

TEACHING CLASSICAL LANGUAGES

AN ONLINE JOURNAL OF THE CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION
OF THE MIDDLE WEST AND SOUTH

FEATURES

Student-Created Editions of Latin Texts

Thomas Hendrickson

Anna Pisarello

ARTICLES

Voices from Below: A Multivocal Approach to Teaching Petronius' *Satyrica*

Rhodora G. Vennarucci and Joy Reeber

Teaching Outside the Box of Classical Languages: A Diverse Curriculum for Diverse Learners

Nathalie Roy

The Polis Method: Towards an Integrative and Dynamic Language Teaching Method

Robert Z. Cortes and Christophe Rico

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TEACHING CLASSICAL LANGUAGES MISSION STATEMENT

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. 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.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to issue 13.1 of Teaching Classical Languages.

This issue's feature story honors the 2022 Winner of the Ladislaus Bolchazy Pedagogy Book Award, *The Passion of Perpetua*. The commentary was written by students at the Stanford Online High School, under the guidance of their teachers, Thomas Hendrickson and Anna Pisarello. We have invited Tom and Anna to share their method and perspectives in this feature story for TCL.

Further, in this issue we offer three articles that argue for making Greek and Latin classrooms more inclusive, whether it be by representing more female voices to students (Vennarucci and Reeber), by using experiential and project-based learning to introduce ancient STEM (Roy), or by immersing students in ancient Greek (Cortes and Rico).

With this issue we also welcome new Editorial Assistant Katie Alfullis-Rayburn to TCL. Katie also works with CAMWS Secretary-Treasurer T. Davina McClain as the Administrative Assistant for CAMWS, in the home office in Natchitoches, Louisiana. Katie's background in professional and technical writing, as well as her Master's in TESOL, make her an excellent fit for this position, and we are lucky to have her with us.

Teaching Outside the Box of Classical Languages: A Diverse Curriculum for Diverse Learners

Nathalie Roy
Glasgow Middle School

ABSTRACT

The author argues that a more diverse definition of classics leads to a more diverse population of classics students. In addition to classes that focus on language acquisition, the field of classics should include courses that center mythology, history, civilization, and material culture. These classes allow for creative pedagogy such as STEM and maker challenges that attract students interested in those areas of classical studies. The author details the curricula of two courses she has developed, Roman Technology and Myth Makers, which have increased the diversity of her classics program, brought awareness to other areas of classical studies, and earned grant money for the program.

KEYWORDS

diversity, material culture, STEM, STEAM, maker movement, mythology

When my previous school (a small, elite, private school) decided to phase out its Latin program and transition me (one of its Latin teachers) into the role of academic technology coordinator, I decided to leave that position¹. I took a job as a Latin teacher at a public middle school in the same city. The Latin program there was in decline with only ten students enrolled. Since the previous Latin teacher had left two years before, the remaining students had been working on an online Latin program. The administration could not find a teacher willing to relocate to Baton Rouge, LA.

¹ Thanks to the editors of *Teaching Classical Languages* for their help in bringing this article to fruition. I appreciate their careful suggestions for edits, but most of all, their open minds toward an article that is about teaching outside the box of classical languages, the regular theme of this publication.

East Baton Rouge Parish is the second-largest public school district in the state, serving over 40,000 students, 77% of whom are economically disadvantaged, and 89% of whom are students of color. (Louisiana Believes, Row 24) When I began the Latin position, I was tasked with continuing the Latin program (an elective option for gifted students), and also, with developing and teaching elective classes which could be taken by all students, regardless of the academic program they were enrolled in. There was a particular interest in anything STEM-related because of the national push to teach classes that lead to interest in and preparation for industry careers such as engineering, cybersecurity, coding, and drone piloting. (STEM is an educational acronym that stands for science, technology, engineering, and math. In secondary education, the subject focuses more on the engineering design process rather than instruction in the subjects that make up the acronym.) Because I had taught an upper-level Latin class focused on STEM authors, called Roman Technology, at my previous school, I was able to adapt the course for non-Latin learners easily. (Roy 1) This course and another I developed for this purpose, called Myth Makers, have become the most popular electives at the school. The best thing about them is their diversity.

In this article, I talk about two types of diversity: the first is diversity of curriculum, and the second is diversity of student population. I argue that the first can lead to the second. First, it's important to understand the demographics of my school: in 2018, the student population was 15% white and 85% students of color

(the largest group of which was Black students at 62%). Despite white students being the minority at the school, they comprise 40% of students in the Latin classes. Why don't students of color take Latin? There are two reasons for this lack of diversity: one is an exclusionary practice by the district, but the other is choice. I briefly explain both of these reasons because I don't think that my district is unique. Perhaps readers will see their own districts echoed here.

Over half the students at my school and many more in the wider district are excluded from studying a world language at their middle schools due to low standardized test scores in English language arts. These scores are carefully tracked from year to year, and if they dip below a certain designated benchmark, those students are enrolled in double ELA (English language arts) classes. At most middle schools in my district, students in this situation have a more rigid daily school schedule that focuses on core subjects. For example, on an A/B day rotation of daily classes, on day A of the rotation, students take ELA, math, science, and physical education. On day B of the rotation, they take ELA, math, social studies, and one choice of elective. To compare, a student in a gifted program would only take one ELA class and one math class on the same A/B day schedule. World Language is not an option amongst the lower-scoring population of students; thus, a whole segment of my school's and district's population of middle school students is exposed to the classical world only once in their Kindergarten to 12th grade school experience. In most social studies classrooms across the United States, one unit on

ancient Greece and Rome is taught in 6th Grade. In some states, including Louisiana, this unit is now taught in 4th grade.

Unfortunately, students with low standardized test scores are overwhelmingly economically disadvantaged and classified as students of color. Taking Latin (or any world language) is not an option for these students. Latin is not just far from their minds; it is not allowed to be on their radar.

In addition to students who are excluded from taking Latin are those who see Latin as an undesirable choice. For example, a student named J. is Black and enrolled in both Roman Technology and Myth Makers, but not Latin. As class was ending one day, I learned why he wasn't taking Latin. Since he was enrolled in both elective courses, which I teach, I surmised that he enjoyed learning about the ancient classical world, so I was curious about why he wasn't in my Latin class. When I asked him why, he told me the following story, "Well, I live in an area of Baton Rouge where there are a lot of Hispanic people, and I figured that learning to speak Spanish would be a good way to get to know my neighbors. Plus, I want to become a doctor one day, and if I'm going to be treating immigrants from Central and South America, a growing population in our city, knowing Spanish will be critical." His practical answer did not surprise me. Students list it as the reason for not taking Latin frequently; students want to study languages that are immediately useful outside the classroom in the diverse communities where they live and will eventually work.

However, lucky for classicists, among many of the students mentioned above, those excluded from taking Latin or those who have chosen not to take it, there is an intense interest in classical mythology and civilization gained from reading books by Rick Riordan and George O'Connor, playing video games like *Rome: Total War*, and watching movies like *Wonder Woman* or a Netflix anime series like *Blood of Zeus*. Teenagers want to engage more deeply with the classical world they have learned about through popular culture, but not through the study of its languages. Thus, I set out to create elective courses that meet that need. As I designed these courses to diversify the definition of classics, it became evident that these classes would also allow for much more diversity in the population of students who chose to study classics. Students at my school now have two options.

In the Roman Technology class, students recreate the products and processes of ancient Roman daily life through experimental archaeology and hands-on STEM labs. We cover many expected topics, such as aqueducts, concrete, catapults, and bread ovens, but also some unexpected ones, such as hairstyling, weaving, and mosaics.

To give some examples of the Roman Technology class curriculum, here are a couple of examples with greater detail. The catapult challenge is a favorite among students. Since weapons, even replicas, are not allowed on our campus, the curriculum focuses on mini-models and the concepts that made Roman catapults so effective. The unit starts with a short lecture on the history and development of

catapults in the Mediterranean world, focusing on material remains such as catapult shot at Masada and images of catapults on Trajan's Column. Throughout the lecture, students read short articles and watch videos of replicas in action. They read a passage by Jewish historian Josephus on the damaging effects of catapults on those being attacked (in translation from the original ancient Greek of *The Jewish Wars*, III.7.23). The students also read selections in translation from Vitruvius' Book X of *De Architectura* about the weight, size, and aerodynamic qualities of different projectiles and the construction of a scorpion (Vitruvius himself was a scorpion operator in the Roman army of the 1st century BCE).

Next, the students learned to build three mini-models out of simple materials, such as wooden tongue depressors, rubber bands, and bottle caps.



Ryan tests his catapult (Photo Credit: Author)

After each build, they tested their catapult's performance in three challenges: 1. Distance — the students shot their catapults as far as possible, measured, and recorded data with each different projectile (cotton ball, ping pong ball, and pencil eraser). 2. Accuracy — the students shot each projectile into a bowl and recorded data, and 3. Wall — the students shot projectiles at a wall of plastic cups and recorded how many shots they fired to knock it down. In each of the challenges, there was a variable and a constant for the students to take note of. In the next step of the unit, students used the information they learned in these initial challenges to design and construct their own catapult, constrained by the supplies they were given. Students whose catapults performed best were asked to model their shots and explain why theirs worked so well. Likewise, students whose models flopped had to reflect on why they failed and were allowed to tweak their models for better performance and try again. Surely, the Romans worked in the same way. (Free access to this unit can be found in the Resources section below.)

This next example from the curriculum is a more collaborative one. In this unit, the final product was a permanent twenty-foot analemmatic mosaic sundial on our school's campus. The students began the unit by learning about the science behind a variety of sundials from antiquity including the *horologium Augusti*. The students read (again, in translation) about the analemma explained in Vitruvius' Book IX. An analemma is a visual representation from the vantage point of the earth depicting the path of the sun through the sky as it changes through the seasons

– it looks similar to an infinity symbol. On an analemmatic sundial, the shadow of the viewer becomes the gnomon or indicator of the time. The students used math skills to orient to true north, reviewed and plotted x/y coordinates to place hourly markers on the dial, and practiced using carpentry measuring tapes.

Once the students had mapped out and plotted the sundial, the next step in the process was learning to design and lay mosaics. Having watched videos of modern mosaic artists using this ancient technology, the students cut stone using hardie wedges and hammers, weighed and estimated stone, designed simple mosaics, laid them in mortar, and grouted the stone.



Students cut marble tesserae using mosaic hammers and hardie wedges (Photo Credit: Author)



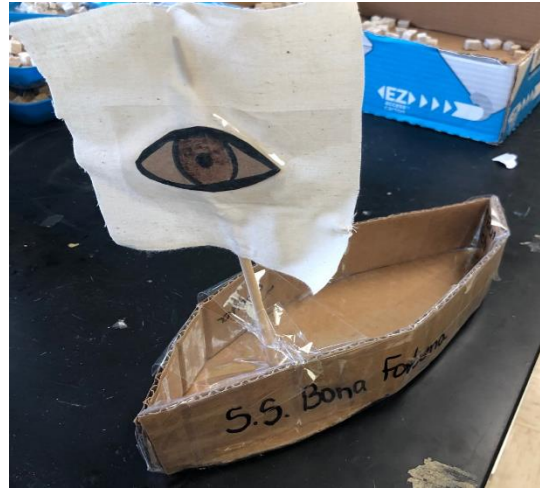
A'Quincy shows off the mosaic he designed and set in mortar (Photo Credit: Author)

Each student was responsible either for a number on the dial or a monthly marker on the gnomon slab. It took a huge amount of collaboration, creative thinking, and engineering to bring this project to fruition, but the students finished it, it works, and it now stands as a testament to the ingenuity of ancient people and the students.



Students demonstrate the finished analemmatic sundial they built in Roman Technology class (Photo Credit: Author)

In the Myth Makers class, the focus is not so much on STEM but on maker education, a cultural movement that encourages students to make things, or tinker with many kinds of materials, in the service of humanity. For example, in a unit dedicated to Jason and the Argonauts, the students listened to the story of the ship *Argo* and then attempted to design and build a boat out of cardboard that would win a race powered solely by their breath.



1. A cardboard boat made by a student for the Argo Challenge (Photo credit: Author)

It was a fun and educational challenge that involved learning a lot about how ancient boats worked. After learning about ancient Mediterranean warp-weighted looms in a unit on Athena and Arachne, the students learned to weave on simple cardboard looms to create a small piece of cloth of their own design.



2. A student learns to weave on a cardboard loom (Photo Credit: Author)

These two courses, developed over the past six years, have become the most popular elective classes at the school. Why? First, kids, especially teenagers, enjoy hands-on experiences which are, unfortunately, not the norm in most schools. In most core classes (math, science, language arts, and social studies), teachers are under pressure to cover the designated curriculum and prepare students for state standardized testing. There is little time for work not related to writing and reading in the subject area. In fact, students often report that the hands-on STEM lessons done in Roman Technology class help them put the math and science skills they learn in those classes to use. They feel “smart” in both classes because they are able to make connections and then proudly announce these cross-curricular connections to their core teachers.

In addition, the hands-on aspect of these classes appeals to learners who do not have strong traditional literary skills. During the first week of teaching Roman Technology a few years ago, D., a Black 6th grader, approached after class one day and said he would be dropping the class because he “was not good at reading and writing.” When promised that he would receive help and accommodations, he stayed. During the year, I noticed that he had innate mechanical knowledge about how things worked — he won the water screw challenge in the hydraulics unit because he was not afraid to experiment, tweak, and then re-experiment with materials. At the end of the school year, he won the Award of Excellence in the class. In fact, D. loved the class so much, he enrolled in it again in 8th grade. His

special education teacher praised the class as being a confidence booster for him. Would a Latin class, so closely focused on language acquisition and literacy, have served this child as well? Perhaps not.

Second, since STEM and STEAM methodology (the engineering design process) focuses heavily on collaboration and cooperation, students in these classes learn and work on projects with students from different programs (gifted, traditional, and special education), different socio-economic groups, and different ethnic groups. Due to concerns about adequate supervision, adequate instructional time, and bullying, many schools have moved away from recess where students have opportunities to socialize. Classes that build in time for students to work together on a common goal help to fill the recess void. In these classes, students make friends and forge relationships that help them build resilience, comfort, and confidence in a school setting.

Last, the focus on material culture, particularly in the Roman Technology class, allows students a diverse view of the classical world not often seen in its literature. Since most classical writers were wealthy and well-resourced, students reading only classical literature do not often hear about the everyday people who made up the classical world. Learning about and recreating the work of skilled craftspeople, such as stone cutters, bread bakers, potters, and hairstylists, in a hands-on way helps to elevate the work and lives of an often-ignored segment of ancient people. It also gives students a window into their lives.

Most importantly, these diverse curricula seem to have sparked an interest from a more diverse segment of my school's population. The demographics of these classes are very different from those of the Latin classes. During the 2020-21 school year (during the first iteration of this article), the Roman Technology classes had the following demographics: 41% Asian, 31% Black, and 7% Hispanic. The white student population was 21%, nearly half of my Latin class percentage of 40%. Overall, in three sections of Roman Technology, 79% were students of color. 84% of my school's population are students of color; thus, my classes lag that average by only 5%. These numbers certainly seem like a win for diversity in classics. This year's numbers are just in, and they are very encouraging: 28% Black (higher than the overall percentage at the school of 25%), 27% Asian, 12% Hispanic, and 33% White (4% lower than the overall percentage at the school).

Even though these curricula may seem novel, the idea of broadening the definition and scope of classics is not an original one. In fact, it has been a trending topic of discussion amongst classicists lately. Recently, Princeton University made news headlines by changing the undergraduate requirements of its classics program to allow for a more flexible route to a degree in classics. In an article defending this change, Dr. Max Leo Goldman and Dr. Rebecca Futo Kennedy, both of Denison University, argued that,

The real story is that classics departments and programs in the United States have been undergoing a steady transformation for many years, often changing the focus of our curricula and scholarship to incorporate the

ancient Greco-Roman world more broadly, to expand the varieties of evidence and methodologies, and to emphasize modern receptions...although we have traditionally shared our annual conference with the Archeological Institute of America, our field has long disproportionately emphasized the ancient Greek and Latin languages. Graduate departments require even bio-archaeologists, who may never use them and need other specialized training, to master both ancient Greek and Latin before they can enter a Ph.D. program. As a result, many undergraduate programs have needed to focus almost exclusively on teaching Greek and Latin languages in order to give their students hope of ever entering the profession, even when this is out of step with their campus needs. (Goldman and Futo Kennedy)

They go on to argue that broadening the scope of classics is good for the field at the university level.

And so, some readers may be asking what schools can do to diversify classics programs. Adding STEM, STEAM, or maker components to already-existing Latin classes is easier than one might think. Having done this for six years, I've written articles about my experience and offer workshops to help teachers envision the necessary methodology (see resources below). Some teachers are unsure of STEM because they do not have the background in those subject areas to feel comfortable teaching them, but remember, the program here at Glasgow Middle can serve as an example. It can be done. One of the most helpful aspects of teaching STEM is the plethora of resources available to STEM teachers. Affordable online learning experiences are available as are grants for classroom projects. Industry supports teachers of the next STEM professionals. STEM classes at Glasgow Middle are sponsored by a local water conservation company which only

asks that students learn about the preservation of the aquifer that supplies our drinking water. This lesson is an easy connection to Roman aqueducts so it's no problem at all. For this small lesson, the company gives Roman Technology classes a renewing grant of \$2500 per year. Just last year, the Roman Technology classes partnered with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to build a Roman road to serve as a sidewalk through the school's campus. The professor who assisted with the project found all the funding for it through coordinating companies in the city. Resources abound in STEM industries as do connections to ancient Roman STEM.

Readers seeking to diversify the student population of their classics program but can't imagine making the jump to STEM should consider developing and offering another elective class: the Mythology of Comic Books, Film Theory with Classical Movies, Roman History, etc. Anything that allows diverse students to interact with the classical world will pique their interest. Many schools, especially at the middle school level, are looking for innovative elective courses to offer their students.

Finally, do classical language teachers expect their students to become teachers of those languages? I know that my personal answer is no. In fact, over the course of a decades-long career, I can think of only one student who graduated and became a Latin teacher. The overwhelming majority of my students have fond memories of Latin class, but they are not actively using the language itself in their

careers nor do they read Latin for pleasure in their free time. For my school, a more diverse curriculum that centers material culture, archaeology, history, civilization, art, STEM, reception, mythology, and other connections to the classical world, serves a more diverse population of learners. Thinking outside the box of classical languages has been an adventure, but it has helped diversify the classics program at my school.

RESOURCES

[A Lesson on Catapults](#)

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