

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

In the Primary Stage, *Kindergarten through Second Grade*, we are laying the foundation upon which your child's classical education will rest. Therefore, great care and attention must be given to these foundational years. At HLS Northeast Wisconsin, we do that by focusing on three key areas: *Culture, Content, and Character*

Culture—

HLS strives for a *culture* of excellence in all our endeavors, and one of those is how we structure and maintain the order and discipline of the traditional classroom. Because the primary stage provides a foundation for the trivium that follows, we must be ever vigilant in how that foundation is built. Lifelong habits are formed at this stage—good and bad.

According to Cheryl Lowe, the founder of Memoria Press and the Highlands Latin School, in order to form the habits we desire to see in our students, we must return GRAVITAS to the classroom. Gravitas is the element most lacking in K-12 classrooms today. American culture is so shallow and pleasure sodden that we really don't know what gravitas is anymore.

Gravitas is a sense of seriousness about what we are doing.

Mrs. Lowe reminds us that our work in Christian terms is a high calling from God. The Romans had gravitas and as Christians, we should have it too, with the added element of *joy*.

What does gravitas look like in the primary classroom?

- Gravitas is not grim, but it IS serious.
- Teachers are at the front of the classroom and use a podium to organize their materials so they may teach effectively.
- All desks face the front of the classroom.
- All students instructed by the teacher are working on the same skills together.
- We use games to practice skills, but the classroom is always quiet and orderly because all are engaged in a purposeful activity that is an efficient use of time.

With gravitas, we return AWE to education and make our primary years—as well as the grammar, logic, and rhetoric years that follow—models of true excellence.

Gravitas in the primary school means that we take very seriously those important foundational skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

We are doing the most important work in Kindergarten through Second Grade. All that we accomplish in the higher grades depends on what our students achieve in these few years and what habits and attitudes are formed—whether good or bad.

Content—

Classical education thrives in a traditional classroom because it is teaching students to order things rightly. An orderly curriculum thrives in an orderly classroom.

The classical core curriculum provides a cohesive plan, not just a compilation of well-meaning parts. Each lesson, each book, each course builds on the next in meaningful and intentional ways. For the teacher and student alike, it is rewarding and exhilarating to recognize connections, observe patterns and themes, and notice influences across the curriculum. Memoria Press provides this. Guides are similar across the curriculum, which allows the focus to be on new instruction and content instead of learning a new format in every grade. Continuity provides order.

At HLS we utilize the Memoria Press curriculum, which focuses on two central ideas:

- *Mastery*—Mastery of content is the goal of the primary program. Students are guided through the material in a way that emphasizes mastering a concept before moving on to a new one. The ability to immediately recall information and explain ideas is the end goal. Repetition, repetition, repetition is key for success. Mastery education ennobles the student and the subject and honors the nature of the child: memorize, recite, repeat. Through repetition and discipline, we are able to do a thing well consistently.
- *Simplicity*—Rather than building the curricula full of extras and dress ups, Memoria Press provides a robust, thorough, and focused exploration of each subject as it is studied. It is not necessary to add to this curriculum or to deviate from the weekly assignments. It is full and rich and complete.

Character—

Classical education offers not only wisdom, but virtue. Again, these years are foundational in character development—good or bad. Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain speak to the importance of character formation in the early years in their book *The Liberal Arts Tradition*:

*...a Kindergarten teacher is indeed a profoundly classical teacher who helps establish young souls in piety, gymnastic, and music—priming and cultivating the affections, loves, wills, and bodies of children at a time when they are docile, receptive, and eager. It is these teachers of the young who make the first deep and lasting impressions on the souls of children—**tuning their hearts and training their bodies**. It turns out ...the primary teachers lead the entire endeavor, as “wonder” is a condition for all future study.” (vii)*

We desire to cultivate in our students a STRONG MIND and NOBLE CHARACTER.

This is accomplished most effectively through the *culture* of our traditional classroom environment, a focus on *character* training, and the rich *content* of our classical curriculum.

