

THE TORCH BY NOVA CLASSICAL ACADEMY

THE TORCH



A DEEP DIVE INTO CLASSICAL EDUCATION

The Torch: The Grammar Stage December 2021

Learning is the interplay between discipline and delight.

-Chögyam Trungpa

December is a time of ritual: lighting candles and trees, driving to relatives on well-traveled roads, watching movies the family has seen numerous times, and rolling out dough for endless racks of cookies. Despite my Scandinavian roots, I am not a baker, but I do love to cook. When

my husband and I used to live in Colorado, we started making homemade tortellini which has become a Winter Break ritual that still exists today. Making homemade pasta is an exercise in trust- I must not only follow the recipe but also practice handling dough so that the filling stays in once the pasta is sealed. I do not question the *why* of the pasta-making mechanics, I just do-over and over, year after year.

The grammar stage of classical education depends in large part on ritual and structure. In a recent observation, I was delighted to hear a teacher explain the grammar stage in a way I hadn't heard before. She was encouraging the student to look at memorizing flashcard information as working with Legos- the more facts a student is able to recall with facility, it's like having another set of Legos with which to build. The structure of the grammar stage allows for the students to soak in as much information as they are able; this can happen through chants, songs, visual information on the board or the walls, and practicing the information over and over again until mastery is achieved. The ritual of the grammar stage ranges from how students move about the building and interact with their teacher to how they write their name on the paper. These rituals help buttress the structure of the learning environment, as well as show how virtue is displayed throughout the building.

Early this month, I took a morning to do a grammar stage walkabout on the first floor at Nova Classical Academy. I filled pages of notes throughout the morning, which only reflected a fraction of what I experienced: spelling, parts of speech definitions and analysis, sentence diagramming, number strings, fractions, land resources, ancient Greek history, *Little Women*, handwriting, text features, a Viking raid, sides of geometric shapes, the globe, and the purpose of the sun. However, our K-5 students are unfazed as this information is coming at them due to their developmental stage which is primed to soak up facts, as well as the structure that our teachers establish to offer those facts. The students are excited to learn, students are excited to practice, and students are excited to demonstrate mastery of the material to their teachers and themselves. A favorite teacher of mine used to say "Learning is the interplay of discipline and delight", which could easily represent the grammar stage of classical education.

The structure and ritual of the grammar stage establishes trust, much as rolling out my pasta dough year after year reminds me that I need to follow the recipe. I'm sure there's a reason that I have to knead the dough a certain amount of time or why I have to leave it alone in plastic wrap, but the understanding of why doesn't affect the end product- it is the ritual, the repetition to mastery, that brings our household one of the best dishes we've ever tasted, and deepens the enjoyment of our time together. [Link to the [recipe](#)]

May you all find meaning and illumination this December in all of your rituals,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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