

## THEY CAN WHEN SHOWN HOW

As a teacher, how many times have you been disappointed after reading a number of student papers that did not measure up to what you anticipated? I came to realize that the vast chasm between my expectations and the reality of what I was receiving did not reflect a lack of effort on my part or of intelligence on the students' part. It was more a matter of their not understanding, and more particularly their not knowing how to accomplish the required task. Although the material and examples used here are aimed at Vergil students studying the *Aeneid* at the secondary school level, they can easily be modified and adapted for other classical authors or for collegiate students at various levels.

Many times students cannot see the forest for the trees as they begin to study Vergil's epic. Their attention is so centered on the meaning of the Latin that they fail to grasp the subtleties of the poet's message and his verbal artistry. As classicists, we want our students not only to be able to translate the Latin and thus gain access to the treasures of classical literature, but also to grasp and understand the richness of the artistry ancient writers employed by using symbolism, recurring themes and other literary devices. In other words, we want our students to delve beyond mere knowledge and comprehension-level thinking and move into the realm of analyzing and evaluating the literature and the author's techniques in creating a piece in which art and message become one.

Most students do not demonstrate an innate ability to write a valid analysis of a literary piece focusing on symbolism and stylistic techniques. Just as we teach them how to apply their Latin grammatical and syntactical knowledge to translate classical works, we must also teach them how to analyze and evaluate what they are translating. The examples of handouts I have developed will suggest how students can be guided through the process of identifying and interpreting various stylistic literary elements. The process culminates in helping the students to make a valid thesis statement based on the evidence they have gathered. By using this information, they can demonstrate what they have learned in an analytical paper that has a clear thesis statement supported by specific, well-articulated examples.

My first set of handouts focuses on Book II of the *Aeneid*. There are several advantages to be gained from these. First, students are

introduced early in the curriculum to the entire process of critical thinking and analyzing a piece of literature in a baby-step method. Book II is an early book, which contains a wealth of symbolism and themes that recur elsewhere in the *Aeneid*. This book also generates a high level of interest in students, most of whom have some knowledge of its content. The first handout (see below) deals with foreshadowing and its use in Book II. Note that we begin with a definition. I have learned never to assume that a student has the background knowledge needed to answer a question; defining terms ensures that everyone is working with the same set of assumptions and expectations. Next comes the listing of examples of foreshadowing in Book II. The death of Laocoon and Sinon and his story are major examples, of course, but students also notice minor examples, such as how the Trojans participate in their own destruction by tearing down their wall to let the horse inside. Questions 3 and 4 allow the students to take their specific examples and develop paragraphs showing how each is related to the fall of Troy. Finally, the students form a supportable thesis statement by using this process.

The next four handouts follow the same procedure of accumulating specific examples and then expanding the students' thinking through the final formative phase, each with a different question. Handout 2 focuses on the use of snakes and snake imagery and their relationship in creating mood, tone and symbolism. Handout 3 compares *crudelitas* and *humanitas* in the case of various characters in Book II. Handout 4 deals with the connection between *dolus* and *donum*, while Handout 5 focuses on *furor* and its destructive nature. The final question on each handout has the students develop their thesis statements and outlines. After completing this, they are ready to write a short paper. As a result of using these handouts, I have found that my students produce higher quality work that displays more critical thinking. In addition, they are more confident and feel less intimidated when analyzing literature.

The same process can be used to expand the scope of the assignment and the material to be studied. Handout 4 on *dolus/donum*, for example, can be expanded to connect the use of this theme in Books I and IV as well, by adding the following question after Question 5: "How is the use of *dolus/donum* in Book II related to the use of these terms in Books I and IV?" This allows the students to connect the trickery of Venus, when she uses Cupid disguised as Ascanius to bring gifts to Dido, with the destruction of Dido in Book IV.

The last three handouts show how the assignment has broadened a topic to include a larger portion of the *Aeneid*. Handout 6 focuses on fire literally and symbolically. Hercules and the lion skin form the basis of Handout 7, while Handout 8 deals with the transformation of Aeneas.

Using these handouts has helped my high school students to organize and develop their thoughts, and to learn how to analyze a piece of literature through the use of symbolism, recurring themes and other literary devices. Finally and most importantly, the results are rewarding for teachers as well: students are able to produce papers displaying scholarly work that meets or exceeds expectations. In Vergil's words, *possunt quia posse videntur* (*Aen.* 5.231).

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Handout 1

*AENEID* BOOK II  
WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. Define Foreshadowing.
2. List examples from Book II that foreshadow the fall of Troy.
3. List commonalities among the examples.
4. Write one paragraph each for three examples from #2. (Set the scene, list the characters involved and be specific in showing the various elements of the foreshadowing and how the example is related to the fall of Troy.)
5. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

Handout 2

*AENEID* BOOK II  
WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. List examples from Book II that use snakes.
2. List examples from Book II that use snake imagery either in a descriptive manner or with words depicting snake imagery (*lapsus, involvens, ampletor*, etc.)
3. Categorize your examples in #1 and #2.

NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	NEUTRAL
GREEK	TROJAN	

4. For each example in #1 and #2 set the scene, characters involved, destructive/negative, positive (etc.) effect on Troy or the rest of Book II.
5. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

## Handout 3

*AENEID* BOOK II  
WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. Define *Humanitas*. (Use its opposite *Crudelitas* as a basis for a more specific definition.)
2. List characters in Book II who exemplify *Humanitas*.
3. List characters in Book II who exemplify *Crudelitas*.
4. Choose one character each from #2 and #3 who best represent the two opposing qualities and who are in direct contrast to each other. Describe these two characters both physically and in terms of character qualities.
5. Do these two characters engage in direct confrontation or is there an unresolved conflict between them? Describe the situation.
6. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

## Handout 4

*AENEID* BOOK II  
WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. Define *Dolus* and *Donum*.
2. In Book II cite examples of trickery and/or deception.
3. Which of the above examples were clearly associated with *Donum*?
4. Of the examples not included in #3, what was the implied or stated gain for the ones being deceived?
5. How is the concept of the *Donum* being a *Dolus* developed in Book II?
6. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

## Handout 5

*AENEID* BOOK II  
WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. Define *Furor*.
2. List examples of verbs or adjectives used in conjunction with *Furor*.
3. List examples of *Furor* in Book II.
4. How was the element of destruction linked to each example?
5. If an example was not linked to destruction, how was the destructive element averted?
6. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

## Handout 6

*AENEID* WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. List the destructive uses of fire in Books II, IV, V, IX.
2. List the symbolic uses of fire in Books IV, VII, VIII, XII.
3. List the uses of fire in nature similes.
4. When is fire not used in a negative manner?
5. How is fire related to *Furor*?
6. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

## Handout 7

*AENEID* WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. What mythological person was associated with the lion skin? Why?
2. List occurrences of the lion skin and/or Hercules in Books II, VIII, IX, X.
3. What did the use of Hercules and the lion skin symbolize?
4. What relevance did this symbolism have to Aeneas?
5. How is this relevance to be transferred to Augustus?
6. What message did these uses of the lion skin and Hercules convey to the Romans?
7. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.

## Handout 8

*AENEID* WORKSHEET FOR ESTABLISHING A CONCEPT

1. The transformation of Aeneas: How did Aeneas change in Book II?
2. The transformation of Aeneas: How did Aeneas change in Book III?
3. How does Book IV relate to the transformation of Aeneas?
4. Why is Book V important to Aeneas' transformation?
5. How is Aeneas changed in Book VI?
6. What part do Books VII and VIII play in the development of Aeneas?
7. How does Aeneas change in Books X, XI and XII?
8. After considering your answers in #1-7, what are the different ways that Aeneas has changed?
9. Which changes are positive and which are negative?
10. What message does Vergil convey through his depiction and development of Aeneas?
11. Now begin conceptualizing. Look over your previous notes. What concept can you focus on in your paper? What can be fashioned into a supportable thesis statement? Write a thesis statement and a brief outline.