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AEA Essay Contest

Grades 7

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Response to Aristotle Quote

A philosopher is "somebody who seeks to understand and explain the principles of existence and reality." Aristotle was one of the greatest philosophical minds of all time. He discovered many different theories and ideas accurately described by the Roman orator, Cicero as "a river of gold." One of the ideologies Aristotle unearthed in his lifetime was put into words this way: "All who have meditated on the art of governing humankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth."

What Aristotle is saying is that anyone who digs deep enough into the gears of a prospering empire will see that the backbone of the civilization is the educated youth. The truth in Aristotle's statement is clearly seen in history and the progress of almost every great civilization, including our own.

The first written language was invented in Mesopotamia by the Sumerians between 3500BC and 2000BC. Initially, only the priests were able to read the manuscripts. But here in the cradle of earliest civilization, the power of the written word truly ignited the greatness of the culture when the ability to read and write spread to the common people, including its youth. Because the children of Sumer were taught to write and read, the trade, wealth and economic growth of the Sumerian Empire soared. The

same was true for the discoveries of astronomy, mathematics, and science. Truly, the fate of the Sumerian Empire depended upon the education of the youth.

The sparkling city of Athens, Greece thrived because of the art of literature born and bred within its walls. The great minds Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle lived and taught in Athens. The absence of such teaching after their deaths was sorely felt and the stream of new ideas (Cicero's river of gold) which constantly flowed through Athens like a proverbial river of life, slowly dried up. When this flow of education from one generation to the next dried up, the culture dried up with it. The metropolis lasted no more than 700 years until 86 BC when this bright star of the ancient world was extinguished. Was it really typhoid fever, as scientists conclude, or the disappearance of great educators that doused the flame of Athens?

Though important, education is not limited to reading, writing, and mathematics. The Spartans taught their children to be tough and strong with mentalities of steel. Their diligence to perfection made them a terror to their neighboring countries.

All around the world, other countries in other eras have depended upon the education of their youth to sustain it. In Costa Rica today, about 96 percent of people over the age of fifteen can read and write. (2003 estimate) The literacy rate in Kyrgyzstan is even more impressive weighing in at almost 99 percent. In countries like India, where the literacy rates are not so high, the people teach their youth about aspects of life they find most important. The different cultures and religions that are growing and flourishing in this South Asian country are doing so because the people there spend time teaching the children about them. Basically, we teach our children how to speak, eat, and live life so that they can do it without us when we are gone. We leave a legacy.

Children are a nation's future. The influence we have on them will dictate the future survival of our country. We, The United States of America, believe this truth and live it out in our daily lives. Every year hundreds of foundations and organizations donate millions of dollars to schools, libraries and museums across America to better childhood education. In 2004, the Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries gave \$660,000 dollars to 136 different libraries so that they could buy more books. "Idol Gives Back" was a way that the producers and viewers of the popular reality television show American Idol found to pursue higher learning. Together, America raised over seventy-five million dollars to help people in Africa and in the U.S. receive better schooling and to help prevent AIDS.

Not only do we work and give to educate our youth, but we understand that the education of our children is the pillar on which our government leans. Where would we be in 20 years, if we failed to thoroughly teach the kids that are now only just beginning their years of school? What kind of legacy are we leaving them? How can a civilization remain civil apart from one generation investing in the next? As Aristotle said, our children hold our fates in their hands. The ability to secure a future for our children is within our reach. When we direct our time and energy to our children, we provide them with the opportunity to learn and build bright futures for them and for us.