veritas

DISCOVERING ONLINE CLASSICAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Accomplishing the Critical Elements While Fostering Students' Growth



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INTRODUCTION

Is classical education a bit of a mystery to you?

This philosophical method of education has gained serious traction, particularly in the past 20 years. Seemingly, out of nowhere, everyday parents are asking about Latin curriculum and understanding why this educational approach works so well. What is happening?! Why are families switching to a totally different learning method from what any of us experienced growing up?

In this publication, you'll learn what classical education is, how it can be accomplished through live online classes, and more specifically, how Veritas provides classical Christian education.



CHAPTER ONE

Classical Education in a Nutshell

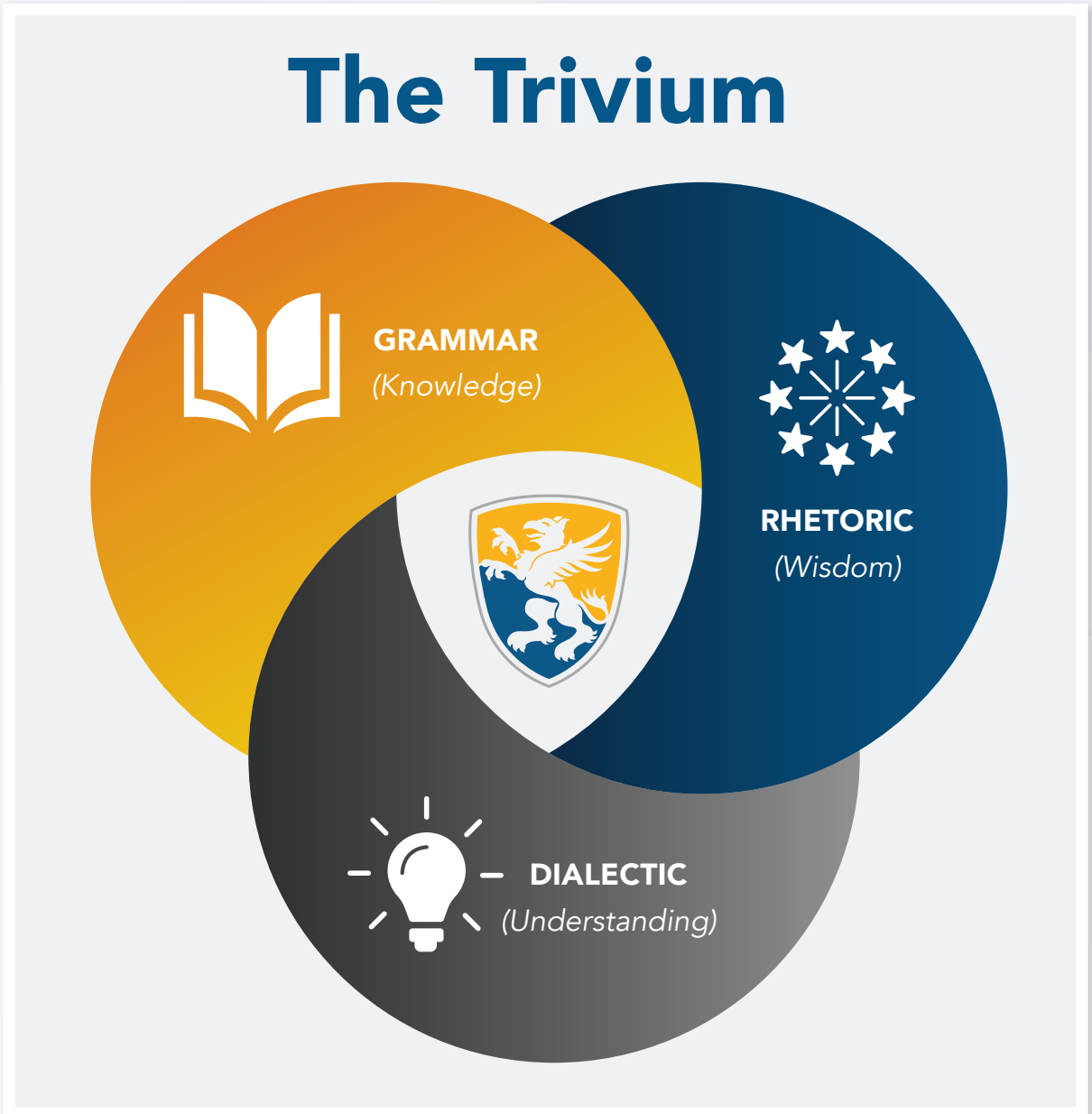
We've heard people suggest that classical Christian education is just "going back in time." Immediately, images of men wearing togas, dusty museum pieces, and papyrus come to mind. Are we expecting your children to write on wax with a stylus, pushing aside modern technology? Do we really want our children to be transported back in time to a "golden" bygone era? Our answer is a resounding "No!"

Far from being a nostalgic movement, the classical model is actually the most timely and relevant form of education for our time.

To educate classically is to search the past for its greatest insights and wisdom, and to then apply such insight and wisdom in a timely and contemporary manner.



How Classical Education is Structured



The trivium is a Latin word meaning "meeting of three ways:" Grammar (think "knowledge"), Dialectic (think "understanding"), and Rhetoric (think "wisdom"). These three ways are the first three of the seven liberal arts. In 1948, Dorthoy Sayers eloquently pointed out that these three ways match childhood development—the way children learn.

1. GRAMMAR *(a.k.a knowledge)*



Age Group: Elementary

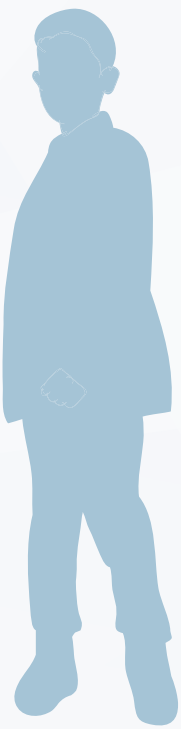
("Grammar" isn't referring to English grammar, by the way!)

This stage focuses on accumulating facts—because young children love to memorize! They spend these younger years committing facts to memory, so when they're ready to comprehend deeper meaning, they can spend that time in contemplation instead of trying to master basic facts.

A familiar example is having your kids memorize scripture like John 3:16 at an early age. Do they fully understand the rich meaning of Christ's blood sacrifice for the atonement of their sins when they're four years old? Of course not. But they memorize that Scripture now, and when they're older they'll comprehend the deeper meaning. Yet, the facts are already there.

We all know our "a, b, c's," right? How fluidly we put the "a, b, c's" to a tune! This is classical, using songs, rhymes, and chants, and children love it.

2. DIALECTIC *(a.k.a. understanding)*



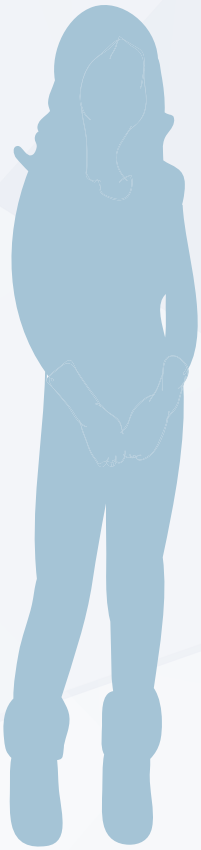
Age group: Middle School

Students in this stage of life love to question everything and argue their points of view! The classical educator teaches them to argue well—to put together information into ordered relationships and cogent arguments.

Teachers teach these middle school students to think well—to recognize bad arguments (called fallacies) in what they're saying and about what others are saying, too. They'll identify these poor

arguments everywhere: in logic class, the books they read, on television, and even when you're talking with them at the dinner table.

3. RHETORIC *(a.k.a. wisdom)*



Age group: High School

Okay, attributing wisdom to sophomores in high school might be a bit of a stretch, but let's focus on the fact that it's the pursuit of wisdom. The classical educator believes it's not enough to know what you believe; you have to be able to articulate your beliefs to others effectively, graciously. Rhetoric is more than just being able to say what you believe. It's bringing all three parts of the Trivium together—knowing the facts, presenting the facts in a logical argument, and doing so graciously and convincingly.

These three stages of learning interact, each one with the other. Without knowledge, there can be no understanding or wisdom. Without understanding, one cannot be wise.



CHAPTER TWO

What the Trivium looks like practically day-to-day

A strong foundation in the classics

Classical education focuses on studying the Great Books of Western Civilization, with emphasis in literature, history, and philosophy. These works are considered some of the most significant and influential pieces of literature, art, and music ever written. Students read these works so they can discuss culturally relevant philosophical and moral issues found in them. Students with a strong foundation in the key ideas of these works that have shaped Western Civilization ultimately develop a deeper understanding of the human experience. Through disciplined study, students make sense of their own experiences, learn how to navigate life, and even influence the world in which they live.





How it looks in your day-to-day life

Does it sound like there's a lot of reading? In general, classically educated students will read more than their traditionally educated peers. They will read everything from Shakespeare to Orwell to Eusebius and many other wonderful works. The selection of books doesn't change with current political agendas. They stand on their own and represent a history of excellence in writing and thought-provoking content.

Students also find themselves involved in more Socratic discussions. Effective classical teachers know how to stimulate discussion among their older students. This "great conversation" is important to effective learning but lost on most modern educational philosophies.

A focus on critical thinking

Classical education emphasizes developing critical thinking skills. A goal for classically educated students is to know what they think, why they think it, and to learn how to graciously and persuasively articulate their thoughts to others.

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze information and make informed decisions. It involves evaluating evidence, considering different perspectives, and using logic to arrive at well-formed conclusions.

In today's world, it is more important than ever for individuals to be able to think critically. With the vast amount of information available at our fingertips, it is easy to be overwhelmed and make poor judgments regarding what is true. By teaching students how to think critically, classical education equips them with the tools they need to navigate the complex world around them.



How it looks in your day-to-day life

Students are encouraged to question, analyze, and evaluate the texts they are reading. It's not about what the text means to them so much as what the author's intentions were.

The development of strong writing skills

Christian educators believe that God pervades every academic subject—science, history, art, literature, and yes, even math. He is the Divine Architect of all knowledge and the Creator of heaven and earth. But it was through words and the Word that the Almighty chose to communicate with us. Knowing this, using words well should be of primary importance to those who wish to glorify God. The words of a Christian's stories and essays, plays, and poems ought to mirror God's incomparable attributes, even to illuminate His will and provision for us. This connection will not always be obvious, but it should be apparent to those who have eyes to see (Matthew 13:16).



How it looks in your day-to-day life

With this strong emphasis on developing effective writing skills, students write persuasive essays on controversial topics and other written assignments. They develop their ability to express themselves proficiently when they write. This is an essential skill for success in college and in the many professions that require written communication.



All from a Christian worldview

Not all classical education is Christian. When reading about the Trivium above, you'll notice that God wasn't mentioned. When seeking classical education, be sure to specify "Christian." We're teaching young people to think logically and speak persuasively, and this must be grounded in biblical principles to anchor one's thinking and beliefs in the truth of God's Word. Without the fear of the Lord, a person has no authentic means of discerning good from evil (Heb. 5:14). A non-Christian classical education will only turn a young cookie thief into an inside trader on Wall Street.

How it looks in your day-to-day life

Subjects are all taught in light of the Gospel. This is more apparent when having conversations and writing papers on controversial topics. Students will certainly cite Bible passages among other sources as supporting evidence in their papers. Teaching from a Christian world-view will simply recognize that we live inescapably in God's world.

CHAPTER THREE

How the Critical Elements of Classical Christian Education Are Accomplished Online

Supporting a student's growing Christian faith

The fear of the Lord is the starting place (Prov. 1:7) and the ending place (Eccl. 12:12-13) of all legitimate learning. It is God's creatures functioning in context. If a person doesn't recognize God as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life, learning information is of little value. When God isn't at the center, it's impossible to assemble all the details into a cohesive whole. It's like lifting sentences randomly from a novel and trying to organize them into something that makes sense without acknowledging there ever was a novel—or a novel writer!



Live online Christian courses that intentionally integrate faith into learning are invaluable for shepherding young people into a deep Christian walk. Students participate in classes with their peers from all around the world. Having conversations about the past and contemporary challenges in the light of the gospel affords a particular richness to the discussions.

Students who don't live in the same state or country as your children will inherently have different life experiences and bring those unique perspectives to classroom conversations. These thought-provoking discussions edify students in that they encourage them to think creatively and stretch them beyond their comfort zone. Students are routinely provided these opportunities to develop a rich, biblical faith of their own, with academic accomplishment, in a safe and supportive environment from the convenience of their homes.

"...thought-provoking discussions edify students in that they encourage them to think creatively and stretch them beyond their comfort zone."

Building a sense of community locally and globally

They won't have chats in locker rooms or notes passed in class, but they will have a chatbox and pass notes in social discussion forums. They may not see each other in sports after school, but online students do engage in a multitude of sport and other extracurricular activities beyond their studies. Online schooling is not the same as brick-and-mortar schooling. Indeed, online students experience life in a way that isn't possible in more traditional settings. A New York City classroom may have students from five different countries, but this certainly isn't typical, and those students aren't actually living in those countries as they sit in class. Veritas has a rich and diverse community of learners from all corners of the globe, with many ways to engage and socialize,

and a flexible schedule to allow for engagement in church and community—both locally and globally.

Veritas students are some of the most socially active people and are constantly sharing about the incredible groups and activities into which they've immersed themselves, activities that traditional school students don't have. By cutting out the extras like assemblies and drills, VSA provides its families the freedom to decide what activities and social interactions they value.

Along with the ability to engage your physical community, Veritas has a rich and diverse community within itself. Discussion boards, Facebook groups, regional meet-ups, End of Year Gathering, international field trips, mission trips, online clubs, and in-class connections all work together to create an incredible learning environment.

Families love connecting in real life. They post pictures from when they met up with their friends from another state or even another country. What a beautiful picture of the diverse canvas of believers that our Veritas faculty have the privilege to teach!

Supporting students with world-class teachers who truly care

Teachers are the most important part of any education. Veritas, having the world from which to choose, has assembled the best collection of teachers you'll find anywhere. The impact that a great teacher can have on the education of a student is immeasurable. It's imperative that teachers not only love the subject they're teaching but love the school for which they work. In a bricks-and-mortar setting, teachers are often

"Teachers are the most important part of any education...The impact that a great teacher can have on the education of a student is immeasurable."



asked to teach multiple subjects to fill roles—e.g., having the P.E. teacher teach science or the English teacher lead the Yearbook class. Although these teachers might be okay with teaching other subjects, it's frequently not their favorite thing to do, nor are they truly passionate about the extra subject they're teaching. We know that children are inspired by teachers who truly love what they do, so why force them to fill roles outside of their passion or expertise? Veritas positions teachers to teach only what they're passionate about. Even at the grammar-level, where traditional schools would have their teachers serve as generalists, grammar-level teachers at Veritas are specialists, as are typically found at the secondary level of education. Our teachers love God, love students, and are passionate about their subjects.



From Dean of Academics, Tom Garfield: "I had unfair and ungrounded assumptions about the people that teach online classes. I may not be alone in the prejudice I had; I often assumed that these were people who were not able to get a job at a "real" school. Isn't that awful? I had no experience or knowledge to support that view. In my new job, I started not only working with the VSA teachers as an evaluator, but I have been in many applicant interviews (online, of course). To say I've had my bias blown away would be an understatement! These teachers are of a very high caliber. And, as Marlin Detweiler often states, we seek world-class teachers, and we seek them from literally around the world… Just like the students, we have teachers working from all around the world, bringing not only their knowledge of their discipline but also introducing their students to some fantastic cultural aspects."

Aiding students' learning through flexibility and focus

Picture this: you're at church in the middle of a hot summer day, but you're freezing cold because they're blasting the A.C. You wore a nice church outfit, but the stiff fabric and dress shoes are getting a little uncomfortable. You're starting to get hungry for lunch, and you can't seem to stop staring at the cute baby just a few rows up who keeps giving you little smiles. It's taking all your brain power to stay focused on the sermon. Maybe you even walk out of church thinking, "Wait, what was the sermon even about?"

Yes, we've been there too! And school is no different. Online classes remove many distractions to help kids focus. You can choose what to wear, when to eat, and where to sit that is most comfortable and conducive to learning.

Flexibility in clothes and location in your house is a great start. The next level of flexibility is choosing class times. Your students aren't constrained to the 8:00 am–3:00 pm schedule. Having teachers around the world means being able to take classes almost any time of the day. Veritas currently offers classes



from 8:00 am–10:00 pm Eastern, and these times continue to expand as demand grows overseas. You'll undoubtedly find the right classes at an hour of the day that suits your family rhythm, not to mention time zone.

You can even take the classes on the road with you! With good internet service your family can hit the road without your students missing class. Sometimes it's nice to take a vacation and miss school days, but it's even better to know you don't have to miss class while you're driving to that softball tournament in the neighboring town or state.

What about when you miss a class? Every class is recorded. Students literally don't miss a single thing said in class—a major plus. Also, If parents want to know what's going on in class, they can watch right along with their students. Furthermore, review of class archives by students who want to double-back on a specific lesson is a snap (actually, a click).



CHAPTER FOUR

How Veritas Press Combines Classical Christian Education with Online Learning

Grammar Stage

Our live classes start in third grade, and pretty much any activity (short of sharing snacks) done in physical grammar classrooms can be done online, e.g., jingles, chants, songs, sound-offs, and even hand motions in Latin or other subjects. With webcams, we can see students' faces very well and hear their pronunciations in oral reading.





The platform we use allows teachers to "send" students into Breakout Rooms (BORs), where they can work in smaller groups, interacting with each other on microphone and webcam. Teachers visit each BOR to monitor students' work (picture a teacher walking around the room). The virtual site also makes bringing in music, photos, maps, or short videos to use in the classroom as easy as clicking a link.

How about using hand-held whiteboards? We do that too! Students draw on the meeting room's whiteboard(s), while others write their answers and then show their work on their webcams. Students feel very connected through the use of our classroom technology.

Logic (aka Dialectic) Stage

What about students who love to argue, talk a lot, or want to know "why" this material matters anyway? As to sheer communication opportunities (and encouragement), it's hard to beat the Chat Box in every classroom. It's exactly what it sounds like: a box in the corner of the screen where students (and teacher) can type to communicate with one another. Keep in mind that the average young teen today can text, just using their thumbs, at 120 words a minute! Okay, I just made that up, but they ARE fast.

Combined with the Participation list of students in the room, an observant teacher can easily keep track of not only who is answering but also who is NOT answering. Candidly this is one of the points stressed with teachers during observations (not to let a half-dozen kids in a class of 20 do all the talking in the chat box). All students need to be addressed and encouraged to speak during class. To be fair, this happens in physical classrooms as well—you know, "front row" syndrome.

"The Socratic Method is...instigated by the continual probing questions of the teacher in a concerted effort to explore the underlying beliefs that shape students' views and opinions.

What else can be done to leverage the frames of these pert students? We use the Socratic Method. The Socratic Method is a dialogue between teacher and students, instigated by the continual probing questions of the teacher in a concerted effort to explore the underlying beliefs that shape students' views and opinions.



Socratic questioning can be done in any context, using anticipatory questions or, along with those, a series of PowerPoint slides of intriguing images. All done without having to set up a projector and screen!

How about competitions, games? Students in the logic stage love to compete, so we bring in a virtual game, similar to Trivial Pursuit, called Kahoots, which can be loaded with applicable questions by the teacher ahead of time. Teams are easy to construct, and points are noted on the board. And the timer can be seen by everyone!

Or how about planned discussions or disputations? A portion of the class comes on webcam to address the topic in a specified manner while the other students observe and take notes of the points made (or blown). Even short dramatic readings, presentations, and enactments can be done, once again on webcams.

We trust you've begun to see the multitude of possibilities for these lively youngsters!



Rhetoric Stage

Then we get to the highest, the most intellectually challenging level, the Rhetoric or Poetic. Why is this a challenge? These students are not only usually very tech-savvy, but they can also be, like most older teens, rather focused on themselves, no? At the same time, they want to be treated with respect and given real work, not just exercises to do. They are old enough to know and even recognize there are usually at least two sides to a story. So biblical world-view discussions and even debates can and should be conducted.

With these adolescents, it can be tough to keep up with their chat box

comments unless you set some ground rules for that interaction, just as you would in a physical classroom, not letting the "talkers" dominate the discussion. Here again, the tools with the virtual classroom: webcams, BORs, multiple whiteboards, PowerPoint slides, maps, short videos, and quick access to the internet can be wisely employed to enhance activities and make the most of class time.

Oral and visual presentations, planned (and graded) discussions, short versions of Mock Trials, dramatic readings, small group work and presentations, even biology class dissections, where they can see everyone else's work, too (a delightful benefit in an art studio as well)!

Impromptu speeches can not only be timed accurately, but students can also sometimes select a virtual background (like the Capitol Building or the Pyramids) to add ethos to their webcam speeches. Oh yes, and since students have immediate access to Google, either on their computers or their phones, there is very little time lost trying to recall or research facts, figures, and events.



CONCLUSION

Classical Christian education uses the recently forgotten but time-tested approach to educate children to master facts, learn to think logically, and articulate their convictions in a gracious and winsome manner. This method is called the Trivium.

This is accomplished consistently in classrooms without walls, bringing together world-class teachers and students who are actually separated by thousands of miles but see and hear each other and spend 90 minutes every class period talking, laughing, praying, and working as one student body—all while comfortably sitting in their pajamas on the couch (if that's what helps them learn best!).

When done well, as all teaching and learning should be, there should be no apology for online education. As more and more Christian families are called to have their children taught at home, VSA will be here to help those parents train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord through excellence in education.

Are you ready for your children to start developing the critical thinking and reasoning that a classical education from a Christian worldview can provide?

Each child has a unique learning style.

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Reach out to us to learn how
Veritas can help you achieve your
K-12 child's educational goals.

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