

Classical Me, Classical Thee

*for
Homeschools!*

SQUANDER NOT
THINE EDUCATION

Rebekah Merkle

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Rebekah Merkle, *Classical Me, Classical Thee ... For Homeschoolers: Squander Not
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*Of course, for Dad:
Some dads buy their kids ponies . . .
You cared more about giving us horsepower.*

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INTRODUCTION

If you have gone so far as to open the cover of this little book, then I think that you and I already have a lot in common.

You're a student being given a classical education.

Yeah—I did that too.

Although I wasn't homeschooled, I went all the way through a classical school, K-12, and I think I have

a pretty fair idea of the kind of life you lead. I bet I know what kind of classes you have to take, what kind of books you have to read, and I bet I know what you think of them.

I might even understand some of your frustrations, your questions, and your boredom, as well as what intrigues you.

I decided to write this book because I have spent my entire life around students in your position. I went through a classical education and walked in your shoes myself; now my own kids are high school students being given a classical education, and they are currently walking in your shoes. I teach classes at a classical high school, so I spend every single day, eyeball to eyeball, with students who are jumping through the same hoops you're having to jump through. I have, in fact, seen the life of the classical student from pretty much every angle.

And let's face it. You're probably not doing the classical thing because *you* picked it.

I don't suppose that sometime in your early youth you sat down and read through a series of books discussing educational styles and decided that classical ed looked like the best option. It's possible that your parents may have done that with you ... but realistically, you're going through this because your parents were sold on the vision of classical education, not because you were.

This whole education thing is not something you chose; it's something that's being done to you. And when you were little, you never questioned it. But now that you're old enough to make a lot of your own choices in other areas (I'm assuming your mother doesn't still pick out your outfit every day), it may have occurred to you to wonder what the point of all this is. If you haven't asked the question out loud, you must have thought about it. Am I right? It probably went something like this:

In the middle of a gripping lesson on the uses of the Latin subjunctive, a voice inside your head says,

“What good is this ever going to do me in life?”

Perhaps you try to shush that voice and concentrate on your lesson – but it won't be shushed. A minute later it asks,

“Why on earth do I have to learn this?”

And if you ever ventured to voice these questions out loud, I'd be willing to bet that whatever answer you heard wasn't terribly compelling. Did someone tell you that Latin will help you with your English vocab and that you will be able to intuit the meanings of unusual words much more easily than other people?



("Yes," you think, "or I could just ask Siri and have a better answer in two seconds.")

Or perhaps they told you that if you go to med school you'll have a breeze of a time learning the names of medical conditions as opposed to all the other the unfortunate souls who never studied Latin?



("But I want to be a pilot," you mutter to yourself, "and chatting casually about the names of bacteria will—let us hope—NEVER be a part of my life.")

Maybe you were told that botanical names will be easier for you to decipher?




(Let's be real—that hardly seems like an alluring enough reason to have to study the subjunctive.)

Or possibly they mentioned that your math scores on standardized tests will be higher?



(And you sat there thinking that you don't even care enough about that statement to even formulate an opinion about it at all. Insert eye roll here.)

Or maybe they scolded you for having a bad attitude.

 *(And maybe you needed that and maybe you didn't.)*

Or were you handed Dorothy Sayers' essay "The Lost Tools of Learning" to read?

Yeah, I'm sorry about that. **I'm assuming that you remain unconvinced, settled in skepticism, and counting the days until you can choose what college you go to, choose what major you want, and choose what classes you sign up for.**

Or maybe you're not that kid.

Maybe you're loyal to this whole project, you enjoy your classes, you like the books, and it really bugs you when your friends or siblings complain. But wouldn't you—even if you don't have a chip on your shoulder and a fuss in your voice—wouldn't you kind of like to hear the answers to those questions, too? Wouldn't it be helpful to know what the rationale is behind teaching you all this material? Wouldn't it be a bit handy to understand some of the behind-the-scenes decision-making which determined that you would learn this stuff? Because in my experience, even the most enthusiastic and on-board students still only have a very hazy notion of what all this is actually about.

Now, I do think there are some extremely compelling answers for this whole thing—I'm just not sure anyone has taken the time to actually spell them out for you.

Everyone's spending so much time giving you a classical education, it's possible that no one has taken the time to stop and tell you why they're doing it.

So here you go—I'm trying to take a shot at that.

Why bother with this? If you don't really have any choice in the matter and you're just going to be stuck in your school until you graduate, why bother reading about it? Why not just hunker down and get through it? Why not just start carving notches in the wall of your prison cell, marking the days until graduation and freedom? To answer that question, bear with me for a sec.

Let's say that you suddenly found out about the opportunity to be an intern on the film set of a major blockbuster movie that is going to be filmed in Italy this summer. You would get to spend your whole summer break on set, shadowing the director and getting a front-row seat watching how all this magic is being made. You would get a behind-the-scenes look at

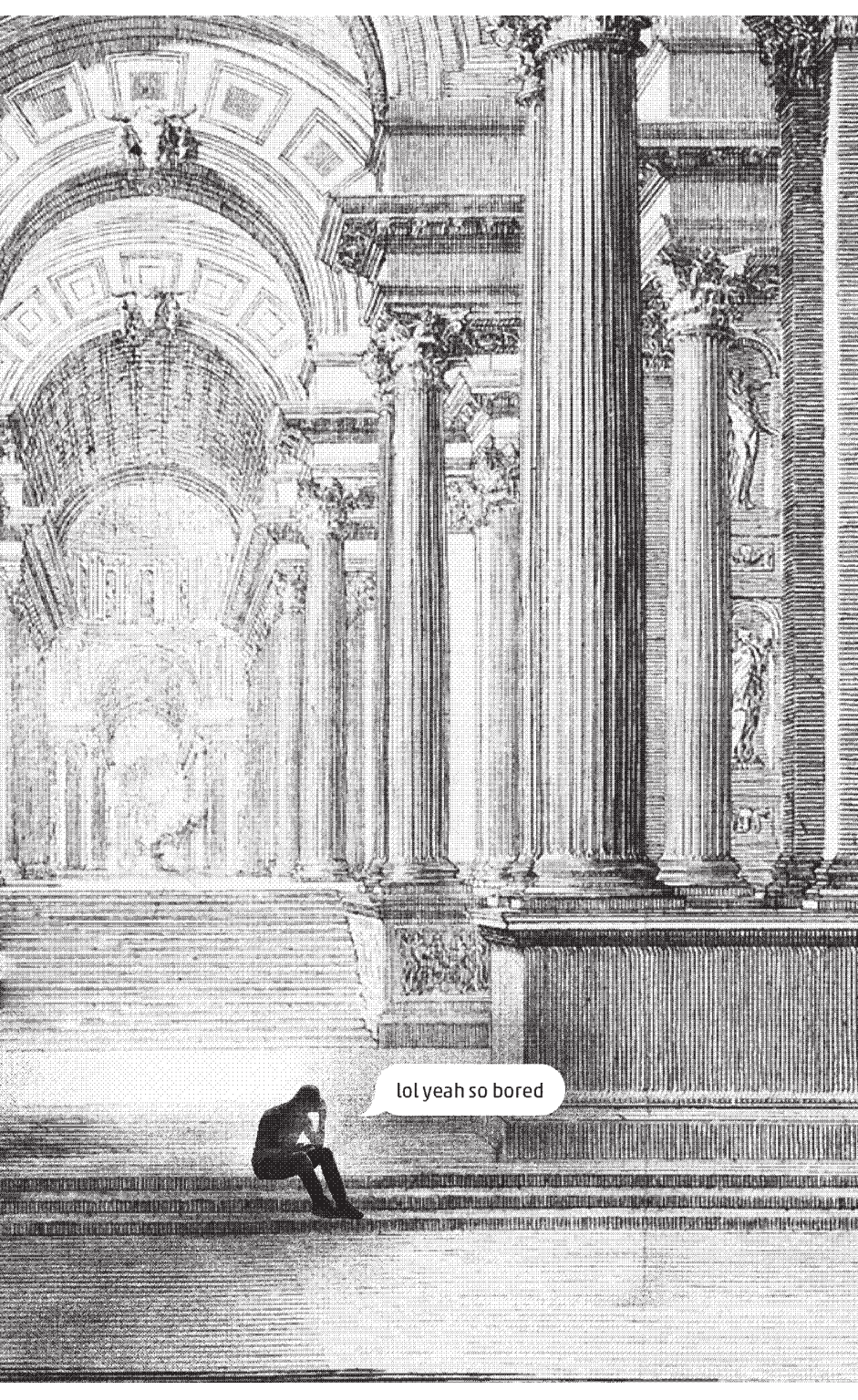
how everything works, from the actors to the special effects guys, the stunt men, the camera crews, the costume designers, and the editors. You could watch and learn from a world-class director as he weaves all that raw material into a gripping story. Let's say that you're interested in pursuing a career in film, and so not only will this whole experience be just plain fun, you also know that it would be of invaluable benefit to you as you get ready to start out on that career path. It could open any number of doors in the future, from what colleges you may attend to further film opportunities of the same kind. You know you would learn tons, and you know that you would come out of this experience with a huge head start over all the other kids who, just like you, are interested in pursuing a career in filmmaking.

Whether or not that particular scenario appeals to you, you can understand how it could appeal to someone. And furthermore, let's say that in order to get into this internship, you have to apply for it, you need to show exceptional talent and be highly qualified, you have to submit an original short film as part of the application process, and then you have to be selected out of thousands of other applicants who are all dying for the same thing. So you do it. You apply. You cross your fingers, you pray like crazy, and then ... against all the odds, you're selected.

You are actually the one lucky winner out of thousands who gets to go on this crazy ride.

With me so far? Now then. Once on the set in Italy, how are you going to feel about all the stuff the director is telling you about the whole process of filmmaking? You're standing in Rome outside the Colosseum in the late afternoon, helping set up the cameras, listening to the director explain how he wants to frame the shot and what he wants to capture as the actress runs across the street to catch a bus. He's talking about the light and why he's going to wait until the sun comes out from behind that cloud, and he's most insistent that the sunlight will profoundly affect the dramatic impact of the scene he's trying to create.

Let me ask you ... Are you groaning and rolling your eyes the whole time? Drumming your pencil on your notebook and dying a little bit inside? Asking yourself, or him, what is the point of it all? Wondering when this will possibly ever benefit you? Yawning ostentatiously, muttering "sheesh" under your breath at periodic intervals, and looking at your watch every two minutes?



lol yeah so bored

Of course not. And the reason you wouldn't be doing that, is that you already value what it is that you're receiving. You know what a privilege it is. You know how crazy hard you had to work and how highly you had to achieve to be here. You see what an enormous opportunity it is. You see how great this is going to look on college applications. You know how this increases your chances of getting onto other sets in the future. Clearly you're not going to waste this moment by fussing, spacing off, or making the director wonder if he shouldn't just send you home. Obviously you're going to be giving this whole thing 110 percent of your effort and attention—and that's because when you value something, you treat it differently than you would if you thought it was worthless.

Now let me introduce you to another person along on this trip. Let's call him Logan. He's the nephew of one of the film crew, and he's stuck hanging out on the set in Italy with you all summer—which really bums him out because he wants to be skateboarding with his friends back home in Milwaukee, but he can't because his parents are forcing him to be on this stupid trip and it's totally lame and uncool. So he slumps around in the background with a tortured look on his face and spends the entire time staring at his phone. The two of you are receiving all the same opportunities, but you're getting two very different things out of it. Now, let's suppose that Logan finishes the summer, goes home to Milwaukee to pursue his dream of be-