

# One Simple Way to Raise Children to be Leaders

Whether they admit it or not, almost every parent entertains visions of greatness for their child from the moment he is born. He'll be a businessman, or a college professor, or maybe even the President of the United States.

Unfortunately, it's often hard to move beyond daydreams and work toward making those imaginations become reality. Yet in spite of this difficulty, author and former college president Ben Sasse suggests that is exactly the job of every parent: to raise children "as if they'll rule someday."

According to Sasse, one practical way of raising future leaders is by creating a list of essential books for your children to read by the time they reach adulthood. In essence, this list becomes a "family canon," and should include books influential in the parents' lives, as well as ones which present concepts which shape society as we know it today.

Sasse and his wife took up this challenge, seeking to limit their list to under 60 titles in a wide variety of areas, including religion, fiction, science, history, and so on. The following list was the result [Note: Hyperlinked titles are those referenced elsewhere on Intellectual Takeout]:

1. *Long Walk to Freedom* – Nelson Mandela
2. [\*Letters and Papers from Prison\*](#) – Dietrich Bonhoeffer
3. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* – Martin Luther King Jr.
4. [\*Mere Christianity\*](#) – C.S. Lewis
5. [\*Orthodoxy\*](#) – G.K. Chesterton
6. [\*Christianity and Liberalism\*](#) – J. Gresham Machen
7. *Being Digital* – Nicolas Negroponte
8. *Moneyball* – Michael Lewis
9. *Commentary on Galatians* – Martin Luther

10. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* – John Calvin
11. [Ethics](#) – Aristotle
12. *Crito* – Plato
13. [The Odyssey](#) – Homer
14. *History of the Peloponnesian War* – Thucydides
15. *Three Theban Plays* – Sophocles
16. [Confessions](#) – Augustine
17. *Why God Became Man* – Anselm of Canterbury
18. *Bondage of the Will* – Martin Luther
19. *Summa Theologica* – Thomas Aquinas
20. [Canterbury Tales](#) – Geoffrey Chaucer
21. *Emile* – Jean-Jacques Rousseau
22. [Romeo and Juliet](#) – Shakespeare
23. [Hamlet](#) – Shakespeare
24. *King Lear* – Shakespeare
25. [Julius Caesar](#) – Shakespeare
26. *Macbeth* – Shakespeare
27. *Sonnets* – Shakespeare
28. [The Declaration of Independence](#)
29. [Constitution](#)
30. [The Federalist Papers](#) – Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay
31. [Democracy in America](#) – Alexis de Tocqueville
32. [Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave](#) – Frederick Douglass
33. *Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*
34. *Politics* – Aristotle
35. *Wealth of Nations* – Adam Smith
36. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* – Charles Sellers
37. *Free to Choose* – Milton and Rose Friedman
38. *Guns, Germs, and Steel* – Jared Diamond
39. *Communist Manifesto* – Karl Marx
40. *Origins of Totalitarianism* – Hannah Arendt
41. *The Road to Serfdom* – F. A. Hayek
42. *Animal Farm* – George Orwell
43. [1984](#) – George Orwell

44. [Brave New World](#) – Aldous Huxley
45. *On the Nature of Things* – Lucretius
46. *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Thomas Kuhn
47. *Elements of Geometry* – Euclid
48. [Huckleberry Finn](#) – Mark Twain
49. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* – Willa Cather
50. *Grapes of Wrath* – John Steinbeck
51. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* – James Baldwin
52. [Invisible Man](#) – Ralph Ellison

Sasse goes on to say:

*“Whether you start out with the above list as an opening bid or choose to go another direction completely, the most important thing is to read early and often, and impart that habit to your children, too. ...*

*If a whole generation grows up having become habituated to reading, then even if we don’t start them off with the same readings, we’ll have prepared and positioned them to enter into meaningful wrestling with their neighbors about a core set of texts that we should tackle together. Both their preparedness and their empathetic debating will strengthen our shared ability to stand in the face of the forces seeking to pull us apart.”*

What do you think of Sasse’s list? Are there titles that you would add or take away? If so, why?

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