

# SHAPED BY CENTURIES

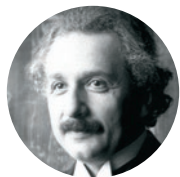
Thousands of years of ideas help ignite students' minds

By Brandon Crowe, Headmaster, Glendale Prep



When I think about how Great Hearts approaches creativity and how it's incorporated into the curriculum, it's based on a foundation of thought shaped by centuries, and not some contemporary idea of the definition.

We provide students with the fodder to ignite their minds. By grounding them in a serious study of the best ideas of the last 6,000 years, we show them what it is to think seriously about the natural world—about humanity and the relationship between human kind and the world.



**ALBERT EINSTEIN**  
The German-born physicist who developed the general theory of relativity, among other feats, is considered the most influential physicist of the 20th century.

Students experience and see—in science, mathematics, the arts, literature, philosophy, and history—how those who come after engage the thoughts and practices of those who've come before them. The term “innovation,” although it's now a buzzword, is what they experience without stripping away the experience of the context of development, change and reform.

### Creativity by Example

To think creatively is not something you set out to achieve. That's what we as post-moderns try to do. We say, “Let us create something new.” This is contrived and yields very little compared to the genuinely creative moves made by Newton and Einstein, Plato and Aristotle, Napoleon and Bismarck, Monet and Picasso, Dostoevsky and Austen. Humans are responders; they

react to challenges and responses in their own minds, societies and in the world. This is the “heavy cream,” as educational theorist Mortimer Adler describes of creativity from which our students drink.

Great Hearts encourages and sparks creativity in students by example and helping them gain a better understanding of that which came before them. Just as scholars and statesmen spent time studying Thucydides to generate new and creative approaches to diplomacy during



**PABLO PICASSO**  
Born in Málaga on the southern coast of Spain in 1881, Picasso could supposedly draw before he could talk.

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Photo by Jared Platt

the Cold War, our students are prepared to respond to friction in creative and careful ways by examining the path of challenge and response from the past.

Furthermore, they're called to truly discuss what they study. In conversation with one another and their teachers, students weigh the ideas and approaches of others. They consider the opinions of their peers and look to understand. There is no better ground from which to create than genuine understanding of where something, or someone, has come from.

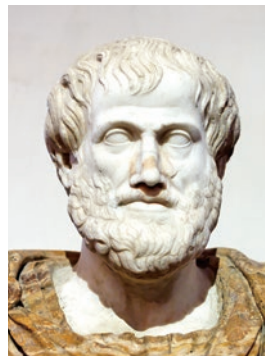
#### Participation is key

Our high school students write several original papers each semester. We maximize what thoughts and theses students have about a great work they've read, rather than asking them to simply report back what others have said/written in a book. Our students take an art class every semester, from poetry study and composition, to studio art, drama and choral music. Our arts classes provide a combination of grounding students in the tradition and requiring them to compose what they've considered. In mathematics, we teach traditionally, but also have all of our students practice for and enter the American Mathematics Competition, which demands care and creativity in solving difficult word problems.

We don't ever say "go be creative" and leave it at that, which would be akin to telling a child "go be good" without providing them opportunity to cultivate and reveal their goodness. We grapple with serious ideas to examine their assumptions and implications. We then require our students to come back together in class and share their ideas.

In so many cases, a student does not yet realize where his ideas might lead. We stress participation in every class as a key piece of learning because this both enriches the conversations and explorations of what we study and poses a variety of perspectives to the questions raised by the course material.

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#### ARISTOTLE

A student at Plato's Academy, the ancient Greek philosopher founded his own school, the Lyceum, in Athens, where he spent most of the rest of his life studying, teaching and writing.



## What sparks creativity?

### PLATO

The Athenian philosopher is one of the most important figures of the Ancient Greek world and the entire history of Western thought.



### JANE AUSTEN

As a child, the English novelist read voraciously and began writing stories as early as age 12, completing a novella at age 14.



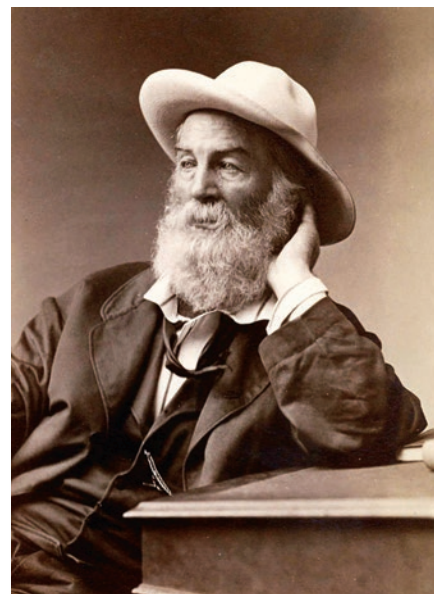
### SIR ISSAC NEWTON

English physicist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton, most famous for his law of gravitation, was instrumental in the scientific revolution of the 17th century.



### CLAUDE MONET

The famous French painter's work gave a name to the art movement Impressionism, which was concerned with capturing light and natural forms.



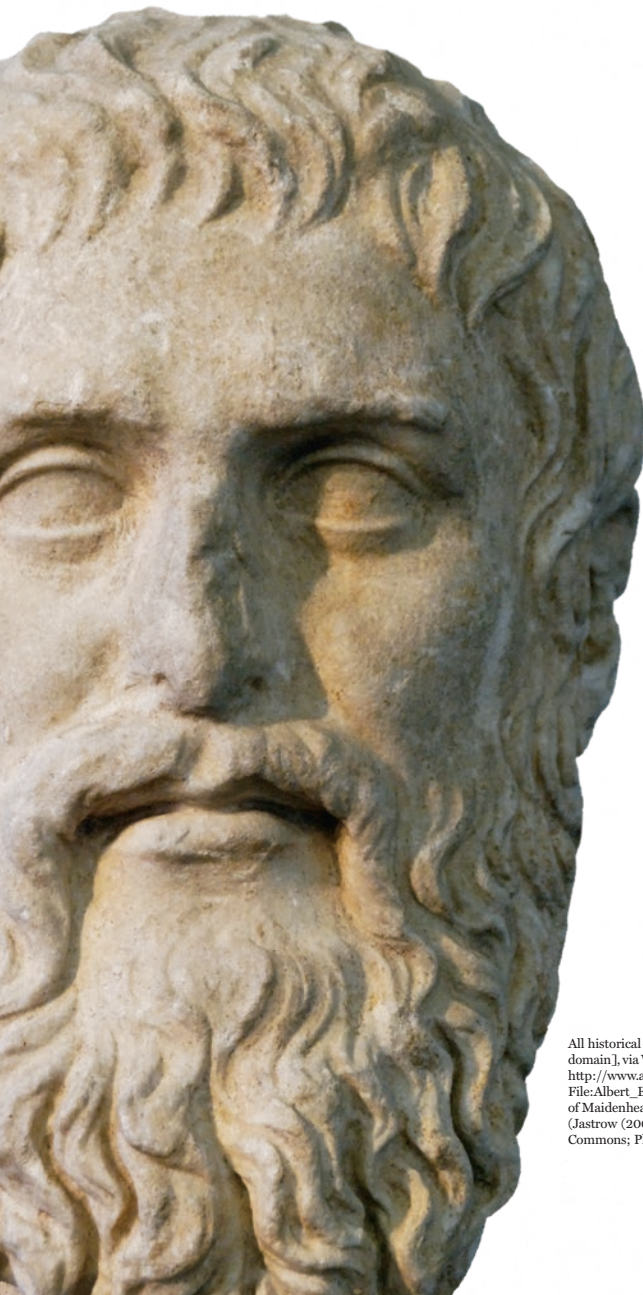
### WALT WHITMAN

Although the American poet loved music and books, he left school at the age of 14 to become a journeyman printer. Later, he worked as a teacher, journalist, editor, carpenter, and held various other jobs to support his writing.



### EMILY DICKINSON

The American poet left school as a teenager to live a reclusive life on the family homestead, where she filled notebooks with poetry and wrote hundreds of letters.



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Creativity, then, is something that's forged in fires of reading, thinking, studying and engaging with others. This process, repeated in all of our classes every day over the course of 13 years of a Great Hearts' education, fosters brilliant thought, words and deeds from our students.

### **Closing the gap**

Creativity is often linked to something that leads to innovation. But the goal of creativity, however, is not to be innovative for innovation's sake. Innovation is needed because of some deficit, absence or problem that currently exists. The innovation is then an improvement on the not-as-good-as-it could be reality. We recognize that something could be better and then aim to improve the outcome.

Improvements cannot be made without enhancing the thought surrounding what is currently occurring. In some cases, greater diligence or commitment is needed to reach success, but creativity recognizes what is getting in the way of making something better and seeks to remedy that problem.

Creativity knows that "willing" change/improvement is naïve; for if we could will things to be better, then we would. Some gap exists between what we want and where we are presently. It's the creativity that generates the innovation to close that gap. These "gaps" are not merely in the realm of technology, but they've persisted for thousands of years in the ways we interact with each other and harness the power of the natural world.

### **Shaping a better future**

Ultimately, understanding and embracing the creative thought process helps students develop leadership qualities. I could go on and on, but ultimately, the effect of what we do with our students is put them in a place where they are prepared to deal with whatever may come their way in the "adult world."

This may be a difficult choice of conscience or a complicated interpersonal problem they have to sort out or a real puzzle they have to solve in the work force. What matters for the world is that our young people are familiar with the best



*Photo by Jared Platt*

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(and worst) of what the past has offered, possess the goodwill to seek solutions that improve people and their circumstances, apply the fortitude to push through the most difficult conditions and have the agile minds to overcome the hurdles that stand in our way of shaping a future better than the present.

Put simply, leaders love. They want the best for those they work with and for. They want to better the circumstances and lives of those they serve. Leaders are needed

because, for myriad reasons, people need help, support and care. The difference between those who merely hold the position of authority and those who genuinely lead us to greater heights is creative energy.

A willingness to examine our circumstances, admit our shortcomings and through this see a way forward is the stuff of creativity. May we be as blessed with this societal virtue as our forebearers were. Great Hearts Academies aims to partner with families in pursuit of this blessing.