

2023 Annual Report

Dear readers and friends:

The past year marked the Catherine Project's third full year of existence. All the same, I remain fixated on the move from one to two. This might be partially due to the fact that Jordan's family has just welcomed a second child into the fold, but it's certainly the case that the most significant doubling for the Project last year—other than the doubling of so many donations thanks to our generous matching donors—came with the addition of a second staff member, our associate director, Aschely Cone.

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates wonders how sound and color are each one thing and yet, taken together, are identified as a single unity: "two" (185b). That there are two items in a single pair testifies to some relation, a bridge—a perplexing and beautiful thing. Unlike the move from one to two children, which requires learning new ways to do everything at once, the move from one to two directors allows us a rare and vital focus, marking a new phase for Project as we venture into 2024.

In 2023 we organized 155 courses and served over 1,200 readers. Through an incredible display of support from community members and friends, we ended the year having met our annual budget with room to spare. As we look toward 2024, we will continue to make both small and large changes to the Project to clarify its shape and strengthen its roots. Perhaps the most noteworthy is our hope of launching a new tutorial program, which will offer more readers, but especially the beginning reader, a simple path opening up onto the life of the mind.

It is truly difficult to express in words our gratitude to everyone who has studied with us, volunteered, or financially supported our work this year to cultivate the love of learning for its own sake. Your participation in our community—a single unity comprised of a beautiful multiplicity—is a great blessing and encouragement to us. Thank you.

With profound gratitude and warmest wishes for your flourishing in 2024,

-Zena Hitz for all of us at the <u>Catherine Project</u>

2023 in Review

Volunteers

The Catherine Project singularly owes its existence and growth to our wonderful volunteers, and so it is only fitting that our year-in-review begin here.

In 2023, 105 volunteers donated over 4,372 hours to the Project!

Volunteers wrote and reviewed pivotal grant proposals, worked tirelessly to publish our journal, *Commonplace*, invented custom software to help with enrollment, and moderated our community forum on Discord.

With our volunteers we hosted 155 courses and 27 Community Seminars. Love of learning is contagious. Our volunteers set examples by the serious pursuit of their own learning. When our aspirations to read great books collide with their difficulty, we need others to encourage us. Our volunteer tutors and reading group leaders model practices of philosophical reading and conversation. They are the lifeblood of the Project.

This past summer, we organized an in-person retreat for long-serving tutors. Over the course of four days, we shared meals together, participated in seminars and considered possibilities for a Catherine Project tutorial curriculum. We are grateful to our generous hosts, Bruderhof Community and Plough Publishing in Esopus, NY, for making this retreat possible.

When Aschely joined us in the fall, we sought to improve the support we offer our volunteers. We started a monthly facilitator reading group, developed orientation materials for new reading group leaders, and sought to increase the connection points between the Project staff and our volunteers. We continue to develop ways to make it as easy as possible for facilitators to seek help and to provide feedback.

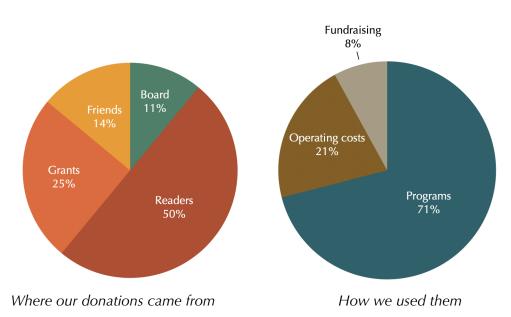
The Catherine Project could not exist without our volunteers who make the Project what it is. This report is a testament to their commitment, their generosity, and their love of learning.

Funding¹

The Project has always grown through leaps of faith. Our latest was hiring an associate director. In the first half of 2023, we received wonderful grants from the Apgar and Teagle Foundations, and we received some very generous gifts from friends. We had a strong foundation from which to jump, but we weren't sure where we'd land.

Our community members and friends met our leap with a show of overwhelming support, and we are very excited to share news of our financial success in 2023. We exceeded our winter fundraising goals thanks to large and small donors alike. Our generous matching donors led the charge. Many new donors threw in their lot with us by committing to a recurring donation.

- Our **total revenue** in 2023 was \$196,332.13 (75% in individual donations).
- Our total expenses in 2023 were \$109,739.²
- **②** 389 individuals (both friends and readers) donated to the Project in 2023.
- **31**% of those who read with us in 2023 donated in that same period.
- ◆ 16 matching donors pledged \$25,100, helping to invigorate our year-end fundraising campaign, and doubling the contributions of 243 individual donors.
- **⊗** 76 individuals offered recurring donations over the course of the year.



¹ Figures in this section are not audited. We used a cash basis for accounting.

² Our total expenses in 2023 include only 1/3rd of the annual cost of a second hire, since our associate director started working in September of 2023.

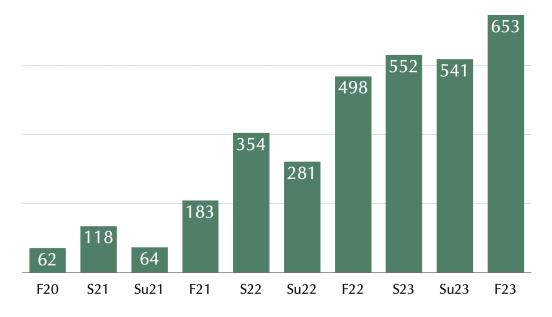
Programs

Over the course of our Spring, Summer, and Fall terms, we offered a total of 155 courses³:

- 15 subject tutorials on ancient Greek, Latin, Latin Vulgate, and Classical Syriac, which served 107 readers.
- **2**6 tutorials, which served 116 readers, including:
 - 1 tutorial conducted in Spanish.
 - 1 tutorial conducted through email correspondence, which served 1 reader.
- **8** 114 reading groups, which served 961 readers, including:
 - 3 in-person reading groups, which served 32 readers and met in Baltimore, MD; Bloomington, IN; and Boston, MA.
 - 2 reading groups conducted in Spanish.
- ⊕ 27 single-session Community Seminars during our spring and fall events, which served a total of 284 unique readers in total.

A total of 1,233 unique readers studied with us in 2023, many of whom participated in multiple terms and courses. The following graphs⁴ illustrate the Project's growth over the last two years.

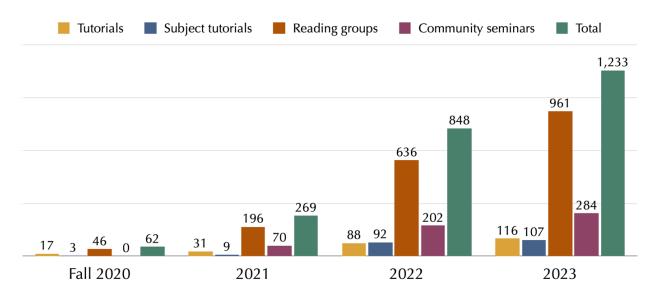
Number of Unique Readers Served Per Term



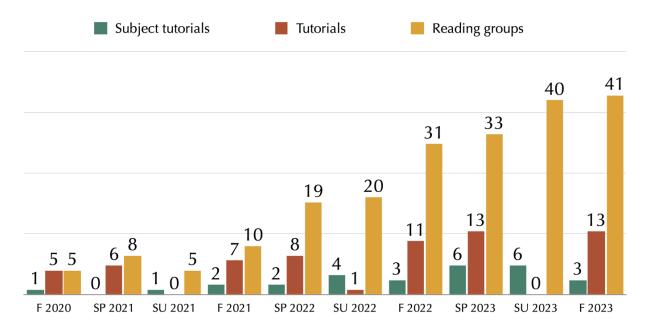
³ See the end of this report for a list of all subjects and texts we studied in 2023.

⁴ F=Fall, S/SP=Spring, SU=Summer

Readers served by year⁵



Number of courses offered per term⁶



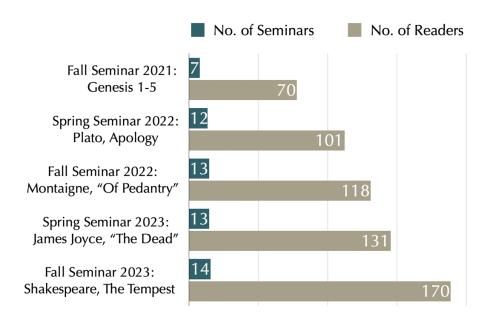
⁵ The numbers above reflect the quantity of unique readers per course type and yearly total. Readers who participated in more than one kind of course in a given year are included in the totals for each kind of course in which they participated ("Tutorial", "Subject Tutorial", "Reading Group", "Community Seminar") but are *not* counted multiple times towards that year's total readers ("Total").

⁶ While there have been exceptions, our tutorials traditionally go on break during the summer.

Community Seminars

Each spring and fall, we host a Community Seminar open to all, where multiple groups discuss a single text over the course of a single day. We have seen continued growth in the numbers of participants since the Seminar was instituted in the fall of 2021. In 2023 we offered 27 Community Seminars, serving a total of 284 unique readers.

We encourage you to invite friends, family, fellow readers and anyone curious about the Project to join us for our Community Seminars in 2024.



Additional Updates

- ⊕ In the summer of 2023, readers and volunteers published the first issue of <u>Commonplace</u>, our free journal designed to be shared in and beyond our community.
- ⊕ In the fall of 2023, we started to use and refine custom enrollment software, built for us by an incredibly generous volunteer. It can be a challenge to process our continually increasing applications with care and attention, and the software is an enormous help!
- In the spring of 2023, we organized a panel, "The Catherine Project and the End of the Conversation," for the 28th Annual Conference of the <u>Association of Core Texts and Courses</u>. Alexandra Baro, Kerry Balden, David Crane, and Jordan Poyner all presented.

Looking Forward to 2024

We seek to maintain a distinct and serious intellectual culture, even with continued growth. Our online location and the enthusiasm that swells our numbers are our greatest opportunity and present our greatest challenge. In 2023 we processed over 2,200 applications and served 1,233 unique readers, up from 1,400 applications and 848 readers in 2022—a 45% increase in readers. In 2024, with Aschely as our second staff member, we can build to accommodate the increasing quantity of applicants without watering down the quality of our conversations.

Following the discussions we had last summer at our tutor retreat, we plan to restructure our tutorial program and implement a 2-year core curriculum. The tutorial program was always intended to be at the heart of the Catherine Project, but the small student-to-tutor ratio and the struggle to find and retain volunteers has hampered us. Last year, for every individual placed in a tutorial, eight to ten individuals were turned away or placed in reading groups instead. Yet tutorials are the natural starting place for the reader who seeks a bit more guidance. In 2024 we will expand and clarify our tutorial offerings with an ordered core sequence. Our revised structure will accommodate more readers without compromising the seriousness of our groups. In this way we will better carry out our core mission, opening up a simple path whereby anyone can enter into the life of the mind. We will pilot this program in the fall of 2024.

We are intent on nurturing a shared intellectual purpose within the Project while continuing to improve. We will continue to find ways to bring the curious into the Project, whether in-person or online, as well as ways for our readers to connect with one another outside of our regular courses.

We look forward to three additional items in 2024:

- ⊕ On May 4, we will host an in-person symposium on Plato's Symposium—seminar conversations followed by a party—in New York City.
- ⊕ In the summer of 2024, readers and volunteers will publish the second issue of <u>Commonplace</u>. Be on the lookout for a call for submissions, and be in touch if you'd like to volunteer!

As always, we ask you to spread the word! Write about your experience in the Project. Volunteer to help publish *Commonplace*. Invite newcomers to our Community Seminars. Talk to your friends, family, and teachers about the Project. We find that word of mouth is often the best way to find kindred spirits. We are always in need of volunteers.

As we look ahead to 2024, we need your support to strengthen the education we offer—especially for those who are newcomers to the life of the mind. We continue to use grants strategically to make developmental leaps, such as hiring an executive director in our first year, or hiring an associate director last year. But the Catherine Project was always meant to be sustained by individuals who believe in our mission and who benefit from it. We intend to always remain accountable for the value of what we do. When you donate, you demonstrate the stake you have in our community, and you make it possible for others to join us.

We welcome one-time and recurring donations of any amount and encourage all to donate in accordance with their means. Your contributions make it possible for both friends and strangers to live the life of the mind in community.

To donate, visit https://catherineproject.org/donate. Donations by check may be mailed to:

Catherine Project, Inc. 2631 Housley Road, Box 1006 Annapolis, MD 21401

As always, we welcome any questions or reflections on the work of the Catherine Project, past or future—please email us, <u>book</u> a virtual meeting with Jordan, or complete our feedback form <u>here</u>. If there's additional information that you'd like to see in the annual report, please let us know. If you haven't already, remember to sign up for our mailing list here.

It is one of the great privileges of our lives to watch the Project continue to take shape—whether by making the leap from one to two directors or by growing to offer additional readers a seat at the table.

With deepest thanksgiving and appreciation for all who make our community of learning possible,

—Aschely Cone, Jordan Poyner, and Zena Hitz for all of us at the <u>Catherine Project</u>

Recent Testimonials

"This summer I have been blessed to participate in a reading group and an introductory Ancient Greek subject tutorial. Both have been highlights of my week! Regarding the former, I think what worked well was the balance of people being willing to argue for various readings of the text. ----- was a thoughtful, measured, and effective reading group leader. Regarding the latter, ----- is an absolute gem of a tutor. Knowledgeable, warm and kind, and radiating excitement and delight for the subject she is teaching (please do let her know that in some way!). I'm not sure what could be improved. The quality of the teaching and participation easily surpass some of the university-level classes I have taken...I am in awe of the generosity of reading group and subject tutorial leaders who dedicate their time and energy to this endeavor, as well as everyone working in the background for making this happen. I'm in doubt about most everything, but the Catherine Project has undoubtedly changed my life for the better. It fills me with gratitude, joy, and hope. Thank you so much to everyone involved!"

"The reading group leaders have been excellent moderators of the discussions. The other readers in the group are intelligent and perceptive, and the discussions with them have greatly enhanced my understanding of the texts we have read...I greatly value humanities education, and no one else is doing what the Catherine Project is doing, in the high-quality way that it does it. Offering this type of education to people of all walks of life, via Zoom, outside of a university setting, in such a welcoming way, and at no cost. It is truly incredible!"

"My tutorial in Attic Greek continues to be one of the best parts of my life."

"I didn't know what to expect. Actually, I underestimated the rigorousness of the program; I have raised my game. It has been an excellent experience getting to know our tutor and fellow group members. I will most definitely sign up for another group in the future and share about CP every chance I have. Thank you for such an outstanding program."

"Once again, thank you for the discussions. It has truly been a pleasure and highlight of my week."

"I just finished my spring Nietzsche reading group today left with a lot of thoughts and emotions. It was an amazing three months and I have always found it a privilege to hear the thoughts from people who really enjoy and analyze the text. I felt refreshed with insights and new angles all the time, and it is only from the group that I was able to have an understanding of the book and pick up lines that I did not pay attention to in my first time reading. This weekly meeting has really become a highlight...in the low months of my life."

"[My tutorial] has kind of been one of the opportunities of my life and I continue to be truly grateful for it."

"Hitz's vision is an 'education without strings attached, no grades, no credits, no tuition, run on the manifest love of learning alone.' If this is the case, she succeeded with me and my Homeric epics class. Our group discussions were lively and enriching, and we bonded so well we decided to reunite for the *Odyssey* this year and Virgil's the *Aeneid* next year."

"It was a terrific experience. The reading assignments were reasonable. This was my first Catherine Project, and I will be signing up for another. The instructor was kind, informative and helped to direct the conversation. The fellow attendees were patient and assisted each other. It was easy to use zoom and allowed for such a diverse class from multiple locations throughout the US and beyond. Thanks!"

"Just finished my Catherine Project tutorial covering the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. We had 12 sessions total and it was so amazing. I learned so much and have such a deep appreciation now for Homer."

"---- was a really great teacher. The students in my Greek section were active and earnest learners. The textbook was great—perfect for those of us with a background or interest in philosophy or the liberal arts more broadly...Your noble work earns the respect of any to whom I describe the Project. To my mind, it is a notably redeeming effort in our professionalized world where so many of us fail to either continue to learn or share our knowledge because the demands of making a living weigh down the high aspirations the liberal arts inspire(d) in us. The Catherine Project revives, for me and for many, those noble aspirations and makes possible the achievement of long-cherished dreams such as learning Greek."

"In addition to free participation, I especially like that the Catherine Project, being an online organization, makes it easier for people from diverse backgrounds to participate in guided discussions. The Catherine Project is fostering a more inclusive intellectual community. Additionally, the guided group reading is very unique and enriching. The leader of the reading groups has the expertise of the book, passionate and sharing. Engaging with passionate individuals (both the leaders and group members) who share a love for profound ideas and deep analysis is very stimulating."

"The Catherine Project is one of the best things out there. Great classic works, compatible people, competent and enthusiastic facilitators... what's not to like??!! It's like my university days only better because there are no assignments to hand in or papers to write. It's sheer learning enjoyment."

"The Catherine Project reading groups and tutorials have reintroduced the joy of reading great books into my life. Both the leaders and the readers make the encounters with great texts so much richer than is possible by reading alone. Reading in a community is just a deeper and richer way to experience these works."

"Thank you so much for setting up and coordinating the Project/making this experience possible. Kierkegaard group made me feel like I was in undergrad again. Ideas from *Either/Or* and class discussion have permeated my day-to-day, coloring the way I understand myself and folks around me, the way I read other books or watch films/tv. Life feels more vibrant and laden with meaning—which is a real treasure in these long pandemic days spent shackled to a capricious dissertation."

"[The Project] is indeed an eye opener, a space to share and ponder, a true oasis."

"[The Catherine Project] has participants from all walks of life, from professors to business owners, from scholars of classics to the first-time readers. All these different participants bring the diverse relationships they have formed with the texts to the groups. Being a part of these discussions with the immense support of excellent tutors and group leaders has been one of the most intellectually enriching experiences of my life. The friendships formed in these groups have lasted beyond the scope of reading groups. The texts vary from the times of antiquity to modernity, from philosophy to literature. Reading these texts with amazing fellow readers has broadened my understanding of the classics in general and has brought me closer to the classics of my own culture."

"The choice of the books to read is what makes the Catherine Project courses I've taken so great. You offer such a wide variety of works that there's always something I'm interested in. The people who sign on to a particular course are obviously interested in the work and that makes for a super discussion group."

"I wanted to tell you again how much I enjoyed the Kierkegaard reading group. There were such lively and engaging discussions, and I got so much more out of the text than I would have had I tried to tackle it alone. Also, I suspect this will come as no surprise: ----- was such an excellent group leader, always prepared and insightful, but also an exceptional facilitator. At our last meeting we were all raving about his poise and talent for bringing out the best in each of us."

"Everyone in the group was respectful and open to thoughtful discussion. People listened carefully to other participants' perspectives and offered meaningful responses. I also appreciated that our group leaders had us start each class by asking a question that occurred to us while reading. This provided a good launching point for the rest of the discussion."

"The project makes me more willing to read longer or harder works than I'd read on my own because I know I'll get more out of them when I read with others. And it's better than a book club because people actually read."

"I thought the facilitators did a great job prompting discussion and encouraging all to ask their own questions and participate in the group—via chat and talking aloud. The group very much felt like a collective effort to make sense of the text, which made it comfortable to honestly raise questions about parts that one didn't quite understand to ask the group for help problem solving dense philosophical concepts."

"Also have to shout out to my class tutors in Virgil, Aristotle, Augustine, and Latin language. I've had a great time in every single one of my classes. It's been amazing!"

"I just finished up my first Catherine Project experience and I loved it! Each week I looked forward to the reading and discussion which provided texture and context for the reading. I was optimistic about the experience before it started, and the reality exceeded my expectations...As an English teacher, I believe that discussing texts enhances our understanding of them. In practice, I know this is true. I see it with my students, and I see it whenever I participate in book discussions. The different perspectives in discussion boosts our overall understanding. I love contributing to—and benefitting from—discussions like these and hope to continue for a second round with the Catherine Project this summer."

"Our discussions were SO rich each week and contributed greatly to my understanding of the book, taking me so much deeper than I would have gone on my own. What a gift! I do agree that learning should take place in community, and this group really attested to that. I loved hearing the different perspectives of our diverse group!"

"The Catherine Project is one of the best educational nonprofits at work today."

List of texts and subjects studied in 2023^7

Tutorials

₿	Aeschylus and Virgil	Oresteia and Aeneid
⊛	Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides	Oresteia and Seven Against Thebes; the Theban plays and Philoctetes; Cyclops, The Bacchae, Hippolytus, and Medea
₿	Aquinas	Selected writings
€	Aristophanes, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Moliere, Oscar Wilde, and Tom Stoppard	Lysistrata, The Birds, and Acharnians; Mandragola; Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, and A Winter's Tale; Tartuffe; The Importance of Being Earnest; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
₿	Aristotle	Nicomachean Ethics
₿	Aristotle	Nicomachean Ethics
₿	Augustine	Confessions
₿	Augustine	Confessions
₿	Augustine	Confessions
₿	Dante	Inferno
₿	Dante	Purgatorio and Paradiso
₿	Homer	Iliad and Odyssey
₿	Homer	Iliad and Odyssey
₿	Homer	Odyssey
₿	Homer and Herodotus	Iliad and Histories
₿	Homer and Xenophon	Odyssey and Anabasis
₿	Lucretius and Cicero	On the Nature of Things and Tusculan Disputations
₿	Miguel de Cervantes	Don Quixote
₿	Plato	Meno
₿	Plato	Republic
₿	Shakespeare	King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, and Julius Caesar
₿	Sophocles	The Theban trilogy, Philoctetes, and Electra
₿	Virgil and Augustine	Aeneid and Confessions

⁷ There are 140 courses on this list (not 155) because additional course sections are not accounted for.

Subject Tutorials

- Introductory ancient Greek

- ❸ Intermediate ancient Greek: Euripides Alcestis
- **⊗** Intermediate ancient Greek: Plato Republic, Book 3

- **❸** Intermediate Latin
- ❸ Intermediate Latin: Vulgate
- Advanced ancient Greek: Homer Iliad, Books 1 and 24

Reading groups

Diario de la guerra del cerdo

Aeschylus Oresteia

 Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay The Federalist Papers

⊗ Aristotle *Metaphysics*

⊗ Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics

⊗ Aristotle Organon

Arthur Miller, John Cheever, Flannery O'Connor, Edgar Allen Poe, J.D. Salinger, James Baldwin, Charlotte Stetson, Herman Meville, Hemingway, and Eudora

Selected short stories

Welty

⊗ Augustine On the Trinity

⊗ Boethius On the Consolation of Philosophy

⊗ Carl Jung The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche

⊗ Clarice Lispector The Passion According to G.H.

literature

Alice in Wonderland, Charlotte's Web, The Little Prince, Peter Pan, The Velveteen Rabbit, and The Wind in the

Willows

Classics of Korean literature The Story of Hong Gildong, The Nine Cloud Dream,

and The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong

⊗ Confucius and Sophocles Analects and The Theban Plays

⊗ Cormac McCarthy Blood Meridian

我 Dante La Vita Nuova

⊗ Dante The Divine Comedy

⊕ Derek Walcott Omeros

❸ Du Fu The poetry of Du Fu

⊗ E. M. Forster Howard's End

⊗ Edmund Spenser The Faerie Queene

❸ Erwin Panofsky Perspective as Symbolic Form

♥ Ferdowsi Shahnameh

❸ Fernando de Rojas La Celestina

₱ Friedrich Nietzsche Daybreak and Human, All Too Human

♦ Friedrich Nietzsche On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life

⊗ George Eliot Daniel Deronda

❸ George Eliot Middlemarch

❸ George Eliot The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob

❸ Hannah Arendt Between Past and Future and Eichmann in Jerusalem

❸ Hannah Arendt The Human Condition

♦ Hegel The Phenomenology of Spirit

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Henry Adams and Johan Huizinga

Middle Ages

Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres and The Autumn of the

⊗ Jane Austen Sense and Sensibility

♦ Jerome K. Jerome Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)

⊗ John Dewey Art as Experience

⊗ John Locke Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning

Toleration

⊗ Julian of Norwich Revelations of Divine Love

♠ Lewis Carroll Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Alice Through

the Looking Glass

❸ Ludovico Ariosto Orlando Furioso

♦ Luo Guanzhong The Romance of the Three Kingdoms

⊗ Sensation and supernatural

fiction

Uncle Silas by J. Sheridan le Fanu and ghost stories by

M. R. James

Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

♠ Meister Eckhart Selections from his sermons and writings

Michel Foucault The Archeology of Knowledge

Mikhail Bulgakov The Master and Margarita

Murasaki Shikibu The Tale of Genji

⊗ Nicholas of Cusa On Learned Ignorance

♦ Old English poetry
Beowulf, The Seafarer, and The Wanderer

❸ Plato Republic

⊗ Plato Symposium

♦ Plato Symposium and Phaedrus

❸ Plato Symposium and Phaedrus

♦ Plato Symposium, Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, Meno,

Phaedrus, and Phaedo

♦ Plato Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman

⊗ Shakespeare Sonnets

⊗ Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida

♦ Sigmund Freud The Interpretation of Dreams

⊗ Simone de Beauvoir The Ethics of Ambiguity

⊗ Søren Kierkegaard The Sickness Unto Death and "Look at the Birds of the

Air; Look at the Lily in the Field"

⊕ T. S. Eliot Four Quartets⊕ T. S. Eliot Four Quartets

Locke

Leviathan and Two Treatises of Government

⊗ Thomas Mann The Magic Mountain

⊗ Thomas More Utopia

Three instances of lawgiving The Iroquois Great Law of Peace, Magna Carta, and

U.S. Constitution

⊗ Tolstoy Anna Karenina

⊗ Tolstoy War and Peace

♦ Virginia Woolf
To the Lighthouse, The Waves, and A Room of One's

Own

♦ W. E. B. Du Bois Black Reconstruction in America

♦ W. E. B. Du Bois The Souls of Black Folk

Thackeray

Vanity Fair

⊗ Mwindo epic

⊗ One Thousand and One Nights

⊗ Rig Veda

⊗ Sunjata epic

♦ The Book of Psalms

Community Seminars

⊗ Shakespeare The Tempest

