





Teaching The Great Books with Joshua Gibbs

Lesson 1: What Should We Read?

Outline:

Types of Art:

Representational Art	Presentational Art
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treats human like angels.• Conversation about it is not repeating the event, but going further.• Sparks conversation that presents an idea not the film over again.• Poses the question, “Did you notice that?”• Encourages people to “think about it” and not just see it.• Liberates the audience to think further and for themselves.• Examples:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The movie “Magnolia”○ Mozart’s “Requiem”  <p data-bbox="289 1749 764 1780"><i>Casper David Friedrich's "The Wanderer"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treats humans like garbage.• Plays to the eyes and ears, but not the mind.• Conversation about it can only replay the happenings over and over again.• Hinders depth of thought regarding it since it does not ask the viewer to ponder.• It is the art of tyranny. Its endings and behaviors are inevitable and compulsory.• You cannot fail to notice what is happening so it does not require care.• Materialistic - only the outer glimmer counts.• Examples:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The movie “Transformers”○ Macklemore’s “Thrift Shop”  <p data-bbox="863 1766 1333 1797"><i>Robert Rauschenberg's "White Painting"</i></p>



"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Philippians 4:8

Two Types of Knowledge

Knowledge from the Inside: Knowledge one has while in the midst of experiencing something.

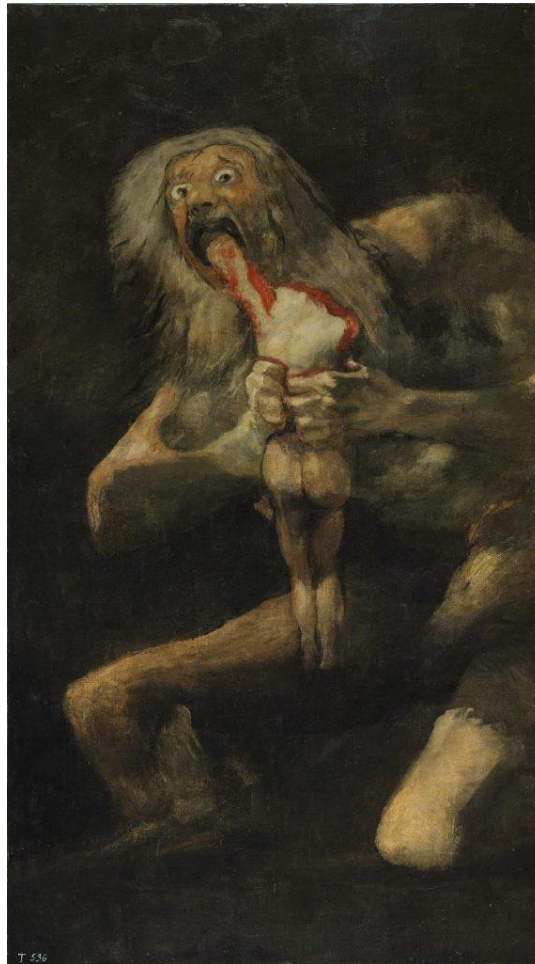
- We must spend some time in this type of knowledge in order to gain from it when we leave.
- You have a unique sort of knowledge about a film while you are watching -- not when thinking about the film, but when you are emerged in the images in front of you.

Knowledge from the Outside: Knowledge one has once one moves away from something.

- Students need to have time to think. Our society gives time to experience but not time to reflect once someone steps away.
- Once you leave a film, you can gain knowledge about what you saw by powering it and asking questions.

Why Classical Books?

- The books worth reading for a classical education are those worth thinking about.
- Modern pop literature does not lend itself to discussion and thought. It is fleeting, meant to be read quickly, and always connected to the most current news cycle. If you miss the moment you will not have anything worth saying.
- Pop art (presentational) only lasts for a year while representational art lasts for centuries.
- Think of Mozarts "Requiem" vs. Macklemore's "Thrift Shop," "American Cheese" vs. cheeses that actually deserve the label "cheese," or fine wine vs. Welch's Grape Juice.
- Though classic works are lasting, they take longer to learn to love.
- Be honest with the students that they might not take pleasure in reading the classics at first -- they take time to love.
- "Time brings fruit and time takes fruit away." Time will reveal what works are truly worthy (i.e. Mozart's "Requiem") and will destroy the unworthy ones (i.e. Macklemore's "Thrift Shop").
- Francisco de Goya's painting depicting Saturn (the Greek god of time, Kronos -- "kronos" means measurable/clock time) devouring his son demonstrates the concept well. Time is producing and destroying:



“Saturn Devouring His Son” by Francisco de Goya

- Some things get better with time. In a way they tame time.
- Great cathedrals, wines, and works of art continue in excellence and even become more appreciated as they grow older.
- The classics are "art leavened by time," but "hard to love."
- Ask students if they can imagine themselves as parents loving the same things as now when they are adults.
- People who only consume Pop Art end up with existential crisis one day. They do not know who they are. Inform your students.
- "We should read old things - we should read old things that have transcended time, that resist the ravages of time, and that flourish over the course of time as opposed of being destroyed by time. We should give these books to our students because we want them to be full of things that last not things that fall away."
- Offer student things that will last and not be devoured by time so that they will not wake up one day intellectually and spiritually starving.