

IN DEFIANCE OF DEWEY: MEMORIZATION & RECITATION FOR TODAY'S CHILD

A MENTOR MOM © CLASS

by Jessica Diviney

Prepared for the 2010 LDSEHE Education Conference in Buena Vista, Virginia

I. In Defense of My Title

A brief overview of Dewey and his influence on modern education

II. Why Memorize?

A. Cultural Value

The literary culture at the heart of these exercises in memorization [. . .] is a record of how men and women have, in various times and places, struggled to understand themselves and make sense of their natures. Such culture does not repress or enslave: it enlarges and strengthens and frees. (Michael Beran)

B. Cognitive and Communicative Value

What the child discovers, in other words, is not only aesthetically pleasing, but important to cognitive development. Classic verse teaches children an enormous amount about order, measure, proportion, correspondence, balance, symmetry, agreement, temporal relation (tense), and contingent possibility (mood). Mastering these concepts involves the most fundamental kind of learning, for these are the basic categories of thought and the framework in which we organize sensory experience. [. . .] No less important, memorizing poetry turns on kids' language capability. It not only teaches them to articulate English words; it heightens their feel for the intricacies and complexities of the English language—an indispensable attainment if they are to go on to speak, write, and read English with ease. (Michael Beran)

C. Social Cachet

III. How do we teach our children to memorize?

A. Learn it yourself

B. Have time to practice (a lot)

C. Repetition (a lot and over time)

D. Variations on a theme

E. Use music

F. Use sign language

G. Write it down (eliminate a few words at a time)

H. Perform it

I. Bribe them

IV. What should we memorize?

A. Poetry

(Robert Louis Stevenson, Emily Dickinson, Shakespeare)

B. Great American Speeches and Documents (The Declaration of Independence, The Gettysburg Address, Lincoln's Second Inaugural)

C. History Dates and Facts (American Presidents)

D. Grammar Rules (definitions, list of prepositions)

E. Geography Facts (states and capitals, countries in Europe)

F. Foreign Language Poems, Passages, Prayers

G. Scriptures, Quotations of Church leaders

My Sources:

The Well-Trained Mind, Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise

"In Defense of Memorization," Michael Beran—published in *City Journal*, Summer 2004)

Jessica Diviney grew up in northern Virginia and studied at BYU Provo and Southern Virginia College, graduating with a degree in English. She resides now in Roanoke, Virginia with her husband and five children, ages 1-9 (three boys, two girls).