Iron Sharpening Iron:
Why the Socratic Method Matters So Much
by Jeff Baldwin

Man is inherently sinful. Why does the Socratic method matter so much? See the above. Man is inherently sinful.

The specific sin I have in mind here is sloth, a sin with which I am well acquainted. Even after trusting Christ at age thirteen, I have been guilty of a great deal of laziness, especially in the classroom. To understand why I'm crazy about the Socratic method, you have to time-travel with me, back to those halcyon days in the public schools . . .

In high school, I was sure that education was a game. You jumped through all the hoops, you earned the right grades, and eventually they would give you a piece of paper. That piece of paper impressed your potential employer, he hired you, and you entered the "real world." Because I figured I would have to survive in the real world one day, I played the game.

If you could write reasonably well, the game was simple. Teachers blathered about this or that, but eventually they would break down and tell you the things you needed to memorize for the test. After wasting a great deal of time eating pizza and horsing around with your friends, you would settle down around midnight to "cram," shoving just enough facts into your brain that could be vomited back out the next day on the test. Once purged of these facts, you would never need them again—unless the teacher was so wicked that they believed in a comprehensive final, which called for more cramming and vomiting later on.

Still, all that "work" never seriously interfered with my free time. Some teachers also assigned essays, it was true, but those were actually easier. Instead of having to memorize, I just had to find a few useful facts in a textbook or a magazine and weave an argument around those facts. I didn't have to believe what I wrote, and the logic could be very weak. The essay just needed to flow and to attribute the facts to the right sources. Such an essay, in my experience, was an automatic "A."

I graduated at the top of my class and selected a Christian college with a fairly strong academic reputation. And there I found that the game had hardly changed at all. Yes, the essays were longer and some of the facts I had to memorize seemed more complex, but it was still a matter of jumping through a few hoops. Except college offered one significant bonus: my parents weren't around to wake me in the morning! I could sleep through much of the blathering and still not miss a test—the part of the education that really counted.

Which brings me to my college calculus class. I had no business taking calculus—I was an English major with very little interest in English, let alone math. I should have taken the "math for poets" class and coasted even more. Maybe I thought calculus would look good on that piece of paper I would hand to my future employer.

In any case, I followed a straightforward strategy throughout the semester. Each calculus class that did not include a test allowed me to work on my serve at the beach volleyball court. Any homework assigned that day could be puzzled out late some night and then turned in the next class period by Jordan, my responsible roommate. On the day of a calculus test, I would get a panicky look in my eyes and track down Jordan and say something desperate like, "You've got to teach me chapter nine in the next twenty minutes or I'm going to fail!" Now comes the really inexplicable part: Jordan would take pity on me and teach me—so well, in fact, that I understood what I needed to know and could remember it just long enough to spit it out on the test. Following this system, as difficult as this is to believe, I earned an "A" in college calculus! And I can say with all honesty today that I don't even know what calculus is.

I suppose the happy ending to this story would read something like this: Jordan went on to study education, and today he has been recognized six separate times as "teacher of the year." But

Jordan sells home security systems, and the sorry truth is that I have a transcript that clearly states that I have mastered college calculus. Which is a lie.

I did not receive an education in high school, and I did not receive an education in college—for the simple reason that no one "receives" an education once they hit their teenage years. At that stage, you either earn an education or you coast, jumping through hoops and waiting for the game to end.

In my sinfulness—and this is not cute and it is not funny, it is sin—I squandered the mind with which I'd been entrusted. Instead of taking God seriously and seeking to love Him with my mind (Mark 12:30) so that I could experience the great joy of being "transformed by the renewing of [my] mind" (Romans 12:2), I viewed education as a secular pursuit and was as lazy as I could get away with being.

This is the tendency of every student. None of us like self-discipline; our sinful nature prefers mindlessness to the effort required to "take every thought captive for Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). And this is why the Socratic method matters so much.

If the classical model is true, then the trivium indicates that a sea-change should occur around the time we turn thirteen. In the first stage of the trivium, the grammar stage, students are a lot like sponges—that is, they *receive* an education. We begin by being good at memorization, and teachers are right to pour certain facts—the multiplication table, for example—into our brains. The grammar stage is the time when you absorb the vocabulary and the facts that form the foundation for the disciplines you will later master. A classroom based on the lecture format generally works well at the grammar stage. The teacher introduces vocabulary and facts, and the students learn to parrot what the teacher teaches. A good foundation is established.

But ultimately we want to train up human beings, not parrots. Although the passive approach to education is challenging at the grammar stage, it invites laziness in the logic and rhetoric stages. Students need only parrot in the grammar stage, but as we become adults we need to learn to learn for ourselves. In essence, that's what education is. "For the sole true end of education is simply this" writes Dorothy Sayers: "to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain."[1] The best minds are not the minds that have absorbed the most facts—the best minds are the minds that can identify and *own* truth, incorporating that truth into their lives.

What's being said here is not radical. Any Christian parent, given a moment's reflection, would agree that the ultimate purpose of education is to train the student to own his Christian faith for himself—that is, to think and live like Jesus Christ.

This requires, then, a move from being a *passive* learner to an *active* learner. As we've seen, I managed to waste both my secondary and my college education refusing to take an active part in my education. You certainly can receive a diploma living this way—and I would argue that most educational programs encourage this sort of mindset—but you're never going to put on the mind of Christ "learning" this way. Faith isn't something that's just absorbed and then vomited back on a test—real faith will influence all that we are, and manifest itself in a different sort of life—"the good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart" (Luke 6:45a). As Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, Peter's trust in Christ did not allow him to say he believed Christ and continue tending his nets—Christ's call on his life required faith *and* obedience.[2] For Bonhoeffer, faith and obedience are inextricably linked (sounds like they are for God, too, in James 2:14-24 and elsewhere). Faith isn't truly faith until it's put into practice. Another way of saying this is that education is part and parcel of sanctification—we can't be like Christ until we put on the mind of Christ, and that requires discipline.

So how does the student begin to put on the mind of Christ? Ultimately, of course, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. But if we want to be used by the Spirit to help a student learn this discipline, we must begin by helping him put aside his sinful desire to be lazy, to sit passively, and to receive education like a sponge. In short, we must use the Socratic method, and use it in such a way that it strikes terror into the student's heart.

Most public speakers learn sooner or later that the only way they can know if their audience is paying attention is by listening to the questions they ask. Many in your audience will look at you benignly and nod when you raise your voice or pound the podium, but you can't be sure they're thinking about what you're saying until they respond to what you've said. In the same way, Socratic method requires response from your students—to what you say, to what their classmates say, to what the author in question says, and most importantly, to what God says.

Ideally, the Socratic classroom would consist of twelve or less students sitting in a circle, guided in a discussion by their wise and kindly teacher. The students would come to class having read the homework assignment (say, "Life Without Principle" by Henry David Thoreau), having researched Thoreau and his influences, and—gasp—having thought about Thoreau's arguments. The wise and kindly teacher would allow the students a great deal of latitude in their discussion, even allowing them to champion indefensible positions, but would eventually point them back to the Bible, and how Christ would have us view the arguments of Thoreau. The students would be persuaded by their teacher, and they would leave with a richer understanding of how Christ speaks to vocation and efficiency, and how Thoreau has influenced the great conversation.

Such a classroom teaches the student to learn for himself—to think biblically about big ideas, and to defend the biblical position in a winsome and persuasive way. It strengthens the student's faith by helping him to understand how important concepts and epochs fit within the framework of the Christian worldview. In short, it teaches the student to own his faith.

But such an ideal isn't achieved without a lot of work. As you might have guessed, what goes around really did come around in my own life, and one day I found myself teaching twelve high school students who still wanted to cling to their grammar stage ways. They said they wanted to learn, of course, but what they meant was that they wanted me to do all the work. They wanted me to start spouting out wisdom, and then they would absorb the very best wisdom (like sponges) and later spit it back out on a test. They wanted what I wanted when I was a student: to be lazy.

And just as my flesh drags its feet when I try to break the habit of sin, my students wanted to drag their feet. It seemed like the first two years of school were spent repeating variations of the following dialog:

> Student A: "So, who influenced Thoreau anyway?"
> Me: "Self-learn!"
> Student B: "But what does the Bible say about civil disobedience?"
> Me: "Self-learn!"
> Students (in chorus): "You're really mean."
> Me (turning red and bellowing): "We've already established that! Self-learn!!"

It got to be quite a joke around the school. Students learned to yell "self-learn!" at the appropriate times, even before I could yell it. But eventually they realized that they were no longer merely sponges or parrots, and that their grades and their sanity depended upon making the switch to becoming active learners.

Until they made the switch, there were many uncomfortable moments. One of the best things about the Socratic method is that it doesn't allow any student to hide. Did you forget to do the reading? Did you do the reading but spend most of your time thinking about who will be voted off the island on the latest episode of Survivor? Can you distinguish between Thoreau and Rousseau, or tell me why Thoreau's name should always come to mind when you hear the name Gandhi? If not, these things will become painfully obvious as we discuss the assignment.

In the passive mode, a student really only has to use his mind about 10-20 hours per semester. As long as you study for the test and then work hard to recall as you take the test, you can check out for most of the rest of the educational process. Unless the classroom is Socratic.

If it is, it requires constant mental engagement—not just during the class time (which is usually a little longer than traditional classes, preferably between an hour and a half to two hours)—but also as the student reads and researches. In fact, the Socratic method encourages engagement any time you bump into a fellow student. Did you understand what Thoreau was saying there? I know the teacher's going to ask about it. Do you think it's biblical to spend a year living in a cabin by a lake, not doing much of anything? Or should you always be working at maximum efficiency?

The active learner is constantly engaged in the learning process. He can't stop thinking about what he's studying, or talking about it with his friends. Such engagement doesn't happen magically—it happens because the student gradually learns the habits of an active learner, in the Socratic classroom.

To further foster students learning this self-discipline, I strongly recommend grading their participation, and making it an especially weighty part of their overall grade (participation counts for close to 40% of the overall grade in the Humanities classes I teach). This, too, will ruffle feathers. Students and parents alike will be quick to play the "subjective card," pointing out that no perfectly objective standard exists for grading participation. But that's not entirely true. When I ask little Johnny what he knows about Thoreau, and he blushes red and says, "Nothing," I can be quite certain that his participation in our Thoreau discussion was sub-par. Conversely, when little Susie's hand is constantly up and she makes several good observations about Thoreau's arguments, I can safely describe her participation as dazzling. Thus, students can earn one of three participation grades each day in my class: incomplete (objective), complete (somewhat subjective, but you have to be awfully quick on your feet to earn a "complete" when you deserve an "incomplete"), and dazzling (somewhat subjective, but as with art, my students know it when they see it).

Such a standard isn't perfect, and students will occasionally differ with you about the grade they earn for a particular class. But as the classes accumulate, the cream rises and the lazy sink—and as they sink they experience the awful sinking feeling we all feel when we stand on a stage unprepared. It's no fun admitting day after day that you haven't invested the time and the thought to jump into a discussion and make a contribution. Eventually it begins to look like it might be worthwhile to invest that work and be saved the embarrassment.

Call it "tough love" or whatever the newest catch-phrase for that sort of thing is. Whatever you call it, I certainly needed a dose of it in my school years. Remember how your meanest teacher also turned out to be your favorite teacher? There's a strange correlation there. It may *seem* kind to protect an unprepared backpacker's self-esteem by allowing him to set out alone on a 40-mile jaunt through the Rockies in October, but in reality nothing could be more unkind. In the same way, it may seem kind to allow a passive learner to remain a passive learner—but his ignorance will invite consequences just as deadly as the consequences faced by the clueless backpacker. This is not hyperbole. Paul admonishes us in Colossians 2:6-7: "So, then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." In the following verse, Paul tells us what can happen if we ignore this self-discipline: men may take "you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." If we're not thinking like Christ, we'll be thinking like men—worldly men. There is no in-between.

I'm not arguing here that you should belittle your students or yell at them (although I think yelling is vastly underrated). Encourage your students like crazy—but also spur them on. Iron sharpens iron; butter doesn't sharpen butter. If you're not expecting more from your students and more from yourself every day, you have no business teaching. The goal is to be like Jesus. Good education always keeps this goal in view, and doesn't treat sloth as something to be accommodated. As we begin our journey up the mountain, we invite the student to come along. But we don't pretend we've reached the top just because they (or we) get tired or discouraged. Grant each student the

dignity he has before God; he or she is a responsible creation who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, has the capacity for so much more.

If it seems like I've been pounding the pulpit up to this point, you're right. It's hard for me not to type this essay in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. This stuff really matters. And it's true. I had the chance to fully taste the fruit last year, primarily in my tenth grade Humanities class. Finally, after four years of pushing and pulling and lots of iron filings on the floor, my students settled in and self-learned. What a pleasure! Many times, as my students were making connections from one great thinker or concept to another, I would find myself thinking, "If a parent walked into this classroom right now, they would think that this discussion has been scripted for their benefit. The students sound so informed and engaged, and are thinking so biblically, that it has to be staged. But it's not!" The students really were thinking that well. They were beginning to understand that the Word of God is relevant to all of history and to each of their lives, and they were trying to live their lives informed by their Christian faith. It was an honor to teach them.

The Socratic method isn't the holy grail. It won't work for students with severe learning disabilities, and it can certainly be abused. But if you use it judiciously, the Socratic method encourages young teens to transition from passive learners to active learners. It requires them to own their Christian faith and apply it to the great conversation.

To reap these benefits, keep certain things in mind as you apply the Socratic method:

(1) The Socratic classroom is the worst kind of classroom absent God's fixed standard. Some discussions aren't worth your time—if you put a Yankees fan and a Red Sox fan in the same room, for example, there will be plenty said but not much progress made. Both fans are passionate about their team, and both think the other person's opinions are unwarranted. But no minds will be changed, and no one will be closer to the truth. In the same way, many people can have many opinions about various elements of the great conversation, but if the discussion is merely an airing of opinions, there's no good reason for any person to change his mind. The only hope for fruitful discussion rests squarely on the fact that there is a fixed standard that exists apart from man and his changeable opinions, and that this standard may be applied to the great conversation. Students may still verbalize opinions and take unbiblical positions—but in the end all such stances will be compared back to scripture. Rather than depending upon the shifting sands of human passions, the Socratic classroom must stand upon the rock of God's revealed truth.

(2) Teachers should look for opportunities to play devil's advocate. Students, especially high school students, often see only one side of an issue and thus view even the most slipshod arguments as irrefutable. Thinking well involves thinking subtly—being able to see not just two possible positions but all the nuances that ultimately must be accounted for if one is to adopt the right position. The best way to encourage this sort of thinking is to force students to defend their hasty generalizations, in the process showing them that their simplistic positions do not take into account all the difficulties of the question. Sunday School answers are not acceptable! There are great mysteries afoot—the Incarnation, the Trinity, marriage—and to deal with them superficially is to trivialize the most profound events. When a student says something sloppy like, "Everyone knows that gambling is wrong," it's easy for the teacher to see the next course of action: "Oh, really? I'm a Christian and I play poker. Am I sinning?"

(3) Closely related to the tactic of playing devil's advocate is the strategy of pushing students to follow their claims to the logical conclusion. In a discussion of Manifest Destiny, I once had a student suggest that America—presumably because it is a "Christian nation"—has the right to seek out and claim natural resources, even on foreign soil. I was a bit taken aback, but I had the sense to ask if that meant that it would be appropriate for the U.S. to

invade Canada if we ran out of oil and Canada still had some. The student loudly asserted that this was right and appropriate! Such a position is indefensible, of course, and eventually—after some ribbing from her classmates—this student acknowledged her position to be unbiblical.

(4) I know I've said it, but I'll say it again: grade participation! The assumption undergirding the Socratic method is that students will remain lazy, passive learners unless you force them to prepare well and think hard. The only way to consistently hold students accountable is to grade their participation day in and day out. Take it from a lazy student who figured out many ways to fake it: you can't fake excellent preparation in a small Socratic classroom.

(5) Diagram ideas and record facts on the whiteboard during the discussion. One of the dangers of the Socratic method is that students will become so caught up in the discussion that they will forget to take notes. Diagramming concepts, or even listing basic facts about the life of the author, will help students remember to jot down what they're hearing. In addition, visual learners will have an easier time following the discussion and keeping the most important ideas in view. I can't tell you how many times my students would say, "Ooh! It's like the pendulum—draw the pendulum!" when our discussion touched on Romanticism versus Realism. A long time ago I had drawn a pendulum to point out that Christianity balanced the over-reactions of Romanticism and Realism, and now my students used that picture as shorthand for holding intricate concepts in their minds.

(6) Include some standard questions in every discussion. The best way to circumvent any charges that grading participation is subjective is to constantly rely on a few stock questions, especially at the beginning of each discussion. A student may legitimately complain that they were unaware that the discussion of *Don Quijote*, for example, would hinge so dramatically on the invention of the modern sense of humor. It's difficult to prepare for every turn that every discussion of a great book might take. But students may not legitimately complain (oh, they'll still complain) that they were unaware that you would ask them what they knew about Miguel Cervantes. Students should come to expect that every discussion will at least include the following questions: What do you know about the author? Why would you argue that the book is well-written (or poorly written)? What was happening in history around the time the book was written? Who influenced the author? Whom did the author influence? These questions provide each student with direction for their research, and will—not coincidentally—help them to discover the import of the work in question if they pursue their research diligently.

(7) Another way to help your students succeed is to require them to complete a standard worksheet for every reading. My reading assignment worksheet includes the following sections: identify one statement with which you agree and one with which you disagree (defending your positions), list any biblical references, and identify the worldview of the reading. Requiring students to complete this worksheet helps them learn to keep certain questions and concerns at the forefront of their thoughts when wrestling with a great work. It's no good reading *Paradise Lost* while you're wondering who won Monday Night Football—you need to dialog with the poem, asking questions and constantly comparing themes and sub-themes with scripture. A worksheet helps students learn this discipline.

(8) Never lose sight of the central ideas. When I prepared to lead a discussion of *Don Quijote*, I was so overwhelmed by the scope of the work that I typed out a record 19 pages of questions and target answers (a very bad sign). While *Don Quijote* certainly merits a discussion that detailed—I could easily imagine spending a semester teaching the work—reality dictated that we only had about four class periods to discuss it. Instead of scattering my focus across much of the smorgasbord that is *Don Quijote*, I should have picked my

battles, choosing to focus only on the most central themes and ideas. As counter-intuitive as it seems, any classes I led where I had prepared more than eight type-written pages of Q&A drifted. Some works are too vast to keep all the issues they raise in view. Better to major on the majors and ignore the minor questions altogether.

(9) Make connections but avoid rabbit trails. This is a closely-related corollary to the last rule, and it obviously references a thin line. When does a connection become a rabbit-trail? It's crucial to point out that Thoreau bought into Rousseau's concept of the "noble savage," but is it also crucial to point out that Thoreau supported John Brown's murderous protest against slavery? In both cases, I would argue that these are valid connections to make—which probably points to my own mindset: I'm willing to risk going down a few rabbit trails to help my students see just how inter-connected all of the great conversation is, and just how crucial a Christian worldview is for properly understanding the great conversation. The theme of Mark Twain's *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg* has almost nothing to do with gambling, but if my students haven't yet thought through the biblical position on gambling I'm willing to pursue that connection until we reach general consensus. It may technically be a rabbit trail, but it is also—to my mind—profitable. The only connections I studiously avoid are the unprofitable ones: anecdotes about a student's pet cat, for example, or conspiracy theories involving Masons. Some rabbit trails are painfully obvious.

(10) Avoid discussing secondary doctrine. While discussions of secondary doctrine should never be categorized with anecdotes about the family cat, such discussions must be viewed as rarely fruitful within the context of the Socratic classroom. In school, it's best to focus on what we *can* know: whether Gregory the Great's view of marriage is biblical or not, or if Thomas Jefferson was a Deist. Instead of bogging down in debates about biblical concepts that are not clearly defined (should baptism be administered in infancy or to adult believers?), we should focus on the many doctrines to which scripture speaks definitively: the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the saving power of Christ's work on the cross, to name a few. There is a time and place to discuss secondary doctrine, but the focus of a Humanities class is to help students apply their Christian faith to the great conversation—that is, to help them master what they can know about reality, rather than endlessly wrangle over the unknowable.

(11) Teach students how to identify themes and worldviews. In order to identify the worldview of a particular work, a student must first identify the central message—the theme—of the work. If the theme is biblical, then the worldview of the work is Christian. If the theme is unbiblical, then the student faces the additional task of determining which non-Christian worldview most closely aligns itself with that theme.[3] The real trick is to help the student learn how to identify and articulate the theme. Most students make two common mistakes when they consider a literary work: they think in very vague generalities, and they think any reference to the Christian faith implies that the work has a biblical worldview. In the first essay he wrote for my class, one of my ninth grade students described the theme of one book as "good versus evil." Can't guess the book he read? That's the point. Well-crafted themes are as unique as the book they represent. Students need to learn this, and quickly. Probably the most important step toward helping your student come to grips with this is to demand that they express their themes in a complete sentence (or two complete sentences). This demand helps the student think in more specific terms, and encourages them to move away from plot description and toward the foundational assumptions of the work.

In addition, there are at least two exercises that help students get better at identifying and articulating themes. First, in an effort to help students identify the central

tension that drives the plot in a work of fiction, I've taught them the concept of a story arc.[4] The beauty of the story arc is that it reminds students to focus on the climactic moment of tension in a fictional work and then notice how the author chose to resolve that tension (whether or not the author intended the resolution to be satisfactory should also be considered). This in turn helps students to focus on what the author wants them to focus on: the key problem that he highlights and dissects. The author's analysis powerfully impacts his theme.

The second tactic that I've found to be helpful involves brainstorming about the key concepts. After completing a discussion of a reading, students should take time to verbalize the ideas emphasized by the work. A brainstorming session about Poe's *Murder in the Rue Morgue*, for example, would include phrases like "chess vs. checkers." "intuition vs. the analytical mind," "prototypical detective," "the anti-Sherlock," "gothic setting," "the murderer as sub-human," and "the big picture trumps specific clues." Once students list all the ideas the author emphasizes, it becomes relatively easy to synthesize these concepts into a coherent theme. With Poe, your theme would probably sound something like, "The truly great critical mind transcends the narrow consciousness of purely analytical minds like Sherlock Holmes, focusing instead on the big picture and relying on more mysterious mental processes to arrive at the truth." Your theme doesn't have to include all the concepts mentioned in your brainstorming session; but it should integrate the most significant ones.

(12) Capitalize on this unique opportunity to encourage students to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Students often will disagree, and discussions can get heated. There's certainly nothing wrong with being passionate about your beliefs—but passion should never result in unkindness, and discussions should never be exercises in vanity. Bad attitudes become pretty transparent in a semester full of discussion, affording the teacher the opportunity to demand practical application of scripture every day. Students should view your class as intensely practical—first, because history demonstrates again and again that ideas matter a great deal because ideas have consequences; second, because the Socratic classroom is a training ground for getting along with diverse people who may often disagree with you. What better forum to learn to be kind, loving, gentle and patient?

(13) This has been implied throughout, but it must be consciously embraced: the Socratic teacher almost never provides answers. The lazy student doesn't really want to wrestle with a problem and God's Word and work out the truth—he wants someone to tell him. Again and again, you'll be tempted by questions (and demands) from students about the right answer. Although it's flattering to be exalted as the wise and all-knowing one, resist the temptation and make the students self-learn. As long as you're willing to volunteer answers when the going gets tough, students will learn that they don't really need to knuckle down. But if they find that you really are mean—that you really do expect them to self-learn—then they'll gradually face up to the fact that they must roll up their sleeves and think hard. This is the turning point! Students need to own their faith, and they can't do that as long as someone else rushes in to help them apply that faith. The move from drinking milk to eating solid food (to use Paul's terms in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2) depends on weaning the spiritual babies.

That's all there is to it (audible groan). I know, I know, the transition to a Socratic classroom sounds daunting—but it's really only the paradigm-shift itself that is hard. Once you've thrown out the old fondness for a passive educational process, and adopted a consistent classroom policy, the rest will follow.

The only thing that will haunt you after the paradigm-shift is the constant sense of working without a net, and as far as I know that feeling never goes away. No amount of preparation can ensure that you are ready for every issue a student will broach, or every twist that a discussion will take. That's the really scary part! But I imagine stuntmen never really shake free of the adrenaline rush that comes with their soaring falls—and why should a teacher have any less fun?

[1] Dorothy Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," (McLean, VA: The Trinity Forum, 2004), p. 35. This essay is a must-read for Christians interested in classical education.
[2] When pushed, Bonhoeffer would admit that faith initially precedes obedience—he knows that we are justified by faith alone. But the thing he wants to emphasize is that faith necessarily manifests itself in obedience; otherwise, it's only lip-service.
[3] Interestingly, most non-Christian works express themes that parallel other Western worldviews. It's rare, for example, to find a work that contains a Taoist or a Buddhist theme. I think this is because Eastern worldviews deny two crucial aspects of reality: antithesis and the physical world. Since Eastern religions don't accept dichotomies such as good/bad or right/wrong, it's impossible to tell a story that allows the reader to know the outcome for which he should cheer. Further, rational argument is impossible apart from the right/wrong dichotomy. And then there's the problem of downplaying the reality of the physical world: most stories must rely on a concrete physical universe as the stage upon which the action occurs. It's hard to imagine a story that has a stage that is completely non-physical (try it). Almost all characters—even genies in lamps—have bodies that are manifested in a way that registers with our five senses. And genies are forever altering physical reality; in fact, that's probably the only thing a genie is good for. Could it be possible that simple narrative depends upon a Christian understanding of reality, and that other Western worldviews can accommodate it only to the extent that they borrow from Christianity?
[4] A story arc represents the building tension in a story. For example, in the story *Othello* the central tension revolves around whether Othello will trust the deceitful Iago or the faithful Desdemona. As the story progresses, the tension builds, until it peaks at the climax of the story arc—in this case, where Othello is driven to a murderous rage when he becomes convinced that Desdemona has cuckolded him. This "maximum tension" is somehow resolved, usually in short order—remember how quickly things happen at the end of *Othello*? Othello murders his wife, finds himself to be deceived by Iago, kills himself, and the curtain comes down. Most stories are "shaped" like a hill seen from the side, with a long rise on the left (terminating in the climax) and a short drop and then a flat plain on the right side.