

THE TORCH BY NOVA CLASSICAL ACADEMY

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# THE TORCH

A DEEP DIVE INTO CLASSICAL EDUCATION

## The Torch: The Trivium and Bass Guitar October 26th

Classical education rests on the concept of the Trivium—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—not as subjects, although these subjects are studied, but as the structure of every subject and discipline.

- **Grammar** is the foundation of a subject—the collection of its parts and the mechanics of how they work.
- **Logic** is the organization of this collection of parts and mechanics of grammar into a whole and an understanding of the relationships among them
- **Rhetoric** is the ability to apply the foundational knowledge and logical understanding of a subject purposefully and creatively to solve a problem, express

an opinion with clarity or create something new.

In its simplest form, the learning process moves through the three stages of the Trivium. For example, a student learning to read and write will learn the sounds that letters make in the grammar stage, organize words together in meaningful ways in the logical stage, and create written compositions expressing their opinions in the rhetoric stage.

At Nova Classical Academy, we integrate the three stages of the Trivium into everything that we learn. For instance, Latin students chant verb conjugations so that they memorize patterns. Whenever I met someone who went to parochial school in the mid-1900s and mentioned that I was a Latin teacher, they immediately would start chanting *amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant* to me. This is a grammar-stage chant that means “I love, you love, he loves, we love, you (all) love, they love”, and as a grammar-stage memorization ingrained in students, could be recalled by the person 50 years later.

The logic stage of conjugating is when the student encounters one of these forms of the word in a translation and is able to connect the chant to the English translation. Students reading Catullus in a Latin 6 class have likely not chanted *amo, amas, amat* for a few years, but when they encounter the line *odi et amo* (“I hate and I love...”), they are able to immediately connect *amo* to its English translation of “I love.”

The rhetoric stage of the *amo, amas, amat* chant may go in a number of directions: students could translate from English to Latin like “You love to dance in the atrium” using *amas*, generate a full synopsis as seen in the Upper School newsletter from last week by using the “predictable patterns of Latin”, or compose their own poetry in Latin in imitation of Catullus’s “I hate and I love...”

The Trivium can also exist outside of Nova Classical Academy. Last year at this time, I purchased an electric bass guitar in order to release stress through a creative outlet. I used to play violin and viola from age five until 18, but hadn’t played a string instrument for over two decades. On the other hand, my husband has been playing guitar and bass for almost 30 years, having learned on his own by experience and existing firmly in the rhetoric stage of expression and creation.

As I started on my learning journey, I decided to work from the grammar stage by investing in the Fender app so that I could learn to what notes to tune the bass strings, how to pluck the strings, even how to play the bass riff for ZZ Top's La Grange (and there's only so much of that a household can hear). I practiced (repetition of foundation) the Fender lessons day after day and week after week, but then came up against a block: how do I take these basic foundations to playing along with someone else on guitar?

It's easy to feel stuck, especially when I am surrounded by talented people who make it seem so easy; but, the key to forward movement in my learning was to lean on the logic stage. Logic-stage learning is about making connections, and one of those connections came as an "aha moment" when I played on an instrument with a tuner which showed me what note I was playing (e.g. A#, E) as I moved up or down the fretboard. Being able to see the notes helps me understand what to play as a bass line when my husband says he's playing in the key of E, a prompt that would confuse me greatly in my early days of foundational work.

I am a long way off from facility with the bass, but my experience over the last calendar year in learning has reminded me why I love classical education. The Trivium, a Latin word that means "a place where three roads meet", is the pathway we use to teach and learn at Nova, but can work at any age. This week, see if you can identify something you've learned using the Trivium, and share that with your child. **We learn not for school but for life**, whether that be learning the bass guitar, baking bread, or translating Catullus.

See you at the crossroads,

Dr. Johnson

Academic Director

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