

**An Introduction to the Veritas Academy Omnibus
Reading Lists for 7th to 12th Grades
2011-2012**

The central component of our 7th to 12th grade curriculum is the “Omnibus” course of study, which is based loosely on the Veritas Press Omnibus Curriculum. “Omnibus” is the dative plural case of the Latin word, “omnis,” meaning “all.” Its meaning, in this case, is that of an “all encompassing curriculum.” In the Omnibus program students will study history, literature and theology in chronological order within a specified time period. In the 7th grade, the period under study will be *Omnibus I: Biblical and Classical Civilizations*; in the 8th grade, it will be *Omnibus II: Church Fathers through the Reformation*; and in the 9th/10th grade, *Omnibus IV: American Studies (Founding to the Present)*. In the 11th/12th grade, the history, literature, and theology will be more thematically related. This year’s focus will be Politics and Ethics.

Each Omnibus program will be taught by a team of three. Mr. Welch is the lead teacher of each program, working with the other two teachers to coordinate and integrate the material so that the students may get a wider view of the period under study.

Each Omnibus reading list includes some of the Great Books of Western Civilization. These books are of two types: primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are first-hand accounts written in the actual time under study. For example, Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, Plutarch’s *Lives* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* are primary sources while G. A. Henty’s *The Dragon and the Raven*, Peter Kreeft’s *The Unaborted Socrates*, and C. S. Lewis’s *The Abolition of Man* are secondary sources. Letters written by soldiers during the Civil War would be primary sources but books about the Civil War would be secondary sources. Primary sources are the most direct means by which we can know history. In examining the Omnibus reading lists, particularly the primary sources, some parents and students may have concerns in several areas: the books’ relevance to Christian education given the fact that they are written mostly by pagans, their level of difficulty and the objectionable content of some texts.

Relevance to Christian Education

As Christians we believe that God is the source of all truth and knowledge. This proposition encompasses not only biblical truth but mathematical and historical truths, e.g. “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” or the fact that the Greeks held the first Olympic Games. During the elementary years when a student is in the Grammar stage of the Trivium, he soaks up the basic facts of all the major disciplines, whether it is learning the basic rules of grammar in English or memorizing the multiplication table in math. The focus for those early years is mainly factual knowledge. In the second stage of the Trivium, the logic stage, the student is no longer simply to accumulate information but to get first-hand knowledge of historical events and to interact with big ideas. He is ready to begin reading the Great Books of the Western tradition. This is the canon of writings that have shaped us as a people and as a culture. They are the foundational works which later authors allude to, build upon or argue against. These are the books that have given us “the great ideas.” As Mortimer Adler said, the reading of the Great Books enables us to join the “great

conversation” that has continued through the ages. It is true that many of these ideas are sinful and humanistic, but students need to learn about these ideas and interact with them nonetheless in order to sharpen their ability to discern the true, good, and beautiful. Students will find that these ideas are timeless and that what seems like a radically new idea today is actually a perennial theme in the history of ideas. In the process of reading great books and discussing their ideas, students will learn to organize facts in a systematic way, integrate knowledge across different disciplines and construct arguments using the rules of logic. As they do so they will be equipped to love God more fully with their minds and to serve him in the public arena of ideas.

Level of Difficulty

Looking at the Omnibus reading lists, it is easy to be both impressed and daunted. Some may wonder whether the material is too difficult for junior-high and high school students. It is undoubtedly true that every student will be challenged by these texts. Veritas students who have studied Latin, history, and literature in the grammar stage will, generally, find these texts more easily accessible than those who have transferred from non-classical schools. Some students have a natural aptitude for understanding this kind of material. Some will have great difficulty. But it must be remembered that a classical education is rigorous and demanding. There is much to learn and a limited time to do it. We know that in every discipline, whether it is sports, music, or whatever, much effort is needed to achieve a level of competency and even greater effort to achieve excellence. The Omnibus curriculum was written with the secondary school student in mind and with the assumption that a capable teacher will guide the student in his reading. Like the Bible, which contains parts that a young child can grasp and parts which are inscrutable and baffling to learned adults, these classical works will benefit the students in varying degrees. We caution parents not to have the idea that a course is too hard if some of the students are struggling. If all the students are struggling, then this would be an indication that the course is too difficult and the teacher is failing in teaching the material. But in any given class, there will be students who will ‘cruise’ through the material, some who will ‘work their tail off’ to get a B-minus and a few who may get a D or F. This is realistic and this is how God made the world. Often a student struggles not because of inability but because of attitude. He has not learned yet the virtues of discipline and hard work. These virtues have to be developed in tandem with his studies. While the school assists the parents in inculcating these virtues in the students, the primary agents for fostering these virtues fall upon the parents and the home life they have built. In addition to instilling good work habits, we recommend that parents, if they can make the time, accompany their child in reading as many of the books on the reading list as possible so as to educate themselves and also to interact with their own child about the ideas that he is learning.

Objectionable Content

Many of the Great Books were written by pagans and, thus, they contain objectionable, offensive or unsettling content, e.g., irreverent and obscene language, violence and sexual acts. It is not the policy of Veritas Academy to always avoid all such content. Such a policy would eliminate not only the works of Homer and Shakespeare, but even the Bible would have to be censored. The study of history is by its very nature,

the history of sinful man and his sinful acts. The heart of most literary masterpieces is the struggle of good versus evil. There is often an attitude among Christians that exposure to sin will produce sin. If students read a story about a sinful act, so it is believed, they will be corrupted. Such thinking is fallacious and unbiblical. If it were true, the Bible itself would have to be condemned as a corrupting influence.

We recognize that some books are so salacious or so hideous that they are unfit for anyone to read. Such books are avoided in the Omnibus curriculum. What are included, however, are well-written or historically important books, some of which include graphic portrayals of sinful acts, others of which blatantly attack core doctrines of Christian truth. We believe that upper-school students at Veritas Academy, guided by godly and discerning teachers and parents, are ready to grapple with such important works of literature and history. In so doing, we are equipping our young scholars for the spiritual warfare that they will surely face when they enter the marketplace of ideas in college and beyond.