

Aeneas and Theseus as Reluctant Heroes

The AP Latin Examination suggests a number of themes for discussion, of which this abstract addresses two in particular: the connections between human beings and the gods and the views of non-Romans. The *Aeneid* invites analyses in these two areas, as it alludes to the personal and spiritual conflicts experienced by people of ancient Greece, Troy, Crete, Phoenicia, Carthage, Africa, and Sicily. This paper will explore these themes, and suggest methods by which teachers can help their students to confidently approach the long essay. By using ancillary literature, students can explore strategies that will enable them to compose accurate, meaningful responses, when asked to apply a single question to two literary selections.

Comparison:

There are a variety of ways to analyze Aeneas and Theseus as heroic figures of classical literature. Most Latin teachers, who teach in either middle school or high school, require students to read the myths of Odysseus, Perseus, Theseus, and Jason. As part of my Latin III curriculum, I require my students to read stories about these characters again in English, but I also assign the translation of selections relating to these characters by various authors. For example, when we address Ovid, students will review the stories of Apollo and Daphne, Jason and Medea, and Theseus.

In the *Aeneid* Book V, lines 685-699, when the Trojan women have set fire to the fleet and seek to stay on Sicily, Aeneas, desperate for a sign and divine aid, prays to Jupiter. In the *Metamorphosis* Book VII, lines 615-621, when King Minos approaches the king of Aegina and asks that he join the Cretans in war against the Athenians, Aeacus prays to Jupiter, seeking a sign and aid. Each passage reflects a perceived relationship between the gods (i.e. Jupiter) and man. In a well-developed essay, analyze how each author addresses this relationship.

In consideration of the topic for consideration, these essential questions arise:

1. How does each nationality or race perceive its pantheon of gods or 'numen?' (i.e. What is each group's relationship with its gods?)
2. What role does spirituality play in the lives of the peoples of ancient Greece, Troy, Crete, Phoenicia, Carthage, Africa, Sicily, and Italy?
3. What similarities can be identified between the Trojans' view of the connections between the gods and men and people of other societies?
4. How does our modern view of spirituality affect our ability to fully understand the ancient peoples' relationship with their gods?