

CINCINNATI CLASSICAL ACADEMY

What is Classical Education?

“Education is teaching our children to desire the right things.”

- Plato

What does it mean to be classical? A classic is anything of enduring value. Classical education thus derives its purpose, pedagogy, and subject matters from the traditions of our Western civilization inheritance that have proven their value over centuries and even millennia. Classical education can be understood as traditional.

The Barney Charter School Initiative of Hillsdale College follows in the tradition of **democratic classical** education. Democratic classicism strives to equip every citizen with the intellectual tools for self-government, personal success, and – in the original sense of the “liberal arts” – freedom.

WHAT IS CLASSICAL EDUCATION?

- ❖ Classical education aims to cultivate human *virtue*, or *excellence*, which is the word’s ancient meaning.
- ❖ Classical education strives to teach the *humanities* (Latin *humanitas*), encompassing the general learning that should be the possession of all human beings.
- ❖ Classical education is founded on *logocentrism*, the principle that truth exists and can be known through the exercise of reason, and that there are objective standards of truth, beauty, and virtue.
- ❖ Classical education stresses achievement in science and mathematics. Advances in STEM disciplines were necessary for the emergence of Enlightenment philosophy, and competence in science and math are necessary to comprehend the changing world and the challenges it faces.
- ❖ Classical education aims to cultivate *moral character and civic virtue*, instilling traditional values of industry, courage, integrity, prudence, temperance, service, justice, and patriotism.
- ❖ Classical education holds that the purpose of education is to *enable human happiness*. It seeks to engage the inquisitive nature and the need for purpose, which are innate in human mind and soul.
- ❖ Classical education aims to instill appreciation and discernment of *the good, the true, and the beautiful*.
- ❖ Classical education recognizes that the *Western and American traditions* are our precious heritage. To transmit the accumulated wisdom of Western civilization – to persuade students that it is their duty to tend that inheritance and to transfer it to future generations with interest – that is the work of a classical school.
- ❖ Classical education relies on *traditional methods*. It holds that teachers, instructing in classrooms, are indispensable as sources of inspiration and models of virtuous character. It is *language-rich* and employs a varied pedagogy of Socratic dialogue, seminar, lecture, and recitation. It stresses *memorization*, proceeding on the belief that it is difficult to think well with an empty mind.

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WHAT IS CLASSICAL EDUCATION? (CONTINUED)

- ❖ Classical education employs a *rigorous, content-rich curriculum* in the liberal arts and sciences. This includes study of full-text primary sources in the humanities to convey the stories and mysteries of the human condition as told by the great authors and thinkers.
- ❖ A classical education is one in which the *classics* feature prominently. The greatest books, as well as the greatest works of art and music, whether old or new, are well-written, and contain profound explorations of the questions that have occupied the noblest minds of every generation.
- ❖ A classical education is a *liberal* education. It is an education fitting for free citizens and one that fits them to be free. It liberates from the double bonds of ignorance and vice. It transcends the confines of one's own time and place.
- ❖ A classical education celebrates *mystery*. It holds that not everything real is quantifiable. Classical schools seek to tap students' sense of wonder and to draw them toward wisdom.
- ❖ A classical education prizes *order*. The object of the education is a well-ordered mind and heart, and every effort is made to reflect this order in the environment, from good manners to a well-adorned campus.
- ❖ Classical education aims to cultivate *human flourishing in the individual, in communities, and in our nation*.

WHAT CLASSICAL EDUCATION IS NOT

- ❖ *Classical education is not elitist*. Historically, classical education was reserved for the upper classes, but that is no longer the case. Charter schools are public, and unlike private schools, anyone may enroll. No tuition is charged, and no tests are given to determine eligibility. If there happens to be a waiting list, the order of admission is decided by lottery. Classical charter schools offer a classical education to anyone who desires it, without consideration of social status, race, or income.
- ❖ *Classical education is not stifling*. It is true, classical schools are characterized by the old-fashioned belief that students should memorize a great many facts. But the learning of facts is merely preparatory. Lower-order thinking is for the sake of higher-order thinking. Of far greater importance are the creativity and good conversation made possible by virtuous habits and a well-stocked mind.
- ❖ *Classical education is not faddish*. The last half century has seen an endless parade of education reforms, and ever-increasing costs have yielded persistently lackluster results. Classical education made possible the greatest achievements of Western civilization, not least its political and economic philosophy, science and technology, material prosperity, law codes and free institutions. Classical educators think it wise to keep hold of the goose that lays the golden eggs.
- ❖ *A classical education is not out-dated*. The ends of a classical education did not cease to be relevant with the opening of the twenty-first century. They were not made obsolete by technological advances of the telegraph, the television, the computer, or the internet. They were not extinguished with the expansion of trade between Europe and the East during the Renaissance, and they will not be extinguished in the global economy that continues today. A classical education is in every essential point a timeless education. Its aims are good for every person and at all times.

