
It is the philosophy of Monument Academy that all students benefit from a challenging, content-rich, educational program that builds academic potential and personal character. The school provides an environment that fosters academic excellence through the habits of thoroughness, the willingness to work, and the perseverance to complete difficult tasks. Through a defined traditional, culturally-literate and classically based curriculum students are prepared to become active, responsible citizens.

What Kind of School is Monument Academy?

Monument Academy is a back-to-basics school. Students learn to read, to write, to do arithmetic. They memorize poems and multiplication tables and elements on the periodic chart. The students have homework: every student, every day. The backpacks are not just for show. The students learn to diagram sentences. They punctuate. Spelling counts. "A" is for mastery, not for effort. The student soon learns there is no mastery without effort and no genuine effort without real reward.

Monument Academy is a culturally literate school. We teach cultural literacy. There are many, many things anyone living in this country and in the larger world needs to know. Absent this knowledge, the individual is culturally illiterate and intellectually deprived. Armed with this knowledge, the young man or woman easily enters into worlds of meaning lost on the uninformed spectator possessed of the bare skill. At MA, skills act as the servants; content is king.

MA is a character-building school. We hold to the self-evident truth known to the ancients and to the Founding Fathers that virtue is the well-charted but too-little-travelled road to true happiness. And we do mean *virtue*, not post-modern "values," a term that implies "whatever I do, whatever my unruly passions and appetites urge on me, is okay; so don't judge me!" There are right and wrong answers in human living no less clear than the simplest addition problem. We abandon or try to cheat these moral answers at our own peril and to the despair of those around us, especially those we care about. The right answers in every human life are to be attained through the practice of the virtues. Those virtues, sources of our moral excellence, consist in the bold ancient virtues—temperance, courage, justice, prudence—as well as the softer virtues, both ancient and modern—honesty, politeness, gratitude—that weave the noble tapestry of the "unbought grace of life."

Students at MA acquire the virtues through the Character First Program. They further study the virtues in the great stories, real and imaginary, that comprise the human pageant. In time, they read the philosophic truth of Socrates:

"For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul, as I say to you: "Wealth does not bring about virtue, but virtue makes wealth and everything else good for men . . ."

Character pervades the curriculum. Character—not magic—is the source of Cinderella's reward. Character—in the form of industry—leads Franklin to discover and to invent. Character—as we are told through the story of the Ring of Gyges—points to "the actions of a man if he knew he would never be found out" (Macaulay). Character is the hard currency—as Washington showed—with which heroism (or simply goodness) is gained and nations are made.

At MA it is not our design to make students behave grudgingly and only when a teacher is in the room. Our sole concern is not just to keep them from cheating on tests. True, we insist upon *discussion in the classroom, decorum in the halls*. Yet our greater hope is that young people will do the good for the best reason of all: because they love it. MA is a classical school. The ancients created a blueprint of a political, cultural, and moral order—aiming at justice—from which Western civilization has been built. In their own education the Founding Fathers of this nation mastered that classical blueprint and from it, with important additions of their own, built the American nation. We shall never truly understand the monument unless we examine the blueprint and the subsequent building of the structure. To understand the West and America, we, too, must go back to the sources. *Ad fontes!* as the men of the Renaissance said. *Back to the sources of the good, and the beautiful, and the true.*

Accordingly, students at MA spend a lot of time with the past, particularly the classical past, the histories and literature of Greece and Rome, in order better to know our own heritage, in order to know not only what "mistakes to avoid" but what excellences to pursue, cherish, and reward.

MA is a school in English and in other languages. Classical education demands the critical study of language: one's own and others. Aristotle said that man is the being that possesses the power of language. Human beings come together in society in order to share their thoughts, through language, on the just and the unjust. The eighth-grade girl who expresses pleasure or displeasure at another girl's dress and make-up, the teenage boy who argues with other boys about who was the greatest quarterback or rock-guitarist of all time: both of these young people are doing what their nature impels them to do. However immaturely or un-philosophically, they are appealing to a standard of the good or the beautiful and trying, in accordance with that standard, to give each person his or her due. They are natural *orderers* of the world around them. In order to

make proper and just determinations and allocations of the standards of the good and the beautiful, we must thoroughly know language through which such decisions are made. Human beings think and act and love and judge and hope and plan through language. They must be very wise, accurate, and just, therefore, in the way they use their language.

We get to know a person better by meeting his parents and his siblings. It is simply uncanny how children resemble their parents and how different children in a family may “take after” one parent more than another, in looks and in behavior, yet all have common qualities. Just so, we come to know our native English better by introducing ourselves to the family of European languages. The words we use in our everyday speech have long histories, and knowing those histories, often involving multiple languages, equips us with a greater command over those words. Intensive study of the grammar of our languages instructs us in how to order those words into clear sentences, the basic units of thought. The more complex the sentence we learn to handle, the more complex the thought we can express. For no small reason did the Greek word *logos* (as in logic, dialogue) mean both speech and reason. The one is useless without the other.

The *patriarch* (from the Latin *pater* for father and the Greek *arkhos* for ruler) of the European languages is Latin, the *matriarch* Greek. The child of his classical parents, English has many *brothers* and *sisters* (resembling the German *Brüder* and *Schwester*), not to mention *cousins* (from the French *cousin*) and other relations. Accordingly, we have students study Latin intensively, many Greek roots, and encourage them in modern languages. From kindergarten through eighth grade MA teaches the English language intensively, analytically, daily. We agree with Churchill in that, “the essential structure of the ordinary [English] sentence . . . is a noble thing.” We view with distress that many children and adults these days, in their halting literacy, seem strangers, indeed orphans, in their own native tongue. MA students are taught to be caretakers of the English language, and therefore of reason, by deploying it with greater precision and wisdom, with greater clarity and depth.

MA is a great books school! Using the power of language, the best thinkers and writers of the Western tradition have unveiled their visions of the world and of man by rendering them into this curious invention called a book. A first glance at a book on the shelf or a coffee table would have us consider it a small, harmless, or unimportant thing. And yet behind the great revolutions, the great reforms, the great beliefs and wars and aspirations of our civilization there is almost always a book, goading men and women on to be the best (and sometimes the worst) that they can be, or sometimes

just to understand themselves. Because human beings think, because they think through language, because great thinkers have permanent lessons to teach humanity, because humanity—even in its darkest moments—wants *to know*, books have become the common reservoir for saving, passing on, and replenishing our collective wisdom about the human condition. Young people, despite whatever popular culture tells us about the state of their souls, ardently want to know who they are and what their purposes are in life. Their souls are ripe for the reading of books.

The books MA teaches in its classes might be called “the great books” of the Western tradition, or as Matthew Arnold put it, “the best that has been thought and said.” These are the books that have been etched into the permanent memory of man. Even in a “post-literate age,” as some people are branding the present, we retain a faint glimmer in our minds of a man named Crusoe who spent years alone on an island; of a couple called Adam and Eve who fell from grace in a Garden; of a hero with the strange name Achilles whose presence or absence in battle determined the fates of armies and peoples; of a boy known as “Huck” who floated down the Mississippi and in so doing found his own, and another’s, humanity.

At Monument we do not read these books in a rush or in snippets, as some schools do: in one week *The Iliad*, the next week *The Odyssey*, then on to *The Canterbury Tales*. In our way of thinking, such a superficial “covering” of the material does no justice to the books, to the characters and themes within the books, to the human condition those books attempt to illuminate, and consequently to the students’ own capacity for thought. Of course, there is never enough time to read and discuss thoroughly everything we want to; some compromises must occasionally be made; but on the whole our approach in reading the great books is to immerse ourselves fully in the lives of the characters as though they were living beings, *as though we were living with them and having to make their choices and take their stands*. To this end, the typical means of reading books employed in most schools, whether plot summaries (rising action, climax, falling action) or historicized and biographical reductionism (Poe was a drunk; no wonder his writing was so weird) are not the means we employ. Our overarching question is, “What does it mean to be human?”

MA is a school of civilization. The great books of the Western canon are not the only books, or only kind of material, we read. Not everything human beings have done noteworthy and good has made it into a book, at least not one having the literary merit of a *Paradise Lost* or a *Henry V*. To support, defend, and make possible the great ideas of the Western experience, men and women—a few extraordinary, others quite ordinary— have had to sweat, fight, invent, and struggle. They have had to learn to live

together in a way worthy of human beings: human beings who we are told in the Bible are made "in the image of God," and who, according to Aristotle, are born to live in a political order. They—we—have had to create law (or discover it) and to defend that law against threats of hostile invasion and internal chaos. They—we—have not always prevailed, over our external threats or the enemy within. But we can never do so unless we try.

The great task of challenge of living in a way worthy of human beings, of pursuing not just mere life, but the good life, we call *civilization*. The study of civilization is arguably the most important young people can embark upon. It is so because each new generation inherits the patrimony of their parents and grandparents: their own personal legacy, such as it may be, but in a larger sense the ideas, manners, laws, arts, institutions, habits, aims and aspirations, and basic common sense or prudence that make life good. As with any inheritance, the inheritors can substantially increase it, just save it, or squander it entirely. Their shepherding of the patrimony depends upon their knowledge and their virtues.

MA instructs students in the knowledge needed to preserve human civilization and to make it flourish. To the extent it can, the school also trains students in the virtues, as we have said. The arts of civilization are at once high and complex arts, and yet at the same time often simple, common-sense observances such as living by the Golden Rule or gentlemen opening doors for ladies. MA teaches these arts of civilization through classes in economics, moral philosophy, and, above all, Western Civilization. MA eschews the tepid term *social studies* as being non-committal, directionless, and lacking in all spirit and life. Students come to understand and grapple with their own inheritance by carefully reading and vigorously discussing the words and deeds of men and women in the past. Original sources are almost always preferred to secondary textbooks. Our emphasis on civilization causes us to expand Arnold's maxim to read, "the best that has been thought and said and done and discovered."

MA is a school for the sciences. Our students spend a lot of time reading one tremendously great and beautiful and mysterious book that does not fit neatly between two cardboard covers. We mean the "book of nature." The purpose of education is for human beings to discover and understand the world. That means the human world and also the physical world around them. Indeed, MA's pursuit of knowledge requires serious attention to be given to the sciences and to math. The first and perhaps most obvious is that the traditions of both the ancients and the Founding Fathers held that human reason compels thinking people to explore and to explain the order of the universe. Aristotle was a scientist as much as an ethicist or political philosopher. Greek

civilization gave us Euclid as well as Euripides. The awe-inspiring art of Michelangelo drew upon a re-discovery of Galen and of the human form and coincided with the birth of modern medical faculties. A compelling case could be made that the greatest American achievement—our Constitution—would not have been written had the eighteenth century not been immersed in the physics and astronomy of Newton. A more-than-historical and more-than-pedagogical reason, though, impels us to teach our students the sciences and mathematics with energy and rigor. Even as we Americans live in a great age of science and discovery, our people become increasingly scientifically and mathematically illiterate, the number of native-born citizens doing graduate work in the sciences continues to diminish, and the complex moral problems arising from novel technologies (such as cloning) challenge us to think about the very nature of the human being even as we strive to make man's physical existence healthier and more pleasant.

MA eschews the common textbook, recipe-following method of teaching math and science found in most public schools today. Instead, we teach the real "math" behind the mathematics and the real "science" behind physics, biology, and chemistry. In other words, our students—who must absolutely master their math and science *facts*—cultivate mathematical and scientific minds by learning the *why* behind the what. Newton's and Boyle's laws did not drop from the heavens, nor did Pythagoras's theorem pop out of a textbook. Rather, the means of understanding an ordered universe resulted from these thinkers' painstaking observation and reasoning about the world before their very eyes. Science is not a thing that sits lifeless in a bulky textbook but a habit of mind often called the "scientific method." This method of reasoning, not individual bits of technology themselves, has ushered in over the last four centuries what we generally call "progress." If the habit of mind is lost, so will be progress. The intense interest our students cultivate in the human condition through the study of history, literature, and allied subjects, then, is no less manifest in our inquiry into the beauties of nature and of numerical relations.

MA is a school for the arts. Students at MA pursue not only the good and the true. They strive for the beautiful. Every human being is endowed with an aesthetic sense no less than a moral one. This sense intuitively understands order, harmony, and proportion. The most tone-deaf person will wince at a sour note. The least imaginative and artistic will be struck by a beautiful sunset over a rolling landscape or a wide ocean. Like the moral sense, the sense of beauty must be trained to act in its fullest capacity. If it is not trained, it remains mere untutored potential, longing for something good but little able to love or effect it.

The primary means by which human beings cultivate the beautiful is through the arts. At MA, the arts are taught through music and "art": painting and drawing, but also the appreciation of sculpture and, to a lesser extent, architecture. In keeping with the way of liberal education, the school teaches music and art largely through the works of the best masters: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Raphael, Michelangelo, Monet. At the same time, the arts require an intensive study of technique, both to appreciate the great works and to try to make or perform art on one's own.

The great advantage the arts have over other disciplines is their exacting demands of *performance*, indeed public performance. It is not true that other disciplines do not have their performances: the student of rhetoric must speak, science students must experiment, everyone in math class must "do math." Indeed, the whole purpose of classical education is to produce *actors*, as both men and citizens. Yet such "performances" are few, private, or remote from our present tasks. The singer, player, or painter performs chiefly for the discriminating view of others. He or she must get it right: every note, every pitch, every brushstroke. No one says of a concert as he would of a written test: that's great job, they got every note but one! Public performance demands perfection. Practice, rehearsal, the difficult measure gone over again and again until it is right is the necessary effort to attain that perfection. Thus the arts—in striving for the beautiful—employ the trained senses, the power of habit, and the best use of human pride to overcome one of the worst barriers to human excellence: complacency, the handmaiden of sloth.

It is no accident that Plato required his young guardian to study music as well as math. A rigorous training in the beautiful is, or should be, a refinement of taste and an opening of the heart to the wonders of a more-than-material world.

MA is a Socratic school. The public-school establishment has for more than half a century abandoned what it refers to offhand as "content," that is, the very marrow and life of what the schools used to impart to young people, in pursuit of their chimera of *method*. The mythology of the educrats holds that the naturally creative, abundantly fecund, and unfailingly thought-seeking minds of children were stifled under the regimented regime of the cudgel-wielding, order-obsessed, drill-or-die grammar Gestapo. Their little minds had to be freed from the chains of memorization, right and wrong answers, knowing basic facts, the mastery of certain events, concepts, and books, all of which was dismissed with great contempt as "mere rote learning." Leaving the Inferno of desks fixed in rows faced towards chalkboard, map, and a teacher who insisted on correct spelling, pronunciation, and enunciation, the children ascended into the Paradiso of the open classroom in which children flitted about from station to

station, rapturously taking to whatever *project* their untrammelled minds felt like embarking on that day, whether writing their own poetry or adopting their own Constitution or building their own Eiffel Tower. There was only one problem with the great and ingenious scheme of the "Progressive" educators. A couple of decades after its full adoption the students were virtually illiterate.

Nonetheless, in the upside-down world of public education, the authors of children's illiteracy claim that they do in fact have content but charge that the rote memorizers have no method, at least not one that keeps from destroying the child's fragile psyche and will to interact with the all-important society of peers. All this, of course, is claptrap. Classical education, liberal education, has a method of teaching developed and honed for over two thousand years in the West. In the first instance it holds that before a person can think, he must have something to think about. That something is a fact: Adam named the animals first, not thought "critically" about them. Without knowing the things around us, the things that brought us here, the words and structure of language through which we express these things—animals, plants, elements, rivers, cities, Presidents, poems, nouns, verbs, adjectives—we cannot *think* at all. The greatest genius of the age, in learning a foreign tongue, would still have to begin with the rudiments of the language. For a young mind to become ready for thought it must pursue a massive importation and organization of basic facts: the bricks for building the edifice. To this end, learning in the early grades, what some call the "grammar stage," consists largely in mastering facts and strengthening the power of the mighty memory to recall these facts on demand.

There is a second truth about the human mind that traditional teachers bring to bear on the subjects at hand. This truth is that the mind is inquisitive. Human beings are the only creatures that want to know things. The so-called progressives took this feature of man to mean that teachers were hardly necessary, that children would drift into learning without much effort on anyone's part. They did not understand the other limitations of our nature: sloth, complacency, anarchy of appetite and passion. Our inquisitiveness means that our reasoning faculties can be led (when first prepared with the rudiments) by the appropriate questions well-stated. While the rudimentary bricks build up the structure, the questions of how, when, and why usher us into the cathedral of understanding. Liberal education is thus both fact-based and question-based. These two are not antithetical but inseparable.

We call this method of questioning *Socratic* after the founder of Western philosophy. He was by no means the only important teacher in our history to use questions to pursue a truth or bring home a point. ("What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and

lose his own soul?" "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans do the same?") The Socratic method should not be thought of as a random, rambling chatter between teacher and kids without direction or insight, nor as a means of taking responsibility from teachers for teaching, nor yet as a fumbling way to get students to participate in class. Rather it is a carefully constructed pattern of questions developed by a knowledgeable and hard-working teacher to bring students' reason to the very heart of the matter. To the uninstructed or uninitiated observer, a Socratic discussion appears easy or looks as though the teacher is not doing much of the work. To the better versed in the ways of learning it appears as true dialogue, in the highest sense of that term.

Now insofar as every discipline is both fact-based and question-based, insofar as each discipline may require more or less of one or the other, in keeping with the idea that the individual styles and personalities of teachers must play into the mix, and because there are different grade levels and degrees of understanding even from class to class, there is no exact recipe for how much time should be spent in going over facts and how much in teachers asking questions and students giving answers (or vice versa).

Nonetheless, the class should almost always have a clear question on the table, so to speak. The young mind without an important question before it soon becomes a wandering or a sleepy or a *bored* mind. And these are not the kinds of minds we want at MA.

The young mind well trained in the Socratic Method applied to the best that has been thought and said and done and discovered becomes a formidable inquirer into the world, both physical and human. The comment we have heard again and again from parents of students of every age is that their family conversations have improved, that their children have amazed them on trips to museums and historical sites that they find their kids even over the summer always *reading*. This phenomenon is more than the claptrap about *life-long learning* we hear from the educrats. The human mind rigorously trained in the arts and sciences that demands to be engaged with the world is a force to be admired. When combined with a steady character, it is a force for good.

MA is an American school. The Founding Fathers of this nation held that schools should prepare young people for civic life and their civic responsibilities. Likewise, the ancients designed education for participation in the civic life of the polis or the republic. Indeed, the word republic itself comes from two Latin words, *res publica*, meaning "the public thing." When at the close of the Constitutional Convention Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government the men now known as the Framers had given the country, he famously replied, "A republic, if you can keep it." The Founding Fathers knew that a

republican frame of government requires an informed citizenry educated in the public things. To this end, public schools used to teach "civics," a series of courses throughout the primary and secondary grades whose purpose was to teach young people the history and theory of their constitutional order, an achievement that, however much influenced by ancient experience and thought, was unique at the time of the Founding and remains a model of self-government today.

We regret two related trends in modern education: the shocking ignorance among our young people today regarding the American tradition of self-government on the one hand and the hostility towards civics education as being somehow a form of "indoctrination" reminiscent of Nazism and thereby undermining a greater world harmony on the other. The two trends have to be related because only someone wholly ignorant of the sacrifices made by the men who stormed the beaches at Normandy, who raised the flag at Iwo Jima, who later formed and executed the Marshall Plan, and who for almost half a century, in a war that was not entirely 'cold,' checked the oppressive grip of communist totalitarianism, could say something so utterly foolish as that a proper American civics education is either fascistic or narrowly Anglo-centric. MA unapologetically embraces a thorough immersion in American government, history, literature, and arts, as well as the related discipline of economics, which vindicates the Founding Fathers' understanding of human nature, of civil society, and of the capacity of the individual following his own conscience under the rule of law. So important is the civic-minded mission of MA that another way of thinking about our enterprise is as "an education worthy of the Founding Fathers," both the education they had in their youth and the education they recommended for "generations yet unborn." In other words, we are in the business of keeping our Republic, not forgetting it or bashing it. Such is the proper and necessary role of public education in a nation with a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Such a purpose does not deny the integrity and importance of other nations. As stated succinctly by E. D. Hirsch, an educational pioneer who describes himself as a man of the "Old Left": "We don't live in France or China. It is a duty of American schools to educate competent *American* citizens." Nor does it claim that this nation has always done right in every moment of its history. Rather, any true study of civics begins with the clear aims of the American regime, stated time and again by the Founders, but most memorably as,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are

instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,— That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

The Founding Fathers created a clear standard by which the “American experiment” is to be judged. When Americans have lived up to this high aim, they have flourished. When they have departed from it, they have done so to their own detriment. Through the clear lens of the Declaration we both study American history and learn to govern ourselves.

MA is a school that works. By adhering to the foregoing aims of education, often in the face of virulent and public criticism, MA has flourished since its inception and has each year built upon its strong tradition of sound learning. There are many ways of proving the school’s success. The most common way, the only one the broader public has much interest or ability in undertaking, is by looking at our test scores. Yet the public may not realize that MA is a school that emphatically *does not teach to the test.*

We should remember that standardized testing is only one, and not the most important, measure of the school’s flourishing. The place to come to grips with MA’s unique aims and methods is in the classroom. Far from having something to hide, we open our doors and our classrooms to prospective students, their parents, reporters, and any school that might find profit from observing our education. What these observers say is usually a good indication of what we labor to achieve: “the kids are so well-behaved,” “the kids know so much,” “the teacher really knew his stuff,” “how do you find teachers like that?” and, our favorite, “this is the kind of education I wish *I* would have had in school.”

Real learning takes place in the Monument Academy classrooms because the entire school is built on the principle that education is simply the basic interaction among teacher, text, and student. To this end, the school adheres to Churchill’s basic tenet. When visiting the White House during the war and asked what sort of Scotch he would like, the witty Prime Minister of Britain replied, “I shall be satisfied with the very best.” Thus is MA satisfied: by having the very best teachers, the very best books, and the very best efforts of its students. In no other way can it be satisfied.

MA is a traditional education for modern times. What Monument Academy does is counter-intuitive. Rooting ourselves firmly in the learning of the past we prepare ourselves for the future. In a world that constantly chatters about the speed of information, we slow down to read long books carefully, to open our minds to stories

that take a good while to tell, to labor over problems that a modern calculator could solve in a microsecond, to love things of permanent and transcendent beauty, and, when necessary, to reinvent the wheel. We make no apologies. We are not antiquaries and do not consider ourselves quaint. We are in the business of forming minds, not programming machines. We are committed to strengthening souls, not gaming a system. Join us.

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