

Plutarch's 3 Tips for Choosing a School

Today's education world is full of options. In fact, there are so many options that it can be tempting for parents to throw up their hands and just pick one without much thought.

But such is a terrible move, according to the ancient Roman author Plutarch. He suggests the following three steps in choosing an education that will produce wise and knowledgeable children:

1. Vet the teacher

Today, the measure of a good teacher is often determined in how many degrees he or she holds. Not so in the mind of Plutarch. He declared that a teacher's morality was of utmost importance:

"Teachers must be sought for the children who are free from scandal in their lives, who are unimpeachable in their manners.... For to receive a proper education is the source and root of all goodness."

2. Research thoroughly

In Plutarch's mind, there was no excuse for parents who caved to the pressure or opinion of friends when choosing a school. Instead, he implies, parents need to do their own homework to determine whether or not a school will suit their child:

"Nowadays there are some fathers who deserve utter contempt, who, before examining those who are going to teach, either because of ignorance, or sometimes because of inexperience, hand over their children to untried and untrustworthy men. This is not so ridiculous if their action is due to inexperience, but there is another case which is absurd to the last degree. What is this? Why, sometimes even with

knowledge and with information from others, who tell them of the inexperience and even of the depravity of certain teachers, they nevertheless entrust their children to them; some yield to the flatteries of those who would please them, and there are those who do it as a favour to insistent friends.”

3. Spare no expense

Because money is precious and cheaper forms of education can often be found, the temptation is to choose the more economical route. Plutarch’s advice? Don’t.

“Many fathers, however, go so far in their devotion to money as well as in animosity toward their children, that in order to avoid paying a larger fee, they select as teachers for their children men who are not worth any wage at all – looking for ignorance, which is cheap enough. Wherefore Aristippus not inelegantly, in fact very cleverly, rebuked a father who was devoid both of mind and sense. For when a man asked him what fee he should require for teaching his child, Aristippus replied, ‘A thousand drachmas’; but when the other exclaimed, ‘Great Heavens! what an excessive demand! I can buy a slave for a thousand,’ Aristippus retorted, ‘Then you will have two slaves, your son and the one you buy.’”