



Ancient Greek

For American Elementary Schools

The DGL Way

— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ||

Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεά

— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ||

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε Μοῦσα

The right way to lead a city is this: Just as a good farmer naturally looks after his young plants first and the rest later, so first one must look after the youth of the city, so that they will be as good as possible. —Plato¹

¹ *Euthyphro* 2c.



Why Ancient Greek?

Detroit Greek and Latin Educational Foundation (hereafter DGL) is a public non-profit dedicated to promoting Ancient Greek language study in American elementary and secondary schools. Founded on the conviction that every student deserves access to a classical education in accord with the highest standards, DGL aims to reinvent pre-collegiate Greek language education—its materials, its techniques, its audience. (What heretofore has been only available to students of the most elite private academies should—with the advent of online learning—now be available to all.) Likewise, DGL believes that every beginning student of Latin ought to have the opportunity of adding a top score on the Advanced Placement™ Latin exam to his or her college application packet. Thus, DGL is no less dedicated to fortifying the rigor of existing Latin programs, to making sure that ambitious and bright students can reach their fullest potential. DGL believes that a return of the rigorous study of Greek and Latin will greatly improve educational outcomes. It might even stimulate a rebirth of civic virtue and political intelligence. An array of educational and social ills cry out for this effort:

- The falling levels of advanced literacy among high school, and even college, graduates ('the Harry Potter generation')
- The precipitous drop in enrollments in collegiate courses of Greek and Latin, and the attendant collapse of demand for PhD classicists
- The stupefaction of American political consciousness due to the loss of the long lens of historical perspective and knowledge
- The trampling—in to the stampede to STEM, Wall Street, and more easily marketable fields—of esteem for the arts and humanities (poetry, history, philosophy)
- The increasing vulgarization of American 'popular' culture and leisure
- The widespread loss of contact *with the virtues of civic leadership*: coherence, style, desire to rule, forcefulness, self-assurance, self-discipline, and morality²

The extent to which society as a whole can be lifted up by any single educational initiative remains, of course, an open question.³ But individual students certainly stand to gain. To young persons mature

² This catalogue of “what a ruling class needs” appears in Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 744. Fest ascribes these traits to the Prussian Junkers. Fest calls the Junkers “perhaps the only and certainly the strongest force capable of governance that Germany has produced in modern times.” Led by Count Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg (Tom Cruise!), conspirators drawn from this class engineered the unsuccessful “Valkyrie” plot: aimed to overthrow the Nazi regime starting with the assassination of Adolf Hitler on July 20, 1944. The characteristics attributed by Fest to the Junkers stand writ large across the annals of ancient Greece and Rome. The most famous example by far is that offered by the Spartan “300” led to Thermopylae by their king, Leonidas. These men (5,200 Greeks total) faced and held at a narrow pass the million-man invasion force of the Persian king Xerxes in 480 BCE (Herodotus 6. 198-233). A universe apart from such true citizens stand the criminal likes of Detroit's Kwami Kilpatrick and Bobby Furguson.

³ Plato himself (*Republic* 492b-c) was not optimistic: “When the crowd huddles together on seats in the assembly or law court or theatre, or when they convene for military purposes . . . the boos and applause of their criticism or praise (excessive in both cases) of whatever is being said or done make a terrible din, and it's not only them—the rocks and their surroundings double the noise of their approval and disapproval by echoing it. In a situation like this, how do you think a young man's heart, as they say, will be affected? *How can the education he received outside of this public arena stand up to it without being overwhelmed by criticism or praise of this kind and swept away at the mercy of the current?* Won't he end



enough to expend the effort required for completion, DGL curriculum will provide a matchless foundation in the language arts, social studies, fine arts, intellectual history, political theory, and the humanities. While for all students—even those unlikely to endure through to capture of highest prize—just one or two year's participation in DGL curricula will leave their minds forever touched by fire.

Greek the DGL Way

The DGL course bases itself upon on the rudiments of Homeric and Ionic Greek⁴ and the healing power of the ancient myths Semitic, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, and African ancient civilizations. It begins with the Greek alphabet.

A quick witted 6 year old can be taught to recite its 24 letters in forty minutes of one-on-one instruction; an average child can in that same time be familiarized enough with the letters to proceed to the next level.

The next step is the slightly more onerous one of teaching the young hand to form the Greek letters with a pencil—at which point *let the games begin*. Tongue, mind, and hand instructed; one now advances to the ears. An approach such as this, one that aggressively frontloads the sounds of Ancient Greek, must prioritize the Greek accents (see below *Teaching the Greek Accents to Children*).

The instructor recites the first half-line of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. Next, the composite units of the half-line, the dactyl /spondee (–∪∪), are marked out and explained, and the meaning of the Greek words is supplied.

– ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ / – ⁵	– ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ / – ∪
Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά	Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα
Wrath sing, Goddess	Man [to] me speak, Muse

The students are then informed that what they have just heard was composed *three thousand years ago*,

up just like them, with the same moral standards and the same habits as them?" The translation is from Robin Waterfield's excellent edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴ Loosely speaking, there are four major literary dialects of ancient Greek: Homeric, Ionic, Attic, and Koine. The first is found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Ionic is found in Herodotus' *History* (the narrative of the Persian Wars); Attic is found in "Golden Age" literature (5th and 4th century BCE); Koine is found in Polybius (the Greek historian of Rome's Middle Republic) and the New Testament. For a more precise account of the *true* dialects of Greece, as defined by ethnic grouping and regions rather than by surviving texts, see H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press: 1920), 1-4. Thus, in the diction of the *basket-case bourn aloft denizens of cloud-co-co-land* —that is to say, university professors of classics —the language of the Homeric poems is technically a *Kunstsprache*, an artificial language concocted for artistic purposes from parts Ionic and Aeolic. For R. H. Ahrens (1852), this mixture suggests that Smyrna, Homer's hometown, was originally founded by Aeolian Greeks, but was later conquered by Ionians.

⁵ The beat and musicality of Homer's dactylic hexameter is most easily grasped by singing (to the tune of *Stars and Stripes Forever*):

– ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – || ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – ∪ ∪ – –

(Be) kind to your web footed friends, for a duck may be somebody's mother.



for performance by persons who—just like the students themselves!—did not yet know how to read or write, but knew only how to sing. By repetition of the sung phrase, the rhythm of Homer's poem slowly becomes audible. Finally, introduced to the rising and falling tones of the pitch accent of Ancient Greek, the child's first major accomplishment will be the ability to utter, with near perfect pronunciation and pitch, the opening words of Odysseus' great adventure (Cf. attached audio file).⁶ Having joined in singing along, these first-day experiences will delight the heart of any child.

This first half-line of the *Odyssey* serves as the starting point for *in-action* of:

- The imperative mood of the verb
- The accusative and vocative case of nouns
- The dative of the first person personal pronoun
- The dative of interest (= "please")

Students will grasp these items not by having memorized their names but by having enacted their jobs. For as Wittgenstein famously said: *The meaning of a word is its use.*⁷

The brains of elementary-aged children are hardwired for language acquisition. They absorb the heard and spoken work like sponges. Every child loves a dramatic story with colorful and brave characters. As such, even early age children will find the acquisition of the names of heroes and gods *in the original Greek* a fun and exciting activity. They will paint pictures of the gods and heroes—of Zeus on Olympus or Odysseus tossed by the sea. They will mimic in play-acting the stirring deeds and legendary adventures of the mythic heroes of Greece—straight from the pages of Homer and Herodotus.

These experiences of ear, hand, imagination and mouth will be augmented by sights for the eye. Inside the classroom, illustrated versions of Greek myths—such as Neil Parker's illustrated version of the *Odyssey* (Candlewick Press, 2012)—will pull children into the story. Field trips abroad, to view the antiquities collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts or of the Kelsey Museum in Ann Arbor, will set before their eyes the wide worlds of modern archeology and art history. They will now stand on the edge of the gaping abyss—confronted by the problem perplexing every ancient historian: How does one separate myth from history and correlate both with the archeological record?

"Did the vase painter have a photograph of Odysseus or did he know him?" asked Johnny

Every exemplum of *enacted use* will originate from some dramatic moment in Greek literature. Bring on Herodotus' gold digging ants the size of foxes whose plunderers—the men of far distant India—make successful escape only by virtue of the speed of retreat provided to them by their young mother camel's desire to get back with maximum haste to her just recently deserted nursling!⁸ Rich in detail, humor, substance and depth—such episodes will delight every student.

⁶ The singer is an 8 year-old DGL student.

⁷ *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 43 and elsewhere.

⁸ Herodotus 3. 102-5.



Other bits of real Greek will launch enactment of additional items common to both Greek and English. From Homer's sung Greek, DGL students will journey to clear understanding of the tools of expression available to them as speakers and writers of English. Soon they will be enacting:

- The subject/predicate distinction
- The uses of the infinitive
- The uses of correlative adverbs and adjectives
- The tenses of the verb (present, future, past; perfect, future perfect, pluperfect)
- The rhetorical question
- The dramatic imprecation (i.e., tweet)
- The lonely soliloquy
- The Homeric art of "ring composition" (one of many keys to a united paragraph or composition)

Every bit of real utterance will expand to embrace the lore of the ancient world; every bit of lore will be fixed by some real utterance of Greek. The larger dramatic context will be supplied by an English transition or adapted version of the episode. This fuller text will be read out-loud by students and instructor as an exercise in the reading of English: time not spent reading or progressing toward reading—by becoming a better speaker, thinker, or writer—is time wasted.⁹ Beginning with inscribing the alphabet, some exercise of Greek (and English) writing will accompany every class session. For DGL students writing will not be an occasional chore but a daily habit.

To begin the DGL course as a first or second grader, the only prerequisite is familiarity with the English alphabet. There is no need for the child to be able to read English "at level" of any particular grade. Whether "ahead" or "behind", any and every elementary learner will profit from the DGL experience.

The orientating core of instruction will be the set of linguistic, historical, and literary concerns native to classical philology. Students will acquaint themselves with history and social life by means of contact with the surviving primary sources, both material and literary. Commitment to depth of content-knowledge characterizes DGL instruction. The instructor must know deeply in order to be able to teach deeply. For this reason all DGL instructors will be required to hold the PhD in classics or a related field, or to have at least passed the equivalent of properly administered PhD qualifying exams in Greek & Latin. In addition, all instructors will have completed specialized DGL training.

Emphasis on both *recognition* (the ability to identify *what* something is) and *reproduction* (the ability to produce that something all its proper details) aligns DGL objectives with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012) both "for languages that are not spoken (i.e. Ancient Greek or Latin)" and "for languages that are both written and spoken."¹⁰ By hearing, speaking, and writing real Greek on a daily basis, DGL students will demonstrate proficiency at the Novice-High Level not only in *writing* (productive skill) and in *reading* (interpretive skill) but also in *producing* and *interpreting*. And as the

⁹ Marilyn Jager Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 213.

¹⁰ American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Language Proficiency Guidelines (2012): PDF on web.



above clearly shows, DGL instruction accords fully with the *Standards for Classical Language Learning* prescribed by the Detroit Public Schools.¹¹

Teaching the Greek Accents to Children

The DGL approach to teaching young students the accents departs radically from the status quo. DGL instruction eschews completely that set of conceptual rules found in most elementary textbooks—rules explaining, for instance, that a circumflex accent can only appear on the second from the last syllable if that syllable is long and the final syllable of the word is short. Such rules have no place in the elementary Greek classroom. With young students it is far better to concentrate upon the raw physicality of the accents, that is to say, their sound. Thus, students should simply be alerted to the fact that the acute accent (´) marks a RISING of the pitch of one's voice; the grave accent (`) marks a FALLING of pitch; while the circumflex accent (~), because it constitutes the union of an acute and a grave over one syllable, marks a RISING and FALL of pitch. Whereas an adult finds all this an impenetrable mystery; a young child will simply accept it and *do it*.

These voice-actions marked by the accents of Greek are easily inculcated into elementary age students once each type of accent is associated with an image/act. Students are informed that a circumflex is like a horse jumping over a fence, an acute like the take off, and a grave like the horse's coming down. (The separate acts of rising and falling together equal the total time of the entire jump.) Alternatively, the acute can be associated with springing off the ground from one's toes, and the grave with ducking one's head or doing a quick stoop. Young students can then be encouraged to execute motions of the hand reflective of the rising, falling, or sustained rounded leap marked by acute, grave, and circumflex accents. A game can be made of producing these motions to accompany the up and down and over pitches of the instructor's or their own enunciation of words, phrases, and sentences of authentic Greek.

If young scholars internalize these associations, and practice them physically every time they learn a new word or phrase (along with the quantities of syllables), they will quickly grow comfortable with this aspect of the sound of Greek, and learn to love, rather than to ignore, the accents of a Greek text. On this basis one can proceed immediately to the doctrine of enclitics (and proclitics) informing them that the enclitics follow fast after and proclitics come fast before the word to which they are attached. A *leaning* game in this regard will make the little ones laugh and smile. And no DGL class is ever to be without laughter and smiling! This manner of teaching the accents fully accords with DGL's general principle: Let them first learn it with their bodies--their ears, mouth, and hands; and let it all be great fun, Their bodies having learned first, their little minds will very soon, and quite naturally, follow. Much further down the road one can begin to introduce their tender minds to the rules found at sections 161-170, 205-209 of Smyth's *Greek Grammar*. But the rule of section 423—recessive accents of verbs—should, of course, lead the way. If students are first taught to *sing* Greek properly (vowel enunciation, pitch of

¹¹ Standards for Classical Language Learning (American Classical League, 1997)



accent, quantity of vowels and syllables, consonant aspiration, all united in the recitation of authentic dactylic hexameters twenty-nine thousand years old!), then all the rest will follow quite naturally—and relatively painlessly.

Outcomes and Benefits

As opposed to the traditional goal of inculcating *proficiency* in reading Greek and Latin, DGL curriculum imparts *familiarity* first with the alphabet, then with recognizing, understanding, and enunciating actual utterances of Greek, and finally with the grammatical terms used to categorize the various parts and functions of utterance.

This provides the native English speaker with the *toolbox* of the polished English writer, orator, or programmer. The euphony of Greek is used as starting point to familiarize students with the phonics, vocabulary, and grammar of English, and—more than that—to invest them with a thorough familiarity with the nuts and bolts of language *as such*. As in the school days of Jefferson, Washington and Madison,¹² study of Greek will pave the way to an exemplary English eloquence.

From the earliest grades, the goal of familiarity will be secured by the acquisition and explication of a vocabulary of 100 Greek words. Many of these will be directly cognate with English; all will be closely wedded to the art, wisdom, and drama of ancient Greece.

Participation in the DGL course will outfit students—to the degree of their own effort—with a number of intellectual and moral benefits:

- An exceptionally high level of cultural literacy
- A truly extraordinary English vocabulary
- The ability to discuss Greek philosophy in its native terms
- Exposure to the meters of Greek and Latin poetry, and thereby to the importance of prosody (i.e., the rhythm and sound of phrases) in English composition
- Exposure to the mytho-poetic foundations of Western culture (from Homer's gods and heroes to Aristotle's *Art of Poetry*)
- Exposure to images of plastic and pictorial representation from early Greek pottery and sculpture to the oil paintings of early modernity (for instance, Boticelli's *Birth of Venus*)
- The simple ability to be able to pronounce names of the giants of classical antiquity, and the intellectual confidence spawned by knowledge of the mythical, archetypal, philosophical or poetic significances associated with these names
- The discipline and confidence that comes from having mastered something truly difficult; and thereby, the conviction that education itself is indeed a serious, challenging, and worthy endeavor
- Admission and awards of academic scholarships to highly selective colleges where a solid grounding in the so-called "dead languages" (especially Ancient Greek) is still

¹² Irving Brant, "Much Greek and More Latin," in *James Madison: the Virginian Revolutionist 1751-1780* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941), 57-71.



recognized as the highest achievement attainable in the humanities

In administrative schemes, DGL curriculum can serve either as an introduction to or as a supplement of any existing college-preparatory course in Latin, English, or language arts. For just as a deep enjoyment of Virgil's *Aeneid* presupposes familiarity with the themes and poetics of Homer; and just as a grasp of the mentality of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* presupposes familiarity with the valor of Herodotus' Greeks at Marathon and Thermopylae, so too for earning a top score—the coveted "5"—on the AP Latin exam, there is no more ideal preparation than the DGL course. Likewise to appreciate and imitate the poetry of Milton, Eliot, or Hughes as well as the prose of Jefferson, Arnold, King or Orwell no more perfect preparation can be imagined. The DGL course is "language arts" instruction of the highest order.

DLG consults with principals, Latin teachers, and heads of language departments to improve the level of challenge afforded students of Latin. Classroom visitations are available for purposes of observation and evaluation. DGL also provides visiting instruction: a three to five class-period course provides an introduction to the history, geography, material culture, myths, ideals, and moral concepts of archaic Greece.

For high school students of the hardest grit, DGL provides lessons both digitally and in person conducive to the intermediate collegiate study of Homeric, Ionic, and Attic Greek. Champions of this final struggle will rise from the mat poised for race-blind admission to our nation's most highly selective colleges and universities, poised to follow pathways forged by Cicero, Erasmus, Madison and Dubois, forged to become, as Plato would have it—*philosopher kings*.¹³

The ethos of 'responsibility to the progress of the team' will dominate the DGL classroom; as in a varsity sport, participation will be a privilege, rather than a right; effort expended will mark willing service to the student's own sense of excellence, rather than a chore performed beneath the lash.

Whatever the level of completion, participation in DGL will outfit students for the remainder of their academic lives. Dispensed from Muse's cup—Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα—that student's grounding in the humane arts will be truly extraordinary. DGL invites students, parents, teachers, and administrators to reach out toward this ultimate prize: the promise of tomorrow in the children of today, the revivification of Detroit's leadership class.

Walter M. Roberts III

Walter M. Roberts III, PhD (UC Berkeley, Classics)
 Founder and Director, Detroit Greek and Latin Educational Foundation

wroberts@detroitgreekandlatin.com

¹³ Plato *Republic* 473c-d.