

High School Themes for Independent Thinking (January 2, 2007)

The final step of the Winding Spring Process of Education that can be tested and graded is the 7th step, the investigation of things. One way for high school students to practice independent investigation and critical thinking is through central themes in high school.

Each class would have a central theme it would follow for all four years of high school. Each theme would focus on history, literature, philosophy, and the arts. Each class will prepare presentations to share with the other classes. The students will discuss and debate their analyses and conclusions. This allows each class to delve deeply into an area of human achievement, extending their knowledge and practicing independent investigation and thinking. This plan also permits each class to learn from the other three classes. This approach promotes both depth and breadth of knowledge.

Today's educational environment tends to produce robot students who surrender their ability to think independently in order to pursue perfect SAT scores. One must think like the SAT test writers in order to score perfectly on the SAT. Independent thinking is penalized. The result is a generation of students without intellectual diversity. When faced with an original problem, they will either all be able to solve it or they will all fail. If one lemming goes over the cliff, all the lemmings go over the cliff.

The approach recommended here will produce intellectual diversity because each class will experience a different view of history and the human story. Each class will have something unique to contribute to society because their experience is unique. The Winding Spring Process is not against standardized testing, the TAKS test (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills), nor the SAT test. It is for intellectual diversity.

This is how we can prepare our students for a future beyond our imagination.

Examples

Here are four examples of central themes for high school: an enlightenment theme, a Greek theme, a Roman theme, and an economics theme.

The Enlightenment Theme:

9th Grade: Study the Carolingian Renaissance. Alcuin promotes the seven liberal arts and writes a manual on the Trivium: grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics (logic). Giovanni Pico della Mirandola writes "Oration on the Dignity of Man." Niccollo Machiavelli writes, "The Prince." The Renaissance blossoms in Florence, and then spreads. Guarino of Verona proposes students read the classic masterpieces in their original Greek or Latin and proposes that sufficient exposure to great works will help students emulate the virtues within those great works. Study the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Erasmus writes, "Adages," "Praise of Folly," and "Julius Excluded." Thomas Moore writes "Utopia."

10th Grade: Students see how the humanism of the Renaissance and church corruption led to the loss of religious authority and the Protestant Reformation. Then the

Reformation led to the application of reason to human affairs that became the Enlightenment. Galileo proposes the earth moves around the sun and the Vatican silences him, only to have Copernicus and Kepler later overturn the earth-centric view of the universe. Sir Francis Bacon recommends experimentation and the scientific method. Advances in science lead to the industrial revolution and increased prosperity. The power of Newton's calculus emboldens Western civilization. Students consider the impact of science on society, during the Enlightenment and today.

11th Grade: The success of the scientific method influences social thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*), John Locke (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Treatises of Government*). Voltaire's *Letters on England* bring the British Enlightenment to France. Diderot publishes his *Encyclopedia*, Rousseau publishes his *Social Contract* and *Emile*. The ideals of the Enlightenment appear in the American *Declaration of Independence* and the *U.S. Constitution*. Adam Smith publishes *The Wealth of Nations*, which still drives American economic thinking. Students consider the impact of ideas upon world events.

12th Grade: Study the backlash to the Enlightenment: the Romantic movement. Examine the emotional content of the musicians Beethoven and Wagner, the poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, William Blake, and Percy Shelley. Consider Thomas Carlyle's appeal to heroism as men are subordinated to factory machines and Robert Owens appeal to Socialism to counter the excesses of industrial society. Students examine 20th Century American society for evidence of Romantic sympathies and concern for industrialization.

The Greek Theme:

9th Grade: Study the rise of the Persian Empire, the culture of ancient Persia, and the rise of Athens and Sparta. Study their forms of government, examining the democratic elements in Greek government. [Major mode: extension of knowledge]

10th Grade: Greek culture: study their arts and philosophy. Focus on key questions they addressed that we still ponder today. Study the pre-Socratic philosophers as well as well as the big three: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. [Major mode: extension of knowledge]

11th Grade: Study the military conflicts between Persia and the Greeks. Study Herodotus's history of the Persian wars. Discuss the birth of historical writing. Study the Peloponnesian War and Thucydides's writing on the Peloponnesian War. Students focus on independent investigation on these major conflicts. They do not use textbooks, but read Herodotus, Thucydides, and research books and papers of their own choosing. [Major mode: investigation]

12th Grade: Students study the rise of Alexander the Great, and the end of the free Greek city states. Students draw parallels between artistic themes, political struggles, and philosophical questions facing the ancient Greeks and facing us today. They consider what lessons Ancient Greece has for contemporary American society. [Major modes: investigation and sincerely seeking the truth of history's lessons]

The Roman Theme:

9th Grade: The Phoenician and Egyptian cultures. The rise of the Roman Republic and its clashes with the Phoenicians and Greeks. The strengths of the Roman society. Plutarch's "Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans." [Major mode: extension of knowledge]

10th Grade: Julius Caesar and Augustus, the rise of the Imperial Roman Empire. The Battle of Actium, fought in Greece against an Egyptian force sent by the Cleopatra, who was a Ptolemaic Greek. The spread into Gaul, Britain, and the Rhine. [Major mode: extension of knowledge]

11th Grade: The culture of Rome, its philosophers and writers: Cicero, Seneca the Younger, Virgil's Aeneid, Tacitus, and Marcus Aurelius. Students read the works of these ancient writers. Diocletian's split of the empire into a Western and Eastern part. [Major mode: investigation]

12th Grade: Students study Edward Gibbon's "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". Students study the Eastern, Byzantine Empire up to its fall. Students the rise and fall of the Roman empire for lessons on the survival of a culture. Students study Oswald Spengler's "The Decline of the West" and consider the future of Western civilization. . [Major modes: investigation and sincerely seeking the truth of history's lessons]

The Economics Theme:

9th Grade: The Phoenician trading empire and its demise. The Vikings examined as traders, explorers, and plunders. They settle Normandy in France and from there invade and conquer Brittan. The Carolingian empire is studied for the growth of agriculture, cities, trade, and the guild system in the high middle ages. Venice studied as a trading center. Examine the famous Venetian trader Marco Polo and the Silk Road to China. Study the growth of Florence in banking and trade during the Renaissance. Study the rise of the Medici family as bankers to the Pope.

10th Grade: The culture of the Italian Renaissance is studied: renaissance paintings, sculpture, and architecture are studied along with the rise of humanism. Study the patronage of the arts by the wealthy Medici family: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli funded by Lorenzo Medici. Introduce the Protestant Reformation and briefly discuss the wars of religion. Spain spends all its wealth from the New World on religious wars and is bankrupted. Study the creation of the Protestant Dutch Republic. Examine the rise of the Dutch as a nation wealthy from exploration, commerce, and banking. Study how the Spanish, Portuguese, and French develop wealth from exploration and expanded trade. The Virginia Company, the British East India Company, the Dutch East India Company are created for trade. Examine different models of trade: the Portuguese establish trading posts but do not conquer the lands they explore, while the French and British send settlers and the Spanish send Conquistadors.

11th Grade: William III of Britain and later Queen Anne fight a series of wars against the French: the Nine Years War, the War of the Spanish Succession, the War of the Austrian Succession, the Seven Years War, and the American Revolution. Study how the Dutch republic is weakened by the wars and ceases to be a great power. Under pressure to pay for the wars, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Montagu (1st Earl of Halifax), develops financial innovations: the sale of government annuities at 14% interest, government lotteries, and Bank of England. This creates a class of financiers, creates wealth, and helps win the wars. Study Napoleon's effort to weaken Britain by economic boycott with his Continental System. Examine the relationship between wealth, the cost of waging war, and the wars between the major economic powers: the British, the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the Dutch.

12th Grade: Study Britain's rise with the Industrial Revolution to become the wealthiest nation on earth. Study Adam Smith's, "The Wealth of Nations," and David Ricardo's "Principals of Political Economy and Taxation," and consider their influence on contemporary politics. Compare Thomas Malthus's "Essay on Population," (1798) and "The Limits to Growth, A Report to the Club of Rome" (1972) and consider the implications for our future. Study "Das Kapital" by Marx & Engels and discuss what they got right and what they got wrong. Study Joseph Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurialism. Draw conclusions about contemporary economics, where our society seems to be going, and where we ought to be going.