

OMNIBUS SYLLABI for LEVELS I -VI

"The tradition of the West is embodied in the Great Conversation that began in the dawn of history and that continues to the present day. Whatever the merits of other civilizations in other respects, no civilization is like that of the West in this respect. No other civilization can claim that its defining characteristic is a dialogue of this sort. No dialogue in any other civilization can compare with that of the West in the number of great works of the mind that have contributed to this dialogue."

- Robert M. Hutchins

Course Description:

Omnibus is a six year series addressing the literature, history and culture of major Western civilizations in chronological order in two, three year cycles. The course format will be a Paideia discussion (used in the Great Books program) which is based on close reading of literature and historical accounts.

Writing assignments for Omnibus courses in general: Each year there will be four major writing assignments, two that are more expressive/creative/imitative in nature, such as imitations of style, parodies, speeches in character, encomia, invectives, etc.) and two that are analytical essays (analysis of themes, conflicts, characters, symbolism, etc.). These essays are always preceded by directed class discussion as well as extensive instruction in essay writing.

Omnibus I: Ancient Cultures (scheduled for 2010-11, 2013-14)

Required summer reading: George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

Unit I: George Orwell's *Animal Farm* -- the power of language & introduction to the Paideia discussion method

Unit II: Homer's *The Iliad & Odyssey* -- the oral tradition, story structure, heroic themes

Unit III: Herodotus & Thucydides (selected readings) -- transition to the written tradition, the beginnings of the study of history

Unit IV: Plutarch, Livy & Suetonius (selected readings) -- moral biographies, comparisons, studies of character

Unit V: Vergil's *Aeneid* -- creating a composite history; the written epic, the secondary epic

Omnibus II: Medieval and Renaissance (scheduled for 2011-12, 2014-15)

Required summer reading: *Famous Men of the Middle Ages*

Unit I: Introduction to the Paideia method, Medieval drama -- *Everyman* -- a medieval morality play

Unit II: Bulfinch's *Age of Charlemagne* -- the *Song of Roland* -- introduction to the Middle Ages: the rise of education, culture

Unit III: *Beowulf* (Trans. Seamus Heaney) -- Anglo-Saxon England, Old English, the heroic epic continued, the Dark Ages transition from pagan to Christian culture

Unit IV: Bulfinch's *Age of Chivalry*, (the Arthurian Legends) -- the heroic quest, the Crusades, Saxon England continued, Norman England, Chretien de Troyes

Unit V: Dante's *Divine Comedy* -- feudal Italy, the beginnings of the Renaissance, classical allusions, courtly love continued

Unit VI: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (selected readings) -- the triumph of Middle English, the tumultuous 14th century, William Caxton brings the printing press in England, the pilgrimage, the romance, classical allusions, Medieval drama

Unit VII: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* -- early Modern English, blank verse, iambic pentameter, rhymed couplets, Pyramus and Thisbe, Elizabethan drama

Omnibus III: Modern (scheduled for 2012-13, 2015-16)

Required summer reading: *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

Unit I: Introduction to Paideia, modern literature, and *Fahrenheit 451*

Unit II: The sonnet/Milton & the Enlightenment; *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, Satire/Irony/British Literature/Culture -- Pope's "The Rape of the Lock"

Unit III: Parody, the Enlightenment, *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathon Swift

Unit IV: Introduction to American literature; the Industrial Age/poetic scansion Emily Dickenson -- selected poems; Walt Whitman -- selected poems

Unit V: The French Revolution; the development of the novel as a form of literature, techniques of characterization; ironic tone - *Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens

Unit VI: the American novel, American dialect, humor *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain; *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Omnibus IV: Ancient Drama and History (scheduled for 2010-11, 2013-14)

Required summer reading: *The Boys' and Girls' Herodotus*

Unit I: Introduction to Paideia, Ancient literature -- the foundations: epic, historical narrative -- *Gilgamesh*

Unit II: the development of Greek drama; Aristotle's definition of tragedy; the structure of a tragedy, the festivals; the trilogy as a form, satyr plays, the use of comic relief -- *The Oresteia* (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *Eumenides*) by Aeschylus

Unit III: Explorations of the themes of fate, justice and enmity -- *Seven Against Thebes*

Unit IV: Greek & Roman History -- scientific versus literary history -- *History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides

Unit V: Later Greek Tragedians: new stagings, additional actors, new perspectives and tones, Sophocles the conservative, the isolated Sophoclean hero and the limits of free will -- *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* by Sophocles -- duty and the individual versus the state -- *Medea*, *Iphigenia* and the *Bacchae* by Euripides -- the irrational

Unit VI: Philosophy and Moral Biography -- moral and political philosophy as bases for society, Plutarch's *Lives*: Solon, Poplicola, Themistocles, Camillus, Pericles, Fabius, Aristides, Marcus Cato and their comparisons
Unit VII: the role of comedy in Greek festivals, old comedy, new comedy
Knights by Aristophanes (abridged) -- the Peloponnesian War, political satire and human nature
Plautus' *The Braggart Soldier* -- the structure of Roman comedy, stage design, stock characters, Roman satire

Omnibus V: Medieval and Renaissance (scheduled for 2011-12, 2014-15)

Required summer reading: *The Agony and the Ecstasy* by Irving Stone

Unit I: Petrarch's sonnets the Italian Quattrocento & the Renaissance, courtly love and the Italian sonnet, writing an Italian sonnet

Unit II: Middle English Arthurian legend in alliterative verse -- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Unit III: The political romance -- *Utopia* by Thomas More

Unit IV: The political treatise; power and the character of government -- *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli

Unit V: The tragic romance and the heroic quest -- *Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Mallory

Unit VI: An allegorical epic of Elizabethan England -- *Faerie Queene* by Sir Edmund Spenser

Unit VII: Moral drama about the soul's yearning for the infinite, transition from medieval to Renaissance England, "The Courtier" -- a new estate for society, *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe

Unit VIII: *The Elizabethan sonnet, practice in scansion, analysis and interpretation of poetry*, Spenserian & Shakespearean Sonnets XVIII, XXIV, XXIX, XCI, LXXXIII, CXVI

Unit IX: Shakespearean drama: *Richard III* -- historical drama, *King Lear* -- the nature of love and vanity, *The Merchant of Venice* -- a comedy of morals

Omnibus VI: Modern (scheduled for 2012-13, 2015-16)

Required summer reading: *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

Unit I: *A classical education*, the founding fathers and the American Revolution -- *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* -- "the first American"; businessman, inventor, diplomat and statesman; the individual -- private, public and theoretical

Unit II: Courtly love, the romantic ideal, social satire and the modern novel -- *Don Quixote* by Cervantes

Unit III: A moral comedy -- *Faust* by Goethe -- ennui, arrogance and the Faustian bargain, Neoclassicism, romanticism

Unit IV: *Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky -- the novel of ideas, a murder mystery

Unit V: British poetry: W.B. Yeats, Gerard Manley Hopkins -- precursor to modern poetry, God in nature, consonant chiming, sprung rhythms, W.B. Yeats, the poet of the "deep heart's core" -- "Sailing to Byzantium", "Adam's Curse", "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", "When You Are Old", "The Heart of the Woman"

Unit VI: The novella: *Daisy Miller* by Henry James -- culture clashes

Unit VII: The essay -- Henry David Thoreau "Civil Disobedience"

Unit VIII: The short story "to see a world in a grain of sand" Washington Irving "Rip Van Winkle", Flannery O'Connor "A Late Encounter with the Enemy", O. Henry "The Ransom of Red Chief", Willa Cather "Night at Greenway Court", Ernest Hemingway "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place", James Thurber "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty", Eudora Welty "Where is the Voice Coming From?"

Unit IX: Autobiographical novel of America's Jazz Age -- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Unit X: *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder -- the simple beauty of Life