toward the Catholic faith. There is no excessive or explicit description of sexual activity or sexual fantasy. The content does not diminish the student's faith or innocence or lead the student to sin or despair. The instructor is adequately equipped to provide a Catholic perspective on most content and themes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>Poor Choice</p>	<p>Themes are primarily cultural and political, limiting discussion about transcendent concerns. Discussion about authentic truth and reality from a Catholic worldview is significantly impeded by a worldview that is provocatively and enticingly anti-Christian. Virtue and vice are confused, ridiculed, or presented as inconsequential. Disorder in the work is not resolved or leads the students' passions or emotions astray. The work is culturally popular, but rarely found in school curricula, and has not yet proved its staying power over time. There is shocking and explicit violence. There is shocking or significant profanity. The work is blasphemous. There is excessive or explicit description of sexual activity or sexual fantasy. The content may diminish the student's faith or innocence or lead the student to sin or despair. The instructor is insufficiently equipped to provide a Catholic perspective on all content and themes.</p>