

Mission and Philosophy

Classical Cottage School, Inc.
2019-20

Our Mission

The Classical Cottage School is a non-denominational Christian consortium whose mission is to equip students with the tools of learning through a careful implementation of classical studies in the Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric stages of development.

Our Philosophy

Modern education sees learning as an accumulation of facts; it is content-driven but skills deficient. Many children don't know what to do with the information they have. The results include an inability to order thoughts and to think clearly or independently. At the Classical Cottage School, we believe the most important curriculum is that which develops the skills of independent learning and equips students for a lifetime of inquiry and growth. A true classical education does not accomplish education through subjects but uses those subjects as a way to build the skills for becoming a lifelong learner. We believe that students benefit most when skill-building is the focus, no matter the subject.

The core courses in our school will be those Liberal Arts classes that develop critical learning skills, as once taught by the Greeks and by Renaissance scholars. These thinking skills are taught carefully and incrementally in correlation with three major stages of intellectual development:

1) **Grammar Stage:** Before age 10, students at the Classical Cottage School focus on the grammar of language through a basic overview of Latin, and English Grammar. In addition to languages, students might participate in music, multi-level art classes, world history and geography, and several levels of science and nature classes. A three-year Classical Studies Program that covers Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, and Early American History is offered to older Grammar students.

2) **Logic Stage:** Students between ages 11 and 16 are ready for intense Latin, beginning Greek, independent writing, and Logic. The study of Latin develops the child's powers of memory and observation and enrich his studies of English Grammar, Ancient History, Mythology, Geography and Science. At the Classical Cottage School, we recommend that students participate in a two-year writing program called Progymnasmata before taking our two-year formal and material Logic program. We also encourage Latin students to take our beginning and intermediate Greek classes, and to participate in the Virginia Junior Classical League and Certamen competitions in order to broaden their knowledge of classical history, mythology, and culture. Our beginning Omnibus classes from level I through III will develop

students' thinking skills through reading, analyzing, discussing, and writing about literature central to Western culture from ancient through modern times.

3) **Rhetoric Stage:** Rhetoric is the art of articulating ideas for the purpose of persuasion. Students who have followed the curricula of the Grammar and Logic stages will be ready for this level of academics between ages 14 and 18. Latin, Logic, and Progymnasmata courses serve as the foundation for our Rhetoric program. Other offerings include A.P. American Government, A.P. Latin, Philosophy, American History, Ancient & Medieval Western Civilizations, European History, Art History and Omnibus classes from level IV through VI. Additionally, students at the rhetoric stage will find high school math and science courses and other important electives such as Speech, Debate, Studio Art, and A.P. essay-writing seminars offered on a separate day.

An Analysis of Our Choices

Does this sound like more than your child can do? It might be if you try to overlay these classes with an already-packed curriculum at home. These courses deserve to be, along with Bible, at the center of your curriculum. It should be noted that core classes cover much more than the subject title. For example, Latin students learn close analysis, English Grammar, Ancient History, Mythology, Classical Literature, and Roman Culture and may choose to participate in local, state, and national contests.

In general, we strongly advise families to cut back on other academics at home. Time spent building skills conveys benefits that will serve a lifetime. Give your students the time necessary to reap the rewards of our core classes of Latin, Progymnasmata, Logic, Omnibus and Rhetoric. This program may seem time-consuming initially, but it will spare your child the frustration that comes from the academic stagnation and boredom that are the end product of typical, workbook-centered curricula.

Classical subjects deservedly have enjoyed a revival in interest in the past few years. There is, however, a major distinction in the way Classical Cottage School approaches these subjects. Most approaches see subjects in the way that modern education views them: simply as material to be covered. While covering classical subjects is an improvement over much school curricula, we think that this more common approach misses the central benefit to a classical education. **Classical Cottage school sees Dorothy Sayers' emphasis on the tools of learning to be the key to all learning;** these tools are what enable students of all abilities to become motivated and independent learners. Emphasizing the development of these tools necessarily means giving up less important content to focus on mastering the tools. While it may seem that this approach leaves subject material uncovered in the short term, these temporary omissions are more than compensated for by the deeper comprehension of key subjects, the mastery of which makes all future learning markedly easier.

One example of this is the study of vocabulary. Typical vocabulary study involves long, unrelated lists of words, lists that are often dutifully learned for a quiz and soon forgotten. By

learning vocabulary in the context of an intensive study of Latin, students understand how words are constructed as well as how language works. This kind of analytical vocabulary study gives an exponential access to new words, one that is not dependent on yet another boring vocabulary list. English words learned in this context are never forgotten, and are used fluently in all their parts of speech and with all modifying prefixes. By mastering Latin (rather than simply studying some Latin), students become attuned to nuances in English words and syntax that are accessible only through a deep grasp of grammar. Previously unfamiliar words and subtle concepts are thus rendered readily and independently comprehensible, simply on the basis of possessing the keys to language—the tools to learning.

While we see Classical Cottage School as a community where Christian children can grow strong in fellowship with their peers, our goal is to educate students in classical education so that they will be armed with an understanding of the history of the ideas upon which western civilization is built. Our classes are taught from the perspective of a biblical worldview, but we do not offer courses that focus specifically on religious teachings. Due to the wide representation of denominations in our school, that vital area of the curriculum is best addressed at home and through the families' respective churches.

For a more thorough explanation of the reasoning behind our choice of subjects, read Dorothy Sayers' essay *The Lost Tools of Learning* at www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html. If you read anything at all about Classical Education, make this the essay. We recommend that families reread this essay at the beginning of every school year.

Our Goals

While the primary goal of a classical education is not high academic achievement but to train students to learn independently, academic success is a natural by-product of this approach. Even though our curriculum is centered on development of core skills rather than coverage of all subjects, don't be surprised when your child's mastery of subjects far exceeds that of your own public or private education. We encourage parents to attend classes with the child and experience the thrill of acquiring new skills.

In summary, the Classical Cottage Schools aims to:

- use the tools of the classical tradition to focus intently on the development of the skills of analysis, reasoning, writing, and speaking (hence Latin, Progymnasmata, Omnibus, Logic and Rhetoric)
- emphasize that with classical education “less is better”, meaning that the younger student is better off listening to and reading fine books and hearing the stories of our culture than grinding through workbooks that really don't teach as much as they might seem.
- emphasize depth over scope of content so that core Upper School courses really aim for mastery of key skills, which takes time and focused attention, because in

developing these skills students will learn *how* to learn, and thereby will be motivated, competent, independent, lifelong learners.

- provide additional liberal arts courses that focus on the noble achievements of western civilization and are carefully designed for maximum effectiveness.
- provide the rich benefits that can best be achieved in courses taught by experienced, professional teachers who have extensive background in their field of study.
- challenge students by making the courses lively and inspiring.
- allow families with multiple children the opportunity to provide quality, age-appropriate instruction for both older and younger children at the same time.
- support families in their desire to school at home by limiting our courses for younger students to one day per week, and assisting families who homeschool through high school by offering additional math, science, and high school electives on a second day of the week,
- encourage mothers to learn alongside their older or younger children if desired (required in the case of Latin).
- model and, when necessary, guide students in Christian principles such as humility, graciousness, and concern for others.

For more information on classical education, we recommend the following lists:

***Essay:** “The Lost Tools of Learning”, Dorothy Sayers (foundational and very important!)

Books:

Berquist, Laura. *Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum*

Bluedorn, Harvey & Laurie. *Teaching the Trivium: Christian Homeschooling in a Classical Style*

Campbell, Andrew. *The Latin-Centered Curriculum.*

Wilson, Douglas. *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning*

Wise, Jessie & Susan Wise Bauer, *The Well Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home*

Websites:

www.classical-homeschooling.org

www.classicalhomeschooling.org

www.well-trainedmind.com

www.triviumpursuit.com

www.canonpress.org

www.memoriapress.com

www.veritaspres.com