

Classical Approach to Homeschooling

During the past decade or so, the Classical Approach to education has regained popularity among many families. This timeless approach makes for an interesting homeschool experience because the proponents of this method have found that the learning stages they rely on to divide the levels of scholarship has been backed up by solid research in the area of brain development. In other words, it just makes a lot of sense! The methods employed by those making use of the varying interpretations of the Classical Approach may differ somewhat, but all work within the learning groupings of the Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric stages, though even these terms may vary. For example, those using the Classical Christian Approach sometimes use the terms: Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom stages. Some use Dorothy Sayres' original names for the levels as the Parrot, Pert, and Poetic stages. Others further categorize the basic three stages by refining them into an early and a latter Grammar stage and then adding a finishing stage after the Rhetoric stage.

For all the differences in the terminology used, essentially there are only a few ways to do the Classical Approach. There are those that I would call the "Purists." For their books, they tend to choose ancient classic tomes. If it's written in Greek or Latin, you can bet they'll read it. These are the people who, like their Medieval counterparts, can be found debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Then there are the Christian Classicists, like Christine Miller, the Bluedorn Family, and the Bauer's and Wise-Bauer's. The folks from Veritas Press Logos School, Classical Conversations, and others of similar tastes, seem to fall more into this category, since they often sift through the available ancient texts and discard much of what is contrary to Christ and His Word. However, Principle Approachers are also Classical Scholars; although they use different methods than the rest, relying more on individual research from primary sources and the use of the commonplace book idea from the Enlightenment period of history. Finally, the Thomas Jefferson Education people are also using a form of Classical learning since they too separate the ages into stages rather than grade levels and they also rely on the tried and true use of classics and mentors with reading and writing to effect scholarship.

Most classical approach adherents use very few textbooks, unless they are following the ideas set forth in *The Well-Trained Mind* or a Classical Conversations Challenge Class, that is. But even if you are using textbooks you can still give your children a classical education by adding in the following methods. During the early years, like the Charlotte Mason and Living Books people, Classical educators read aloud lots of living books, have the children narrate the stories back, and teach them all sorts of things while their minds are still in the "boot up" stage and the skill of memorization comes so readily. In the middle years, when children will naturally argue or contradict others, parents will capitalize on this propensity and teach their children how to learn and how to argue effectively. This is the stage for teaching the rules for argumentation; the first sign of which is that the child has attained the character necessary to hear the word "No" and does not roll her eyes or "harrumph" at you. Once that foundational skill is set, you can teach your child how to recognize false logic, A.K.A., fallacies. Skill in using Informal Logic is what you are after at this point. This is also the ideal time to teach your child how to write intelligently, cohesively, and persuasively in anticipation of the often grueling pace of the next level. The final level of education for most Classicists is what is known as the Rhetoric stage. This is the time in your student's life that he should regularly be spending many hours studying, documenting their learning, and communicating original thoughts to others as a result of his scholarship. For the Classical Scholar, though, there really is no end to learning. By the time a classically educated youth has graduated, learning has become a lifelong habit and, hopefully, a joy they will continue to pursue for the rest of their lives.