

# **Classical Education in History**

**By John De Gree**

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"I highly recommend *The Classical Historian* to any administrator looking for an outstanding history curriculum for their program. Within the classical education model history teachers are asked to go to original sources and conduct Socratic seminars. *The Classical Historian* offers this material in easy to reference and implement formats with assignments, instructional guides, and step by step Socratic seminars. Any student taking these courses not only becomes highly educated in history but also a critical thinker. Mentoring new teachers in the classical model can be a monumental task. This curriculum trains a teacher through a sound educational approach and puts master teacher instruction into their hands. This curriculum was the answer to years of inconsistent course offerings. It has turned a struggling history program into one of our greatest strengths. Thank you!"

"*The Classical Historian* is an excellent choice for any American history course offering. It meets and exceeds the highest standards for content and mastery. The curriculum is organized and sequenced in a logical and easy to implement format. It engages students and fosters a love for learning history!"

Christianna Fogler  
Chief Executive Officer  
Rocky Mountain Classical Academy  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

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"Like *Teaching the Classics*, the *Classical Historian* is a method for analysis that students can apply to any historical period. With a goal of teaching students to think historically, the *Classical Historian* shows teachers how to discuss a series of open-ended discussion questions about specific historical events. In answering these questions, students learn a step-by-step process for evaluating evidence, arranging historical data, developing arguments and writing effective essays.

If you are searching for a *Teaching the Classics* style approach to history, look no further.

Adam and Missy Andrews, Center for Lit, [www.centerforlit.com](http://www.centerforlit.com)

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## Foreword

History---the study of the past---is something we all talk about, but how often do we really think about just what exactly History *is*? This booklet, *Classical Education in History*, by John DeGree, explains in clear, thoughtful language what History *is* and what historians *do*, and how parents and students can become better historians.

It has been said that “every man is his own historian,” and this is true because we all tell “stories” about our own past and the past of our families, communities, and nation. On a grand level the study of history is literally the study of *His Story*, the story of God’s green earth throughout the thousands of years mankind has been blessed to inhabit this planet.

How can we become better historians and teach our children well? In *Classical Education in History*, John DeGree begins by defining history and carefully explaining the methods of the ancient Greek scholars---the *classical* historians. He methodically teaches the reader how historians learned to gather evidence, cull that evidence, form conclusions about the past, debate those conclusions using Socratic Method, and then serve up their histories and conclusions in concise narrative prose and oral presentation. The aim of this classical scholarly method is no less than the search for historical *truth*.

Reading *Classical Education in History*, one is struck by realization that this hugely important classical method is no longer used in the many of our nation’s “Progressive” public schools. In the booklet’s concluding section, John DeGree tells his own history---how he learned the Socratic Method from his parents and furthered this knowledge in a wide range of experiences and jobs that took him and his wife and children across the globe.

Every parent and teacher will benefit from reading *Classical Education in History* and utilizing its methods. The result will be a generation of history students who have learned how to reason, form truthful conclusions, and take their place as productive citizens. I hope that *history* will someday record the significance of the classical education movement to the American people.

**Michael Allen, Ph.D.**

**University of Washington, Tacoma**

**Co-author, #1 Amazon.com and New York Times Bestseller, *A Patriot’s History of the United States***

## Introduction

History is the study of written human behavior over time. Although this sounds extremely simple, it is not. Sometimes our knowledge of history changes with time. For example, Pompeii had been buried for 1600 years before its discovery led to increased knowledge regarding Roman civilization. But more important than archeological finds, perspective plays the central role in the study of history. Two courses in medieval history, one taught by an avid atheist, the other by a devout Christian, could be presented as two different histories. The historian's perspective and historical judgment can determine what his interpretation of events looks like. To the avid Western atheist, the Middle Ages were the Dark Ages, where controlling religious fanatics burned innocent people at the stake and led a huge, useless war against the harmless Muslims. To a devout Christian, the Medieval Ages was a time when brave Christians civilized German, Slavic, and Celtic barbarians and the entire European continent. Sacred and classical literature and culture were kept alive in holy places guarded by pious monks.

It is the goal of this book to promote the teaching of history in the best possible way. We do not say that all of western man has traditionally learned history this way. We are taking the best of the classical model and applying it to our modern times. Since American students have access to documents and authors as never before, now more than ever is the best time to learn history with a classical approach.

A person naturally gravitates to whatever is the best. At a most simple level, this may mean that if you have a choice between a magnificently cooked meal and fast food, or gazing at a beautifully sculpted or poorly created statue, you will choose the options that are more appealing and healthy to the body and mind. Regarding education in history, one of the teacher's roles is to present the past and teach the analytical tools of history using the best method for the appropriate age. In the United States, the primary place where history is taught with the best method is in some graduate level schools. There, students are challenged to not only have a basic knowledge of the past, but to also be able to analyze the *meaning* of the past. Students read both secondary and primary sources, question analyses of authors and of teachers, and create their own interpretations that are hopefully based in evidence, historical context, and logic.

Unfortunately, in K-12, undergraduate and graduate level education, history courses are often places of indoctrination or job skills. Students are compelled to learn what the teacher thinks and they are taught how to convey this message to others. As most k-12 teachers in

the United States rely on the state for their paycheck, it is natural that the bias of most public school history teachers is for a larger and more powerful state. The more tax money coming into the state schools represent higher salaries and better work conditions for teachers. The result of this educational structure and style is an American society that does not know history and is not able to analyze the past or the present logically and honestly. And, it is an educational system that is biased towards a greater role of the state.

Along with the ideological problems, many history classrooms are structured to teach large groups of students menial tasks, such as organizational skills, technical skills of writing, and memorization of information. Teachers, who feel overwhelmed with so many tasks outside the academic arena, and whose students are unable to perform simple reading, writing, and speaking tasks, eventually succumb to the philosophy that their students will never rise beyond the ability to work in linguistically rich environments. As one of my colleagues at the middle school said, “We all know our students are going to be working in factories or outside doing menial tasks. Our job is to teach them organizational skills.”

Happily, there is a movement whose aim is to educate youth so that they know history and are encouraged to analyze and interpret the meaning of the past. It is rooted in a tradition that began with the first historians from ancient Greece and is tied to the ideal of providing children with the very best in education. It is Classical Education in History. This method is also known as the historical method, or historical thinking.

### **I. What is Classical Education?**

In *An Introduction to Classical Education*, Dr. Christopher A. Perrin, founder of Classical Academic Press, writes:

“Classical education, therefore, can mean the educational methods of the Greeks and Romans. However, the word classical or classic cannot be restricted to the classical period, per se. We also use the term to describe things that are authoritative, traditional and enduring...Classical education is the authoritative, traditional, enduring form of education, begun by the Greeks and Romans, developed through history and now being renewed and recovered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Classical Education is not to be confused with Classical Studies. Whereas Classical Education is primarily a method of learning, Classical Studies is a study of humanities from ancient Greece and Rome. Classical Education was the dominant form of Western education until the late 1800s, although it typically did not include the study of history. At the turn of the century in the United States, other educational

philosophies crowded out the ideal of teaching individuals basic knowledge and how to analyze. Progressive education meant to give American students the tools to live in an industrialized society, respond positively to bells and mass instruction, and the ability to fulfill menial tasks punctually. After a few generations this alternative method of education began to produce inferior results in the United States, and so today writers and teachers have started to go back to the proven educational methods of the past. (For a thorough explanation of Classical Education, read *The Lost Tools of Learning*, by Dorothy Sayers, *An Introduction to Classical Education* by Dr. Christopher Perrin, *Recovering The Tools of Learning*, by Douglas Wilson, and *Classical Education: The Movement Sweeping America* (Studies in Philanthropy by Gene Edward Veith, Jr., and Andrew Kern.)

Dorothy Sayers was a twentieth-century English writer who spearheaded the beginning of the classical approach to education in modern times. She wrote in “The Lost Tools of Learning” that students need first to learn the analytical tools of learning before they learn a variety of “subjects.” She separated a student’s life into three stages: 1. Grammar 2. Dialectic 3. Rhetoric

The Grammar stage is appropriate to the child before the age of 11 or 12. Sayers called this stage the “Poll Parrot” because the child is so intent at pleasing his parent that he will parrot whatever the parent teaches him. I’ve met many parents of children at age ten who are so worried their children are not independent thinkers, and they worry that there is something wrong with their teaching. Don’t Worry! Rejoice! It is a beautiful thing to work with a child before he becomes argumentative. In the Grammar Stage, children read interesting stories of history, memorize simple historical facts, and memorize where continents and countries are located. And, as a parent, this is the stage where children are eager to please their parents!

Near the age of 12 or so, when a child begins to express his own thoughts and seems to want to argue intellectually, he has then entered this second stage, what Sayers called the Dialectic, also known as Logic. In this stage, the student is capable of acquiring and using the tools of learning. In the study of history, these tools include but are not limited to the following: distinguishing fact from opinion, developing good judgment from historical evidence, critiquing various historical sources, understanding the various influences on history, the Socratic discussion, and writing analytical essays.

In the final stage, Rhetoric, the student continues to use the tools of learning and works on perfecting his ability to speak and write. The student in the Rhetoric stage should be given more primary source

materials to read and analyze and spend less time working with a textbook. Primary source materials are those created by the eyewitness to history. For example, the journal of Christopher Columbus is a primary source, whereas the history textbook in a classroom a secondary source. The student should be introduced to the great thinkers and writings of all time and question and discuss the great ideas that have existed throughout history.

### **The Absolute in History**

The Socratic discussion is an integral element of a Classical Education in History. In a Socratic discussion, students present their historical judgment and defend it with evidence and logic. Throughout the discussion, and in every element of a Classical approach to the study of history, is the principle of The Absolute. The Absolute is a concept of unconditional reality, existing regardless of individual circumstances. In simpler terms - for the study of history, this idea means that there is a truth; students and teachers are called to honestly search for the truth, and all work in history needs to be aimed at finding out the truth.

Without the existence of The Absolute, any definition of what is man, what is right, what is worthy, is relative. The tragedies caused by mass murderers like Mao and Hitler and Stalin become merely decisions and outcomes taken by others instead of horrendous acts. Without the goal of searching for the truth in history, the classroom becomes slave to the bias of the teacher as he attempts to shape students into what he has determined what is good or bad.

In a public school district-sponsored Common Core Training I attended in 2013, the presenter stated how everything in history is up to debate and that there is not one right answer. When I challenged her by giving examples of murder caused by Stalin, Hitler, and Mao, she changed the subject. Without the idea that there is an Absolute, mass murders, torture, and other indignations become merely events in history to memorize. America's educational establishment would like to teach in this manner, in order to manipulate the past and direct our students to make the "correct" choices today that fulfill their political agenda. We owe it to our children and ourselves to offer alternatives based in truth, goodness, and beauty.

The study of history has standards to follow that enable a person to best analyze the past, in some ways similar to the Scientific Method. Sometimes this is referred to as historical thinking of the historical method. Without the idea of an Absolute, the study of history becomes just an exercise of the mind, or a tool of indoctrination. Studying history goes beyond mere memorization of certain facts, and mere analysis of



events. It is the search for true causes, effects, reasons, and understanding of humans and human actions.

## **II. Classical Education and Progressive Education**

Dr. Perrin writes in *An Introduction to Classical Education* that classical education has evolved over time. One goal of Greek and Roman education was to teach youth how to strive for truth, beauty, and goodness in every endeavor. In the Middle Ages (c. 476 – 1460), the Western world built upon this ideal by instilling Christian principles and systematically organizing educational subjects and sequence into the trivium (“three ways”) and quadrivium (“four ways”). The trivium features the subjects of grammar, logic, and rhetoric; The quadrivium features astronomy, arithmetic, music and geometry.

The goal of the Medieval Christian Church, which founded all universities of Europe and directed all education, was to honor God and Church and to teach others how to live according to Christian principles. The trivium is known as the Arts of Language (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric). In order to understand how to write and speak, for example, a student needs to know the rules of language, how to understand meaning of language, and also how to express oneself in speech and in writing. The quadrivium is the Quantitative Arts (Geometry, Astronomy, Music, Arithmetic). During the Middle Ages the study of theology, the “queen of the sciences” was added to the seven arts (artes liberales, or liberal arts).

Three great movements greatly affected education in the modern western world. The Renaissance (c. 1350-1600) was an effort to study and emulate the great works of the ancient world and to show how the beauty of man gives honor to God. The Reformation (c. 1517-1700) emphasized the authority of Scripture and the necessity for all to learn how to read and write in order to access the message of Bible. The Enlightenment (c. 1700-1789) was a movement away from the religious foundation of education and focused on the ability of man to completely understand and manage his social and economic and political well-being through his intellect and through the scientific breakthroughs of the Scientific Revolution.

In the Enlightenment, Erasmus’ “knowledge is power” and Descartes’ “I think; therefore I am,” became the new cornerstones upon which education was based. Educators came to believe that the humanities could be understood just as the natural sciences were. As scientists made breakthroughs throughout the 1500s – 1700s, philosophers thought that they could take the scientific method and apply it to human studies. While the Enlightenment greatly affected the

American Founding Fathers, they were also men who were classically taught in literature, classical languages, history, and rhetoric, and who believed in God according to Judeo-Christian principles.

Throughout the independent period of American educational history, when each family decided how best to teach their children without governmental direction or coercion, students were taught classically, with an emphasis on learning the basics first, and later tackling the quantitative subjects. However, the public school movement (or forced mass schooling movement) of the late 1800s and early 1900s gradually moved education away from the classical model to a “progressive” model. As Dr. Perrin notes, the classical approach to education has reigned for centuries, whereas the current progressive model is the novelty.

The progressive model of education focuses on feelings, approved outcomes and opinions, and less on rigorous academic work. The progressive classroom teaches students ideals such as “toleration,” but in actuality it is only tolerance of the approved political and social goals of the progressives. There is a rejection of the absolute, and also a complete negation of any theories and evidence that goes against progressive ideals. In the public school classroom today, progressives force an unconstitutional muzzle on believers, by implying that all religious motives of our Founding Fathers should either not be taught or should be ridiculed. In teacher lounges, there is little tolerance for philosophical or religious discussion that does not mirror the progressives.

John Dewey (1859-1952), a proponent of progressive education, emphasized “learning by doing” and rejected memorization and classical language study. Progressives believed it to be more important to train students how to survive in an industrialized country instead of how to be good thinkers. As Dr. Perrin notes, phonics was replaced with “whole language,” and “training in logic and dialectic was replaced with self-expression without fault-finding.” Instead of learning to write by imitating the masters, students were encouraged to be creative.

History education in America, which had been steeped in promoting the western tradition from which the United States came, has been replaced with a multi-cultural, “non-judgmental” perspective, in which all cultures are viewed as equal. When an educational expert speaks of multi-culturalism, he doesn’t mean we should promote the teaching of foreign languages or the reading of French and Spanish and Russian literature or even the understanding and appreciation of foreign cultures. What multi-culturalism means in America is the rejection of the ideals that the American Republic were founded on: individual liberty,

limited government, free market principles, color blindness in law and equal justice under the law. The progressive's goal is to redistribute wealth and to forcefully acquire and control private property. To promote these ends, all of the greatness of the western tradition needs to be eradicated from education. Based on my experiences in the public school for 17 years, my state teaching credential program, and my experiences raising seven children with my wife, the progressives have done a magnificent job towards reaching their goals.

### **The Progressive Attack on the Study of History**

It appears that American society has become accustomed to not discussing important ideas. In the United States, when discussing politics or philosophy or religion with others, it is very common that one of the parties will become extremely upset or hurt, if his viewpoint is not shared by all. This has created an environment where there can be no discussion on any serious topic. In a society where you are not able to freely discuss ideas, there is little room for freedom. As the art of open and free discussion dies, so do the American ideals promised in the Bill of Rights. It is sad that it is not the government unilaterally taking away these rights, but other citizens slowly pressing their will on those who want to think and speak independently.

Is the truth relative? How could a modern teacher use the Socratic discussion if he himself believes that truth is relative? For many today, the Socratic method is too intrusive and judgmental, because it questions the personal judgments of individuals. If truth is relative, there is no sense in pursuing a calm, orderly discussion where individuals are free to say what they think. Allan Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind*, states that today's mainstream university system teaches students "Truth is relative." He writes, "Today's university students are unified only in their relativism." Today's student sees that "Relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight but a moral postulate, the condition of a free society." In this atmosphere the Socratic Method cannot exist, as it can only survive where people think there is truth and they must seek it.

### **III. Classical Education in History**

There are at least two ways in which to teach history. Option One is with a curriculum that teaches the perspective of the teacher. If the history class is in the public school, the perspective of the state tends to dominate. If it is private school, it can be the perspective of the state, as well, as many private schools want to "teach the standards." If it is a home school, the perspective of the family tends to be preeminent. With Option One, history is taught mainly as answers to questions. The

student learns what happened, when, where, why, and how, all according to the perspective of the author the parent or state chooses. The student answers questions from worksheets by parroting what the author thinks. To make history more interesting in Option One, the student may read historical fiction novels, which make the historical figures seem to “come alive”. This option is very effective in communicating to the child the historical and moral lessons of the family, or the state. However, it is extremely deficient in developing a student’s natural capacity to analyze, to create, and to persuade in speech and in writing. And, if the historical narrative is false, the student never learns the skills how to determine if what he is learning is true.

The student in Option One is always treated as a child in the early stages of intellectual development. For the classical educator, Option One is the Grammar Stage. Dorothy Sayers termed this stage the “Poll Parrot,” and wrote that this stage ended at the age of 11 or 12, when a student began to express his own thoughts. If we stop our children’s education at the Grammar Stage, we are leaving him unprepared for the world. How will our children answer the clever writings and speeches of demagogues? How will our children function in a society when they leave the safe confines of the home? As Sayers wrote of students, “They are a prey to words in their emotions instead of being the masters of them in their intellects. We who were scandalized in 1940 when men were sent to fight armored tanks with rifles, are not scandalized when young men and women are sent into the world to fight massed propaganda with a smattering of “subjects”. Our children will never learn to analyze history with such a curriculum, and will remain in the Grammar Stage of intellectual development.

In teaching our children history, there is a Second Option. In this option, we teach the Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric Stages of history. We teach our children basic facts, events, and people of the past. But then we do much more. At the appropriate age, usually 11 or 12, classical educators equip children with the intellectual tools of the historian. These include but are not limited to teaching the analytical skills of distinguishing fact from opinion, developing good judgment from historical evidence, critiquing various historical sources, and teaching the differing influences on history.

History is a perfect subject to practice the skills of the Dialectic and Rhetoric Stage. History is an excellent subject to practice analysis and logic because it is more concrete than philosophy. There are real people and events to practice the skills of logic and rhetoric. Presented in a discussion format, history is interesting, because it involves the analysis of the student. As many historical events can be viewed from a

variety of perspectives, history is a topic that is conducive to discussion. Did the North have to go to war against the South in the American Civil War? What was the main cause of the fall of the Roman Empire? Was Napoleon a hero or a villain? Was America's westward expansion in the 1800s a triumph or a tragedy? Discussing and debating these topics hone the student's skills of Logic and Rhetoric.

A goal that every teacher should strive for is to have their teenage child present a final paper, a thesis, in front of a panel that would comment upon, question, and challenge the findings. As Dorothy Sayers writes, "the final synthesis of the Trivium—the presentation and public defense of the thesis—should be restored in some form; perhaps as a kind of "leaving examination" during the last term in school." As parents of home schooled children, we can expect our children to conduct research on a particular topic in history, create a perspective, and present findings to us. It is not up to the parent to do the work for the child. Rather, once the student learns how to be a historian, she is able to go about her work on her own. The final judge of the work is the parent teacher.

Students taught the skills of the Dialectic and Rhetoric in history are also able to analyze our modern media. How many times have we seen a "shocking headline" on an internet news service's home page, only to learn a day later that it was untrue? How many times have we read about the same event presented in two very contrasting perspectives from two different news services? One goal in history education is to teach students the value of analyzing news sources and recognizing bias. When students can determine the political perspectives of the major news gathering services in the United States, they will be more able to question the claims of journalists and politicians. We want our children not only be well-informed citizens, but to also be able to decipher the truth from the media.

## **Herodotus and Thucydides**

Herodotus (c. 484-425 BC) is called the "Father of History" because he was the first known historian who collected his evidence systematically, tested the evidence and arranged it in a thoughtful and interesting narrative. Thucydides (c. 460-395 BC) is called the father of scientific history because of his strict adherence to high standards of evidence-gathering and analysis and because he did not reference intervention by the gods as a cause of historical events. Both authors strove to understand human nature through history.

They lived during a time of storytellers who built heroic images of political leaders of the day and the past. Unlike their counterparts,

Herodotus and Thucydides wanted to find out and report about the events of humans without hyperbole. They set the standard upon which future historians would judge themselves.

### **Who Was Socrates?**

Most of what we know about Socrates (470-399 B.C) comes from the writings of his student Plato. Socrates was perhaps the most influential of all ancient Athenians. Plato taught Aristotle, and Aristotle taught Alexander the Great. Socrates was a philosopher who lived in Athens, the cultural center of Ancient Greece. He spent his adult life training young men how to analyze their own lives, and life in general, including religion, morality, and the political systems of the world. Socrates urged his students to “know thyself” and to question the commonly held assumptions of Athens. The method Socrates used with his students involved asking questions, and compelling his students to probe their own minds for sound judgments regarding the main events and questions of the day. Socrates’ questions poked holes into the philosophical ideas of his students, and forced them to reformulate their conclusions in a lively discussion. Students were encouraged to debate honestly and to be open to losing a debate if another’s ideas were better.

Ultimately, Socrates sacrificed his life for the right to question and practice philosophy. During the life of Socrates, ancient Athens was in the last days of Greek supremacy. Long respected for its cultural and political dominance, Athens was in a battle for survival with the neighboring Greek city-state of Sparta in the Peloponnesian Wars (431 – 404 BC). Whereas Athens was a model of democratic experimentation, intellectual and cultural development, Sparta was the epitome of the military state. In Athens, men had been encouraged to explore new ideas that questioned the past and the framework for the best society. In Sparta, citizens learned the need to obey leaders and wield power over subordinates. The Peloponnesian Wars took a toll on Athens, however, and its citizens grew angry with Socrates, because he questioned basic ideas of his own city-state during a time of war. Socrates challenged young men to think about and question the gods of Athens. His probing and observations seemed to state that a polytheistic world was impossible, and that perhaps the Athenian gods were not real. Athenian society could not tolerate a citizen who questioned the beliefs and actions of its members. Socrates was arrested and sentenced to die for corrupting the youth and for questioning the city’s gods. Although he had a chance to escape, he chose instead to follow the judgment of the Athenian leaders. By not escaping, Socrates sacrificed his life for the right to philosophize, to question authority, and to teach and speak freely. He

also showed by not escaping that it is important to respect the laws of the society one lives in, even if it means giving up your life. Let us keep his spirit alive by teaching our children to analyze, speak, and write about history, even when it is counter-culture.

### **The Socratic Method and Classical Education in History**

When Socrates taught, he used a method that is called the dialectic, also known today as the Socratic Method. Simply stated, Socrates used questions to challenge and probe his students' assumptions, thoughts, and beliefs. Through questioning, he caused his students to fully analyze, formulate, and defend their positions. Because of Socrates' questioning, his students could analyze their own arguments and question their own conclusions. Often, students altered their conclusions when they realized their arguments could not stand up to questioning from Socrates. The Socratic method was thus successful because it challenged students to think through their ideas in a manner conducive to furthering their knowledge. Open and free discussion reigned, and there was an honest attempt to arrive at the truth. For Socrates, truth was not relative. It was an ideal to be sought and to even lose one's life over.

Socrates attempted to live a life in pursuit of wisdom and of the truth. He was self-reflective and challenged others to be so as well. He valued friendship over wealth. He was a nuisance to politicians, but in a way that was non-violent and open to discussion. To have an honest discussion with Socrates meant to be open to see one's own failures in logic. Socrates loved philosophy so much that he gave the supreme sacrifice for his love and his obedience to the laws of his state. As Professor Gordon Lloyd said, "Socrates is for philosophy what Jesus is for religion and faith." Whereas Socrates sacrificed his life for the honest pursuit of the truth in philosophy, Jesus sacrificed his life for the salvation of mankind.

For the classically educated student, there is no question that the Socratic method is a key in learning the Liberal Arts, the subjects of the Trivium. In the dialectic stage, the Socratic method supports a child's natural curiosity and willingness to argue. At the exact moment when a child begins to express what he thinks about a particular subject, it is essential for the parent educator to facilitate this natural tendency. Through the rhetorical stage, the Socratic discussion trains the mind to be critical and open to good arguments and all evidence. Eventually, a student trained in the Socratic Method is able to think on his own and persuasively and vigorously defend good judgment and the truth while rejecting poor judgment and falsehood.

## **Studying Historical Evidence in Context and the Mistake of Presentism**

The most recent fad among the American educational elites, known as Common Core, purposefully takes the study of history out of context and commits the error of presentism. At a recent Common Core seminar I had to attend for my public school teaching job, the presenter explained that students will now analyze historical documents, such as paintings and pictures, and that these images will now be called “texts.” After debating the presenter about the lunacy of calling a picture a “text,” I realized it mattered little what I thought. The approved definition by the Common Core proponents for what is “text” and what is an “image” had already been made, and reality was not to play a role in this definition.

The presenter explained to the teachers at the training that one goal of the Common Core is to encourage students to discuss topics using academic language. The presenter handed out a booklet with a number of images. Using the pictures called texts, students were to answer a number of questions:

1. What are the people in the image doing?
2. What do they want?
3. What was the painter’s intention in creating the image?
4. What does this tell you about people and rights and power?

The paintings and pictures were of various moments in the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, the Egyptian protests in the 2000s, and slavery in the United States.

This exercise, to compel students to discuss what they thought merely based on the images, without any knowledge or historical context from which the images came, does a great disservice to academics, to the study of history, to the students’ educations, and to the country as a whole. Without any historical context to place the images in their correct place in time, the students and teachers were left to their own sentiments to analyze and guess their meaning. Placing no importance on the history of these images allows for great manipulation of meaning, either by the person who created the questions and recommended answers, or by the teacher.

“Presentism” means to erroneously use today’s values to judge the events and people of the past. When a person commits this error, he shows no empathy towards the people and time he is studying, and in the process, he misunderstands and misinterprets the meaning of history. Committed by young people and those who never studied beyond entry-level college history courses, the error of presentism can cause those who commit it to make poor decisions in the current time. For instance,



slavery among all Americans is viewed as an evil, however, in the early 1700s, slavery was accepted in many parts, if not all, of the western world. A student who studies how some English colonists had slaves could believe that all English colonists were evil, and therefore, nothing from the English colonists had value. A student could decide to turn away from everything from the English Heritage, including representative government, because slavery was a part of English colonial life.

### **Christianity and Classical Education in History**

As Dr. Perrin writes, “Classical education was inherited by the Church with some modifications and put into service for centuries. We are continuing in a tradition, therefore, that is both classical and Christian.” The goal of education in medieval Europe was to bring individuals and society closer to God, to a greater worship of the Holy Trinity, and to a fuller understanding of the Church, man, and society. As a historian, I share in these goals.

Christianity inherited classical education from pagan Greek and Roman society, however, and it is important to note that the methodology of the study of history started with ancient Greece in a society that worshipped a multiplicity of gods. Herodotus and Thucydides were not Christian and could not have been Christians. However, they were both intent on searching for the truth in history and reporting it as honestly as possible. For those who are not Christian but believe that there is an Absolute and that it is the historian’s job to seek the truth and to diligently report and teach it, the classical model is the best to reach these goals.

Christians have the benefit of the example of the perfect human, Jesus Christ, in how to approach the study of history, how to teach others, especially youth, and we also benefit from the belief that man is inspired not only by socio-political realities, but also by unseen inspiration and motivation. Adam Andrews, founder of “Center for Lit.” explains that when we study history, we must treat the dead with the same respect as the living. Our Christian understanding of love should permeate how we analyze the past. We need to be patient in forming conclusions and perspectives of individuals of the past, for example. We should read from various sources, take our time in evaluating important events and people, and also show a kindness and compassion towards societies that we may have a hard time understanding today.

The inspirations and motivations of people in the past are complicated and confusing. Writers of history are also faced with their own socio-political realities. It is challenging to understand people of the

past when they no longer exist and we cannot speak to them. The Christian, in attempting to find the truth in history and to teach it to younger people, is aided by the patient and humble example of Jesus, in how He taught others.

History students deserve the very best of their teachers. For the Christian, this means that when we teach our students, we are called to be patient, kind, loving, but also fair and demanding. History teachers should be constantly studying history, careful in their judgments of the past, patient with their students, and should strive to never let a foul mood or bad day get the best of them. It is possible for the non-believer to attempt to live this way, but the Christian has the benefit of the perfect example of these characteristics in Christ, and he has the aid of prayer, Scripture, and the Church to be the perfect teacher.

#### **IV. Elements of a Classical Education in History**

Classical education in history *ideally* teaches students the tools of learning, gives pupils independence to think on their own, and compels them to create their own perspective and defend it in speech and in writing. Student think, analyze, and express their perspective of history.

There are five steps to the process of studying history with a classical approach.

1. The Grammar of History
2. The Tools of the Historian
3. Research to answer open-ended questions
4. The Socratic Discussion
5. Analytical Essays

#### **The Grammar of History**

The grammar of history refers to basic facts of an historical event. Answers to the questions of “who, what, when, and where” make up the grammar of history. Unfortunately, most students of history never move beyond this level. In the public and in home schools, students spend a great deal of time memorizing dates, historical figures, timelines, and coloring. It is essential for a historian to know the grammar of history, but as a first step to the more challenging and interesting area of history: analysis, discussion, and imagination. This book is primarily focused on teaching the Socratic discussion in history, which can begin at the age of 12, when a student’s mind is developed enough for analysis. For an in-depth look on how to teach children under 12, see the book by Leigh Bortins, *The Core: Teaching Your Child the Foundations of Classical Education*.

## **The Tools of the Historian**

The tools of learning refer to the thinking, speaking, and writing tools essential for analysis and expression and are as follows:

1. Distinguishing Fact from Opinion
2. Forming Historical Judgement
3. Acquiring Supporting Evidence That May be Used in an Argument
4. Understanding Primary and Secondary Source Materials
5. Making a Counter Argument
6. Understanding Cause and Effect
7. Understanding Compare and Contrast
8. Understanding Bias
9. Using Evidence and Not Emotion to Form Judgement
10. Writing a Thesis Statement for an Analytical History Essay
11. Writing an Outline for an Analytical History Essay
12. Writing a Rough Draft for an Analytical History Essay
13. Revising an Analytical History Essay
14. Citing Sources in the Text of an Analytical History Essay
15. Writing a Works Cited Page
16. Understanding influences of history:
  - a. Technology
  - b. Social and cultural forces
  - c. Institutional factor
  - d. Revolution
  - e. Individual in history
  - f. The role of ideas
  - g. Power (Political)
  - h. International organization (diplomacy and military)
  - i. Causation
  - j. Loyalty
  - k. Curiosity
  - l. Patriotism
  - m. Economics
  - n. Religion
17. Understanding concepts of critical thinking in history as they are found on high school Advanced Placement tests and on college level exams such as:
  - a. Change Over Time
  - b. Cause and Effect

- c. Compare and Contrast
- d. Define and Identify
- e. Statement/Reaction
- f. Evaluation
- g. Analyzing Viewpoints

## **Introduction to the Tools of the Historian**

Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff, authors of *The Modern Researcher*, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers in 1992, and Carl Gustavson, author of *A Preface to History*, published by McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc. in 1955, detail the tools of the historian. For a more complete understanding of this method of learning history, refer to these books. These two books provided me the understanding of skills necessary to analyze history. They also inspired me to create something that my students could use. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, 20 years in the classroom as a teacher, and over 16 years in the classroom as a student, has made it apparent to me that the student wants to learn, be inspired, be challenged, and attempt to go beyond himself to strive for perfection in the academic world. To do this, the lessons have to be presented in an understandable format, accessible and logical. Lessons also have to give freedom to the student to create, to imagine, and to express. Following is an explanation of some of the various tools of the historian.

### **Tool #1**

#### **Distinguishing Fact from Opinion**

One essential task of the historian is to distinguish between opinion and fact. In the classroom, I found out very fast how my students could not do this without training and practice. Although I thought they already knew, I found that most students under eighteen have had no instruction on the difference between opinion and fact. Often times, people will think that if it is said on television, then it is true.

Unfortunately, these students may have only learned history from teachers who tell them what they think happened and why. As educated adults, we know this idea of history is completely false. Consider the varying opinions on the Iraq War during the years of the 43<sup>rd</sup> President, George H. W. Bush. If you were to ask well-educated adults their opinions about this war, the reasons it started, its success or failure, and its effect on the United States, you will get very different answers, because very few people bother to read in various sources and to find the truth in history.

## **Tool #2**

### **Forming Good Judgment**

For students, historical judgment is one of the key elements of education that is lacking. However, it is normal in other subjects for the teacher to require students to use judgment. It is very common in the Language Arts classroom to ask students to tell what they think about a particular character in a novel, or to try to persuade somebody to think that the school dress code is onerous. In Science, good teachers encourage students to perform experiments to test their hypotheses, then to examine the results and form opinions from these results. In classes that used to be available, for example Music Appreciation and Art, students were allowed to state their own opinion regarding artistic creations.

How has history become the dead beat when it comes to analysis and critical thinking? It is in history where opinion, analysis, and judgment are essential to a quality education. If our students leave the school system unable to make decisions based on the evidence, how do we think they will be able to choose the best job, the best home mortgage, or the best car loan? Giving our students facts to memorize and telling them how to think prepares them to be robots, not responsible citizens. Do we want the future generation to be equipped with facts but unable to figure out their meaning? Without proper training and practice in judgment, our youth are susceptible to those who want to manipulate them into thinking a certain way or buying particular products they do not need.

Forming judgment and defending one's ideas are the most exciting elements of the history class. Once students realize that their opinions differ from their classmates, and that they don't have to mimic the teacher's ideas, history becomes a living subject, a study whose meaning is determined in part by students. Instead of the student just trying to give the teacher what he thinks the teacher wants, the student becomes an active academic, deciding the exact relevance of history.

## **Tool #3**

### **Supporting Evidence**

Supporting evidence refers to everything you use to support your main idea. It does not include peripheral information that may be interesting, but is not necessary to get your point across. Understanding and using supporting evidence properly is necessary in forming and making good judgment. If our students cannot distinguish good supporting evidence from poor, our society will be one where people will believe whatever they are told to believe based on nothing more than an

opinion. How many times have we heard from a so-called expert an opinion that is not backed up by evidence? Turn on any news station and try to determine if the broadcaster uses more opinion than fact in making judgment. Do certain stations seem to promote more opinion-based analysis and others more fact-based analysis? Unfortunately, many of our students are not learning these simple lessons. To some, sources of information are more important than the information itself. In some circumstances, how something is said or written is more important than what is said or written.

One problem with supporting evidence is what it is not. Many young students, when faced with an essay assignment in history, will throw the facts on paper thinking that, if their paper is full of facts then the teacher will reward them. In one assignment from my classroom of eighth graders, I ask students to decide if George Washington was necessary for the success of the American Revolution. Without failure, there are a few students who attempt to place as many facts as possible in their answer. These facts, however, have nothing to do with Washington being responsible. They are about the dates he was born and died, his wife's biographical information, or where he lived and farmed. Proper training in the use of supporting evidence is necessary to train young students to be analytical thinkers and decision-makers.

## **Tool #4**

### **How to Read a Textbook**

Because of circumstances beyond my control, history textbooks tend to be dry and without excitement. Due to this fact, students find reading informational materials in history very boring. Whatever is boring is hard to remember, as what does not engage the human spirit tends to be quickly forgotten. Perhaps that is one reason that some people say, "I don't remember anything I learned in history."

Reading with a purpose is the answer that solves the problem of getting students to read the textbook. Once students know that they have to make a choice in the interpretive question, their reading becomes their personal research. Focused on finding information that makes their argument stronger or on evidence that disputes their perspective allows students to navigate through the information they do not need to read. Reading with a purpose helps students focus on the essential, and gives them an internal motivation for reading.

Along with an interpretive question that focuses reading, younger students need reading aids that help them along the way. A graphic organizer to fill in, or questions to answer that are specific to the research goal, will help students avoid taking too many notes.

## **Tool #5**

### **Analyzing Primary Sources**

The use of primary sources is essential to the most advanced study of history. It is here where the student comes into direct contact with the historical characters themselves, without any intermediary analysis by experts and teachers. However, because of limits of language ability and practice, primary sources may be too challenging for a lower level English Learner or younger student. It is for these reasons that I recommend, at least in the beginning of study, only using a good textbook. If you don't have one in your school, then please find supplements! I know it is very challenging to find good secondary source materials without unnecessary pictures. However, our students have to start somewhere, and a good teacher can also provide quality summaries of history his students can use. As soon as the student is ready, introduce primary sources. The more primary sources the student has to analyze the better, and usually, the better-rounded the argument and paper, in terms of learning all of the varying perspectives.

## **Tool #6**

### **Using Quotes**

When making an argument, it is important to show that your idea is supported by others who are working in the field. On television news, "experts" frequently give their opinion on a wide range of topics. It is thought that since they are experts, they should know. Sometimes this is true, but even when it is not it is sometimes advantageous to hear what others think.

More important than using modern-day experts, the writer is strongly encouraged to use primary source quotes from historical figures. Quoting from Plato's Republic to illustrate what ancient man thought of philosophy and politics is very powerful. Quoting from autobiographies of historical figures who lived through great events lets the reader get a glimpse into the magic of primary sources. The excellent writer of essays will quote from period historical figures and add their voices to the narrative.

## **Tool #7**

### **Paraphrasing**

The adult may well remember that as a child, he stayed up late at night the evening before the fifth-grade project was due, taking sentences from an encyclopedia and changing the word order around so the teacher would not accuse him of copying. I remember this. (I think the project

was on the state of Nevada!) While we were supposed to be reading and thinking about the information, often times this practice became a language exercise, testing our ability to work with words.

It seems the student today has no practice in paraphrasing, and younger students at times don't know the difference between copying and paraphrasing. For a homework assignment, I have my students research a person, or an event. Invariably, a few students come back the next day with printed sheets of copy from the internet. "Here are my notes, Mr. De Gree." Even though I explain to them beforehand that this is not acceptable, there are always a few who try to get by without thinking.

The skill of paraphrasing is an important one and one that can be easily learned and practiced in the history classroom. When researching a topic to find supporting evidence for a thesis, paraphrasing is crucial, and natural. It is crucial, because a thesis is only as good as the evidence that supports it. And it is natural, because when you are researching a topic to support a thesis, you will focus only on that information which is necessary for your paper, leaving out unnecessary items. The history paper is excellent for practicing the skill of paraphrasing.

## **Tool # 8**

### **Counterargument**

The counterargument in a history paper is a must if the paper is to be of the highest quality. The writer first presents the supporting evidence for his thesis, making the strongest argument possible. Then, the author states the strongest argument against his own thesis and explains the rationale for this. However, this counterargument is to be brief and less involved an explanation than the thesis. After the essayist writes this counterargument, he then shows how it really is not as strong as some would have you believe. The writer, in effect, is taking the biggest argument of his opponent and showing that it is not that effective. It is as if the other side is having the wind taken from its sails.

This technique is extremely beneficial, as it challenges the mind of the author to see things from various perspectives. Because the meaning of history is up to debate, it is essential that the historian be open-minded enough to entertain opposing viewpoints. The counterargument and refutation makes the paper stronger by showing that the thesis is stronger than the strongest argument from the opposing side.



## **Tool # 9**

### **Cause and Effect**

Cause and effect is an important aspect of historical reasoning. Unfortunately, as Carl Gustavson writes in *A Preface to History*, it is all too easy and common to turn to one person, or one party, as the cause of something. He gives as the example the tendency of young historians to attribute one cause to the Reformation. “It was Luther,” or, “The Church was corrupt.” These one-cause answers are typical of a writer who wished not to delve deeply and broadly into the variety of causes that may bring about events.

As I am writing this, the United States of America is in the middle of another hotly contested presidential election. The claims of the candidates are similar to those claims of the past elections.

“It’s his fault.”

“He’s the reason everything is broken in Washington. If it wasn’t for him, we would be in this mess.”

“If you elect him, you’ll make the terrorists happy. Our country won’t be any safer, but in fact it will be more dangerous.”

“If you elect him, America will be a place with more poor on the street.”

These claims all adhere to the simplistic idea that one person can be the cause of huge events or massive movements in a country. While it is tempting to become emotionally involved in political debates, the historian has to try with effort to remain detached, and remember that it is a multitude of causes that bring about huge events. Making the claim that “Hitler started World War II” completely forgets Japan’s and the Soviet Union’s appetite for territory, the Versailles Treaty, the demilitarization of France, the appeasement of Hitler by Chamberlain, and the thousand or so years of anti-Jewish ferment in Europe.

Of course, it may be challenging to teach the multiple levels of causation to young students, and so our task as teachers may be to just teach them that events have causes. Once we get past this point, we can teach them that typically, events have various causes, some more important than others. The student’s job is to assess the importance of the various causes and to ascertain which cause was the most important.

## **Tool # 10**

### **Compare and Contrast**

While compare and contrast is not typically seen as an element of historical reasoning, it is commonly seen on tests in Language Arts and in Social Studies and is therefore an important skill for the student to

learn. When a student compares and contrasts different items, it allows him to see that people, movements, and countries often have similarities and differences. This very obvious notion for the adult teacher is often lost on the student. The compare and contrast essay also teaches how to organize a complex argument.

### **An Introduction to Influences in History**

Influences in history refer to ideas that shape the course of history, regardless of which time period or history you are studying. They are constants that historians use to understand the past.

### **Change Over Time**

Change over time refers to how there is constant, if gradual, change in society over time. When we are living in it, change is often difficult to perceive. Even so, adults in 2009 can well recall how as teenagers, most if not all telephones were dial. There were no cell phones and no internet. The rapid technological change of the twenty-first century is an excellent example of how society changes over time. But, for the adolescent historian, it is better to change this aspect of history into an interpretive question. Why was there great change in communication technology in twenty-first America? How did technological change in America affect society? Did the technological change in communication make life simpler or more complicated?

### **The Individual in History**

In *A Preface to History*, Carl Gustavson writes that there are two extremes in judging the role of the individual in history. The first extreme is known as “The Great Man Theory,” the second extreme is held by the “determinists.”

The Great Man Theory is the seemingly natural inclination for students of history to believe that it is only through the genius of individuals that change occurs in society. Who caused World War II? Hitler did. This response is typical of what you might hear from a very young history student. This simplistic view throws out all other forces and reduces all of mankind to the masses of ignorant and following hordes. In this light, the individual small-fry in society loses his free-will, his choice, and is reduced to a mere subject. It seems the younger or more inexperienced the history student, the more likely he will assume the “Great Man Theory” is the reason for all twists and turns of the past.

The determinists hold the opposite view. They view that the world turns on a preordained set of principles and societal evolution, and that the individual leader is created by the movement. The Marxist view

of history, where society evolves from a capitalistic to a communistic society, holds that it is not the Great Man, but the evolution of social and economic development that determines history. Both extremes tend to be false, but present students strategies with which to analyze history.

For the young mind, the Great Man Theory is the one that is easiest to hold onto. “Hitler caused World War II,” or, “Einstein created the nuclear bomb,” or “Lincoln freed the slaves,” or even “Martin Luther King freed the slaves” are typically heard among students in k-12 education. The appropriate question, then, is to challenge this assertion of the Great Man Theory and to ask students if this person, or that person, was *solely* responsible for a certain event.

## **Causation**

One challenge young people face when studying history is of placing oneself in history, at the time of the event, and imagining the variety of outcomes. It is too easy for us to imagine that what happened in history had to happen. And, the further back we go, the easier it is to do this. Washington as victorious Commander-in-Chief? Of course! Lincoln leading the North into a struggle to save the Union? Who else could there have been? When we get closer to our time, it becomes much more challenging to do this.

In cause and effect essays, students attempt to see historical events in their true light, in *context*. Events are not encapsulated moments, separated from what came before and after. They are instead a part of the whole story. Understanding a particular era means to realize what came before, what came after, and to decide the most influential of these. This is not always easy to do, and, provides for excellent opportunities for debate.

It is easier to imagine a debate about the causes of events when we focus on current events. For instance, the cause of the Iraq war that removed Saddam Hussein from power in the early 2000s is a topic that could cause fierce debate. Who caused it: the failure of intelligence from Russia, the United States of America, the European Union countries, or Hussein’s inability to cooperate and come clean? This topic, because it is so close to many historian’s lives, would be easy to generate debate and discussion, although it might be nearly impossible to have a dispassionate discourse on it.

Events that occurred long ago, however, are more difficult to see the various causes. Perhaps because of this difficulty, cause and effect essay questions are excellent to train the mind of the young person. Instead of being told what the causes to an event are, the young person is given the freedom to think on their own and make their own decisions.

Cause and effect essay assignments are therefore excellent for the young person to grapple with.

### **The Role of Ideas**

This scenario or one similar is practiced on nearly every high school campus across America: It is a school election where all students get to choose class representatives. Each first-period class will send their representative to a meeting of the Associated Student Body, where they will decide the theme of the Senior Prom. Imagine the student response if they were told that instead the most unpopular teacher would get to decide the theme and the music to be played. If there wouldn't be a violent protest, then perhaps it would be the least attended Senior Prom in school history!

The role of ideas may sound like the most challenging of the aspects of historical reasoning in this book, but surprisingly for young minds it is perhaps the easiest to grasp. Because ideas appear to transcend time, it is simple to get youth to relate to with this aspect. Teaching representative democracy versus tyranny is perhaps the easiest, because almost every school practices representative government when deciding school functions like dances.

While the term "role of ideas" may sound dull, it actually may bring about the most excitable response from students. Which ideas are better for society: socialism, capitalism, communism? A young person's mind seems naturally inclined to analyze and discuss these ideas.

### **The Interpretive Question**

A common complaint among adolescent history students who do poorly is, "History is boring." This remark, uttered over the ages, is not based on the actual content itself, but on the teaching method implemented in the classroom or the type of history books students have tried to read. When history is taught as a set of items to memorize, it is cold, scientific, without life, and for the adolescent, it is boring. Professor Michael Allen states, "History is not boring, but often history teachers are boring!" Memorization is necessary to learn and understand history, however, the idealistic adolescent mind yearns for more, and the study of history calls for more.

History is a subject of disagreement, argumentation, and debate. Adolescents love to disagree, argue, and debate. The subject and the student are perfect matches for each other. This is a match made in heaven! Kids love to argue. Just listen to some of their conversations to find out. What is the best movie of all time? Which music is the best to listen to? Who makes the best hamburger? What is the toughest sport to

play? Which game system is the best? These are topics adolescents will spend countless hours debating. “Kids think they know it all.” How many times have you heard an adult say this phrase? Therefore, if kids like to argue, and they think they know it all, then let’s give them an academic subject to slug it out over.

Any parent with a teenager knows that very often, the kid thinks he knows it all and will tell you so. My physics teacher in high school would tell us, “When you’re a teenager, your parent is one of the most stupid beings on the planet. But, as you get older, it seems like they get more intelligent, too. The older you get, the smarter your parents get.”

History is the best subject to debate. It is not the facts that are the focus of the argument, but the meaning of history. Contrast your school’s textbook with a book by Howard Zinn. The meaning of historical events will be greatly different, depending on the historian. Listen to news stations MSNBC and Fox News report on presidential candidates, and you will hear two different stories. Read a local liberal paper and contrast it with a local conservative paper. You will find that each interprets the day’s events with often opposing interpretations. Read a Protestant Christian’s interpretation of the Reformation and contrast it with a Roman Catholic’s view, and you will get two varying sides.

Because the meaning of history lends itself to interpretation, and because the adolescent wants to argue, the two have to be brought together. Starting at least in the sixth grade classroom, the student should be challenged to interpret the meaning of historical events and people. The more a student progresses in his abilities as a historian and a reader, the more challenging tasks he can take on, including reading more primary sources.

A key ingredient to the historical debate is to begin with the correct type of question. The question needs to be open-ended, without the possibility of there being only one correct answer. The question needs to be about a topic that the student will have sufficient resources to find. With the availability of textbooks, the school library, and the internet, students today have become very savvy about getting information, but not always *reliable* information.

Most history questions that are debatable occur around aspects of historical thinking. According to Carl Gustavson in his book, *A Preface to History*, aspects of historical thinking include social forces, causation, change and continuity, the institutional factor, revolution, bases of loyalty, the individual in history, inventors and inventions, the role of ideas, the use and misuse of history, power, and international organizations. For the teacher who likes history but doesn’t have much

time, *A Preface to History* is an outstanding and simple book to read and it explains these aspects of historical reasoning in a way that is easy to grasp.

Typically, there exist seven types of questions for free-response essays in high school, college entrance exams, and college. They are: Change over Time, Cause and Effect, Compare and Contrast, Define and Identify, Statement/Reaction, Analyzing Viewpoints, and Evaluation. For specific examples of these questions you can use with students in grades 6-12, please see the curriculum published by The Classical Historian©.

1. Cause and Effect
2. Change over Time
3. Compare and Contrast
4. Define and Identify
5. Statement/Reaction
6. Evaluation
7. Analyzing Viewpoints

### **Research to Answer Open-Ended Questions**

Behind every good historian is the research he conducts to form his analysis. The beginning historian may use one reliable resource. As the child ages, he should use primary source documents, conflicting sources, and as many varied texts as he can get his hands on. The idea is that once the tools of history are embedded in a student's mind, he can use these tools and apply it to various author's interpretations of history.

The active reader recognizes the bias of the writer, and the active student grasps the importance of primary source documents. History is usually taught from one perspective. However, the problem with this approach is that if the child does not learn how to analyze history and practice this analysis on various authors, the student will leave the home or school unprepared to analyze conflicting viewpoints.

Because much in history is left up to interpretation, this subject is excellent for discussion. Open-ended, interpretive questions are those that are impossible to answer with a simple yes or no and need explanation. Some questions that will stimulate thought and discussion are "What caused the Roman Empire to change from persecuting Christians to adopting Christianity as the state religion?" "How did American society change from 1950 to 1990 because of technology?" "What caused the fall of the Soviet Union?" "Compare and contrast the Incas with the Aztecs." "Compare and contrast the reasons Martin Luther and King Henry VIII founded new religions." In their discussions, students will learn that it is possible to look at history from varying vantage points. This exercise in logic trains the mind.

## **The Socratic Discussion in History**

One key element of the tools of learning history is the Socratic method. Students first learn short lessons involving logic, as applied to history. Once we have taught our students how to analyze history, we will teach them how to discuss and debate. Whereas Socrates used questions to pursue the truth in philosophy, we will use questions to pursue the truth in history.

One point that parents need never worry about is whether they themselves know enough to conduct a Socratic discussion in history. Socrates noted that the best teacher and most intelligent philosopher is one who knows what he does not know. It is essential that the parent, instead of knowing historical information, adopt certain habits of thought and of questioning. Beyond the introductory level of “Who, what, where, when why, how?” however, the parent must ask, “What evidence do you have that supports this?” If the evidence is weak, then the student’s judgment will be weak as well. For how can there be a strong conclusion with weak evidence? The open discussion stimulates the mind to think of other possible conclusions.

The teacher’s role in the discussion is not to tell the student what to think, but rather to question and challenge the student’s conclusions, forcing the student to continually clarify and defend with historical evidence and sound judgment. If other students are available, the teacher can encourage students to debate each other’s ideas, with the intention of arriving at the best possible conclusion. If there are not other students available, the parent should encourage the student to be able to present a perspective that is contrary to the student’s own perspective. The teacher’s goal is to create a scholarly atmosphere where students are free to express their ideas but careful to cite the historical evidence that supports their thesis statement.

## **How to Lead the Socratic Discussion in History**

### **1. Have the right frame of mind.**

As the teacher, your role is to encourage discussion and to get your students to explain their answer and reasoning. You must be more interested in getting to know who your student is and how he thinks, than giving him information. Researching the history is what your student is supposed to do, not you.

### **2. Ask the right questions.**

When the student comes forth with his answer, ask him to prove everything. “Why do you think this?” “What is your evidence?”

“If you don’t have evidence, then maybe you should consider changing your answer.” “Do you have any historical figures, dates, and events that would provide evidence for your answer?”

3. You are the “master” of the process, not the outcome. You may have your ideas about the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, but your role is to challenge the student to come up with his own reasons and evidence. If you provide him with your answers, then he will stop thinking and just wait because you are the teacher who is supposed to be smarter.
4. Let the student Take a Stand!  
The discussion phase is where the student should feel like he is going to shine. Let him shine. Be amazed at good analysis. Support strong use of evidence. Encourage him in his work.
5. Common Errors of Students
  - a. Student does not have evidence to back up argument.
  - b. Student has one piece of evidence and thinks that that is enough.
  - c. Student goes with his “feelings” even though he can’t find evidence.
  - d. Student is very capable with the spoken word and is used to getting by with a minimum of work.

### **Student Rules for a Socratic Discussion in History**

1. Each participant has tried their best in researching for the discussion.  
If no research work has been done, the student cannot participate.
2. The goal of each student is to search for the truth, not “win” the discussion.
3. When others talk, all students will be respectfully silent.
4. To signal the teacher that you want to talk, the student will raise his hand and wait for the teacher to call on him.
5. If a student wants to talk, the teacher will recognize him.
6. In making an assertion, the student will attempt to use historical evidence as support.
7. Unless noted otherwise, students may use notes during the



discussion.

8. Students are encouraged to acknowledge good arguments of their peers.
9. The student will make every possible effort to participate in the discussion.
10. It is the student's responsibility to report to the teacher any problems that may inhibit his participation in the discussion.

### **Analytical Essays**

In analytical writing in history, substance takes precedence over style. It is more important that the student takes a perspective that can be defended with evidence, and that the thesis is one where an opposing viewpoint is possible, than if the essay sounds beautiful. Of course, it is best to create a sound argument with wonderful prose. For assignments that use these questions for grades 6-12, see The Classical Historian Complete Curriculum.

### **The One-Paragraph Essay**

Below are two sample one-paragraph essays that could be written by a secondary-school student. Spelling and grammatical mistakes are found in these samples to demonstrate imperfect essays.

**Question:** Was George Washington greatly responsible for the founding of the United States of America?

#### **Student Essay #1**

##### **"George Washington – Not Responsible"**

George Washington was not greatly responsible for the founding of the U.S. because he did not write the Declaration of Independence, France helped him at Yorktown, Thomas Paine wrote "Common Sense" which fired up the troops, he wasn't at the Boston Tea Party, and didn't start the Great Awakening. First of all, Thomas Jefferson wrote the declaration of independence. And, gave us our freedom that we have today. Secondly, the French advised him to attack Cornwallis at Yorktown. Other wise he would have lost in New York. Thirdly, Thomas Paine wrote "Common Sense" that fired up the troops. Which gave them the reason for fighting. In addition, George Washington was not present at the Boston tea party. Neither did he start the great awakening. So, as you see with out the Boston Tea party, the Declaration of Independence, "Common Sense" or the Boston massacre the U.S. wouldn't be were it is now.

## **Student Essay #2**

### **"George Washington – Greatly Responsible"**

George Washington was greatly responsible for the founding of the United States of America because of his loyalty, bravery, and cleverness. First of all, Washington bravely led the crossing of the Delaware River on Christmas night, December 25, 1776. This was important because George Washington captured the enemy at Trenton, New Jersey when it seemed like the Americans were losing the war. This event brought hope to Washington and his army. Secondly, Washington was a clever general and was nicknamed “the Silver Fox.” During the first few years of the war, Washington’s army was trapped in New York, and it appeared that the British would capture him and end the war. Washington kept fires burning at the American camp throughout the night, and in the meantime every soldier snuck away by boat. Furthermore, to end the war, Washington pretended to attack New York, but instead marched on the British at Yorktown while the French fleet cut off the British escape to the sea. In 1781, Washington scored the major victory of the war, capturing Cornwallis and a huge British army. Thirdly, Washington was loyal. Towards the end of the war, some in his army proposed for him to become a king. Washington refused this. As America’s first president, Washington also refused to remain for a third term as President. He believed a republican government should not have one leader for too many years. In conclusion, Washington’s actions during the American Revolution and his behavior during the first few years of the young republic were essential to the founding of the new republic, the United States of America.

### **Grading Notes for “George Washington – Not Responsible”**

**I. Thesis Statement:**                      **Grade: 4**              **Exceeds Standards**

The thesis statement answers the question persuasively and provides pieces of supporting evidence.

**II. Evidence Used:**                      **Grade: 3**              **Meets Standards**

Are two or more relevant pieces of evidence used? The answer is yes. Although there are some problems with the evidence, the writer uses at least two pieces of evidence well. He writes that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. The author is inferring that more patriots besides George Washington were needed to make the American Revolution a success. The essayist also writes that Thomas Paine wrote “Common Sense.” In this piece of evidence, the essayist is proving again that other Americans were necessary for the success of the American

Revolution. There are problems with the remaining evidence used, so the grader should not count them positively towards the grade.

**III. Evidence Explained:            Grade: 2            Approaching Standards**

Is the evidence explained correctly and persuasively? There are a number of problems in this category. The author states that it was Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence gave us our freedoms today. This is somewhat of a stretch. The essayist offers us no proof that France told Washington to attack Cornwallis at Yorktown. Which general told Washington? At what meeting did it take place? The essayist states that Washington was not present at the Boston Tea Party, and that he did not start the Great Awakening. Yet, the author does not describe how these events led to the success of the American Revolution.

**IV. Conclusion:                    Grade: 2.5            Approaching Standards**

The conclusion doesn’t sum up the main points of the essay entirely. The essayist should have written that other factors besides the life of George Washington led to the success of the American Revolution. The author also brings in a new piece of supporting evidence, the Boston Massacre. The conclusion should not bring in any new piece of evidence that was not explained in detail in the body of the essay. Also, it is difficult to understand the essayist due to spelling and grammatical errors.

**V. Prewriting Activities:            Grade            4            Exceeds Standards**

This particular student completed all prewriting activities and researched in multiple sources.

**VI. The Unwritten Category:            -5**

This student wrote with grammatical and spelling errors and sometimes sentences were awkward. Still, he was able to convey the content effectively.

**Grade for “George Washington – Not Responsible”**

Thesis:	4	x 5 =	20
Evidence Used:	3	x 5 =	15
Evidence Explained:	2	x 5 =	10
Conclusion:	2.5	x 5 =	12.5
Prewriting Activities	4	x <u>5</u> =	<u>20</u>
Sub Total:			77.5
Spelling and Grammatical Errors:			<u>-5</u>
<b>Total Grade:</b>	<b>C-</b>		<b>72.5</b>

**Grade for Essay #2 “George Washington – Greatly Responsible”**

**I. Thesis Statement: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards**

This student clearly answers the prompt and provides insight as to what the essay will be about.

**II. Evidence Used: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards**

Convincing evidence is presented. Historical names, dates, and places are used to support the evidence.

**III. Evidence Explained: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards**

This student shows that he grasps the content.

**IV. Conclusion: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards**

The author shows that good writing can be interesting, even at the last sentence.

**V. Prewriting Activities: Grade 4 Exceeds Standards**

This particular student completed all prewriting activities.

**VI. The Unwritten Category: Nothing detracted from the content.**

**Grade for “George Washington – Greatly Responsible”**

Thesis:	4	x 5 =	20
Evidence Used:	4	x 5 =	20
Evidence Explained:	4	x 5 =	20
Conclusion:	4	x 5 =	20
Prewriting Activities	4	x	<u>5</u> = 20
Sub Total:			100
Spelling and Grammatical Errors:			
<b>Total Grade:</b>	<b>A+</b>		<b>100</b>

**C. The Five-Paragraph Essay**

The five-paragraph is the standard for essay tests in secondary schools. Once a student can master this essay, all writing assignments will be made easier throughout the student’s academic career, including at the university level. Below are two examples of five-paragraph essays based on a question from this book.

**Grading Categories for a Five-Paragraph Essay**

The grading categories for a five-paragraph essay differ from the one and three-paragraph essays primarily to make the grading easier for the teacher. The teacher grades each paragraph separately, grading as he

reads. Saving valuable time, the teacher does not have to go back to different parts of the essay after he has read it. Please refer to the grading rubric in this book for more detail.

**Paragraph I. Thesis Statement and Interest**

Is there a thesis statement and is the paragraph interesting?

**Paragraph II. Topic Sentence, Evidence, Closer**

Does the paragraph contain a topic sentence, supporting evidence, explanations of the evidence, and a closer?

**Paragraph III. Topic Sentence, Evidence, Closer**

Does the paragraph contain a topic sentence, supporting evidence, explanations of the evidence, and a closer?

**Paragraph IV. Topic Sentence, Evidence, Closer**

Does the paragraph contain a topic sentence, supporting evidence, explanations of the evidence, and a closer?

**Paragraph V Restating Thesis Statement and Closer Spelling or Grammatical Errors?**

Do spelling or grammatical errors detract from the essay content?

**Question:** What were the greatest three challenges to the young nation, 1789-1825?

**Essay #1**

**"The Young Nation"**

The three greatest challenges to the young nation were the Alien and Sedition Act because the President was allowed to kick out an illegal immigrant, Jefferson because he was the first Secretary of State and the Whiskey Rebellion because Americans rebelled.

The greatest challenge was the Alien and Sedition Act because the President was allowed to kick out or expel any illegal immigrant. This is when the president can tell any illegal immigrant to go back home. President was also able to jail any person that wrote or spoke against the U.S. This meant that if any person wrote something bad about the U.S. they would go to jail and also for speaking against. They would also say that immigrants were "Alien." They would say that because alien invade and immigrant come in from another country. John Adams was known for the Alien and Sedition. In 1801-1816 when Jefferson was president he let the Act expire. This Act was powerful towards illegal immigrants.

Jefferson was the second greatest challenge because he was the first Secretary of State. Jefferson then became president in 1801. He tried to appear more common. Jefferson passed the Embargo Act. In 1803 he bought Louisiana. He brought it so he could double the size of the U.S. This land was brought from Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1804 he sent Lewis

and Clark to explore the Louisiana Territory. Sacagawea was the Indian guide that led them around territory. This opened the west up for settlement. Jefferson changed the U.S. during his Presidency in 1801-1816.

The third greatest challenge was the Whiskey rebellion because Americans rebelled. They did this because the whiskey was taxed. Americans didn't like that and were very angry. Washington heard that they were going to rebel so he marched with 15,000 and they rebelled. People didn't want to fight back because they were scared. This was a challenge because of Americans were rebelling.

The greatest challenge to the young nation was Alien and Sedition Act because any illegal immigrant can get kicked or expelled from the U.S., Jefferson because he was the first Secretary of State and Whiskey Rebellion because Americans rebelled. These were really tough challenges towards many Americans.

## **Essay #2**

### **"The Young Nation"**

The three greatest challenges that faced the young United States of America were the War of 1812, the Whisky Rebellion, and the Alien and Sedition Acts. These three challenges could have brought any new country complete ruin. The War of 1812 has been called "The Second American Revolution" because the British did not respect us, yet. The Whisky Rebellion could have started a Civil War. The Alien and Sedition Acts was a threat against the very principles that our country was founded on.

The War of 1812 was a big challenge for the young nation to take on because the young nation had to at war with Great Britain shortly after the American Revolution. First of all, Henry Clay the war hawk felt that Great Britain was not treating the United States fairly and he thought that a war was the only thing that would earn us respect. Great Britain was treating the United States unfairly because great Britain was impressing American sailors and seizing our ships. Great Britain had the strongest navy in the world. America only had about 16 ships. Even though America was up against great odds, the American navy defeated the British navy. Captain Perry in the battle of Lake Erie defeated a British fleet and uttered the memorable words, "We have met the enemy and they are ours." On land, Andrew Jackson led American soldiers to defeat the British and their Indian allies. Jackson defeated the great Indian leader, Tecumseh. He also led the Americans to destroy the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, killing over 2,000 British soldiers and only losing 7 Americans. The War of 1812 was a great

challenge to the young nation that the United States of America succeeded in overcoming.

A second big challenge that the young nation had to face was the Whisky Rebellion. This was a big challenge for the young nation because Americans wanted to fight each other. Congress passed a law placing a tax on whisky. Farmers and whisky makers did not like this law. Throughout Pittsburgh protesters gathered with guns, and threatened to destroy public buildings. George Washington reacted to this threat to the government by marching 15,000 American soldiers towards the rebels. Seeing what they were up against, the rebels disbanded. In this challenge, the supremacy of the federal government was threatened, but Washington solved the problem by a show of force. The second greatest challenge to the young republic was the Whisky Rebellion.

The third greatest challenge for the young nation was the Alien and Sedition Act. In 1798, the Federalists pushed this Act through Congress. This law allowed the president to kick out any immigrant or foreigner for any reason. It also allowed the president to jail anybody who spoke or wrote against the government. This was a horrible law that went directly against one of the main reasons for the American Revolution. One reason the founding fathers struggled for independence against Great Britain was so that each person would be free to express himself in words. The First Amendment guarantees Americans freedom of speech and press. This law took these freedoms away, and became a law that was actually unconstitutional. Also, it denied legal immigrants fair and just treatment. The Alien and Sedition Acts were a great challenge to our young nation. Fortunately, under Thomas Jefferson as President, this Act expired.

In conclusion, the three greatest challenges to the United States as a young nation were the War of 1812, the Whisky Rebellion, and the Alien and Sedition Acts. One challenge involved foreign affairs and two domestic. Also called the Second American Revolution, the War of 1812 could have meant dependence on Great Britain, or loss of territory, if America would have lost. The Whisky Rebellion was a great test of strength of the American government. And, the Alien and Sedition Act was a test of whether a country born with the ideas of freedom could withstand an overzealous government.

## **Grade Notes for Student Essay #1 "The Young Nation"**

### **I. Paragraph I: Grade: 2.5      Approaching Standards**

This student's thesis statement is confusing. To make the claim that Jefferson was one of the top three challenges to the young nation because he was the first Secretary of State does not make sense. The student

should spend more time here explaining what he means. Also, the thesis would have been more understandable to read if the writer had broken up the various ideas into multiple sentences.

**II. Paragraph II: Grade: 2.5 Approaching Standards**

This paragraph describes the Alien and Sedition Act as it relates to treatment of immigrants and of somebody speaking against the government, but there is no explanation of why these aspects are bad. The writer should have written something such as, “America should have been known as a place where immigrants were welcome because immigrants founded our country. It was wrong to take civil rights away from those not born on American soil.” Also, the writer could have added, “To lock somebody up for speaking against the government is clearly a violation of the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of speech. It is wrong to not be able to say what you think.” Without statements such as these, it is hard to see if the writer understands what he is writing.

**III. Paragraph III: Grade: 1 Below Standards**

Unfortunately, it appears that the student misunderstood the word challenge as it relates to Thomas Jefferson and the young republic.

**IV. Paragraph IV: Grade: 3 Meets Standards**

The topic sentence clearly states the third challenge and there is some explanation about what the rebellion was about. The writer could have done a better job at explaining how this rebellion was a threat to the new government, describing how many rebels there were, and telling in what state it happened.

**V. Paragraph V: Grade: 2.5 Approaching Standards**

This receives the same exact grade as Paragraph I because it is written with almost exactly the same words.

**VI. Grammar/Spelling Errors** No errors detracted from content

Although there were errors in this essay, the errors didn't take away from the poor quality of the content.

**Grade for Student Essay #1**

Paragraph I:	2.5	x	5=12.5
Paragraph II:	2.5	x	5=12.5
Paragraph III:	1	x	5= 5
Paragraph IV:	3	x	5=15
Paragraph V:	2.5	x	<u>5=12.5</u>
Subtotal:			57.5
Grammar/Spelling Errors			
<b>Total Grade:</b>	<b>F</b>		<b>57.5</b>



## Grade Notes for Student Essay #2 "The Young Nation"

### I. Paragraph I: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards

The student does an excellent job answering the question and giving three reasons for the answer.

### II. Paragraph II: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards

A large amount of supporting evidence is used to support the topic sentence.

### III. Paragraph III: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards

The student uses great analytical skills, explaining the dangers of the whisky rebellion.

### IV. Paragraph IV: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards

The student crafts a strong argument, using evidence and explaining its importance.

### V. Paragraph V: Grade: 4 Exceeds Standards

The student pulls off an outstanding paper with a terrific conclusion.

### VI. Grammar/Spelling Errors -3

When a paper is as good as this, the teacher can be stricter in this area. There are minor errors with grammar and punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and a missing word.

### Grade for Student Essay #2

Paragraph I:	4	x	5= 20	
Paragraph II:		4	x	5= 20
Paragraph III:		4	x	5= 20
Paragraph IV:		4	x	5= 20
Paragraph V:		4	x	<u>5= 20</u>
Subtotal:				100
Grammar/Spelling Errors			<u>-3</u>	
<b>Total Score:</b>	<b>A+</b>			<b>97</b>

## V. Personal Reflections on Learning History with a Classical Approach

My most influential educational years in history were spent learning from those who had experienced history and who were patient to speak to me about their experiences. The most important person in this area was my dad, Robert De Gree. In the evenings, when I was doing homework, I could talk to him about history and ask him questions on whatever I was studying. My dad had taught intermediate school history for about 15 years, and then went into administration. Two things that he had an excellent knowledge of, however, were people and the Socratic discussion.

Because my dad had taught junior high school history, I knew I could go to him for help. I think when I asked him questions, I was originally just looking for the easy answer. But, he would never just give me what I wanted. He would set me up for reflection and discussion. For example, I specifically remember asking for his help when I had to write an essay on the American Revolution during my 11<sup>th</sup> grade AP US History class. Sitting across from him in our living room, I asked him,

“Hey Dad, could you give me some reasons why English colonial farmers would want to break away from Great Britain?” He put the newspaper down, looked at me, and said,

“Just imagine you were an English colonial farmer in the early 1770s, right before the American Revolution. When you were done working for many months to get your crop of food ready to sell, what would you do?”

Very disappointed, I continued with the conversation seeing that he was not going to just give me the answer. “I would go into town and try to sell it,” I said.

“And then what would you do with the money you made?” he asked.

“I would buy food and supplies for my family,” I answered. “Maybe I would try to buy better farm equipment to build up the family farm.”

“John, how would you feel if you wanted to buy a plow or other tool made in France but couldn’t because there was a law that said you could only buy manufactured goods from Great Britain?” he asked.

“I would be upset,” I answered.

“And how would you feel if you had to pay taxes on the supplies and it was the King and the English Parliament who decided the taxes, and you couldn’t do anything about it?” he continued.

“I wouldn’t like it,” I replied.

“Well, those are two reasons many English colonial farmers wanted to overthrow the British. Hey John, did you ever consider if the colonial farmer benefitted from British rule?”

“Not really. What do you mean?”

“Well, did the British provide any benefits to the colonial farmer?”

“Hmm. I guess. Maybe their army provided some benefits in protecting them from the Indians,” I replied.

“Do you know of any wars or instances where the British army protected the colonists?” he asked me.

“I know about the French and Indian War. The British helped the colonists defend against Indian invasions.”

“Do you have any names of battles during this war? Do you know of any other times where the British helped the colonists? John, why I’m asking is that it is too often people blame one side when they don’t know the facts. Maybe the British have some good points we should know. I’d like you to look these things up and let me know about when these things happened.”

After this conversation, I had to write down what we talked about and figure out how it would fit into my essay. But, because I had played an active role in the conversation, and because my Dad had given me a concrete picture to imagine, I never forgot this part of history. English colonial farmers were upset at the British because they were not allowed to buy manufactured goods from anyone but the British, even if the French had a better or less expensive product. And, English colonists were upset because the taxes were decided by the Parliament and King, not the colonists. But, the British were not all wrong. The British had defeated the French enemy and only wanted Americans to help pay off the war debt.

I would call this lesson from my Dad a very short and beginner’s introduction to classical education in history. He could have just told me the reasons farmers didn’t like the British. Instead, he made me part of the story, and I got to understand how somebody in the position of the English colonial farmer might have thought. In coming to understand history and literature, it helps if the reader can imagine himself as part of the story. How would you think if were an English colonist and could not buy the best the world could offer because of a law somebody else had made? How would you like it if another group of people determined what your taxes were, and you had absolutely no say in the matter? How did the British feel about Americans paying their “fair share”? The historian attempts to have empathy when studying other people.

## **Growing up in a Large Family**

As a child, discussions were natural for me because I'm from a family of eleven children. As the tenth of eleven, and got to witness an amazing amount of discussions. The discussions weren't always civil and polite, but they were effective. We discussed politics, religion, friends, sports, and the correct ways of eating pizza. After a heated discussion, for example, the kids established the rule that when Mom and Dad bought pizza, the kid eating it was allowed to take only one slice of pizza at a time on his plate. If someone took more he would be accused of hoarding pizza and would be forced to give it back. He could also receive some sort of physical punishment administered by an older kid sitting nearby. The idea was, you shouldn't take more than you could eat quickly because you might deny somebody else their chance. Discussion in my home was not always peaceful, but it was interesting! And my older brothers could have set records for speed eating!

I didn't realize that through these discussions I was learning a method of discourse that would help me understand novels and history. It was just part of growing up. I later realized, that having family discussions and talking to Dad about history were unique events that other typical American kids do not experience. It is not a typical event for a family to sit around the dinner table and talk and listen. It is also not normal for Dad to be honored as an authority figure and to be a source of knowledge in the average American family. Of my own students, those who outperform others and display empathy towards their classmates, are those who eat dinner with their families and who have an active dad in their lives. Likewise, it is very common that students with social and academic problems do not have family dinner time and an active Dad in their lives.

## **In Germany, Turkey, and in the Czech Republic**

I was extremely fortunate in my college and post graduate years to spend five years in foreign countries, working, studying languages, and getting married to my wife Zdenka. It was my time abroad that helped me perfect a method to learn another language, and to engage others in discussions of history, language, philosophy, literature, and religion.

For about ten months, I lived and travelled throughout Germany and Austria. As a junior in college and after college I lived in Austria and Germany because I wanted to be a professor of history and thought I should know at least one other language to understand another

perspective. During this time, I went to school and worked at a local restaurant. For a period of five months, I roomed under an older Austrian couple. The husband had been in the German army in World War II, had been captured by the Russians, had escaped, and then was captured by the Americans and sent to Pennsylvania to work on a farm as a prisoner of war. This man thought that life had been better under the Habsburg Emperors, that taxes were lower under the emperors, and that democracy was a failed idea. I had never heard this idea before, and was initially shocked how somebody preferred being a subject instead of a citizen.

In Germany, I lived with an older couple as well. The husband also had been in the German army in World War II, had invaded the Soviet Union, and had personally witnessed the brutality of the Nazis. He did not join the Nazi party, but he also did not protest vociferously against the Nazi tortures and murders. When Romania switched sides, he had to sneak back into Germany by travelling at night.

In both of these homes that I lived in, I was incredibly curious about the gentlemen's experiences of the war. I had many questions, and many thoughts. I was angry at their association with Hitler, and yet I saw that these men seemed to be good and upright as well. And, I wanted to learn German by speaking and listening to them. Every evening, I made it a point to get to know them, to ask gentle questions, and to listen. I was especially successful with the gentleman from Germany, Herr Buchelmeier. He let me get to know him and to see his war experiences as he saw them. On one of the last nights, he and his wife said that they still carry the guilt of the war because they had not openly opposed Hitler. I realized through these experiences that history is a complex story, told by different people with different perspectives. It is only right that we strive as teachers to present these perspective to our students, and let them see the intricacies of history.

After my wife and I married, we lived in Turkey and taught Germans how to windsurf. Originally, we had a problem. My wife knew how to windsurf but couldn't really speak German. I knew how to speak German but couldn't windsurf. Eventually everything worked out. I was responsible for teaching the tools of windsurfing on land, and she showed them how to surf on the ocean. We eventually let them tackle the Mediterranean Sea on their own. I didn't realize it at the time, but I received an excellent education. My wife and I were exposed to Islam, to public prayer, and we also learned how we were perceived by others because of our skin color and our style of dressing.

Curious about how the Turks viewed the first war in Iraq, I queried them about it. Without exception, all Turks replied that Saddam Hussein had beaten George Bush. When I pointed out that the U.S.A. had kicked out Iraq from Kuwait, the Turks just replied that that didn't really matter. Hussein was still alive. I realized, maybe for the first time, how it is often impossible for us in America to understand the perspectives of others. We may have a plethora of information from the media, but it is challenging to imagine how others think. For the Turks, America was weak because it hadn't gone after Hussein.

But my definitive education in history came when I lived in Czechoslovakia. First, I had the goal of learning Czech. To do this, I went to school and learned the basics. To communicate with others well, however, required many conversations. My wife and I led a youth group where I was forced to speak Czech and lead young people.

Wherever we went, there were always people eager to learn about what life was like in the United States and who were eager to tell me about their life in Czechoslovakia. I was very curious to learn about life under Communists, who ruled the land until 1989. Remembering the lessons I had learned at home, and the lessons I had learned studying German, I was always very curious to ask questions and to listen. My goal was to learn how others thought and perceived the world, and it was a great blessing to be living in Czechoslovakia in the 1990s as an American. Basically, everything I had learned about Communism from my Dad turned out to be true. There was no freedom of expression, very little freedom of religion, little opportunity, and the ruling class thought it was smarter and better than everyone and stole from everyone. But I also learned that many non-Communist Czechs had strong friendships because they needed each other. It seems that because of these hardships, the religious were extremely faithful and they gave me excellent examples to follow in how to treat others and in how to have faith.

What was maybe most interesting, however, was that the Czechs felt free to talk about everything, and wanted to discuss everything. No topic was taboo. They could express their thoughts, and I mine, and we could completely disagree, but, we would walk away friends. We could discuss religion, abortion, politics, wars, anything. And still, Czechs wouldn't take anything personally. I realized returning to America, that this was not the case here. So many times, we Americans are not able to hold discussions with others.

While in Czechoslovakia, the Czechs and Slovaks peacefully divided and became the Czech Republic the Slovak Republic. It was in Prague, where I settled down into what would become my main

profession: teacher. I taught English as a Second Language and History. My students were high school students, moms, dads, high level business people, a devout Communist, and a mayor. Once I taught the students the main tools of the English language, our classes were centered around the Socratic Discussion. We would have a topic of discussion, and it was my job to teach the new vocabulary words, but mainly to get my students to talk and express themselves. This job really showed me that it is through questioning and answering that people learn languages, and share ideas.

In all of my experiences abroad, I was blessed to have the method of learning that my parents had given me. Ask questions. Listen. Empathize. When I became a teacher in Santa Ana, California, I saw the necessity of teaching this approach to my students, and to my children.

### **In Santa Ana and in San Clemente**

My family and I returned to California in 1996 where I have been teaching History and English for the past 14 years. Very quickly, it became evident to me that although a majority of my students were officially designated “English Learners,” their home language was Spanish, and their English was limited. But, their thinking skills were not limited. What they lacked, however, were the tools of learning.

My students were accustomed to being given assignments that required memorization and organization, but little analytical thought. What happened in most cases, is that the students struggled to stay organized, and what was memorized one month was forgotten the next. I wanted to provide these students with something that would make learning history meaningful to them.

In 2001, I earned my Masters of Humanities, History emphasis, from Cal State Dominguez Hills. This program gave me the tools of the historian. Equipped with these tools, I knew I could teach them to my students and challenge them to be historians. Thus, the *Take a Stand!* Series was born in 2005. My goal then, as it is now, was to equip students with the skills of the historian, and then allow them to take a stand on a historical topic of the past and defend it in speech and writing. To make a very long story short, *Take a Stand!* was successful in a few local school districts, and then I experienced many of the great problems afflicting America’s school system and society first hand. These negative experiences forced me look elsewhere to express my ideas on the study of history.

We began to home school when our oldest of seven children was entering third grade, in 2002. When he reached the sixth grade, I took over teaching him history and reading and writing. Teaching at home

allowed my wife and other home school moms to observe how I taught history. They encouraged me to create curriculum that would teach other home school moms how to do the same. It is from this encouragement that the Classical Historian was born. The methods of the ancients, starting with Herodotus and Thucydides, put to our use to study the past, is The Classical Historian.