

# How to Teach Latin

(A Guide to Using *Latin for Children*) ♦ By Karen Moore

**N**OTA BENE: This guide is intended for the use of teachers in various settings—whether at home, a co-op, or a traditional school. The word “teacher” refers to whoever is teaching Latin to the students regardless of the setting. This guide, while designed to be straightforward and clear, is also designed to be detailed enough to provide teachers with practical and specific advice that a more general guide could not provide. For the reader wanting more general guidance, we refer you to the Latin section on the Classical Academic Press website ([www.classicalacademicpress.com](http://www.classicalacademicpress.com)). Here one can find a variety of guidance and help. Those wishing to review a suggested weekly schedule for teaching the Latin for Children primers, should download the PDF file entitled Latin for Children—Suggested Weekly Schedule (<http://classicalacademicpress.com/product/latin-for-children-primer-a-program/>).

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Practitioners of classical education have long asserted that Latin is the foundation for the grammar stage of learning. Indeed, it has even become a kind of trademark distinguishing classical schools from other schools. Most schools that endeavor to teach Latin to very young children are considered classical, and a school of any kind cannot be truly classical unless its teachers train their grammar students in the rudiments of Latin. Latin forms such a key element for the grammar school that it is an essential element to the very foundation upon which the following stages of the Trivium, Logic and Rhetoric, are built. Dorothy Sayers, in her famous essay, goes so far as to declare, “quite firmly, that the best grounding for education is the Latin grammar.” (Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning”) If this language is so very important, even essential to the classical philosophy of education, then it is of the greatest necessity that we train our Latin teachers how to teach Latin grammar effectively.

The first order of business in creating a Latin program should be to determine the ultimate goal, and then how to go about achieving this goal. After all, you would never undertake a family trip by choosing a route, uncertain of where it might end -- particularly when you are bringing a great many young children with you. The greater the number of active young minds onboard, the greater the need for preparation. I

will state quite quickly with all the certainty that conviction allows that **the ultimate goal of any truly effective Latin program must be to construe original Latin texts.** There are certainly several other excellent benefits to studying Latin in addition to the construing or reading of original texts, some of which will be discussed shortly. However, as your studies progress the ability to read Latin ought to remain the primary goal. While students may not fully realize this goal until the Logic stage of learning (7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade), the groundwork for it most assuredly begins in the grammar school. I will begin my defense for this statement by defining my terms. The verb *construe* is a marvelous word defined by Webster as, “1. to analyze the structure of (a clause or sentence); to analyze grammatical structure 2. to place a certain meaning on: INTERPRET. 3. to translate, especially aloud.” Is it not the end goal of classical education to train students *how* to think, reason, even interpret what they may hear or read? So, should it not be the purpose of a language program to teach them *how* to construe (i.e. analyze, interpret, translate) the structure of a language? As Ms. Sayers instructs us the purpose of studying this particular classical language is knowing, “not just how to order a meal in a foreign language, but the structure of a language, and hence of language itself – what it was, how it was put together, and how it worked.” (Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning”)

The other term in this purpose statement that we should clearly define is *original Latin texts*. While many of the young readers involving colors and numbers, or the adventures of a Roman family are wonderful for beginning Latin students, by the end of their Latin studies, students should be able to read the orations of Cicero, the poetry of Vergil, and the theological dissertations of Augustine. In classical education, we often hear talk of reading the “Great Books.” Why not read the greatest books in their original language? Give students the opportunity to truly construe for themselves the writings of these great works, which inspired hearts and changed the course of history, instead of simply reading someone else’s English interpretation. This goal will take several years of diligent study to achieve, but it can be attained by any student whether studying at home or in a more formal school setting.

To some it may seem as though I have laid before you an impossible task. The languages of antiquity often carry with them a foreboding reputation. However, this is not raising a standard beyond reach, but merely placing it once again to the height from which it had fallen. John Adams, French Ambassador, framer of the U.S. Constitution, and our second President, met these same requirements. He grew up on a farm in rural Massachusetts. His father saved up enough money to send him alone of their several children to the nearby Latin school. At the age of sixteen when young John applied for Harvard University, the examiner asked him to translate a particularly complex passage from Cicero as part of his entrance exam. At first he was a bit daunted by the task before him, until the examiner allowed him the use of a Latin lexicon and grammar. With these familiar tools he was able to conquer Cicero, win entrance to Harvard, and eventually become one of our founding fathers.

However, when it comes time to choose the best Latin program for our students today, many often lose sight of this goal. They instead focus only on the other benefits of Latin study; a list which you can find in the multitude of “why Latin?” articles posted on every classical website. To borrow an old proverb, they do in a very real sense lose sight of the forest for looking at all the individual trees. These other benefits are indeed very worthwhile, but they should not keep us from purposing to teach students to construe Latin texts.

A favorite benefit is the great expansion of a young students’ English vocabulary. So, many prefer to adopt a root-word or derivative based program. Certainly any program you choose should have a very rich vocabulary, and it should take the time to demonstrate to students the etymology of Latin words and how

they are transformed into English derivatives. However, if all that students learn is a list of Latin words and their English derivatives, without any understanding of how these words fit into the context of a sentence, I would say they have not truly learned Latin at all.

Latin does increase the students' problem-solving skills, so perhaps an inductive reading program would prove fruitful. However, grammar school students are well-suited to learning vocabulary and grammar paradigms. They are little sponges who love to soak up data. Children of this age think in black and white. They thrive on memorization and recitation, not on inductive and deductive reasoning. The inductive approach is better saved for the students in middle school.

Another benefit is the advantage that Latin will give them when it comes time to learn a modern language. After all, Latin is the basis of many of our modern Western languages such as French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Most of us would love to see our children become fluent in at least one these modern languages. So, perhaps it would be best to prepare them for cultural language study through an immersion course rather than studying Latin grammar and syntax in a dedicated fashion. While this approach sounds entertaining and exciting, it misses the purpose of studying Latin. Such an approach does not enable students to truly understand original Latin texts without also including a significant and systematic study of grammar. Is it our goal to have students fluently speaking with other Romans? No, that is simply not possible. Students may be able to understand a Latin passage, but can they understand why it is to be translated a certain way? Can they speak of its diction and syntax? Blending conversational Latin into a traditional Latin course is an excellent idea, but neglecting the traditional study and mastery of grammar and syntax leave students without the necessary tools to properly understand and construe Latin.

I would suggest that while each of the goals above and the *cursus vitae* they might suggest has some merit, none of these should be viewed as the ultimate goal, the purpose of studying Latin. The purpose of Latin should neither end with a simple derivative study, nor strive to revive a conversational language that has long been silent. I will say again that the ultimate goal is to be able to construe original Latin texts, interpreting the intent and minds of these ancients, and to convey their thoughts eloquently in our own tongue. If we pursue this goal, then we will gain the many other benefits as well.

## **METHODOLOGY: Parts-to-Whole**

The best approach to learning the structure of a language, as Ms. Sayers exhorts us, is what we commonly refer to as the parts-to-whole method. In its truest form, this method instructs students in the various "parts" of Latin grammar, and then asks them to apply those tools in translating "whole" sentences and passages. Opponents to this method argue that this is not the natural way humans learn language. However, such arguments forget the purpose of studying Latin. We ought not to teach students Latin for the same purpose as we would a modern language such as French, Spanish, or Italian. Instead we teach it as a discipline of the mind that is designed to focus on how language works. One can equate this study in many ways to anatomical studies. Students cannot acquire a full understanding of how a toad's body works simply by observation and imitation. Instead they must cut the toad open to learn about each part and how those parts come together as a whole to make the toad effective. So it is with language. We do not study Latin in order to converse with or imitate the Romans, we study Latin that we may better understand language and what makes it effective.

The [Latin for Children](#) Primer Series is arguably the best parts-to-whole program available for young

grammar students today. Authors Drs. Chris Perrin and Aaron Larsen designed each text specifically for students of the grammar stage as prescribed by the classical methodology. While each text focuses primarily on the rote memorization of Latin vocabulary and grammar paradigms, all the texts progressively teach the students how to apply these tools to simple translation. Thus, the primers have found a way to marry beautifully the rote repetition of the grammar stage with the reading so necessary to learning a language well. After carefully considering the many different curricula available for teaching Latin, I have found this series to be the most effective in my classroom. Their many supplemental tools and the support provided on their website make them the ideal resource for the new or inexperienced Latin teacher. I will, therefore, use this curriculum as I share with you how to teach Latin effectively.

### **PREPARATION: What do I need to get started?**

I once heard that, “ten minutes of preparation is worth two hours of labor.” This certainly is true for the labor of education, whether you are planning a class for one or for twenty. Classical Academic Press provides a wealth of materials to choose from. In addition to their series of Latin primers, they provide a DVD & CD combo, an activity book, a line of history readers, and a multitude of worksheets that users may download from their website for FREE. Often consumers ask, “but do I need *all* of this?” Certainly you do not *need* to purchase every product on the LFC line. Every child, every class of children, is unique, as is every teacher’s style of instruction. Classical Academic Press provides a wide variety of supplemental materials in order to ensure that all teaches are able to tailor their program to their students’ needs. I encourage you to learn more about each of these supplemental materials and how it may benefit your class by referring to the product descriptions provided in the appendix, or visit [www.classicalacademicpress.com](http://www.classicalacademicpress.com).

Once you have decided upon the supplemental materials you will use alongside your textbooks, it is time to prepare your order. I always recommend that teachers purchase an additional copy of the written products for themselves. This is particularly helpful with primers and readers. Well before the first day of class, allow yourself the time to read through each of these materials, marking them up with notes and ideas. Work through the memory worksheets in the primers and decide which of the online worksheets will best supplement them. You should print these out and place them in their own binder. Decide which games in the activity book you would like to use, and make sure you understand how to play them. Peruse the history readers and select the stories you are most interested in using. Discuss these stories with your history teacher to find out which ones might best compliment his or her lesson plans for the year. Once you have made these plans, it is a given that they will change over the course of the year. However, at this point you have become very familiar with the resources available and better prepared to use them. Now you are ready to begin teaching.

### **VOCABULARY: The building blocks of language.**

Words are the essential building blocks of any language. A toddler needn’t have a great understanding to communicate his needs, but the right words are crucial. So also is the case with the lost traveler desperately searching through his pocket-sized conversational-help-book. He is not worried about how articulate he sounds, but in getting out the right word to get him to his destination. In the grammar stage the central focus of teaching language is the rote memorization of words, the building of vocabulary. The LFC series introduces ten new words in each chapter, adding an additional five review words in primers B and C. Day one should be spent on introducing these new words to the students; do not leave them

to fend for themselves. The teacher should model the pronunciation and then ask students to imitate. If you feel less than confident about your pronunciation, you may wish to use the DVD or CD provided by Classical Academic Press.

The debate over classical vs. ecclesiastical pronunciation is a hot topic in some circles. There are well respected Latin instructors who present well crafted arguments on both sides. I, myself, prefer the classical pronunciation. However, I do not feel that the pronunciation you choose is nearly as important as being consistent with your decision. The primers and DVD sets provide readers with guides to both ecclesiastical and classical pronunciation. Choose the one that fits best with your style of teaching. Then, stick to it.

When reciting vocabulary I urge you not to simply repeat endings, but make sure you chant the whole words to them. In other words do not have students chant: *puella, -ae*. This may not seem to present a problem for the well-behaved first declension nouns. However, before too long you will begin introducing second and third declension nouns whose stem varies between the nominative and genitive singular, i.e. *ager, agrī*. Instead require students to continue chanting the noun stem with both endings: *puella, puellae; ager, agrī; vox, vocis, etc.* The same should apply to adjectives (*bonus, bona, bonum*) and to verbs (*amō, amāre, amāvī, amātum*).

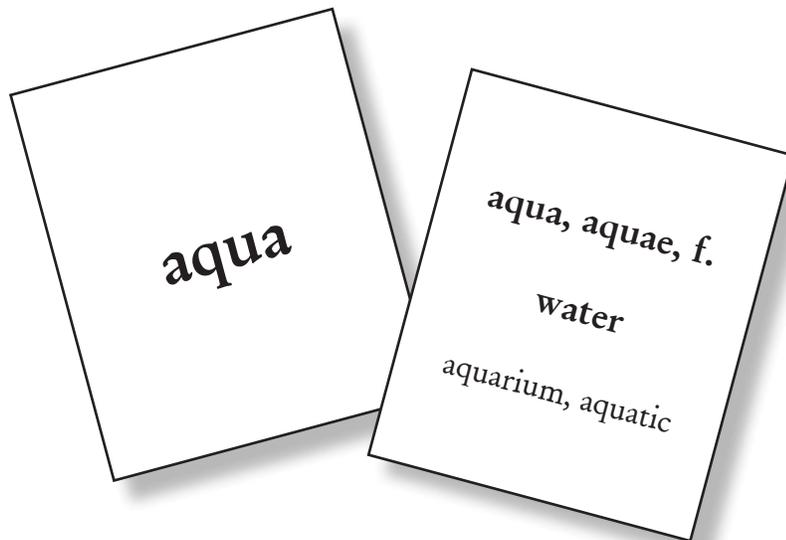
Some texts do not teach students to memorize all four principal parts of verbs, and some teachers do not require it. I am emphatic about requiring such memorization from my students. The principal parts are the essential forms from which every type of verb will be formed. If they do not memorize all the principal parts as a complete set now, it will be much more difficult to do so later. The last two parts often vary in their form, and students will not readily associate them with the first two. They will in essence find it necessary to relearn all of their verbs. Moreover, this is the stage at which children are easily able to assemble and retain great quantities of data. The extra memorization may take a little more rehearsal, but is readily accomplished. It is crucial that students have command of their vocabulary, and now is the opportune time for them to gain it.

As you proceed through the new vocabulary list, pronouncing each word properly, take time to discuss English derivatives. At first, give students the opportunity to guess a few derivatives on their own. The guidelines for detecting a derivative are: 1) it must look similar in spelling to the Latin word and 2) it must have a meaning related to the Latin word. If the suggested derivative does not meet both of these requirements, then it cannot be a true derivative. They often love this time for it is a game that provides them active participation in the learning process. If they can come up with some derivatives on their own, they make an invaluable connection – they own that word.

Of course there are those Latin words that seem only to inspire diction too elevated for young students. So, the primers do provide some help. Each review chapter contains a set of derivatives for most of the Latin vocabulary words. You can sneak an early peek at this list and have some derivatives ready at hand. The memory worksheets also provide a derivative exercise for each chapter. It is helpful to introduce the derivatives they will need in your initial derivative discussion. Sometimes the younger students have a hard time coming up with some of the derivatives for the memory worksheet on their own. However, if you have discussed it as a class the day before, they will almost certainly be able to recall the word with little or no prompting. Older students should be encouraged to use an English dictionary to find some derivatives on their own. In this case it is important to make sure you have an English dictionary that will list the words' origins. Unfortunately, not all dictionaries will provide this information. At the beginning of the year, do a few derivative detective exercises, teach your students how to search for derivatives using the two clues above and then how to use the dictionary to verify their theories. Once again, they have

made the connection themselves and this builds confidence in their newfound vocabulary skills.

A very wise Latin teacher once instructed me that the more senses you use to learn something, the better you retain it. I have found this time and time again to be so true, particularly with children. So far students have used the senses of sight and sound to learn their vocabulary words; now it is time to add tactile practice. Next on the agenda are the famous flashcards. Some programs offer pretty pre-made cards. I, however, have always preferred that students make their own. The time it takes them to write out every vocabulary word with all of its grammatical parts, meanings, and even a derivative or two is time well spent. As they write they review each letter that makes up each part of each word. Ask students to write only the first entry of each word on the front and the remaining information on the back.



Always require students to memorize the gender of their nouns along with the other pertinent information. We are, after all, training them *how* to learn a language. While gender may appear easily recognizable in the beginning, it will not be so easy later on. Even the first declension has its exceptions. It is wise to develop in students a habit for memorizing a noun's assigned gender.

To this end it is also beneficial to use color coded index cards. Pink is assigned to feminine nouns, blue to masculine, and yellow to neuter. White remains the color for verbs. Some colored packs also include green and orange. These colors can be assigned to adjectives and prepositions. Use white once again when it comes time for adverbs, thus connecting them visually with the verbs they modify. This mnemonic device not only comes in handy when students are reviewing vocabulary cards at home, but also when they are creating them. The student must take the time to think again about the word, the part of speech, the gender (if it is a noun), and then the color needed for that word. When they have finished creating the cards, the teacher should check them. The students need to use the vocabulary tools they have just created to practice their new words for a few minutes each night at home. It is important to make sure that they have recorded the information correctly.

The mantra for the grammar stage is "rote, repetition, review." This seems a dry and dull philosophy, but it does not have to be. There are plenty of creative ways to review vocabulary words that will keep the young mind fully engaged. Classical Academic Press provides an activity book full of games and puzzles that serve this very purpose. Many kids enjoy using the flashcards they have just created to quiz each other on their new words. These same cards can lead to playing Latin taboo, a favorite at our

school. One student must give clues to try to help another guess the word on the card, BUT they cannot use the meaning of the word or any of the derivatives listed. Some students like to use extra index cards to create another set of Latin cards that are blank on one side, making them suitable for card games such as “memory” or “go fish.” There are other games that do not require cards at all such as Latin Hangman, Around the World, and Spelling Bees. The list of Latin games could continue *ad infinitum*. Many of them are the creations of imaginative Latin students. Engage your students in creating their own review game. It will most likely become their favorite.

### **GRAMMAR: The mortar that binds.**

If words are the building blocks of language, then grammar is the mortar that binds them together. It is grammar that gives vocabulary meaning and power. Without it they would be, well . . . just words. On a fundamental level, the grammar of Latin is very different from that of English. Latin is an inflected language. That is it is a language that regularly affixes endings to words in order to demonstrate to the reader the function of that word in a sentence. The word inflection is itself a Latin derivative from the verb *flectere* meaning, “to alter the shape of.” Indeed Latin is very fond of altering the shape of its words, molding them to fit the purpose needed. English too uses inflection as demonstrated in the manner that it pluralizes most words, i.e. *girl – girls*. Of course Latin, with its many lists of noun declensions and verb tenses, uses inflection on a much larger scale. It often takes a little time for our English brains to conform to this new paradigm of grammar. A very good reason to begin instructing the so called “poll-parrots” in these new paradigms with the familiar method of “rote, repetition, review.” Each chapter of Latin for Children begins with a new or review grammar chant. Although we do not introduce the grammar lesson until the second day spent on this chapter, we always make time to rehearse the grammar chant on the very first day. Again it is important to model the pronunciation of each word and each ending for the students, and then ask them to repeat it. Rehearsing these chants should be the first exercise of every Latin class. It is a great way to signal to the students that we are moving from the world of English grammar to that of Latin. Once again, however, the time spent orally reviewing these chants does not have to be dry and boring. Find creative ways to enhance this time. We have several grammar songs and chants that have become so popular at our school, even the Kindergarteners know them. Many a student has been caught singing them on the playground, in the car, and on one occasion even in her sleep! Many of these were created by the students themselves. One fifth grade student set the imperfect and future tenses of *esse* to the music of the Mexican Hat Dance. Another group created a rap that listed all of the prepositions that take the ablative case, and another for those taking the accusative. We have nurtured such an attitude of enjoyment at our school with regard to Latin that my husband often teases me that I am “warping” these young minds. No - I’m merely “inflecting” them.

Once students have begun learning how to memorize the vocabulary and grammar paradigms of this language, it is time to show them how the two work together. Some programs prefer to wait until children are older to show them how to apply the tools of vocabulary and grammar work together. This could be compared to a lesson in wood shop in which we teach students about a nail and then about a hammer, but then put off instructing them on the affect the hammer has on the nail when applied. Once students have learned a few words and then a grammar chart, it is only natural to show them how the one affects the other. Latin for Children does just this. On day two of each chapter students are presented with a short and fairly simple grammar lesson. The lessons are written in a very straightforward manner that clearly takes into consideration a young audience, and the possibility of a novice teacher or parent who does not

have any formal training in Latin. Before class look over the grammar page and the worksheet that follows. Every worksheet will have a grammar section with questions regarding the grammar lesson on the previous page. Take the time now to circle the answers on the grammar page so you know exactly where they are located. You will want to emphasize these as you give the day's grammar lesson, particularly with the younger children.

Begin the grammar lesson by having the students read the grammar page out loud, stopping often to ask comprehension questions about what they have just read: "What is a conjugation? What does it mean to conjugate a verb?" As they read, have them also circle or underline the same passages that you identified in your preparation for the lesson. Allow them to use a colored pencil (markers tend to bleed). This exercise is training them in the skill of note taking. Not only will they relish the opportunity to use colors in their book, this exercise will highlight the segments of the lesson they will need to complete the worksheet. As the students get older, it will become less necessary for you to tell them exactly which sentences they need to highlight. Instead at the end of the reading ask the class, "What is the most important point in the first paragraph? Circle that sentence." Again, teaching is not simply filling them full of information, but training them how to learn.

Now the students are ready to review the vocabulary and grammar they have learned with their first assignment, the chapter worksheet. With all of the preparation you, as the teacher, have provided in discussing vocabulary words, derivatives, and grammar, the students should be able to work quietly on their own or with a single partner to complete the worksheet. Afterwards the teacher can collect the books to look over the assignment. Of course, with larger classes, taking up fifteen to twenty books can be quite a lot. Instead, you might consider having the students check their own work. Ask them again to produce a colored pencil – any color (always a big hit). Review the worksheet aloud as a class and ask them not to erase their mistakes, but simply write the correct answer over the error. It is important to emphasize that mistakes are a part of learning, and not an occasion for embarrassment. This method of correction and review tends to work best with the younger classes, who are not naturally given to reviewing their corrected assignments on their own.

For the Primer A students, the chapter worksheet is often the end of their grammar lesson. The sequential primers do often provide additional exercises for grammar application, often in the form of translation worksheets. Budget your class time appropriately for these additional exercises. Begin each one by modeling how to complete the exercise. End by reviewing the students work. If you do not have time to review the exercise that class day, make sure to allow time to do so soon. Students cannot learn from their mistakes unless they understand them.

For primer A students who would like additional practice, there are more than ninety such worksheets available free of cost on the Classical Academic Press website. These vary from exercises that rehearse declining nouns to parsing verbs to translating simple sentences. Latin teachers using LFC have created these for use in their classroom and have generously made them available for public use. Students using Primers B and C can benefit from some of these exercises as well. I created the declining and conjugating worksheets, as well as the generic parsing worksheet for Latin students of all levels. The wider the variety of practice offered the students, the better they will understand their grammar and how to use it.

## TRANSLATION: Applying the tools of the trade.

Now that the students have their bricks, mortar, and the knowledge to use them, it is time to create – or rather construe. To put it simply, you cannot begin training children to construe Latin too early. Even if this exercise begins with a simple one-word sentence consisting of a lone verb; train them to identify the verb, parse it, and translate it appropriately into a complete English sentence. All too often I have heard bewildered Latin teachers lament that their upper level students could not “read Latin.” They had diligently trained them by reciting vocabulary lists and grammar paradigms. They had conjugated the verb *amāre* in every known tense a thousand times. The students knew their language tools backwards and forwards, but they did not know how to use them. They had the hammer and the nail, but they did not know how to construct anything with them.

As soon as students learn about the person and number of a verb they are ready to begin translating. First, provide them with a parsing worksheet. Parsing (from the Latin *pars*, meaning “part”) requires students to identify the parts that make up a verb and then put them together again to understand the verb as a whole. This worksheet consists of five columns, designated as follows: VERB, TENSE, PERSON, NUMER, and TRANSLATION. Some parsing worksheets designed for beginners leave off the column marked “tense.” Advanced levels can add columns for mood and voice as it becomes appropriate. Fill in the far left column with a list of verbs the students are learning. Make sure to vary the tense, person, and number of these verbs appropriately. In class ask students to identify the items as requested in the remaining columns, and then translate that word appropriately.

verb	tense	person	number	translation
amat	P	3	S	He loves
vidēbis	F	2	S	You will see
dābāmus	I	1	PL	We were giving
habent	P	3	PL	They have

This exercise will train the students to consider all the characteristics of a verb when translating. As mentioned earlier, such a worksheet is available on the Classical Academic Press website.

Once students have mastered this exercise you can provide them with one-word sentences, consisting of a single verb. Again ask students to parse the verb *before* translating. They will be sorely tempted to show off their newfound skills by merely translating the little sentence without showing their work. However, the point of parsing is training them how to look at Latin sentences and consider all the elements of grammar before jumping to a conclusion on how to interpret the meaning. Just as with math, the study of Latin is a means to discipline the mind; students must show their work.

Gradually nominative nouns can be added to these sentences, then predicates, objects, and so on. Require students to parse their nouns and adjectives as well, identifying case, number, and gender. Every time a new case is added to the mix make sure that students know how to parse it, and also how to identify its function in the sentence. Diagramming or labeling sentences is not just for English class. Students should use these same notations in Latin class as well. As students parse, then diagram a sentence, they are creating a type of road map for themselves. When it comes time to translate the sentence, all they need do is look at the instructions they have written. They should now easily identify the subject, verb and object

and be able to transfer them into an English sentence. Once again, some will be eager to skip the grunt work when they are cutting their teeth on short simple sentences. However, as their skills mature and they begin to encounter more complex sentences with possessives, indirect objects, and subordinate clauses, these habits will become extremely useful. The flexible word order for which Latin is famous if not notorious can sometimes be the student's greatest obstacle. The ability to parse sentences correctly will guide them in construing effectively.

The next step in reaching our goal, to construe original Latin texts, is to begin providing students with small passages. Primers B and C provide a few such passages in some of the review units. These passages are borrowed from the history reader series, "*Libellus de Historia*" (A Little Book about History), the companion reader for the Latin for Children series. This series is modeled after the graded readers that Latin students have used for many decades. A graded reader is one that begins with short passages containing very simple grammar, and gradually increases the readings in length and complexity. We designed "*Libellus de Historia*" to work in tandem with the LFC series, grading the difficulty of the readings to coincide with the grammar lessons in the primers. The subject matter follows the Veritas Press History Card Series, and is particularly useful for those programs that use both of these curricula. Should you prefer, there are other graded Latin readers available that use stories strictly pertaining to Roman culture and history. No matter which topic you prefer, the approach to passage translation is the same.

Begin by having each student compile a list of unfamiliar vocabulary words. This exercise may seem tedious at first, but it will save time later. The exercise also asks students to look closely at each individual word, considering its part of speech, the declension or conjugation to which it belongs, possible cases or tenses, and the wide range of meanings that may need consideration. While the *Libellus* series does seek to incorporate as many known words as possible, it would be impossible to describe these historical events using only LFC vocabulary. We view this as an opportunity for students to expand their Latin vocabulary further. The main goal of the reader is to practice the grammar learned. This is a particularly effective exercise when new words appear that students must parse more carefully.

With the vocabulary list complete, students are ready to begin construing the text. Small groups of two to three are the most effective in the beginning. After students have translated several passages, gaining confidence in their skills, you may wish to have them tackle a passage individually. One advantage the *Libellus* series has over other graded readers is the manner in which the actual text of the story appears. The large font and extra spacing not typically found in other readers, allows the student additional work space. They can parse their sentences within the text if they find it helpful. While I sometimes encourage this practice in the beginning, I no longer require it. At some point the students must begin to stretch their wings without the use of these visual cues. Under no circumstances do I allow them to translate the stories within the text. Instead they must use a separate sheet of notebook paper. Some teachers may wish to have students keep their own spiral notebook set apart for just this purpose. This notebook becomes a type of journal, recording the progress in their studies. It is fun for students to be able to look back over the course of a year or more and see how far their skills have improved. Often we do not realize how far we have come until we see where we have been.

Now we have come to my favorite element of Latin, both as a teacher and a student; now we read Latin – aloud. After completing the written assignment arrange students in a comfortable group setting (I like having them in a circle) with their Latin text and unfamiliar vocabulary list, do not allow them access to their written translation. The purpose of this exercise is to train the students to read Latin; we already know they can read English. Before you begin, give everyone, including yourself, permission to make

mistakes. No one is fluent in Latin yet; we are all learning. Call upon individuals to read the passage aloud in Latin first, then English. Guide students having trouble through the sentence by asking questions. A question and answer flow is provided inside the front of the history readers. Avoid giving the answers if possible. Again, our goal is to train them how to think, how to consider the language before them, not merely to get the right answer. After you have guided a student through a sentence, ask him to re-translate that same sentence smoothly. Occasionally ask another student to again translate that same sentence, but in a slightly different way. By doing this, you can illustrate how the role of the translator is truly the role of an interpreter. Students begin to see how different points of view can interpret the same sentence in a slightly different manner. Now they have begun construing.

Teaching students how to read for comprehension and specific information is an important goal at the grammar stage. It need not be limited to English grammar classes. Comprehension questions follow each story in the history reader. This is another feature unique to this particular reader series. Not all readers include comprehension questions, but they are a great asset. Students may use them as a written exercise. However, I recommend asking them orally following the time of oral translation. It gives students a thrill to know they are having a Latin conversation, while at the same time exercising both their oral and reading comprehension skills. A little Latin dialogue can be a great way to conclude a particularly constructive class.

Afterwards, allow the students time to return to their written translations. Now they have the opportunity to apply what the class has discussed, what they have learned, in order to improve upon what they had initially written. Then, they may submit their final translation to the teacher. Some complain that it is impossible for them to remember all that the translation meant. However, the purpose of this exercise is not to teach the students dictation, but how to construe language. The goal is not to earn an ‘A’ on every assignment, but to improve an understanding of how language works.

This assignment is extremely rewarding, but can also be time consuming particularly for grammar students. I would not advise that the fourth and fifth graders using primers B and C tackle a passage with each new chapter. However, I do think it important that they begin building their reading skills by translating appropriate passages when possible. Teachers should consider the stories in the readers they choose carefully and plan ahead. Choose stories that will emphasize a particular element of grammar that you feel needs extra attention. I particularly like using translation assignments with the review chapters. What better way to review the grammar learned over the past several chapters, than to apply it to a good story?

### **ASSESSMENTS: What are you evaluating?**

It is important every so often to assess how much each individual student truly knows on their own. This is very important, as Latin is a cumulative subject. Every sequential lesson depends on the previous lessons. Each year builds on the one before. Proficiency can often be hard to detect with daily assignments, as students have the use of their texts, teacher, classmates, and sometimes their parents. The primer series does provide a quiz at the end of each chapter. I myself prefer to use this as a type of pre-quiz. It reminds the students very clearly of what they must know in order to continue successfully. I ask students to consider this a “pretend quiz” that they should try to complete on their own without using their book for help. Once finished, they are allowed to go back and correct their errors. They are then to use this as a study guide for the quiz to come the following day. I intentionally keep the quizzes I assign similar,

virtually identical, to those found in the book. These are grammar stage students, and the *modus operandi* is repetition. Presenting them with “surprises” will not always give an accurate picture of knowledge. It can instead unnerve young students and damage the confidence you are trying to build. I deviate from the LFC quiz in that I only provide the first grammar form for the vocabulary section. I ask that students, even third graders, recall all remaining grammatical information along with the meaning of their vocabulary words. This is because I feel it very important to evaluate how thoroughly the students are learning their whole vocabulary. These are the building blocks from which everything else is constructed. If they have them imbedded properly now, they will own them forever. If their understanding seems shaky, they may struggle in lessons to come.

Classroom assessments are important, but extra-curricular assessments can be just as telling and a lot more entertaining. The diligent student will work hard toward the prize of the coveted ‘A.’ However, providing a new goal for students, apart from grades, can be an incredible motivator. The National Latin Exam and the Exploratory Latin Exam can be such motivators, particularly for competitive students. These exams are available each year from an association of classicists committed to promoting the study of Latin amongst students across our nation. The Exploratory Latin Exam is tailor made for students in grades three through six. The National Latin Exam is generally thought to be for older students. However, students nearing the end of Primer B should be able to successfully complete the intro exam, and students of Primer C may be ready for the Latin I exam. All exams must take place during a designated time in the Spring. Afterwards, students’ scores are ranked and awards are mailed according to achievement level. For those of you who choose to home school your children, the NLE is able to provide for you as well. Interested teachers should visit the NLE website at <http://www.nle.org> for details.

Another great motivator is the National Junior Classical League. This is a phenomenal organization, sponsored by the American Classical League. The NJCL has more than 5,000 members across the United States. Membership is open to students in grades six through twelve. Students must join a local chapter of the NJCL in order to obtain membership and participation in events. Creating such a chapter is extremely easy to accomplish. Members are eligible to participate in the area, state, and national Latin conventions. At each convention students are able to compete in a wide variety of events including academic testing, oratory, creative arts, and even the olympika. These conventions have been the source of great excitement and anticipation each year our Latin Club has participated. For more information regarding the NJCL and how to learn about state and area chapters visit <http://www.njcl.org>.

### **ROMAN CULTURE: Bringing language to life.**

It is impossible to study a language effectively without taking the time to learn something about the culture and livelihood of those who spoke it. The Romans were a fascinating people. The years of the Republic reveal a people that are hard working and cunning, a people with a strong sense of honor and piety. The years of the Empire reveal the great heights they are able to reach in engineering, art, literature, and of course their military might. No other nation in history has been able to achieve the, “grandeur that was Greece and the glory that was Rome.” (Poe, “To Helen”) Of course, they were also a people that became utterly corrupt – a prime example of the depravity of man.

While the focus of Latin class should most certainly remain on the language itself, teachers should take time every now and then to set the context for the language by teaching students something of the people who spoke it. I plan a cultural project once toward the end of each quarter, and sometimes a mini

lesson following the end of a chapter or unit. Each year we study the Julian Calendar, the names of the months, the numbering of the days. Students are then asked to construct their own calendar, according to the Roman system. We use these daily in class. Students are amazed to find how similar the Julian Calendar is to the Gregorian version we use today. In fact, the difference is only a fraction of time. The study of Roman art is always popular. Most craft stores carry the products necessary for creating mosaics and frescoes. We host an annual *Romana Epula* (Roman Banquet). Prior to the banquet, we hold lessons in Roman dress, food, and table manners. Students sign up to bring their favorite Roman dish – no American items allowed! In all the years I’ve hosted these, I have yet to see anyone sign up for the honey-roasted dormice. Not long ago we learned about the various types of gladiators, their training, and fighting styles. We then held a carefully choreographed gladiatorial exhibition for the whole school, complete with sports announcer.

Many area universities, libraries, and museums are only too glad to help young classicists explore the ancient world and the language that defines it. If you have a college or university in the area, I would exhort you to contact its classics department. Often the faculty can direct you to upcoming lectures, events, or exhibits on campus and in the area. You would be pleasantly surprised at the professors who are happy to serve as guest lecturers for your classes. The professors at the University of Texas have spoken to our students on Roman law and music. One of their Egyptologists became a fast favorite with our second grade class and has returned multiple times.

Contact area museums to find out when they will host exhibits featuring antiquity. Children are visually inspired. Take them on a field trip to see replicas of ancient statuary, frescoes, or mosaics when they are available. Let them feast their eyes on paintings inspired by mythology. Let them guess who the characters are, citing the clues that reveal their persona. The museums are generally able to provide a docent to guide your class. If a suitable docent is unavailable, local universities often are happy to provide a graduate student to provide such tours.

Do not forget your local library. Call ahead and ask the children’s librarian to schedule a Roman day for you. Librarians are often eager to encourage children in their love for books. Use this field trip to begin a book report assignment for young students. For older students let this be a research project in preparation for an oral report on some aspect of Roman culture. The local library is another place where you can often find information on area events that may be of interest. Contact these places not only before the school year begins, but occasionally throughout the year. Finding ways to weave such explorations into your lesson plan will greatly add to the effectiveness of your classroom by capturing the students’ interest and their imagination.

Students perceive these projects and field trips as a “fun” deviation from the rigors of study, a reward for their hard work. I view this as another means to prepare them to read and construe the great literature of antiquity. Students cannot truly appreciate reading Cicero’s orations on the Catilinarian conspiracy until they understand the manner in which the court system worked, or the volatile time period in which Cicero and Catiline lived. They can appreciate Caesar’s Gallic Wars and the battle scenes of the Aeneid much better once they understand the military tactics and fighting styles the Romans used so effectively. Many have misunderstood the meaning of Horace’s exhortation, “*carpe diem*,” for they do not understand the Roman code of honor. Language is most meaningful when placed in the appropriate context.

## INTEGRATION: Making Latin relevant.

Most young children are still quite egocentric. Their number one question, “but what does this have to do with me?” The best way that I have found to win the students’ interest and gain their attention is to make Latin relevant to their modern lives. Fortunately, Latin has provided such a broad foundation for civilization as we know it today that this is really not hard to accomplish. It does require a little outside preparation and some creative thinking. To accomplish this I begin each class with a warm-up called *Latina Dicta* (Latin sayings). The purpose accomplished here is three fold. First, this exercise will “warm-up” their Latin minds. It engages the class immediately on a Latin lesson, causing them to begin recalling the skills they have acquired. Second, it gives me time as a teacher to set out whatever materials I need and prepare to begin the day’s lesson. This is invaluable time for those of us who must travel from one classroom to the next, often with only a few minutes between classes. Lastly, this exercise will demonstrate how “Latin is relevant to me.”

At the beginning of the week, I pass out a worksheet with a large horizontal box for each class day of the week. In modern times schools vary widely in the number of days that classes meet, so construct yours appropriately. Each morning I write the date on the board according to the Roman Calendar using Roman numerals. You can purchase Roman Calendar from various classical websites, or you can have students create their own following a culture lesson on the Calendar of Julius Caesar. This daily exercise will keep the numerals they learn in Primer B fresh and incorporate math as you add and subtract days. I often begin class by asking the questions, “*Quid est hodiē? Quid erat herī? Quid erit cras?*” Students must respond in a complete sentence, “*Hodiē est . . .*”

After the date I write some example of a modern use of Latin that students must identify and/or translate. There is a great wealth of these depending upon the subject that your class is interested in.

**Anatomy:** The nomenclature of bones are either Latin or Greek, and always in the nominative case. Students can look up the name of the bone using a Latin dictionary and then guess which bone in the skeletal system it refers to. You can hang a large picture of a skeleton on the wall to give students a picture of where that bone is, then have them find it on themselves. You can also use the muscular system.

**Solar System:** Each of the planets in our solar system, with the exception of Earth, bears the name of a Roman god. Have students look these names up in their dictionary to find out about the god and guess why the name might be appropriate for that planet.

**Astronomy:** The names of the constellations are Latin and often are associated with a Greco-Roman myth. Star charts and inflatable star globes are easy to find. Have students look up the name of the constellation using their dictionaries. Most dictionaries will give a brief definition for important heroes and deities.

**Medicine:** Medical terminology is often crystallized in Latin. Write phrases such as *post mortem* on the board for students to translate. After they have learned a few, challenge them to use them when talking to their doctor (they love this!).

**Law:** Most legal terminology stems from the Roman court system. List terms still used today by lawyers and ask students to translate them. Then, discuss what the phrase means and how a lawyer would use it. These are usually 2-3 word phrases. Many contain the demonstrative pronouns taught in Primer B.

**Literary abbreviations:** Abbreviations such as *i.e. (id est)* and *etc. (et cetera)* are used widely today. Many who use them have no idea that they are speaking Latin!

**Geography:** Many of the cities and states in our country as well as nations around the world have

Latin mottoes. Ask students to translate them and discuss why that motto is appropriate for that region. A *caveat*, some of these mottoes can be quite challenging and are best saved for upper level students.

As you might imagine the list could go on *ad infinitum*, and include numerous branches of science, government, art & architecture, and much more. Find out what other teachers in your school or co-op may be covering in their classes during the term. Those who are teaching their children Latin at home should take into consideration the other subjects they have chosen to study at that time. Above all, consider what topics your students are interested in. While you demonstrate how relevant Latin is to them, you will captivate their interest.

## MAINTAINING THE VISION

I purposed in this article to share some of the strategies I employ in teaching Latin to grammar students. I have not ventured into the lesson plans I use for the upper level students, although some of what appears here is certainly applicable. We must however consider them as we continue to perfect our lesson plans and daily routines for the grammar students; for it is they who will soon fill the seats in the schools of Logic and Rhetoric. We must always keep before us the vision that we wish to accomplish. Is our goal to produce students filled with a wealth of words and paradigms? Do we wish them to hold a colloquial conversation, or read through a story?

Our goal is to begin training students in such a way that they will be able to construe the original texts that make up the Great Books of antiquity. Our vision is to train students in the structure of language that they may apply that knowledge as they use it in the days to come. Above my desk I have framed a quotation from Plutarch that states, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” My desire is to kindle a love and appreciation for the art of language through Latin.



## APPENDIX: Supplemental materials for Latin for Children

The DVD and CD, sold together as a set, are ideal for those teachers new to Latin. The DVD features author, Chris Perrin, as he instructs his own daughters at home using the Latin Primers. The CD rehearses all the grammar chants contained in its companion primer. This is a great resource for those who feel less than confident with their Latin pronunciation. This tool will keep students chanting their grammar paradigms long after the teacher’s voice has succumbed. Even if you are a seasoned Latin teacher, this dynamic duo can come to the rescue of your substitute teachers. Often times Latin subs are noble volunteers who know little about the subject they are to take on for the day. They will be happy (or relieved) to have these tools ready at hand. The students will enjoy a fun deviation from the normal routine, and regular Latin teachers have less work to prepare for their absence.

The **activity book** provides a diverting way to review the vocabulary and grammar paradigms featured in each chapter of the Primer. This book, a fast favorite in the curriculum for many students,

features approximately three different puzzles or games per primer chapter. These range from the traditional crossword and word search to “Latin on the High Seas!”™

The multitude of **online worksheets** provide exercises to help students fine tune their grammar skills. Latin teachers using Latin for Children in their classrooms have donated many of these worksheets. Here you will find worksheets that offer practice in declining nouns, conjugating and parsing verbs, modifying nouns with adjectives, and applying all of the above to simple sentence translation. Each one is clearly designated to accompany a particular chapter of Latin for Children, and reviews the vocabulary taught in that chapter.

For those students who are ready to begin reading Latin, the **history reader series**, “*Libellus de Historia*,” provides a unique opportunity to apply the grammar tools they have acquired to translation. “*Libellus de Historia, pars A*” introduces students to passage translation by presenting them with short individual sentences that add up to create a complete story. The following books, which correlate with primers B and C, both use a more traditional paragraph format, gradually increasing in length and complexity from five sentences at the beginning of B to fifteen sentences at the conclusion of C. The format of this reader series was inspired by the graded readers traditionally used for many decades. Each book features a table of contents listing the grammar assumed and a comprehensive glossary defining every word used throughout the reader. The grammar advances at the very same pace as the primer series. Thus, when Latin for Children introduces demonstrative pronouns in chapter 22 of Primer B, “*Libellus de Historia*” begins using the same pronouns in chapter 22 of reader B. In addition, each story has its own glossary not only detailing the appropriate definitions for new words, but also providing insightful information regarding grammatical constructions, etymology, or the people and places written about. As an added bonus this little book about history uses the content of the popular Veritas Press History Card Series to guide the subject matter of each story. Thus, when students are reading about the Battle of Bunker Hill on card twenty of the Explorers to 1815 History Card Series, they will read a story about this important event in chapter twenty of “*Libellus de Historia, pars C*.” These readers provide a wonderful means to laterally integrate Latin and history courses, greatly enriching the study of both.

