

CLASSIS LATINE – CUI BONO?

The secrets of a Latin cult at the GISW



I only took Latin for 3 years, and yet I have heard people refer to Latin as a “dead language” over a hundred times. Usually my response to (in my opinion) such an ignorant remark is: *“barbarus/barbara est, quia latine loqui non potes”* – but really, learning Latin goes beyond the discussion of its vitality.

I chose to take Latin instead of NWP (the combined sciences subject) in the 7th grade, even though I knew it meant taking four exams a year and weekly vocabulary tests while the other class had none or very few. What on earth could compel a 7th grader to voluntarily sign up for more tests? It was how I believed Latin would benefit me academically and socially, and how it did.

Latin is the mother of all Romanic languages like Spanish, French, Portuguese and Italian. Latin words and roots even make up roughly 50% of the English language! Meaning the “terrible” Latin grammar I was warned about, was actually very easy – I had learned the same basic principles already in Spanish! Additionally, studying grammar rigorously helped immensely in German and English writing. And it was always a proud moment in religion, social sciences, biology, and history when a Latin term came up and I already knew what it meant.

However, Latin isn’t just important for all the academic virtues it provides but perhaps even more important than academics, I gained a special friend group.

In the 8th grade, our Latin class was unusually large – much to my Latin teacher’s delight. However, throughout the school year, many students decided to switch to NWP. Within a blink of an eye, our once large Latin class became a nerdy family, or how it has come to be known as: the GISW Latin cult. Our teacher employed the most ingenious teaching methods and long story short: we became a Cicero fan group. Cicero, or Marcus Tullius Cicero, was famous for being a Roman statesman, lawyer and husband, who wasn’t a cheating and lying bastard.

He fought for justice and achieved his fame by standing up to corruption within the Roman justice system by simply asking *“cui bono”*/ “who benefits?” The saying has become something of a mantra for anyone trying to change the status quo.

Just as true fans would, we adopted Cicero’s motto; however, whenever we were asked *“cui bono”* in regard to Latin class, the answer was almost always *“nos”*/ “us” (as long as we weren’t asked during exam season).

And here is where the cult portion comes in: we had our own Latin class merch! It was a white mug that had our/Cicero's motto on it and "Classis Latina" because it wouldn't be Latin class unless we embraced the idea of full immersion. As our Latin classes were almost always scheduled for the afternoon, we needed a caffeine "pick me up." Our thoughtful Latin teacher would "borrow" the coffee pot from the teacher's lounge and bring us coffee, milk and creamer (we were quite spoiled). Students took turns bringing in sweets or snacks – sometimes they were homemade cookies, sometimes donuts, and sometimes popcorn from the vending machine. But what really made the lesson sweet was all the insider jokes. Now what kind of a cult leader would I be if I exposed the multitude of said special jokes? So here are only a small handful of giggles from class: "*Punkt für die Girls! Punkt für die Jungs!*"; "*1 grüner Stern, bitte!*"; "*der Frau J.-K ring!*"; "*Wo ist den ein ACI?*" and of course, many, many more.

In sum, the lasting effect that my Latin class has had on me can't be summed up in such a brief article, but if there is one bit of advice, I can impart to GISW Students and

especially 7th graders who are wary about signing up for a class on a supposedly dead language it is this:

Latin is very much alive. If not the language, then the study of it. It is a greatly underrated subject, and beyond that, if you join Latin class, you will find a wonderful group of Latin nerds – the best kind of nerds. Latin class isn't only about the ablative absolute, or about translating Caesar's works, it is also a study of ancient history. It is a tool that connects us to people who lived thousands of years ago.

On the greater scale of the universe, studying the classics and history honors the lives of those long forgotten, and reminds us that indeed, we are all in this together. Who knows, perhaps in 2000 years from now, there will be a new set of nerds studying the ancient language and culture of English or German.

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