



Going Classical...Education, I mean

What do Thomas Jefferson and Plato have in common? Their formative education was not a one-size-fits-all approach as we have in modern education. They were classically trained. What is a classical education? A classical education is systematic, personalized, challenging, deep and extensive. At the core of this education is the doctrine of reminiscence and virtue. The aim of classical education is to cultivate virtue and wisdom. Students who study the people, cultures, events, literature, art and languages of the past are provided with the knowledge to make connections between those of the past and that of the present. It allows the student to engage in, what Mortimer Adler calls, the "Great Conversation". It teaches and demonstrates the frailty and strength of the human endeavor. As a result of this personalized, broad and challenging education Jefferson and Plato became thinkers, questioners, leaders, and historians who not only impacted their community but the world.

This sophisticated education practice is on the rise. It provides the student with the training necessary for the student to read, write and speak with authority and persuasion. If you can't enroll your child in a school that follows the classical model there are a few things that a parent can do to implement classical learning into the home.

- Encourage Questioning- At the heart of a classical education is the questioning methodology referred to as the Socratic Method. Engage your child in higher levels of questioning by asking probing questions that go beyond basic facts and extend into deeper understanding. A common tool used by teachers to formulate thought provoking questions is Blooms Taxonomy. The taxonomy is structured to elicit both general knowledge recall and higher level thinking. General recall or remembering questions might include

terms like recall, recognize, name, match, identify or list. Where higher level thinking questions include terms like summarize, compare, explain, defend, justify, classify or infer. Available in education stores or found on-line is the table for this taxonomy. It is an easy way to generate questions and whereby train the mind to delve deeper into the concepts and content domains. The taxonomy also fosters opportunities for the student to generate their own questions, which is a pathway to life-long learning. Answers are important, but teaching the student to respond to and create deeper questions is the goal. This form of education teaches the child how to question. When a child learns how to ask questions, new ideas, concepts and information will be approached with enthusiasm and excitement.

- Read the Classics- Exposing your child to great writings, literature and even art that were handed down through the ages is foundational to a well trained mind as well as a sophisticated learning environment. In a classical classroom the teacher will use these types of sources when probable and possible before they use a textbook. Works by authors like C. S. Lewis, Jane Austin, William Shakespeare, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Schopenhauer, Ayn Rand Charles Dickens, and Victor Hugo are the norm in a classical classroom. Exposure to great novels, plays and poetry are significant to a child's intellectual and creative development. Pick a classical story and read it to or with your child. Stories such as Black Beauty, The secret Garden, The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe or Huckleberry Finn are some examples with which to begin.

The literature selected for reading is chosen with definite criteria in mind. First, the stories must contain vivid details that capture the imagination and have age-appropriate plots. Second, they are well-written stories, offering students examples of the English language used at its finest. Third, some will be chosen because they integrate with periods in history that the students are studying, thereby integrating disciplines and bringing to life different human experiences.

Poetry is a central part of a classical education because it introduces a unique form of expression to our student, and because

of its evocative use of language. These sources expose the student to human virtue, human frailties and to good and evil.

- Memorization- Finally, exercising the brain with memorization is another practice found in the classical classroom. Nursery rhymes, biblical texts, poetry, or other important writings passed down through history should be memorized. In addition to memorizing the *Preamble to the Constitution* or a portion of the *Gettysburg Address* a child could memorize other famous speeches or Biblical passages. Students could read, discuss, and memorize poems of all kinds: narrative, humorous, or descriptive. They could recite poems before an audience of friends and family. Memorization builds brain power and it puts information at the hands of students. They jump at the opportunity to share that which they have learned.

These are three easy exercises a parent can begin to use to train the child's mind. While you may already think your child asks enough questions, direct his thoughts to delve deeper into the subject. These exercises will also provide quality time with your child—future Jefferson or Plato. Reading develops the imagination and questioning sharpens it.

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