

Aids in Teaching Caesar: Yesterday and Today

In 1909, a Latin teacher from Baltimore, Maryland named Mary Harwood published an article entitled “Aids in Teaching Caesar.” In the article, she expresses some of the frustrations she often encountered in teaching Caesar’s *De bello Gallico*. Her students found Caesar to be difficult and tedious, and it was often hard for them to see the text as anything other than “an endless confusion of camps, marches, and grammatical constructions.” Since Ms. Harwood desperately wanted her students to appreciate Caesar and to experience the text as something more than a jumble of obscure Celtic tribes and thorny indirect statements, she developed some creative teaching strategies to give her students a break from the daily grind of grammar and translation: “I determined that if anything could be found to create an interest and lessen the drudgery, I would find it or die!”

One hundred years later, teachers of the Advanced Placement Caesar syllabus face very similar challenges: How do we teach a 2000-year-old war commentary to high school students, and how can we make it interesting and relevant for them? How can we push them through all of the lines on the syllabus and prepare them for the AP exam while still keeping them motivated and engaged?

In my paper, I will examine the teaching methods suggested by Ms. Harwood a century ago. Some of her ideas would work well in 21st-century AP classrooms and some of them would not, but all of them should, at the very least, help modern-day AP teachers generate some ideas about how we can help our students better understand, visualize, and appreciate this ancient text. In addition to considering Ms. Harwood’s suggestions, I will also offer some examples from my own classroom of how I try to provide some “oil for the wheels” (as Ms. Harwood phrases it), in particular by drawing upon technology, popular culture, and current events.

Bibliography

Harwood, Mary E. "Aids in Teaching Caesar." *Classical Weekly* 2.13 (1909): 98-100.