

A Classical Education: The Stuff You Wish You'd Been Taught in School

Caroline Taggart

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How many times have you wished that you'd been taught Latin at school? Or that your history stretched all the way back to Greek and Roman myths and legends? Or perhaps you wish you knew all about the great inventions and medical developments that have made our world what it is today? *A Classical Education* provides all of these classical facts that modern schooling leaves out and many more. Perfect for parents who wish to teach their children and for those who would like to learn or relearn the facts themselves, *A Classical Education* is informative and educational, but in a completely accessible way, including:

- Latin and Greek
- Logic and philosophy
- Natural sciences
- Art and architecture
- Poetry and drama
- History and Classical literature

Also including suggestions for further reading and entertaining tit-bits of information on the classics, *A Classical Education* is a must for anyone feeling let down by modern schooling.

A Classical Education: The Stuff You Wish You'd Been Taught in School Details

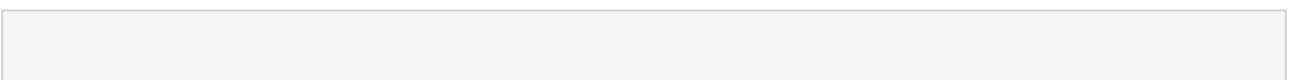
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ZaraS *book reviewer says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. At first I thought it would be a boring book about the pros and cons of a classical education when the reality was quite different. It's a very easy and fast read.

The author had a very jovial way of getting the different aspects of what a classical education includes (for example, Greek Mythology etc). She spoke about all the different players in Greek, Roman and modern literature, history, architecture and art, to name a few.

I was always found Greek Mythology, particularly, very interesting. However, Caroline Taggart managed to show me just how incestuous, among other things, the gods of Greek Mythology were. I laughed at their antics as well as finding myself thinking just how weird they all were.

I would definitely recommend others to read this book especially if you want a concise account of classical education that helps to demystify this area of education.

Ardyth says

Stumbled on this in the children's books section at my local library...?

It's a light, humorous survey of ancient Greece and Rome suitable for anyone who feels nervous or embarrassed about not having had a classical education.

Unfortunately, if you have any familiarity with ancient cultures whatsoever, this book isn't going to do much for you.

And I do mean any familiarity whatsoever.

Heard of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle? The Parthenon? Hercules? Homer? Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Julius Caesar?

If you have even a vague sense of these, and why they are famous, this book won't do a whole lot for you. It does touch on many additina people and topics of interest, but there is too much packed into a slim volume for any of it to be memorable.

Leeroy says

This is a good book. At a bit under 200 pages, with quite large text, you're obviously not going to get a full classical education *per se*, but what you will get is a knowledge of what constitutes a classical education. Which is a big deal. Now that you know who Socrates was, or how democracy started, or how Rome became a dictatorship, you know where to look if you want to learn more. You're no longer in the dark about these

subjects, which were usually reserved for the privileged.

The author writes in a casual, jokey style. It's as if you were being told a great, long story by your grandpa, with his encyclopaedic knowledge, after he's had two beers. It helps to keep you enjoying the book, and I'm sure some subjects would be dull without it. Other subjects, mythological and historical stories principally, are exciting and fascinating enough in their own right, and an absolute joy to read.

The author only really gets in the way twice: when she calls Plato "pompous" (are you kidding me?) and when she dedicates a third of the mere paragraph on Pythagoras to a quip about how he "probably wasn't a barrel of laughs" while neglecting to mention that he's the guy who basically invented **music** (nothing fun about music then is there?). But I digress...

If you're interested enough to read this far, you'll like the book.

Ness Kingsley says

I wike it.

Maciej Bliziński says

But I was taught this stuff in school!

It was fun to listen about ancient Greece and Rome again. I have a feeling though, that for someone who wasn't already acquainted with Greek mythology and other ancient topics, would potentially find the rundown of ancient topics quite boring, despite the amusing writing style. So if you know nothing about ancient Greece, try reading something short in original, if not instead, then at least alongside this book.

Harold Coutts says

achilles was a bottom, caroline

Andy says

Whether you are digging into classical civilisations (history, politics, literature, religion etc) for the first time or using this as a refresher it is humorous, chatty, just detailed enough, and certainly factual. It's an excellent companion and will help you know your Sophocles from your Cicero, Your Marcus Aurelius from your Euripides.

Oscar Despard says

This is a humorous, well-presented overview of the world of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. It does not go into detailed explanations, but gives a pleasant mix of interesting stories and basic facts. It was an enjoyable read.

Fadillah says

I didnt learn all the stuff about romans and greece thingy at school but i heard and read most of it from the movies and books. Reading this book definitely add up all the things that i dont really know about the classics. Be it herodotus, pompey and hercules, this book is interesting. Funny, witty and yet a readable book. 4 out 5 from me :)

B. Rule says

This is basically "Classical Studies for Lads." It provides a very breezy, jokey, and superficial account of classical history, mythology, philosophy and etymology of some common phrases. It is also often inaccurate in the details. It's written from a very British perspective, and I honestly had more trouble making sense of her analogies to modern references than I did the classical stuff. It's not a bad book for a neophyte, but it's a light meal for anyone with a passing knowledge of the subject.

Lisbeth says

This funny, humorous book by Caroline Taggart is a must if you are interested in A Classical Education. Here you get the most important information on the classical world, described in an easy way and with a lot of humour. I really loved it. We get a look at the classical Gods, the emperors, the philosophers, writers, architectural features, the sciences and much more. Here you find the background to a lot of features in our present world, be it language, characterisations, architecture, mythology and so on.

It is divided into chapters covering Languages, Religion and Mythology, Crete (this is a detour!), Ancient Greek History, Roman History, Classical Literature, Architecture and Art, Maths, Science and Inventions, Philosophy and the 'Liberal Arts' and the Games.

Here a few teasers. I start with Hercules.

"So after gods and monsters come superheroes, and other bits and pieces of mythology that have lingered on into our culture and vocabulary. People still talk about a Herculean task, which might mean as little as doing the washing-up after a dinner party. The original twelve Labours of Hercules were rather tougher. To kill the Nemean Lion; to kill the Lernaean Hydra; to capture the Hind of Ceryneia; to capture the Erymanthian Boar; to clean out the Augean Stables; to get rid of the Stymphalian Birds; to capture the Cretan Bull; to tame the Horses of Diomedes; to capture the Girdle of Hippolyta; to capture the Oxen of Geryon; to capture the Apples of the Hesperides; and to capture Cerberus.

The tasks might not sound that challenging, but when you read what it really is, I agree that we talk about a super hero when speaking about Hercules.

The introduction to Alexander the Great reads as follow:

"Reflecting on how little many of us accomplish in life, Tom Lehrer once said that 'when Mozart was my age he had been dead for two years.'

If that idea upsets you, don't read this section."

Can't talk about the Roman world without mentioning Caesar.

"...Caesar, disgusted by this breach of trust, put Ptolemy's sister Cleopatra on the Egyptian throne instead.

Pausing only to have an affair with her (see the play by George Bernard Shaw, in which she smuggles herself into his presence rolled in a carpet), Caesar went off to win a quick battle in Asia Minor -after which he declared, Veni, vidi, vici ('I came, I saw, I conquered') - and a few more in other outposts of the empire. He then returned to Rome to be assassinated."

"One other thing before we leave Caesar: he found time to reform the calendar. (The foot note says: If you want something done, ask a busy person, they say.)

On Livy, a historian living from 59 B.C. to AD 17, Ms Taggart writes, among other things:

"...Personally I could never get on with him, not because I am a stickler for historical accuracy but because he had a Henry-James-like attitude to the length of sentences and paragraphs and by the time you came to the verb at the end you had lost all trace of the noun at the beginning, though I realize that this opinion may well put me in the minority and that a modern translation might have a few more full stops in it."

I have to check next time I read Henry James! About the Roman way of organising their armies.

"The structure of the army was brilliant, too - with the possible exception of calling a unit of eighty men a century, which was surely somebody's idea of a joke. Six centuries made a cohort and ten cohorts made a legion - which therefore consisted of 4800 men under normal circumstances. It sounds formulaic, but in fact the subdivision into small units made it very flexible: soldiers marched and went into battle in strict formation, but each century could be redeployed quickly if conditions changed. It certainly scared the hell out of the Ancient Britons, whose idea of battle formation was to paint themselves blue and run around like lunatics."

She also gives us the opportunity to shine at dinner parties with a few favourite lines. From Aristotle; 'Probable impossibilities are to be preferred to improbable possibilities'. However, as Ms Taggart says; "Perhaps best to wait till everyone is a bit pissed, though." And a last one: "So, a tough cookie, Seneca. And just in case you are still being invited to dinner parties, I rather like: 'If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable.'" I like these two!

At the end is this final words:

The 1959 film Ben-Hur won eleven Oscars, a feat that was unequalled until Titanic came along nearly forty years later. And why was the Titanic so named? Because she possessed titanic strength, an attribute of the Titans of Greek mythology, who existed even before the gods. As I said almost 200 pages ago, the classics really are everywhere.

Cut."

Just a few of a lot of funny and educational information on the cradle to our civilisation. It does not hurt to be repeated and reminded when we think we are on top of civilisation today. There were people, long before us, who had already thought about it and gave us the hints.

I just love these kind of books and the humour and references makes it a very entertaining read. I have another one to go; Pandora's Box.

Jules says

I got a kick out of this sometimes irreverent book. Ms. Taggart takes what can sometimes be a very, very dry subject and injects quite a bit of wit and humor into it. She touches on things such as the roots of words in language, the greats such as Homer and Aristotle, and then pokes a bit of fun at their logic and rhetoric. It makes for a relatively easy read and a quick source of reference. Very informative and interesting book.

Ilka says

I picked this up as part of a Kindle deal and didn't realize how short it was until I started reading, so part of why I'm so disappointed might be that I was expecting a lot more than a book this size can offer. Having said that, I feel as if this book did little more than repeat what anyone with a good general knowledge already knows. There were a few tidbits of information that were new to me, but more than 90% were things the author mentions I already knew more about than she presents here. I say mention, because for the most part it felt like the author was doing little more than throwing out a name and a couple of sentence description and then moved on to the next name, which left me feeling like I was speedreading a tiny dictionary. On the positive side, the book is written in a very accessible and funny style and I managed to fly through the book.

Monica says

This book starts out kind of slow. It starts out by talking about the classical languages. I won't be able to remember any of it, I read it though. The next chapter is much better going into brief detail about the Greek Pantheon. I love to learn about the Greek Gods and Goddesses and Ms. Taggart throws in a tad bit of humor within this section to keep you reading. The next chapter covers events happening in Crete and include some pretty funny asterisk (comes from the Green for little star, see I am learning) comments. The next chapter is also a bit stiff going into Ancient Greek history but she keeps it light and quick in order to keep the reader interested. She covers everything Alexander the great to some of the great Greek historians. Continuing in this manner the author goes over the history of Ancient Rome, this chapter was more interesting and compelling than the one on Greece surprisingly but I always liked to learn about Cesar and such.

I will leave the rest of the chapters for you to discover but each one gets better and funnier than the last. I loved this nice mix of facts and humor that Ms. Taggart created. The following chapters will take a look at some literature (my favorite), the arts, and a few other things I will leave to you. I enjoyed this brief informative jaunt through history. You probably will too.

Elimh says

This book gives very basic background information on:

Greek/Roman mythology and history;
Where and how it has had influence on modern sciences.

-The information was somewhat useful for me as I didn't really understand the different ideas until now.

-This book isn't a book to rely on in the sense of authenticity of its historical facts.

However it was an enjoyable read for a non-fiction. The humour was intertwined well with the text, as it had me laughing in places I didn't expect.
