Foundations of American Thought Course Description

A Word about Course Objectives
We believe that the ultimate aim of a complete education is to help each student to flourish, namely, to rightly order his or her soul and body through acquisition of skills and information, growth in discernment and mental acuity, establishment of justified true beliefs, formation of Godly sentiments and habits, and growth in understanding of God, one’s self, humankind, and the rest of God’s creation so that he or she can grow deeper in the love and knowledge of God, becoming more like Christ through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Torrey Academy can by no means encompass the entirety of such an education in its scope. Hence, while keeping the larger vision in view, we focus on the following essential objectives in the three core classes:

(1) Development of crucial skills—As the basis for true understanding and discernment, the following skills are paramount: critical thinking and reasoning, reading comprehension and biblical hermeneutics, written and oral communication.

(2) Formation of crucial sentiments and habits—As models for students to imitate, tutors and staff will help students value the life of the mind, reverence the Bible as is its due, love and desire God, love one another, value integrated learning across the disciplines, develop humility and self-discipline, cultivate a teachable attitude, defer to others, respect authority, desire holiness, be zealous for Truth and true doctrine, oppose anti-Christian ideologies (specifically: materialism, naturalism, scientism, skepticism, relativism), work diligently, follow through, practice study as an act of worship and service to God.

(3) Establishment of justified true beliefs—While not taught explicitly by the tutors, the following beliefs are assumed as the foundation for all Torrey learning, are modeled by the tutors, and are articulated in many of the texts, especially by the authors in The Inklings curriculum: belief in metaphysical and epistemic realism; that faith and reason work together and are not antithetical; that the various fields of study inform one another and are rightly informed by knowledge of Christ; that religious, aesthetic, and ethical beliefs can be justified and true (or unjustified or false) and therefore are to be considered fields of knowledge; that the Christian cultural and intellectual heritage is rich, beautiful, good, and true and makes the most sense out of reality; that God’s design for human flourishing is holistic, encompassing the intellect, the volition, the affections, and the body; that knowledge of God rightly informs school, vocation, relationships, lifestyle, hobbies, play, and all of life.

Foundations of American Thought

Building on the skills learned in the Inklings class, this course provides continued growth in critical thinking, academic writing, and biblical hermeneutics while providing a strong foundation in early American literature, history, and government. Students study the founding documents of the United States and formative Supreme Court cases, along with other literary and theological writings. Authors include John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Charles de Montesquieu,

The students also study law and authority, along with other themes, in the biblical books of Exodus, Amos, and Romans. We recommend that parents and independent study programs count this class as meeting the requirements for thirty-five high school academic units: American Literature (ten units), Bible/Theology (ten units), American History (ten units), and Government (five units).

Specific Course Objectives:

Students will become competent in biblical hermeneutics. They will be able to

- reverence the books of the Bible as is due to God’s inspired and inerrant Word
- identify textual and historical context for a biblical passage
- identify and articulate the main theme or argument of a biblical book
- identify and articulate the structure of specific biblical books
- understand the difference between the meaning and the significance of a biblical passage

Students will develop an understanding of early American literature. They will be able to

- identify and summarize major arguments in early American nonfiction work
- identify major themes in works of early American fiction and summarize the plot
- support their interpretations of a text with textual citations
- identify and respond to key themes in early American texts
- characterize the different genres of sermon, essay, novel, poem, and short story
- compare and contrast the ideas and writing styles of the various authors studied
- trace the literary development of early American culture and identify key movements

Students will develop an understanding of early American history. They will be able to

- trace major historical developments of the United States as expressed in her literature
- identify the ideas that shaped American culture and trace their evolution
- critique these historical and cultural ideas in light of Biblical Theology
- support opinions and beliefs about American history and culture with reasonable arguments
- respond to opposition to their opinions and beliefs with reasonable rebuttals
- articulate significant historical and cultural ideas in outline and essay form

Students will develop an understanding of American government. They will be able to

- identify key elements and competing philosophies of government
- articulate the competing ideas and ideologies underscoring the Federalist and Anti-Federalist debates
- identify the philosophies that shaped the U.S. constitution
- explicate biblical teachings on law, authority, and social justice in Exodus, Amos, and Romans
- identify the propensities for good and ill in American government and society
- trace and critique the evolution of American philosophies of government
Course objectives will be realized through the intensive reading, writing, and discussion required of the students. The discussion and the writing assignments will serve as the evaluative tools to assess the student’s progress toward the set objectives. Student notebooks serve as a catalog of the student’s progress through the course of the academic year, and the final term paper is equivalent to a final exam.