

What is a Classical Education?

For those of you who have no clue what classical education is, I will attempt to explain it in lay terms.

You will hear the word, "Trivium" which is basically a breakdown of learning stages into three main levels:

- The Grammar Stage--From K through elementary, the focus is mainly on memorization of the facts of different subjects.
- The Logic Stage--In junior grades (7th-8th) children learn to argue logically and think critically.
- The Rhetoric Stage--in high school, emphasis is placed on speech/debate, communication in writing, and independent thinking.

These stages are filled with "great" or classical books, the learning of classical languages such as Latin and Greek, and a heavy emphasis on history. Of course math and science and Bible are always essential in these stages as well.

Here are some pros and cons to classical education that I have observed and heard about from other homeschoolers. I'll start with the cons and end on a positive note with the pros:

Cons:

- Can require a good amount of research time on the different stages and requirements of each stage before you get started and as you go along.
- Includes a good amount of monitoring the children's progressions to different stages. Can be teacher intensive.
- If you lean more towards unschooling, this is probably not the best method for you, but I'm sure there might be an unschooling classical person out there somewhere!
- If you have children that are not bookworms or lovers of history, this may be a bit hard for them to be enthusiastic about.
- The older grades may have challenging curriculum and require the child to be disciplined and an independent thinker and worker.
- May be difficult to implement consistently if you are bogged down with other life issues.

Pros:

- There are lots of helps and resources for anyone considering classical education, such as explanations of the Trivium, scope & sequences for each stage, as well as online tutorial help.
- Excellent for bright learners and lovers of literature and history.
- Promotes the introduction of classics to children at a young age.
- Is a well-ordered and disciplined form of study.
- Produces well-rounded, highly educated children who usually go on to do very well in higher learning institutions.

No matter which way you prefer to educate your children, remember to enjoy the many blessings of having them home with you.

~Deborah Wuehler

The history of classical education is long and varied. Back in Greece it was pagan, of course, and Paul wrote against Greek teaching when he wrote to the Grecian city of Corinth in I Corinthians 1 to 3, and elsewhere. Other early Christians wrote against it. Puritans in colonial America wrote against it. They criticized its ethics, its lack of sciences, its paganism, and its logic. Aristotelian logic, they argued, could only restate what's already known. It cannot produce new knowledge like the sciences can.

Grammar was a special problem too. The Greeks used the word to refer to learning language through literature. Later, what we now call grammar was invented, and the Romans added it to education. Their Latin grammar came to America, and the Puritans objected because Latin grammar was a poor fit for English language, and because the grammar approach to educating did not work well. Some today try to change the meaning of grammar to refer to a "grammar level" of child development. That's a recent invention and nothing like what the Greeks called grammar.

In the last century in America, philosopher Mortimer Adler popularized a version of classical education and it came into use mostly by Catholics and mostly at university level. For this education, Adler compiled a list of Great Books of Western Civilization, which was published by Encyclopedia Britannica in 1952. That list contained parts of the Bible. Their revised list contains no Bible, although it includes Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and some other Christians.

People after Adler made their own book lists, and that practice continues into today's homeschooling. Some say that learning Latin and maybe Greek is necessary for a classical education. Others say those languages are not important today since all the ancient books are now available in English. So today, the various homeschool curriculums labeled "classical" contain different book lists and different recommendations about learning Latin. Also they contain different definitions of what grammar means and different ways to use it. If you choose classical, your version will depend on what publisher you buy it from. Use it flexibly as you would any curriculum.

~Ruth Beechick

Biographical Information

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Dr. Ruth Beechick is a lifelong educator who now writes mostly for homeschoolers, whom she sees as bright lights in these days before Christ returns. Dr. Ruth Beechick has taught hundreds of people to read, Her own newest books are World History Made Simple: Matching History with the Bible (www.HomeschoolingBooks.com or 1-800-421-6645. and A Biblical Home Education.

Deborah Wuehler is the senior editor for The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine. She resides in Roseville, California, with her husband Richard. They are the parents of eight children: three teenagers, three elementary, a preschooler and a baby. They have been homeschooling since the birth of their firstborn who is now graduated from high school. Many of her articles can be found on www.Crosswalk.com, and many other homeschooling sites. She is a group leader in her local homeschooling support organization and she loves digging for buried treasure in the Word, reading, writing, homeschooling, and dark chocolate! Email her at senioreditor@TheHomeschoolMagazine.com.