

# Running a Greek Club — The Hereford Cathedral School Experience

by Anne Wright

Last autumn, Hereford Cathedral School began an after-school Greek Club open to state-school pupils from across Hereford. This article aims to provide some ideas about what works and how best to foster interest in Greek and Greek culture.

## The Rationale for Greek Club

I am passionate about the value of pupils learning about Greek history and society. I think that they gain enormously both in terms of wider culture (art, literature, etc.) and in how they approach their own culture(s). As Edith Hall has said,<sup>1</sup> studying the Greeks is a lesson in how to be a citizen.

Equally, Greek as a language is increasingly rarely taught or studied at school. I believe that if you can catch pupils young they will sign up for Greek. Moreover, if you can let them explore Greek culture and history, they will be more inclined to take the language. A Greek Club gives you the freedom to explore widely, without the pressure of syllabus demands.

The name 'Greek Club' is not especially inspired, but I had to have something short and 'Learn Greek' sounded too much like hard work. The sales pitch also emphasised the cultural aspects, rather than vocabulary or grammar. Although the ultimate aim is to have follow-through to GCSE Greek,

I wanted to encourage an attitude of intellectual curiosity, not one of 'how many GCSEs can I take?'

## Why open it up to external candidates?

Or, more accurately, why not? Why not encourage all the intellectually curious students you can find? Why not introduce more bright young minds into the glories of Greek civilisation? Why not provide them with something totally unique and stimulating? Since Hereford Cathedral School is extremely supportive towards outreach (in music and Latin, for example), senior management was very happy to have external pupils attend Greek Club.

I am aware that not everyone is in the fortunate position of working with a pro-outreach school ethos (including very supportive governors). So how would you sell a similar scheme to a sceptical management? The main points are probably the following:

- You get a bigger, more exciting group which will encourage uptake within your own school;
- Your pupils make new friends of a similar outlook (something which can be very important for shy, bright kids);
- You are likely to please governments of various colours;

- Your school's reputation can only be enhanced by doing this sort of outreach.

## Setting it up

Posters, announcements, and word-of-mouth round the school, plus an email to all parents, ensured that Hereford Cathedral School pupils knew of Greek Club. However, it is – obviously – much harder to reach external candidates. We adopted two strategies: an advert and utilising existing contacts. Direct contacts are far more useful than sending an email to whoever is in charge of AG&T, where it will probably just get lost. My colleague, Siobhan de Souza, had previously offered Latin teaching to two local schools and we alerted her contacts to the new initiative.

Hereford Cathedral School's outreach also paid for a small advert in the local press. This deliberately began with a reference to mythology, since that is what most pupils think of in relation to the Greeks. There was a reference to formal OCR qualifications on this, but that was more to appeal to parents than pupils.

The response was extremely gratifying – we had 38 students apply, so many that a colleague very generously offered to help teach at Greek Club. If you are not in the position of having an additional helper – whether a colleague or a Sixth Former – it might be worth having a cap on numbers and a waiting

list. It would have been impossible for me to run a class of 38 on my own. Of the 38, approximately 75% came from six schools (including one primary) in the local state sector. The students from five of the schools had come in response to the advert.

## LEARN ANCIENT GREEK!

*Does your child love mythology and the ancient world? Are they interested in languages? Would they like the chance to explore one of the most fascinating and gifted civilisations in the history of the world?*

*If so, there is a new after-school course on offer at Hereford Cathedral School for Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils. The class will run on Wednesdays during term time (4pm-5pm). Classes will explore both the language and the culture of Ancient Greece. There will be a chance to work towards the OCR Entry Level Qualification in Classical Greek, but this will be optional. The main aim is to introduce the language and to provide a stimulating and interesting insight into the influence of the Ancient Greeks on European civilisation.*

## Other practical points

Let your Greek Club be mixed-age. You get far more students joining and they interact with each other in a manner which is very beneficial to their social development. I overheard one of my older girls saying how nice it was to realise that some of the younger girls were just like them. Originally, I intended to have the club as Years 7-9, but several Year 10s and one Year 6 also asked to join. There was no difficulty about this spread of ages.

Be flexible. Let students join midway through the term. They'll soon catch up. Realise that unexpected commitments may hit an after-school club more often than they would lessons in school. Understand that transport can be a major difficulty – in our case, Hereford is a very rural county and some of our students live nearly an hour away. Car-shares meant that if one student was not able to come, another two also couldn't.

Be aware of local conditions. Hereford is a sparsely-populated county with very good musical and dramatic

provision. However, it does not have the sort of excellent museum resources so easily accessible in large cities (for example, the Ashmolean Museum is over two hours away in Oxford). This meant that some of the Greek Club students have literally never been in museum with Classical artefacts. Clearly, a similar situation can also apply in deprived inner-city areas, so in such cases it becomes very important to use as many visual resources as possible to provide a sense of what 'the Greek thing' is all about. The upside to the lack of museums is that the students are really keen to take up intellectual opportunities, and this may have helped our recruitment.

## What to use as textbooks?

We used *Gorilla Greek* followed by Taylor's *Greek to GCSE*.

Given that your Greek Club will probably be an after-school activity when the pupils may be tired, it is also useful to introduce fun games, such as Quizlet,<sup>2</sup> Tarsia,<sup>3</sup> or matching pictures and Greek words. I am making a number of these available on the Oxford University *Classics in Communities* website and will try to keep adding to the bank. *Classics Library* versions should follow soon. Try to keep things colourful and don't do too many of the same games. Even our Year 9s and 10s enjoyed matching games and Greek Snap. Tarsia puzzles look deceptively simple, but require concentration and attention to detail.

## What to offer in terms of the non-linguistic element?

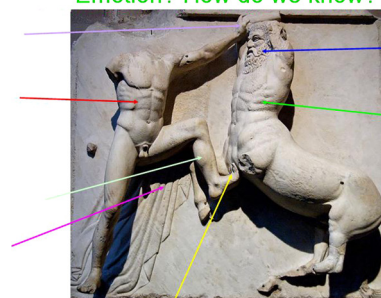
It is **vital** to have a Classical Civilisation element. This is your chance to get over why Classics is cool and why Greek matters. At least part of the time I decided the half-hour slot for the week depending upon the news (the UK election was a great stimulus). And since most of what you'll be talking about is completely new to them, it doesn't matter if you are talking about something which isn't 'basic' history. Our students seemed very happy to lap up Kleisthenes v. Isagoras – as one of them asked in breathless tones: 'Who won?'

Since last year's sessions were a one-year introduction, I tried to ring the changes in terms of whether I was dealing with literature and philosophy, social history, military history, art or politics. Mythology probably got the least attention because that is the one aspect of Greek culture that the pupils already knew about (some of them most impressively). Sometimes it makes sense to carry on with one topic. For example, I spent three sessions on some of the Parthenon metopes – a Year 7 then proceeded to talk her parents through four of them when she saw replicas on holiday. However, you will probably find that you want to adapt to the individual interests of the pupils (such as Greek maths or Greek music). In the second year of Greek Club, I have adopted a chronological narrative, with lots of art and archaeology added in.

Don't be afraid to pitch things high. Basic intelligence is more important than age. The Parthenon metopes may be on the A-level syllabus, but some of the responses from my Greek Club students could easily have been written as part of an exam answer.

I also invented 'paper archaeology' digs for end-of-term lessons. Here, pupils had to match together cut-up full-sized

South Metope 26 - Mood? Emotion? How do we know?



South Metope 28 – Composition and use of space?

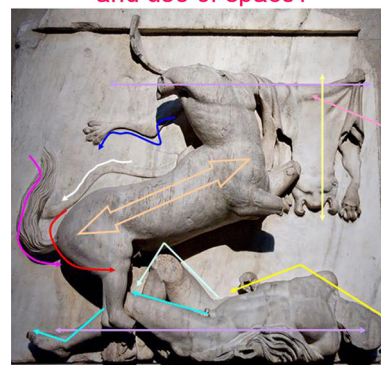


Figure 1. | Examples of our analyses of Parthenon metopes

print-outs of tombstones, pots, jewellery, and broken weaponry and then work out what was going on. Again, the idea was to get them thinking about what they could see, and how they could interpret it.

## Parental feedback

Parental feedback was uniformly positive, although I am aware such responses represent the views of those who care enough to contact me.

## Will you have people dropping out?

Yes. Ultimately, we lost half of our cohort (down from 38 to 19). Some of these losses were for unavoidable reasons (such as times of music lessons changing and the difficulty of transport), but in our experience, the greatest numbers of pupils dropped out once learning vocabulary crept in. It is important to be prepared for this and to remember that the ones you've got left are really keen. We also lost a couple at the start of the new academic year when they decided that GCSE homework in other subjects had to take priority.

## The Future Positive

We have now entered the second year ('Greek 2') of Hereford Cathedral School Greek Club. As well as those continuing from last year, we have picked up 7 new students. This presents some logistical difficulties, currently solved by having everyone come to the cultural half and then dividing them into two groups for the language session. We aim to enter candidates for OCR Entry Level this year and to build up their linguistic confidence in preparation for moving on to GCSE work. In 2016/17, we intend to have a 'Greek 3' class and to start a new 'Greek 1' class for those who were too young to join the first Greek Club. Obviously, this is going to be very demanding in terms of teacher input, but we feel that the benefits are worth it. As far as I am concerned, the preparation and teaching of Greek Club is probably the most exhausting element of my week, but it is also one of the most rewarding and stimulating.

## The Future Negative

It is, of course, extremely disappointing that OCR is going to abolish the Short Course in Greek, since it was ideal for those doing Greek on limited time. The move flies in the face of logic, realism and the introduction of the excellent Entry Level course. I can only hope that OCR can be prevailed upon to see that different (and difficult) circumstances apply to Greek – particularly for Outreach Greek. Even if we drop the cultural element, on an hour a week my state school students will not be able to get the full complement of Greek teaching necessary to tackle two language papers and two set texts (or whatever the new regulations demand).

## Gorilla Greek<sup>4</sup>

The thinking behind *Gorilla Greek* was the fact that, while modern languages have colourful, visually-attractive books for beginners, there is nothing of this sort for Greek. Furthermore, with the exception of Kristian Waite's ISEB book, Greek books are aimed at Year 9 and above. However, by Year 9, most children have already got a very clear idea of what GCSE options they intend to take. Moreover, most options are finalised in the spring term of Year 9, leaving very little time to sell Greek if it is introduced in Year 9. It seemed to me that there was a

real need to have a book which would stimulate interest in Greek *before* the issue of GCSE options arose. If that book could also be visually attractive, all the better.

The format of the book is very simple, and works on the appeal of code-breaking. The language pages have an image of the Gorilla with a caption in Greek which describes what he is doing. An English derivation provides a hint to the meaning of the caption and a translation is also included (printed upside down to encourage decoding). Some of the language pages also provide grammatical explanations of the present tense regular verbs or the verb 'to be'. Two-thirds of the book is devoted to language. After every four language pages, there is a double-page spread devoted to derivations. These 'Greek Around You' pages explain how Greek words are commonly used in every area of the curriculum from Maths to History, P.E. and Music.<sup>5</sup> Each of these includes at least one fun quiz (with the answers printed upside down).

There is a deliberate emphasis on mastering the alphabet. Confidence in reading Greek letters means that children feel that they are succeeding in Greek – and want to do more. It also means that, when grammatical features are introduced, readers will not be worrying about what individual letters mean, but can concentrate on the new concept. Accents are not included, because I think that there is enough potential confusion



Figure 2. | Examples of pages from *Gorilla Greek*

with breathings and it is much more important that breathings are got right.

Although the layout and approach is straightforward, by the end of the book the reader has met present tense verbs (ἐπιμι and regular verbs), as well as a considerable number of English derivations.

The book is designed to be used flexibly. It is being used successfully in prep schools, but the main target audience is not those lucky schools with two or three Anne Wright is Head of Classics at periods a week of Greek in Year 7 or 8. It is primarily designed to be used:

- In lunchtime or after-school clubs;
- In enrichment lessons (for example, to encourage understanding of English vocabulary);
- By non-specialists;
- As an add-on at the end of Latin lessons;
- By parents who wish to provide some intellectual challenge to enquiring minds.

## Why the Gorilla?

It would be nice to claim some deep pedagogical research as the justification for selecting the Gorilla as the poster-boy for the project. In truth, a number of pupils of a variety of ages, both boys and girls, had met the Gorilla and thought he was adorable, particularly when he taught Latin. He looks sufficiently like a human to appeal to humans (the intelligent eyes are a great help), while the fact that he is also obviously a cuddly toy makes him unthreatening. He is also a lot easier to dress up and pose than, for example, a lynx or an ounce. The wide range of his wardrobe enables him to mimic a wide variety of actions, while adding further visual interest – each photograph looks very different.<sup>6</sup>

In relation to Greek Club, it was noticeable that it was not just the Hereford Cathedral School students (who

knew me) who found the Gorilla very cute, it was our external students too. Cute-appeal meant that they wanted to read more and to be able to read out loud. David Stephenson, the Head of Classics at Warwick School, who uses Gorilla Greek throughout Warwick's entire Year 8 Latin sets, reports that boys there like the book and find the images lovely and eye-catching. Adults also like the Gorilla – he has a following among some top-flight dons...

## How is the book best used?

This very much depends on what sort of group you are dealing with and how much follow-up material you intend to use. I am slowly adding resources to Oxford's *Classics in Communities* web-pages.<sup>7</sup> An actual class which is taught nothing but Greek would easily get through the book in less than a term. Similarly, a Latin class which has fifteen minutes twice a week given over to Greek could also complete the book in a term. After-school or lunch-hour clubs will progress more slowly, particularly as you will probably need to spend a lot of time consolidating the alphabet since students find moving on to verbs daunting if they lack confidence with the alphabet. Again, this aspect will vary on how many lessons a week you have with your students.

Currently, schools are using the book:

- To encourage uptake of Greek GCSE;
- To enhance literacy;<sup>8</sup>
- To provide stretch and challenge for able Latinists;
- In junior / primary school Classics Clubs run by sixth formers.<sup>9</sup>

A number of schools have asked for a follow-up book. Realistically, this is not going to happen soon as each image takes an enormous amount of time to plan, pose and produce. What I am attempting to do is to create further resources and to

collate information about how the book is being used in schools. I know of some clever and inspiring uses of the book, and I am always grateful to hear of more. For example, Haberdasher Aske's Girls' School now have George the Gorilla to accompany their Greek Club, while King Edward VI School Southampton created their own 'Gorilla Scenarios' to practise vocabulary and verb endings.

Ultimately, the success of the book must be judged in terms of how well it fosters interest in the Greek language – the purpose for which it was written.

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<sup>1</sup>Edith Hall's article is reprinted in this edition of JCT.

<sup>2</sup>For Gorilla Greek on Quizlet, see <https://quizlet.com/class/1612994/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.mmsoft.com/index.php/products/tarsia>

<sup>4</sup>I should like to record my thanks to the Hellenic Society for their support of the project and their helpful advice. I should particularly like to thank Prof. Malcolm Schofield and Prof. Chris Carey for their support. I should also like to record my thanks to JACT Council for their endorsement.

<sup>5</sup>The focus on curriculum-related vocabulary follows a suggestion from James Renshaw of Colet Court / St Paul's.

<sup>6</sup>For the naturalists reading this, I am aware that the Gorilla has a slight trace of chimpanzee about his features (a mixed-species ape?). He has also lost some colour owing to sun-exposure. Despite these points, he is definitely a Gorilla and a male one.

<sup>7</sup><http://classicsincommunities.org/greek-classroom-materials/>

<sup>8</sup>David Stephenson comments that, as well as the language, the book '...provides some very nice well-presented snippets of the ancient world and the relevance of some Greek concepts to us. Varied stuff too – from simple derivations to the origins of some basic mathematical and scientific theories.'

<sup>9</sup>At Highgate School sixth formers found the book and the Gorilla entertaining and stimulating.