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Welcome to our tenth edition of "The Academic Journal," a bimonthly bulletin in which you can read about MCA's educational philosophy, instructional methodology, and the various viewpoints and positions of our faculty, staff, students, and families.

THE CHALLENGE OF CITIZENSHIP

Literacy, Language, and Leadership in the Twenty-First Century

Almost as soon as the ball dropped at Times Square on the eve of 2000, the educational community, always eager to seize upon a mantra, began raising the banner of "twenty-first century literacy." Holographic images of the state of learning in the coming decades flashed before the minds of the visionary, and "new literacies" began to take center stage in the education of coming generations. However, if our desire in education is to empower young citizens to lead our brave new world, we might better look to the past than the future to consider the importance of literacy and language in the development of leaders.

John Adams said, "The preservation of liberty depends on the moral and intellectual character of the people." The Founders' concept of representative government rested squarely on the shoulders of an educated citizenry, a literate citizenry. Literacy, in this sense, is far more than the mere ability to read. It is the ability to read and think well, to fashion credible ideas, and to articulate those ideas with both logic and eloquence. It is a commitment to the pursuit of truth.

In our digital world, where the "new literacies" focus on bits and bytes, texts and tweets, and social networking, how are we to promote a literacy that delves below the surface, or a depth of understanding that is vital in nurturing the thoughtful citizen? In a world where blogs tout unsubstantiated opinions of every kind, how do we lead our budding citizens in the pursuit of truth? Gene Edward Veith, Jr. in [Reading Between the Lines](#) asks, "Can democratic institutions survive without a literate—that is, a reading—populace, or will the new modes of thinking lend themselves to new forms of totalitarianism? Can educational and intellectual progress continue if visual imagery supplants reading, or will the new information technologies, ironically, subvert the scientific thinking that created them, resulting in anti-intellectualism and mass ignorance?" (p. 20) A recent national media event focused on education in America with all its alarming statistics. The basic question asked in that event was, "What can the federal government do to improve our test scores?" Perhaps that is the wrong question. Perhaps we should be asking how we could develop a sound-thinking, literate generation of citizens. Perhaps we should even be asking how we could turn the tide of anti-intellectualism.



First of all, we must regard our wondrous new technologies as important tools and significant means, but never ends. While these technologies support us in the classroom in ways we never would have imagined possible just years ago, let us still build our instruction around great books, great language, and great ideas. From the thousands and thousands of books available, both classic and contemporary, let us choose the best of the best for our students: books that use sophisticated language, books that open the world, books that foster moral and intellectual character, books that present lofty ideas. And then, let's talk about the ideas; let's write about them.

Furthermore, let us give our young citizens the language with which to discuss lofty ideas. This would mean exploring the language of logic, the language of rhetoric, the language of the intellectual. Let's go beyond the language of the average blog! It is impossible to discuss lofty ideas with everyday language. Listen to or read Patrick Henry's *Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death* speech. Attempt to imagine those powerful, inspirational words in blog fashion!

Young citizens well armed with great ideas and sophisticated language will quickly rise to the top. "Thinking, planning, imagining, creating—processes encouraged by reading—remain essential to society. Even television shows must have writers. Without people oriented toward language, very little would be accomplished. ***The point is, the wielders of influence will always be those who read and write, who still work within the framework of language.***" (Veith, p. 25) If the pen truly is mightier than the sword, let's be sure our students exercise their right to bear arms—the arms of pens (or tiny keyboards), the arms of great words and great ideas.

How can we, as charter schools, impact the digital world? We can impact the world by immersing our students in the "old literacies" of reading, writing, and thinking! We can impact the world by finding the best and highest uses for technology, supporting the deeper structures of learning. We can impact the world by empowering tomorrow's leaders to work within the framework of language. We can impact the world by producing citizens who think well, fashion credible ideas, articulate those ideas, and zealously pursue truth in all its dimensions. In doing so, we just might "secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

Veith, Gene Edward Jr. Reading between the lines: A Christian guide to literature. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990. Print.

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