

Chloe Benner's Story

"If you say 'salve' to greet one person and 'salvete' to greet multiple people, what would you say to Cerberus since he has three heads?" one of my Latin Summer students inquired on the first day of class. As if that hadn't caught me off-guard enough, he then proceeded to extend the question to Orthrus, the obscure two-headed relative of the underworld's famous guard dog. I was too impressed by his knowledge to answer right away.

The Orthrus question wasn't the only way my students pleasantly surprised me. I wanted to teach for Ascanius because I wanted to inspire a passion for Latin in these children that they would be grateful for in years to come. The biggest surprise, though, was that in significant ways those expectations were flipped. I thought *I* would influence *them* to love Classics. But *they* also influenced *me* to love Classics even more as their enthusiasm met mine. Being with them made me change my future plans and hope to become a teacher. I'm infinitely grateful for that development.

I found that each day of coming into class made me happy. I loved seeing the students explore these ancient times, and I was excited to find a job that I cared about so much. I loved the creativity and energy of that age group, and I loved talking to them about my favorite subjects. I had to brace myself, though, for the end of the program. I wondered if I would ever have the chance to combine Latin and elementary school education again.

The opportunity presented itself sooner than expected. When I came back to Virginia Tech, a principal at a local elementary school asked if I could teach Latin and mythology at an afterschool program. The plans are forming now before I start teaching again next semester. Thanks to Ascanius, I have a strong foundation for how to structure my approach.

Why do the Classics matter? I can give the typical answer of how learning Latin helps high school students on the SAT tests and facilitates learning spoken languages. However, the Classics shouldn't be seen as just a stepping-stone to other pursuits, especially in the minds of elementary school children. My Latin Summer students never asked why they were spending their summer in a classroom. They understood the inherent value of the mythology, history, and language because these subjects inspired their imaginations and sparked their enthusiasm. At the very least, I saw how the material in the Ascanius curriculum led to independent research, reading, and writing that could someday be applied to other fields. One student decided to start writing a historical fiction piece about a girl living in Ancient Rome. Another took some of my myth books home to borrow for a night because the free reading time wasn't enough to satiate her curiosity. The books reliably returned the next morning, after she read them cover-to-cover. That passion for learning, that initiative to pursue a subject beyond the classroom, and that excitement that leads to multiple avenues of expressing new knowledge, are traits that will stay with these students as they develop. Classical studies encompass so many fields within the ancient cultures. A student can find an outlet within that context for an interest in history, philosophy, religion, engineering, drama,

literature, politics, et cetera. The ancient quality seems to add a dimension that draws kids in to a unique degree.

Teaching with Ascanius, and the future teaching at the school, have given me validation in my studies and validation in my love for teaching this age group. It's refreshing to know that elementary schools can push beyond the standard expectations for what to teach their students. It's refreshing to see principals express an interest in preserving these topics. It's a comfort to know that Ascanius is an organization that exists to promote and enable these goals. And above all, it's inspiring to be in the presence of the enthusiastic students who make it all worthwhile.