

BASIC PROGRAM of LIBERAL EDUCATION for ADULTS

September 2024 How to Read Classic Texts

INSTRUCTORS	DATES AND TIMES	LOCATION
Amy Thomas Elder	COURSE LENGTH: Three Weeks DATES: Sep. 3 - 17	Remote Course
EMAIL: amythomas@uchicago.edu ; Instructor can be contacted through Canvas message	DAY OF THE WEEK: Tuesdays TIME: 9:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.	COURSE CODE and SECTION: BASC70059 24U1 PREREQUISITES: None

Remote courses require you to login to Canvas to access the Zoom Classroom. **You will receive an invitation to join Canvas about a week before your course begins.** Please visit <https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts> to find Canvas login instructions, Zoom instructions, and student training sessions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to address some of the more persistent and daunting difficulties that attend the effort to read classic texts of the Western cultural tradition.

We will begin from the recommendations of Adler and Van Doren in their now-classical work, *How to Read a Book*, and move toward more immediately relevant and useful approaches to reading classic texts, both expository and literary, with a view toward the kind of preparation that most readily lends itself to productive class discussion in the four-year Basic Program.

Each session will be divided into two parts. In the first we will consider the reading of classic expository texts—philosophical, social scientific, political, etc.—and especially how to read for a thesis and supporting argument (based on evidence and grounds).

In the second, we will consider literary and poetic texts—what it means to interpret, understand, and comprehend them, with particular attention to how form (diction, structure, genre, etc.) and content (image, narrative, theme, etc.) work together to achieve specifically literary and poetic effects.

Students will be encouraged—but not required—to complete weekly short (1-2 page) writing exercises that have proven useful in students' effort to appreciate and understand these various kinds of texts. Students will be encouraged—but not required—to bring these to class and share with other students. At the very least these writing exercises have proven useful to help prepare for class discussion.

Readings will be selected largely from the four-year Basic Program list, with the idea that not only will this be an opportunity to learn techniques for good reading, but also an occasion for reading and discussing—again—selections from some truly great works of the Classical and Western traditions. Students are asked to do the reading for the first week before the first session meets.

BOOKS & WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Adler, Mortimer and Van Doren, Charles, *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*, Touchstone. ISBN: 978-071212094
2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 9780226026756
3. Homer, *The Odyssey*. Fagles tr., Penguin, ISBN 978-0140268867
4. Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ellington, tr., Hackett Publishing, ISBN 9780872201668
5. Plato Republic (Reeve Edition) Hackett Publishing ISBN 978-0-87220-736-3
6. Bible (any)

DAY	AUTHOR	READING ASSIGNMENT
Week 1 Sep. 3	Adler Aristotle Bloom Homer	<i>How to Read a Book</i> Part I, "The Dimensions of Reading" <i>Ethics</i> , Book I, chapters 1-7 Introductory, <i>How to Read and Why</i> <i>Odyssey</i> Book 11
Week 2 Sep. 10	Adler Plato Flannery O'Connor	<i>How to Read a Book</i> , chapter 14 "How to Read Imaginative Literature" & (recommended) chapter 15 "Suggestions for Reading Stories, Plays, and Poems" <i>Republic</i> , Book VII "Good Country People"
Week 3 Sep. 17	Adler Kant Bible	<i>How to Read a Book</i> , chapter 9 "Determining an Author's Message" & chapter 18 "How to Read Philosophy" <i>Grounding for a Metaphysics of Morals</i> , Preface Genesis 1-3

Students will receive an invitation to join the Graham School Student Community Canvas Site, a place to read announcements, have discussions, ask questions, and find resources.

DISABILITY INFORMATION

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class meeting at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.