



WASHINGTON LATIN
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

WHY LATIN?



At Washington Latin, we believe that the study of foreign language is essential for all students as part of our classical curriculum. To study a foreign language is to jump into the shoes of another, to look at the world from a different perspective and try to remove one's own presuppositions and prejudices. We believe that this ability to see the world from a different perspective is essential to the task of living a moral life.

We require that all students complete at least three years of the study of Latin. They may additionally elect to study Arabic, Mandarin, or French. Among the four languages we offer, Latin possesses a place *sui generis*, for the following reasons.

Latin greatly improves one's English vocabulary.

At least 60% of English words trace their origins to Latin. This means that students of Latin generally read and write better than their peers. They can puzzle out the meaning of abstract nouns like “transcendence” by breaking down the words into pieces. Because of their improved literacy, our students understand more of what they read and are able to express their ideas more accurately.

Latin greatly improves one's understanding of English grammar.

Students who have mastered Latin's complex grammatical foundation can identify and produce the nuances which mark a truly strong student of English.

The study of the history and culture of the Roman world provides students with insight into their own lives in the 21st century.

Our society – from pennies and pillars, political offices and post office (whose motto is a quotation from Herodotus) – bears the mark of the classical world. Equipped with knowledge of the most influential civilization in history, our students become culturally literate.

Studying Latin and Roman history provides historical context for the modern world.

Students realize societies have been pondering the same basic questions for thousands of years, as they rise, fall, and are reinvented. For example, the study of Julius Caesar opens conversations about justice, empire, the military, the treatment of outsiders, and personal relationships in the political sphere.

Studying Latin opens up the hundreds of brilliant myths from the Roman and Greek traditions.

Jupiter, Cupid, Venus, Perseus, Theseus, and Narcissus are common figures in educated and popular culture. They are also characters in an elaborate web of stories which wrestle with the essential questions of being human: *Is there justice? What is the role of reason in love? What makes one a hero? How is vulnerability necessary for life?* By digesting these myths, our students face these basic questions themselves, gain access to a wealth of later paintings and stories, and bridge the divide separating them from people who lived over 2,000 years ago.