Get Classically Educated

DEVELOPING THINKERS, NOT TEST TAKERS

FREE DOWNLOAD · AGES 8–11

GRAMMAR STAGE

10 things a strong classical foundation builds in a young learner, and the signs your child is ready

A free guide for parents of 8- to 11-year-olds from Get Classically Educated

Grammar	Dialectic	Rhetoric
Ages 8–11	Ages 12–13	Ages 14–18
THIS GUIDE		

Hi friend,

If you're reading this, you're probably asking the question every homeschool mom asks sooner or later: *Am I giving my child what they really need?* Not just enough to get through the year, but a real foundation.

Get Classically Educated was started by two Florida homeschool families, so we know that question well. Here's what we've learned about ages 8 to 11. These years are a special window. Kids memorize songs without trying, ask "why?" a hundred times a day, and want to tell you every detail of what they learned. Classical education calls this the Grammar stage, and it's built to make the most of it.

Below are 10 things a strong classical foundation builds in these years. Each one comes with a real fact you can check for yourself, because you deserve more than a sales pitch.

THE 10 THINGS AT A GLANCE

1. Saying it back beats reading it again: how kids actually remember
2. Why reading out loud still matters after your child can read
3. The easiest way to build a strong writer starts before the pencil
4. Handwriting helps the brain learn letters, and typing doesn't do the same
5. A few Latin roots unlock a huge share of English words
6. The baseball study: why knowing more makes reading easier
7. Great scientists started by noticing, and kids can learn it too
8. Five questions rooted in Aristotle that your child can start asking now
9. 1 in 4 adults fear public speaking. Here's how kids get comfortable early
10. Why 8- to 11-year-olds love to memorize, and how to use it

THE 10 THINGS

1 Saying it back beats reading it again: how kids actually remember

1 week later, students who practiced recalling a passage remembered much more than students who reread it

Let's be honest: some days it feels like nothing is sticking. You taught it Monday, and by Thursday it's gone.

Here's the encouraging part. In a well-known 2006 study, college **students who practiced recalling a passage remembered much more of it a week later than students who simply reread it.** Yes, even grown-ups remember better by saying it back. Researchers call this retrieval practice, and it's one of the most reliable findings in learning science.

That's what the chants, songs and recitation of the Grammar years are. Every time your child says it back, it gets a little more permanent. It isn't busywork. It's how "we covered that" becomes "I know that."

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
> At dinner or in the car, ask, "Tell me one thing you learned today." Then ask about the same thing again tomorrow. That second ask is retrieval practice too.

2 Why reading out loud still matters after your child can read

31 vs 12 rare words per 1,000: children's books vs. a conversation with a 10-year-old

This one surprised us: **children's books use about 31 rare words per 1,000, while a conversation with a 10-year-old uses about 12.** Books are where kids meet words they almost never hear out loud.

Yet many of us stop reading out loud once our kids can read on their own, often around ages 6 to 8. It makes sense. We're tired, and they can do it themselves now. But reading out loud together still has so much to give at this age. A classical foundation keeps it going, with books a little above what your child would pick up alone.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
> Pick a chapter book a little above your child's reading level and read it together for 15 minutes a day. When you hit a word they don't know, pause and talk about it for a moment.

3 The easiest way to build a strong writer starts before the pencil

Writing is hard. It asks a child to remember, organize, spell and punctuate all at the same time.

Narration takes some of that weight off. **When a child tells back a story in their own words, they recall it, put it in order and choose their words, all before writing a single**

sentence. A child who can say it clearly is already halfway to writing it clearly.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
>
> After reading out loud together, say, "Tell me what happened, in your own words." Write down exactly what they say, then read it back to them. Kids are often amazed to hear that they "wrote" it.

4 Handwriting helps the brain learn letters, and typing doesn't do the same

In a world where everything happens on a screen, it's fair to wonder if handwriting still matters.

It does. Researchers at Indiana University found that **when young children practiced printing letters by hand, the brain area adults use to recognize letters became active. Typing or tracing the same letters didn't have the same effect.**

So copywork isn't just neat practice. Forming letters by hand helps the brain learn them, and copying good sentences quietly teaches spelling, punctuation and attention all at once.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
>
> Choose one good sentence a day from a book you're reading. Have your child copy it neatly, then check it together against the book for spelling and punctuation.

5 A few Latin roots unlock a huge share of English words

28% + 28% **of English words come from Latin, and from French, which grew out of Latin**

A study of about 75,000 English words found that **roughly 28% come from Latin, and another 28% from French**, which itself grew out of Latin.

That means a little word study goes a long way. Once a child learns that *aqua* means water, aquarium, aquatic and aqueduct suddenly make sense. It's a fun moment to watch when it

clicks.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
>
> Pick one root a week, like *aqua* (water), *port* (carry) or *scrib* (write). Go on a word hunt for it in books, on cereal boxes and around town.

6 The baseball study: why knowing more makes reading easier

This is one of our favorite studies to share. Researchers gave middle schoolers a story about a baseball game. **Weaker readers who knew baseball understood it about as well as strong readers.** What kids already knew mattered as much as how well they could read.

It's a good reminder that reading isn't only a skill. It runs on knowledge. Every bit of history, science and literature makes the next book easier. That's why classical education teaches history in order, as one big story, so each new person and event has a place to land.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
>
> Before starting a new book, spend two minutes on the background. Find the place on a map, look up a picture of the time period, or ask what they already know about the topic.

7 Great scientists started by noticing, and kids can learn it too

Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Faraday both filled notebooks with careful sketches and notes on what they saw. Their big ideas started with close looking.

Science at this age doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. Drawing a leaf, watching an experiment, writing down what happened. Noticing is a skill, and it can be taught.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
>
> Hand your child a notebook and send them outside for 10 minutes to draw one thing slowly: a leaf, a bug, a cloud. Afterward, ask, "What did you notice that you didn't see at first?"

8 Five questions rooted in Aristotle that your child can start asking now

2,300+ years since Aristotle's writing that the Five Common Topics grew out of

The Five Common Topics (Definition, Comparison, Relationship, Circumstance and Testimony) grew out of Aristotle's writing on how to think through an argument, more than 2,300 years ago. He listed dozens of these "topics." Later teachers boiled them down to these five.

They sound fancy, but they're really just good questions. What is it? What is it like? What caused it? What else was happening at the time? Who says so? A young child can start asking them in simple form, and those same questions grow with them all the way through high school.

Definition	What is it?
Comparison	What is it like?
Relationship	What caused it?
Circumstance	What else was happening at the time?
Testimony	Who says so?

TRY THIS AT HOME:

Pick one of these questions each day and ask it about anything: a book, a movie, something that happened at the store. "What is it?" "What is it like?" "Who says so?"

9 1 in 4 adults fear public speaking. Here's how kids get comfortable early

1 in 4 American adults say they're afraid of public speaking

About 1 in 4 American adults say they're afraid of public speaking. Maybe you're one of them. Plenty of us are.

Reciting, answering questions and sharing ideas in a small group, week after week, makes speaking up feel normal. Confidence comes from practice, and the Grammar years are a low-pressure time to get lots of it.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
> Once a week, have your child stand up at dinner and recite a short poem or tell the family about something they learned. Clap every time.

10 Why 8- to 11-year-olds love to memorize, and how to use it

1947 the year Dorothy Sayers gave "The Lost Tools of Learning" at Oxford

The modern classical homeschool movement grew from **a 1947 essay Dorothy Sayers gave at Oxford, "The Lost Tools of Learning."** She noticed that young children love to memorize, chant and collect facts, and argued that schooling should use that instead of fighting it.

That's the heart of the Grammar years. When learning matches how 8- to 11-year-olds already think, it feels less like a battle and more like something they're good at. And honestly? That makes the days easier for you, too.

> **TRY THIS AT HOME:**
> Turn something worth knowing into a chant or a song, like the planets in order, the continents or a skip-counting pattern. Sing it in the car until everyone knows it.

Does this approach suit your child? Signs to look for

This isn't a test. Most kids show some of these, and the rest grow with practice.

- They remember song lyrics, movie lines or sports stats better than you do.
- They love lists and collections: animals, flags, dinosaurs, trivia.

- They still ask you to read to them, even though they can read on their own.
- They ask "why?" and "how?" constantly, and they actually want the answer.
- They can listen to a story and tell you what happened, in order.
- They like an audience: performing, explaining, showing you how something works.

When it might not be the right fit (yet)

We'd rather tell you now than have you find out six weeks in. GCE may not be the best fit for your family right now if:

- **You want a program that does all the teaching for you.** With GCE, you stay in charge of your homeschool and you're involved every week. We plan it; you lead it.
- **You want grades, report cards or transcripts handed to you.** You're the educator of record. GCE doesn't issue grades, and you keep your own records.
- **You need a math curriculum.** Math isn't included, so you'll choose your own.
- **You'd rather have mostly video lessons.** GCE is planned online but learned with real books, paper and conversation.

And if your child doesn't check every box above? That's okay. That's exactly what the free sample week and the 15-minute call are for.

See a real GCE week, free

You don't have to be the one planning all of this. On GCE days, you get to be their mom, not just their teacher. You get a pre-planned weekly Agenda for the whole year, and you stay in charge of your homeschool. For the Grammar years, you can add optional live classes: a GCE mentor leads discussion on Zoom twice a week for two hours, with no more than 12 students.

Here are three free, no-pressure ways to see if it fits your family:

1. Look at a real week. Browse actual sample weeks, hour by hour:

See a GCE Week

2. Try a live class. Fill out a short form, and a real person from GCE will set your child up in a class:

Try a week for free

3. Talk it through. A free 15-minute call about your child and your family:

Book a discovery call

Have a question? Just reply to the email this guide came in. A real person reads every one, and we'd love to hear from you.

Warmly,
The Get Classically Educated Team

SOURCES

- **#1 Retrieval practice:** Roediger & Karpicke (2006), discussed in Frontiers in Cognition (2023)
- **#2 Rare words in books vs. conversation:** Hayes & Ahrens research, via Jim Trelease, in School Library Journal
- **#2 Reading out loud dropping off after ages 6 to 8:** Scholastic Kids & Family Reading Report, 2019
- **#4 Handwriting and letter recognition:** Karin James lab, Indiana University
- **#5 Where English words come from:** Finkenstaedt & Wolff (1973), via Wikipedia
- **#6 The baseball study:** Recht & Leslie, via Core Knowledge Foundation
- **#7 Leonardo's and Faraday's notebooks:** British Library, "Leonardo da Vinci: A Mind in Motion"; The Royal Institution, "The note-taking life of a young Michael Faraday"
- **#9 Fear of public speaking:** Chapman University Survey of American Fears, 2016
- **#10 Dorothy Sayers:** "The Lost Tools of Learning" (1947)

FOR THE FRIDGE

All 10 “Try this at home” tips

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1. **SAY IT BACK**
   At dinner or in the car, ask, "Tell me one thing you learned today." Then ask about the same thing again tomorrow. That second ask is retrieval practice too.

2. **READ OUT LOUD**
   Pick a chapter book a little above your child's reading level and read it together for 15 minutes a day. When you hit a word they don't know, pause and talk about it for a moment.

3. **NARRATE**
   After reading out loud together, say, "Tell me what happened, in your own words." Write down exactly what they say, then read it back to them. Kids are often amazed to hear that they "wrote" it.

4. **COPYWORK**
   Choose one good sentence a day from a book you're reading. Have your child copy it neatly, then check it together against the book for spelling and punctuation.

5. **WORD HUNT**
   Pick one root a week, like *aqua* (water), *port* (carry) or *scrib* (write). Go on a word hunt for it in books, on cereal boxes and around town.

6. **BACKGROUND FIRST**
   Before starting a new book, spend two minutes on the background. Find the place on a map, look up a picture of the time period, or ask what they already know about the topic.

7. **NATURE NOTEBOOK**
   Hand your child a notebook and send them outside for 10 minutes to draw one thing slowly: a leaf, a bug, a cloud. Afterward, ask, "What did you notice that you didn't see at first?"

8. **FIVE QUESTIONS**
   Pick one of these questions each day and ask it about anything: a book, a movie, something that happened at the store. "What is it?" "What is it like?" "Who says so?"

9. **STAND AND SPEAK**
   Once a week, have your child stand up at dinner and recite a short poem or tell the family about something they learned. Clap every time.

10. **SING IT**
    Turn something worth knowing into a chant or a song, like the planets in order, the continents or a skip-counting pattern. Sing it in the car until everyone knows it.