

What Is Classical Education?

Classical education seeks to not simply inform the mind but to form it. It does so by harnessing the natural power and progression of the intellect through a three part process called the Trivium. The early years of school are spent in absorbing facts, systematically laying the foundations for advanced study. In the middle grades, students learn to think through arguments. In the high school years, they learn to express themselves.

In those early years we find the first part of the Trivium which is grammar. This first step helps the mind assign meanings to words, objects and ideas so that the mind can grasp the truth or falsity of something. These are the years in which the building blocks for all other learning are laid. In the elementary school year, grades one through four, the mind is ready to absorb information and children easily absorb the truth of their environment.

By middle school a child's mind begins to think more analytically. This is the logic stage. Children pay attention to cause and effect, relationship between different fields of knowledge, the way facts fit together into a logical framework. Ultimately the logic part of the Trivium forms the child's mind in how to put two or more aspects of grammar into harmony which forms more complex ideas. During these years the student begins to apply logic to all academic subjects and not simple absorption of information. Learning logic will help students throughout their life as they learn to analyze statements they encounter and discern truth from falsehood in them.

The third part of the Trivium is the fulfillment of the first two parts and is known as rhetoric. Rhetoric in the classical sense of the term is the formation of an argument, taking multiple ideas and exploring their relationship to one another and reality. This is also known as the process of reasoning. Rhetoric also includes learning how to express oneself well, in ways that appeal to both the hearts and minds of an audience.

A classical education is more than just one subject among many in a broader education, it is a model of learning that compliments the natural state and progression of the intellect. Classical education is language-focused; learning is accomplished through words, written and spoken and discussed. It is ultimately a dialogue with reality, and a way that the child can use their natural curiosity of the world and ask questions of it. It is language focused and it follows a specific three-part pattern; the mind must be first supplied with facts and images, then given the logical tools for organization of facts, and finally equipped to express conclusions.

To the classical mind, all knowledge is interrelated. A classical education takes history as its organizing outline – beginning with the ancients and progressing forward to the moderns in history, science, literature, art and music. The classical education is systematic. It exercises the child's mind in a scholarly way which gives them a lifelong ability to understand their environment, the world and the universe, both materially and immaterially.