

Homeschooling Approach: Classical Method
by Vicki S. Norris

Schools in early America were typically Classical Christian. Classical education can be traced back at least as far as the Middle Ages but with the Puritans and colonial Americans adding the Christian influence to the previous Greek and Roman influence.

Whenever you start researching the Classical method, there will immediately be four words that jump out at you - trivium, grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. The trivium is made up of the grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric stages which parallel a child's thinking, reasoning and expressive skills.

The grammar stage, which comprises the elementary years, is a time for concrete thinking - the memorization, drill, and recitation of facts. It is a time for the storing up of knowledge, for understanding what is being taught, and for using language correctly.

The dialectic stage, also known as the logic stage, is a time for analytical thinking and can sometimes begin as early as the middle school years. The student is encouraged to go beyond the obvious by asking, "Why?" and to explore the science of right thinking. In essence, they are questioning everything learned in the grammar stage to see for themselves if it is true and valid.

The rhetoric stage, usually begun in high school, is the time for abstract thinking. It is the exploration of the art of communication and expressing one's self, in both verbal and written form.

The Classical method is systematic and advocates three repetitions of a four year pattern: Ancients, Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation, and Modern Times. This pattern is applied to all subjects and each repetition is taught at each student's level. For instance, the same student in the 1st, 5th, and 9th grades would learn about the sciences known about in ancient times, but with each grade level the study would become more in depth and would be approached from a different "stage" - either grammar, dialectic, or rhetoric.

One aspect of this method that I like is that it focuses on language at all three stages. It does not advocate the use of video which tends to make a student lazy, but rather focuses on the written word which challenges the mind because the brain has to turn the written word into a "picture." I would definitely encourage those of you that might be interested in this method to teach the Christian Classical method and not just the Classical method, just as the early educators of this country did.