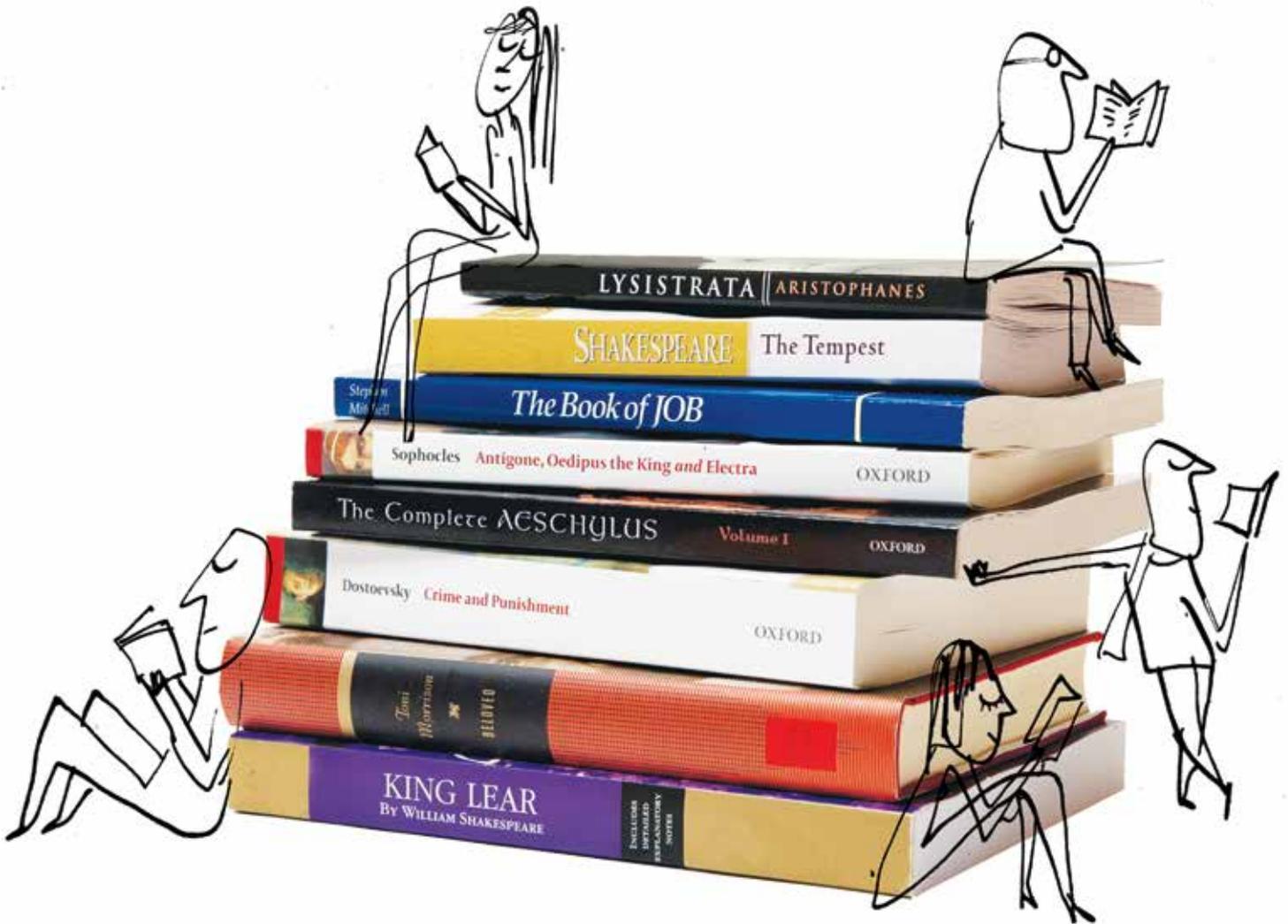


Promethean Summer

Professional Development Boldly Focuses on the Classics



BY JENNIFER DUBIN

On July 8, 2013, Keith Black set his alarm for the first time that summer. The high school English teacher in Dallas, Texas, usually liked to spend his break between school years tweaking his lesson plans and reading for pleasure. But for three weeks last July, he had little time for leisure.

Black had voluntarily enrolled in the Sue Rose Summer Institute for Teachers at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.* He had first learned of the program from colleagues who told him it would reinvigorate his teaching and renew his passion for lifelong learning, and on both counts it did. Throughout

the three-week institute, he did not hear the terms “21st-century skills,” “high-stakes testing,” or “value-added assessment,”¹ among other education buzzwords that too often fail to develop teachers and students in thoughtful ways.

Instead of being subjected to what he disparagingly calls “PowerPoint drudgery,” Black spent eight hours each day discussing classic works of literature, 17 in all, that he had read the previous three months on his own: *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Peace*, *Lysistrata*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Blood Wedding*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Beloved*.

Each morning, he attended lectures on these works given by the Dallas Institute’s faculty members, who hold PhDs in literature. Afterward, he discussed the texts with teachers just like

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*To learn more about the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, visit www.dallasinstitute.org.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGE BLOCH, PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL

himself in small faculty-led seminars. In the afternoons, he sometimes watched a film relating to the literature studied that day or attended another discussion or lecture. Then he wrote a response to a tightly focused question posed by the faculty to demonstrate what he had learned. “It’s divine,” says Black, summing up the experience three days before it ended. “I’m surrounded by intelligent people talking about intelligent books, intelligently.”

For 30 years, the Dallas Institute has treated teachers as intellectuals. To that end, the nonprofit educational organization, founded by former faculty members at the University of Dallas, offers teachers from all grade levels and all disciplines—not just English—an experience that either reacquaints them with or introduces them to the literature of Western civilization. The classic works studied are taught at the level of a graduate-school course and do not at all resemble typical professional development. Educators who attend this program rise to the challenge of engaging in insightful discussions about these complicated texts. In fact, they hunger to do so.

“Teachers work with human material, and the best way traditionally to gain access to human things is through the humanities, which are the foundation of a liberal arts education,” says Claudia Allums, who directs the Summer Institute. But a liberal arts education encompasses more than literature or philosophy or history courses, she says. It’s a particular spirit with which one approaches any discipline. “If a teacher has a broad, strong liberal arts education, then he or she is going to have a broad, strong foundation in human sensibilities. That’s the foundation we believe is important for any teacher’s wisdom.”

Today, that belief is not widely shared. With the overwhelming focus on testing and measuring, it’s rare to hear words such as “wisdom,” “humanities,” and “human sensibilities” in relation to public education. Occasionally, reports like *The Heart of the Matter: The Humanities and Social Sciences for a Vibrant, Competitive, and Secure Nation*,² published last year by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, will decry the narrowing of the curriculum and call for a renewed emphasis on the liberal arts and their importance. But in the end, often little will be done to act on these ideas, however noble.

Given that in the 1980s, the test-based accountability that has failed to strengthen public education first got its start in Texas, it’s ironic that a small Dallas nonprofit offers a meaningful alternative to supporting teachers in such a test-obsessed environment.

The Summer Institute provides “a learning experience that helps remind us of the joy of learning, the joy that must be present if we are to have any hope of leading students to a love of learning,” says Allums. “The institute is where you recover what it means to be a teacher.”

For many years, the Dallas Institute has encouraged teachers to read, understand, and enjoy the classics. In doing so, it is powerfully connecting teachers with great literature to make teachers aware of their own greatness at a time when many of them feel powerless to help students like never before.

Hope in the Humanities

The Dallas Institute was established in 1980 to further the intellectual life of the city by featuring speakers, showing films, and organizing book discussions. Among the founders were Donald

and Louise Cowan (see the sidebar on page 38). Donald was a former president of the University of Dallas and a professor of physics, while Louise had been a chair of the English department and dean of graduate studies there. Both left the university to help start the Dallas Institute. Donald Cowan died in 2002.

In response to the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, which criticized the state of public education, Louise Cowan decided to create a literature-based summer seminar for high school English teachers. That same year, she applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to fund her program, which it did for four years. “Although the program makes no attempt to change the English curriculum in the secondary schools,” she wrote in her grant application, “its effect through the participants will be to introduce into the body of the educational process a self generat-

The Summer Institute provides
“a learning experience that helps
remind us of the joy of learning.”

—Claudia Allums

ing source of cohesion and understanding that will permeate all its parts. This is the essential element in any reform the humanities can effect, perhaps the only way in which the ‘rising tide of mediocrity’ in our schools may be stemmed.”

In her proposal, Cowan conceived of a four-week program in which the same works would be studied every other summer. In even-numbered years, the seminar would be called “The Epic Tradition,” and teachers would study the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Moby-Dick*, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the West African *Mwindo Epic*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the book of Genesis, as well as excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” In odd-numbered years, the seminar would be called “Tragedy and Comedy,” and would include many of the same works that Keith Black would read nearly 30 years later. The first Summer Institute, “The Epic Tradition,” was held in 1984.

Louise Cowan wrote the syllabus for the seminars, officially called the Sue Rose Summer Institutes for Teachers (renamed in 2008 for a faithful volunteer with the program). Cowan selected the works for their universal appeal and timelessness. Over the years, the list of texts studied each summer has remained largely unchanged. She based the teaching of the classics on her literary genre theory, a lens through which to interpret literature. Her theory operates on the premise that literature

consists of four distinct, yet sometimes overlapping, parts: epic, lyric, tragic, and comic. Thus, the Summer Institute's focus reflects Cowan's life's work.

In June 2013, to round out its offerings, the Dallas Institute began a weeklong institute titled "Lyric Tradition I," in honor of the fourth piece of Cowan's genre theory. Like "The Epic Tradition" and the "Tragedy and Comedy" institutes, "Lyric Tradition I" focuses on the same works every other summer. It includes Old Testament Psalms; Shakespearean sonnets; and works of the meta-physical poets John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and George Herbert, romantics such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats, as well as Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Gerard Manley Hopkins, A. E. Housman, and William Butler Yeats. "Lyric Tradition II," to be offered beginning in summer 2014, will feature 20th-century works, including those of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and the contemporary poets. Though Cowan no longer teaches during the Summer Institute, she still keeps a hand in it and gives new lectures every summer. At 96, she wrote the syllabi for the new lyric institutes.

In 30 years, even in the midst of great change within the broader field of education, few things about the Summer Institute have changed. It originally lasted four weeks, but in the mid-1990s, as area school districts lengthened the school year, the founders of the Dallas Institute shortened the program to three weeks. Also, though the institutes were originally for high school English teachers, teachers from other disciplines and grade levels heard about them a few years after they started and asked to attend. Now teachers from all academic disciplines, as well as art, music, physical education, and special education, and from all grade levels, preK-12, can and do participate.

With its initial grant from the NEH, the Summer Institute enrolled 45 teachers each summer during the program's first four years. But when Cowan wanted to increase the number of participants, the Dallas Institute's founders began to seek funds from donors instead of relying on grants. Today, anywhere from 45 to 60 teachers attend each summer. To this day, the Dallas Institute continues its fundraising efforts to help defray the costs of running all its programming, including the Summer Institute. According to the NEH, the summer program is the only one of

its kind in the country. In 2008, an NEH official, speaking in honor of the Summer Institute's 25th anniversary, lauded the program as a "model for the nation."

The cost for an individual teacher to attend the Summer Institute is \$300, which covers books and some food. Usually, schools or districts pay this amount. Sometimes, though, district administrators don't see the value in the program or simply don't have the funds and can't pay for the course, so teachers must pay themselves. Those who attend mostly come from Dallas-area public schools and a few private schools. Often, an out-of-state teacher who has heard about the Summer Institute will enroll, but he or she must find and pay for lodging. Last summer, one teacher came from Arizona. She stayed with a Dallas teacher who was also participating. Because she couldn't afford the airfare, she drove 17 hours to attend.

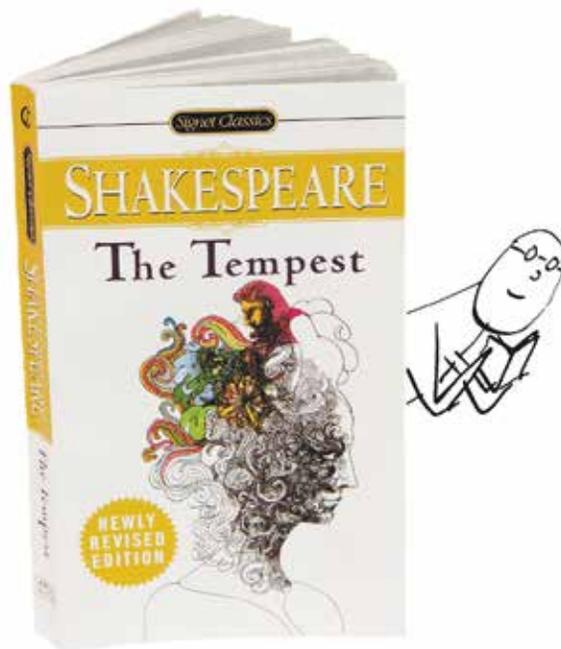
Besides paying the fee, teachers must submit a typed, two-page paper chronicling their "intellectual journey" to explain why they wish to enroll. They must also agree to 10 "statements of commitment," in which they promise to attend all 15 days of class, to read and prepare for at least half the assigned readings before class begins, and to turn off any technology, including smartphones, during class.

Each year, some teachers take the course to earn professional development credits from their district (some districts accept credit and some do not), while others take it for graduate credit toward a master's of humanities degree offered by the University of Dallas. Those pursuing the master's degree must write a 10- to 15-page paper, grounded in literary criticism, on a topic of their

choice, and submit it two weeks after the institute.

Each day, all teachers write in a journal to reflect on a question posed by a faculty member. On Fridays, everyone is given two hours in the afternoon to write an essay on a prompt assigned to the whole class. Though the papers are not graded, even for those taking the course for graduate credit, faculty members do read them and mark them with comments.

Typically, four full-time faculty members and one junior faculty member teach the Summer Institute. Guest lecturers also speak during the three weeks. Last summer's full-time faculty members included Claudia Allums, who directs the summer



COVER ART BY MILTON GLASER, THE TEMPEST, BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, PUBLISHED BY SIGNET CLASSICS.

"Teachers are the heart of any educational system. They represent content more than method. Their method is their own. But the content is shared."

—Louise Cowan

program; Larry Allums, her husband, who directs the Dallas Institute; Glenn Arbery, a former director of the Summer Institute; Diana Senechal,³ a writer and public school teacher in New York City; and Elizabeth Reyes, last summer's junior faculty member who teaches at Thomas Aquinas College in California.

Teachers enrolled in the "Tragedy and Comedy" institute meet with both Larry and Claudia Allums in the spring when they attend an hourlong orientation. There, they receive their books and a messenger bag for carrying them. Years when "Tragedy and Comedy" takes place, the orientation occurs in April. In years when "The Epic Tradition" is offered, the orientation takes place in March to give teachers more of a head start on reading. They must read about 1,700 pages for "Tragedy and Comedy" compared with more than 3,000 pages for "The Epic Tradition." At both orientations, however, Claudia Allums encourages everyone to begin reading as soon as they can. Many teachers take her up on that by reading before the school year ends.

For those feeling overwhelmed at the amount of work, Allums offers Louise Cowan's advice: read fiction as quickly as possible and resist the urge to look up words. Allums admits this is difficult to do. "What we're looking for is just a general feel, a sense of the thing," Allums tells them during last April's orientation. She suggests that they mark in their books as they read. "It will make you feel better when you go back to read again," she says to nervous laughter. By the time the Summer Institute starts in July, they may think, "I don't remember any of this, but I was here," and that's all right, she tells them.

After all, Allums knows how they feel. "I sat where you're sitting in 1989 when I came here for my first Summer Institute," she says. The experience "transformed me." Allums had been teaching high school English for 10 years and was ready to quit when a mentor told her about the program. She so enjoyed the academic discussions of meaningful content that she went on to earn a PhD in humanities from the University of Dallas and came to work for the Dallas Institute in 2004.

During the orientation, Allums explains that the Summer Institute is based on great works of literature that help all teachers understand the complexities of human nature so they can better understand themselves, their students, and how to help them thrive in the world. "This is not a class about pedagogy or methodology," she continues. "Until a character or a theme in one of the works we're reading calls it to mind, we don't discuss formally teaching at all, or teachers. It's not our conversation."

A Conversation about Content

On July 8 at 8 a.m., 52 teachers arrive at the Dallas Institute to participate in this unique experience. The very setting of the Summer Institute—its location, and the relaxed pace of what takes place here—greatly differs from the hustle and bustle of the school day. The Dallas Institute sits on a quiet street in the uptown part of the city, an area known for its upscale shops and restaurants. It's housed in a two-story brick home built in 1907 that features a generous front porch with tables and chairs, where teachers write in the afternoons as ceiling fans whir overhead.

Inside, the front of the house, with its hardwood floors and wood trim, looks very much as it did at the turn of the 20th century. Parlor rooms once used for family private time are now devoted to teacher discussions of literature. On this morning,

one of those rooms is where educators help themselves to breakfast; lunch is also provided. Toward the back of the house is a large room with windows and high ceilings that was part of a renovation. At 8:45 a.m., the teachers take their seats here, as they will each day, for a morning lecture.

The first speaker is Claudia Allums, who welcomes them to the 30th Summer Institute and reads them a poem, "The World Is Too Much With Us," by William Wordsworth:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

Allums says that the above first few lines, which lament the wasting of time and talent on trivial pursuits, speak, for her, to why the teachers have gathered here this summer and the work they will do. She then discusses some of the literary terms from Aristotle's *Poetics*—such as "mimesis," meaning imitation, in the sense of making a representation, and "praxis," meaning action, in the sense of doing—that they will be referencing in their seminars. After briefly explaining what tragedy is—imitations of human actions—and what it is not—imitations of people, Allums introduces Louise Cowan, who slowly makes her way to the lectern.

A tiny woman, whose eyesight and hearing are both fading, Cowan is 96 and her mind is still sharp. In a talk that spans nearly an hour, she tells them that the Summer Institute "endows teachers with their literary heritage."

Though half of the teachers do not even teach literature, studying these works enables them to pass on universal truths to their students.

"For teachers are the heart of any educational system," she continues a few minutes later. "They represent content more than method. Their method is their own. But the content is shared."

For 30 years, Cowan has delivered the opening lecture of every Summer Institute. On this morning, she focuses much of her talk on *Prometheus Bound*, the 2,500-year-old play by Aeschylus, which they will discuss in their seminars later this morning. Cowan explains that Prometheus, a god, has stolen fire for mankind, and in so doing has given mankind the means with which to reason, to understand, and to judge, which before only the gods could do. To punish Prometheus, Zeus has him pinned to a rock where a vulture perpetually pecks away at his liver. The tension in the play is that Prometheus simultaneously represents

the figure of the martyr, the rebel, the prophet, the thief, and the teacher, and so deserves both blame and praise. It is this ambiguity that defines tragedy. “If Prometheus were mere victim, the work would not produce the effect of tragedy,” Cowan says, as the teachers furiously take notes. “But he has crossed over the line, committing what the Greeks considered hubris, and that’s overweening pride. And though he’s to be admired for his valor and his generosity, he’s at the same time to be feared for his boldness. For in Greek thought at this time, the chasm between humanity and the gods was considered to be unbridgeable.”

Although this play represents part of our ancient literary heritage, it’s too often not taught in our schools, Cowan says. The

poem, based on a myth, speaks to the fundamental qualities of our civilization, “our idealism, our greatness of soul, our capacity for sacrifice,” she says. If we do not teach it and other classics, Cowan warns, our children will grow up to be “mythless,” meaning they will fail to understand their civilization’s greatness and in turn their own. That’s where these teachers come in. Though they cannot always choose the curricula they teach, and almost half of them do not even teach literature, studying these works enables them to understand universal truths of human existence, truths that they, by virtue of being educators, can pass on to their students in one way or another.

After Cowan receives a standing ovation, Allums returns to the

Teaching and Its Spiritual Power

BY LOUISE COWAN

Though the official authority of teachers has been greatly diminished in the past century, their moral and spiritual authority is indestructible. And by spiritual authority, I’m not referring to anything connected with religion. I mean the ability to testify to the full dimensions of reality, to the enduring vitality of our myths and our mysteries.

The Greeks had a word for that region of memory where great heroes and great events reside. They called it *kleos*, something that is timeless, a dimension of memory and mystery attached to human events and just as real as empirical data. A people without access to this realm is badly hampered on its quest for greatness. And teachers are the “high priests” of this region of communal memory. Without teachers, only bits and pieces of it can emerge to ordinary life, and perhaps in distorted form.

Because I’ve spent a long lifetime of teaching and, from the vantage point of universities, viewed with frustration what has been happening in public schooling during that lifetime, I write without caution. I write of this realm of mystery surrounding our ordinary lives, the ignoring of which is having deleterious effects on our national destiny.

This realm is what Keats discovered in the “Ode to a Nightingale,” in which the poet, after following his aching heart in drowsy numbness, enters the dark wood where he hears the nightingale sing. The bird carries

within its voice the living past. And through the untroubled song of the nightingale, Keats can commune with that past.

Only the teacher as “shaman,” as a kind of nightingale, can guide his or her pupils toward the dark wood of shared human memory. Having said this, however, we must admit that in our time, a teacher’s ability to be a conduit for the past is insufficiently recognized. The world wants teachers to instruct students in practical matters, how to be adept in current procedures, so that the next generation can take over in processes that already exist. Thus, the task of the teacher is seen to be a work of relevancy, instruction, and skills necessary to maintain the status quo. The teacher’s traditional role of spiritual guide, then, already shaken in the past by dubious education theory, has in our time been all but demolished.

This determination to reduce learning to practical skills is likely to raise questions concerning the necessity of having teachers at all, except to handle electronic media, making their role that of manipulator rather than teacher. The increased emphasis on standardized testing also poses the danger of reducing the instructional role even further to educational clerk or drill master.

But despite all the misunderstanding of the role of teachers, to ask what authority they have is a little like asking the same question about mothers or fathers. The teacher’s authority is one of those ancient immemorial verities, like a parent’s, that we ought to take for granted, trusting that it’s simply in the nature of things. Poets over the centuries have given us images of the teacher’s stature: the Titan Prometheus; the centaur Chiron; the goddess Athena; the archetypal wise Old Man in so many myths and legends, from Merlin, the wizard of ethereal legends, on up to Prospero in *The*

Tempest. And in all of these, the teacher is connected with a kind of magic or at least some sort of occult powers. This “sorcery” is an important symbol, for it signifies the ability to enchant and hence points to another dimension found in the ordinary.

Yet ours is an age of unbelief in mystery. Teachers have to find an equivalent for this magic that can enable the young to pull swords from stones. For Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, this magic is “active love,” which transforms the painful events of the world. For some of us, it’s the great books whose spells are just as potent today as ever.

Though teachers are increasingly prevented from exercising their full “magical” powers in our schools, we can say at the outset that they are not and cannot be considered mere educational tools or equipment. Teachers bear a responsibility to the human race that is neither mechanical nor biological. Thus, it might best be said that teachers provide a way to rise above fate. And in the same way, they’re not part of the political establishment. Their work is to impart not official knowledge, subject to the politics of the day, but a timeless heritage, a body of wisdom belonging to the human race that teachers alone transmit.

Teachers represent—I’m not saying they possess—an entire body of knowledge. Through their very dedication to the task of learning, they have a bridge to another world, we might say, which, like magic, they use for the purpose of transporting others. So it’s not facts or any sort of ready-made knowledge that makes the effective teacher. Mechanical means can possibly handle better the transmission of facts. It’s a commitment to and a faith in intangibles, qualities, moral and spiritual values that ride on the back of the information being taught. It’s these signals of transcendence

Louise Cowan is a founder of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture and a former chair of the English department and dean of graduate studies at the University of Dallas. A recipient of the National Humanities Medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities, she has written widely on the American South, Faulkner, and the Russian novel. This article is excerpted from a lecture she gave at the Dallas Institute in 2010.

lectern. She asks the teachers to wear their nametags throughout the day, especially in the seminar groups to which they've been assigned. That way, they can get to know each other and build on one another's thoughts, the point of the seminars. She also reminds them to keep the discussion centered in the text. "What we're trying to do in the seminars is to explore the content of the play," she says.

After a short break, the teachers meet in their randomly assigned groups. Faculty member Glenn Arbery begins his seminar by asking the 11 teachers sitting around the table if they have any comments or questions. Michael says he didn't catch what Cowan said after "myth is a way of seeing." The other teachers

search their notes. "Myth is not a conduit but a way of seeing," says Donna, finding the quote.

Arbery asks, "So what does that mean?"

"A way of seeing all dimensions," says Maria.

"Really, a way of framing an issue or knowledge," says Melody.

"How is it a way of seeing something?" Arbery asks. When no one responds, he explains that through Prometheus's action we learn about ourselves.

Prometheus's crime was stealing fire, he continues. "Why fire?"

Maria says that fire symbolizes knowledge, which is what the gods possess. Another teacher adds that "knowledge is power. It's really about not wanting to share power."

that the teacher gives out, an awareness of an arena of spiritual wisdom.

The spiritual perception is necessary to the body politic. In fact, it's irreplaceable in producing free persons. And though this depository of wisdom to which teachers bear witness is referred to in books or manuscripts, accessible to private individuals, it is through teachers that this wisdom is preserved and confidently explored. Only the teacher approaches this wisdom, not to possess it but to point toward it, to profess that it exists.

I don't mean to argue that teachers have, or even should have, encyclopedic knowledge. I'm suggesting that, as teachers, they have faith in the transforming power of the realm of intangibles to which they bear witness, for they are members of a profession and a calling that guards a cumulative body of knowledge. Just as we accept the fact that doctors' authority stems from their representing the whole history of medicine, and that lawyers' authority stems from the great tradition of law, so it is with teachers—wisdom, knowledge, invisible presences stand behind them. The discipline represented by the teacher is the tradition of learning that has the power to transform those who encounter it. And so, when we use the word transformation, we're speaking of a kind of magic work by teachers, which satisfies an essential need in society.

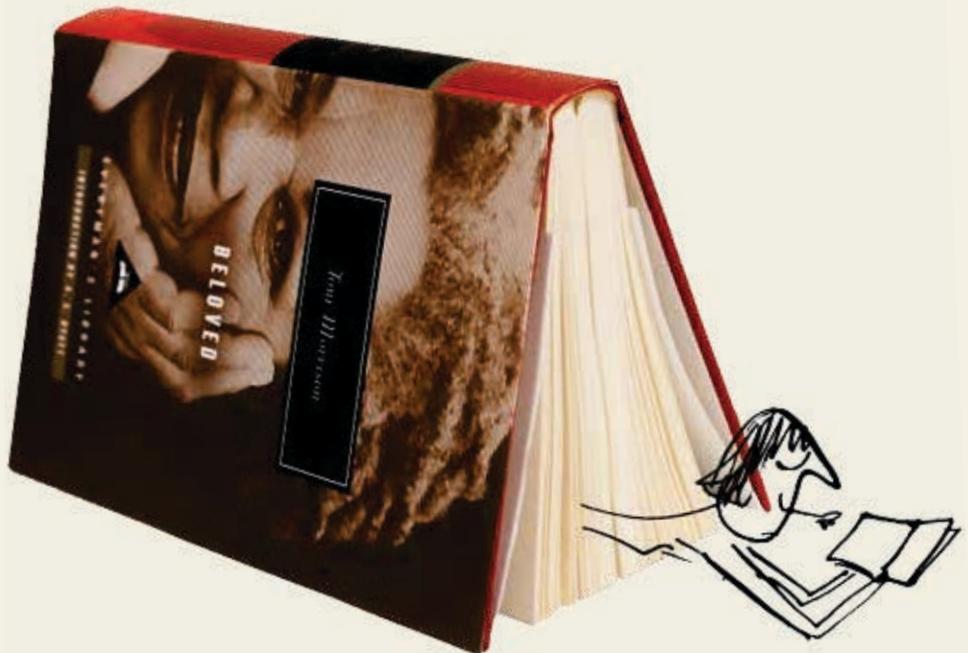
The practical world depends on the professions. Without lawyers, a society would have to try to arbitrate to make just rulings, as it would have to make medical diagnoses without doctors. But those decisions would be erratic and difficult, some brilliant and some misguided. And the same may be said of the teaching profession. People can learn without teachers, and certainly will nowadays from the Internet, but without a teacher, their learning is likely to be erratic, some of it enlightening, but a great deal of it misleading and even dangerous.

Teachers are members of a heretofore respected profession, and their concern for learning is a concern for others and hence a service to the community. Society can't do without them, and what they profess apart from the specifics of their teaching is the moral and spiritual wisdom necessary for the survival of our civilization. Individuals can no doubt make contact with this vast reservoir of achieved knowledge on their own. But its full volume and, in a sense, its public dimension are lost if we ignore those who take as their life work its dissemination.

Teachers guard, interpret, and transmit the treasures of their discipline. Without the

teaching profession, we would lose general literacy not only in the verbal but also in the mathematical realm. The authority of teachers comes not from their having an extraordinarily large body of information themselves but from a commitment to the preservation of their discipline, to putting information in perspective, consenting to be its medium, and using whatever spiritual powers are available to effect its transmission. Teachers are the bearers of something they consider more significant than themselves, more important than any method, something of enormous value to the culture. □

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Daniel says that with knowledge man can now navigate the elements and forge metal, which allows him to control nature.

Arbery moves the discussion along by directing them to a line on page 28 of their texts, in which Prometheus says, "I caused men no longer to foresee their death." He explains that Prometheus gave man the gift of not dwelling on his ultimate demise. "Seriously, if you can't get past the idea that you're going to die, you can't get yourself to do anything," Arbery says. "Prometheus's gift is to take that away."

A few minutes later, he asks them to explain the action of this play, given that not much happens with Prometheus pinned to a rock.

over the question.

Suddenly, another teacher named Heather looks up from her book and says Prometheus's motive is to teach.

Arbery nods. Prometheus's only motive is foresight, he says. "He looks past what they are now and sees what they're going to be."

"It's a choice to side with cunning over force," says Michael, quoting the word "cunning" from the text. "Wherever he finds it, he sides with it."

Arbery asks them to define cunning.

"In our world, it has a negative connotation," says Keith. Andrea says it means "by reasoning or figuring out," while Heather says it means "outsmarting."

Arbery then asks if they can imagine as teachers ever giving somebody reason.

They shake their heads no.

"Somehow the gift of fire is also the gift of the mind," he says. "There's some way that you awaken somebody's mind. You show them a possibility they didn't see. There's a kind of gift in that, isn't there?"

The teachers agree.

True to Allums's word, this discussion is one of the few times in the entire three weeks that the word "teaching" arises in relation to the text. For the two-hour seminar, the teachers follow her instructions to keep their talk focused on the literature. The discourse is thoughtful and engaging and does not resemble a typical book-club discussion or group therapy. No one says, "This reminds me of when I was ..." or "Just the other day, I was thinking about ..." Instead, they truly immerse themselves in the content and what they can glean from it.

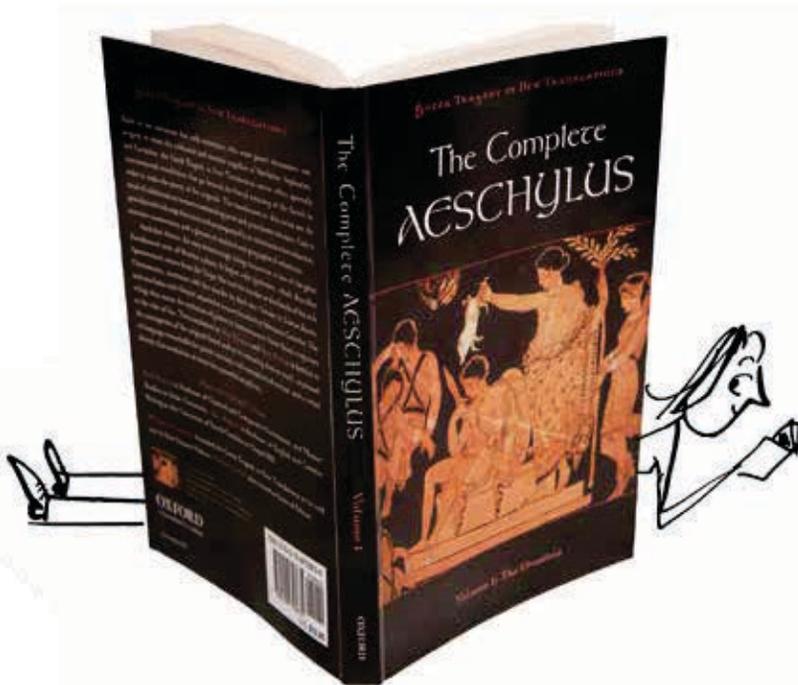
The same holds true when the teachers discuss films they watch in the afternoon or engage in discussions after guest lectures. Because of the absence of personal information shared during class, it's difficult to tell which subject and grade level these individuals teach. The literature so fascinates them that insightful comments come from all teachers. No one has trouble staying grounded in the text.

Teachers as Learners

Gail Rothstein initially wondered how much of the literature she would comprehend. The high school science teacher at Townview Magnet Center in Dallas studied music and science in college. She spends her days with scientific concepts, formulas, and facts. But a colleague who had previously attended the Summer Institute told her it would renew her desire to be a teacher. Rothstein, who has taught for 17 years, says that she has loved to read ever since she was young; she would finish books she received in school before the teacher even began to teach them. "The program sounded like some sort of heaven to me," she says.

Much to her surprise, she ended up grasping the concepts immediately and gaining an in-depth understanding of the texts. "For example," she says, "in *Prometheus Bound*, the struggle that goes through your mind is: Should I keep teaching students when some of them don't pay attention and don't seem interested? To me, Aeschylus, the author, answered my question. You accept that you must make the sacrifice."

Although Rothstein teaches pre-AP physics and earth and



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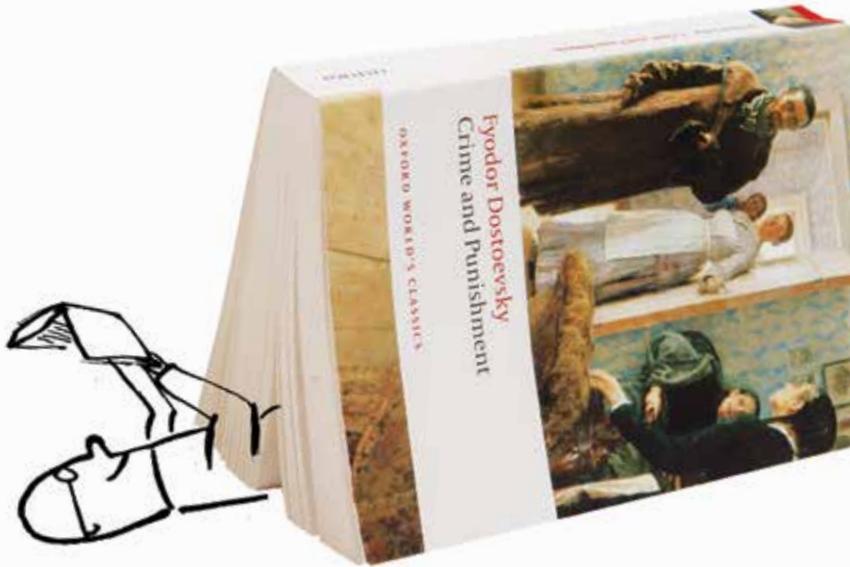
"Isn't the action the motive?" asks Heather, and Arbery nods.

"If you're faced with an action in which some choice is involved, character helps determine what choice you make," he says. "What's the choice Prometheus makes?"

To side with Zeus, the king of the gods, or to challenge him, Daniel says.

"What's Prometheus's motive?" asks Andrea, who furrows her brow and seems to pose the question as much to herself as to the rest of the class.

Arbery hints at an answer. He says Prometheus's motive is the same when he sides with Zeus and when he defies him to give man fire. The room falls silent as the group continues to puzzle



The Impact of the Sue Rose Summer Institute for Teachers

- ✓ Approximately 1,500 schoolteachers have participated since 1984.
- ✓ Typically, teachers teach 100 students each year.
- ✓ On average, teachers teach 15 years after attending the program.
- ✓ To date, participants have taught or will have taught more than 2,250,000 students.
- ✓ In a survey of participants from 2008 to 2013, nearly 70 percent said the program transformed the way they think about the teaching profession.

space sciences, she says that the classics do relate to her courses. “Our scientific method is based on Greek logic and philosophy,” she says. “Geometry was written in 350 BC by Euclid. I use that.” She also incorporates Greek mythology in her lessons. For instance, she tells students that Jupiter has four moons, named for the lovers of the god Jupiter, for whom the planet is named. Teaching such myths brings science to life; her students find them riveting.

She is pleasantly surprised at the way this program differs from other professional development courses, which often direct her to websites and resources that suggest ways to help her students pass standardized tests. Sometimes such courses offer “all these gizmos and gadgets” that claim to promote student learning, she says. Unlike most professional development she has experienced, the Summer Institute is not computer-based. “That’s what I like about this. It’s a wonderful chance to reconnect with other people and the world of ideas.”

For Maria Valencia Peña, a fifth-grade bilingual teacher at Wilmer-Hutchins Elementary School in Dallas, the Summer Institute has reminded her to try to instill a love of reading in her students; she realizes that sometimes reading instruction can detract from students’ enjoyment of a text.⁴ During the orientation, when Allums encouraged the teachers to read the assigned works for pleasure, Valencia Peña took those words to heart. “In the classroom, we tend to analyze everything that we read because we have to cover the main idea, what the topic is,” she says. “We are so focused on analyzing the text that sometimes we forget that the reading has to be for the enjoyment of reading.”

Tyler Woods wants her students to love literature, too. She believes they would enjoy reading *Prometheus Bound* as much as she did. The seventh-grade English teacher at Highland Park Middle School in Dallas has always taught simplified retellings of the myth. After this summer, however, she’s considering teaching students the same text she studied. “First of all, it’s short,” only about 30 pages, she says. “It doesn’t look intimidating.” With the right amount of support and background knowledge, she says her students would find it empowering to read an ancient work that hasn’t been watered down.

But the Summer Institute offers more than the occasional instructional idea for those who teach English. After Keith Black attended “The Epic Tradition” in 2012, he felt reinvigorated in the classroom. “I’m not saying I was losing steam as a teacher, but after a while the battery does lose a little charge,” he says. “But after coming here, I was amazed at the freshness with which I looked at the material I taught.” Black teaches AP English and an IB Theory of Knowledge course at Woodrow Wilson High School in Dallas. Each Summer Institute has shown him that overarching themes such as hubris and the fallibility of man run throughout the literature he has studied here and the various works he teaches during the year. Because of this overlap, he has developed a greater appreciation for the classics. He better understands how all of humanity is connected through them.

Just as important, the program allows Black to show his students that he continues to see himself as a student, too. As he wrote his “intellectual journey” essay for his application, he shared it with his students as they struggled to write their college essays. “Sometimes it’s not easy, but to be a thoughtful, engaged member of society, you have to do certain things,” he says. “And I choose this.” In choosing to attend the Summer Institute, Black is teaching his students one of the most valuable lessons of all—that learning never really ends. □

Endnotes

1. For more on the faddish ideas behind reforms pushing 21st-century skills, see “The Most Daring Education Reform of All” in the Spring 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2010/Senechal.pdf. To read about the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing, see “Unintended Consequences” in the Summer 2010 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2010/Perlstein.pdf. For more on the problems with value-added models, see “A Measured Approach” in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/koretz.pdf.
2. *The Heart of the Matter* is available at www.humanitiescommission.org/_pdf/hss_report.pdf.
3. Diana Senechal is the author of *Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture*, an excerpt of which was published in the Winter 2011–2012 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/winter1112/Senechal.pdf.
4. For more on how teachers can move ideas back to the center of English language arts instruction, see “Letting the Text Take Center Stage” in the Fall 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/Shanahan.pdf.