

## Modern teenagers and classical literature. Path to wisdom.

By Chupika Kateryna

The world has been living in the postmodern era for several decades. Mass culture reigns supreme, resulting in fragmented thinking, or so-called clip thinking, in which people perceive information in short bursts and vivid images. Short videos and pseudoscientific clips about various phenomena of life are widespread among teenagers and young people, offering superficial explanations of human relationships, friendship, love, and vocation, and suggesting that one should choose a profession quickly and easily, based solely on economic benefits. The crowning achievement of technological development to date is GPT chat. In school and even university education, there has been an almost complete rejection (in schools – a complete rejection) of complex and long texts. Instead, abridged and simplified versions are offered.

To avoid making unfounded claims, I will cite specific facts. The 29 April 2025 issue of Die Zeit, a German magazine well known among university professors and students, featured a lengthy article on reading skills. Several dozen professors of literature, philosophy, history, and other humanities were surveyed. They were asked how students read and how their seminars were conducted. In addition, the article includes statements from experts in the field of teaching methodology and cognitive scientists.

- Michael Sommer, Professor of Ancient History in Oldenburg: '70-80% of students have problems working with texts of medium difficulty.'

- Professor of German Literature at Bielefeld University: 'Only after three semesters do we begin independent work with literary texts with our students. Before that, we slowly, step by step, master the skills of understanding fragments or specialised articles' - this refers to literary specialisation.

- Karolina Röder, professor of literary didactics in Ludwigsburg: 'Over the past 20 years, the reading programme has been cut in half.' In upper grades, students read adapted excerpts at best.

- A professor of German studies at the University of Regensburg says that she cannot ask her students difficult questions now, so as not to offend them and alienate them from the course.

Cognitivists argue that without the skill of deep reading, we do not develop critical thinking and analytical abilities. In other words, our cognitive apparatus is not developed at all. Critical thinking, in turn, develops resistance to manipulation, authoritarian tendencies and propaganda. Deep reading remains the main factor in education.

- 2024 – 17% of students read daily vs. 2002 – 43%.

- One in five students does not open a book for an entire month.

- 2004 - 56% of students surveyed said they were interested in books vs. 2024 - 35%. 23% of students surveyed were not interested in books at all.

Why deep reading is necessary:

- immersion in the author's theses and theories
- tracking logic
- to follow the argumentation
- to follow the consistency.

Deep reading skills are formed over many years. Fragmentation kills thinking in its infancy, says cognitive scientist Mariana Wolf.

The path to knowledge and understanding is always a personal one. Ukrainian philosopher Andriy Baumeister says: 'GPT chat is impersonal, anonymous, and average. It's not even ideas, it's arrays of sentences. It's a bloated illusion of knowledge.'

Along with this, teenagers continue to face complex ethical issues, relationship problems and life choices. This often leads to the development of depression and anxiety among modern teenagers. They come to psychological counselling with these issues and often expect the same quick solutions promised by the world of bloggers, social networks and, of course, GPT chat. A book club was created with the aim of correcting such conditions, as well as touching on complex issues, developing the ability to think broadly and deeply, learning to read slowly and thoughtfully, and expressing one's feelings among peers. I would like to share with you my experience of creating and running such a club in Bratislava (Slovakia).

The topic of adolescence in psychology is currently extremely popular and extremely alarming. I think that in the entire history of humanity, there has never been a period when teenagers caused so much concern for their parents. This is due to the processes taking place in the world and in societies, which are leading to a catastrophic generation gap. According to Strauss and Howe's theory, people born within a 20-year period were considered to be one generation. Now, however, changes are so rapid that what was true 3, 4, or 5 years ago is already outdated. It is very difficult for modern parents to understand their children, even if there is only a minimal age difference between them (20-25 years).

But, just like 200 and 400 years ago, they are looking for answers to the same questions: What are relationships between people, apart from those I am used to seeing in my family? What are relationships in general?

Why am I alive? What should I do with my life after school? And so on.

It is good if a teenager has a trusting relationship within their family. But what if they don't?

Modern teenagers are very anxious. They are looking for support in the world that does not exist in this world. Adults themselves do not always have it. The other extreme is depression. Problems are greatly exacerbated by war and emigration.

My report is called ‘...’ and I would like to talk about that. Who are teenagers, what is classical literature, what is wisdom, how I understand all this, and what connections I see based on my work experience and observations.

The classical triad of virtues in Plato's system is wisdom, courage and moderation.

According to the definition of academician D. Likhachev, wisdom is a combination of intelligence and kindness.

Aristotle: ‘Knowing oneself is the beginning of all wisdom.’

Socrates: ‘The highest wisdom is to distinguish between good and evil.’

There are many definitions of wisdom, but I like the four above the most. The first two contain the moral concept of good. The second two refer to self-knowledge, looking within oneself and distinguishing between good and evil, which is where it all begins. We cannot talk about anything without understanding whether it relates to good or evil and what coordinate system we use for this.

As a coordinate system, I suggest using classical literature, as well as my own expertise and guidance.

The generally accepted concepts of classical literature were formed during the last three centuries of antiquity. Homer was considered the first classical author. Classical authors were considered worthy of serving as models and mentors in everything related to mastery of language and acquisition of knowledge. In a broad sense, the term ‘classical’ came to be used in relation to any work that set the standard for its genre. This is how the classics of Romanticism (Byron), the classics of Modernism (Proust), etc. came into being.

In other words, classical literature is a kind of canon, a benchmark. Classical works are timeless in their subject matter and sometimes even in their plot. Classical works are also distinguished by their beautiful and, in a good sense, complex literary language, which teaches us to think and formulate our thoughts.

In addition, classical literature is the quintessence of centuries of human experience. Speaking of classical literature, I would also like to mention modern classics. The 20th century and even the 21st century have their own authors who are republished many times.

While preparing this report, I reflected on wisdom and the book clubs I run, and thought about how they are related. Here is what I think. Wisdom is untimely and even harmful for teenagers. It would be wrong to try to make them wise at their age. But the path to wisdom should be open to them.

According to the renowned academic Dmitry Likhachev, ‘Wisdom is a combination of intelligence and kindness.’ I would like to highlight this in my first thesis. What I undoubtedly see in many works by the classics is a belief in the good nature of human beings. One could even begin with how the author himself relates to his characters. A good writer loves them and,

even when they make mistakes, gives them a chance to correct them. A good writer does not condemn his characters. He condemns the act itself, but does not judge the person. Such is the case, for example, with Chekhov and Dostoevsky in relation to their characters, and Chesterton in his detective stories about Father Brown.

The second thesis about wisdom is self-knowledge. Without asking 'Who am I and what do I want from this life?' it is impossible to move forward. As I have already said, answers to teenagers come from everywhere, but few modern teenagers will look for them in a good book. And they are there. And like any good and real answer, it will not be prescriptive. For example, in 'A Woman's Happiness,' Émile Zola does not speak prescriptively about how the human spirit is diminished by the subjugation to the consumption of beautiful things, but when reading the novel, even a young man or woman begins to ask themselves this question.

In my opinion, good literature makes you ask questions first and foremost to yourself and then discuss and find your own answers in a group. It is also very important for teenagers to see the support of the group and their peers who also share these searches.

For me, practical psychology begins with the concept of internal ethics and often ends with it. Many requests for psychological counselling disappear when this internal ethics begins to take shape and create its own support for making certain decisions. According to my observations, psychological support groups were very relevant in the first 1-1.5 years after the start of the war in 2022. But now something more is needed to build a strategy for one's own life, based on eternal values — something that classical literature and its interpretation can offer.