

Creating a Classical Home

part of our Parent Education Literature Series



by Susie Theule, Ph.D.

We find delight in the beauty and happiness of children that makes the heart too big for the body. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

One of the benefits of classical education the way SLO Classical Academy does it is that our children are home for part of their schooling. We set up this program very purposefully because we believe in the model for many reasons, one of which is the fact that children can thrive when they have the opportunity to spend time with their parents. As parents, you have the opportunity to bathe them in education whenever they are around. This is not only done through the formal education process you pursue at home, but by making your home one which provides the rich, fertile soil from which your children will grow in knowledge, character and wisdom.

We at the Classical Academy encourage our families to create what we will call a “classical home” in order to provide this type of growing environment. Instead of adding more work to your load, there are some things we can do as classical educators and parents to create an environment in our homes that is naturally conducive to learning and growth. Listed below are several key ideas to get you going...you will likely come up with a few of your own!

~ Turn off the TV and turn on the music! Studies show that the content and amount of television watched actually dulls the mind (not to mention the morals). Turning off the tube creates space for classical activ-

ity — music, art, science, creative play, handiwork. Although enjoyable, these activities also stimulate brain cells and encourage imagination, exploration, and skill development, as well as exercise. And while your children take part in these activities, make sure to expose them to classical music, not just classic rock! Let them hear medieval music, music from the Renaissance, jazz, rock and modern classical pieces. And if you’re one of those endless energy types, throw in a few lessons on the genre of music or composer to which you are listening, or visit the symphony or opera with your kids. You will be surprised that with a bit of consistent exposure, your children will enjoy music you thought they might not.

~ Create an environment that engages the whole development of the child. Education, classical or not, is of limited value when other aspects of children’s development are left unattended. Children not only need to be stimulated intellectually, but emotionally, physically, relationally and spiritually. Make sure to spend time just “being” with your children — playing ball, cook-

ing, going to the beach, snuggling, reading, listening to and talking with them. While not solely “classical” per se, these activities are nonetheless educational and will contribute to the rich soil from which classical education will be nourished.

~ Provide a home with structure and predictability. Make sure your children know what to expect in your home. Children need some consistent structure to function at their highest levels in all areas of life, and this discipline on your part will allow classical education to take place effectively and enjoyably.

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Structure provides that there is ample time to finish school and chores, but also guarantees there will be time to rest, read, play, and be flexible when necessary. It teaches children to focus

when it is time to focus and to eventually organize their own time. It will help our kids feel rested and ready to learn and will teach them respect as you follow through on your plans. You do not need structure all the time, but

enough to provide emotional security for your children and margin to insure you can trash the structure some of the time!

~ Provide visuals. Having visual reminders of classical education around your home is a wonderful way to keep educating “after hours.” Put up maps, artwork, anthills and school projects.

Have classic books (or Mother Goose!) in your kid’s field of vision; place picture books on art, history and science out on the coffee table; utilize the laminated learning-centered placemats during dinner; hang up timelines and adverbs and clocks. These reminders will encourage our children to learn and

will spark their curiosity — a wonderful trait for a classical student!

~ Provide opportunities for character development. Consider opportunities in and out of school for your children to be stimulated not only intellectually, but towards character development as well. Virtue is central to classical education. Music lessons, sports, community service, hobbies and clubs can spark and encourage the development of sportsmanship, perseverance, discipline, commitment, teamwork, charity, leadership, servant-hood and kindness. Find places for your children to learn about and develop good charac-

ter. The opportunities are endless in this rich community, and as your child gets older, he or she can help choose the activities that are most interesting.

~ READ with your kids! We cannot emphasize enough the centrality of reading with your children both in classical education and for the over-

all development of children and family as well. Choose from the many classics and make it a habit to sit down and read out loud to your children. Let them take a break from doing the reading and let them listen and enjoy the stories you have chosen. Follow the reading with a short discussion and perhaps even

an opportunity for them to narrate a portion of what they just heard. We are strong advocates of evening family reading, when the whole family gathers together to hear a great story read out loud. Some do it around a fire, some in a dark room with a flashlight, or out on a blanket at the end of a summer day. Snuggle together and read. It will not only educate your children at many levels, it will grow your relationship with them in wonderful ways.

~ Finally, make sure, as you choose the ways to make your home classical, that you are connecting with your children. Converse with them all day

long — not only about “subjects”, but also about them and you — family life, plans, dreams, ideas, beliefs and hopes. This will help our children learn to think and express themselves, but more importantly, it will help to provide them with the confidence they need to be themselves — classically educated and all — in a world which would like to tell THEM what to be and what to think.

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Susie Theule, - Susie is married and the mother of four young children. She brings years of education and an ongoing, passionate commitment to classical education to her role as founder and Director. She has spent hours researching the classical approach to education and has been actively involved in home schooling her children for several years. Susie holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Rosemead School of Psychology.

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