

“Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.”

-John Milton in *Areopagitica: A Speech of John Milton, 1644*

“Reading well, is in itself an act of virtue, or excellence.”

-Karen Swallow Prior in *Reading Well*

### **What is a Classical Library?**

At Whitefield Academy, we do not strive to teach children simply to read, but to read well which “is in itself an act of virtue, or excellence.”<sup>1</sup> The library at Whitefield serves this fundamental purpose to the glory of God. The classical library exists to provide students with abundant choices of excellent literature to inspire them and enhance learning. In order to encourage the practice of and passion for reading, books are selected to challenge every student. Standards applied to books require that they possess meritorious qualities that serve a variety of purposes.

### **Classical Lower School Library**

The youngest students at Whitefield are provided with quality picture books meant to awaken children to the world of literature through words and illustrations which convey beauty. Picture books are chosen that engage and inspire younger students to a sense of wonder and excitement as well as those that incorporate excellence in storytelling. We emphasize books containing rhyme and repetition, virtuous and proper behavior, and those that emphasize loving God and others. Additionally, we offer children the sheer pleasure of stories. Tales of imagination and magical kingdoms, good versus evil, truth and consequences, and books that simply elicit joy are read aloud to students. By exposing these younger students to such literature, we hope to encourage them to develop good literary habits and an enduring affection for good stories.

Early student readers at Whitefield are provided with quality early reader and chapter books which allow the students to put into practice the phonograms they are learning in the classroom. This allows them to learn to read with confidence utilizing their decoding skills. A variety of picture books, non-fiction early readers, and easy-to-read fiction is available until they have progressed into becoming mature readers.

Lower School students who have established comprehension are ready to progress to a large assortment of quality novels, according to their particular level. Our fiction books are individually labeled corresponding to comprehension levels. This allows our readers to gradually increase comprehension as they progress to more and more challenging books. This collection of children’s literature is carefully chosen to include high-quality books which exhibit lessons of virtue and celebrate good triumphing over evil. Students are offered time-tested literature which employ themes incorporating the “great ideas,” which allow them to grow in wisdom and identify truth. Virtues like prudence, justice, courage, hope and love are embodied in the stories the students read and they learn through them. We emphasize those classics of children’s literature which possess enduring qualities of good literature, especially excellence in language and beauty in imagery.

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Swallow Prior, *Reading Well* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2018), 15.

Literature has the power to form and to transform a child. We provide stories which allow children to satisfy curiosity, and to imagine other worlds by introducing them to places and times in history which are new to them. They learn to relate to characters who are heroic and to vicariously experience their joys and sorrows. They learn lessons through plot and characters which allow them to see rewards and consequences. Similarly, the biographies at Whitefield are selected to provide students with historical figures of merit. The students are able to read about great scientists, politicians, explorers, saints, missionaries, and many more figures worthy of emulating. Current pop stars and athletes are intentionally excluded in order to allow students to concentrate on more worthy choices. Finally, a large quantity of non-fiction books are available for students to read among a wide variety of subjects. These books allow individual students deeper exploration of topics they are interested in as well as complementing particular subjects covered in the classroom.

### **Classical Upper School Library**

The Upper School Library at Whitefield is limited to purely classical literature, and intentionally does not offer popular fiction. The books are intended to complement the curriculum of the Upper School and allow further study. The *Kaufman Collection* is a collection of hundreds of beautifully-bound and illustrated unabridged hardcover classics ranging from ancient texts to twentieth century classics. Especially those students who love books enjoy reading such beautiful versions of the most famous classical stories.

### **Selection of Classics and Children's Literature**

Each library book at Whitefield is one selected with a specific purpose. The emphasis is always on excellence in literary quality and content. Purposefully excluded are those books which may compromise our moral values and our faith in Christ. We avoid books which contain gratuitous violence, controversial themes, or glorify immoral language and behavior. The likelihood of children reading well is increased by limiting them to a selection of worthy books. Therefore, the frivolous and mundane are also avoided. The *Whitefield Academy Reading List* is a list of books that we consider the most beneficial for these purposes. The books on the list are designated by two stars on the spine and are time-tested classics and books of particular educational and literary merit. Teachers often require students to choose from this list when choosing their book reports which promotes our students choosing quality literature.

The library at Whitefield Academy seeks to build godly character, wisdom and virtue in students by giving them an appetite for great books which allow them to read well. Reading well is a unique gift that will remain with them always and provide immeasurable joy.