

TCL

TEACHING CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

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In This Issue:

The MovieTalk:

A Practical Application of
Comprehensible Input
Theory



Squaring the Circle and Saving the Phenomena:

Reading Science in the
Greek Language Classroom



Beginner Latin Novels,
A General Overview

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Teaching Classical Languages (ISSN 2160-2220) is the only peer-reviewed electronic journal dedicated to the teaching and learning of Latin and ancient Greek. It addresses the interests of all Latin and Greek teachers, graduate students, coordinators, and administrators. *Teaching Classical Languages* welcomes articles offering innovative practice and methods, advocating new theoretical approaches, or reporting on empirical research in teaching and learning Latin and Greek. As an electronic journal, *Teaching Classical Languages* has a unique global outreach. It offers authors and readers a multimedia format that more fully illustrates the topics discussed, and provides hypermedia links to related information and websites. Articles not only contribute to successful Latin and Greek pedagogy, but draw on relevant literature in language education, applied linguistics, and second language acquisition for an ongoing dialogue with modern language educators.

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Letter from the Editor

Creating Engaged, Empathetic Students: Social Justice in the Latin Classroom

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Martha Nussbaum, in her book *Cultivating Humanity*, argues that one of the tasks of the Humanities is the development of the distinctively human quality empathy. The word empathy, of course, comes from the Greek ἐμπαθής -ές, “affected emotionally, moved,” most often by human suffering or misfortune.

We can learn from the biographer and moralist Plutarch what this word means in his *Life of Alexander*. After defeating the Persian King Darius, Alexander the Great sees the king’s mother and wife and two unmarried daughters in captivity. Plutarch comments that Alexander is “more affected by their own misfortunes than by his own success” (καὶ ταῖς ἐκείνων τύχαις μᾶλλον ἢ ταῖς ἑαυτοῦ ἐμπαθῆς γενόμενος), Alexander reassures them that Darius is not dead and that they have no reason to fear what he may do to them. Plutarch’s example reminds us that Alexander was tutored by the philosopher Aristotle and highlights the Greek general’s compassion and ethical integrity in this instance.

If we, the inheritors of the classical world, are doing our job and introducing stories that move our students, then we are opening their imagination to ponder possible human responses to difficult situations. If we offer our students templates for virtuous action and negative models of behaviors to be avoided, then we are creating opportunities for our students to think about ethical issues and to imagine putting themselves in others’ shoes. The key is for teachers is to start with the past and then move to the present, to guide our students to learn to notice situations in antiquity that call for empathy and then to compare these lessons to the present day. By challenging our students to examine the ancient world through the lens of social justice, they will also be challenged to think about how they might see present inequities and injustices.

How do we help our students learn to reach out to those who are vulnerable or different or beset by suffering or injustice? One way is by asking students to con-

sider similar situations here and now. In the process of learning about ancient examples of exploitation or powerlessness or violence, my hope is that students realize that what they are learning about antiquity shapes and informs our actions here and now. By challenging our students to examine the ancient world through the lens of social justice, they will also be challenged to think about how they might see present inequities and injustices.

I have found that the definition of social justice articulated by Lee Anne Bell makes sense to me and my students. She stresses that social justice is both a process and a goal. As a process, we must “keep on keepin’ on,” continuing to make visible the slaves, women, and strangers who are so easy to ignore in our elite authored texts. The vision she lays out emphasizes the safety and security—both physically and psychologically—of all people, an equitable distribution of resources, self-determination by every person, and the interdependence and reliance of each person in the community on each other. This vision is the opposite of the rugged individualism of our present day and opposite the fear or despair that so many who are marginalized feel.

This vision is one of both pain and love, noticing the pain expressed in ancient texts in the lives of slaves, the working poor, the prostitute, the refugee, and other marginalized people and calling it to the forefront rather than ignoring it. It is a vision that recognizes the lack of agency that so many in the ancient world experienced and resolves to confront it and talk about it. It is also a vision of love, treating with dignity those who are experiencing misfortune and working with them as allies to find just and equitable solutions. This vision calls our students to shoulder a sense of social responsibility toward others in their community and in the larger world.

It is a truism, at least among the general public, that the ancient world is a world apart, a world with marvelous, fantastical stories that has no bearing on the present day. And if one reads the ancient world exclusively through the eyes of the elite authored texts that have come down to us, it is easy to see the world through the ruling classes, to naturalize the hierarchical world that the Greeks and Romans developed and to miss the plight of non-elites. It takes effort to read against the grain and to look for evidence for the lives of the working poor, the enslaved, the day laborer, and the refugee. Yet, the world of Greco-Roman antiquity also offers certain advantages for helping students recognize the dark sides of human interaction. The temporal, spatial, and cultural distance between the ancient world and the pres-

ent day makes it easier for students to explore a highly charged topic from a more dispassionate perspective before making a connection to a contemporary analogue.

Slavery in the ancient world is one place where it is possible to open up difficult conversations about slavery, human trafficking, and systemic injustice in our world today. Without the production of slaves powering agriculture and commercial establishments, the everyday activities of Greek and Roman households—not to mention the ancient economy—would have scarcely been possible. Similarly, there are multiple Latin texts that explore the plight of refugees and those fleeing in exile: Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and Cicero’s letters, especially *ad Atticum*, Book 3, *ad Quintum* 1.3-4, and *ad Familiares* 14.2-4. Another place to witness the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the Roman world can be found in Pompeii and other multi-ethnic cities. The varieties of Latin manifest at Pompeii and the bilingual inscriptions across the Mediterranean attest to the varieties of Latin or Greek spoken by different ethnic populations, much like the world Englishes spoken around the world by colonized peoples as well as indigenous communities (World Englishes on TED). For more social justice topics and units, see Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell.

While some of these examples align with more advanced classes, how do we bring questions of social justice to the foreground in a language class, including beginning classes? It starts with posing an essential question that shapes a unit and motivates curiosity among students. For example, instead of a unit on Roman food, a unit that describes the general types of foods eaten in the Roman world, the essential question might be “How do diet and dining practices reveal Roman social structures?” Such a question leads not just to what was eaten, but also by whom and under what circumstances. Similarly, in a unit on Roman education, the essential question posed might be “How does Roman education reveal a rigid class structure within Roman society and a lack of upward mobility?”

After posing an essential question, the next step is to narrow the focus of the unit to specific language tasks and concrete cultural products and practices. For example, beginning students might well be able to notice class-based differences in diet by comparing in Latin one or two recipes for the simple, traditional foods that Cato the Elder highlights in the *De Agricultura* with one or two by Apicius intended for the upper classes. Students could talk about which ingredients are available to farmers, to working city-dwellers, and to Roman elites (see Giacosa or Dalby and Grainger). In a unit on Roman education, students might read a simple dialogue

about getting ready for the day or coming home for lunch. In both dialogues, the boy (note the masculine bias) addresses a slave, thereby reinforcing the social hierarchy (Dickey 12-13, 26-27).

Finally, the third stage in creating a social justice unit is to link what students learned about the ancient world with ongoing issues of inequality in the modern world. For example, after comparing the availability and price of ingredients for the two dishes that students read in Cato or Apicius, one could also ask who prepares this food and where. How are those who prepare the food at home or in bars treated? In the ancient world, there might be male or female slaves who prepare meals, but they are typically slaves in elite households (see Green). How does gender inform who prepares food at home in today's world? What sort of treatment and pay do foodworkers receive in restaurants today (e.g., Chen)? Likewise, after exploring the limited literacy of Roman children and the preponderance of the apprenticeship model among Romans, it is a short step to ask students whether the lack of mobility seen in Roman society is paralleled in the United States.

In sum, applying a social justice lens to the ancient world teaches students what questions to pose and how to recognize social hierarchies and patterns of inequity. By comparing the ancient world with the 21st century, students sharpen their critical thinking skills and enhance their ability to see similar patterns from one time period to another. In making explicit the connections between the world of ancient Rome and the present day, students perceive the relevance of the ancient world to our own and are motivated to learn more. Finally, if given the opportunity to respond to an essential question, they learn to be purposeful and to develop a sense of responsibility for those who are marginalized. In short, they learn to become empathetic and caring citizens of the world.

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