

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of teaching beginning Latin is imparting some overarching significance and universal meaning to the language, i.e. giving some reason for the effort necessary to learn and memorize declensions, conjugations, and proper syntax. Whether students take Latin in high school or in college to satisfy general language requirements or to aid in their future professional pursuits, teaching the history of Latin as the language that tells the story of western European culture in conjunction with its grammatical and syntactical rudiments gives external significance to Latin in ways that a grammar-only approach makes impossible. As part of a Critical Perspectives requirement at a small Liberal Arts college that demands students explore compelling aspects of the western experience over the course of time, I have now included the study of the history of Latin in our Latin for Beginners course 4 times in the past 3 years and in this paper will relate some specific and even unforeseen benefits to using this method. I will also discuss some possible resources for doing so successfully.

Some benefits include but can not be limited to the following: Students learn that the Latin of the Romans developed in ways that are analogous to other more tangible advancements such as roads, buildings, and aqueducts. Classical Latin literature was a highly constructed language based on Greek grammatical models and was consciously developed to achieve a high level of expression in emulation of Greek genres, yet borrows words and ideas from other nearby cultures, e.g. the Etruscans. Latin is not only the language of the ancient Romans, but also the language that the Catholic Church deliberately adopted to spread and unify its doctrine in Western Europe. Since the Church remained unchallenged as an educational institution in Europe for many centuries, students gain insight into how Latin was both able to be adapted when necessary, but also became a hindrance for changing times and ideas. In exploring the evolution of the Latin of the Romans and of the Church, students learn the difference between written and vernacular languages and how the natural process of change in vernacular languages eventually resulted in the Romance languages. They also learn why and in what areas different European nations as well as America gradually abandoned the use of Latin. The study of the history of Latin also encourages students to explore the uses to which Latin has been more recently put and how it is still being employed. This includes the practical use of Latin such as scientific taxonomy, the symbolic use of Latin for mottoes and maxims, and more imaginative ways that Latin intersects with the modern world in music, art, and literature.

I will also discuss briefly 3 recent books that address the history of Latin and the benefits and drawbacks of using each in different classroom settings: Philip Baldi's *Foundations of Latin* (2002), Tore Janson's *A Natural History of Latin* (2004), and Nicholas Ostler's *Ad Infinitum: A Biography of Latin*.