

"The supreme task of education (is) the cultivation of the human spirit: to teach the young to know what is good, to serve it above self, to reproduce it, and to recognize that in knowledge lies this responsibility."

David Hicks, *Norms & Nobility*

Education and Its Role in Cultivating the Human Spirit

A LOOK AT THE CHALLENGE THEMES

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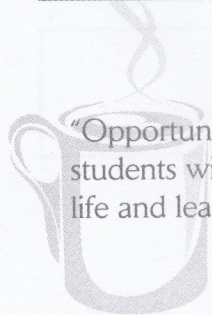
What do you think of when you hear the word "education"? Perhaps you envision a teacher standing at a blackboard lecturing and students taking notes. Maybe you see a place where students are waiting for a bell to ring as the clock ticks slowly by? In the quote above, David Hicks writes that education should attend to the "cultivation of the human spirit." This idea of cultivating a human spirit alludes to imparting virtue and implies that education should move beyond knowledge toward something bigger, greater, and more encompassing—that is, virtue. The themes emphasized in the Classical Conversations Challenge programs address the relationship between the impartation of knowledge and the cultivation of virtue within each student. Both are essential elements of a good education.

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Our children are not machines to be measured, prodded, and measured again. Rather, they are God-designed humans with souls that require tending and nurturing. Challenge themes create a pathway—a foundation—where students can be nurtured into and wooed toward greater virtue. Just as fall brings winter and seeds flower into plants, so each Challenge program builds on the previous one while preparing the learner for what is to come. One truth builds on the next, bringing increasing clarity, truth, and wisdom. Education that aims to cultivate a soul includes intentional lessons and methodology that will guide the student increasingly down the path of virtue.

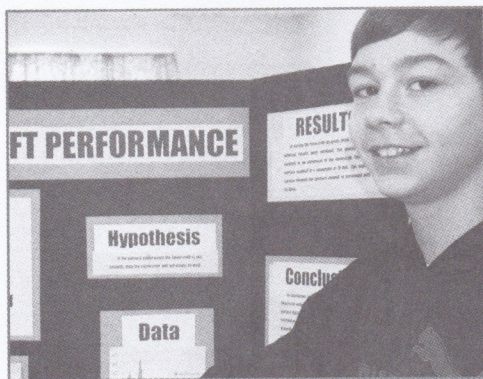
Education and Its Role in Cultivating the Human Spirit

A LOOK AT THE CHALLENGE THEMES



"Opportunities abound for students with a profound love of life and learning."

—Leigh Bortins,
The Conversation (4)



Challenge A: Personal Investment Builds Ownership

In Challenge A, students have the opportunity to invest themselves and “own” their studies. As they get lost in the adventures of the characters in a book, they are challenged to think about the propriety of the decisions these characters make. Challenge A students spend hours drawing maps, memorizing Latin vocabulary, and solving math equations. Through the personal investment of thinking, reading, writing, and memorizing, students increasingly devote themselves to their studies and assume the responsibilities of learning that which they can only learn for themselves.

Challenge B: Ownership Builds Discipline

In *The Seven Laws of Teaching*, John Milton Gregory discusses the importance of the learner attending to his studies with resolution and persistence. Effort, sacrifice, and persistence are tools the student uses to learn, remember, and apply knowledge. For Challenge B students, this active learning involves asking good questions, preparing presentations, and studying difficult paradigms. Self-discipline becomes evident in the diligent student and prepares him for greater freedom in his future educational pursuits.

Challenge I: Discipline is the Cornerstone of Freedom

In his famous speech “Liberty or Death,” Patrick Henry states that freedom is for “the vigilant, the active, and the brave.” The same is true of a learner and his lesson. By devoting time, energy, and attention to the lessons of personal investment, ownership, and discipline, the learner has developed a form for successful learning. Freedom is a prevalent theme in the literature that Challenge I students read; they consider how Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Atticus Finch, and Tom Robinson manage their freedom. As the student wrestles with various assignments and challenges, he travels the path of personal investment, ownership, and discipline. He can now experience greater freedom in his own rhetorical expression. Greater freedom brings expanded choices.

Challenge II: Freedom Allows Opportunities for Noble Choices

Flowing from the examination of freedom in Challenge I, the theme of Challenge II leads students to weigh the value and impact of choices executed by literary figures and heroes, historical leaders, artistic greats, and other persons of influence. Students contemplate the choices made by leaders in history: Were these choices wise or unwise? Were they timely or untimely? Students study the flow and development of ideas that have shaped Western thought and culture and how they have influenced twenty-first-century thinking. Using the five common topics as a model (definition, compar-

ison, relationship, circumstance, and testimony), students practice the art of questioning in order to gain clarity and insight. This insight leads to deep and profound conversations that consider consequences.

Challenge III: All Choices Bring Consequences

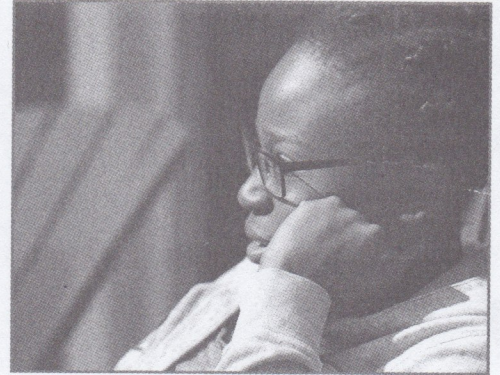
Consequences flow out of the choices one makes. In *The Conversation*, Leigh Bortins calls us to “teach our students to be both wise and humble as they attempt to separate truth from lies and persuasion from manipulation.” Challenge III students contemplate consequences of truth, lies, persuasion, and manipulation as they observe and practice discernment. They pursue a more fully embodied understanding and presentation of truth, goodness, and beauty as they reflect upon the consequences of choices. Through each area of study, students consider their unique place in the overarching story of mankind’s search for knowledge, justice, and God, preparing them to be wise leaders.

Challenge IV: Understanding Consequences Builds Great Leadership

The practice of considering consequences builds wise and godly leadership. Examining the mistakes and successes of others in addition to experiencing a few of one’s own mistakes and successes provides training and preparation for leadership. Challenge IV crowns the Challenge years by contemplating duty, honor, and leadership across the ages and into our own day. Students prepare to lead seminars as they create, consider, and converse. They debate, discuss, and digest the true, the good, and the beautiful. They learn to ask good questions, engage their audience, and lead conversations toward the pursuit of truth and virtue.

The journey from personal investment to leadership includes ownership, discipline, freedom, choices, and consequences. These themes mark a path for the cultivation of the human spirit toward greater virtue. This is quite a daunting task and indeed impossible if dependent on human wisdom and effort alone. As with all things, it is possible only when God is brought into the equation. Let’s determine to trust Him to cultivate virtue, goodness, and excellence in us and in our children as we seek to know God and to make Him known.

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“Young adults succeeded in making the transition [from childhood] because wise and loving mentors trained them for adulthood.”

—Leigh Bortins,
The Conversation (5)





Personal Investment Builds Ownership