

Course Title: Literature: Writers in Ancient Greece  
Course Code: ENGL 321 & HIST 321  
Credit Hours: 3  
  
Location: Classroom 1, Main building  
Instructor: Sigrid Heath  
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Office Hour: by appointment  
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## Syllabus

### Course Description

This course explores selected ancient Greek writers through readings, discussions, travel to relevant sites, keeping a notebook, an oral presentation and a written report. It has three units: Unit 1: Epic Poetry: Homer's *The Odyssey*; Unit 2: Archilochus and Sappho: The Emergence of the Personal Voice; and Unit 3: The Great Tragic Poets, to cover Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

### Course Context

*'Sing to me of the man, Muse ... start from where you will—sing for our time too.'*

Homer has been doing just that for about 2,700 years. It is impossible to consider the canon of Western literature without acknowledging the debt owed Homer. In addition to the entertainment value of action and romance told through the depiction of many complex characters — archetypal characters who are yet enigmatic and beyond archetypal boundaries — we have the gift of Homer's brilliant story architecture and his clear, direct and absolute control of narrative.

We also have the gift of insight: through Homer, writing in the Archaic age about a mythic Heroic age, we glimpse of how the ancient Greeks viewed their world. How human beings behaved towards one another was a matter not only of whether one survived in Homer's time, but how one was spoken of in perpetuity. In his story — a weaving together of many old tales — Homer introduces us to Greek ethical and cultural traditions, the development of which we chart through the semester's other readings.

### Texts

- *The Odyssey*, by Homer (in its entirety)
- Archilochus and Sappho (selections of poetry fragments)
- *The Oresteia*, by Aeschylus (all three plays of the trilogy: *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, *The Eumenides*)
- *Antigone*, by Sophocles
- Three plays by Euripides, to be chosen from *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Medea*, *The Bacchae*, *Trojan Women*, *Orestes*

### **Course Objectives:**

- Students engaging in deep reading of assigned texts and keeping a notebook of questions, thoughts and other observations.
- Students reading and discussing in-depth a number of essential writers of ancient Greece, including the context in which each writer lived and worked.
- Students discovering the use of Greek myth, classical and Hellenistic history and culture themes, and track the evolution of Greek literature from its origin.
- Students exploring how the authors themselves were impacted by the spirit of the place in and about which they have chose to write.
- Students gaining an appreciation of how the nature and environment of Greece energized the characters and colored theatrical place settings in individual works.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of the semester, students will:

- Be able to identify and explain the significance of a number of essential writers of ancient Greece.
- Be able to discuss the context in which each writer lived and worked.
- Be able to demonstrate familiarity with, and appreciation of, the use of Greek myth, classical and Hellenistic history and culture themes and track the evolution of Greek literature from its origin.
- Be able to explain how the ancient Greek authors themselves were impacted by the spirit of the place in and about which they chose to write.
- Be able to demonstrate understanding of, an appreciation for, how the nature and environment of Greece energized characters and colored theatrical place settings in individual works.

### **Course Method and Approach**

The first and obvious requirement is that the students give themselves over to a deep reading of the material. They will be asked to keep a notebook in which they write down questions, thoughts and observations to share with the class. Their exploration will be guided by the instructor who will provide lines of inquiry to follow in the text.

Living and studying ancient Greek literature on the island that was Archilochos's birthplace lends a frisson of immediacy to students' experience of the work. The landscapes described become familiar in walks around Paros and other islands. Students' understanding of the presence of the gods in the lives of early Greeks is enhanced by visits to the ruins of ancient temples.

Students will be expected to make notes of their connections between what they read for the course, classroom discussions, exposure to the ancient world in other courses related to Greek

history and culture — e.g., what they observe in archeological museums — and their experience of cultural traditions still intact in the streets and tavernas of Greek towns.

Students must be able to clearly and succinctly communicate these connections to the course. Class participation is of critical importance and will comprise the greater part of the grade received. An oral presentation and written reports are also required. A paper of approximately 1500 words and an oral report are required. The subject will be chosen from the list of study points distributed at the beginning of class amplified by notes taken by the student during class discussion and by personal observation. (It is expected that “personal observation” will include impressions of Greek culture and history received in trips on Paros and other islands to archaeological sites, museums, and in other related courses.) We will also engage in a number of creative activities to better internalize the readings throughout the semester.

### **Evaluation Weighting**

- Attendance, Class participation, discussion, note-taking: 30%
- Completion of reading: 10%
- Oral presentation: 30%
- Final report: 30%

### **Grading Scale, Late Work, Attendance and Make-Up, Academic Integrity, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policies:**

Students are required to abide by HISA’s Academic policies first introduced and explained at the school and class orientation. See the attached policy sheet.

### **Bibliography of Reference Materials**

- *The Odyssey*, translator, Robert Fagles; Penguin Classics, 1996.
- *The Illiad*, translator, Robert Fagles; Penguin Classics, 1990.
- *7 Greeks*, translator, Guy Davenport; New Directions, 1980.
- *The Oresteia*, translator, Robert Fagles; Penguin Classics, 1979.
- *Sophocles, Plays: One, The Theban Plays (Oedipus The King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone)*, translator, Don Taylor; Methuen Drama, 1998.
- *Euripides, Plays: Two, (Hecuba, The Women of Troy, Iphigenia at Aulis, Cyclops)*; Methuen Drama, 1991.
- *Three Plays of Euripides, Alcestis, Medea, The Bacchae*, translator, Paul Roche, W.W. Norton, 1974.
- *Orestes and Other Plays, Euripides*; translator, Philip Vellacott, Penguin Books, 1972
- *The Greek Myths*, Robert Graves, combined edition; Penguin Classics, 1992.
- *The Landmark Herodotus*, edited by Robert Strassler; Quercus, 2007.
- *The Landmark Thucydides*, edited by Robert Strassler; Quercus, 2007.
- *Xenophon, A History of My Times*, translator, Rex Warner; Penguin Classics, 1979.
- *Theogony and Works and Days*, Hesiod, translator, M. L. West; Oxford World’s Classics, 2008.