

# CLASSICS NEWSLETTER

*This is the newsletter for anything to do with ancient Mediterranean cultures, including Greece, Rome, Egypt and the Persian empire.*

## Io Saturnalia!

As Christmas draws near, so does **Saturnalia** - the Ancient Roman celebration of the shortest day and longest night of the year. The holiday was initially intended to honour Saturn, the Roman God of sowing and planting. However, by the final years of the Roman Empire Saturnalia was just seen as an occasion for revelry with its religious origins largely forgotten. Our cover picture, a fresco wall painting from a pub in Pompeii, shows that some customs never change - playing board games was a popular activity during Saturnalia, as it still is among families during the festive period nowadays. Interestingly, Saturnalia also featured curious inversions of social norms - masters would serve slaves, dressing them in finery and allowing them to have a hint of freedom. The holiday served as a kind of safety valve, giving slaves an occasion to look forward to every year and reducing the risk of rebellion. How much Saturnalia influenced Christmas is a matter of debate - some evidence exists that Christianity gradually incorporated a number of Roman holidays that were held around mid-winter in order to ease the Empire's conversion from a pagan society to a Christian one. Gift giving, singing and a holiday dinner were all things that the Romans engaged in during their own celebrations. So make sure to thank the Roman Empire for your presents this Christmas!

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Classical mythology is old news... so why do we still care?
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- Memes, Jokes & Puzzles!
- Competitions to enter!

### Did you know...?

Wax taper candles called *cerei* were common gifts during Saturnalia, to signify light returning after the solstice.

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# Classical mythology is old news... so why do we still care?

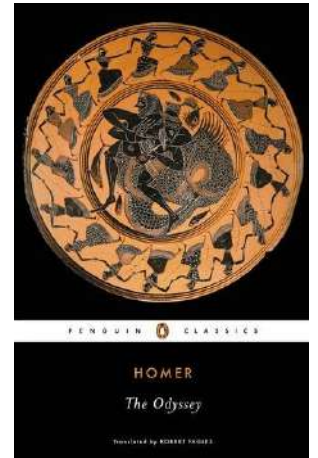
For at least as long as there's been civilisation, there have been stories. From the oral tradition of Australia's Aboriginal peoples that are thought to be some of the oldest accurate historical accounts that exist, to ancient cave paintings created from the blood of the dead, humans have been going to great lengths to pass on the narratives that we think are important since we've had the wherewithal to do so. Psychologically, storytelling is vital as a way that human beings learn from their experiences, and is so important that there is an entire field of study dedicated to it - narrative psychology. This theorises that things learnt from stories are learnt differently to other things; for instance, knowing not to eat a certain type of berry and hearing a story where someone ate it and died are two different types of knowledge, and it's not hard to see the evolutionary advantage to this ability to learn from the experience of others without having to experience it yourself. As well as this basic survival advantage, stories have also been used to impart a moral message, and by teaching these social norms, expectations, and values, they have played a large part in forming a society's culture and beliefs.

The Ancient Greeks and Romans were no exception to this human constant. Many of the world's most famous stories can be traced back to these cultures - in fact, the word 'myth' itself comes from the Greek 'mythos', meaning 'tale' or 'narrative'. Tales of gods, heroes, kings, creatures, prophesied births, and inevitable deaths were all given to children as moral lessons and written down for posterity by Ancient Greeks and Romans as a matter of course, and they formed an important part of their societies and cultures. However, they didn't die with Ancient Rome. Even today, they still fascinate us. Just look at the success of Rick Riordan's 'Percy Jackson and the Olympians' series, or Madeline Miller's 'Circe', named after the witch from whose perspective it tells the stories of various myths. New classical mythology inspired books, TV shows, films, and artworks are created all the time, and it's not because this is an unpopular theme. It cannot be denied that we, as a society, have something of an obsession with Greek and Roman mythology. But with all the new modern stories, issues, and perspectives available to us, why is it that we keep coming back to myths that are thought to have their origins in the 18th century BC - almost 4000 years ago?



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Some might argue that the only reason for the popularity of classical mythology is the sometimes pretentious and exclusive atmosphere that can sometimes surround the study of these texts and stories, and it's true that the fact that classical culture has been so heavily studied in a world where education was, for a long time, reserved for the rich and privileged has undoubtedly led to some degree of elitism surrounding the field of Classics. However, the fact remains that classical mythology has an audience outside of the world of Eton alumni and Oxbridge graduates, and is enjoyed by many different people in many different forms. Something about the tales of classical mythology keeps drawing us in, be that in the form of *The Odyssey* in the original Ancient Greek, or of Disney's adaptation of *Hercules*.



The truth is, these stories have most likely survived, not because they come from dull texts read by dull professors in dull universities, but because they are *interesting*. Throughout mythology, heroes go on epic journeys where they fight monsters, fall in love, and get rescued and betrayed by gods and goddesses, the underdog uses logic and wit to overcome the fearsome creature, and magic, madness, and murder abound. In their popular forms, they may have become somewhat sanitised over time (for example, Disney missed out the part where Hercules went mad and killed his first wife and their two children), but the fundamental elements undoubtedly hold a consistent appeal. The core ideas of bravery, respect, determination, love, and heroism are all things we still want to hear and teach about, and if we can do that in the context of a sea voyage and a dramatic fight to the death, all the better.



Some people, if you were to ask them why we still enjoy classical mythology, might tell you something about how they are fundamental and foundational stories, or about how they speak to the very truth of human nature. But maybe it's just that the people who wrote the stories and told and retold the myths and fables were human too. And while society might have changed significantly, we as a species haven't changed that much. We like stories with a decent (but flawed) protagonist who can be relied upon to get into as much trouble as possible before the story's over, a crisis that has to be overcome, and plenty of action, romance, and excitement.

And if it happens to teach you something along the way...well, that can only be a bonus.

Chloe Hadland 13SW

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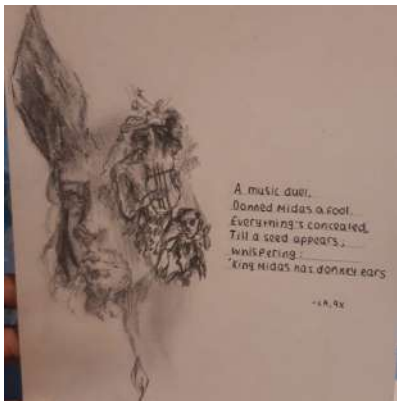
# Ovid in the West Midlands - Year 9 Mythology Competition



Nikita 9W



Isha 9Y



Lamis 9X



Finalist: Aliza R 9Z: model of the myth of King Midas



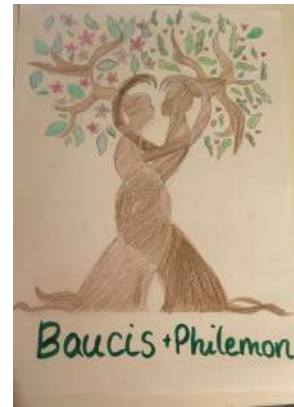
Finalist: Amina 9Z: video of the myth of Baucis & Philemon

Year 9 were busy this term making creative interpretations of myths as part of the Ovid in the West Midlands Mythology Competition, hosted by the University of Birmingham. Drs Jones & Kerr had a particularly fraught half term holiday, trying to whittle over 100 absolutely OUTSTANDING mythological entries down to a mere 3 to submit to the national competition.

Over fifteen students presented their myth in baked form, with many making shimmering cakes to symbolise the point at which King Midas tries to eat food and his Touch makes it turn to Gold. But Ayesha & Anna (9Z) used their cakes as actors in a storyboard retelling, and Safiya (9Z) actually painted a storyboard onto a set of fairy cakes, with each cake being a different panel in the story.

There were **ten storyboards** in non-cake form, **nine models** - including a pop-up diorama by Rinsola, Alicia, Vera & Georgina (9Y), a paper model representing the moment that Baucis & Philemon turn into trees by Evelina (9V) and a miniature model set design for a hypothetical performance of a mythological play by Eleanor (9Z), **six videos**, ranging from live action to animation to stop motion (Issy, Rem & Emma in 9W used Lego, whereas Zainab in 9X did a flick book), and over thirty detailed **drawings and paintings**. Those of a literary bent were well represented, with over **ten poems** and a number of **haikus**, an **epistolary account** from Adiba (9W) and even a **nursery rhyme** from Jasleen (9W)! Mahera (9W) submitted a **musical composition** and Eva (9Z) made a short point-and-click **computer game**.

We wish we could name and display every entry! Overall there were six winners in the various categories per form; of these, three students have been selected to go forward to the national final which will be held in the New Year. Stay tuned for further updates!



Haneen 9Y



Naomi 9X



Ysabella 9V

King and Queen  
Priest and Priestess  
Woman and Man  
Hand in Hand  
Branch in Branch  
Tree by Tree  
Alive in nature  
At last they're free

Finalist: Nawal 9V: poem about Baucis & Philemon (this is the final stanza)

# Latin @ CHG - Autumn Term Round Up

There have been lots of new starts this term. Dr Jones has joined the department, bringing with her knowledge of Egyptian hieroglyphs, Ovid's poetry and the best ever white choc chip cookies. A new cohort of Year 7s have been inducted into the cult of Caecilius (you all know the password), the new Year 10 GCSE students have travelled to Roman Britain and ancient Egypt (not literally) to meet a host of new - and familiar (!) - characters in Cambridge Latin Book 2, and the Year 11s have started the new GCSE Literature unit on Superstition and Magic.



The new Year 12 A Level students, meanwhile, have been channeling their inner nursery-school-pupil and have made play-dough models of a simile in Virgil's Aeneid, in which the heroic warrior Turnus is compared to a vicious lion fighting off hunters in the North African city of Carthage. I'm sure you can see the resemblance here!

## Anagrams:

tigf Giginv

Ceil sots

Erl very

Lastraiuan

Cris facies

Ber decem

Absque tn

Alfi vest

Dem fore

Aili grails

Ennis ivor

S	T	I	R	O	A	G	L	S	G	A	G	L	H
N	S	O	T	I	G	S	P	C	I	M	S	I	S
V	N	S	N	U	I	E	T	S	P	I	H	I	O
K	N	O	L	S	C	T	I	I	V	G	E	S	L
C	R	L	R	N	U	N	B	N	N	I	N	S	I
K	G	I	I	L	S	I	G	Y	I	E	G	Y	N
G	I	R	T	A	I	R	R	T	L	I	G	N	V
C	P	E	A	G	S	S	I	E	R	E	C	T	I
I	O	S	A	T	U	R	N	A	L	I	A	H	C
L	I	S	G	A	G	G	I	F	T	S	N	E	T
S	I	G	I	L	L	A	R	I	A	L	I	S	U
S	R	T	A	L	I	I	G	U	I	A	L	I	S
O	S	I	I	R	N	P	C	A	A	O	P	S	I
I	S	B	G	N	I	L	B	M	A	G	A	I	R

## Wordsearch:

See if you can find how these words are relevant to Saturnalia!

PRINCEPS

CEREI

GAG GIFTS

GAMBLING

OPS

SOL INVICTUS

IO SATURNALIA

SIGILLARIA

KRONIA

SYNTHESIS

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## Classics in the News...

### "Astounding" Roman statues unearthed at Norman church ruins on route of HS2:

"Exceptionally well preserved" Roman statues of a man, woman and child were uncovered by archaeologists beneath the ruins of a Norman church last month. Experts believe that the location was a Roman burial ground long before the church was built, having already unearthed around 3000 bodies. A hexagonal glass jug was also discovered that is thought to be more than 1000 years old. The only known comparable vessel is on display in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

You can read more about the discovery here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/oct/29/astounding-roman-statues-unearthed-at-norman-church-ruins-on-route-of-hs2>



### Archaeology breakthrough as "important" Roman-era statues of Aphrodite and Dionysus found:



Over in the ancient city of Aizanoi in western Turkey, archaeologists have discovered the limestone heads of Aphrodite and Dionysus buried in a creek bed. It's unknown how the statues' heads became separated from their bodies. Archaeologist Gokhan Coskun said "the findings suggest that there may have been a sculpture workshop in the region." The city is home to many Roman-era ruins, including a bathhouse, Zeus temple and macellum (indoor market.)

You can read more about the discovery here:

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/science/1518619/archaeology-breakthrough-roman-era-statue-aphrodite-dionysus-turkey-aizanoi>

### Roman aqueduct found under an Armenian melon field:

Archaeologists uncovered the foundation stones from an incomplete aqueduct intended to funnel water to the ancient Armenian city of Artaxacata. The original water source is not known, but its length is calculated to have been around 31 kilometres. Rome controlled the city for just three years before retreating west in the face of a local uprising in AD 117, hence the unfinished aqueduct.

You can read more about the discovery here:

<https://www.rferl.org/a/easternmost-roman-aqueduct-uncovered-armenia/31590655.html>



# Memes!

## Did you know?

People in ancient Rome used to buy vials of their favourite gladiator's sweat to wear as perfume...



Meme sent in by Jude Shayeb 12SW

#1908

(credit to Anon)

When you have a hard time explaining to others how the language you study has its own fandom

latin-student-problems.tumblr.com

When your Starbucks cup says Happy Holidays instead of Io Saturnalia



if you were a twin in ancient rome they would name the firstborn and then name the secondborn after the firstborn except

if your older twin's name was geminus, your name would be anti-geminus

that is the equivalent of naming your children steve and not steve

He protec



He attac



but most importantly

He dominum frustra custodiebat



JOKE

"Hey, do you have a quid on you?"

"A what?"

# Classics Competitions

## The Classical Association 'Heroes'

### Creative Writing Competition

The Classical Association has launched a nationwide Creative Writing competition for writers and classicists of all ages, inspired by the books on mythology by Stephen Fry - the Honorary President of the CA. As well as prize money and signed books, there is also the unique opportunity for one exceptional writer to have their story read and recorded by Stephen himself! This audio recording will be made available on the CA website, podcast and social media.

#### Senior Competition (aged 12-18)

### HEROES

Write a piece of creative prose of no more than 1500 words using the theme 'Heroes' as your stimulus. You should draw inspiration from the ancient world, but you do not have to set your story in ancient times. You can choose any title for your piece.

Entries will be judged on originality, interpretation of the theme 'Heroes', use of language, plot, and characterisation. Submissions will be read anonymously by the Classical Association Judging Panel. A shortlist will be drawn up and then three winners selected to win the following prizes:

#### Prizes

1st Prize: £200, certificate and signed book  
2nd Prize: £150, certificate and signed book  
3rd Prize: £100, certificate and signed book  
Up to five highly commended certificates will also be handed out to shortlisted entrants.

The Classical Association  
Creative Writing Competition

Overall Winning Story Read By CA Hon. President  
**Stephen Fry**

£1275  
PRIZE FUND!

Junior: 11 and under  
1st Prize £150  
2nd Prize £100  
3rd Prize £75  
+ Signed Books

Senior: 12-18 years  
1st Prize £200  
2nd Prize £150  
3rd Prize £100  
+ Signed Books

Open: 19 and over  
1st Prize £250  
2nd Prize £150  
3rd Prize £100  
+ Signed Books

**OPEN TO ALL!**  
Write a piece of creative prose in response to the themes:  
Myths Heroes or Troy  
**FREE TO ENTER**  
Full details at [www.classicalassociation.org](http://www.classicalassociation.org)

The closing date is

**Thursday 3rd February 2022 at 6pm.**

For details on how to enter see:

<https://classicalassociation.org/competition/>

Please let Dr Kerr know if you enter!

## Lytham St Annes 2022 Presentation Competition

Who is your unsung hero from the ancient world? Tell us all about your unsung hero in 15 minutes or less and you could be in with the chance of winning a share of £550 prizemoney! You need to submit a video recording of a presentation about who your unsung hero is and why - and be prepared to give the presentation in person if you make it to the final!

Your unsung hero does not need to be a 'hero' in the 'warrior' sense but somebody, of any gender, who you think fits your definition of an 'unsung hero'. They can be named e.g. 'Hypatia', or unnamed e.g. 'the Etruscan who designed the sewage system'. For the purpose of this competition, the ancient world is defined as 'the region around the Mediterranean and the Near East between 3000 BCE and CE 476' including Ancient Egypt, the Hellenistic World and the Roman world (including Roman Britain).

We are only able to enter ONE student into the Lytham St Annes presentation competition, so please see Dr Kerr if you wish to enter. The deadline for video presentations is 6th March 2022 at 6pm.