

Advanced Grammar & Composition **Week 9 Reading**

From [*On the Sublime*](#) by Longinus

The universe therefore is not wide enough for the range of human speculation and intellect. Our thoughts often travel beyond the boundaries of our surroundings. If anyone wants to know what we were born for, let him look round at life and contemplate the splendour, grandeur, and beauty in which it everywhere abounds. It is a natural inclination that leads us to admire not the little streams, however pellucid and however useful, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and above all the Ocean. Nor do we feel so much awe before the little flame we kindle, because it keeps its light clear and pure, as before the fires of heaven, though they are often obscured. We do not think our flame more worthy of admiration than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions bring up rocks and whole hills out of the depths, and sometimes pour forth rivers of the earth-born, spontaneous fire. A single comment fits all these examples: the useful and necessary are readily available to man, it is the unusual that always excites our wonder. So when we come to great geniuses in literature--where, by contrast, grandeur is not divorced from service and utility--we have to conclude that such men, for all their faults, tower far above mortal stature. Other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of God. Freedom from error does indeed save us from blame, but it is only greatness that wins admiration. Need I add that every one of those great men redeems all his mistakes many times over by a single sublime stroke?