

Infelix Dido: Teaching Suicide Prevention Alongside Virgil's Aeneid

This project uses Book Four of Vergil's *Aeneid* to introduce suicide prevention education to high school students. Dido is a character that readers can have both sympathy and respect for, which is important for the destigmatization of mental health and suicide. This project draws on secondary literature to show that Dido has experiences (such as loss of a loved one and break up) that are common risk factors for suicide. Secondary literature also lists feelings and behaviors one might have if they are suicidal. Dido exhibits several warning signs such as talking about death, self isolation, and hopelessness.

The *Aeneid* is frequently read by high school students. Suicide is a leading cause of death for young adults (CDC) and in 2019 the Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that nearly 19% of high school students seriously considered suicide (Ivey Stephenson, 2020). Many schools provide suicide prevention training for faculty and staff, but don't have a student training or developed one in response to a student's death by suicide (Smith-Millman and Flaspohler, 2019). While educators play an important role in a student's support system, many adolescents are hesitant to confide in an adult and don't have as many interactions where warning signs may be apparent. By introducing prevention education into the *Aeneid* curriculum, both students and teachers can learn about potential warning signs of suicide through an example they can empathize with.

The poster presenting this project has a brief summary of the project, four small sections of background information, and one table. The first background section explains the prevalence of suicidal ideation in adolescents and the current state of suicide prevention education. The second section describes the number of high school programs already teaching the *Aeneid* (and could potentially benefit from this project), reasons suicide in the ancient world need context,

and a couple particular reasons that Dido might resonate with young adults. Next there's a section on suicide describing why one may choose to end their life, some common risk factors, and some common warning signs. Then there's a brief summary of Book Four followed by a table highlighting five passages from Book Four and how they align with modern understandings of suicide.

Works Cited

"Facts About Suicide." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed August 17, 2022.

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>.

Ivey-Stephenson, Asha, Demissie Zewditu, Alexander Crosby, Deborah Stone, Elizabeth Gaylor, Natalie Wilkins, Richard Lowry, and Margaret Brown. "Suicidal Ideation and Behaviors Among High School Students Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2019." *MMWR* 69, no. 1 (August 21, 2020): 47-55, accessed August 17, 2022. doi: 10.15585/mmwr.su6901a6.

Smith-Millman, Mills and Paul Flaspohler. "School-Based Suicide Prevention Laws in Action: A Nationwide Investigation of Principals' Knowledge of and Adherence to State School-Based Suicide Prevention Laws." *School Mental Health* 11, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 321-334, accessed July 25, 2022. doi: 10.1007/s12310-018-9287-y.

