

HSLDA Essay Contest

The prolific and witty English writer G.K. Chesterton once said, "Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another." Education, though preparation for the future, is rooted in the past. No education is complete until the student understands what has come before him. Why did Socrates drink a cup of poison? Where did western culture come from? Who shaped the world? To truly grasp these questions hundreds, if not thousands, of books need to be read. However, three pieces of literature stand out as vital components of any education.

No education is complete until a student has read the Bible. The Bible is the greatest of all educational books. It provides us with years upon years of history detailing an enthralling story that is as true as it is captivating. The story is presented using literary devices, beautiful imagery, prose, and poetry. Not only is the Bible an excellent example of literary style, it also contains educational substance. From Proverbs to Paul, Ruth to Revelation, scripture is full of instruction and guidance on how to live. Powerfully, the Bible moves the hearts of men. This is pivotal to a complete education. The purpose of education is to prepare men to live life. What could be better than learning from the divine source?

Philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Education should be built on the foundation of our forefathers. Plutarch, in his book *Lives*, leaves us the account of many famous (or infamous) historical characters. Plutarch devotes a considerable amount of time to exploring the

character qualities of each of his subjects. *Lives* is a vital part of any education because it allows us to learn the lessons of the past. It grants us the fortune of not repeating the same mistakes as Alcibiades, Marcus Cato, or Fabius. *Lives* gives the student the opportunity to take the values that he learned from reading the Bible and see how they have manifested themselves over the ages. Reading *Lives* is also essential to grasp western culture. Shakespeare based all his Roman plays off the characters Plutarch presents. *Lives* is a book that has survived the sands of time and is essential to a full education.

Dante said that Aristotle was, "The master of those who know." The works of Aristotle are the third pillar in a complete education. Aristotle is the father of western culture and to truly understand why the world is the way it is, his works must be a key part of education. The syllogism, three point rhetoric, and countless other contributions are presented in his philosophical treatises. Even centuries later, Aristotle's logic dominates our culture. It is so ingrained into our minds that we hardly notice it is even there. The reason Aristotle's works are a requisite to a complete education is the first task of education is to understand our culture. As Paul Gauguin asked near the turn of the 19th century, "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?"

Where do we come from? Plutarch's gives us a glimpse of where we came from. Plutarch tells us great stories of courage, commitment, and resolve, but we also are told the stories of frustration and failure. Though Plutarch has been dead for almost two thousand years, *Lives* still implores us to heed the warning of Mr. Santayana and understand where we came from. What are we? To answer this question, we turn to

Aristotle, the father of Western culture. Through his work we can understand why men in our culture have the presuppositions they do. Where are we going? The last solution lies in the Bible. Scripture is an inerrant road map to navigate the straight and narrow road of life. The Bible, the works of Aristotle, and *Lives* are three books that have shaped western culture for two millennia and should continue to shape education as the soul of our society passes to the next generation.