

What U.S. Students Miss by Not Learning Latin

Although it's not primetime news in the U.S., a 15 year-old student from Athens, Georgia, recently made international waves when he became the first American to win the Certamen Ovidianum Latin competition in Italy.

Josiah Meadows took home [\\$1,000 in cash and other prizes](#) for translating a passage from Ovid and then writing an essay on it – in Latin no less.

According to [The Athens Banner-Herald](#), Josiah got his start in Latin at a young age by overhearing his father teach the language to an older sibling. Josiah now has several Latin students of his own, including one from Australia.

And Josiah himself isn't yet done learning languages. To Latin he has added Greek, Italian, and German.

Josiah's success seems reminiscent of that enjoyed by other students learning Latin in [several U.S.](#) and [Australian](#) schools. Recent reports have suggested that reintroducing the so-called “dead” languages of Latin and Greek may actually boost scores in reading, math, and science.

So why does learning Latin seem to give students a leg up in life? Latin educators and authors Harvey and Laurie Bluedorn suggest seven possible reasons in their book [Teaching the Trivium](#):

1. Latin is basic to English.

As the Bluedorn's explain, roughly two-thirds of the English language is based on Latin. Thus, knowing Latin increases understanding of English, a fact that may explain why Latin students score so much better on exams such as the SAT.

2. Latin is a springboard for mastering other inflected languages, such as Greek or German.

Just as English is largely based on Latin, so other modern languages are also composed of Latin roots, some up to 80 percent! As the Bluedorns note, learning Latin before these languages “is like having a ticket to Europe or to South America with an 80 percent reduction in price.”

3. The study of Latin sharpens the mental process.

“The task of searching for words and structures in our own language to compare with that of another language, develops and trains skills of accurate observation and logical analysis.”

4. Everything in a culture is embedded in its language.

As the Bluedorn’s explain, learning Latin naturally gives way to learning about Latin culture, a fact that opens the door to greater understanding of America’s legal and social systems.

5. Technical language is Latin.

Want your child to become a doctor, scientist, or lawyer? Teach him Latin.

“Medical, scientific, and legal terms are all Latin and Greek. Because a great deal of these studies is terminology, then, if we know the terminology of these three disciplines, we will have a lifelong advantage over others.”

6. Latin is also valuable for further studies in all disciplines.

According to the Bluedorns, the other disciplines which Latin knowledge aids include “history, theology, literature, art, architecture, ad infinitum.”

7. Latin is useful in English.

“Many of us learned some Spanish, German, or French in high school or college. How much of it do we use? ... [E]veryone who learns Latin vocabulary and grammar will use it often, even if he continues his studies only in English.”

Given these benefits, would we see greater knowledge and understanding if more U.S. students were introduced to the nuances of Latin?

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