

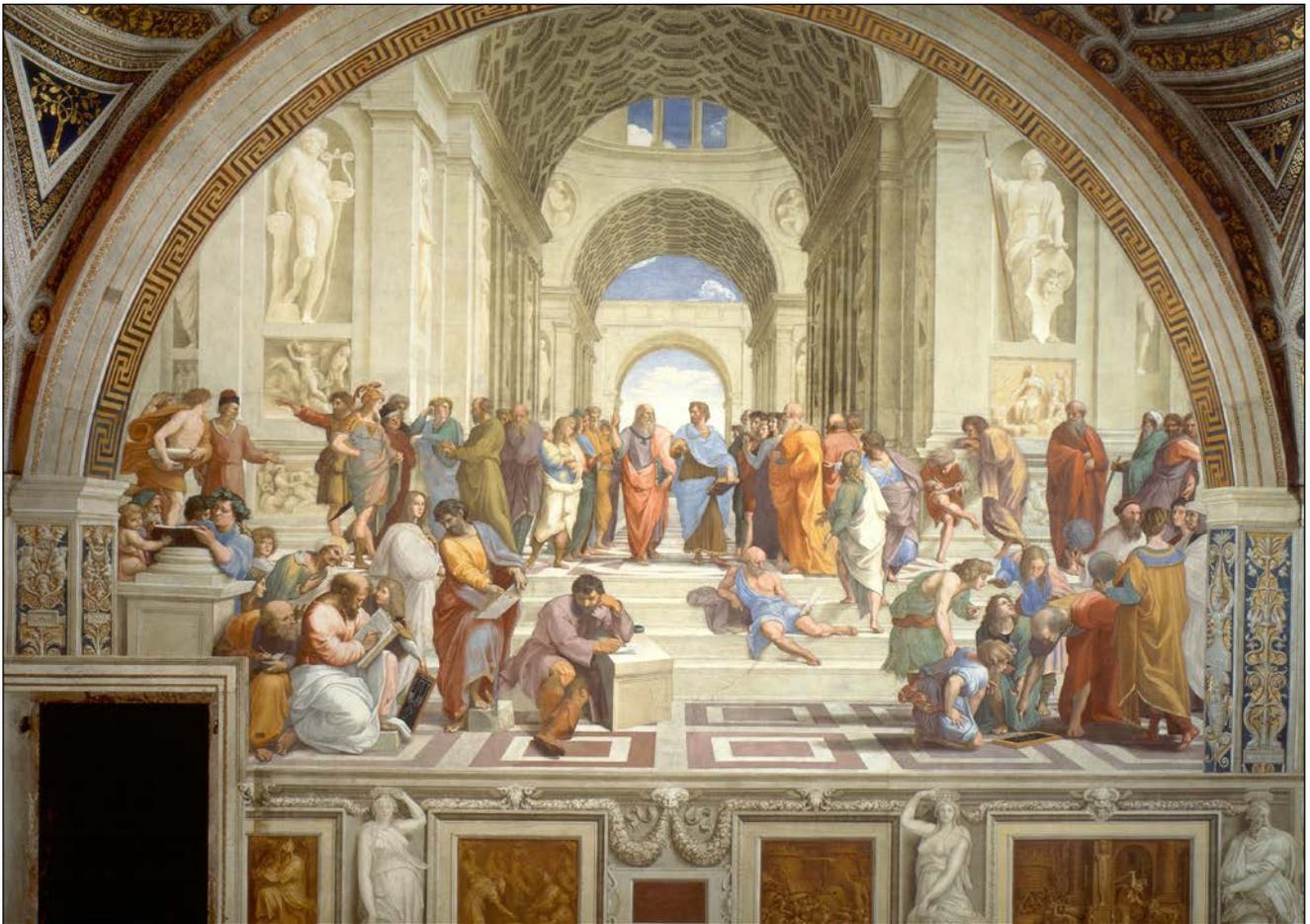
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# The Discipline of Fine Arts

## As Taught in Great Hearts Academies

New Faculty Orientation - July 2016

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## Philosophy undergirding the GH pedagogy

### I. What's our understanding of and general approach to the discipline?

•✎ At Great Hearts, we teach the 'classical' fine arts. They are classical because they have been a continuous part of the Western high art tradition for more than 2000 years: art (painting/drawing/sculpting), music, drama, and poetry.

•✎ We teach the fine arts as arts, and something an artist *does* and others *encounter*. Great Hearts students engage the fine arts on both levels: doing and encountering beauty. They will explore the praxis of the art as well as the theory of each discipline: its matter and the form.

•✎ We teach the form and content through historical works themselves, not through the lens of a critic, or the opinions of a scholar. The students will encounter the "primary" sources as well as learn the skills of those masters. Through this encounter with and knowledge of the best of the 2000 year history of fine arts, the Great Hearts student will be given the tools to cultivate a lifetime of enjoyment and appreciation of the fine arts.



### II. How do the fine arts fit into a liberal arts education?

•✎ In the three transcendentals, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, the fine arts are situated primarily under Beauty. The fine arts are viewed as an essential human experience, as a key part of the liberal arts. They are to be taught in a way that is experiential and not professional: all participate in the fine arts, not just the professional.

•✎ The primary experience is the thing itself, and it should not be hampered by the historical context in which it arose, the biography of the artist, or the sociological study of it.

•✎ The fine arts fit into a liberal education by the content, but also by our method: we teach in a liberal rather than in a specialized way through coaching and discovery rather than through didactic instruction that bears fruit for all. The emphasis in all of the grades is upon the process of creating beauty.

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## Philosophy undergirding the GH pedagogy

### III. Why do we study the fine arts at Great Hearts?

•✎ We study the fine arts at Great Hearts to experience beauty: it is a participation in beauty. This participation should be open to everyone, despite innate skill level. When the youth participate in beauty, their beauty radiates; on a daily basis, they transcend the mundane. The participation in the fine arts allows the fullness of the liberal arts education to radiate through the students in their artistic endeavors. It codifies and typifies all that a Great Hearts education provides to students.

•✎ The fruits of a Great Hearts education are on display to families and to the community in the presentation of student artworks and performances and in a manner that captivates all. The experience of beauty that students produce binds the entire community in a delightful wonder that extends immediately beyond our classroom instruction. Such public presentation is perhaps the most important display of the school's work to everyone in the community. The students' participation in beauty is more easily observable than the slower progression of 13 years worth of learning in other subjects.



•✎ We categorically reject the view that learning to produce works of art is reserved for the naturally talented. Adults will often say things such as, "I was never good at art....I can't sing to save my life." or when viewing student artworks, "I could never do something like that!" As educators, our answer is always "If that's true, it's only because you weren't taught properly." All children can learn artistic skills when taught.

•✎ We teach the students the elements of the fine arts to give them the tools to use for the rest of their life; we expose them to the masters to give them depth of artistic material to encounter for the rest of their life; we teach the students the fine arts to give them the ability and means to have a life-long encounter with and participation in Beauty.

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# Curricular Guidelines to Teach Students to Know and Understand, Practice, and Love the Fine Arts

## I. What curricular choices has GH made based on the notes above? Is there a path/progression in the discipline of the fine arts?

•✎ The Great Hearts curriculum would not be complete without the study of the musical, visual, poetic and dramatic arts. In each art form, this process begins with a focus on the skills at the core of the medium while instilling an appreciation for beautiful works. This two-pronged approach requires thoughtful integration of the making and performance of the arts – poesis – with the formation of a student’s aesthetic sense in studying great works of art, poetry, drama and music. The curricular path in our Fine Arts courses must therefore support this integration of skills and knowledge that result in a student’s intelligent understanding of the form.

•✎ Yes, there is a progression. But this progression should not be misunderstood as getting more conceptually difficult or tedious from grade to grade. The foundational concepts discovered are repeated over and over and over, perhaps framed within different modes, but essentially nothing changes. What changes from grade to grade are a student’s ability, a more careful sense of observation, and a greater articulation of purpose – things that develop in concert within all of the GH classes throughout a student’s tenure.

## II. How do we go about teaching this based on what we believe about it and its purpose?

•✎ We teach the arts as separate and independent disciplines in order to cultivate understanding of each. Our teaching of the arts should never be strictly chronological/historical. It should be elemental, starting with basic techniques and building upon them.

•✎ We bind the teaching of the fine arts to the content and form of the Western Tradition. Assignments and projects are pedagogical in purpose – and never boundlessly “creative.” We provide an artistic framework in which the students can use the tools they have been given to perform the art.

•✎ Students who are given wide latitude to choose their own topics/projects/forms will often struggle unproductively with lacking skill at their fingertips and few examples. Culminating/concluding projects in upper grades are not subject to all the same restrictions – students there have the skills to flourish in less-prescriptive projects.

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## Curricular Guidelines to Teach Students to Know and Understand, Practice, and Love the Fine Arts

### III. Is there is a language of the discipline that we help kids understand during their course of study?

•✎ The overall goals of the curriculum are to give students a detailed language by which to express the order and logic of these four classical media. The language of the craft allows students to experiment with the ineffable beyond the rational: the epiphanies made possible by symbolic thought.

•✎ See the Epilogue for examples in each discipline.

### IV. What big questions will/should students be asking in their course of study?

•✎ There will be big questions on the order of communication of Beauty and How Tradition and the Individual Talent interact with one another.

•✎ Each discipline will have distinct questions that are overarching to the discipline. In later years cross-disciplinary questions should arise. Examples:

- How the Classical sonata form might have been influenced by the period of Enlightenment in history?
- How might they apply the poetic device learned in 9th grade Poetry class to 11th grade Drama in the study/performance of Shakespeare?
- The comparison between the work of visual art and musical composition from the same period.

### V. What skills and habits should students develop through studying it?

•✎ A more careful sense of artistic observation: an ability to render what is observed

•✎ Students should come away with an appreciation of human potential for excellence – for the individual and the collective. They can step outside of themselves and their own times, appreciating the value of participation in a collective endeavor (a dramatic production that fulfills the vision of Shakespeare, or a choral performance of a Brahms motet), and the study of great works that allow them to see the origins of excellence and better understand the tradition from which new and creative works are generated.

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# Epilogue

Specifics dimensions around individual disciplines, included in the GH K-12 perspective

## Visual Art

1. Class instruction
  - a. Group critiques/discussions
  - b. One-on-one direction
  - c. Personal exploration
2. Media:
  - a. Primary: Painting and drawing (portraiture, still life, and landscape traditions)
  - b. Secondary: Three-dimensional images on a two-dimensional surface; various sculptural media are also introduced.

## Music

1. Theory:
  - a. Musical notation, modes and scales, key signatures, basic rhythm/meter, and basic intervals
  - b. Triads, grand staff notation, and harmonic analysis of chords with Roman numerals and inversions
  - c. Performance:
  - d. Elementary: Choral performances, up to and including two-part harmony
  - e. Middle School: Recorder (Y1 soprano; Y2 alto)
  - f. High School: Choral performance
2. History:
  - a. Aural recognition of hallmark composers and their famous works;
  - b. Musical period and genre recognition;
  - c. Instrument recognition;
  - d. Concert attendance and written reports

## Poetry

1. Poetry writing; literary study of poetry;
2. Oral poetic performance, memorization of masterpieces of the tradition;
3. Instruction in the rational and systematic interpretation of poetic meaning and the wisdom of great poems

## Drama

1. A progression from Greek & Roman theater, through the Shakespearean and Restoration eras, to the modern era;
2. Major historical trends and genres of theater;
3. A concurrent progression from staging fundamentals to advanced levels of acting, playwriting, and directing.
4. Improved stage presence, a heightened sense of self and of the social environment in which he functions, and an intimate familiarity with at least two theatrical great works.