



Written by [Dr. Duke Pesta](#) on May 7, 2024

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Classical Education: The Good-news Solution for Attacks on Our Children

This issue of *The New American* exposes the myriad ways that government and culture wage war on our kids. It is ironic, cynical, and evil how progressive elites treat adults like helpless children, while simultaneously burdening the youngest kids with very dark and adult issues, including climate change, transgenderism, LGBTQ advocacy, and critical race theory. During the long arc of American education, there was one bulwark that helped insulate young minds from such pernicious assaults: classical education.



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It is absolutely true that the origins of American public schools were steeped in statism, socialism, and rank psychologism. Nevertheless, for a significant period of time, students were exposed to a classical curriculum that taught them to think critically, to read the great books of Western culture, and to experience a wide and pluralistic spectrum of worldviews. This one great gift helped keep the country more or less grounded, preparing educated citizens to understand the nation's origins, triumphs, and struggles; to admire our enduring and ever-tested idealism; and to think critically about those aspects of our civilization that required change — all without throwing out the cultural baby along with the progressive bathwater.

English author, philosopher, and Christian apologist G.K. Chesterton once observed that “Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” This is the most succinct and accurate description of classical education to be found. The very good news — and one of the most hopeful beacons of light in the darkening twilight of Western culture — is that classical education remains robust, time-tested, and accessible. The great works of Western art, literature, history, philosophy, and economics are but a click away on the internet, stocked in bookstores, and shelved at public and private libraries, uncensored and available for universal consumption and consultation. The embers of this once-great educational conflagration still glow hot and bright, waiting to be stoked into a blaze that will sustain our nation, if we choose to rekindle our interest in and take control of our children's schooling. Equally encouraging is the fact that the intellectual heat and light of classical education flickers brightly in many private academies and Christian schools, select universities and colleges, and especially the burgeoning homeschool movement. How thrilling that in the early 21st century, millions of homeschool parents have rallied around a form of classical, home-based education that gave rise centuries ago to the generation of thinkers who founded this country and secured its many liberties.

Class, Classics, Classicism, and Classical Education: A Rose by



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Any Other Name

The concept of classical education has a long, varied, and often protean history. Of course, when we hear the phrase “classical education,” our minds are carried back to the “Classical” world of the ancient Greeks and Romans. And this is a perfectly appropriate starting point. Athens and Rome are two of the three founding cities out of which Western culture flourished and expanded. From these cultures emanated such concepts as democracy and republican forms of government, and they innovated stunning advancements in philosophy, poetry, sculpture, theater, historical writing, statecraft, the prosecution of war, architecture, mathematics, engineering, biology, and medicine, to name but a few. A visit to Washington, D.C. — the nation’s capital and the site of the Capitol — reveals the architectural influence of the ancients, recreated in our major government buildings with their columns, domes, arches, and marble colonnades. Like modern America, ancient Athens and Rome were innovative and resilient places of debate, election, faction, rhetoric, duty, public service, corruption, and patriotism, overflowing with schools, philosophical groups, private tutors, intellectual communities, and impressive libraries, monuments, and temples.

When considering “Classical” culture, Jerusalem would be the third ancient city to earn the title of “cradle of Western culture.” If Greece and Rome provided the form and structure of our government and law, then surely Jerusalem gave us our moral code and spiritual ethos, from the creation story in Genesis, to the Mosaic code, to the Sermon on the Mount, and to the letters of Saint Paul. From this source, classical education inherited and expanded on the idea that God is the architect of our rights and the judge of our moral decisions. This legacy is ultimately the reason that it was Western culture — under the aegis of God’s providence — that first developed and enshrined in law such precepts as civil rights, women’s rights, protections for minorities, and the abolition of slavery. The Founding Fathers’ wisdom in declaring that our rights emanate from the Creator alone — and not from the fickle hand of government manipulation — ushered in the only form of civilization capable of developing such broad and comprehensive human rights. These rights, paradoxically, are only universally “human” under the guidance of His creating and sustaining hand. Since the founding of our nation, classical education has been inextricably linked to this blessed paradox. It is also important to note that the Enlightenment did not materialize fully formed, like Athena sprung from the mind of Zeus. Rather, the so-called Age of Reason in the 18th century was deeply in debt to the relative tolerance, intellectual curiosity, and evolving science of the previous five Christian centuries. To this day, there are many cultures outside of the West that have experienced “enlightenments” but still lack these basic moral imperatives.

And so it is no overstatement to say that classical education has much to do with the “Classical” culture of the ancients. Related to this pedigree in more recent times, classical education has been cross-pollinated with “The Classics,” those canonical, so-called Great Books that are must-reads for cultural literacy, intellectual preservation, and societal cohesion. While a good number of those books are the legacy of the ancients, many more are formally designated as “World Classics,” spanning many different countries and time periods. The lack of classical education and the rejection of these books in the public schools and universities is a driving force behind the anarchic cultural disintegration we see across the country.

Finally, the idea of classical education has shifted slightly under the rise of homeschooling in the United States over the last few decades. The term “classical education” in this context is less broad and comprehensive, reflecting its appeal to evangelical Christians, many of whom are cautious about



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exposing children to ancient literature and culture that reflects pagan beliefs, or more modern texts steeped in skepticism, gratuitous sex and violence, and postmodern moral relativity. For many of these families, the moral, cultural, and philosophical goals and outcomes remain the same as for more traditional and academic adherents of classical education, but instead of working their way through dense works such as *The Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, *Gulliver's Travels*, or *Moby Dick*, homeschoolers are more likely to read modern, mass-marketed “versions” of these stories, pared down and scaled in tone and action for younger demographics. Such books are sold cheaply and in great numbers at thriving homeschool conventions.

Classical vs. Modern Education: Remember and Restore, Not Reject and Reinvent

Contemporary education is forever rejecting the past and futilely reinventing the pedagogical wheel, jettisoning phonics, trashing the classics, and deconstructing math education to the point of incomprehension. Classical education, on the other hand, conserves, curates, and promotes the time-tested truths found in books, ideas, movements, and cultures. In a 1947 speech at Oxford University, Dorothy Sayers, that brilliant exemplar of a mind well cultivated, brings together all of these disparate origins and objectives of classical education. The gist of her argument is that classical education is a way of learning, not a set list of books or exercises or exams. It is a method, a program, and a worldview whose efficacy can be universally recognized by the degree to which it teaches students *how* to think, not *what* to think. To that end, the purpose of a classical education is to train the mind to approach all subjects rationally, and to recognize the value of reason, not only as a primary way of arriving at truth, but as one part of a complex human organism that includes body and soul, each of which has its own contributions to make in the development of what we call the educated “person.”

Classical education rejects the contemporary idea that reason alone is sufficient for human progress and fulfillment. If that were true, courses in mathematics and science might constitute the entire curriculum. Rather, classical education foregrounds subjects such as Latin and logic, as well as courses on the Greek and Roman world, biblical wisdom, the Great Books, and economics — all of which give rise to the well-rounded Renaissance ideal of the polymath. The classically educated individual is conversant in a wide variety of subjects and is able to properly distinguish those disciplines fit for the soul, those fit for the mind, and those fit for the body, as well as how to integrate them. Classical education balances the practical demands of the material world with the humanistic requirements of right living and moral development.

For instance, it's not so much the way math is taught that makes it an appropriate subject for classical education. Instead, it is the emphasis placed on the relationship of math to all other disciplines in the curriculum, the holistic way that subjects are integrated, linked together, and ultimately subordinated to a higher ideal of what the aim and purpose of education should be. Math is, of course, rational and empirical, and in this sense, a mathematic sensibility is necessary for the mastery of logic, and even Latin, which requires a precision and exactness that might almost be termed “mathematical.” By the same token, exercises in Latin declensions or time spent studying classical syllogisms can only reinforce the rigor and flexibility of thought required to succeed at math at the highest levels. The end game is not complete mastery of a particular subject at the expense of all others — a hallmark of the current “scientization” of education, whereby we create endlessly myopic specialists focused on increasingly



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rarefied and arcane bodies of knowledge.

Instead, classical education seeks to develop highly intuitive students who can function on multiple levels and are comfortable in multiple disciplines; in other words, students equally able to appreciate the vastness of forests without losing sight of the uniqueness of trees. A student trained classically is a student who recognizes that learning is a lifelong process, and who values the pleasure of learning for learning's sake. Kate Deddens, writing at the *The Federalist*, explains it as follows:

Classical education pursues higher aims, opposing the modern view. When greater goals are pursued, subordinate goals are also attained. An obvious example is literacy. When education provides comprehension of challenging material, the capacity to understand instruction manuals follows. But training students to read instruction manuals does not enable them to comprehend more beautiful, demanding, and beneficial writing.

And this is exactly how postmodern quackery such as Common Core proceeds to teach reading. Remove complex poetry and serious fiction from the English language arts classes; replace literature with tendentious and utilitarian prose, designed to inculcate a progressive worldview; and then stop reading books altogether in favor of excerpts and summaries.

Literacy is key. As important and necessary as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) knowledge is, success in those fields still requires deft and sophisticated readers. This reality is too often beyond the grasp of utilitarian reformers on both the Left and the Right who think that the answer to the politicization of America's classrooms is to trivialize or cancel the humanities altogether. Becoming efficient and advanced in science, technology, engineering, and math requires an exceptional reading prowess. Even the numerical purity of arithmetic has to be "read," and decoding the deeply syntactic poetry of Milton has a great deal in common with the deciphering required to contemplate complex equations in physics. Currently, in the classes I teach at the university, my freshman students have about a ninth-grade reading level. An alarming subset of that group expresses a deep hatred for reading and writing, and increasing numbers admit that they had never read a book cover to cover before enrolling in college. Thirty years ago, students came to college knowing a good deal less than they should, but at least they were aware of — and in many cases embarrassed by — their own educational deficiencies. Such students could be taught. Today, a much more pervasive illiteracy is buttressed by an impenetrable veneer of indifference and ideological condescension.

Tech literacy: STEM fields are being pushed in schools these days, while the importance of literacy is downplayed. However, strong reading and communication skills are necessary for success in STEM. (Getty Images Plus)



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Anti-classical Education: Critical Lenses and the Death of Reading

In order to fully understand the idea that diverse and intellectually independent reading is our best and last hope to preserve Western culture, we must consider how the anti-classical educators who glower over our schools — from pre-kindergarten through graduate school — have warped reading into a socialistic hermeneutic that indoctrinates instead of educates. Rather than allowing students to read books as written — enabling them to encounter the original ideas and intellects of the authors — postmodern education requires that books be filtered through progressive “lenses.” In universities today, to read Shakespeare is not to grapple with his artistic achievements or cultural contexts. Instead, students who know nothing about England in the 16th and 17th centuries, or about the development of Elizabethan drama, are required to encounter Shakespeare through alien and irrelevant postmodern ideologies such as Marxism, feminism, environmentalism, queer theory, and deconstruction.

Through these “lenses,” the original meanings and contexts of Shakespeare and his world are erased, and what students discover in their place is nothing less than warmed-over Marxist dialectic, as books are transformed into agitprop for toxic politics. This form of textual “colonization” is not only found in universities, but is currently being peddled in public schools under the name of pedagogies such as critical race theory. Why are postmodern lenses required to “see” a work of literature? A Marxist reading of Shakespeare tells us nothing at all about him, his art, or his culture. The only lens needed to understand Shakespeare is the one that brings him and his plays into sharper focus.

In the real world, lenses allow weak eyes to see correctly. These postmodern lenses, however, distort the meaning of books, turning them into something far removed from what the author produced. It’s as if a student with perfect eyesight was forced to wear someone else’s glasses: The lenses would blur the text, not clarify it. According to Professor Christopher Norris, progressive lenses must eradicate the original meaning of books. In a stark example of the socialist nature of postmodern “reading,” he writes, “We can’t read texts, but we can read ideologies.” In this way, postmodern readers overthrow the integrity of books in favor of their own political advocacy positions. Ironically, these politicized readings claim a linguistic and cultural stability for themselves that they deny for the books they colonize. According to them, their writings are epistemologically sound and comprehensible, unlike all other writings, which are unreliable and unavailable to modern readers. For a visual example of how



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traditional reading strategies compare to postmodern interventions, see the chart included on this page.

The antidote to this type of postmodern reading is, of course, classical education. Humane readings of texts do not act as *mirrors* for our own politics, but function as *windows* that reveal new worlds. George Orwell's 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* eerily predicts the coming consequences of postmodern reading strategies:

By 2050 — earlier, probably — all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron — they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be.... The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking — not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.

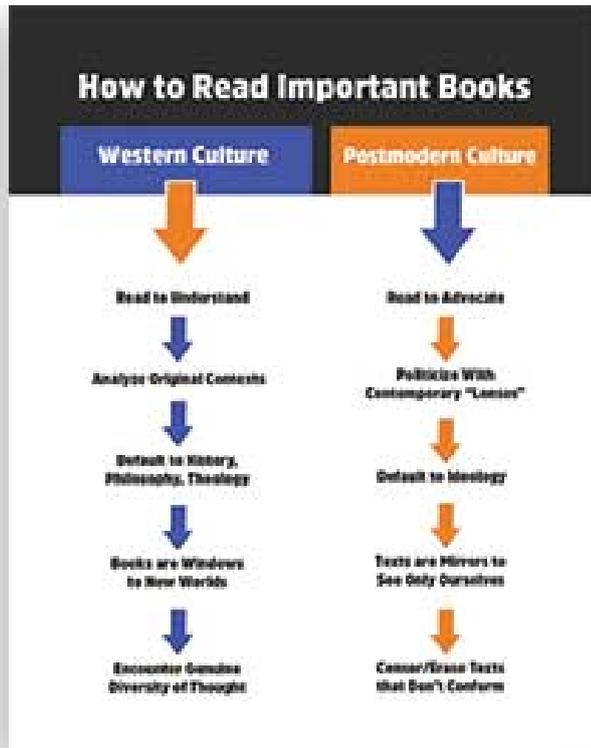
The dystopian approach to knowledge sketched by Orwell is already radicalizing our universities, transforming them from sites of intellectual exploration to places of conformity and dangerous groupthink. In 1961, C.S. Lewis in *An Experiment in Criticism* offered a brilliant defense of humane reading, one that makes the definitive case for classical education:

Through literature ... we see through the eyes of others and by doing this, we expand our horizons and our understanding. We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts.... In reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. The man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through the eyes of others.



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Classical Education in the 21st Century

Recognizing the dangers posed to the Republic as public schools reject classical education and transform classrooms into sites of progressive ideology, anti-Americanism, and left-wing advocacy, FreedomProject was created in 2009.

FreedomProject Academy (FPA) is dedicated to offering alternatives to the monopolistic and tendentious culture of progressive education. FPA offers college-ready education online, based exclusively on subject mastery and a rigorous curriculum that allows students to move seamlessly into college or career.

FPA offers a fully accredited, classical education for kids from kindergarten through high school, and is rooted firmly in Judeo-Christian values as promoted in the Constitution by our Founding Fathers, who strove to guarantee the preservation of our God-given liberties. Our live classes are delivered online through interactive classrooms to students in all 50 states and a dozen foreign countries.

FPA is also proud to serve missionary and military families overseas who seek a classical education for their children. Live classes are recorded, uploaded, and made available 24/7 so that parents can view and evaluate every minute of our educational programs. FPA believes that parents are primarily responsible for their kids' education, and we partner with them at every level, unlike the public schools, who increasingly seek to undermine parental rights. Each of our educational tracks includes a path to an accredited diploma, allowing students to begin college or career at a high level.

We also provide self-paced, pre-recorded, and homeschool tracks for those families who opt for non-live classes. This initiative is our Anytime program, which offers pre-recorded learning that is self-paced, parent-guided, and available around the clock. Within the allotted academic window for each subject, students can view classes at their own convenience and finish the assigned reading, quizzes, and examinations in ways best suited for them. Students can attend weekly live sessions with teachers and



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other students, and can get assistance from an academic counselor. All Anytime classes are graded by FPA, and those grades count toward the student's school transcript. We also provide tutors to assist students who require a more individual focus or remediation.

FreedomProject Academy further provides an innovative Partnership Program. We team up with churches and private schools to stream our classes into brick-and-mortar classrooms across the country. This makes it possible for faith-based schools to flourish, because FPA offers all of the curriculum, homework, assessments, and grading that schools require to remain financially stable. Many of these churches are hubs of activity on the weekends, but are largely dormant from Monday through Friday. In very cost-efficient ways, our Partnership Program can turn these underused spaces into thriving private and Christian schools. What better way to restore American values than to bring the worlds of faith and education together again?

Modern technology has moved the needle in the educational landscape by introducing digitally enabled learning environments. Many schools are incorporating online classes to help make education more effortless and accessible. FreedomProject Academy created the template for live online learning platforms. The school is dedicated to using state-of-the-art technology to provide rigorous, subject-based education, free from political manipulation, progressive activism, and the inappropriate sexualization and racialization of the classroom. FPA is committed to educating children to become highly literate critical thinkers who possess a deep understanding of Western culture, accurate American history, science, and math.

With each year that goes by, the public-school students who join FPA are further behind the grade levels where they ought to be. We have a dynamic and comprehensive set of programs designed to bring students up to grade level in all subjects. And, unlike the public schools, where students are chained artificially to their peer groups, we have the ability to allow students to jump ahead in some classes, and step back in others. A gifted math student, for instance, can skip ahead two grades in order to meet his or her potential with numbers, but that same student might also need to step back a grade in reading. We can help improve progress in those subjects that do not come as easily. In short, we can repair the educational damage and neglect inflicted by the public schools.

Beyond plunging grades, cratering test scores, and politicized classrooms, the public schools push more and more social-emotional learning every year, at the expense of knowledge and skills-based education. FreedomProject Academy is designed to pick up the educational slack and restore the classical methods that gave rise to American exceptionalism, a worldview that helped make the United States preeminent among nations. Our curriculum, developed in-house, is free of Common Core, critical race theory, and social-emotional learning, including all forms of progressive sex, gender, and sexuality education. We believe that the oversight of such issues belongs to the parents.

We strongly believe that education is the most important way to create moral and discerning children. Our program stresses liberty, individualism, free markets, critical thinking, and the importance of personal achievement and meritocracy. We strive to create the next generation of great patriot leaders, and our mission is to offer the best possible education for God, faith, country, and family.

FreedomProject Academy is enrolling students for the 2024-2025 school year through mid-July 2024. For more information, go to fpeusa.org.



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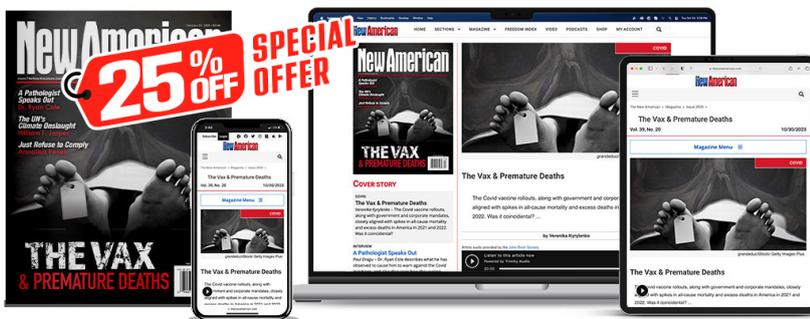
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