



Junior Gryphons girls' basketball in action against James River Day School on February 6.

THE NEWSLETTER OF
NEW COVENANT SCHOOLS

QUID NOVI

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OPENAI'S CHATGPT: CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF WRITING?

by Scott McCurley, Academic Dean and Head of the School of Rhetoric

November 30, 2022 might just go down as a *hinge-point* in history. On that date, OpenAI, a company co-founded by Elon Musk, launched ChatGPT to the public. To be sure, there are other AI interfaces out there, but this release has galvanized our attention, having reached 100 million users in just two months. To put that in perspective, it took Instagram two years and Facebook four years, to reach that milestone. Wednesday afternoon of last week, I gathered all SOR students and faculty together in the Moomaw Center to discuss this development. In the following article I want to

highlight my initial reflections on this as well as some of the things I said and demonstrated for the students.

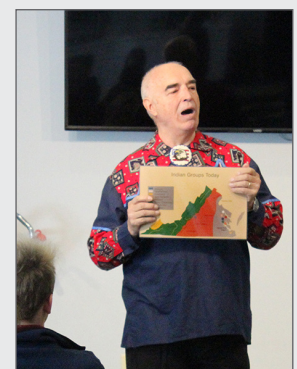
For those in the community who have not been paying attention to this development, it's easiest to understand this new chatbot by comparing it to a familiar one, the ubiquitous Google search. Let's say I want to know how to cook that once-a-year Thanksgiving turkey. Into the search bar we type, "best method for baking a turkey." We are all familiar with what that produces—*links* to websites that provide the information we want. When you open

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WHAT'S NEW?

iHistory Brings the Past to Life

There is no more vivid way to learn about history than from those who lived it. That is why we started our iHistory program—to provide a forum for folks in our community to tell their personal stories. Recently, Chief **Kenneth Branham** of the Monacan Indian Nation came to speak to 8th grade students and enlighten them on the true background, practices and challenges that the Monacan people have faced throughout history. Our students loved hearing his stories. Do you have a story to tell? Or have a relative who does? If you would like to participate in our iHistory program, contact us about joining our list of storytellers and let us get you on the schedule.



THINK. LEARN. LOVE. LIVE.



A play by Thornton Wilder

OUR TOWN

Friday, February 24 – 7pm
Saturday, February 25 – 7pm

Friday, March 3 – 7pm
Saturday, March 4 – 7pm

Moomaw Center
Adults \$15
Students \$10

Please call 847-8313
to reserve your seats



E T C E T E R A

EVERYONE

ART & SCIENCE FAIR

Plan to join us **Monday, February 27** for the Art & Science Fair. Come out and view the artistic endeavors of our students and enjoy watching them compete in various science challenges. Art viewing will begin at 5:30pm, and science challenges will start around 6:00pm. Two-hotdog combo meals will be available to purchase with all proceeds supporting the Cuirim House missions team. This is an enjoyable event for the whole family and one not to be missed!

PANACHE PRESENTS

The School of Rhetoric is proud to present *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder on **February 24 & 25** and **March 3 & 4** at **7pm** in the Moomaw Center. Please call (434) 847-8313 to reserve your seats. Adult tickets are \$15 and student tickets are \$10.

SAVE THE DATE FOR HANDS & HEARTS

Our schoolwide service day will be **Wednesday, April 19**. Parents are welcome to work alongside students completing tasks for area nonprofit groups. Sponsorship packets will come home next Monday.

GENERATIONS DAY

Generations Day will be held on **Friday, March 24**. Grandparents and other

special guests are invited to join students in class for the morning as well as enjoy light refreshments and coffee in the library. **There will be an 11am dismissal on this day.**

LADIES' EVENT

On the evening of **Friday, April 21**, the Moms in Prayer group will be holding a social gathering for ladies in our school community. Mothers and grandmothers, save the date! More details will follow.

ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICE

Ash Wednesday is this week and the service of the **Imposition of Ashes will be held at 7am in the school Chapel**. Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, a season devoted to self-assessment, confession of sin and amendment of life. The Imposition of Ashes is a brief service that will be concluded by 7:40am, our customary time for dismissal from faculty Matins. The service consists of readings from the Old and New Testaments, the Psalms, the singing of two hymns and the reception of ashes on the forehead. The whole school community is cordially invited.

NATIONAL LATIN EXAMS

All students enrolled in Latin classes in grades 7-12 will be sitting for National Latin Exams **Wednesday, March 1 through Friday, March 3**. Teachers will be preparing students for the format of the exams, but no extra study is required.

SPORTS NEWS



VISAA SWIMMING STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS AT LU

Declund Stevenson: 15th place - 50 Free and 13th place - 500 Free

Luke Hottle: 7th place - 500 Free

John Scruggs, Andrew Rogers, Declund Stevenson, Luke Hottle: 14th place - Medley Relay

John Scruggs, Andrew Rogers, Declund Stevenson, Luke Hottle: 15th place - Free Relay

Andrew Rogers, Declund Stevenson, Luke Hottle all with school records.

The exams range from introductory to advanced levels, according to each student's Latin class. Results from the exams will be announced later in the spring, with recognition and awards given to students who place above the national average for their level.

- 7th grade: 8am on **Thursday, March 2**
- 8th grade (Latin I): 8:50am on **Thursday, March 2**
- 9th grade (Latin II): 9:40am on **Wednesday, March 1**
- 10th grade (Latin III): 8:55am on **Friday, March 3**
- 11th grade (Latin IV): 9:40am on **Thursday, March 2**

FUNDRAISING REPORT

	GOAL	RECEIVED
Permanent Things Campaign/Annual Fund	\$100,000	\$351,050
General Scholarship	\$10,000	\$25,324
Foundation	\$300,000	<i>Pledged</i> \$497,570 <i>Received</i> \$481,093

GIVING IS EASY

Thank you to all who have given so generously to New Covenant Schools. Your gifts are appreciated and will be used to further the mission of our school. Donations may be given throughout the year through cash, check, stock transfers or IRA distributions. All gifts are tax-deductible to the extent that the law provides. Contact **Dayna Renalds** in the Development Office for more information.

the ChatGPT webpage, similarly, you have a search bar into which you can type the same six words. The result? Not links, but rather *text*—it types out, right in front of you, in rather natural language (replete with ingredient list) a “popular and reliable method” for cooking a turkey. How did it do that? I certainly have no idea at a technical level, but the layman’s explanations I have encountered describe a process wherein the chatbot synthesizes from the digital data it has ‘digested’ or learned from, and then provides, in the form of original text, a response to your query.

A phrase within that last sentence has educators everywhere wringing their hands—*original text*. This was not cut and pasted from previously written material. You can ask the AI to write you a thousand-word essay on the subject matter of your choice and it will kick it out rather quickly. Whether it is yet ‘smart enough’ to write an A paper is apparently up for debate and it is clear that it will produce errors, but these problems will seemingly be worked out in the future. Headlines in the *Atlantic* recently have included *The End of High-School English* and *The College Essay is Dead*. While pondering the possible implications for the venerable student essay, one of these authors wrote, “*The question isn’t ‘How will we get around this?’ but rather ‘Is this still worth doing?’*” In probing for a metaphor, he also asked, “*Is this moment more like the invention of the calculator, saving me from the tedium of long division, or more like the invention of the player piano, robbing us of what can be communicated only through human emotion?*” What is the promise and what is the peril of this new technology?

In a recent *Christianity Today* article entitled *AI Might Teach, But it Can’t Preach*, Russell Moore stated, “*But the real question is not about technological possibility. It’s not really about church leadership ethics either. Rather, the question*



is about what preaching actually is.” While readily acknowledging that the technology can in fact write a sermon, he wanted to press the ontology (the nature of the being) of the thing itself—the sermon. This too, is paramount for educators—what is the nature of education (and where does the essay fit into that)? Are we in want of mere information or of being formed up? At New Covenant we have answered that definitively—it is the latter, not the former.

When we gathered the SOR last week and asked for a show of hands, only about half the students had heard of this while fewer than ten percent had signed up and used it themselves. I took the time to let them know a little about the chatbot, the basics of how it worked and how it was different than an internet search engine, and then I pulled up my AI ChatGPT account and, while projected on the big screen for all to see, fed it two of our vaunted summer reading questions, to which AI instantly produced

a couple of decent answers. Why would I do that? First, because I believe we are only months away from most high school and college students becoming familiar with the technology—so why pretend it’s not there? Second, because it gave us an opportunity to discuss again the purpose and nature of education. Yes, teachers will need to make adjustments to accommodate this new tool, exploring both its potential promise as an aide to our aims, and to mitigate its potential peril as a thief thereof. But this does not forestall the deeper question that remains squarely with the student themselves—will they take the long and arduous path

to becoming an educated son or daughter of God, or will the temptation of the shortcut rob them of that reality?

QUID NOVI

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OUR MISSION

New Covenant Schools is an educational community serving families of Central Virginia, providing an exceptional education in a classical curriculum within the framework of historic Christianity, furnishing the student with the tools of education and the inspiration to be a lifelong learner.

NEW COVENANT schools