

Charlotte Mason Philosophy



The Classical Academy

Classical education endeavors to impart basic knowledge of core subjects, train students to think critically, instill a lifelong love of learning, and develop learning tools which can be applied to any field of study. A rich collection of successful teaching methods has been passed down through the classical tradition. A tradition committed to building appetites for lifelong pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness using classic books and art, nature study, and a focus on the history of western civilization. Having adopted the classical model of education to help bring us to this end, our elementary school integrates the teachings of Charlotte Mason to help bring us to that end.

Charlotte Mason was a turn of the century British educationalist philosopher who believed that children are born persons thirsty for knowledge with a desire to learn and a need to be nourished through authentic curriculum and real experiences. She described education as “an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life.” These ideas are embedded in our Core Values and guide the instructional approach at the elementary level.

We regard the belief expressed by Charlotte Mason that “Education is a Life” as one of our foundational philosophies. We value an education that cultivates virtuous character including excellence with honor, courage, compassion, and relational grace. Where inspirational ideas and truth are recognized to be the real food for the child’s mind. We seek to uphold the historical pillars of society—truth, beauty, and goodness—by engaging with living books, primary sources, idea centered instruction, and experiences that cultivate curiosity and stir awe and wonder regarding the natural world. To prepare a child for the future, we must help them live it fully now.

Following Mason insistence that “Education is an Atmosphere” that must be carefully cultivated to promote the natural stages of learning. By this, Mason believed that atmosphere is defined not just as the child’s environment, but the formation of proper conditions for learning. As such, we endeavor to foster and nurture a warm learning environment. Elementary teachers begin with the notion that intrinsic motivation produces a desire to learn when external rewards are used sparingly. This fosters competence and confidence in students when sincere praise is applied to genuine accomplishments and there is an expectation of excellent work with a high level of academic mastery. In the elementary classroom, high expectations are facilitated through the compassion, encouragement, and support of a teacher who has a deep passion and interest in the material being taught. Students adopt the belief that

it is important to “be our best, do our best, and give our best” when they feel seen and respected by a caring teacher and are expected to do the work of learning and perform the act of knowing.

We carefully cultivate wisdom, virtue, and a love of learning by developing healthy habits. Charlotte Mason speaks of “Education as a Discipline” and following through on the musts in life where healthy habits of spirit, mind, and body are formed thoughtfully and responsibly. Authentic character and freedom are developed when one learns to submit to the proper authority and accept correction, done with kindness, as a form of invaluable feedback.

Mason also refers to “Education as the Science of Relations”. To fulfill our mission, teachers masterfully facilitate and support healthy and beneficial relationships between the children and their families, teachers, and classmates, as well as texts through the study of mathematics, history, quality literature, and nature through the study of science.

In the elementary school, teachers carefully consider the learning environment when they decorate and organize the classroom. Visually pleasing wall hangings and décor that add to a sense of calm as well as accent lighting and carefully arranged furniture create a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom. Welcoming students at the door with a kind word and a handshake gives every student a sense of belonging. Teachers make a sincere effort to guide instruction with questions that promote a safe environment for students to voice their ideas and questions.

It has been said that “habits are either the best of servants or the worst of masters.” We therefore work diligently to instill habits of mind, body, and spirit that will benefit students for the rest of their lives. From expecting work to be carefully and neatly completed, to learning to respect every member of the class, each habit gained cultivates a person capable of self-mastery. We desire for students to build habits because, as James V. Schall states, “the person who is most free is the one who has the most control over himself.”

Laying this foundation in elementary school allows the secondary student to seek and recognize truth, to contemplate and appreciate beauty, and to choose to do good as they develop into exemplary citizens.