
History

As Taught in Great Hearts Academies

New Faculty Orientation - July 2016



Philosophy undergirding the GH pedagogy

I. What's our understanding of and general approach to history?

- History is the story of people through place and time; it is a literary art. We approach the human nature of this discipline (both as those who studied and who are studied) through the fundamentally human characteristic of narrative. We teach students to look for, to understand, to analyze, and to tell stories.
- History is neither science nor philosophy but it has aspects of both – humans are both material and spiritual beings. History is complex but comprehensible. It is rarely simple, but it is not inexplicable.



II. How does history fit into a liberal arts education?

The study of history can help liberate students from the narrow confines of present day issues by illuminating for them three very important aspects of reality:

1. The great variety of cultural trends and opinions in any given epoch:
 - This can help break young people out of the parochial and prejudiced assumptions, which they may share with their immediate peers. The past is real. The stories we look for, tell, and analyze must be as accurate, complete, and truthful as possible.
2. The ability of persons of thoughtfulness and conviction to rise above the trends and opinions of their own times:
 - The student may discover better guides for living a good life than current trends. History lays before the student the truth that many of the great personalities of history have freed themselves from the narrowness of their own limited times and places, and that one persuasive man or woman of strong conviction can influence friends and associates and change the lives of thousands.
3. The underlying similarities we share with men and women of other ages:
 - If we can help students see beyond the glaring differences in circumstances, cultural assumptions, and styles to the underlying similarities between men and women of other ages, we may help them understand the common nature and

purpose all humans share. There is such a thing as human nature. We must look for both similarities and differences – continuity and change.

If taught free from chronological snobbery, history can show students something about who they are and even suggest possibilities as to what they may become. Thus history can become a study within which every thoughtful student may see, as in a mirror, himself.

III. Why do we study history at Great Hearts?

- **Facts:** Students need to get their facts straight, as it were, and though mastery of facts may seem to be a more pedestrian job, factual knowledge provides the student with keys to understanding a thousand things he or she will read or hear in years to come. Also, factual knowledge will provide the student with the elements for his or her own interpretations and insights.
- **Stories:** The stories of noble human struggle—from the Spartans at Thermopylae to the illiterate Sequoyah attempting to create an alphabet—can captivate students while encouraging them to persevere in good things. Facts and lessons find their home in a tale, and the tale makes its home in the heart.
- **Insights:** In studying history, students will see examples of sacrifice, fortitude, charity, and magnanimity that can become models for them as they negotiate the many choices that lie before them.
- **Models:** Our focus on the broader aspects of Western Civilization is an attempt to ground young minds in a legacy of ideas, actions, and aesthetics that span continents and millennia. We want them to see society as comprising the dead, the living, and those yet unborn. Our studies of great historical personalities are intended to impress upon the students how greatly their own lives and options have been shaped by the prudent foresight of previous generations.
- Even in our study of other cultures, we are not so much impressed with the insular cults of folk-ways as we are with the common nature all humans share—a nature which universally acknowledges one natural law and so illuminates the existence of a standard higher than the assumptions of any one self-approving group.
- We teach our students history to give them facts, stories, insights, and models, but more importantly we teach them history as part of the greater human project of remembering who we are.



Curricular Guidelines to Teach Students to Know and Understand, Practice, and Love History

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

- Goal: To have an educated knowledge of the people, societies, places, governments, arts, religions that have shaped Western Civilization
- K-5: Creating a framework for deeper study in the upper level history courses; each year focuses on a major civilization as well as a section of American history
- 6-12: American history (continues the 3rd-5th progression of American study), then returns to a chronological order through Ancient and Medieval European courses. The return to American studies 9th grade allows the progression of the Humane Letters sequence to return again to that which is most familiar to students and work our way back to the beginning of Western Culture.

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

- History is a study of how humans have acted personally and in groups. As such, it includes biography, ethics, sociology, politics, military history, the study of ideas and artistic trends, as well as a bit of geography and chronology. We keep the focus on human action, its sources, and its consequences. We are not teaching anthropology, histories of ideas, political philosophy, or a chronicle of centuries of class struggle. By focusing on the many elements and disciplines of history, we avoid the tendency to derail the study of history into social studies.
- In order to present history in this way, there must be some focus during the class on significant persons. Just as we choose representative verbs in Latin to stand for an entire class of verbs that behave in similar ways, we choose paradigmatic characters who are founders, pioneers, saints, traitors, and tyrants. Biographical units or lessons can reveal the power of influential people within their communities. Such a personal focus can show human events to be the result of human choices rather than blind forces beyond our collective control. It can also help young people see the long-term consequences of a person's choices and habits.

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

- For any event, a student should be able to say (with appropriate level of complexity): What happened? Why did it happen? Why does it matter that it happened?

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

As **story**, the teacher should make the following array of content regular elements of lesson planning:

1. Chronology- A setting in time as well as key dates to remember.
2. Geography- A setting in place as well as important landmarks of the events.
3. Significant actions of the story- the accounts of history share many aspects of plot with literature. As “stories,” students should be able to identify the complication, rising action, turning points, resolutions, protagonists, and antagonists.
4. Personalities and character qualities- different people will respond to the same circumstances in different ways. Students should give attention to the character qualities (or virtues) of significant characters.
5. Aspects of cause and effect- the chief causes of an event, or the many and conflicting causes of an event, the different causes motivating different key players in events, the various short and long-term consequences of the events.

As **analytical**, the teacher should begin to unfold the following: GRAPES: Geography (inc. climate), Religion, Art (inc. literature, architecture, sculpture, music), Politics, Economy (inc. agriculture, trade, etc.), and Science (inc. philosophy). These are all vital and evident elements in civilization, the largest expression of historical order.

As **philosophical reflections**, students should consider the following:

1. Motivating ideas- i.e. Christendom, feudal loyalty, the customs of the tribe, clan, or family; independence, blood ties, sovereignty, justice, necessity, freedom, expansion, charity, will to dominate, etc.
2. Free will and circumstance- how does the exercise of someone’s will drive the action of events? How does the exercise of someone’s will influence others? What circumstances act against or limit the actions of the will?

Epilogue

Specifics around individual disciplines, from a K-12 perspective

- To understand causation, to look for patterns, to think about significance, to look for change and continuity, to understand more fully the consequences of ideas and choices
Examples:

For something like 2nd grade ancient Greece, that's a little more obvious:

1. Art/architecture/poetry hugely influential for 2500 continuous years
2. Special influence upon ROMAN civilization (3rd gr.)
3. Democratic government influential upon American founders (Grade 4 American Revolution)
4. Events of Persian War and Peloponnesian War have been studied, retold for millennia (7th grade history; 11th grade Humane Letters)

For something like 2nd grade ancient India, maybe the "why" isn't as obvious. But it's still there:

1. In 325 BC, Alexander the Great will get as far as India, will fight a battle against Indians on elephants, and will marry an Indo-Bactrian princess named Roxane(3rd grade)
2. Ancient India is Hindu, but Islam comes in the middle ages; Indian emperors in the 1600s are Muslim; the modern country of Pakistan is really just "Muslim India", and was only separated in 1947 (world religions-1st grade; Islam, 4th grade)
3. Buddhism comes from India, but it is never strong there; Buddhism spreads throughout E. Asia, but not Indian (world religions, 1st grade; medieval Japan, 5th grade)
4. The British conquer and rule India in modern times (10th grade); India Pale Ale is invented because of the need to send beer thousands of miles by ship from England to the English living in India (OK, this little fact is more important for TEACHERS than for students...and it doesn't necessarily make drinking a tall cold one any more enjoyable after work than it already is...)

- To think chronologically and geographically – the "algebra" of history
- Thinking chronologically, learning how things are connected is an important and challenging thinking skill for this developmental stage
- To read a variety of sources, primary and secondary in different genres, with understanding and to be able to make and respond to arguments with textual evidence
- To grapple with the complexity
- To participate fully and humanely in discussions with others.
- Forming, expressing, supporting an argument (with evidence and logic)
- Listening to others and being shaped by their ideas
- To be able to disagree with someone while still seeing their humanity – to participate in civilized (political) discourse.
- To be able to express themselves articulately in written and oral form
- To practice making "judgments", both moral and prudential
- Skills – note-taking, reading, writing (mostly 1-3 paragraphs)