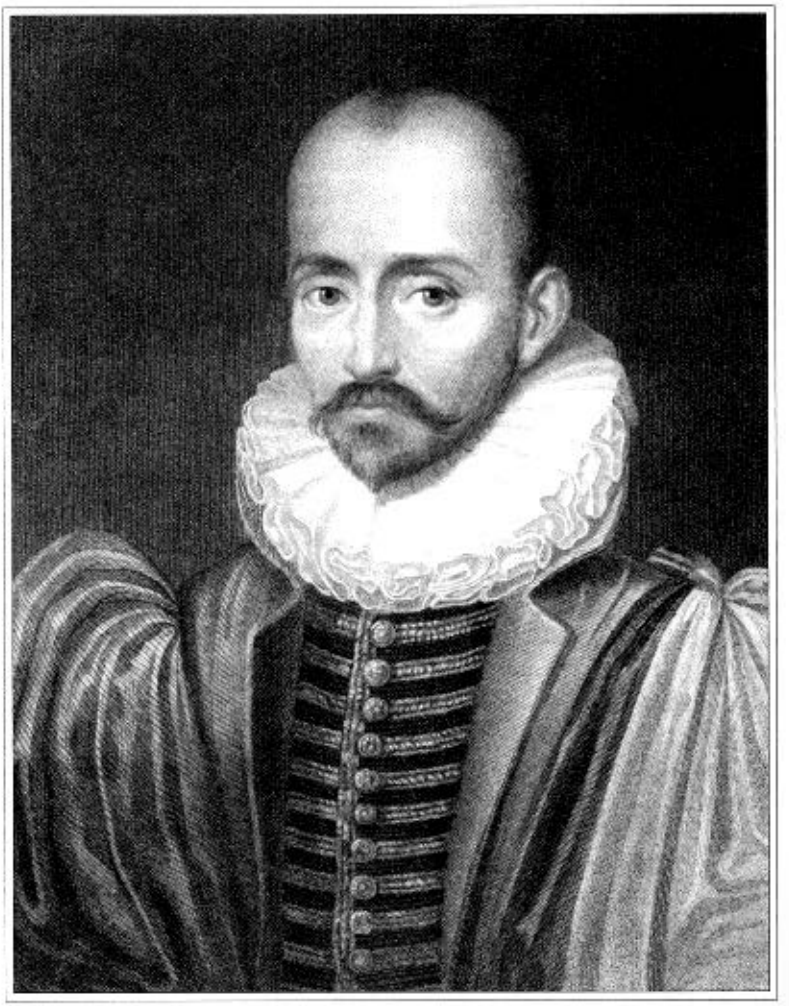

# MICHEL EYQUEM DE MONTAIGNE
## *Of the Education of Children*

MICHEL EYQUEM DE MONTAIGNE (1533–1592) was born into a wealthy Catholic family near Bordeaux, France. Throughout his life, Montaigne maintained a commitment to the Catholic faith, despite the fact that during his lifetime terrible wars between Catholics and Protestants raged in Europe. In terms of religion, Montaigne was a moderate and argued for tolerance.

Montaigne's father, a soldier, survived the religious wars, and when he returned home he brought with him advanced ideas about education. Some of those ideas are expressed in the following essay. Montaigne's father was elected mayor of Bordeaux and set an example for his son by working in public service. In 1581, Montaigne himself was elected mayor of Bordeaux and served for four years. Before he retired to write, Montaigne had a long career in government.

As a child, Montaigne's tutor and servants spoke to him only in Latin, which became his native language for his first six years. Early on he read Virgil and Ovid as well as other classical authors. Since Latin was the second language of educated Europeans and the language of many of the most important books he would read, he was at an early advantage in school. He went to Guyenne College in Bordeaux—essentially a grammar school—at age six, and then later to Toulouse to study law. He became a lawyer attached to the Bordeaux Parlement, but he spent some of his time in Paris. He developed one of the most important friendships of his life in Bordeaux with Etienne de La Boétie (1530–1563), a writer who inspired one of Montaigne's greatest essays, "Of Friendship." In 1571, three years after his father's death and his inheritance of the estate of Montaigne, he retired to pursue a life of thought and reflection.

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From *The Complete Works*. Translated by Donald M. Frame.

Retirement produced a touch of melancholy, so he began a project that he thought of as a personal self-examination. He had St. Augustine's *Confessions* as an inspiration, but what he produced had no previous model. His *Essays*, as they came to be known, were original in form and have spawned innumerable imitations. But for Montaigne, the essays were not studies of things outside himself, but rather studies of his own nature and his own concerns. He said of himself that he was not looking outside, but inside—that the true subject of his essays was his inner life.

His first volume of twenty-one essays was produced in 1575, followed by two volumes of essays in 1580. Subsequent essays and revisions of earlier ones appeared until his death in 1592. His subjects are diverse: "Of Sadness," "Whether the Governor of a Besieged Place Should Go Out to Parley," "Of Idleness," "Of Liars," "Of Constancy," "Of Cannibals," "Of Drunkenness," "Of Vanity," "Of Experience," "Of the Punishment of Cowardice," and many more. Because of his early publication of "Apology for Raymond Sebond," in which he discusses the myriad ways in which people worship God, he gained a reputation for being a skeptic—one who is much quicker to doubt than to believe. As a skeptic, Montaigne found it easy to be tolerant of the behavior and beliefs of others—he felt he had no grounds for thinking that the way he did things was so correct that all others must follow his precepts. He felt, for example, that Stoic philosophies, which insisted that everything was the result of the divine will and that there was little people could do beyond enduring life as it was, were too limiting and did not respect the complexities of human difference.

## Montaigne's Rhetoric

Montaigne was a lawyer, which meant that he was well educated and trained in argumentation. He studied logic and rhetoric and knew how to tailor a piece of writing to any audience. In "Of the Education of Children" his primary audience is Countess Diane de la Foix, pregnant with her first child, but the essay is also a self-reflective meditation on Montaigne himself as a student. As his editions became well known and he gained a very large audience, he began a pattern of incessantly revising and rethinking his work. Nonetheless, the hallmark of most of his essays is a relaxed form that meanders from one thought to the next, developing through the association of ideas. In a sense, the essays give insight into the

associative nature of his mind. He responds to what he observes and writes what he thinks at a given moment. The result is writing that does not seem dogmatic or rigid, but flexible, cordial, and inviting.

Among the special rhetorical qualities of his writing is his tendency to produce pithy sentences that become epigrams—for example, "Only the fools are certain and assured" (para. 8), "He who follows another follows nothing" (para. 8), and "Let him be taught not so much the histories as how to judge them" (para. 21). In addition, he quotes classical writers such as Dante, Cicero, Horace, Propertius, and many others in support of his own views.

Montaigne is often praised for his ability to conjure up intense imagery. In this essay, his gift for metaphor is striking. Early on, he compares the progress of a child in school to the gait of a horse when he says of the tutor: "It is good that he should have his pupil trot before him, to judge the child's pace" (para. 4). Later, when speaking of how one makes use of wide reading of Plato and others, he uses the metaphor of bees: "The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs" (para. 8). Like bees, children should read widely and then, rather than adopt one or another position taken from a book, make the ideas thus gathered their own. As Montaigne implies, this will come from judging well and avoiding dogmatic acceptance.

One of the unusual rhetorical techniques he uses is personification. Late in the essay, he personifies Virtue as a woman: "Virtue's tool is moderation, not strength. Socrates, her prime favorite, deliberately gives up his strength, to slip into the naturalness and ease of her gait. She is the nursing mother of human pleasures" (para. 26).

Montaigne also reveals that he has a sense of humor. In paragraph 26 he suggests that if the tutor has a dull child who wants to play instead of learn, "I see no other remedy than for his tutor to strangle him early, if there are no witnesses, or apprentice him to a pastry cook in some good town."

Throughout the essay, Montaigne recommends some very interesting principles of education. The most important is that the tutor is not to fill the student's head with useless information, especially the kind of information that is to be memorized and recited. As he states, "To know by heart is not to know" (para. 11). What the student must aim for is judgment and understanding, which involves being skeptical enough to ask questions rather than to accept authorities—even Aristotle—without complete and independent examination.

## PREREADING QUESTIONS: WHAT TO READ FOR

The following prereading questions may help you anticipate key issues in the discussion of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne's "Of the Education of Children." Keeping them in mind during your first reading of the selection should help focus your attention.

- What should be the student's attitude toward authority?
- Which are the best writers for the student to read?
- How should the tutor behave toward his student?

# *Of the Education of Children*

Madame, learning is a great ornament and a wonderfully ser- 1
viceable tool, notably for people raised to such a degree of fortune as you are. In truth, it does not receive its proper use in mean and lowborn hands. It is much prouder to lend its resources to conducting a war, governing a people, or gaining the friendship of a prince or a foreign nation, than to constructing a dialectical argument, pleading an appeal, or prescribing a mass of pills. Thus, Madame, because I think you will not forget this element in the education of your children, you who have tasted its sweetness and who are of a literary race (for we still have the writings of those ancient counts of Foix[1] from whom his lordship the count your husband and yourself are descended; and François, Monsieur de Candale, your uncle, every day brings forth others, which will extend for many centuries the knowledge of this quality in your family), I want to tell you a single fancy of mine on this subject, which is contrary to common usage; it is all that I can contribute to your service in this matter.

The task of the tutor that you will give your son, upon whose 2
choice depends the whole success of his education, has many other important parts, but I do not touch upon them, since I cannot offer anything worth while concerning them; and in this matter on which I venture to give him advice, he will take it only as far as it seems good to him. For a child of noble family who seeks learning not for gain (for such an abject goal is unworthy of the graces and favor of

[1] **Foix** A castle in Southern France. Montaigne addressed his essay to Countess Diane de la Foix while she was pregnant with her first child.

the Muses, and besides it looks to others and depends on them), or so much for external advantages as for his own, and to enrich and furnish himself inwardly, since I would rather make of him an able man than a learned man, I would also urge that care be taken to choose a guide with a well-made rather than a well-filled head; that both these qualities should be required of him, but more particularly character and understanding than learning; and that he should go about his job in a novel way.

Our tutors never stop bawling into our ears, as though they 3
were pouring water into a funnel; and our task is only to repeat what has been told us. I should like the tutor to correct this practice, and right from the start, according to the capacity of the mind he has in hand, to begin putting it through its paces, making it taste things, choose them, and discern them by itself; sometimes clearing the way for him, sometimes letting him clear his own way. I don't want him to think and talk alone, I want him to listen to his pupil speaking in his turn. Socrates, and later Arcesilaus,[2] first had their disciples speak, and then they spoke to them. *The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn* [Cicero].

It is good that he should have his pupil trot before him, to judge 4
the child's pace and how much he must stoop to match his strength. For lack of this proportion we spoil everything; and to be able to hit it right and to go along in it evenly is one of the hardest tasks that I know; it is the achievement of a lofty and very strong soul to know how to come down to a childish gait and guide it. I walk more firmly and surely uphill than down.

If, as is our custom, the teachers undertake to regulate many 5
minds of such different capacities and forms with the same lesson and a similar measure of guidance, it is no wonder if in a whole race of children they find barely two or three who reap any proper fruit from their teaching.

Let him be asked for an account not merely of the words of his 6
lesson, but of its sense and substance, and let him judge the profit he has made by the testimony not of his memory, but of his life. Let him be made to show what he has just learned in a hundred aspects, and apply it to as many different subjects, to see if he has yet properly grasped it and made it his own, planning his progress according to the pedagogical method of Plato. It is a sign of rawness and indigestion to disgorge food just as we swallowed it. The stomach has not done its work if it has not changed the condition and form of what has been given it to cook.

[2] **Arcesilaus (315–240 B.C.)** Sixth director of Plato's Academy.

Our mind moves only on faith, being bound and constrained to 7
the whim of others' fancies, a slave and a captive under the authority of their teaching. We have been so well accustomed to leading strings that we have no free motion left; our vigor and liberty are extinct. *They never become their own guardians* [Seneca]. I had a private talk with a man at Pisa, a good man, but such an Aristotelian that the most sweeping of his dogmas is that the touchstone and measure of all solid speculations and of all truth is conformity with the teaching of Aristotle; that outside of this there is nothing but chimeras and inanity; that Aristotle saw everything and said everything. This proposition, having been interpreted a little too broadly and unfairly, put him once, and kept him long, in great danger of the Inquisition at Rome.

Let the tutor make his charge pass everything through a sieve 8
and lodge nothing in his head on mere authority and trust: let not Aristotle's principles be principles to him any more than those of the Stoics or Epicureans. Let this variety of ideas be set before him; he will choose if he can; if not, he will remain in doubt. Only the fools are certain and assured.

> For doubting pleases me no less than knowing.
> —DANTE

For if he embraces Xenophon's[3] and Plato's opinions by his own reasoning, they will no longer be theirs, they will be his. He who follows another follows nothing. He finds nothing; indeed he seeks nothing. *We are not under a king; let each one claim his own freedom* [Seneca]. Let him know that he knows, at least. He must imbibe their ways of thinking, not learn their precepts. And let him boldly forget, if he wants, where he got them, but let him know how to make them his own. Truth and reason are common to everyone, and no more belong to the man who first spoke them than to the man who says them later. It is no more according to Plato than according to me, since he and I understand and see it in the same way. The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs; it is no longer thyme or marjoram. Even so with the pieces borrowed from others; he will transform and blend them to make a work that is all his own, to wit, his judgment. His education, work, and study aim only at forming this.

Let him hide all the help he has had, and show only what he has 9
made of it. The pillagers, the borrowers, parade their buildings, their

[3] **Xenophon (430–355 B.C.)** His great book *Anabasis* is on the Persian wars.

purchases, not what they get from others. You do not see the gratuities of a member of a Parlement, you see the alliances he has gained and honors for his children. No one makes public his receipts; everyone makes public his acquisitions.

The gain from our study is to have become better and wiser by it. 10

It is the understanding, Epicharmus[4] used to say, that sees and 11
hears; it is the understanding that makes profit of everything, that arranges everything, that acts, dominates, and reigns; all other things are blind, deaf, and soulless. Truly we make it servile and cowardly, by leaving it no freedom to do anything by itself. Who ever asked his pupil what he thinks of rhetoric or grammar, or of such-and-such a saying of Cicero? They slap them into our memory with all their feathers on, like oracles in which the letters and syllables are the substance of the matter. To know by heart is not to know; it is to retain what we have given our memory to keep. What we know rightly we dispose of, without looking at the model, without turning our eyes toward our book. Sad competence, a purely bookish competence! I intend it to serve as decoration, not as foundation, according to the opinion of Plato, who says that steadfastness, faith, and sincerity are the real philosophy, and the other sciences which aim at other things are only powder and rouge.

I wish Paluel or Pompey,[5] those fine dancers of my time, could 12
teach us capers just by performing them before us and without moving us from our seats, as those people want to train our understanding without setting it in motion; or that we could be taught to handle a horse, or a pike, or a lute, or our voice, without practicing at it, as those people want to teach us to judge well and to speak well, without having us practice either speaking or judging.

Now, for this apprenticeship, everything that comes to our eyes 13
is book enough: a page's prank, a servant's blunder, a remark at table, are so many new materials.

For this reason, mixing with men is wonderfully useful, and vis- 14
iting foreign countries, not merely to bring back, in the manner of our French noblemen, knowledge of the measurements of the Santa Rotonda, or of the richness of Signora Livia's[6] drawers, or, like some others, how much longer or wider Nero's[7] face is in some old ruin there than on some similar medallion; but to bring back knowledge of the characters and ways of those nations, and to rub and polish

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[4] **Epicharmus (540–450 B.C.)** A Greek poet.

[5] Ludovico Palvalli and Pompeo Diobono, two famous Milanese dancing masters at the French court.

[6] Probably a Roman dancer of Montaigne's time.

[7] **Nero (A.D. 37–68)** One of Rome's most notorious emperors.

our brains by contact with those of others. I should like the tutor to start taking him abroad at a tender age, and first, to kill two birds with one stone, in those neighboring nations where the language is farthest from our own and where the tongue cannot be bent to it unless you train it early.

Likewise it is an opinion accepted by all, that it is not right to 15
bring up a child in the lap of his parents. This natural love makes them too tender and lax, even the wisest of them. They are capable neither of chastising his faults nor of seeing him brought up roughly, as he should be, and hazardously. They could not endure his returning sweating and dusty from his exercise, drinking hot, drinking cold, or see him on a skittish horse, or up against a tough fencer, foil in hand, or with his first harquebus.[8] For there is no help for it: if you want to make a man of him, unquestionably you must not spare him in his youth, and must often clash with the rules of medicine:

> Let him live beneath the open sky
> And dangerously.
> —HORACE

It is not enough to toughen his soul; we must also toughen his 16
muscles. The soul is too hard pressed unless it is seconded, and has too great a task doing two jobs alone. I know how much mine labors in company with a body so tender and so sensitive, which leans so hard upon it. And I often perceive in my reading that in their writings my masters give weight, as examples of great spirit and stoutheartedness, to acts that are likely to owe more to thickness of skin and toughness of bones. I have seen men, women, and children naturally so constituted that a beating is less to them than a flick of the finger to me; who move neither tongue nor eyebrow at the blows they receive. When athletes imitate philosophers in endurance, their strength is that of sinews rather than of heart.

Now practice at enduring work is practice at enduring pain: 17
*Work hardens one against pain* [Cicero]. The boy must be broken in to the pain and harshness of exercises, to build him up against the pain and harshness of dislocation, colic, cauterization, and the dungeon, and torture. For he may yet be a prey to the last two, which threaten the good as well as the bad in a time like this. We have proof of this right now. Whoever fights the laws threatens even the best of men with the scourge and the noose.

And besides, the authority of the tutor, which should be sover- 18
eign over the pupil, is interrupted and hampered by the presence of

[8] **harquebus** A gun.

the parents. Add the fact that the respect the whole household pays the boy, and the consciousness of the power and greatness of his house, are in my opinion no slight drawbacks at that age.

In this school of dealing with men I have often noticed this flaw, 19
that instead of gaining knowledge of others we strive only to give knowledge of ourselves, and take more pains to peddle our wares than to get new ones. Silence and modesty are very good qualities for social intercourse. This boy will be trained to be sparing and thrifty with his ability when he has acquired it; not to take exception to the stupid things and wild tales that will be told in his presence, for it is uncivil and annoying to hit at everything that is not to our taste. Let him be content with correcting himself, and not seem to reproach others for everything that he refuses to do, or set himself up against common practices. *A man may be wise without ostentation, without arousing envy* [Seneca]. Let him shun these domineering and uncivil airs, and this childish ambition to try to seem more clever by being different and to gain reputation by finding fault and being original. As it is becoming only to great poets to indulge in poetic license, so it is tolerable only for great and illustrious souls to take unusual liberties. *If Socrates and Aristippus have done something contrary to the rules of behavior and custom, let him not think that he has a right to do the same; for they have gained that privilege by great and divine merits* [Cicero]. . . .

Put into his head an honest curiosity to inquire into all things; 20
whatever is unusual around him he will see: a building, a fountain, a man, the field of an ancient battle, the place where Caesar or Charlemagne passed:

> Which land is parched with heat, which numb with frost,
> What wind drives sails to the Italian coast.
> —PROPERTIUS

He will inquire into the conduct, the resources, and the alliances of this prince and that. These are things very pleasant to learn and very useful to know.

In this association with men I mean to include, and foremost, 21
those who live only in the memory of books. He will associate, by means of histories, with those great souls of the best ages. It is a vain study, if you will; but also, if you will, it is a study of inestimable value, and the only study, as Plato tells us, in which the Lacedaemonians[9] had kept a stake for themselves. What profit will he not gain in this field by reading the *Lives* of our Plutarch?[10] But let my guide remember

[9] **Lacedaemonians** Spartans, the chief rivals of Athenians.

[10] **Plutarch (A.D. 46?–120)** Author of *Parallel Lives*, biographies of Greek and Roman dignitaries.

the object of his task, and let him not impress on his pupil so much the date of the destruction of Carthage as the characters of Hannibal and Scipio,[11] nor so much where Marcellus died as why his death there showed him unworthy of his duty. Let him be taught not so much the histories as how to judge them. That, in my opinion, is of all matters the one to which we apply our minds in the most varying degree. I have read in Livy[12] a hundred things that another man has not read in him. Plutarch has read in him a hundred besides the ones I could read, and perhaps besides what the author had put in. For some it is a purely grammatical study; for others, the skeleton of philosophy, in which the most abstruse parts of our nature are penetrated.

There are in Plutarch many extensive discussions, well worth 22
knowing, for in my judgment he is the master workman in that field; but there are a thousand that he has only just touched on; he merely points out with his finger where we are to go, if we like, and sometimes is content to make only a stab at the heart of a subject. We must snatch these bits out of there and display them properly. Just as that remark of his, that the inhabitants of Asia served one single man because they could not pronounce one single syllable, which is "No," may have given the matter and the impulsion to La Boétie[13] for his *Voluntary Servitude*. Just to see him pick out a trivial action in a man's life, or a word which seems unimportant: that is a treatise in itself. It is a pity that men of understanding are so fond of brevity; doubtless their reputation gains by it, but we lose by it. Plutarch would rather we praised him for his judgment than for his knowledge; he would rather leave us wanting more of him than satiated. He knew that even of good things one may say too much, and that Alexandridas justly reproached the man who was talking sensibly but too long to the Ephors: "O stranger, you say what you should, but otherwise than you should." Those who have a thin body fill it out with padding; those who have slim substance swell it out with words.

Wonderful brilliance may be gained for human judgment by get- 23
ting to know men. We are all huddled and concentrated in ourselves, and our vision is reduced to the length of our nose. Socrates was asked where he was from. He replied not "Athens," but "The world." He, whose imagination was fuller and more extensive, embraced the universe as his city, and distributed his knowledge, his company, and his affections to all mankind, unlike us who look only at what is underfoot. When the vines freeze in my village, my priest infers that the

[11] **Hannibal (247–182 B.C.)** was a Carthaginian general who attacked Rome. **Scipio (237–183 B.C.)** was the general who defeated him.

[12] **Livy (64 B.C.–A.D. 17)** Great Roman historian.

[13] **Etienne de La Boétie (1530–1563)** Montaigne's closest friend.

wrath of God is upon the human race, and judges that the cannibals already have the pip. Seeing our civil wars, who does not cry out that this mechanism is being turned topsy-turvy and that the judgment day has us by the throat, without reflecting that many worse things have happened, and that ten thousand parts of the world, to our one, are meanwhile having a gay time? Myself, considering their licentiousness and impunity, I am amazed to see our wars so gentle and mild. When the hail comes down on a man's head, it seems to him that the whole hemisphere is in tempest and storm. And a Savoyard said that if that fool of a French king had known how to play his cards right, he would have had it in him to become chief steward to the duke of Savoy. His imagination conceived no higher dignity than that of his master. We are all unconsciously in this error, an error of great consequence and harm. But whoever considers as in a painting the great picture of our mother Nature in her full majesty; whoever reads such universal and constant variety in her face; whoever finds himself there, and not merely himself, but a whole kingdom, as a dot made with a very fine brush; that man alone estimates things according to their true proportions. . . .

After the tutor has told his pupil what will help make him wiser 24
and better, he will explain to him the meaning of logic, physics, geometry, rhetoric; and the science he chooses, now that his judgment is already formed, he will soon master. His lesson will be now in talk, now in a book; now his tutor will give him straight from the author some passage that is suitable to this purpose in his education, now he will give him the marrow and the substance predigested. And if the tutor himself is not familiar enough with books to find all the fine passages that are in them for his purpose, some man of letters may be associated with him, who as each need arises shall supply him with the material he requires, which he may then sort out and dispense to his nursling. And who can doubt that this kind of teaching is easier and more natural than that of Gaza?[14] There we find thorny and unpleasant precepts and empty and fleshless words that you cannot get a hold on, nothing that rouses your mind. Here the mind finds something to bite and feed on. The fruit of it is incomparably greater, and also it will be sooner ripe. . . .

My tutor, who knows he must fill his pupil's mind as much, or 25
more, with affection as with reverence for virtue, will be able to tell him that the poets agree with the common view, and to set his finger on the fact that the gods make men sweat harder in the approaches

[14] A fifteenth-century translator of Aristotle and author of a Greek grammar. [Translator's note]

to the chambers of Venus than of Pallas.[15] And when he begins to feel his oats, and the choice is offered him between Bradamante and Angelica as a mistress to be enjoyed—a natural, active, spirited, manly but not mannish beauty, next to a soft, affected, delicate, artificial beauty; one disguised as a boy, wearing a shining helmet, the other dressed as a girl, wearing a headdress of pearls—the tutor will think his pupil manly even in love if he chooses quite differently from that effeminate shepherd of Phrygia.[16]

He will teach him this new lesson, that the value and height of 26
true virtue lies in the ease, utility, and pleasure of its practice, which is so far from being difficult that children can master it as well as men, the simple as well as the subtle. Virtue's tool is moderation, not strength. Socrates, her prime favorite, deliberately gives up his strength, to slip into the naturalness and ease of her gait. She is the nursing mother of human pleasures. By making them just, she makes them sure and pure. By moderating them, she keeps them in breath and appetite. By withdrawing the ones she refuses, she makes us keener for the ones she allows us; and she allows us abundantly all those that nature wills, even to satiety, in maternal fashion, if not to the point of lassitude (unless perchance we want to say that the regimen that stops the drinker short of drunkenness, the eater short of indigestion, the lecher short of baldness, is an enemy of our pleasures). If she lacks the fortune of ordinary men, she rises above it or does without it, and makes herself a different sort of fortune that is all her own, and no longer fluctuating and unsteady. She knows how to be rich and powerful and learned, and lie on perfumed mattresses. She loves life, she loves beauty and glory and health. But her own particular task is to know how to enjoy those blessings with temperance, and to lose them with fortitude: a task far more noble than harsh, without which the course of any life is denatured, turbulent, and deformed, and fit to be associated with those dangers, those brambles, and those monsters.

If this pupil happens to be of such an odd disposition that he 27
would rather listen to some idle story than to the account of a fine voyage or a wise conversation when he hears one; if, at the sound of the drum that calls the youthful ardor of his companions to arms, he turns aside to another that invites him to the tricks of the jugglers; if,

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[15] **Pallas** Venus was the goddess of love and Pallas was Pallas Athene, the owl-eyed goddess of war.

[16] Paris, whose award of the golden apple, the prize of beauty, to Aphrodite instead of Hera or Athene led to the Trojan War. Bradamante and Angelica are two heroines of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. [Translator's note]

by his own preference, he does not find it more pleasant and sweet to return dusty and victorious from a combat than from tennis or a ball with the prize for that exercise, I see no other remedy than for his tutor to strangle him early, if there are no witnesses, or apprentice him to a pastry cook in some good town, even though he were the son of a duke; in accordance with Plato's precept that children should be placed not according to the faculties of their father, but according to the faculties of their soul.

Since it is philosophy that teaches us to live, and since there is a 28
lesson in it for childhood as well as for the other ages, why is it not imparted to children?

> He still is yielding clay; now, now, ere he congeal,
> Tirelessly we must shape him on the potter's wheel.
> —PERSIUS

## QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL READING

1. What are Montaigne's assumptions about the social class of the student?
2. How is the tutor to help shape the character of the student?
3. What does Montaigne think about a tutor's demand that children repeat what they are told?
4. Should the child be silent in the presence of the tutor?
5. What are Montaigne's views about the capacity of individual students to learn? What is the tutor's responsibility to the individual?
6. What are Montaigne's attitudes toward accepting the views of authorities? When, if ever, can those views be accepted?
7. Of what use is travel to the student?
8. Why should parents be somewhere else when the student is with the tutor?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING

1. Throughout the essay, Montaigne insists that the tutor help the child make his learning his own. He writes, "let him judge the profit he has made by the testimony not of his memory, but of his life" (para. 6). What does Montaigne mean by making learning "his own"? How do you make your own learning your own?
2. In paragraph 5 Montaigne complains that when "teachers undertake to regulate many minds of such different capacities and forms with the same lesson," only a few students will get much out of it. In other words, Montaigne recommends that different students receive different "lessons." To what extent has your own experience confirmed or denied

this observation? Compare your experiences in large classes with experiences either in small classes or tutorials. How does your capacity for learning alter depending on the size of your class?

3. In paragraph 8 Montaigne discourses on the metaphor of the bees, who sample many flowers and make their honey from a unique mixture of pollen. Here he recommends that students read widely, collect many ideas, and then make those ideas their own. How can this be done? What is your own experience in gathering evidence and opinions and drawing your own conclusions? Give a clear example in which you have researched and developed your own views.
4. Montaigne recommends that children be removed from their parents when in school, as he was. Review his arguments in paragraph 15 and take a stand on this issue. As much as possible, model your response on Montaigne's essay. Make an effort to use metaphor where appropriate to bolster your argument.
5. In paragraph 16 Montaigne addresses the physical training of the child. He insists that physical training enables the child to face the trials of Renaissance life. What kinds of physical trials do you think the modern student would likely face later in life? Use as many examples of current physical threats as possible, and suggest ways in which physical training may help the student later in life.
6. Write your own essay titled "Of the Education of Children." Be sure to use some of Montaigne's techniques: use of metaphor and vivid imagery, quotations from important writers, and details concerning the point of instruction. What would you recommend, beginning with grade school, as the best way to educate children? What are your educational ideals and what would you recommend as the best setting and structure for a good education?
7. **CONNECTIONS** Compare Montaigne's views on education with those of Ralph Waldo Emerson. These men are three centuries removed from one another and come from societies that have totally different attitudes toward social class. What links Montaigne and Emerson in their common goal for the education of the young? What separates them? Compare them point by point. Examine, too, their respective rhetorical approaches to their subject. What are the principal ways in which their writing differs?
8. **CONNECTIONS** Would John Dewey or Paolo Freire agree with Montaigne's views about the education of children? Consider Montaigne's attitudes toward accepting authority, making one's learning one's own, the usefulness of travel, the separation of the child from home, and any other important issues you feel these writers either agree or disagree about.