

# **Principles of Classical Christian Education**

## **Veritas School, Richmond**

Veritas School offers a traditional Christian liberal arts education that begins with the end in mind – the formation of a whole human person who will mature, flourish and bear fruit in every area of life; whose path is more than school, college, career – but rather a full and worshipful life that includes work, family, community, church, culture and service.

*“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.”*

- GK Chesterton

### **The Trivium**

Classical education is often characterized as a three-stage process through which students move at appropriate developmental stages. Known collectively as the Trivium, these three stages are grammar, logic and rhetoric, and are the tools we apply to the discovery of subject matter as well as the subject matter itself. Once students master these tools of learning, reasoning and communication, they can and will continue to utilize them for a lifetime. These tools are taught throughout every grade at Veritas, but with particular emphasis appropriate to student development.

Grammar is emphasized in our Lower School, as the most fundamental building block for effective reading and writing, and includes extensive development of vocabulary and the acquisition of factual information across subject areas. Students are presented with foundational literature to savor and to memorize, with artistic masterpieces for delight and imitation and with computational and scientific principles that display the wonder of God’s design and beauty.

Logic is the primary emphasis in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, when students are most eager to debate, to discuss and to draw connections. Given the tools of effective, respectful construction and deconstruction of arguments, students engage one another, their teachers and their world with reason and clarity. Students are also equipped to “learn how to learn” with greater independence and expectations for personal responsibility.

Well-equipped with the tools of grammar and logic, our 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade Rhetoric students are prepared to present their scientific findings, faith convictions, art, creative and expository writing and research with wisdom and eloquence. They are also regularly challenged to learn and apply Scriptural ethics, harnessing the great power of effective rhetoric as a tool to be used for the good of others as they mature in their walk with Christ.

The trivium, in concert with the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), formed the basis of the traditional liberal arts for centuries, and is largely responsible for significant flourishing within human experience, particularly within western civilization. At Veritas, we practice “ancient-future education”, reviving the most proven and fruitful teaching methods from the past, while incorporating innovation in education theory and brain research, bringing together the best of both – time tested, soul-enriching texts and methods and the very best practices in academia in 2014.

## **Latin**

Across the country, classical schools are restoring the once common practice of formal Latin instruction. Far more than a means to improved college entrance exam scores, Latin unlocks the study of all romance languages and profoundly increases English vocabulary. Students are equipped to read the foundational literature of our culture, to correctly decipher unfamiliar scientific, legal and mathematic terms and to most fully participate in what has been called “The Great Conversation”. At Veritas, students begin their discovery of Greek and Latin roots in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Formal Latin classes continue through Latin III in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students may continue through Latin V, or benefit from instruction in Spanish.

## **Great Books, Great Conversation**

Why do certain books endure throughout time and across cultures? What do they have in common, and why do they stir rich conversation and provoke reflection among readers of all ages? We believe such books, often considered ‘the classics’, promote that which most resonates with the mind and soul – the true, good and beautiful. Created in God’s image (*Imago Dei*), our minds and souls

respond to stories that reveal the sacred and eternal. At Veritas, we believe making space for The Great Conversation, the reading, contemplation and discussion of classical works and ideas is not a diversion from the task at hand, it is a joy and a core responsibility.

### **Covenantal Partnership**

Veritas School takes seriously her role *in locos parentis* – that is, assisting parents in the matter of formal education, by their express delegation rather than by right. To that end, we highly value and expect parent participation in the life of our school. We strive for a culture of mutual support, of honoring parents by listening well, of welcoming involvement, and of partnering together to build a Christ-centered and fruitful community of faith and learning.

We also recognize that few in our generation received a classical education, including the staff and faculty of Veritas School. Veritas teachers are committed to the principles of classical education, and pursue professional growth and learning through faculty forums, conferences and readings. Parents too can struggle to assist children with homework, or to feel fully engaged and confident with the material their students are taught. Life in the Veritas community is much more than an excellent education for our children; as adults, we are co-laboring lifelong learners. One important avenue is through parent classes and book studies, our Veritas U program. Many of our parents find journeying through Veritas with their children to be immensely rewarding, joining in The Great Conversation, unlocking the mysteries of mathematics, deciphering common phrases with new Latin skills, wondering at the interconnectedness of subjects first learned in isolation. We welcome you to join the adventure!

### **Interconnectedness**

Dr. Christopher Perrin, a leader in the classical education movement, describes this approach to knowledge “more like a web than a chest of drawers; there are no subjects that are unrelated to others ... the boundaries [between subjects] are light and fluid and emphasize the inter-relationship of all knowledge.” As parents, we know this to be the dominant experience of life. Our work, relationships, shopping, travel, leisure and even worship are informed by a host of influences –

historic, mathematic, scientific, social, creative – all informed by experience and culture and bound by the limitations or expansiveness of language. Awakening students to discover this inter-relatedness is a core principle at Veritas School.

To this end, students will quickly discern mathematic precision in a beautiful piece of music, geometry peering back at them in art class, Beowulf’s daring literary epic in history, Latin unlocking Biology, and the Creator God undergirding all, “for in Him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28).

### **Christ-Centered**

Veritas School is a place of joy and peace, of mental, physical, emotional and spiritual growth, a place where both the mind and soul are cultivated. On any morning, walking through our academic buildings, you will pass kindergarten classes enjoying their morning devotional, an Upper School Leadership course discussing the implications of Christ’s life and ministry, a Practical Theology class unpacking the extension of grace through hospitality, and a Chemistry class pausing to admire the created order. Stepping across into Virginia Hall, music and art from hundreds of years of Christian worship are known and celebrated, student assemblies welcome intriguing, culture-making Christ-followers, and our school song *Non Nobis Domine* (Psalm 115:1) is sung often and with conviction.

Not satisfied to keep Christ only in a Bible class and a chapel service, we desire our students to see Christ pre-eminent in all areas of life, interwoven into every discipline, the first priority on the field of sports competition, the object of our worship through the arts, worthy of our best efforts and highest devotion.

### **Training the Affections**

Created in God’s image (*Imago Dei*), every person has the capacity to “love what is lovely” (Titus 1:8) and to “abhor that which is evil” (Romans 12:9). Sadly, our brokenness distorts our understanding of Truth, Goodness and Beauty and in sin we pursue those things that lead away from God and toward personal and community destruction.

As a community of faith and learning, Veritas is uniquely positioned to intentionally place before our students the most noble, most just, most beautiful objects of study – holding in high esteem models of excellence throughout history. Year after year, class after class, students spend the best hours of their day considering, and at times, imitating masters of the creative arts, writers, scientists, pilgrims and saints. Engaging not just the intellect, but also the emotion and the imagination in this orientation toward the best and highest is a core responsibility of our faculty and staff.

Training the affections to love what is lovely is a corporate and counter-cultural task, and one that must be made in partnership with parents and the wider school community. We are thankful for the role each plays, and gratefully welcome God’s redemptive work among us.

### **Shepherding**

The shepherding of young hearts and minds is a high privilege and great responsibility. Building space into each day for teachable moments, even at inopportune times, is a discipline we encourage at Veritas. Addressing student behavior privately, respectfully and with a true desire to understand the heart issue rather than simply modify behavior, costs time and attention in the short-term. In the long-term, we believe this time is well-invested and bears fruit for the individual student and the entire classroom community.

### **Ordinary Students, Extraordinary Results**

At Veritas, the True, Beautiful and Good are cultivated in every student, not just for the next test, but for a lifetime, regardless of socio-economic status or ultimate place of employment. We believe our students, who represent a wide spectrum of natural abilities, can and should read from the most noble literature, be familiar with artistic masterpieces, embrace poetry as an enrichment of the human experience, be able to compose and decompose numbers, patterns and form, in short, that every manifestation of God’s creation and human discovery throughout the ages can be understood and in that understanding, bear fruit.

While this approach may be counter-cultural, it is not new. For hundreds of years, education for every class, for those with a wide range of future prospects, would have included a thorough reading and understanding of original source texts, significant mathematics, familiarity with great works of art and music and a belief that education was a high privilege, required hard work and was its own reward.

In God's kindness, the ordinary students at Veritas School are earning extraordinary results. While test results and college admissions are not the end goal, we believe excellent and challenging curriculum, presented by nurturing faculty in small classes, in a supportive and joyful setting, creates the environment for every student to flourish - mind and soul.

SKK, August 2014