

# To Parents,

*Classical Conversations is very excited to be working with you and your child(ren) this year. The Lord has given you a very special treasure — your students — and we feel honored to be a part of their lives. We want so much to not only help your student have a rich secondary education but also to help you as parents grow in the role of home schooling. Homeschooling parents have much to learn and offer to one another. We pray that this year we all learn more about raising children to meet God's standards in their thoughts and talents.*

*Our main concern is the student's ability to do the work assigned. Hopefully, giving you the book list, letting you know Classical Conversations' goals, and talking to you about your student before you enrolled, has enabled you to determine if your child will enjoy and be successful in the seminars.*

*To help ensure your student's success, please keep in mind two things: **First**, that you are the primary teacher and principal, and you need to keep up with your child's daily progress. **Second**, that you are the final giver of grades and the developer of your home school. The assignments and any progress discussed through Classical Conversations are optional for your home school. If your family is on vacation, if you are in the midst of a teachable moment or a family crisis, or if you have a better assignment in mind, you may substitute our assignment with an alternative exercise. Please continue to work with your children. We see so little of their actual efforts compared to you, and you do know what is best for your children. This assignment guide is just that — a guide.*

*The philosophy, goals, and general description of each seminar are in the opening chapters. Next, the assignments and basic instructions for all seminars are given for each week, followed by a variety of articles to assist your home school. Please have your students look over their books before arriving on the first day and complete any assigned material. All Challenge resources are available for purchase from our online bookstore at [www.ClassicalConversationsBooks.com](http://www.ClassicalConversationsBooks.com).*

*"Grading Written Papers and Reports" is included for you to use as a guide for the entire year's compositions and research projects. Don't expect your student's first papers to meet these standards. Work on one item at a time until your child has mastered it and then move to another. The students will talk about these points in seminar as they share their written work. Encourage your child where he or she is able to succeed and encourage him or her to practice the basics. Also, by reading good literature and discussing it, your student will begin to have a feel for interesting writing.*

*Some families are about to work harder at their schoolwork than ever before. Remind your child that they are older now and God expects them to use their talents wisely and diligently. Also remind them that they will have almost five weeks off at Christmas and that they will be finished earlier than their "school friends." Enjoy your family!*

# Classical Conversations®

## is a mission...

to know God and to make Him known.

In every subject, God has hidden His truth and beauty. It is our pleasure as students and teachers to discover Him as we learn. Our studies should also prepare us to reason clearly, speak eloquently, and write convincingly so that we have the ability to make God known to others.

## is a model...

to combine a Christ-centered worldview and classical tools.

We believe that each child is uniquely and wonderfully made, and the people who know and love a child best (the parents) are the ones most motivated to help that child succeed.

Within the framework of a Christ-centered worldview, Classical Conversations (CC) teaches parents the classical model: the tools for learning any subject.

The classical model divides learning into three stages:

1) the **grammar** stage—memorizing facts, 2) the **dialectic** stage—discovering how the facts relate, and 3) the **rhetoric** stage—applying the facts. The Bible refers to these stages in Proverbs 24:3-4 as knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

## is a method...

to equip parents and encourage students.

*How can I give my children a better education than I received?*

Classical Conversations connects families with others who home-school using the classical model. They become companions who can share the journey. Classical Conversations also connects families with experienced and trained mentors who offer leadership. Students enjoy the community of friends who are on the same journey, too. They encourage one another in their studies.

### Local Communities

Parents and students meet once a week throughout the school year. Each community is facilitated by a trained parent-director. Seminars are led by trained parent-tutors who model the classical tools of learning. Classical Conversations has developed three programs: Foundations, Essentials, and Challenge.

*If you are interested in starting either a Foundations or Challenge Program in your community, please visit our website and click on your state on the U.S. map, then click Start a New Community link. Follow the steps outlined.*

# Core Beliefs of Classical Conversations

## CC DIFFERENCE #1

### We believe in parents.

According to Scripture, education is the responsibility of the parent and family — not the state or the church. God established the state to administer justice and the body of Christ to spread the gospel. In the words of R. L. Dabney, “The Church’s duty is to instruct parents on how God would have them rear their children, and enforce the duty by spiritual sanction; but there its official power ends. It does not usurp the doing of the important task it inculcates.”

## CC DIFFERENCE #2

### We believe in parents equipping parents.

- We are different because we believe parents are trustworthy; therefore, our tutors are not specialists that undermine parental confidence. Our tutors are mentors that model and disciple leadership and the love of life and learning. We believe that if parents are capable of teaching children about God’s word, then they are capable of teaching children about God’s world.
- We are different because we believe children can rise above their natural limitations and be conquerors with Christ. We equip children to master the basics of reading, writing, and ciphering ANYTHING.
- We are different because we reject utilitarianism and pragmatism as the purpose of education. They should be the logical out-workings of a person who can learn to learn. The purpose of education is to know God and to make Him known.

## CC DIFFERENCE #3

### We believe in the skills of learning.

Our method of tutoring is dialectic. We engage students in dialogue by asking pointed questions that encourage them to think about their assignments. Our academic goals consist of fostering the skills necessary to succeed in any field of study or vocation. These include:

- Invention — gathering substantive facts and illustrations
- Disposition — developing introductions, outlines, arguments, refutations, and conclusions
- Elocution — using the best words and phrases to express ourselves
- Memorization — memorizing speeches or other pertinent facts
- Pronunciation — effectively delivering speeches

## CC DIFFERENCE #4

### We believe in accountability and community.

Classical Conversations motivates and encourages students to complete assignments well, on time, and in an interesting manner. We provide parents with suggestions in running their home school, and we encourage both parents and students to aim high in their academic aspirations. We aim to teach the tools of learning and the integration of subjects through the lens of a Christ-centered worldview. We pray that as a Christian organization, with the help of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we can assist our participating families to discover the best God has for their students.

## CC DIFFERENCE #5

### We believe in the stick in the sand.

Here’s a simple question Classical Conversations founder Leigh Bortins asks herself when teaching her boys or tutoring students: “If I only had a

stick and sand, could I engage and effectively dialogue with my students about the concept I want to teach them?” Asking this question helps us to rely more on modeling, dialogue, and relationship than on the false sense of accomplishment a flashy presentation can leave. Minutes of effective modeling and dialogue are exponentially more effective than hours spent on presentation.

## CC DIFFERENCE #6

### We believe in home-centered education.

Classical Conversations exists to help parents raise academically and spiritually strong children. This is a very difficult task and requires accountability, planning, and encouragement. Classical Conversations encourages adults committed to quality education to form communities where their entire family will be loved and sharpened by other families reinstating the home as the foundation of culture and learning.

## CC DIFFERENCE #7

### We believe in an integrated education that seeks to know God and to make Him known.

Rejecting modern, cafeteria-style education in the middle and high school years, which often consists of picking and choosing elective subjects, Classical Conversations seeks to equip students with the tools of learning. We believe dialectic, rhetoric, and other learning skills need to be the core of the classical students’ educational efforts. By mastering the grammar, deepening the dialectic skills, and integrating universal ideas and themes of rhetoric, students experience a deeper, connected, Christ-centered worldview education.

# A Word about Homeschooling through High School

As high school students transition to independent learners and earnestly prepare for adulthood, they must learn self-discipline in addition to a greater volume of information. Their interaction with peers is more direct and ongoing than in their previous school experience as they gather together to research for debate and other large project studies. Students possess the skills, maturity, and ability to advance quickly in academics during these important years.

For parents, the shift in these years can be both freeing and bewildering. At this level, the Challenge seminars direct the full scope of day-to-day activities through tutor assignments and review, but *parents remain their students' primary teachers*. Parental involvement continues at the high school level and includes: being familiar with the material being studied; noticing and encouraging good study habits; holding students accountable to complete assignments on time; and reviewing papers for content and grammar. Parents need to keep up with progress in areas that need work and should ask engaging questions of their student. Finally, parents are required to assign grades for all completed assignments. Tutors can make grade suggestions based on their homeschool experience, but as the student's primary teacher, parents are ultimately responsible for grading their student's work.

Parents also have the responsibility, beginning in ninth grade, to develop a permanent transcript of students' grades that will eventually be the basis for a high school diploma and college entrance requirements. Classical Conversations provides a transcript service for a nominal annual subscription fee. For more information, please visit [www.AcademicRecords.net](http://www.AcademicRecords.net).

Families with students who are college-bound must navigate through the requirements of college entrance exams, including the SAT, or alternately the ACT; scholarship applications and college funding options; and ultimately finding the college that fits their student. Again, being in community with tutors who have "been there, done that" is an invaluable resource in Challenge communities.

*"Students lead busy lives; distractions are plentiful—TV, computer, video games, cell phones. Help prepare a weekly assignment schedule for student accountability. As time goes on, students will be able to create their own schedule as they become more familiar with the time needed to complete the assignments. Challenge I is a time for deep thinking and the discovery of many new ideas. Participate in these new ideas with your student by having rich discussions."*

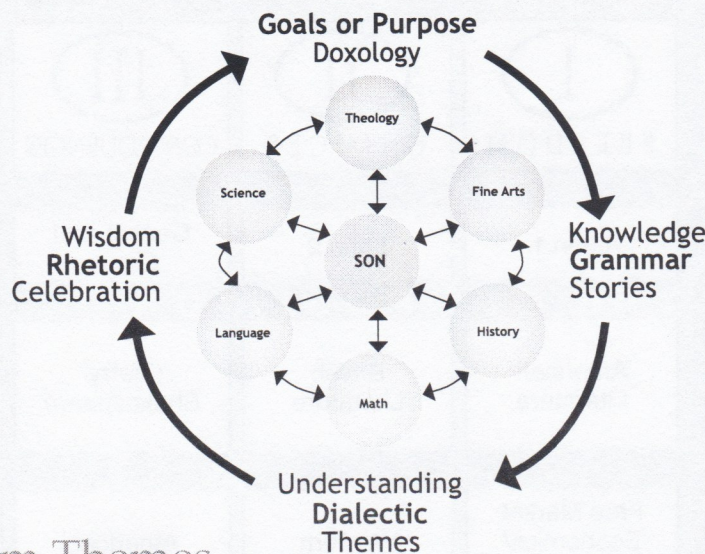
Denise Moore, a Challenge I tutor since 2005

# The Challenge Program

## Program Paradigm

	Classical Education
Goals	To develop life-long skills of learning through parental leadership; to discover unifying principles within a variety of disciplines; to discuss issues from a Christ-centered worldview within an academic community with the purpose of cultivating wisdom and virtue.
Parental Involvement	Parents are supported by the tutor in their child's education. Parents attend Parent Practicums to strengthen their teaching abilities.
Tutors	No more than two tutors model teaching/learning all six subjects.
Training	On a yearly basis, tutors are trained in the classical model of teaching.
Community	Maximum of twelve students per Challenge; a student takes all courses together, which provides continuity.
Subject Integration	Subjects are integrated around universal themes and ideas while compared with a Christ-centered worldview.

*We can only be successful if the parents who enroll their students are willing to be highly involved in their children's education. Parents must actively homeschool their children; Challenge tutors can't do all the teaching in an hour a week per course.*



*In Challenge, our content, assignments, and discussions help students progress from knowledge to understanding to wisdom. Tutors and parents collaborate in guiding students to become godly leaders and confident adults who echo in celebration of their Creator.*

### Program Themes

- A** Personal Investment Builds Ownership
- B** Ownership Builds Discipline
- I** Discipline Brings Freedom
- II** Freedom Brings Choices
- III** Choices Bring Consequences
- IV** Consequences Birth Leadership

*The culmination of a classical, Christian education:*

*CATECHESIS  
...an echo in celebration*

# Scope and Sequence

A unique characteristic of the Challenge program is the combination of six learning skills practiced in six weekly seminars. Each sequence is offered with the goal of developing these six skills. The chart below lays out the six-year scope and sequence of Challenge seminars. Subjects associate with one of six academic skills emphasized in the classical model.

The six skills are:

- **GRAMMAR:** The grammar strand is associated with language studies; although every

subject has "grammar," the tutor will discuss this skill and how it relates to language in particular.

- **EXPOSITION and COMPOSITION:** The exposition strand is linked with literature and history. In this strand, students refine their writing skills.
- **DEBATE:** In the debate strand, students learn and then practice the skills of research, argumentation, critical thinking, public speaking, and logic.
- **RESEARCH:** Students perfect their research skills through

a series of science topics and texts.

- **RHETORIC:** In this strand, students combine writing, public speaking, and logical thinking to improve their rhetoric technique through the discussion of various ideas.
- **LOGIC:** The study of mathematics develops the ability to think logically.

All six strands of Challenge are woven together to develop a complementary and comprehensive set of life-long learning skills.

## Challenge Scope and Sequence

Junior High		High School			
A OWNERSHIP	B DISCIPLINE	I FREEDOM	II CHOICES	III CONSEQUENCES	IV LEADERSHIP
<b>GRAMMAR</b>					
Latin A	Latin B	Latin 1	Latin 2	Caesar and Cicero	Language and Literature
<b>EXPOSITION and COMPOSITION</b>					
Literature, Discussion & Persuasive Writing	Persuasive Writing/Short Stories	American Literature	British Literature	Poetry/Shakespeare	Ancient Literature
<b>DEBATE</b>					
Geography	Current Events/Mock Trial	Free Market Economics/American Government	Western Cultural History	American History	World History
<b>RESEARCH</b>					
Biology and Natural Science	History of Science/Origins	Physical Science	Biology	Chemistry	Physics
<b>RHETORIC</b>					
Clear Reasoning/Apologetics	Formal Logic	Intro to Philosophy/Drama	Traditional Logic/American Drama	Advanced Logic/Advanced Philosophy	Theology
<b>LOGIC</b>					
Mathematics	Pre-Algebra	Algebra	Algebra & Geometry	Pre-Calculus	Pre-Calculus/Calculus

# Classical Conversations and the Five Canons of Rhetoric

Rhetoric skills, or the art of persuading others of your ideas, are often defined as the Five Canons of Rhetoric and include invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Invention relates to finding something to say. Arrangement relates to how an author organizes the things they want to say. Style is how something will be said. Memory pertains to not only memorizing the argument to be presented but also the art of bringing all the things remembered into context in order to enhance the presentation. Delivery is the public presentation of information.

For example, I could invent the words for a song, arrange them into a rhythm and meter, determine that it is going to be a folk style song, memorize it in light of the appreciation I feel for the great songwriters who influenced my love of music, and then deliver the song as a round to be sung in many parts. The entire purpose of the song could be to persuade the listener to care for their community.

We live in a time when anyone can upload their opinion to the Internet via words, music, or video and call herself an artist. This has greatly reduced our ability to even recognize—let alone reward—an artist who actually put enormous efforts into crafting a message. Why pay to attend an opera where someone has spent a lifetime developing her voice when you can laugh at a video of people hurting themselves online? Why produce a thoughtful TV show with gifted writers when narcissists will perform on reality shows for free? Why study the U.S. Constitution when charismatic politicians tell you they can just give taxpayers anything the majority wants?

Families who appreciate the classical model recognize that the current deluge of trivia and the trivial has damaged their ability to engage in meaningful, responsible discourse. They want to train their children in the art of thinking and using words to clearly express those thoughts. Practicing the five canons of rhetoric inculcates these abilities.

Classical Conversations' curriculum was developed to gradually draw students into the practice of the rhetoric skills. Some of our Challenge curriculum looks unfamiliar or seems inadequate because it is being compared to traditional education rather than classical education. The intention never was to replicate traditional course selections of a government high school or even to have a single course in rhetoric. The Challenge curriculum works the canons of rhetoric into all of the assignments. It is impossible for a young student to learn much of anything over a single semester, let alone develop difficult rhetoric skills. These skills take years to practice and are applicable to all subjects.

Look at math skills. If I'm going to teach how to solve two simultaneous equations like

$$(1) x + y = 4 \text{ and } (2) 2x + y = 12,$$

I need to make a number of communication decisions. I could invent an explanation that uses the elimination method or the substitution method. I need to decide if I'm going to rearrange the equations to solve for  $y$  first or  $x$  first, and if I'm going to begin with equation 1 or 2. My style determines if I'm going to jump straight into the solution or if I'm going to compare the problem to a simpler one first in order to explain the eventual solution. Besides calling upon my memory of the ways to balance equations, I also want to keep in mind the things that caused me to struggle when I was a student, so that I include clear explanations as a tutor. And finally, I can deliver the solution in a dry step-by-step lecture, or I can get my students laughing, asking questions, and remembering how far they've come since 5th grade math and that solving simultaneous equations is no harder now than fractions were five years ago.

Good communication always demands consideration of the canons of rhetoric. As Challenge parents or tutors, we need to develop our skills in rhetoric so that we may model for our students interesting and compelling ways to persuade others that the words we say are true.

—Leigh Bortins  
March, 2010

# Challenge Blue Book Guidelines

## Definition

A blue book is a small booklet of line-ruled pages, traditionally with a blue cover. The blue color came from blue rags, often the cast-offs from sailors. Because blue paper was cheap, it was often used for the covers of throwaway books. Traditionally, students use blue books to respond to questions on a particular subject in an essay or short-answer format.

It was 1857 when Harvard approved the first use of blue books in the New World. The rationale was that this was a better test of a student's analytic and writing skills than the traditional oral exams. By 1865, Yale followed suit and blue books spread from there.

As one of many academic avenues for testing, blue books offer a way for the students to confront, approach, and demonstrate what they know and how effectively they can communicate their thoughts and beliefs in a limited time frame.

## Blue Book Assessment vs. Traditional Examinations

The argument against traditional examination is that this is not a very valuable standard. These tests ask the kind of questions that students may never be asked again in their lives, in detail that they may never be asked again in their lives. They can be arbitrary and abstract—an inauthentic gauge of learning, of knowledge, understanding, or wisdom. The better approach is a more integrated approach—the method of classical assessment.

The final exam “has the singular power to force students to go back over material, think critically about what they have read, review hard-to-grasp-topics once more, and even talk about the subject matter with classmates and instructors—all of which enhance learning” (Robert Bangert-Drowns, dean of the school of education at the University at Albany SUNY). Blue books better enable the parent or tutor to answer the question, “Is the student more skilled at thinking critically now than when (s)he started?”

## Benefits of the Blue Book Exam

The blue book format offers the opportunity to evaluate and assess classically:

- Grammar: Demonstrate what you know; its meaning and significance.

- Dialectic: Demonstrate what you understand about a subject.
- Rhetoric: Demonstrate your writing and conversant ability on a subject.

## Content Suggestions and Examples

Below are sample questions a tutor could use for Challenge I blue book assessments. These are only ideas on how to organize these assessments and what to include. Tutors have the flexibility to include what is most suitable for their students, knowing that it will probably change from year to year.

### Logic

Tell me everything that you know about this problem.

$$5y + x - 2y - 4 + 3x = 0$$

Solve the problem below, step by step. Next to the problem, for each step, indicate which laws, properties, or rules you use to solve it.

$$x/(2 \frac{1}{2}) = 7$$

### Grammar

Parse this sentence, and translate it.

*Clāmor hostium locis difficilibus et angustis legionēs terret.*

Write Latin sentences containing the following elements and translate to English: subject, verb, direct object, indirect object, adjective, possessive noun.

### Debate

Write an essay explaining three key concepts of the study of economics. Examples might include, but are not limited to: inflation, the business cycle, supply and demand, the true nature of money, and free market capitalism. How does this knowledge affect your ability to manage or protect your freedom?

### Research

What evidence for creation theory has Wiles given us so far this year? How does this knowledge help you manage or protect your freedom?

Discuss the earth's magnetic field (be sure to include the cause, importance, and theories surrounding it).

Describe the earth's hydrosphere (be sure to use specific terminology).

Select a module of your choice and summarize it in detail.



# Challenge Blue Book Guidelines (continued)

## Exposition and Composition

Choose a book that we read this semester to use as the basis for the following essay. Consider a specific character. How do you think that character would define freedom? How was his/her freedom affected by the events of the book? How can you use the ideas from this book to improve the way you manage or protect your own freedom?

## Rhetoric

For the philosophy exam, have students review their class notes from the semester and bring in ideas for questions that they think would be appropriate for the exam. Have a class discussion in which the ideas are discussed. As a reward for asking a good question, the tutor could tell the student that if their question is used on the exam, they automatically get credit for it without having to answer it. This idea works well for other strands as well.

## Integration of all Seminars

How is the free market system demonstrated in *Johnny Tremain*? How has it changed since colonial times? In what ways is it the same?

How does science affect the economy? Explain two or three examples in detail.

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### References

Weiss, Kenneth R. "Dreaded 'Blue Books' May Go the Way of Quill Pens." *Los Angeles Times* N.p., 12 Mar. 1999. Web. Accessed 9/15/2014.

"Tips for Taking University Essay Exams and Blue Book Tests." Southern Connecticut State University. <http://www.southernct.edu/student-life/academic-success/study-skills-enrichment/links/university-exams.html>

O'Brien, Keith. "The Test is Canceled." *The Boston Globe* N.p., 3 Oct. 2010. Web. Accessed 9/15/2014.

# Discipline Policy

Although discipline issues rarely occur within our program, we have established guidelines for appropriate dress and conduct. Classical Conversations is committed to helping our students receive a Christian education, so

guiding each other toward godly character must be an important part of our program. Our dress code and classroom conduct codes are below.

## Dress Code

Previously, Classical Conversations has stayed away from a written dress code and trusted the parents to use good judgment. Overall, clothing hasn't been a big issue, but the issue has surfaced a few times, and we want to set a standard before it becomes a problem. In response to concerns of legalism, there will always be a dress code in any situation; it will either be established by the children and the culture or by mature adults, but it will be there. So let's set one in a way that honors our Father in heaven. This

means dressing to please Him and to make others comfortable around us. We are to honor the body of Christ and not our personal desires. A good way to be sure we do this is for daughters to ask their earthly father if they are dressed modestly and unprovocatively and for sons to ask their mothers if they are dressed neatly and honorably. Since these are children, it is up to us, their parents, to teach them to respect others with their dress.

## Classroom Conduct Codes

If a student is not respectful to another student or the tutor, it is up to the tutor to immediately encourage the offender to sincerely repent and apologize and to encourage the offended to be forgiving. In other words, we are to deal privately with the matter and move on. However, if the student refuses to repent (change conduct), a note will be sent to the parent with a follow-up phone call to discuss the situation. If the student misbehaves again, the parent will be called to pick up the student. If a third disciplinary action becomes necessary, the student will be dismissed from

the program. This policy copies the three-step procedure in Matthew 18:15-17.

Classical Conversations' view is that our children are not beasts as the world proposes but heirs to a kingdom and therefore can control themselves quite easily. If this is not the case for your children, may we suggest Trumbull's *Hints on Child Training* or *Age of Opportunity* by Ted Tripp. Another excellent resource on conflict, although it is not specific to child training, is *The Peacemaker*, by Ken Sande.