



# ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

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## THE ANCIENT DISCIPLINE OF RHETORIC

By Reverend Allen M. Baker, III

Rhetoric has fallen on hard times in the West. In fact most people use the word pejoratively today. They may say of politicians, for example, "The two sides on the Hill are going back and forth with their rhetoric." Rhetoric, the third part of the Trivium of classical education, is the science of public speaking. It has been, along with grammar and logic, the very foundation of learning in Western civilization for at least 2500 years. It all began around 467 B.C. when Thrasylbulus, a corrupt dictator of the Sicilian city-state of Syracuse, had taken real estate from the people and given it to his friends. After Thrasylbulus was ousted, the citizens began suing one another over title deed issues. Since there were no lawyers there at the time, they had to argue their own cases before a jury of their peers, which could number several hundred. Most were inexperienced communicators who lost their property simply because of stage fright. The Athenians, knowing a good business opportunity when they saw one and having a much longer litigious tradition, rescued the citizens of Syracuse by opening schools of rhetoric and teaching people how to communicate publicly. Rhetoric follows very naturally in the wake of grammar and logic. Grammar is the rote learning stage of classical education. It is here that young students (up to grade six) learn the grammar of all subjects. Children at this age learn best by memorizing facts. They love singing chants to learn the grammar of English, Latin, history time lines, and math tables; and they learn theology through the Westminster Shorter

Catechism and the Children's Catechism. Granted, they don't know yet what these things mean. This comes later. However, this is the foundation upon which the rest of the Trivium is built.

Next comes the logic stage, grades seven and eight. It is at this age that children begin to ask the question "Why?" They challenge everything. God made them that way, and classical education has long understood this and used it to the benefit of children's learning. We teach informal logic in seventh grade where our students learn to spot fallacies like ad hominem, ad populum, ignoratio elenche, post hoc ergo propter hoc, ad baculum, and ab annis arguments. And in eighth grade we teach formal logic, instructing our students in the art of syllogism and propositional logic. The students do extremely well with this because God made them to think, and children at this age are ready to think. If I were into conspiracy theories (which I am not), I would be forced to believe that our public educators over the last sixty years have purposely moved from grammar, logic, and rhetoric to produce a society of unthinking, illiterate citizens who cannot communicate, in order to rule them with an intellectual elite.

When students reach the tenth grade, they are able to build upon their grasp of grammar and logic and move on to the rhetoric stage. Since they now have the ability to think and they command a wealth of facts, they are able to put it all together with force, beauty, and appeal. I liken this to a budding piano virtuoso who must work through the rigor of learning piano scales.



*“While teaching the science of communication is very important, it should also be said that virtuous character must under gird it”*

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Improvisation at this stage just won't do. Finally, after mastering the basics, theory, and music of great composers, he or she is ready to play that great music in his or her own style.

Rhetoric has been abused at times throughout history. Some have manipulated it terribly. Adolph Hitler comes immediately to mind. However, it has also been used very powerfully for good. Daniel Webster, a great rhetorician of early America, was a powerful and popular speaker who did much good in American government. Winston Churchill, by the force of his personality and courage bolstered by his amazing rhetorical ability literally saved England from oblivion at the hands of the Nazis in World War II. And as recently as the 1980s, both friend and foe of President Ronald Reagan referred to him as "the great communicator."

While teaching the science of communication in both speaking and writing is very important, it should also

be said that virtuous character must under gird it. Aristotle, who wrote the first book on rhetoric some 2500 years ago (which is still in print today), understood this. He said that any great speaker



must have three things: logos, pathos, and ethos. His argument must be factual, truth-filled, and logical; that's logos. He must speak with passion; he must really believe and feel what he is saying; that's pathos. And he must have ethos; the

character to back up what he is saying. A grossly overweight person, for example, no matter how impassioned and factual his argument may be, is going to have trouble selling dietary supplements to people who wish to lose weight. This is where the Christian aspect of a classical and Christian school education comes into play. We know that godly character is necessary to the development of our students. We hope to produce godly, Christian scholars who will transform our next generation. While knowledge, and expertise in communicating it, is essential, so also is Christian character.

*This article is reprinted by permission of the author, the Reverend Allen M. Baker III, pastor of Golden Isles Presbyterian Church (PCA) and Chairman of the Board for The Whitefield School, St. Simons Island, Georgia, a charter member of ACCS. This article first appeared in the October 2001 issue of The Whitefield News, a newsletter of The Whitefield School.*

## ROCKBRIDGE STUDENTS STUDY A MEDIEVAL SIEGE WEAPON

*by Mr. Blair*

The ninth grade Analytic Science class completed the first quarter by applying the scientific method to a small-scale trebuchet. A trebuchet is a medieval weapon used to assault castles under siege.

This device was typically set-up outside the range of the castle's bowmen, to hurl anything from boulders to diseased animals into the castle. While similar in concept to a catapult, a trebuchet applies a first class lever, a large counterweight, and a sling to launch its projectile a great distance.

The challenge set before the ninth grade class was to apply the scientific method to identify the trebuchet configuration that would yield the greatest range, or shot distance. The students examined the following variables: projectile mass, counterweight mass, sling design, and presence or absence of wheels on the base of the trebuchet.

While only 16 inches long, our best trebuchet configuration

fired a 31 gram ball of clay 257 inches. That's over 21 feet!

Upon completion of their written lab reports and oral presentations, the class demonstrated their trebuchet during the fourth grade's Medieval Feast.



*Brandon Antkowiak tests his sling design during Analytic Science.*

# SPORTS & SPECTACLES



The 4th grade celebrated their Medieval Feast in appropriate fashion.



History Parade – This year's 5th grade parades in period clothing, donned in colonial garb.



Rockbridge Academy Soccer Team 2002 – Front Row: Beau Bustanoby, Grant Wilson, Nick Atkins, Michael McKenna, Palmer Horst, Gregg Dwyer, John Vanik, Gilbert Horst, Alexander Cochran; Back Row: Mr. Tim Feeney, Andy Morsberger, Kenny Trovato, Matt Tucker, John Hollidge, Stephen Orazem, Zachary Cochran, Stephen Horst, Shawn Laser, Lucas Roe, Mr. Steve Hollidge.



Gilbert Horst puts his best foot forward against CHEN (Christian Home Educators Network).

## GIANT AND SAFEWAY CARDS



It's not too late to sign up for Giant or Safeway cards to benefit Rockbridge Academy. Details and forms for Giant's Bonus Bucks program and Safeway's e-script program are available in the school office.

## *Inclement Weather?*

What should you do in case of snow or severe weather? Turn your radio dial to either WRBS (FM 95.1) or WBAL (AM 1090). Rockbridge Academy announces all early dismissals or school closings on both of these radio stations. We will also leave a message on our answering machine to indicate whether or not we will close. As always, we respect your decision to do whatever you feel is necessary for your family.