

# THE ART OF PERSUASION

BY: MARIA BONVISSUTO, MARKETING ASSOCIATE



The liberal arts are a treasure trove of truth, knowledge, and beauty. But you need the keys to access that treasure—and those keys are logic and rhetoric. They may sound like fancy, old-fashioned words, but they simply mean the ability to think rationally and express oneself with clarity and persuasiveness. Logic and rhetoric are the tools that help form the basis of a young

person's education. They equip her to dive deep into learning, make discoveries, and share those discoveries with others in a way that will make sense to and move them.

The Greeks and Romans understood this very well. Thinkers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian developed and perfected a Classical method of persuasive writing and speaking that is still incredibly powerful to this day. Our forebears' ability to take knowledge, deeply understand it, and properly use and convey that knowledge allowed for learning across disciplines and created an atmosphere of intellectual exchange.

The mind is moved by reason, the emotions by beauty, and the will by a desire for what is good. In the tradition of the great thinkers of the West, students at Oakcrest learn how to speak and write persuasively on all three levels. They do this by practicing three essential things: invention (coming up with ideas), arrangement (ordering ideas in a logical manner), and elocution (expressing your ideas well). Each piece of writing involves these three elements and they're important for helping a student develop her ideas logically and communicate them with precision and appeal. By devoting time to each step, the student learns how to move from big picture ideas to the concrete steps that will help her articulate these ideas.

Elizabeth Black teaches Oakcrest's logic and rhetoric class. She notes that one of the best ways to help students develop their rational and persuasive skills is to study excellent speeches and imitate elements in them. The class discusses structure, amplification, and clarity in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. They examine how Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," uses circumstances to powerful rhetorical effect. They watch Kennedy's "'Ich bin ein Berliner" speech, parsing his use of ethos and pathos.



## THE ART OF PERSUASION

(CONTINUED)

Learning the basics of logic and rhetoric gives students the foundation they'll need to process, analyze, and write about increasingly complex information and ideas as they move through high school and beyond.

Elizabeth has seen how the skills that her students cultivate in that class carry over into other parts of their education. She says, "I have the privilege of also teaching ninth grade Literature, and it is very evident in our class discussions that students are more sensitive to needing textual evidence for their argument. They argue more logically, and discern a false argument more readily, too. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of teaching this class is watching the girls realize that these tools can be used in any area of their academic or personal lives."

One such instance of Oakcrest students using these tools outside the classroom took place at a recent Junior States of America Congress. During a debate over a bill to take "under God" out of the Pledge of Allegiance, Oakcrest junior Frances North gave a speech against the bill in front of a packed room of over 70 students. Although she faced strong objections and rigorous questioning from her peers—many of whom did not agree with her stance—Frances stood her ground and clearly and persuasively made her case, with no pre-written speech and barely any notes to assist her.

Frances credits her success to many hours of learning how to think and communicate in class. She explains, "My Oakcrest education has helped me to better interact with and respond to information I encounter. At Oakcrest, we don't learn passively; we are taught to interact with all the material we encounter. We coherently question, respond, contradict, support, and generally argue the material we learn on a daily basis, and this prepares us to quickly and eloquently respond in situations like JSA. We are taught to form cohesive, clear, and engaging arguments in all of our classes, but particularly English and History. Participating on the debate team has also vastly increased my ability to quickly and confidently formulate arguments and respond to questions when being cross examined."

Thanks to logic and rhetoric, our students are able to bring the goodness, truth and beauty that they encounter to the world around them.