

Starting with the Themes in Sight

The speaker will introduce her opening assignment for her upper level class, an essay designed to get the students thinking about the broader goals of the course. The students have all read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* over the summer, and they are given a brief introduction to Sallust and his *Bellum Catilinae*.

After introducing the idea of themes and essential questions, the students read the Latin for *Met.* 1.125-50 and *BC* 13 in class (at sight but with help from the teacher). They are then given this essay prompt: "In these two passages, Sallust and Ovid are describing the fallen morals of the Romans. In a well-developed essay, analyze how each author frames his lament." The students read and comment on each other's essays, and there is a general discussion of how to structure an essay, how to use Latin citations, how genre influences an author, and how morality relates to religion for the Romans.

The assignment takes 3-4 days, but the benefit for the students' understanding of the essay-writing process is immense; the students are also reminded of sight reading techniques and the importance of contextualization.