

## Why Does Liberty Require Latin?

By: Patrick Albright, Member of the Board, February 2016

My initial reaction when I heard about making 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Latin a requirement was one of skepticism. Why is this necessary? I pondered the question within the context of the discussion I had already heard, and wasn't able to solidly bring myself to commit to one side or the other.

Then I had an epiphany. I saw the question in an entirely different context, and things made sense. There were three specific foundational values that underlie Liberty's philosophy regarding the Latin question:

1. Content knowledge:

Teaching content to students gives them the cultural literacy and common framework to relate to others. It provides a superior foundation and context in which skills and critical thinking can be applied, rather than trying to learn skills and critical thinking in a vacuum without context.

2. Mutually reinforcing curriculum:

The Core Knowledge curriculum aligns topics across subject areas. For example, when second graders are learning Ancient Greece in History, they are also reading Greek stories like "Pandora's Box" and other Greek myths. In Art, they are looking at Greek art and architecture. Understanding the architecture of Ancient Greece gives context to the stories in literature. The stories give insight to the structure of Greek society. Understanding Greek history gives context to what students are reading in the stories. This mutual reinforcement both broadens and deepens the understanding and appreciation of Ancient Greece.

3. Emphasis on the development of modern Western Civilization:

Liberty places an emphasis on the development and evolution of modern Western Civilization. We want our students to be leaders, and to be successful leaders they need to have an understanding of how our world has been shaped. So much of our culture and institutions have their roots in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, that a strong emphasis is placed on these civilizations in our curriculum.

Content knowledge, mutually reinforcing curriculum, emphasis on the development of modern Western Civilization....how do these three values form a nexus at Latin, and specifically 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Latin? The discussion up until now has primarily focused on Latin being a primary contributor to the English language, aiding in English language acquisition, increasing vocabulary, and improving grammar. These are certainly very important considerations, but also incomplete.

The content of our Latin courses goes beyond simply learning the vocabulary and grammar. The courses also include historical, cultural, and geographical content as related to the Latin language. Pompeiian graffiti, letters from Julius Caesar, writings of Pliny and Cicero are examples of the type of content included in "Wheelock's Latin", the text Liberty uses. This content not only provides the contextual knowledge for the appreciation of the Latin language

itself and its influence on the English language, it is also mutually reinforcing the subject areas of history, literature, and civics, leaving our students with a deeper appreciation and understanding of our roots.

These are good arguments in favor of Latin in general, but the question still remains why Latin II in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade? From speaking with Marques Kem, coursework in Latin I is focused primarily on vocabulary and grammar. There are specific fundamentals that need to be learned in Latin I before any significant Latin literature can be appreciated, and most of the time in Latin I is spent developing those fundamentals. In Latin II, sprinkled throughout the course are all kinds of literary references to Roman history, culture, and geography. From that, I conclude that the mutually reinforcing aspects of Latin come more into play in Latin II than in Latin I.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, students are still under the Core Knowledge sequence. The history curriculum in those two grades covers 1890-present: The rise of America as a world power, the world wars, the cold war, etc. The literature in the English curriculum in those grades serves to reinforce that time-era covered in History. When the students reach 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they are out of the Core Knowledge sequence and begin the high school history and literature track which begins with Western Civilization I and Western Literature, which heavily focus on Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. The only link providing that historical and cultural content in the junior high years are the Latin courses. Latin I is a requirement in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but students who do not currently take Latin II in 8<sup>th</sup> grade have a gap. Requiring Latin II will provide a logical and seamless transition from the junior high to the senior high, in addition to providing a capstone to the emphasis we place on Latin instruction throughout the Core Knowledge sequence years.

In conclusion, the content learned in Latin II includes vocabulary, grammar, historical, cultural, and geographical references that serve to increase our students contextual knowledge—which is consistent with our foundational value of teaching content knowledge. The content also serves to reinforce our other subject areas of history and literature, especially as students move into 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Western Civilization I and Western Literature—which is consistent with our foundational value of implementing a mutually reinforcing curriculum. Finally, the historical and cultural content learned in Latin II and reinforced in the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade classes deepens the appreciation and understanding of our modern Western Civilization's roots—which serves the foundational value of an emphasis on the development of modern Western Civilization. Within the context of examining Latin II from the perspective of these foundational values, adopting the Latin II requirement makes sense.