

Classical Civilisation

“Happiness depends upon ourselves.” Aristotle

“The beginning is the most important part of the work.” Plato

When we look for understanding about our world, the past is often a very good place to start, as these quotations, which could have been taken from modern life coach websites, show! And A-level Classical civilisation will broaden your horizons to the world of Plato, of Aristotle – the world of the Greeks and Romans.

Course content

You will study and explore the ancient Greek and Roman worlds through reading and discussing original texts in translation, physical art and architecture, and enhancing your understanding with some secondary reading.

For *The World of the Hero* module you will read and consider the very first literary work of Western European culture, Homer’s epic poem, the *Iliad*; and you will need to think hard about what it means to be a hero and how the heroic code enforced behaviour just as powerfully as the fear of being shamed on Instagram today... You will then think about how that code changed and adapted to the different society of Rome, and how Virgil conveys those differences in his poem the *Aeneid*, which in many ways is a response to Homer. Both poems tackle key themes of heroism, self-perception, vengeance, love and loss; but in different and often surprising ways.

For *Culture and the Arts*, our second module, students either prepare for the *Greek Art* or *Greek Theatre* paper. For *Greek Art*, you will be getting to grips with visual and material culture, considering how it developed and how the viewer is drawn into the visual work, whether it be a vase-painting, a free-standing sculpture or an architectural sculpture on a temple or other key building. For *Greek Theatre*, you will explore the origins, forms, and conventions of Western drama through visual and archaeological sources, as well as studying three extraordinary plays: the tragedies *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles and *Bacchae* by Euripides, and Aristophanes’ comedy *The Frogs*. These seminal texts explore the full range of human experience, examining issues of family, politics, morality, and free will.

When we turn to the third module, *Beliefs and Ideas*, you will be focusing on desire in the ancient world; the topic option is entitled *Love and Relationships*. You will start by thinking about the ideals – what was the role and status of a man and a woman in Greece or in Rome; and how did they relate to each other, both inside and outside the context of marriage. You will consider the philosophical writing of both Plato and Seneca about love and desire, and move from this to its poetic representation in the works of Sappho and Ovid. You will need to formulate your own views on desire, and decide how our society constructs it, to some extent, in order to help you see how this happened in the ancient world.

Skills developed

As a student of Classical civilisation you will come to understand your own culture in a broader context, you will develop skills of literary and artistic appreciation and you will learn, through spoken discussion, debate and written essay work, to present a cogent and well-supported argument. You will also, of course, gain a wide-ranging and thorough understanding of the ancient world; its codes, beliefs and ideals.

What a good Classical civilisation student looks like

As a department we don't really have any pre-conceived ideas about what you might look like if you want to study Classical civilisation! We know that, as an A level, Classical civilisation has clear connections with English literature, modern languages, history, politics, and philosophy and ethics; but it is also taken by girls studying mathematics and sciences to provide breadth and variety. If you love debate, ideas about society and why the world is the way it is, then Classical civilisation is for you!

Assessments

There are three examinations, all taken at the end of the two-year course.

The World of the Hero paper – 40% of the total A level; 2 hours 30 minutes. This assessment will involve responding to prepared stimulus material from both texts, and essays, on the texts separately and comparing them. The entire focus of this paper is on literature in translation, considering the composition, themes, characters and cultural context of both epics studied.

Culture and the Arts - 30% of the total A level; 1 hour 45 minutes. For *Greek Art*, this assessment is entirely visually focused. You will have the opportunity to answer short questions based on provided visual stimulus material and also to demonstrate your knowledge more widely in an essay. For *Greek Theatre*, you answer stimulus questions on both visual sources and extracts from the text and write longer responses allowing for both deeper analysis of particular plays and characters as well as broader thematic questions.

Beliefs and Ideas – 30% of the total A level; 1 hour 45 minutes. This assessment is focused on the material you have studied, as well as wider reading you will have done about love and relationships in the ancient world, both real and idealised. You will again choose from a variety of question types, ranging from short answers to longer responses to prepared stimulus material and an essay.

Entry requirements including skills

All we really require is an eagerness to learn and an enthusiasm for the ancient world. The course does follow on well from the GCSE but it can also be studied at A level for the first time with great success if you are keen and willing to engage! You will need to like to read (there's a lot of textual material to be covered as well as some secondary reading); and it does help if you are willing to express your ideas in discussion: we tend to talk about everything under the sun, from religion to war, from gender issues

to law and from politics to art. And of course you will need to be prepared to write essays and longer answers; it's not a subject where you can answer in figures or single words.

Beyond the classroom

Beyond the classroom, you are likely to have the opportunity for a museum trip to London as part of your course, as well as an overseas trip to somewhere classical (and sunny!) in alternate years. There will also be opportunities to attend stagings of classical plays in translation, as well as participating in a variety of exciting and engaging classical events within St Swithun's and in conjunction with other schools.

Future Options

There is no single set path for students who study Classical civilisation. You could do a degree in Classical civilisation, archaeology or ancient history (or a combination). This could lead to roles within heritage and archaeology, but also, because of the wide-ranging transferrable skills and experience in constructing a convincing argument, these subjects can lead to a huge range of careers: law, public relations, business, finance, the Civil Service, HR... Many students who thoroughly enjoy and triumph in Classical civilisation also go on to study completely unrelated degrees: recently these have included modern languages, English, biological sciences and medicine.

As Seneca said, **“hang on to your youthful enthusiasms – you will be able to use them better when you are older...”**

Dr GUY BRINDLEY
head of Classics