



Teaching the Great Books with Josh Gibbs

Lesson 14: How to Begin the School Year

Outline:

- **Begin the School Year with Freedom and Wonder:** Avoid starting the year with charts, rules, and lists. Instead, introduce students to the learning process in a way that mirrors how God introduces man to creation—with freedom, gifts, and a sense of awe.
- **Establish Trust Before Rules:** Just as God introduces Himself as a giver of gifts before laying down rules, reveal yourself as a supportive and generous teacher before enforcing regulations.
- **Show Genuine Interest in Students:** A good teacher begins the school year with a desire to know his students personally. Use questionnaires and curious prompts on the first day to understand their beliefs, interests, and personalities.
- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Recognize that students will have perennial problems, such as dress code violations or romantic distractions, just as adults struggle with ongoing issues. Address these issues faithfully without expecting them to disappear entirely.
- **Present Yourself as a Custodian of Tradition, not a Fountain of Wisdom:** Emphasize that education is about receiving and passing on wisdom, not about being novel or overly creative. Honor the traditions of learning and avoid the temptation to reinvent them to gain student approval.
- **Introduce the Syllabus with Enthusiasm:** Treat the syllabus as a carefully curated selection of valuable content. Spend time discussing the books and materials you will cover, presenting them with the excitement and reverence they deserve.
- **Communicate House Rules as a Courtesy:** When introducing classroom rules, present them as a service to help students understand how to thrive in the learning environment, rather than as rigid mandates.