

In its charter application to the North Carolina State Board of Education, Pinnacle Classical Academy's founding board of directors stated that in addition to drawing on the Core Knowledge Foundation's K-8 sequence, "classroom curriculum and instruction will be based on Dorothy Sayers's *The Lost Tools of Learning* and the classical education model."

The founding board added:

Using Dorothy Sayers' *The Lost Tools of Learning* as a guide, the classical education program allows students to grow and refine their knowledge by focusing on developing their ability to use logic to reason and to infer. Students then progress to use these skills to communicate their thoughts in a reasonable and effective manner.

Drawing on Leonard Peikoff's *Teaching Johnny to Think*, Pinnacle Classical Academy's board of directors also adopted a "Beyond the Mission" statement to make clear the school's educational philosophy:

Pinnacle Classical Academy offers more than an exemplary college preparatory education. PCA embodies a philosophy, a passion and a strongly held belief that the purpose of education is to teach a student to live by developing the mind to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He must be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past, and equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort.

In addition to Sayers and Peikoff, Pinnacle Classical Academy looks to Aristotle, who influenced them both with his commitment to reason and the life of the mind. The school's values are ultimately derived from Aristotle's *Ethics*, and the school's outdoor Lyceum recalls Aristotle's own school in Athens.

The Promise of Classical Education

In common speech, if something is "classic" or "classical," it is excellent, traditional, enduring, authoritative. When the term is applied in education, when students major in classics at a university, they study the Greek and Latin languages, and the literature and history of the ancient Greeks and Romans.

When Greek and Roman thinkers reflected on the human condition, they realized there was something distinctive about human beings. Unlike inanimate beings, plants, and the lower animals, human beings are rational: we have the potential to reason, to ponder the causes of things, to ask the question "Why?" Over time, the consensus developed among Greek and Roman thinkers that grammar, logic, and rhetoric—later called the trivium—best prepared human beings for a lifetime of active intellectual inquiry.

The trivium is not foreign to our everyday lives. Every day we put words into sentences, and on most days, we read and seek to understand what we read. A strong foundation in grammar helps us do these things well. Every day, we also think about many things. A strong foundation in logic helps us think more clearly and reasonably. And every day, we speak or write to others, and we often seek to persuade others. A strong foundation in rhetoric helps us speak and write effectively, persuasively, even eloquently.

The trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric— which Dorothy Sayers called “the lost tools of learning— endures in our lives as workers, citizens, and parents, because speaking, writing, reading, thinking, and communicating are a major part of what it is to be a human being.

Because of Pinnacle Classical Academy’s commitment to the trivium, all high school students are required to take two Latin classes (with an emphasis on grammar), a logic class, and a rhetoric class.

In most schools, the trivium has fallen by the wayside, and despite the best efforts of teachers, education has become something far different: the teaching and learning of different disconnected subjects. One common way to teach and learn different disconnected subjects is for students to memorize facts so that they can be repeated on a test or term paper, only to be quickly forgotten. This has contributed to the well-documented “rising tide of mediocrity” discussed earlier, as well as to the sense of boredom and dissatisfaction that many experience in school.

Classical education has a different emphasis. In the words of Dorothy Sayers, “the sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves; and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain.” Likewise, Leonard Peikoff wrote that “the purpose of education is to take a perceptual-level creature and train him, over many years, to become a mature, cognitively self-sufficient, informed being.”

To “teach men how to learn for themselves”: this is the purpose of classical education, an overarching vision that is far higher than learning material for disconnected subjects.

As a public charter school, Pinnacle Classical Academy requires students to study English, history, mathematics, science, and other subjects. What is the relationship of these classes to the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric?

In *The Lost Tools of Learning*, Dorothy Sayers discussed how all teachers can bring the trivium to life in their classrooms, for Sayers saw grammar, logic, and rhetoric as three stages of learning as well as intellectual skills.

Many adults have observed that younger children learn by repetition, middle-aged children begin to inquire about how and why things work, and older teens discuss and achieve long-term wishes and goals. Sayers advised teachers to work with human nature.

When a child is young, when rote learning is easier, Dorothy Sayers advised teachers to emphasize observation and memorization. She called this stage of development the grammar stage of learning. The Core Knowledge Sequence, discussed earlier, is used at Pinnacle Classical Academy during Sayers's grammar stage, and its integration of literature, history, art, and music is a powerful antidote to the view of education as a series of disconnected subjects.

In early adolescence, when students become more naturally argumentative, Sayers advised teachers to logical argumentation, questioning, and discursive reasoning. She calls this stage of development the logic (or dialectic) stage of learning.

In later adolescence, when students wish more to express themselves than to argue, Sayers advised teachers to emphasize projects—culminating in a rhetoric thesis—and she calls this stage the rhetoric stage of learning.

Thus, in Sayers's vision of classical education, all teachers have the opportunity to bring the trivium to life in their classroom by teaching according to the grammar, logic, and rhetoric stages of learning.

In offering an alternative to the idea that disconnected subjects should be the primary focus of education, Pinnacle Classical Academy strives to present mathematical and scientific facts and theories in the context of their relevance, and historical events in the context of their causes, circumstances, and outcomes.

For example, most high school students know that 1776 is the date of the Declaration of Independence, and many can recall the Boston Tea Party three years earlier. Fewer can name the Townshend Acts (1767-68) and other important events that preceded the American Revolution. Far fewer have learned what John Adams called “the real American Revolution”: the “radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people” in the fifteen years before 1776 that is an even deeper cause of the Revolution.

By exploring natural and historical causes—the “whys” of our world and its history—and by giving students the lost tools of learning, Pinnacle Classical Academy seeks to educate independent thinkers who, in Sayers's words, can “learn for themselves.”

How does this apply to students today? As we witness and experience current events— whether international, national, or local, and whether political, economic, or medical— we are all called to use our reason in making decisions.

Students ask, “Where should I go to college? What should I major in?” Later in life, as adults, they must set personal budgets and make choices about work, housing, transportation, and hundreds of other matters. Lessons in history, science, economics, and other disciplines, as well as literary characters stored up in one’s imagination, can give a thoughtful person a long-term perspective on how to make decisions in their best long-term interest, rather than relying on trial and error.

For example, students who learn about Adam Smith’s theory of rational self-interest in their economics classes are more likely to be frugal and less likely to become debtors— or to become persons who expect so much to be given to them by others. Students who learn about the incredible work ethic of historical figures are more likely to acquire that work ethic themselves. Students who learn about the great progress made in the history of science will be more likely to break new ground themselves, whether in science, business, or whatever profession they choose.

This, indeed, is the great promise of classical education: that it gives students the tools to learn for themselves.

Pinnacle Classical Academy strives to educate students who can learn for themselves, rather than absorbing without question what they read and hear.

Pinnacle Classical Academy strives to educate students who can learn for themselves, who can analyze and question, who seek out sources to verify what they read or hear.

Pinnacle Classical Academy strives to educate students who can learn for themselves, rather than students whose direction in life is determined by a whim, by the desire of the moment, or by the call of the crowd.

Pinnacle Classical Academy also strives to educate well-rounded students. At PCA, we keep in mind the old Latin maxim of *mens sana in corpore sano* (a sound mind in a healthy body). Athletics and other extracurricular activities are like the flying buttresses that helped support a medieval cathedral, but they are not the cathedral itself. They play an important role, but it is a supporting role, and not the main role.