



Dear Aristoi Classical Families:

Greetings. Or rather Howdy. I wanted to take a few moments to introduce myself and to offer a few words about the great work that has been going on at Aristoi for a while now and the great work still ahead of us. My family and I are very happy to be coming down to Texas and joining Aristoi. I have known about the school for over a decade and have had the chance over the years to talk to Mrs. Davidson on several occasions. Better still, I was able to visit the school this past spring and see a vibrant classical school in action.

For my own part, I feel like I have been on an educational Odyssey that began many moons ago with my having a great history teacher in high school (who did things in the old ways and was not favored by the administration) and also stumbling across a set of books called *The Great Books of the Western World*. When I found this literary gold mine, I wondered, “Why aren’t we reading these books?” Or, to the extent we were (barely) reading parts of them, then, “Why aren’t we having this Great Conversation about these books?”

The pursuit of this Great Conversation, and the attempt to rekindle it in our great country, has taken me to several places over the years—Chicago, Edinburgh, Colorado a couple of times, and to teaching and working on school reform at the college level. Now I am finally and gratefully able to return to my home state of Texas to participate in and further that conversation.

I look forward to meeting all of you parents and, of course, meeting, talking to, and teaching your children. I like to host a Headmaster’s Coffee from time to time where we can discuss both the principles and the practice of classical schooling. Until then, in the midst of moving, I shall try to pen an essay or two in order to share some thoughts on this Classical Comeback we are fortunate enough to have shaping our children’s minds and hearts.

For the moment, I would like to address a few potential “concerns” or worries that could be forming as a result of having a new head of school or, one might say, “a new sheriff in town.” I address these potential concerns not only as a school leader who has worked with parents and students for quite a while but also as a parent myself who has four children, each of whom is unlike the others.

The first apprehension might be homework. “We have gotten used to the homework load at Aristoi. Is this fellow going to come in and double it?” The answer is simply *no*. As has any head of a classical school, I have had to monitor homework schoolwide and in my own classes. My experience has been that in kindergarten through eighth grade, if the teachers follow a clear strategy, the students find the homework very manageable. As you would expect, the homework is harder and there is more of it in the high school, but reasonable expectations are usually met with reasonable results. In fact, I am eager to see how things are going on that front and to find out from teachers and students what works best for them.

The second apprehension might be along the lines of, “This fellow sounds really *academic*. I am sure he is really interested in what goes on in the classroom, but does he value other pursuits, such as music and art and sports?” I respond with this phrase: *l’uomo universale*. That is Italian



ARISTOI CLASSICAL ACADEMY

for “universal man,” the phrase used during the Renaissance to describe what we now call “a Renaissance man.” The Renaissance, following the ancients, held that a complete education ought to cultivate complete human beings: in their intellectual, physical, artistic, and moral dimensions. The greatest of Renaissance men could not only write and quote poetry; they were excellent horsemen, swordsmen, artists, and sometimes musicians. In other words, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy and Jill a dull girl. Children need sports and other pursuits in their lives. If for some reason you doubt I believe this, then I invite you to read my book *The Perfect Game* about how boys in Texas back in the Eighties spent their summers. (Sorry, I had to get a plug in there for at least one book.)

Finally, and related to the first two questions, you may wonder, “Is this fellow, this former college professor, well, too serious? We know classical education is serious, but our children aren’t perfect, and . . .” Again, I simply draw from the great books. The Greeks wrote tragedies, to be sure. They also wrote comedies. Likewise, Shakespeare wrote tragedies and histories and comedies. The greatest orators in our tradition, Lincoln, Churchill, and Reagan, had the gift of wit. They knew that people need levity even when addressing the most serious of human struggles. One thing I learned in the Marine Corps is that those who face death for a living frequently have the best sense of humor. They have to. They couldn’t function otherwise. To be entrusted with the lives and actions of children, both as parents and teachers, we owe it to the children and to ourselves to see the comic side of life. If anything, the classical movement—as vital as it is to the health of this nation and as important are the truths it seeks to convey—is in danger of being a little too stuffy for ordinary folk. When pretension or stuffiness becomes the rule, I’ll be the second out the door, right behind my buddy Tom Sawyer.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not a coaster. We have plenty of good *work* ahead of us. But the work of the mind is often best enjoyed and most productive with a song in one’s heart. For now, please enjoy your summer!

Best regards,

Dr. T. O. Moore
Headmaster