

VIRILITER



AGE

OLD'S COOL ACADEMY
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www.oldscoolacademy.com

WE LOVED THE ACADEMY* SO MUCH WE DECIDED TO OPEN ONE OF OUR OWN.

Same cast of characters, of course: Democritus, Cicero, Caesar, Montaigne, Michelangelo, Spinoza, Shakespeare, Washington, Grant, and Patton.

Seriously, the Old's Cool Academy is a traditional, back-to-basics school, offering a rigorous six-month Classical Liberal Arts Education centered on the Western canon. And the time-honored principles, somehow almost-forgotten today—of intellectual honesty, facts over feelings, critical thinking, discipline, and character above all. Damn difficult stuff.

This baptism by fire (and fun) will be immediately followed by a six-month apprenticeship at one of the many businesses we are partnering with to give our "graduates" an out-of-the-frying-pan taste of the real world.

But the real objective of the Academy will be to provide a timeless and priceless education in the art of how to do good and live well, and to enrich our students with the importance of knowledge, curiosity, hard work, and integrity. We'll also instill an Emersonian sense of self-reliance, a can-do attitude that will inspire them beyond Hamlet, oars, and lathes, and help them find meaning and responsibility in their lives.

Unlike most schools, which are either academic or vocational (or specifically-focused on getting the applicant a job), the Academy will have the students immerse themselves in the *Great Books*, to be awed and enlightened by the deeply human and valuable perspectives and answers these classics can still bring to their everyday.

Students will also be studying traditional craftsmanship—e.g. woodworking, penmanship, beer-brewing—the thrill of the drill, the quill, and the still, so-to-speak. As well as business etiquette basics, and, although pooh-pooed in today's real-whirled immediacy and relentless pursuit of gratification, so many other simple but enriching life skills like being humble and truly grateful.

Our students will discover that manual labor is not only admirable and fulfilling, but almost always translates to a deeper and broader world view. As part of the curriculum every student will either restore a car or motorcycle, or build a boat and drive/sail it away into the sunset, so-to-speak, on graduation day.

The perfect antidote to the go-to-university-or-you're-a-loser mentality, as well as a lifetime membership in a tight-knit community of like-minded recalcitrants and kings—the Academy is a wicked awesome option for anyone ready to bite the ass off a bear, in a quarter of the time, and at a tenth of the cost of college.

Read all about our motto, *Viriliter Age*, our nickname, *Wiseacres*, a day in the life, and tuition cost and fees here:

www.oldscoolacademy.com

*West Point

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE AND EXPECTATIONS

Education should be treated with respect at all times. Your "subfusc" will be a button-down shirt, school tie, tied, pants (or skirts for the ladies), blazer, and shoes. No hip-hop hoodies or flip-flops. In shop class you'll wear your jumpsuit instead of a blazer. You need to be serious about learning, and should expect to spend at least one hour for each subject outside of class—set aside the time, and devote yourself to focusing on the task at hand. No cell phone, or... look, a squirrel!

All notes, class assignments, and homework will be written out long-hand, in a notebook. We provide you with a fountain pen to give you the tactile feel of forming words, shooting from the shoulder as it were. Learning should involve every sense intensely. All-in, all-out.

Homework reading assignments need your undivided attention, in a quiet place, in at least half hour sessions at a minimum, one hour the recommended maximum. Longer than that and you can't concentrate; shorter and you don't have enough time to settle in. You should also try to read aloud, to yourself or to a friend, on a regular basis, which we will do in class every day. We recommend twenty minute sessions—hearing your own voice and the rhythm of the words will give you a better feeling for the material and become a transformative experience.

THE HONOR CODE

You will not lie, cheat, or steal (except when playing One Up!) nor tolerate those who do.

TUITION

Tuition for the twelve-month program will be \$12,000. The six-month internship will pay approximately \$12,000, so the program is a net-zero cost proposition. Room and board is extra.

SPECIAL SUMMER SESSION: Tuition for the eight-week summer intensive (July 1–September 1) is \$4750, total, and will include the 40 days of school, in addition to a hot lunch every day, as well as the course/shop materials and the Tool Kit. Room/board is an additional \$2000.

COURSE MATERIALS AND CLOBBER COST

The course book list includes: *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*; *Liar's Poker*; *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*; *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Frankenstein*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Lord of the Flies*, *West with the Night*; *The Iliad*, Plutarch's *Lives*; *The Gulag Archipelago*; and *The Road to Serfdom*.

Leather-bound notebook, fountain pen, and school supplies. Each student will also receive an Old's Cool polo and an Old's Cool Academy tie. Course Materials and clobber cost is: \$500.

TOOL KIT AND SHOP MATERIALS FEE

Old's Cool Tool Kit includes Old's Cool coveralls, gloves, safety glasses, ear plugs and tool bag, which the students will make themselves. It'll be filled with numerous essentials starting with our old's cool pal Tim Leatherman's Sidekick or Wingman. Shop materials include boat building/ car restoration supplies, parts, and paint. Tool Kit and Shop Materials fee is: \$500.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WISEACRE*

At 7:00 am the American flag is raised every morning to start the day.

From 8:00 am to 11:00 am there are three morning classes, 45 minutes each. First period always starts with the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

Every Monday morning from 8:00 am to 8:45 am there is a mandatory school-wide assembly to reflect on the previous week, and plan the upcoming one.

From 11 am to 12:30 pm students plan, prepare, cook, eat and cleanup the midday meal together. We will also “play games” right after lunch, if there’s time.


At 12:30 pm afternoon shop class begins, and ends at 3:30. These traditional skills classes can be anything from car restoration to boat building to beekeeping to brewing beer.

From 3:30 pm to 5 pm is optional: the time for sports or extra-curriculars, where students participate in activities of their own choosing, ranging from sailing to sewing to trap shooting.

At 6 pm Retreat will be played and the flag will be lowered to end the day.

*Our nickname. Our mascot is “Smart Aleck.”

OLD’S COOL ACADEMY WEEK 1 - JULY 1 - JULY 5, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
ASSEMBLY 1 	ENGLISH 2	HISTORY 3 THE ILIAD, CHAPTERS 1 & 2. INTRO TO TROJAN WAR, GODS, GREEKS. APPLE OF DISCORD, ETC. EVERY STORY HAS A HERO... START A HISTORY TIMELINE WE’LL ADD TO ALL YEAR.	ENGLISH 4 THE AENEID, FIRST BOOK. INTRO TO ROMANS, VIRGIL, AENEAS. ADD TO TIMELINE. A WORD A DAY	ARTS 5 PETER BREUGEL’S PAINTING LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS, 1555.
ENGLISH OUR INITIAL BONDING EVENT WILL BE FOR ALL THE STUDENTS TO MAKE AN OLD’S COOL ACADEMY FLAG TOGETHER, WHICH WE WILL PROUDLY FLY TO MARK EVERY SCHOOL DAY. WE HAVE A MAPS AND FLAGS VIEW OF HISTORY: THEY SHOW WHERE OUR LOYALTIES LIE AND WHAT AND TO WHOM WE PLEDGE OUR HONOR AND ALLEGIENCE. LONG MAY IT WAVE.		TRADITIONAL SEWING 101. START BY MAKING THE FLAG, THEN A CANVAS TOOL BAG. BOOK: ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAIN- TENANCE, CHAPTER 1.	LIFE 101 LIVE IN THE PRESENT, WITH VIRTUE - M. AURELIUS FIRST ASSIGNMENT: THREE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE THAT WERE EITHER GOOD/BAD. \$ QUESTION	BUSINESS 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE - STEVEN COVEY, FIRST CHAPTER. INTRO TO O’ E-COMMERCE SITE-STUDENTS WILL RUN AS THEIR OWN BUSINESS.
HISTORY WE HAVE A MAPS AND FLAGS VIEW OF HISTORY: THEY SHOW WHERE OUR LOYALTIES LIE AND WHAT AND TO WHOM WE PLEDGE OUR HONOR AND ALLEGIENCE. LONG MAY IT WAVE.		ARTS ODE ON A GRECIAN URN, JOHN KEATS, 1819. “TRUTH IS BEAUTY, BEAUTY TRUTH.”	SCIENCE COSMOS - CARL SAGAN FIRST CHAPTER. THE LAWS OF THE UNIVERSE ARE GOD. TO BAKE A CAKE FROM SCRATCH YOU MUST INVENT THE UNIVERSE FIRST.	MASTER CLASS ABE SCHOERER - VINTER EXTRAORDINAIRE. SYTHIANS, NEWTON AND PRESSING GRAPES.
SHOP CHOOSE YOUR PATH TO FREEDOM: CAR, BOAT (AND WHICH ONE), OR MOTORCYCLE. GATHER MATERIALS. CRAIGSLIST HUNTING IF NEEDED. WE’LL START BY SHARPENING THE SAW, LITERALLY. TOOL INSTRUCTION, AND THEN MACHINERY BASICS. LET’S BUILD A FANTASTIC FUTURE!				

CURRICULUM

Program starts July 1 and January 1. There are six subjects at the Academy: English, History, Science, Life 101, Traditional Skills, and Business Basics. There's also one "Master Class" per week.

In the six-month academic program there will be a total of 325 class periods.

These will be divided as follows:

English – 3 x week = 75 classes

History, Science, Life 101, and Arts – 2 x week = 50 classes each for a total of 200 classes

Traditional Skills and Business Basics – 1 x week = 25 classes each for a total of 50 classes

Students will read a total of 33 books during the academic year, broken down by subject:

English – 14; History – 6; Science – 4; Business – 3; Traditional – 2; Apprenticeship – 4.

LIFE 101

We're going to follow Marcus Aurelius' maxim: Live in the present, with virtue. We can't overestimate the utility of being positive and grateful every day, and living with some nobility in truth, while aiming for the highest ideal. It's that simple.

2 classes x week = 50 classes.

1. You'll start your journey by making a schedule. This will be a rough out of your day to day. Schedules are freedom, not prison—it's your blueprint for life. The most important part of this "map" will be the bookends: your wake-up time and your bedtime. You'll go from there.
2. You will also keep a written diary. You don't have to write down everything, but it helps to be consistent and diligent.
3. If you want to change the world, change yourself first. Here's how to start: make your bed and clean your room—literally and figuratively—it's your psychological space. Everything is connected, and matters.
4. Your body is your best friend. Take yourself seriously. Eat regularly, and less. Get enough sleep. All priorities. Self-care is a lifestyle. Start small, but again, consistency.
5. The Initial assignment, written by hand, and read aloud: what do you want out of the Academy, and what do you hope to accomplish this year?
6. The second assignment is to describe two people in your life that have had a major impact, one positive and the other negative. How did they (and do they still) effect you, and what did you learn from them?
7. The third assignment, again, written by hand, and read aloud: what do you see yourself becoming in five years—if all goes well, and if not. What's your ultimate vision for a happy life?

8. The fourth assignment is in two parts: what is the most important thing you could change in your personal life that would make the biggest difference? And, the same question for your professional life.

9. OCEAN—the big five character traits: open-mindedness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Take the test and see how and who you are.

10. As we've said before: Aim high, draw a frame around the ideal, and always tell the truth. Stand up straight. Dress well. Be punctual. Respect is a responsibility, not a right.

11. Attack each day with courage and integrity. Be amazed and thankful, for everything. Be humble and kind. Don't take anything personally, or make assumptions. Always do your best.

12. Open mind. Critical thinking. Facts and data, not feelings. Inductive reasoning. Ask the right questions. Learn how to listen.

13. Clothes keeping, personal grooming, sewing basics, shoes, coats, gloves. Games people play. Joseph and his coat. How to wear a hat. An excellent ride is key. Wrap artist. You are where you're from. Strunk & White. Latin matching game. A-maze-ing. Being illiterate sucks. We're in the army now. Script, schmipt. Craigslist tips. The Irish Exit. How to apologize sincerely.

14. Who are your heroes? Jordan Peterson's *12 Rules for Life*. Saying grace—how to be thankful. Kintsugi. Thought-provoking \$ Questions every class.

TRADITIONAL SKILLS

Classic cars (and boats) are a great means to this end(game): they're a fascinating and frustrating and fabulous lifestyle—there's always something wrong, and broken, and expensive, and fubar, and ugly... but when you ride around in the dream-maker you've restored or repaired with your own two hands on a sunny day, emitting desire and smiles everywhere with the wind in your hair, all of life's problems either seem laughable or a piece of cake.

This class will supplement your shop time with practicals that will hone your craft and sharpen your mind, as well as introduce you to various other valuable skills and experiences.

1 x week = 25 classes.

Geography, orientation, navigation. Fill-in-the-blank maps. Geometry of the globe. Longitude and latitude. How to navigate. Culture, religion, biology, climate—everything's connected. Genetics, demographics, wealth, history. Constellation and solar systems. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Cooking—First, catch your hare. Introduction to the kitchen, basic kit, knife sharpening, butchering, techniques, ingredients, and three go-to meals. We will all cook, eat and clean up together every day. Breaking/baking bread, foraging, knife sharpening, field dress a rabbit, pluck a chicken, basic table etiquette.

Homesteading: Three-sisters garden, herb garden, raising chickens, beekeeping, and soap making, housekeeping. How to build a house.

Automobiles 101—fuel/air/spark; changing oil and tires; how to drive a stick, tool kit, road tripping. How to buy a used vehicle. Motorcycles are dangerous, but fun!

Boats, boating, sailing and seamanship, knots, fishing, clamming.

Carpentry/Woodworking—let's start with sharpening a chisel, lathing a table leg, wood types and uses, brick laying 101, tools and tricks of any trade. Welding, and metal work.

It's a jungle out there: 5 Cs of survival. OODA. Ocean survival 101. Roadkill. Starting a fire.

Books: *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (12 classes), *Kon Tiki* (8 classes).

ENGLISH

English is the greatest weapon in the world. Twenty-six letters. Nine parts of speech. Simple grammar Penmanship matters. Thinking and writing are a physical acts. You'll read the classics, out loud, to listen to the loveliness of the sounds and feel the power of words.

3 x week = 75 classes. Penmanship and oral recitation will be stressed at all times.

The Aeneid, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, A Tale of Two Cities, Lolita, Heart of Darkness, Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, The Great Gatsby, All Quiet on the Western Front, Lord of the Flies, West with the Night, Empire of the Sun, Arabian Sands, and Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

We'll spend 5 classes on each of the 13 books, except *The Aeneid* which will take us 10.

HISTORY

You'll create a history timeline, filling in the blanks all semester. Wars and civilizations. Famous and infamous figures. Re-concept the political spectrum. Understand citizenship and patriotism. Geopolitics, then and now. Why history matters. Making connections, the Greeks are us. Lessons learned. Coats of Arms/Flags/Ancestry. Morse Code, signal flags, phonetic alphabet.

2 x week = 50+ classes.

Our reading list will be: *The Iliad* (15 classes), *Plutarch's Roman Lives* (12 classes), *Montaigne's Essays* (5 classes), *Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution* (4 classes), *The Road to Serfdom* (4 classes), and *The Gulag Archipelago* (10 classes) = 50 total.

The other 6 classes will be "labs": Osiris; pilum, pemmican, printing press, papyrus, and coins.

SCIENCE

Why something rather than nothing? "The laws of the universe are god." What happens when you die? How trees communicate with other trees, Newton's genius. Which way's north? Virus vs bacteria? How to be good stewards of our precious planet. The politics of starvation. Are there UFOs? Why nuclear energy is the greenest future. IQ, and you. Great inventions. Misc. games: Einstein's Fish, Kryptos and codes, potato gun and clown fish.

2 x week = 50 classes.

Reading: *Cosmos* (12 classes), *The Worst Journey in the World* (16 classes), *Walden Pond* (4 classes), *Frankenstein* (4 classes), *Brave New World* (7 classes) = 52 classes.

The other 6 classes will be “labs”: how to find north, solar vs wind vs nuclear, collecting and analyzing trash, Popsicle bridges, animal anatomy.

ARTS

A top ten romp through the fundamentals of art, including painting, sculpture, theater, architecture and film, and the transcendent quest for understanding and meaning.

2 x week = 50 classes. Five categories with 9 masterpieces each for a total of 45 – 1 class per masterpiece rotating through the categories = 45 classes.

The other 5 classes will be for “practicals,” e.g. all students will write at least one song and one sonnet, design their dream house, write a poem, and draw a self-portrait.

10 Poems: *Ode on a Grecian Urn, Leda and the Swan, Sonnet 29, She walks in beauty, If, Ulysses, Life as Meditation, The Red Wheel Barrow/Nantucket, and Lying in a Hammock.../Autumn Begins...*

10 Art Masterpieces: *Landscape with the fall of Icarus, Laocoon, David, The Last Supper, Starry Night, Breezin’ up, Guernica, The Persistence of Memory, and Flags*

10 Performances: *Trojan Women, Oedipus Rex, The Tempest, Shakespeare in Love, Tosca, 12 Angry Men, Marat/Sade, Cabaret, and Man on Wire*

10 Music: *Beethoven’s 9th, O mio bambino, Rachmaninov 2, Summertime, Hound dog, Send in the clowns, Take Five, Bridge over troubled water, and Marley*

10 Architectural Wonders: *Pyramids, Parthenon, Chartres, Eiffel Tower, Empire State Building, Washington Monument, Vietnam Wall, Great Wall of China, and The Elms*

BUSINESS BASICS

First, students will be introduced to and take over the running of Old’s Cool Academy e-commerce business—social media, sales, marketing, inventory, and fulfillment. New products can also be introduced. As capitalist as it gets.

Most of business basics will overlap with Life Skills 101, with the end goal being to build, above all, character, confidence, and competence, i.e. polite, patient, and more than presentable professionals—starting with punctuality, “the courtesy of kings,” to quote Louis XIV.

1 x week = 25 classes

We’ll dive right in with: How to write a resumé, and cover letter. Compose a hand-written thank you note. Stand up straight. Admit errors. Throw in an appropriate joke. Or two. With aplomb!

How to interview—show up on time, dress well, look the interviewer in the eye, etc. LinkedIn profile basics, and advanced upgrades. How to compose a blog article that has impact and interestingness.

Bring value to every job or challenge, no matter how mundane or seemingly unimportant. You can learn something from everyone. Never gossip. Money changes everything. And nothing.

The Lean Start-Up: come up with an idea and then learn the mechanics of starting your own business first-hand by diving right in. *The E-Myth* and other myths busted. Business accounting basics. Business success is simple: great product, great customer service. Period.

Navigating office politics. Don't take anything personally; don't have any expectations. Always think win/win.

Time management and prioritizing. How to write a press release. Internship win/win. What's an MVP, and how to evaluate, modify, relaunch. Write a perfect recommendation. Price's Law/The Pareto Principle, The Peter principle, The Gini Coefficient. Buy low, sell high!

Business book list: *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* (12 classes); *Liar's Poker* (5 classes); *The Prince* (8 classes).

EVERY DAY/WEEK READING

A Word A Day
Delancey Place
The Marginalian
Financial Times Weekend
Quillette
Unherd

MASTER CLASS

We will have a "master" lecturer once a week, every Friday morning at 11 am, for a total of 25, on a broad range of topics. Here is the (tentative) list:

1. Abe Schoerer – Scythians, Newton, and smooshing grapes
2. Tristan St. Germain – God is dead
3. Mike Lerario – Be the Fulcrum
4. Andre Arguimbau – Wood craft
5. Ed Kane – How is the cow?
6. Rose Keravauri – How to fight like a girl
7. Emlen Drayton – The Laughing Philosopher
8. Peter Stack – Yalie extraordinaire
9. Donald Osborne – An Operatic Life
10. Frank Garafalo – Master of Etiquette
11. Mike Cataldo – Wanna bet?
12. Dan O'Connell – At Home At Sea
13. Mike Longo – From Plebe to CEO
14. Emily Allen-Hornblower – Latin marches; Greek sings.
15. James Cataldo – King of your own Castle
16. Doc Horton – It's not brain surgery
17. Don Stewart – Doctor Ball-Point Pen
18. Nick Benson – Carved in Stone
19. Kurt Keville – Juice Hive
20. Ed Parker – Out of Cackalack
21. Dan Berger – The sky's the limit
22. Alexis Handelman – Breaking Bread
23. Roosevelt Montas – Unjailed?
24. Lauren Fide – A Dancing Life
25. Doug Wheelock – We Have Liftoff!

SHOP CLASS

ALL STUDENTS will either build a boat or restore a vintage automobile/motorcycle as a requirement for graduation.

The choice of boats is up to the student, but our three recommendations are:

Lutra cedar strip canoe from Otter Creek
Petral Play Kayak from Guillemot Kayaks
Jimmy Skiff II, sailing pram from Chesapeake Light Craft

Vintage car restoration is wide open, but we've already done a 1961 gray fin-tail Mercedes nicknamed "The Bismarck," and a 1969 Beetle Convertible.

As for motorcycles, our two favorites are a 1977 Honda CB 175 in Hawaiian Orange, and a 1966 Honda Super Cub. Original patina is only original once.

EXTRA-CURRICULARS—OPTIONAL

Students choice: boxing, skeet shooting, sailing, rowing, horseback riding, dance.

APPRENTICESHIP

The second half of the Academy's program is a paid six-month mentorship out in the real world, in the field or career path of your choice. We'll match you with a company that will nurture and guide you, teaching you the basic skills necessary to being successful in the position, while you'll bring enthusiasm, a professional can-do attitude, and heaps of elbow grease and sweat equity to the job. A win-win situation for everyone. And, you'll tap in to a worldwide community of like-minded go-getters, who will provide a life-time of mentorship and advice.

Students will read six additional books during their apprenticeship for a grand total of 34 books for the entire program.

Here's that list: *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*, *The Peloponnesian Wars* (Thucydides), *The Armies of the Night*, *A Separate Peace*, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

CITIZENSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Students will study *The Declaration of Independence*, the greatest document in the history of the universe, bar none, and how and why the *U.S. Constitution* is its magnificent and enduring offspring. Students will come to know and love the wisdom and impact of these astounding philosophical and cultural achievements.

Respect and personal responsibility are the cornerstone of any successful society, and they must be taken seriously. Our Quaker grandmother taught us "Doing well by doing good," genuine kindness, given with sincerity and generosity, was one of the keys to a meaningful and happy life.

This spirit of service, *noblesse oblige*, will be a large part of our mission, and will extend beyond our family to our neighborhood and city (there will be mandatory community service), and to our great nation too. A great education should also promote great citizenship, and to us this is always summed up in the famous motto: Duty. Honor. Country.

UN-JAILED AT LAST?

Our teaching method will be a dialectic salted sometimes with Socratic irony. We're all about posing provocative questions, or making bold thesis statements and then presenting facts and data—historical perspective/refutation, the full spectrum of opinions and counter-arguments, and a healthy welcome dose skepticism will ensue.

So the cheeky gauntlet has been thrown down in the headline—let's see where we go with it.

"I sit with Shakespeare, and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm and arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed Earth and the tracery of stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?" – *The Souls of Black Folk* – W. E. B. Du Bois

Emerson said something like "there is only perception, and morality" and I don't think that that's just another "little darling" theory. He also said that the "eye is the first circle, the horizon the second" and what he means by that is that we see the world through our own eyes, and that affects not only our perception, obviously, but the morality of the perception too.

There was an article in the *Financial Times* on Sunday about the intimacy of baking and breaking bread together, which I agreed with, for the most part—it was personal and insightful. The accompanying photograph was Winslow Homer's painting *The Watermelon Boys* (look it up and save me 1,000 words). The author saw it as a commentary on the racism of the time, and how the boy in the middle was looking worried because he shouldn't have been fraternizing with his schoolboy friend, who was oblivious to anything but his own pleasurable, sunny-summer's-day engorgement. And the weight of the world of prejudice and exclusion was secretly bursting through in triumph, like sad disdain.

I saw it differently—three friends having a secret snack, maybe even a literal stolen moment in an essential green field, while one boy was worried he was late for chores, or something, and his mother might come looking for him.

This difference in interpretations reminded me of Leonard Bernstein, in the opening scene of the Young People's Concert series, conducting the William Tell Overture, and then asking the audience "What does this music mean?"

"That's just what I thought you'd say," he responds, "cowboys, bandits, horses, the wild west. I know my little daughter, Jamie, who's five years old, agrees with you. When she heard me play this piece, she said - 'That's the Lone Ranger song, Hi-ho Silver! 'Well, I hate to disappoint her, and you too, but it isn't about the Lone Ranger at all. It's about notes—E Flats and F sharps. You see, no matter how many times people tell you stories about what music means, forget them. Stories are not what the music means at all. Music is never about anything. Music just is. Music is notes, beautiful notes and sounds put together in such a way that we get pleasure out of listening to them, and that's all it is."

We can get pure, unprojected pleasure out of Rossini, as much as we get out of Shakespeare, Balzac or Dumas, no matter how heavy or opaque our myopic baggage may be, by just listening to what they had to say. The watermelon boys don't care who's looking at them, or why. Or how. They're busy eating. The transcendence of Homer's subtle vision is inherent, not incidental, and speaks across time and place, first, eloquent, then irrevocable. The same is true for almost all art masterpieces, and classical literature too—great books are great a priori, and the ideals they embody are worth living, and dying for, or else our whole magnificent civilization would already have been annihilated. Content is character.

Wait, don't abandon ship yet! There is a point I'm trying to make—these meanderings have meaning—*advantavit sinus, pulcher et fortissimus*—and it leads us to Martin Luther King Jr of all people.

After he became a famous civil rights leader, following on the success of his bus boycott in Birmingham, (no burning, looting, or rock throwing, BTW) he moved to Atlanta and was feeling “almost an eagerness to give the rest of my life to the pursuit of the cultural, intellectual and aesthetic ideas I've been pulled away from.” He was hired by Morehouse College, his alma mater, to teach a course he called “Social Psychology I,” in which he used the Socratic Method to discuss and debate the Great Books. Sound familiar? Well, the similarities end pretty quickly after that—he was Martin Luther King Jr after all.

King's syllabus moves mostly chronologically from antiquity through to the 19th Century very-American ethical and practical system of utilitarianism, as championed by Emerson first among many others. King believed that “to study the past is not only to encounter a world of monstrous injustices, but also to encounter the values in the name of which we can reject and rectify those injustices,” according to Roosevelt Moras, a senior lecturer at Columbia University's Centre for American Studies. Except for the pretentious spelling of center, I couldn't agree more. The “conversation” in King's class included Rousseau's Social Contract, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, the “brutish, nasty, and short” leviathan in any classroom.

Here are some of the questions on King's final exam: “Appraise the Student Movement in its practice of law-breaking in light of Aquinas's Doctrine of Law”; “State and Evaluate Aristotle's theory of slavery”; “List and evaluate the radical ideas presented in Plato's Republic.” I won't go into my analysis here—come to the Academy and you'll understand exactly what I think about these things. And what you think about them too.

And I'm not going to opine on the fashionable assault these days in the halls of academia on the un-p.c. faults of King's Great book choices and the “whiteness” of his authors, which, according to the mob, must disqualify them from having any validity because they are, it goes without saying, Euro-centric and colonialist. Um, St. Augustine was a Berber, I believe. Caesar was himself a slave; and Gandhi a very short, bald, brown Hindu. Judge a book by the character of its content (and not its cover), the same way you'd judge a man. This explosive canon of dynamite ideas and liberating morality is one of the most powerful weapons we have ever created to advance our ideals of social justice—and, oh, the irony of cancelling it on thin, horizontal grounds.

King was arrested shortly after he taught his course, for organizing another demonstration of all things (surprise, surprise), which must be why there wasn't a Social Psychology II. While incarcerated, he wrote a *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*—a masterful recapitulation of his teachings. (That word makes me think of “surrendering again, instead of ‘summary.’”) He invokes

Socrates and quotes Aquinas and Augustine from memory, it seems, tracing “the moral arc of the universe,” which he thought would inevitably “bend towards justice.”

If the last prison scribbles you read was *Mein Kampf*, like it was for me, this will be an erudite and educational delight. King, the real King, should rise again—his common-sense moral vision is revelatory and necessary, especially in our alarming, turbulent time—with the confused struggling of ignorant armies everywhere. Unfortunately, renaissance is much more difficult than revolution, and “Don’t tread on me” seems to be the flag flying over King’s kingdom these days. But the worm will turn.

The point is we must recover this venerable political tradition, the literate and lovely strings that bind us all the way back to our beginnings, and which hold the keys to enlightenment and meaning for all of us. The virtues of tolerance and temperance are the perfect antidote to today’s gormless provinciality and division. The common-sense King knew well that the patriarchy—male, white, elitist, and abusive at times, granted, is also the benevolent and wise connective bridge, the perfectly-flawed but essential foundation to a prosperous, just, and great nation, if we are to continue to have one at all. Protest marches; freedom sings.