

We Don't Teach This For Nothing:  
Transferable Skills and A Classical Life After Career Death

In 2021, I unexpectedly lost my Latin/Greek teaching job immediately before the start of a new school year. The details of my own “being let-go” aren’t all that interesting or instructive. I had seen several colleagues lose their jobs over the course of my ten-year career and it was just my turn to live out that nightmare. Suddenly, my life (which included two children and a mortgage) became the proving ground for a claim I had made many times to skeptical students, parents, and administrators: Does a background in the classics foster skills which are more broadly applicable and transferable to other personal and professional pursuits?

It turns out, at least in my case, the answer is “yes.” In this appropriately personal paper, I will share how my education and career in ancient languages 1) helped me to deal with the existentially-unsettling experience of career death, 2) developed skills that are immediately transferable to other career paths, and 3) provided me with an avocational pursuit that benefits me and my community.

I will explore questions of privilege, job (in)security, and discuss specific opportunities to use our skills to benefit ourselves and our communities outside of formal/traditional school settings. The goal of this paper is to provide an optimistic perspective on the specter of career death and to provide anecdotal evidence for the benefits of an education that includes ancient language and literature.