



MONSIGNOR FARRELL HIGH SCHOOL

Department of History & Social Sciences

Freshman Scholars Seminar, 2026-2027

Summer Assignment: Mr. Franz

A.M.D.G.

Summer reading (you MUST purchase this book yourself):

Meditations: A New Translation

by Marcus Aurelius (Author), Gregory Hays (Translator)

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You may acquire this anywhere, but it is available on Amazon. **Please buy the physical paperback.**

Welcome to Monsignor Farrell's Scholars program!

At Monsignor Farrell, our goal is to give every man the best education possible *for that man*. This is known as *cura personalis* (a Latin phrase): "care for the whole person." It means that each man, indeed each human being, has unique abilities, challenges, needs and possibilities, and our mission as a school is to help each man develop fully all of those possibilities as the unique individual he is, putting those possibilities to work for the good of all people as he grows in virtue as a *vir fidelis* (a second Latin phrase): a "faithful man," faithful to the image of God that is in him, faithful to that same image of God in every person he encounters, faithful to his responsibilities to God, to his family, to every person he meets and to his community.

Farrell men always strive for *magis* (a third Latin term) – "more" – never asking "How little must I do?" but always, "What more can I accomplish?" One of the Farrell man's key goals is *eloquentia perfecta* (a fourth phrase): "perfected eloquence," which is nothing more, nor less, than right reason applied through rigorous critical thinking and expressed effectively, responsibly, and gracefully for the common good.

As a freshman in the **Scholars Program**, you will be taking part in a unique course called the Scholars' Seminar. "Seminar" comes from the Latin word (again!) for "seed-bed," as in a garden where seeds (ideas, and intellects) grow. Seminars are common in academic circles as courses in which students learn through the exchange of ideas. The course is built as a colloquium, from the Latin for "conversation," which includes the idea of conversation, civil debate, and exchange of ideas.

We must have something to discuss, however, so we will be reading our way through some of the most important texts of Western Civilization, discussing and

critiquing the ideas they present.

This course is just a small part of this larger, overall effort, but it is important to understand that the goal of all we do at Farrell is to help you discover the *vir fidelis* you already are, and more fully live that ideal.

You are no longer a boy (that's a *puer* in Latin). No, you are already a young *vir*, a "man," a word that can also be used in Latin to mean "hero." *Fidelis* means "faithful," but the Romans meant by that term the qualities that we would label, "trustworthy," "honorable," "honest," "responsible," or "loyal."

So, *vir fidelis*, the motto and ideal of Farrell, is usually translated as "faithful man," but might just as well be translated, "trustworthy man," or, "honorable man," or, "responsible hero."

These are a lot of big ideas to digest over four years, so let's be specific for the moment.

The trustworthy, honorable, honest Farrell faithful man, we say, "always does the right thing, only because it is the right thing to do." Whether anyone is looking or not, he does what he should, not for a reward or thanks, but motivated only by his own sense of integrity.

This applies to his academic work. The Farrell man does his own work, honestly making his best effort, never passing off someone else's work, or answers, or research, or words of an essay or paper, as his own. To do otherwise is to violate that *vir fidelis* he is and is called to be.

The "responsible hero" also takes responsibility for his own education. His academic work is his, not his parents', and so he takes it upon himself to manage his own calendar, his own time schedule, he keeps track of his own assignments and takes his own notes, and in every way acts as his own boss dependent on no other person to do it all for him.

He also knows that his education is not the job of his teachers. Teachers are like coaches: a coach can show a player the right way to play the game, correct him when he is wrong, encourage him when he is struggling, tell him how to practice and hold him to standards, but no coach can play the game for the player, no coach can run the race if the runner will not do it himself. So, no teacher can learn for a student.

The mark of a true scholar is not the answers he knows, but the questions he asks. The scholar is not the student with 100 on every test, but the student who is curious, insightful, hungers to better understand, is humble enough to recognize what he does not know, is confident enough of himself that he knows it is perfectly OK to not be perfect, to ask a question, to admit ignorance, and who comes to enjoy the process of listening to others, or learning new things, or challenging himself with new thoughts.

Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*

(It is VERY important that you READ – do NOT skip – the introduction in those first 57 pages are CRUCIAL to understanding the book)

Your summer reading will be a book, and a type of book, that will be new to you.

You will have the privilege of reading an emperor's private diaries. (To be a good historian, you must develop a taste for reading other people's mail and private journals!)

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was the emperor of the whole "known" (well, known to the Romans!) world from 161 to 180 a.D., when the Roman empire was at the height of its power and the world was (more or less) at peace. He is considered by historians to have been a wise, efficient, moral ruler, at least within the limits of the understandings of the time, though he did see Christianity as a threat to the stability of the empire (yet the Christians of the time do not identify him as a persecutor).

Marcus Aurelius was that rarest of things, a talented ruler who was also an authentic scholar and a deeply reflective philosopher. We know this because he kept a private notebook – what was called in other centuries a, "common-place book." This appears to have been a notebook (written, you might be surprised to learn, in Greek, which was used by most educated Romans as an alternative to Latin) which Marcus Aurelius carried with him, and in which he jotted down interesting quotes or stories he heard, interesting facts, but much more, notes to himself about ideas he was considering, insights he thought he had, or memories and reflections.

We have no evidence that he ever expected that anyone else would read this (some diaries of history were written specifically for publication – this was not). It is therefore organized as snippets randomly assembled together.

Do not read it, therefore, as you would a textbook or novel. Read through a few entries, a few paragraphs, at a time, and digest them, consider them, reflect on them. Take it slow and let yourself absorb them. **Start early in the summer, not the weekend before school.**

Just because it is written in a book does not make it "right." As you consider the thoughts, challenge them. Consider how you might learn from them, or why they might seem, "wrong," to you. Is there a good idea you had never considered, or is he saying something you have discovered yourself but hadn't been able to put into words?

You are going to write down your thoughts as you go in a **dialectical journal**. "Dialectical" is from Ancient Greek for conversation – it is a notebook in which you engage in a sort of conversation with the author of a work, noting down passages you find interesting or ideas that trigger your own reflection, and then writing a bit about that to "think out loud" by writing down your thoughts on the page. (A famous writer once said, "I don't know what I think until I read my own writing.")

Your goal is to read the book thoroughly and to take a notebook full of notes as you go. In September you will come to class on your first day with this notebook (hand-written, please) and you will be faced with some class work during your first few days based on this. The better the job you do of taking these notes, the more successful you will be at it.

Some Study Skills Helps

Some of you may not be familiar with the proper way to read a textbook, nor the proper way to take good, solid academic notes. Visit the Farrell History Department's Youtube channel: www.youtube.com/c/FarrellHistoryDepartment

There, look under "playlists" and you should find a playlist for "Farrell Freshmen."

You will also find attached to this sheet some supplemental materials. The video explains these, so keep them handy as you watch it.

Congratulations on joining the ranks of the *viri fideles* (the plural form), the Men of Farrell

SQ3R

Survey – Question – Read – Recite – Review

SURVEY: Gather the information necessary to focus and formulate goals.

1. *Read the title* - help your mind prepare to receive the subject at hand.
2. *Read the introduction and/or summary* - orient yourself to how this chapter fits the author's purposes, and focus on the author's statement of most important points.
3. *Notice each boldface heading and subheading* - organize your mind before you read - build a structure for the thoughts and details to come.
4. *Notice any graphics* - charts, maps, diagrams, etc. are there to make a point - don't miss them.
5. *Notice reading aids* - italics, bold face print, chapter objective, end-of -chapter questions are all included to help you sort, comprehend, and remember.

QUESTION: Help your mind engage and concentrate.

One section at a time, turn the boldface headings into as many questions as you think will be answered in that section. The better the questions, the better your comprehension is likely to be. You may add further questions as you proceed. As your mind actively searches for answers to questions, it becomes engaged in learning.

READ: Fill in the information around the mental structures you've been building.

Read each section (one at a time) with your questions in mind. Look for the answers and notice if you need to make up some new questions. NOTE ANY UNFAMILIAR WORDS, ANY WORD YOU DON'T KNOW OR UNDERSTAND AND LOOK IT UP!!!

RECITE: Train your mind to concentrate and learn as it reads.

“Recitation,” is a bit of an old-fashioned word in schools for repeating, reviewing, explaining what you have learned. After each section - stop, recall your questions, and see if you can answer them from memory. If not, look back again (as often as necessary) but don't go on to the next section until you can recite.

REVIEW: Refine your mental organization and begin building memory.

Once you've finished the entire chapter using the preceding steps, go back over the questions from all the headings. See if you can still answer them. If not, look back and refresh your memory, then continue.

Cornell Note-Taking System

1. Draw a line down your paper 2 1/2 inches from the left side to create a 2 1/2 inch margin for noting key words and a 6-inch area on the right for sentence summaries.
2. Record your notes in the 6-inch area on the right side of your paper during class. Use your own words and make sure you have included the main ideas and significant supporting details. Be brief.
3. Review your summary sentences and underline key words. Write these key words in the column on the left side of your paper. These words can be used to stimulate your memory of the material for later study.
4. There are companies that actually make note-pads already set up for this.
5. You can also use the following templates:
[http://www.timeatlas.com/5 minute tips/general/word templates and cornell note taking#.Ub04MdjNIm4](http://www.timeatlas.com/5_minute_tips/general/word_templates_and_cornell_note_taking#.Ub04MdjNIm4)
6. The Cornell method can be used for taking notes on classroom lectures or textbooks. The following chart explains the procedure and gives a visual display of the results.
7. Attached are a few templates and examples.

The Cornell Note-taking System



