

Teaching notes on 1.03 Classical Culture in Modern Times

Slide 1

The learning objective: To understand Ancient Greek and Roman influences in our lives today. Just as in the previous two lessons we've been looking at how Latin and Ancient Greek appear in the English language, we're going to have a look in this lesson at elements of ancient culture that have persisted into modern times. You may be surprised!

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A starter activity to recap last session's activity of associating English words with their Greek roots.



Students can use the picture clues (which appear on mouse-click) to identify the words with Greek roots. They are:

Tele (far away) – television, telephone, telescope

Micro (small) – microphone, microscope, microbe

Tri (three) – triangle, triplets, tripod

As an extension, students can try to explain the connection between the root and the English word. For example, "A microscope helps us to look at very small things." As a further extension, they can also think of more words with these three roots.

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In this lesson, we're going to visit some familiar places to look for Roman and Greek connections. The children may be able to identify or have a good guess at the connections, but some may be entirely new to them. Our first visit is to school, where we may find...

A calendar/dates written on the board or in books The modern Western calendar is based on the Roman system and uses Roman names:

| <i>Month</i> | <i>Named after</i> |
|--------------|---|
| January | Ianus, or Janus, god of doorways (as we exit one year and enter another) |
| February | Februa, a Roman ceremony of purification held at this time |
| March | Mars, god of war |
| April | (1) possibly from 'aperire', to open as this is a time when buds open up (2) possibly Aphrodite, goddess of love whose festival was held in this month |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| May | Maia, goddess of growth signaling growth in nature at this time |
| June | Juno, queen of the Gods |
| July | Julius Caesar, ruler of Rome |
| August | Caesar Augustus, ruler of Rome |
| September | 'septem' (seven) as this was the seventh month in the Roman calendar |
| October | 'octo' (eight) as this was the eighth month in the Roman calendar |
| November | 'novem' (nine) as this was the ninth month in the Roman calendar |
| December | 'decem' (ten) as this was the tenth month in the Roman calendar |

The word 'calendar' also comes from Latin. The calends (or 'kalendae' in Latin) is the first day of every month.

A pen Pens are essentially hollow tubes that hold and dispense ink. The first pens created were made from naturally-occurring hollow tubes such as reeds and feathers. The Latin for 'feather' is 'penna', from where we get the modern word 'pen'.

The Ampersand (&) We all recognise that '&' is a way of writing 'and', but it is actually a stylised form of writing the letters E and T together. 'Et' in Latin means 'and'.

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Our next visit is to the supermarket, a relatively modern invention, but there are classical influences lurking in the aisles.

Magnum ice cream 'Magnum' is Latin for 'big'. Why do you think the manufacturers chose this name for their product?

Felix cat food 'Felix' is Latin for lucky. The Latin for cat is 'feles' (from which we get the word 'feline'), which is very similar to 'felix', meaning 'lucky'. A linguistic and a cultural connection between cats and luck existed in Roman times and persists to this day. We talk of cats having nine lives (i.e. they are lucky to get out of scrapes that would kill other animals) and we also have a tradition of black cats representing luck.

Pound sign Just like the '&' is a stylized 'et', the £ sign is a stylized capital letter 'L'. This is because it stands for 'libra pondo'. 'Libra' means 'weighing scales' and 'pondo' means 'weight' as initially currencies were based on weights of precious metals such as silver (even today 'pound' is both a measure of money and of weight). 'Libra' is also related to Italy's pre-Euro currency, the lira. The star sign Libra is represented by weighing scales.

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Literature and film are both fertile hunting grounds for classical influence.

Batman (and all superheroes in general) Greek myth is a template for many modern superheroes. They may possess superhuman strength (Heracles/ The Hulk), be tasked with protecting weaker humans against evil (Theseus/Batman), have divine parentage (Perseus/Wonder Woman), have a fatal weakness (Achilles/Superman), have control over the elements (Poseidon/Aquaman). The parallels go on and on.

The Harry Potter universe Where to start on this one?! For starters, Hogwarts has a Latin motto (we'll see this later in the exercise sheet). Many of the spells feature Latin or Latin-derived words. And JK Rowling has given many of her characters names that have relevance in Latin, for example:

Albus Dumbledore: 'Albus' means 'light' or 'white' (like the albumen of an egg), showing that Dumbledore is very much on the light side of magic.

Severus Snape: 'Severus' means 'harsh' or 'severe'.

Remus Lupin: 'Lupus' means 'wolf' and the mythological figure Remus was brother of the founder of Rome and brought up by a wolf.

Bellatrix Lestrange: 'Bellatrix' means 'female warrior'.

Minerva McGonagall: Minerva was the Roman equivalent of Athena, goddess of wisdom and battle strategy.

Draco Malfoy: 'Draco' means 'dragon' and anything with 'mal' in it has something to do with evil ('malus' means 'bad').

Percy Jackson: These books (and subsequent films) take inspiration from Greek mythology transplanting the hero to a modern setting. Thus Perseus becomes Percy.

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Even on an everyday journey around town, we can see the Roman and Greek legacy.

Roman numerals The Romans used a different number notation to the Arabic-derived system we use today. However, if we look closely on clocks and inscriptions (and sometimes at the end of television programmes), we can see Roman numerals used, often to represent year dates. The seven 'building blocks' are I(1), V(5), X(10), L(50), C(100), D(500) and M(1000) Roman numerals are covered more extensively later on in the Maximum Classics course.

Hermes delivery Hermes was the Greek god who acted as messenger between the gods, hence a great name for a delivery company. He was also the patron god of travellers and thieves (maybe Hermes delivery shouldn't make too much of that association).

Stadium A 'stadion' was an Ancient Greek measurement of distance (equivalent to roughly 180m) and was based on the circumference of a competitive arena or what we today call the stadium. The shape of many modern stadia also reflects the amphitheatres and arenas of the ancient world. The word 'arena' comes from the Latin for sand ('harena') which was strewn across the amphitheatre floor to soak up blood, sweat and general gore.



The students now have the opportunity to look at some Latin mottoes used today by various modern organisations and, using their skills as word detectives, use clues to match the Latin up to the correct English translation.

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The plenary which takes the form of a set of questions:

Question 1 What two letters make up the '&' sign? [E and T] What word does this make in Latin and what does it mean in English? ['et' which means 'and']

Question 2 Which Greek god gives his name to a parcel delivery company? [Hermes] Why? [Because he was the Greek messenger god]

Question 3 Which school's Latin motto translates as, "A sleeping dragon should never be tickled"? [Hogwarts]