

PORT·REGIS



Carpe Diem: the living language of Latin

Dr Annelise Freisenbruch
Head of Classics

Dr Freisenbruch was born in Bermuda and read Classics at Newnham College, Cambridge under the supervision of Professor Mary Beard. She taught GCSE and A Level Latin and Classical Civilisation at The Leys School while studying for her PhD. After working as a historical researcher for the BBC and broadcasters such as Bettany Hughes, she returned to teaching as the Head of Classics at Chafyn Grove before moving to Port Regis in 2014. She is the author of five books set in ancient Rome, including the Circus Maximus children's adventure series which she writes under the pseudonym Annelise Gray. The third title, *Rider of the Storm*, was published on World Book Day, 2023

Ab Initio

Sigmund Freud. Susan Greenfield. Tom Hiddleston. Ian Hislop. Thomas Jefferson. Boris Johnson. Martha Kearney. Kwasi Kwarteng. Frank Lampard. CS Lewis. Chris Martin. Karl Marx. Toni Morrison. JK Rowling. Mark Zuckerberg. What do these people have in common? The answer - they are all Classicists. At one time or another, either at school or university, they have all excelled in the study of Latin, Ancient Greek or Classical Civilisation.

The subject of Classics has in recent decades suffered from a bit of an image problem (and it could be argued that one or two of the ambassadors listed above

don't do it any favours). 'Latin is a dead language, as dead as dead can be'. If I had a pound for every time someone had gleefully quoted the first lines of that little rhyme at me, I probably could have retired by now.

Yet it isn't the 'gotcha' line my interlocutor often imagines it to be. Is Latin dead? In the sense that you probably won't get very far if you try to order a pizza in it, perhaps. People don't commonly converse in Latin any more, that's true enough. But Latin still speaks to us. It is part of our linguistic and cultural DNA, its imprint indelibly left not just on our everyday language – an estimated 50-60% of all English words have a Latin root - but on the lexicon of science (in vitro), medicine (placebo), the law (habeas corpus), business (per capita) politics (vox populi), horticulture (crocus sativus), and religion (dona nobis pacem

Besides, since when did something being 'dead' or belonging to the past make it uninteresting or unworthy of study? We don't dismiss the writings of George Eliot or William Shakespeare on the

"If I ruled the world, I would re-introduce the Classics into all schools. . . . It's my firm belief that everyone would benefit from studying them"

~Professor Susan Greenfield~

grounds that they're dead. Nobody worthy of being listened to would advocate culling history lessons from the timetable on the basis that a lot of it happened a long time ago. Call Latin a dead language if you like. But the dead are fascinating. We ignore their voices at our peril.

Port Regis is a school that celebrates and champions the study of Latin. It is taught under the aegis of the Classics department, which is also responsible for the teaching of ancient Greek as an optional subject to interested pupils in the Upper School. Each year, I give an induction in that language to the Lower School as well and there are current A form pupils who still have the Greece-themed rulers they won in the F Form as a prize for memorising the entire Greek alphabet.

Latin, however, is our focus, taught to virtually all members of the B and C Forms and the vast majority in the A Form, and we have good reason to set such store by it. Research by London-based charity The Latin Programme, which supports the teaching of the subject in state primary schools, suggests that Latin turbo-charges children's literacy levels, resulting in dramatically improved standardised test scores. Studies in the US indicate that Latin lifts children's academic outcomes in other areas, including maths and computer science. Why? Because Latin boosts the cognitive processes required for those subjects. A highly-organised and logical language, it encourages and demands skills of analysis, critical thinking, scrupulous attention to detail and problem solving. As Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has said of his own experience of learning Latin at high school, 'it's very much like coding or math – so I appreciated that.'



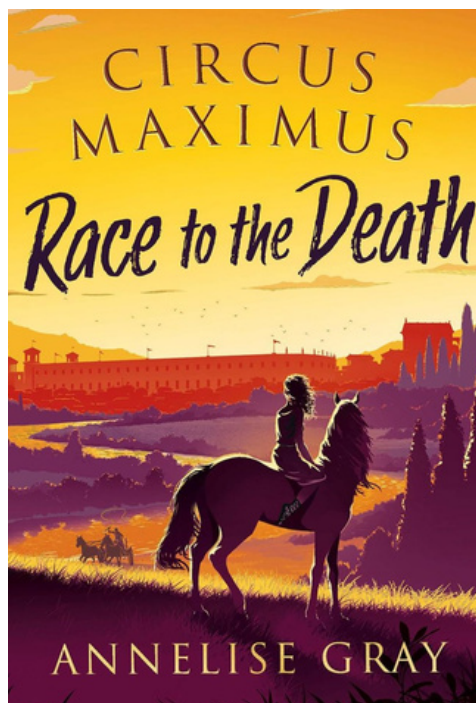
With those and other benefits in mind, we seek to make Port Regis pupils' first encounter with Latin a lively and enjoyable one that will give them a rock-solid foundation in the language as well as inspiring them to pursue their Classical studies further at senior school. Anyone expecting to walk into one of our classrooms and find rows of glassy-eyed children reciting 'amo, amas, amat' on repeat like automatons will have their expectations confounded. A Port Regis Latin lesson might begin with a video of London-based instructor Jonathan Goddard, also known by his YouTube sobriquet of Rapteach, singing a catchy song about the rules of Latin noun endings, with which the children join in. It could continue with a translation of a Latin retelling of an episode from the Trojan War (via a pithy discussion of gender stereotypes in the ancient world) in which the class are invited to use that recently reinforced knowledge of noun endings to decode sentences, while also considering fluency of English in their written rendition. And it's quite likely to conclude with a vocabulary study session in one of our computer rooms, where children gleefully attempt to beat their previous test scores on the flashcard-study website Quizlet.

In looking for fun and varied ways to teach Latin, we don't seek to obscure its challenges. Latin is a logical but complex language, with a different syntax and accidence to English. Studying it is a bit like yoga for the brain – some of the stretches are enjoyable, others might leave you cursing. But with time and practice, you can surprise yourself with how far you can get. It is our experience at Port Regis that children of all abilities get a big ego-boost from discovering that they can be successful in a subject culturally regarded as 'difficult'. In embracing Latin's challenges, we aim to confound the misguided notion that it's an elite subject, suitable only for the academically confident. Latin is for everyone. That is our passionate belief. And as that earlier roll call of famous

names indicates, it can be a stepping stone to all kinds of different futures.

Learning Latin at Port Regis

Port Regis pupils begin their Latin journey in earnest when they reach the C Form. Their guide is Book 1 of the Cambridge Latin Course, which engages beginners by immersing them in the lives of a fictionalised family living in Pompeii on the eve of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79CE. With the emphasis on reading stories and setting the language in its cultural context, the CLC helps children to see Latin as a real language spoken by real people, rather than as merely a mechanical delivery system for the rules of grammar.



Understanding the rules of Latin grammar is, however, very important if one is going to get to grips with the language, and we set great store by this, particularly in A and B Form, as our attention concentrates itself on the linguistic demands of the Common Entrance syllabus. Our Classics department is staffed by four specialist teachers – a rare strength in a prep school – and it prides itself on its outstanding CE results record, with almost 90% of children in the last five years scoring A*, A or B grades in Latin. Scholarship outcomes are also

impressive. Since 2016, scholarship candidates for Bryanston, Canford, Marlborough, Harrow, Radley, Downe House, Sherborne, Sherborne Girls, Clifton College, King Edward's Oxford and Cheltenham College have all had their Latin papers ranked in the top bracket available for those schools. Some pupils have also gilded their scholarship offering by submitting papers in ancient Greek, a subject they can study off-timetable from the B Form, whether for examination or just for pleasure. We put our exam success down to a combination of factors – outstanding teaching, carefully designed vocabulary and grammar resources created in-house, and appropriate expectations of our pupils.

Latin setting in C Form is determined by that in other Humanities subjects. In B Form, there is a top Latin set for those who have shown a particularly strong aptitude so far. The rest of the year group are placed in mixed sets. For children who arrive in B Form never having studied Latin before, that's no barrier to success. We start them off in one of the parallel sets where the emphasis is on consolidating the work covered in C Form and building confidence. Beginners who show a quick aptitude can graduate to a higher set if appropriate and some pupils have reached scholarship standard via this route. Others can work at a steadier pace and aim to achieve a solid understanding of the basics. In common with Maths, Common Entrance Latin papers are available in three tiers of difficulty – Level 3 being the hardest. Level 3 pupils work alongside the scholarship candidates in A form, while Level 2 and Level 1 candidates are taught in separate CE sets. It's important to note that there is no stigma attached to taking the easier paper. Almost without exception, our senior schools welcome Level 1 candidates and invariably prefer a student with a good mastery of the basics over one with a shaky acquaintance with more advanced material. As Head of Department, it's my job to make the

decision as to which level of CE is an appropriate goal for individual pupils, based on what pace of work will suit them best at this stage.

We sometimes receive queries about pupils with Learning Support needs from parents understandably spooked by the traditional perception of Latin as difficult. In fact, research by the charity Dyslexia Scotland shows that Latin is often an ideal subject for a child with a dyslexic-type profile, as its formal, unchanging structure can work to their advantage. We have had many success stories with children who receive Learning Support lessons passing Latin exams with flying colours – and, importantly, enjoying the subject at the same time. The same is true for our EAL students, particularly Spanish speakers who enjoy a natural advantage given that Latin is the basis for over 75% of Spanish words, meaning they get a valuable chance to shine in a new subject at a new school.

Ad Astra Per Aspera

Having said that, there are exceptional cases where a child may have a particular

Learning Support profile which makes the acquisition of any new language a daunting challenge. For those few pupils, their timetable can be organised differently, without Latin, although a once-weekly lesson in Classical Civilisation once they reach the A Form ensures that they still get a valuable grounding in the ancient world. In these classes, they might learn about the pantheon of Greek and Roman gods and their role in classic Greek myths, or compare politicians in ancient Rome to leaders of today.

Classics at Port Regis doesn't just happen in the classroom. Many of our children have a love of Greek myths from their own reading, and we have recently introduced an annual Greek Myth competition, open to all pupils in Upper, Middle and Lower School – with a special category to include the Pre-Prep – in which they are invited to take inspiration from a myth of their choice and respond creatively to it through a piece of writing or artwork done in their own time. Each year, we send competitors to the local Greek and Latin reading competition, where we have a

stellar track record in the junior categories. We have also played host to visiting speakers such as children's Roman fiction authors Caroline Lawrence and Ben Kane, and to broadcaster Professor Michael Scott who gave the C and D forms a fascinating lecture on the history of the ancient Olympics.

Excitingly, our pupils also get to experience the Greek and Roman world at first hand. The C Form recently visited Roman Bath and there are plans afoot for an excursion to the Romano-British villa at the Newt in Somerset. In the Easter of 2023, our hugely popular overseas Classics Trip will resume after a Covid-induced hiatus, with twenty-four members of the A Form signed up for the Roman tour of a lifetime. Led by former Head of Department James Wall – affectionately known as 'Magister Murus' – they will take in the sights of the Colosseum, the Circus Maximus, the Pantheon, Trajan's Colum and the ancient port of Ostia as well as training at 'gladiator school'. In recent years, we have also visited the Classical sites of Greece, Sicily and Provence – an ambitious and



creative overseas tour itinerary highly unusual in a prep school.

After Port Regis

After Port Regis, most of our pupils will have the opportunity to continue and broaden their Classical studies as they move on to senior school. Latin and Greek can be taken for GCSE and A Level, offering students the chance to read the great literature of the Classical era in the original – poets and historians like Virgil, Ovid and Tacitus from Rome, or storytellers and tragedians like Homer, Sophocles and Aeschylus from Greece. For those who prefer a less language-focused approach, Classical Civilisation is often a popular option. We love to hear news of Port Regis Classicists as they graduate through these stages, and have excellent testimony as to their success from the likes of Bryanston, where several recent PR pupils have scored (or are predicted to score) 9s for Latin and Greek at GCSE.



At university, the options become even more varied. A degree in Classics – for which prior knowledge of Latin and/or Greek is usually though not always essential – is a training not just in language and literature, but in history, art, archaeology, architecture, philosophy, politics and so much more. To study Classics, in any form, is to ask important questions. Who are we and where do we come from? What do we know, and how do we know it? Who are

the gatekeepers of knowledge, what is power, how are myths made? Classics is about imagining ourselves into another world both similar and different from our own, and using that experience to interrogate the one we live in now. In today's so-called 'post-truth age', such training is invaluable.

Dr Annelise Freisenbruch
Head of Classics
af@portregis.com

