

SLO Classical Academy

Curricula Q & A, 2009/2010

The following questions were compiled by parents and answered by the Curriculum Committee as a team. Great care, much time, and extensive discussion and research were primary components of the history and literature lists. We hope this Q & A format answers your questions and/or those being posed to you. If you have further questions, please let the committee know by emailing April Kemp – aprilkemp@sloclassicalacademy.com. The team is happy to set up a time for further clarification.

What is the goal of history and literature in classical education at SLO Classical Academy?

History is the spine of the curriculum at SLO Classical Academy, and literature essential in our historical studies, and there are three major arenas that are seminal to our study of history and literature. They are: the moral codes that have contributed to the stability and justice of human society, the literature and philosophies that have given meaning and purpose to the human condition, and the events that underscore the human quest for freedom and justice in a world fraught with tyranny and oppression. All of the above will provide our students with a "cultural consciousness" essential to an appreciation for the great works of Western civilization, and will lead them on their way to cultural literacy.

To state it a bit differently, through looking at the events of history and the individual and collective responses to these events over time, we hope to help students understand the timelessness of good character choices and have a context with which to understand the forces that continue to shape our world. Literature helps the students see the daily life of individuals during different time periods in history and understand the historical figures and events on a deeper level. While these are lofty goals for Primary and some Intermediate students, our students have shown us time and time again that they are capable of reaching these goals in some capacity. In addition, our 4 year cycle allows for the introduction to the people and events at a younger age with the opportunity to revisit them during the rotation when the student has most likely moved from the grammar to the logic phase of development. This allows these students to strive for our ultimate goal of creating critical thinkers and leaders with good character.

Why are we including the Bible on the literature lists?

Great literature and the study of the ancient world, with its root in the Judeo-Christian and Roman-Greco traditions, are basic tenets of Classical Education. As a major text of antiquity, the Bible qualifies in the three essential areas above (last question) as well as being a literary work of beauty and significance. The fact that within the plays of Shakespeare are 1300 biblical allusions, that many of the foundational documents of American history contain biblical references and principles (including the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address), and that many contemporary works of art, including literature and films contain biblical allusions, all contribute to making knowledge of this text essential for modern literacy.

While the actual required excerpts from the Bible that the students will read at home are minimal, we feel that to exclude any readings from this primary source document would be a disservice to our students by not beginning this component of well-established guidelines for cultural literacy. Additionally, the opportunity for building connections and understanding is strengthened with this resource, as they will be reading other culture's literature sources that have similar stories and themes from the same general time periods.

For another perspective on teaching the Bible in school, please see <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1601845,00.html>

Can you present the Bible without teaching Christianity/faith?

While the Bible does contain strong spiritual underpinnings, it is also a book of great literary and historical value. It can be taught for its literary, ethical, and historical significance without promoting a sectarian view of religious faith, and it is our intent to do so. Much of the discussion, thinking and rethinking of this year's curriculum has been centered on these kinds of questions because we feel great responsibility and duty to do this properly with no hidden agenda. We know that our staff (which is composed of people of many faiths, just like our school community) is committed to handling this material in a fair and unbiased way. While it will take special care and effort, we are up for challenge of this most important task. The inclusion of material from other religions, including excerpts from their relevant sacred texts, will most likely lead to discussions about faith at the higher levels and surely should at home. We considered omitting any teaching of religion because of this but ultimately decided that our students, families and teachers would benefit from this opportunity. While there may be missteps in this process, we trust that you will honor our commitment to open and fair communication and speak with us directly if anything occurs which is not in keeping with our shared goals.

How will the Bible be presented in class?

The Bible will be presented in class in the same manner in which the other texts are presented--respectfully and in a manner that allows the text to stand upon its own merits. Theology will not be taught in this context.

The specific excerpts from the Bible have been chosen because they share some common themes with other required history and literature resources. The Biblical excerpts will always be presented as one of several resources to help build the connections that lead to a greater understanding of our educational themes. Looking at the History/Literature Core List for each level, these themes are clearly laid out for each trimester.

How much time will be spent on the Bible?

While we are still working on refining the plan for this year, there are 6 instructional days for this year where Biblical references will be discussed along with other corresponding references that support the teaching of the educational themes highlighted for that lesson. With the exception of one, all fall within the first trimester. This is the reason the Primary literature list is weighted more heavily with Bible stories during trimester 1.

Why is Primary so loaded with biblical stories for in-class reading?

In addition to the reasons just stated, many biblical stories have found their way into the cultural consciousness in such a way that every year new books are produced for children on Moses, Noah's Ark, Jonah and the Whale, Joseph in Egypt, and so forth. Because there is a rich treasury of these books, it is fitting to begin to introduce these stories to children in the form of beautiful picture books that enhance their understanding and exposure. Most of these stories happen to take place (historically) in the period covered in the first trimester.

What about giving equal time to other cultures/religions?

Some time will be given to other cultures, their worldviews, faith practices and so on. Because SLOCA is a classical academy the focus is concentrated on the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian perspective. However, we feel strongly that it is important to include some teaching about the other ancient world cultures and religions that also begin during this time frame. While we wish there were more class time to do justice to them

all, we realistically decided to have introductions and readings about them in class and the opportunity to study more extensively as part of required projects for each trimester.

In addition, families will be exploring at least one other culture during the year to investigate in order to broaden our scope and appreciation for other worldviews. This allows families some choice in studying what they feel is important.

Why aren't the primary source documents from other religions required?

The primary source documents of the Greek worldview are contained in the works of Homer and the Greek pantheon. The Roman worldview is summed up in the *Aeneid*. All students will be required to read these documents and they will be covered in depth. In the same way, the Bible is the literary and spiritual work of the Judeo-Christian worldview and will be approached in the same manner.

Additionally, we have one supplemental book that has excerpts from the primary source documents from these other religions that the teachers will use as in-class resources. We strongly encourage families to broaden and enrich their studies through our extensive supplemental history and literature resource lists.

Does this mean that the school is becoming a Christian school?

Absolutely not. Over 30 states now include the "Bible as Literature" as mandatory requirements in their curriculum — in public school. But we hope you now understand the reasons for our choices for this year. We continue to hold steadfast to our goal of providing an excellent classical education without bias. This may not always be easy, there may be mistakes made, but it's definitely worthwhile!

What happens if another child tries to evangelize mine or makes any statements regarding the wrongness of the other's faith? Or what if a child tells my child he is wrong because he believes the Bible?

It is natural to expect that children process their faith all the time and this year will be no exception. Frankly, we hope that every year will bring introspection and discussion at home about this and other defining components of character as a result of our studies. It is particularly important that all of us take a stand on the importance of honoring other's views and treating each other with respect in this and all other areas of difference. Discussion and modeling the kind of behavior we expect is an important part of helping children understand this basic tenet of positive human relations. Any kind of disrespect violates our Code of Conduct. Please let Cheryl and/or your child's teacher know if any of these kinds of problems are occurring. Naturally, the school's administrators would want to know if you feel as if these avenues of action have not been sufficient for our shared goal of positive growth for our students.

Why are Intermediate and Middle school students required to read the same literature selections?

One of the reasons this has taken so long is because of the difficulty of finding literature that is appropriate for each of our students. We are committed to finding quality, well-written books, books that include accurate historical content, books that are usable for classroom instruction and goals, and books that captivate the children. Another reason some of these books were chosen was for their beautiful illustrations that allow us a different avenue of learning for our students. Lastly, there is something to be said about the value of reading a rich retelling of a classic book, because it serves as a great springboard for jumping into the 300-400 page literal translation as a next step. Having a solid understanding of the plot and themes helps in navigating the

complex language and details of the original text. Because of many considerations, Intermediate and Middle School selections are often the same.

These shared books were not chosen because the specific goals of classroom instruction are the same for both levels. In fact, each level will be using those materials in very different ways. At the Intermediate level, much of the material will still need to be read aloud by the parent, while some of these readings will be promoting independent reading for the more advanced readers. Intermediate students will be working on summarizing and beginning literary analysis. Comparative analysis, recognition of literary elements, and concentration on development of writing skills will be expected at the Middle School level. As always, we encourage families to work with their student's teacher to modify assignments to be more appropriate for their child. We have created a very strong supplemental reference list that has choices for all reading levels. We encourage you to enrich your child's learning experience in the three home-teaching days. We recognize that compromises were made and some of these choices may not be perfect. Because of this, we are working on a plan for helping families stretch and encourage their child to a greater depth of learning for the more advanced student.