

## **What is Good Literature?**

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The books which fill Liberty's library and classrooms are selected according to criteria beyond current popularity. The quality of language, the value of a story to the human experience, the contribution to character education, and the support of the Core Knowledge Sequence all play a role in identifying "good" books.

According to Neil Postman, whose ideas are frequently referenced in our Charter, "Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of existence. If our stories are coherent and plausible and have continuity, they will help us to understand why we are here, what we need to pay attention to, and what we may ignore." Our goal, then, is to immerse students in great stories.

And how do we identify great stories? Great authors do not write stories so students can identify the main characters or write plot summaries. Rather, they seek to portray characters struggling with the great issues of life (e.g. truth, love, war, faith, politics, even loneliness). As our Charter states, "*literature that will be introduced is chosen...because it provides access to deeper meaning of universal human problems.*"

We recognize these stories because they hold our interest, even as adults. We recognize these stories because the characters have something to learn. They develop and grow as the plot unfolds. We recognize these stories because readers desire to emulate their heroes. Good literature has withstood the filter of time, speaking to the universal struggles of humans throughout the ages.

Great stories are intended to be enlarging experiences, rather than cures prescribed for a given sociological, political or emotional problem. Genres that encourage narrow self-preoccupation, are void of meaningful character development, encourage acceptance of and identification with poor role models, or strive to give children "appropriate" attitudes about contemporary social issues (e.g. divorce, sex, war, gender) are avoided at Liberty.

Most of the literature at Liberty is generally acknowledged as traditional classics or children's classics. To support our character education program, Liberty is filled with books providing examples, over and over again, of the reasons for living well. Liberty also strives to provide content-based non-fiction books necessary to support the Core Knowledge Sequence, student research, and parent education.

Children's 'non-books,' a prevalent trend in children's non-fiction, are composed of tiny facts and snippets of interesting material with visually pleasing photography which have no sustained narrative, carefully developed argument, or background knowledge. They require little concentration or focused thinking, but like television, are instantly accessible. The most conspicuous example of a 'non-book' is the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Such books are diverting filler and fail to meet Liberty's criteria for literature worthy of our student body.

For more information please read Policy 7.14 **Literature Acquisition** and *The Case for Good Taste in Children's Books* by Meghan Cox Gurdon, The Wall Street Journal, July/August 2013, Volume 42, Number 7/8.