

by Brian G. Daigle

Welcome. As we launch our new site, our second school year, and this new Gadfly forum, I thought it most fitting in this first entry to post something which could offer a bit of nourishment to our current students, parents, those who have been simply keeping up with us, and curious neighbors just stopping by to check out the commotion – straining hard to peep through the hole in the fence. So, I found tucked away in the archives from last year a bit of vision casting, which I will adapt into this first entry. Thus, you all are welcome at this table, peeping neighbors included. Nonetheless, for all who found their way here for one reason or many others, we hope this summer has offered your family both restful days and fruitful encouragement. Even more than this, we hope all you current families will soon find the texts from this year’s book list trickling onto your front porch, probably having the effect of wowing your neighbors and scaring your children, as these books are anything but a trickle. All this may or may not lead to your daughter’s resurrected fear of closet monsters, offering further evidence for why her new depiction of such monsters has an odd resemblance to oversized books. While I cannot get rid of all the closet monsters in your home, for I was still quite young when *Ghostbusters* hit the big screen, I would like to offer some encouragement, as starting anything new, and continuing something still quite new, can be daunting, much less starting something that appears to be so daunting.

If you have gotten in your summer reading books and perhaps some of the books on the book list, I’m certain you have had some remarkable responses, most of which should be filmed and watched repeatedly with your family during future holidays. “Did you see mom’s face when she opened the Amazon box!” It would not surprise me if, upon getting in your books for this coming school year, most of the Sequitur homes hear at least one of the following phrases:

“That book is thicker than my thigh!”

“What does that word even mean?”

“This has more pages than grandma’s phone book.” “What is a phone book?” asks your little brother, born at the turn of the century.

“This guy definitely wasn’t on the New York Times bestseller.”

“But, dad, Justin Bieber doesn’t have to read this stuff!”

“How am I going to fit this in one backpack?”

“Mr. Daigle hates us already. I know it.”

“But if Uncle Tommy has never read this, then why should we?”

“Dad, what was the Peloponnesian War? Was grandpa in that one?”

“Honey, I think we need to invest in more band-aids. I picture countless paper cuts on little Johnny’s fingers over the next year.”

“Mom, look. The stack of books is taller than me!”

The list really could go on, and I would be delighted for you to share any original phrases heard around your house upon receiving the books. While at first glance it would seem that your child’s plate has been stacked higher than anything they could consume in one educational sitting, let me reassure you that the buffet of bindings has a method to its madness. The last thing we plan on doing is throwing any student into the gargantuan lake of pages and keeping them there until they learn to swim for the shore. So, let the following remarks be an encouragement, and slight roadmap, for getting through the paper palace currently constructed on your dining table.

First, it’s important to keep in mind that **not every page of every book will be read**. For example, some of the history books will be used as a primary source guide for the course. Some days, the students may read twenty pages from the text, while the next they may skip the next ten and pick up reading twenty more pages. In other words, I will be assigning and teaching from the most important parts of the history texts, and not simply reading through the entire thing.

Second, it’s important to keep in mind that **not every book will be exhaustively used this year**. If you remember back from the book list last year, some of the books were marked as books that would be used both years in the course. In other words, if there is a book with three different plays, we may read only one play this year and read the other two next year. Or if there is a single book with multiple texts bound together, we may read three of that author’s texts this year and the others next year. I did this for cost, space efficiency, and translation consistency.

Third, **I will be walking with them through each book**. I can imagine that after many years of being the primary or sole academic teacher for your child, it would be difficult to transition to a situation where someone else will be taking on that responsibility in full. While we expect the parents to retain the position as primary teacher in their child’s life, and ensure the home is meeting the requirements set forth by Louisiana law, it is my privilege and responsibility in these courses to teach the students the specific material and work with them to ensure understanding. Consequently, I will give introductions to each piece of work, as well as issue assignments according to the pace of the class as a whole and the overall curriculum. As they read the text, I will read with them (even if I’ve read it before). Some days, we will even read together in class. I will assess for student understanding in various ways, and make sure I conduct each class in such a way that allows students to ask questions and submit concerns. I am under no illusion that every student will

come to every text and butter their way right through it with no difficulty. That is hardly a good education. I anticipate students will struggle in all the right ways. And I anticipate that we, individually and collectively, will be better for having done so.

Fourth, for those of you more scientifically minded who want some kind of empirical proof or research data, **these texts in conjunction with this ‘stage of development’ are proven.** Not only have I taught these texts to these age groups, I have seen others teach these texts to these age groups. And I have seen classrooms full of students thrive under these curricula. One of the most common questions asked of a Classical Christian curriculum is, “Do you really think little Johnny can do this? I didn’t even read this in college!” While the questioner usually has good and genuine intentions for this question, and while it is a very legitimate question to ask, I believe it is precisely the seed of this skepticism that has kept our modern American education system, and the majority of the students therein, from maturing past an elementary level in both skill and knowledge. Not only is this material accessible to modern students at this age, but it has been accessible to students at this age for thousands of years. What has blocked its use at present is not a sudden change in a human child’s ability, but a change in societal priority, a shift in values and goals for our posterity. For generations we have expected less of our children and thus challenged them with less. We have expected less of our society and thus pursued and matured less. Our goals have shifted elsewhere and in doing so we have made an appendix out of good education. It has simply become something that once worked, but no longer has any ‘practical value’. Both the depth of skill and breadth of learning in a Classical Christian education are designed to challenge the student in a way God has distinctly created us. Academic laziness and mediocre pursuits, particularly in young boys and girls, are no marks of a healthy Christian. In short, though Sequitur classes will offer some unique challenges to the students, I have seen students regularly rise to the occasion of these challenges, and come out on the other end with one regret: “Why didn’t we do this sooner?”

So, while the stack of books peer at you and your children like a cantankerous intruder, be not afraid. They only harm us if we ignore them. Blessings on the rest of your summer.