



Teaching the Classics: Basic Principles

In *Teaching the Classics*, seminar participants learn to recognize the structure within stories and the stylistic devices used by authors to create them.

The seminar is built around three unique ideas which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

First: All works of fiction share the same basic elements — Context, Structure, and Style

The seminar moves through lessons devoted to each of these elements of fiction, making clear not only how to identify them in each story, but how to see them working together to create the author's imaginary world.

Second: Because it is approachable and engaging, Children's Literature is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis.

Any student embarking upon the study of a subject must begin at the beginning, regardless of his age or ability. He must learn the building blocks of his subject before he can interact with it in any meaningful way. Children's books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher — allowing him to present Context, Structure and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children's story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

Third: The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the Socratic method.

Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program teaches students how to think, rather than dictating to them what to think. Students who have learned how to think clearly about literature become better students in every subject, and eventually can become leaders and authorities in their own spheres of activity.

The *Teaching the Classics* syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essay assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces deep thinkers at any age.