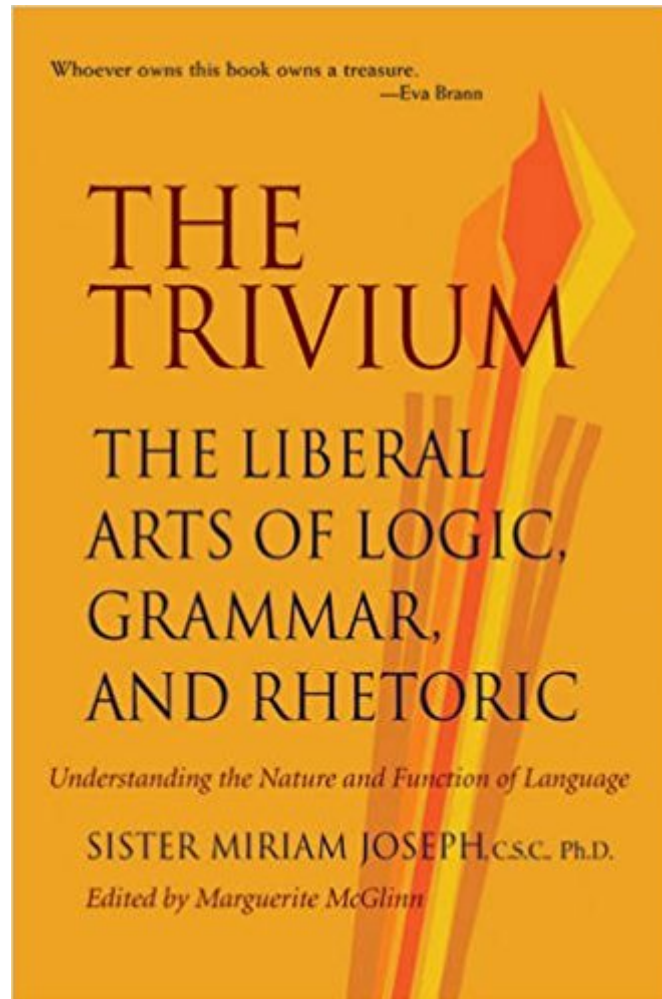


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The Trivium: The Liberal Arts Of Logic, Grammar, And Rhetoric



Synopsis

Who sets language policy today? Who made whom the grammar doctor? Lacking the equivalent of l'Académie française, we English speakers must find our own way looking for guidance or vindication in source after source. McGuffey's Readers introduced nineteenth-century students to "correct" English. Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* and William Safire's column, "On Language," provide help on diction and syntax to contemporary writers and speakers. Sister Miriam Joseph's book, *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric*, invites the reader into a deeper understanding—one that includes rules, definitions, and guidelines, but whose ultimate end is to transform the reader into a liberal artist. A liberal artist seeks the perfection of the human faculties. The liberal artist begins with the language arts, the trivium, which is the basis of all learning because it teaches the tools for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Thinking underlies all these activities. Many readers will recognize elements of this book: parts of speech, syntax, propositions, syllogisms, enthymemes, logical fallacies, scientific method, figures of speech, rhetorical technique, and poetics. The *Trivium*, however, presents these elements within a philosophy of language that connects thought, expression, and reality. "Trivium" means the crossroads where the three branches of language meet. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, students studied and mastered this integrated view of language. Regrettably, modern language teaching keeps the parts without the vision of the whole. Inspired by the possibility of helping students "acquire mastery over the tools of learning" Sister Miriam Joseph and other teachers at Saint Mary's College designed and taught a course on the trivium for all first year students. The *Trivium* resulted from that noble endeavor. The liberal artist travels in good company. Sister Miriam Joseph frequently cites passages from William Shakespeare, John Milton, Plato, the Bible, Homer, and other great writers. The Paul Dry Books edition of *The Trivium* provides new graphics and notes to make the book accessible to today's readers. Sister Miriam Joseph told her first audience that "the function of the trivium is the training of the mind for the study of matter and spirit, which constitute the sum of reality. The fruit of education is culture, which Mathew Arnold defined as 'the knowledge of ourselves and the world.'" May this noble endeavor lead many to that end. "Is the trivium, then, a sufficient education for life? Properly taught, I believe that it should be."—Dorothy L. Sayers "The *Trivium* is a highly recommended and welcome contribution to any serious and dedicated writer's reference collection."—Midwest Book Review

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Customer Reviews

I must applaud the late Sister Joseph along with editor McGlinn for making available this fantastic book on the three fundamental discipline of Classical knowledge - grammar, logic and rhetoric, which were the central building block of scholarly education for the better part of two thousand years. The book is divided into four major sections: introductory material (first section), grammar (second), logic (third) and rhetoric (fourth). In the first section, Joseph defines the Trivium and frames it vis a vis the classification of "goods" (valuable, useful and pleasurable); then she goes on to explain the difference between liberal arts, fine arts or "servile" arts. All definitions are sound and solid, the examples are pertinent and the whole is crystal-clear in a way only a classically-educated person can be clear. The second section contemplates grammar, but not as we understand it in the commonsense meaning (e.g. how to properly conjugate the verb "to be"); rather, the Trivium deals with "general grammar," the way words are used to construct logical symbols to represent reality. This is why an ancient Greek discipline applies equally well to English (or any other language for that matter), since the way the human mind formulates words representing the "substance" and the "accidents" of things is rather universal across geography and time. In all, I think this second section is where Joseph shines the most, although she is also extremely enlightening on the remaining sections. The last two sections on logic and rhetoric are also treated in strictly Classical terms; we have subjects like the essence and construction of a syllogism, the main logical fallacies, and a compendium on rhetorical devices.

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