



Ascent Classical Academy of Douglas County

SENIOR THESIS: Summer Guidelines for Rising Seniors

Objective

The capstone of a classical education, the Senior Thesis course provides a final opportunity for students to reflect on the wisdom and practice the skills their education has fostered.

Prompt

Every senior thesis prompt should be formulated in a way that encourages students to engage with **the greatest ideas, works, and minds** while wrestling with **real problems concerning human nature, the human good, and the natural order**. The prompt should not direct students to write research papers, to report on things they have already mastered, or to develop arguments based on personal belief or opinion. Instead, the prompt should lead students to employ all their skills of reading, reasoning, and rhetoric **in pursuit of universally accessible truths** that are worth knowing for their own sake.

Summer Guidelines

1. Read the following content on ACADC's web page for Senior Thesis:
 - **Senior Thesis Overview** – see “The Booklist,” which is not an exhaustive list. Alternative texts are approved at the discretion of the instructor (source: *Hillsdale College K-12 Program Guide*)
 - **Senior Thesis Prep** – answer “Questions for Personal Reflection” and pay attention to “What a Senior Thesis Is Not” vs. “What a Senior Thesis Is” (source: *Rhetoric Alive! Senior Thesis Student Workbook*)
2. Consult with your Senior Thesis instructors to match a great idea with great texts (see the example below). Teachers can be reached by their work emails, although response times will vary during the summer recess.

3. Select a great text – or great texts – to carefully read and annotate. Do not postpone reading until the academic year when you will be preoccupied with classes, extracurriculars, and college applications. You will be evaluated on the quality of your annotations. Keep a journal with your notes and questions. Your topic should emerge organically from the reading.

Example

If you wish to write a Senior Thesis on the topic of joy, you could approach it from different angles:

- Focus on earthly joy in a single text: Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*.
- Focus on heavenly joy in a single text: Dante's epic poem *Paradiso*.
- Compare and contrast an account of earthly joy *without* transcendence in Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* and an account of earthly joy *with* transcendence in Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*.
- Compare and contrast heavenly joy in Dante's medieval epic poem *Paradiso* and C. S. Lewis' modern novel *The Great Divorce*.
- Explore different conceptions of earthly joy in lyric poems by William Wordsworth ("Surprised by Joy," "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"), Percy Bysshe Shelley ("To the Skylark"), William Blake ("Laughing Song," "Infant Joy," "Eternity"), Walt Whitman ("A Song of Joys"), Gerard Manley Hopkins ("Pied Beauty," "God's Grandeur"), Christina Rossetti ("A Birthday"), Carl Sandburg ("Joy"), and Mary Oliver ("Don't Hesitate," "Peonies").