

# A Humanities Approach to Education Week

by Lauren Walker (Communications: Public Relations '25)

Each August, BYU Campus Education Week offers hundreds of classes ranging from improving family relationships, parenting, and finding gospel insights to finances, technology, health care, and even automobile repair. The classes are organized and taught in a way that caters to all types of learners. These classes can be one-off, independent lectures, but they are sometimes recurring lecture series. Faculty members from the College of Humanities have recently become an integral part of Education Week, providing insightful and interesting humanities classes.

## HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE IN EDUCATION WEEK

Many College faculty members teach classes based on their own interests in humanities or gospel topics. For example, Professor Donald W. Parry (Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls) has consistently lectured at Education Week, speaking about angels and symbolism in the temple. Adjunct Faculty Jane Hinckley (18th-Century British Women Writers and Artists) has also spoken many times on Jane Austen and her literary works. Adjunct Faculty Lori Steadman (Rhetoric and Composition) taught in 2022 on knowing and teaching family stories to help build a resilient family.

In addition to the many classes that College faculty organize and teach, the Humanities Center recently began sponsoring Education Week presentations. Professor Matthew Wickman (Scottish Literature), founding and former director of the Humanities Center, recognized the opportunity to provide greater access to the rich scholarship and educational perspectives of College faculty. To create a feeling of familiarity with the classes, Wickman and the Humanities Center created recurring, themed courses.

One of the most successful themed series is Finding Christ in the Humanities, a lecture series focused on appealing to religious interests. Many participants noted that the series helped them see Christ more frequently in unexpected places.

Additionally, the Humanities Center sponsors Five Best, a series highlighting niche interests like “Five Best Foreign Films,” or “Five Best Cartoons.” The initial lecture was so well attended, it became a popular, annual series at Education Week. Wickman explains, “These lectures appeal to the eclectic interests of both our faculty in the College and people attending Education Week. They were getting good audiences and great feedback, so we decided to keep going with them.”

Wickman also notes that the annual lecture series created excitement about the topics. “I’ve heard really good feedback from people who have attended and have either been moved by something that was said or that had new things they wanted to read as a result,” Wickman says. “I think it has increased the visibility and the accessibility of work being done by colleagues around the College.”

## FUTURE OF THE COLLEGE IN EDUCATION WEEK

As the new director of the Humanities Center, Professor Rex Nielson (Luso-Afro-Brazilian Literature and Culture) eagerly awaits the 2023 Education Week. “We have really high attendance at our panels,” he says. “And to me, those high levels of attendance are evidence that many members of the Church are hungry for the humanities and hungry for the way that the humanities help us think about the important issues of our lives.” The recent spike in attendance at humanities-related lectures led the Humanities Center to expand the number of faculty members participating in Education Week for 2023.

Not only do Education Week attendees pursue ongoing learning, but they sharpen skills learned from their time as students. Reflecting on his experiences with Education Week, Wickman says, “In a lot of ways, I imagine attendees come to reenter to learn and then are reminded of ways that they both went to serve after graduation but still serve, in part, through their experiences and education in the College.”

Nielson hopes Education Week attendees look forward to the year to come and assures that this year will be just as uplifting, applicable, and spiritually enlightening. “Our college is invested in helping us understand what it means to be a child of God on this planet” as we interact with and learn about other cultures. “I think we have a lot to offer Education Week.”

*The following two articles showcase presentations by College of Humanities faculty from Education Week in 2022.*

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Photo by Brooklynn Jarvis Kelson/BYU Photo

## **JAMES SWENSEN: “WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: FIVE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT CAN CHANGE HOW WE SEE THE WORLD”**

by Simon Laraway (Editing and Publishing '23)

The average internet user is bombarded with tens of thousands of photographs every day. Exorbitant numbers float around about the number of images present in the digital age: Instagram users post 46,000 photos a minute, Facebook users upload 350 million photos a day, humans take a grand total of 1.72 trillion photos every year, and so on. This results in a paradox, according to Associate Professor James Swensen (History of Photography): “We are so inundated with photographic imagery that we don’t look.”

But photographs can be powerful. During a 2022 BYU Education Week lecture, Swensen explored cases where photographs quite literally changed the world.

The photograph shown on the following page—one of Swensen’s titular five photographs—is one of a number taken by Lewis Hine depicting child labor toward the end of the Industrial Revolution in the early 1900s. Hine was hired by the National Child Labor Committee to document child labor, a widespread phenomenon at the time. “He’s going to photograph these children,” Swensen said. “He’s going to bring their faces and their situations to light so that not only can they be seen but something can be done.”

Hine worked as a social studies teacher, but early in his career he took up photography to supplement his teaching. He soon recognized

the power that photography had, and he determined to use it to sway public opinion on child labor. As a child, Hine had to work to support his family, so he empathized deeply with the children he photographed. Swensen said, “He not only shows these young children, but he gives them a name. They are not just anonymous or unknown figures, but they are real people. He humanizes these young girls and young boys.”

Hine’s work was far from easy—often he would have to sneak into factories, avoiding factory foremen or supervisors who wanted to prevent images of child labor from circulating. But Hine’s efforts were duly rewarded. “Hine’s work actually moves the needle,” Swensen confirmed.

In fact, as a result of his photographs, the public and government could no longer turn a blind eye to the depravity of child labor. This led to laws against it during the Progressive reform movement, ultimately culminating in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act, in which the federal government outlawed child labor completely.





Lewis Wickes Hine. *Sadie Pfeiffer, a Cotton Mill Spinner, Lancaster, South Carolina, 1908.* The Art Institute of Chicago.

At that point, Swensen's discussion came sharply back to the present, where he critiqued current interactions with visual media. Hine's photography resulted in real and practical change. But little photography we see in our own lives seems to have such a profound effect—whether personally or societally. Our eyes tend to glaze over when we scroll through the deluge of social media photos and advertisements. How can we reform our relationship with photography to see it as the powerful tool and art form it is?

Swensen said the first step is to slow down and “consider the images that we are seeing. We blindly accept these things, but we should stop and think about what they are, where they are from, who made them, what kinds of choices went into those photographs. There are those handful that we should slow down and think about and scrutinize.”

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We also ought to exercise some wariness in interacting with photographs and be slow to accept what they seem to depict as the truth. “They are not completely objective things,” Swensen said. “It behooves us to understand what photographs are, what they do, because we trust photographs.” Doctored images are becoming increasingly commonplace (and increasingly convincing) but that does not mean we are at the mercy of anyone with Photoshop. A little research can go a long way, Swensen said: “It’s good to do a little detective work,

to ask, ‘Is this really what it’s saying that it is?’”

Practicing this conscious interaction with such a commonplace media can affect not only how we see the world but how we participate in the world. “What I love about photography is that it not only helps us see but helps us act. It propels us to do something,” Swensen concluded.



Photo of Associate Professor James Swensen by BYU Photo

**Look for more great classes sponsored by the Humanities Center at BYU Education Week in August 2023.**

**Stream 1:** Deja que el Señor guíe tu vida [Let the Lord Guide Your Life]

**Stream 2:** Environmental Stewardship and the Humanities

**Stream 3:** My 5 Best

**Stream 4:** Christ in the Humanities

**Stream 5:** Understanding the Diversity of the Body of Christ

## JANE HINCKLEY: “INSPIRING 17TH-CENTURY WOMEN”

by Julie Irvine (Editing and Publishing '23)

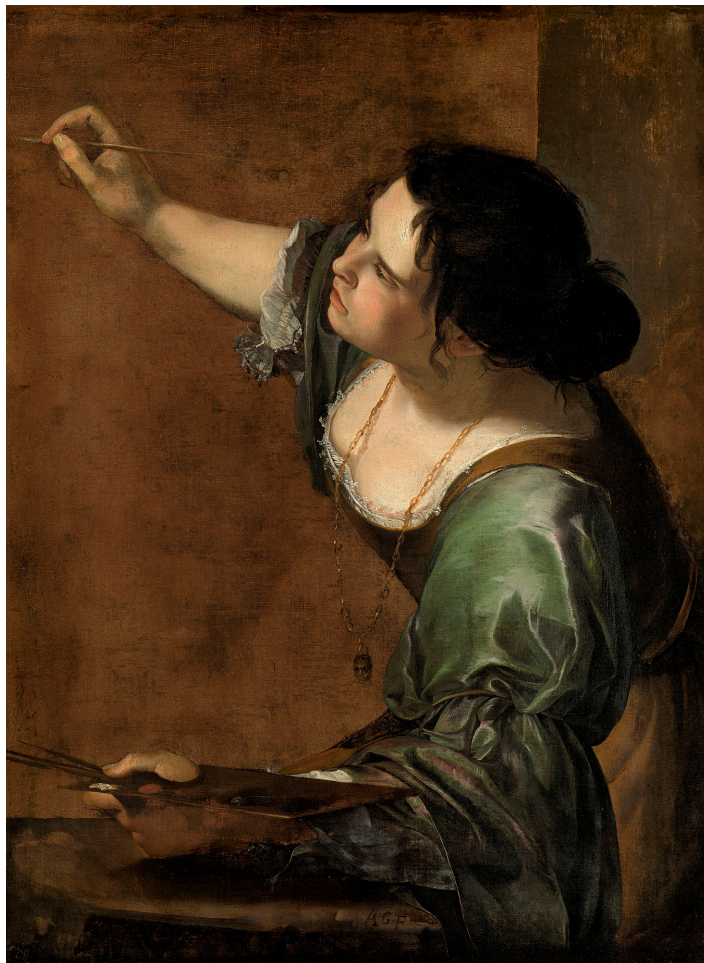
“Each time a girl opens a book and reads a womanless history, she learns she is worth less.”<sup>1</sup>

During Education Week, Adjunct Faculty Jane Hinckley prefaced her lecture with this quote. Hinckley’s lecture focused on three women who changed the arts for future generations of female creators.

### AN ITALIAN PAINTER

Artemisia Gentileschi forever changed the trajectory of female artists’ careers. Gentileschi, daughter of Italian artist Orazio Gentileschi, was a Catholic baroque artist during the 17th century, a time when “young women were to stay inside, either at home or church, waiting for their fathers to arrange a marriage for them,” Hinckley explained. Instead of falling into a woman’s traditional role, Gentileschi learned to paint.

When Gentileschi was 17, she suffered rape by her tutor, artist Agostino Tassi. Gentileschi used her trauma to infuse emotion and action into her paintings of biblical women—depicting women accurately as strong heroes (*Judith Beheading Holofernes*) or victims (*Susanna and the Elders*) rather than timid subjects or temptresses as Gentileschi’s male counterparts often did. She became so successful that she was the first female artist in the Academy of the Arts of Drawing in Florence.



Artemisia Gentileschi. *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura)* c. 1638-9. Royal Collection Trust/© His Majesty King Charles III 2023.

Her paintings show that she “refused to allow Tassi to derail her desire to be a professional female painter,” Hinckley noted. “She redefined feminine virtue to mean strength—strength drawn from the stories of unconventional heroes in the scriptures.”

### AN AMERICAN POET

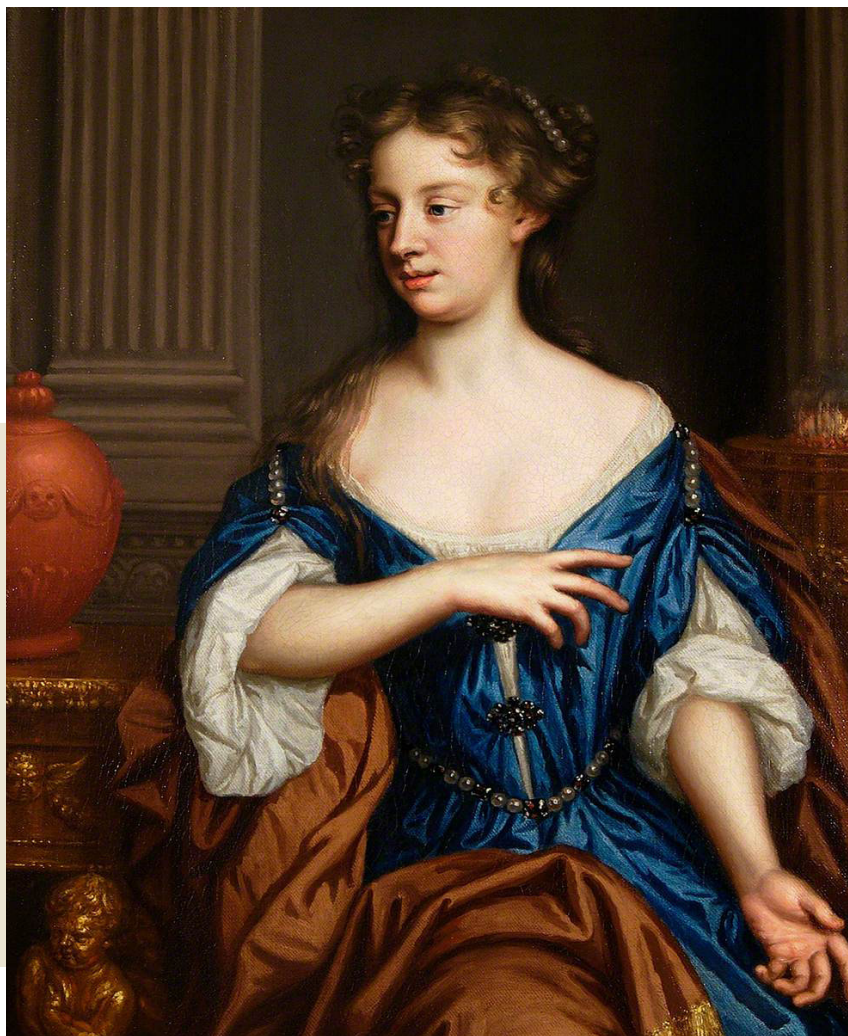
Anne Bradstreet (née Dudley) was an English-born American poet. As a young girl, she was taught history, literature, and poetry. Bradstreet married when she was 16 and, in 1630, left England with her husband and their families to establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Hinckley said, “Two years into her American experience, Anne contracted tuberculosis and came close to death. In gratitude for sparing her life, Anne turned to composing what previously she had only read and admired.” Anne wrote “Upon a Fit of Sickness” in 1632 (excerpt below).

*All men must die, and so must I;  
this cannot be revoked.  
For Adam's sake this word God spake  
when he so high provoked.  
Yet live I shall, this life's but small,  
in place of highest bliss,  
Where I shall have all I can crave,  
no life is like to this.  
For what's this but care and strife  
since first we came from womb?  
Our strength doth waste, our time doth haste,  
and then we go to th' tomb.  
O bubble blast, how long can'st last?  
that always art a breaking,  
No sooner blown, but dead and gone,  
ev'n as a word that's speaking.  
O whilst I live this grace me give,  
I doing good may be,  
Then death's arrest I shall count best,  
because it's Thy decree;  
Bestow much cost there's nothing lost,  
to make salvation sure,  
O great's the gain, though got with pain,  
comes by profession pure.*

Quoting author Charlotte Gordon, Hinckley added, “From 1638 to 1648, Anne wrote more than 6,000 lines of poetry, more than almost any other English writer on either side of the Atlantic composed in an entire lifetime. For most of this time, she was either pregnant, recovering from childbirth, or nursing an infant.”<sup>2</sup>





Mary Beale. *Self Portrait*, c. 1675. West Suffolk Heritage Service, CC BY-NC-ND.



Photo of Jane Hinckley by Jaren Hinckley

In 1647, Bradstreet's brother-in-law traveled back to England with a copy of her poetry and published her work three years later as *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*. This collection made Bradstreet the first author, "male or female, published in the New World," Hinckley said. "I admire her bravery to do something that few women (and in America, very few men) were doing—namely, writing and publishing her poetry." Bradstreet was a pioneer for female poets and for working mothers.

#### AN ENGLISH PORTRAITIST

Mary Beale (née Cradock) was a talented artist and writer who balanced her career and family. She learned to paint at an early age from her father, a Puritan minister and amateur artist. When she was 17, she met and later married cloth merchant Charles Beale, another amateur artist. Soon after they married, Beale and her husband moved to London, where she began painting portraits of her family and friends.

Beale was also a writer, and she composed a manuscript on painting as well as poetry and other

writings. In her manuscript, *Observations by MB*, she discussed the techniques and materials she used to paint apricots. "This is the first known text in English to explain the practice of painting by a female artist and one of the earliest writings on the subject by either gender," Hinckley noted. The Beales then moved from London to Hampshire, where Beale wrote her treatise, *Discourse on Friendship*. She also contributed to Samuel Woodforde's *Paraphrase of the Psalms*.

After moving with her family back to London, Beale became the sole provider for her family. "She and Charles were this dream team of a married couple who were best friends, who cherished each other and worked together so that she could be the successful, first female portrait artist in England," Hinckley explained. Reflecting on Beale's contribution to art, Hinckley said, "In addition to her abilities as a painter, she was one of the first English portraitists to allow people to smile in their portraits." Beale's new take on the classic portrait helped her gracefully and successfully create a space for herself in typically male-dominated fields.

"The 17th century was, historically, and is, historiographically, a mess," Hinckley said, quoting author Jenny Wormald.<sup>3</sup> Hinckley continued, "It's within this messy time of the 17th century that women began to challenge or further challenge perceived notions of what women could or could not accomplish." Gentileschi, Bradstreet, and Beale were among those influential women who pushed boundaries and paved the way for future female artists and writers. ■

1. Myra Sadker and David Sadker. *Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 13.
2. *Mistress Bradstreet: The Untold Life of America's First Poet* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2005), 195.
3. *The Seventeenth Century (Short Oxford History of the British Isles)* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.