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RETURNING TO IMAGINATIVE LITERARY TEXTS IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM:
A CASE STUDY OF GREEK LITERATURE AND THEIR
POTENTIAL IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING

by

ESTHER GABAY

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Returning to Imaginative Literary Texts in the Composition
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Esther Gabay

Advisor: Marie Marianetti

The basis for the argument—a return to literature in first-year college composition—stems from a composition debate that emerged in the 90s that suggested instructors of composition refrain from using literature in their writing courses. The thesis proposes that literature, specifically Greek literature, be repurposed and integrated back into first-year writing college courses. Chapter one contextualizes the historical debate and proposes imaginative literary texts return to first-year writing. The second chapter presents cross-disciplinary advantages, looking closely at the value of teaching literature in composition classes as a tool for building prior knowledge, developing cross-disciplinary insights and access into other disciplinary conversations, in addition to promoting critical literacies. The third chapter discusses the cognitive and meta-cognitive benefits imaginative literary texts can have on the brain, in so far as it relates to reading, writing, and critical thinking, and in turn their effect in academic writing.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

HISTORY OF THE FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION DEBATE

Presenting the Problem and Solution:

There's been a long-standing debate between First-Year Composition (FYC or FYW) instructors about the role of literature in the first-year writing classroom. While FYC is a branch of the English Discipline, the study of Composition and Rhetoric as a means to teaching composition through English departments, has firmly detached itself from literary studies. The curricular difference lies in departmental pedagogy, where directors or coordinators of writing programs determine best practices for teaching composition as a multidiscipline craft, focusing predominantly on rhetoric and expository devices to enhance students' skillsets. However, in more recent years, and after trying various teaching methods and approaches to essay writing and research writing, it has become evident that more can be gained from imaginative literary texts than composition instructors recognize. What is most important to consider, however, is what literature instructors decide to use in their course and how particular texts can aid in students' writing praxis. This paper seeks to examine the effects of using Greek literature in composition courses in order to best guide students to develop as writers. Also, by reading Greek texts students can develop new historical, political, social, and psychological content knowledge to strengthen their overall critical abilities, in addition to accomplishing other critical reading, writing, and thinking objectives.

The basis for the argument--a return to literature in first year college composition--stems from a composition debate that emerged in the 90s that suggested instructors of composition refrain from using literature in their writing courses. I propose that literature, specifically ancient Greek literature, be repurposed and integrated back into first year writing college courses.

The Composition Literature Debate:

First Year Composition established its place in higher education almost a century ago and has been changing philosophically, pedagogically, and methodologically as a discipline each decade, reaffirming and adjusting its practices to suit its purpose and role in academe (Steinberg 267). Since the 1930s FYC courses have varied in what and how they teach (266). Courses focused on a spectrum from grammar to linguistics, structure, literature, rhetoric, logic, analysis, media, and more, depend on the instructors and their areas of interest and value (267). The premise, however, always returns to composition for the first-year writer who learns how to write for college. Among the attempts to theorize writing studies we have seen a plethora of literature related to writing in the disciplines and across disciplines. We have also seen conversations focus on professional writing, style and prose, and the purpose of composition as a basic writing course for the prepared and underprepared student. The mainstay for composition is teaching students how to communicate in writing: effectively, clearly, cohesively, emphatically, and concisely-- controlling with style and flair. In a composition classroom one might find students who have a range of experience with these techniques and the instructor's job is to prepare the majority of students in the classroom well enough to thrive in their other courses and learn the language of the academy. Throughout these many decades of FYC growth and transformation, approaches to teaching these skills and the arguments that scholars presented created paradigms and trends that have shaped the methodologies we apply today. Yet the discussion is not over. Debates that began in the earlier part of twentieth century that have influenced the nature of FYC continued on to the end of the twentieth century, maturing as a legitimate discipline, with plentiful theories and debates regarding best practices and approaches. The discussions and classroom experiences spanned from inundating FYC with grammar and mechanics instruction to literary studies to technical writing workshops, with instructors designing their curriculum according to their own disciplinary values

and biases. Part of the contention emerged between those who saw FYC as a service course for other disciplines and resented its anti-intellectual and reductive form. Those who saw FYC as a writing intervention found the traditional methods often overindulged in intellectualizing the conversation and saw the use of certain literary materials as a distraction to the course's purpose.

Historically, professors of FYC often assigned imaginative literary texts in their composition courses and relied on imparting their expertise onto their freshmen students. When FYC first grew into its own discipline, it began to evaluate traditional English approaches and shift into a more skills-based and technical course. In March 1993, in the journal *College English*, Erika Lindemann, a leading expert in Composition and Rhetoric, argued against the use of literary texts in her revolutionary article "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature." The article firmly established that First Year Composition (FYC) should be a course focused on the development of techniques, devices, and process of academic writing, "whereby writers and readers enter the conversation of the academy and begin to contribute to the making of knowledge" (313). The problem for Lindemann is really that literature, and the mere act of reading it, does not inherently inform students' writing of prose or adequately prepare them for general college writing. She noted that FYC should be a place for: "planning, drafting, revising, using data, evaluating sources, reading critically, interpreting evidence, solving problems, understanding and applying the rhetorical and formal conventions of texts and becoming good collaborators" (313). She was interested in creating an atmosphere that *was* and *is* conducive to generating all types of writing, in which students are guided by practical approaches through workshopping, and by reading content that modeled expository argumentative writing. This would help them learn about, practice, and develop as writers for college, along with writing for their own personal and professional purposes.

According to Lindemann, teaching and reading literature in FYC, albeit enjoyable and in some cases advantageous to the first-year writer, did not lend well to the actual teaching of writing,

composition and academic discourse. It often limited students to literary criticism and scholarly perspectives, that were not realistic models for academic writing. Instead of allowing students to explore, experiment, and interpret on their own, and to read academic works that reflected the kinds of writing students would have to undertake, English professors were teaching what their English expertise called for, which wasn't universal to academic writing and thus interfered with the fundamental purpose of the course (313). Writing in these literary centered classrooms becomes about writing analyzing literature, rather than learning to compose and developing techniques that apply to most writing for college, in and across the disciplines.

As composition and rhetoric grew as a discipline, dominating FYC, the exclusion of literary texts became commonplace, and even ridiculed in some cases. By the nineties, the use of literature in FYC had already become scarce. Lindemann's argument made waves in composition studies for many years after, influencing more than two decades of writing instruction that excluded literary imaginative texts. I use Louise M. Rosenblatt's definition of literature to define what I continuously refer to as "imaginative literary texts." In her book *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt describes literature

Whatever the form—poem, novel, drama, biography, essay—literature makes comprehensible the myriad ways in which human beings meet the infinite possibilities that life offers. And always we seek some close contact with a mind uttering its sense of life. Always too, in greater or lesser degree, the author has written out of a scheme of values, a sense of a social framework or even, perhaps, a cosmic pattern. (6)

For Lindemann, composition instruction provides an opportunity to take writing risks and focus on the writer's development of their voice and authorial skills (311). In addition, first year writing instructors, often experts in literary studies, used the composition classroom to flex content expertise and teach literary criticism, which she found antithetical to the course's role and intent

(313). Since FYC is meant to support student authorship and prepare them for discipline-related college writing, she believed the use of literary texts as a model for writing was an impractical defense of literary application that ultimately undermined the main objectives of the first-year writing course (314). Thus, the debate in support of literature in composition and against literature in composition began to take form in scholarly literature.

The very next article in the same issue of *College English* was by Lindemann's colleague and Professor of English from Texas Christian University, Gary Tate. His oppositional response, "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition," argues that the decision to exclude literary texts from FYC had not been properly discussed and needed more evaluative conversation to assess the advantages and disadvantages of neglecting literary texts. Tate expresses his concern that instructors were losing too much when they excluded and eliminated literary texts. His essay grieved for the opportunity to engage the imagination and expose students to good writing and style. He states that "to ignore the study of style as just another of the many misguided concerns of current traditionalists, is to deprive our students of the linguistic possibilities that just might elevate their prose above mediocrity" (318). While Lindemann sees FYC as a place to support universal academic writing, Tate sees the study of literary texts in composition as a means to move beyond the superficiality of writing only for the academy—that literary texts offer students a means to become civically-minded individuals and intellectual interactors with the world (320). His fear corroborates the notion that academia is transforming into a workforce-centered institution, wherein critical thinking and intellectual pursuit of knowledge is becoming less important, thus eroding the transcendental and transformative shifts higher education has been known to foster.

The debate between Lindemann and Tate is pretty well known in FYC programs, but literature's place in composition only declined in the years that followed their work. At the English Department in the community college where I teach, "literature" can be a *bad* word. Some have

given up on the argument altogether and totally subscribe to Lindemann's approach, while others teach literature only in their designated literature elective courses. And some, like me, take a mixed-genre approach in order to broaden the development of students' skills and exposure to different forms of writing. For a long time, the door to this conversation had been sealed pretty tightly, but more recently, scholars like Sheridan Blau have reopened the conversation, illustrating and discussing how FYC can and should be a place for literature instruction.

Blau, Professor of Practice at Columbia Teacher's College who has written extensively on the teaching and learning of literature and composition, recently published "How the Teaching of Literature in College Writing Classes Might Rescue Reading as It Never Has Before" (2017). He builds on and resolves Lindemann's popularly subscribed to argument. Blau suggests that Lindemann's case is predicated on traditional literary teaching, which has been known to focus on lecture, literary criticism, and interpretation as a product of expertism which has been known to limit (or corrode) the reading and learning experience. The implication that literature has correct and final interpretations and answers, determined by elite scholarly minds, has given literature a bad name and had excluded students from the meaning making process (270). Blau agrees with Lindemann that this approach inherently restricts learners, discouraging them from participating in the meaning-making process and from the generation of their own ideas, and furthermore, nurtures a climate where the professor is always right and the student is a basket in which the professor deposits knowledge. Lindemann's argument here was not unwarranted nor inappropriate for pedagogical purposes. Her article challenged traditional professorial methodology and critiqued its effectiveness. The benefactor here was the student and the evolution of the student-centered approach. Understandably, the study of literature, that is, literature as content, had to lose its place in FYC because it was not supporting the *writing as a process* principle where students truly exercise their writing chops and develop as academic writers. Instead, as Blau asserts, literary

studies had historically represented methods that contradict process and knowledge building and reinforced and encouraged the development of “false knowledge” through the teacher-centered banking model (271). But where Blau’s argument veers from Lindemann’s is in his view of FYC as the best and most natural place to teach literature. His essay concludes by acknowledging how, since Lindemann wrote her article, composition studies has evolved into a pedagogically-focused discipline that is now mostly taught by pedagogically-minded writing instructors. With that, Blau’s belief is that compositionists are no longer teaching in ways that stunt students’ learning, but rather that these writing pedagogues, who have studied the craft of teaching, now apply pedagogical methods that provoke students to think deeply about meaning and know how to guide students in revising their own ideas in order to come to logical, unique, and close readings of a text as they work to unpack, interrogate, and experience content. Today, we can find the practice of reading literature in FYC courses to be mutually respectful of writing, reading, and deep-thinking instruction, but only with the guidance of writing instructors who understand the process by which learning occurs (248). Composition instructors are now content experts and pedagogues, elevating the quality of teaching and learning beyond literary content mastery and ineffective lecture methods.

Lindemann’s anti-literature argument was and is totally valid. Her concern, along with Tate and Blau’s, was in *how* we teach literature in first-year writing courses, and that the traditional English professoriate’s status quo methodology simply was not the best approach. Lindemann did not focus enough on actual pedagogy and how the use of literary texts could be a valuable and viable textual asset in FYC. Blau’s return to this discussion is exhilarating because it acknowledges the value of literary texts that cultivate indispensable skills that elicit deep reading, multiple meaning making, and critical questioning that cannot be fostered by other genres, for example informational textbooks or newspaper editorials, when they are lost from the curriculum.

While all literary texts have the potential to engage and activate multiple learning processes, Greek texts have the ability to activate and fulfill an assortment of reading, writing, and learning objectives related to goals we find in FYC like: developing rhetorical style, understanding the value of structure and cohesion, establishing and building an argument, illustrating and defending ideas, presenting a variety of perspectives, and finding and expressing meaning that enhances the complexity of one's ideas. Greek literature takes the foundations of composition and rhetoric to the place where literature is studied and interpreted, together, in ways that are mutually beneficial to both disciplines.

Introducing Greek Texts: Why Plato/Socrates, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, and Sophocles Serve

Writing:

The benefit in using Greek canonical literary texts is that they are reflective of the origins and foundations of communication, composition, and rhetoricians, providing an introduction to the history of rhetorical and persuasive writing. Aristophanes' *The Clouds* and Plato's "Apology" are two Greek texts that create an inherent illumination of structure, style, and argument. The "Apology," based on Socrates' famous Athenian defense, is an immediate throwback to what it means to construct a case and defend it. Socrates is charged with "corrupting the youth" and blasphemy by way of creating skepticism and challenging the status quo through questions, which he is called to defend in this speech. The first half of the "Apology" is a classic argument in which he breaks down his case to show the jury that his methods are pure and pious. However, the jury finds Socrates guilty and sentences him to death. In response, Socrates' tone changes: he concedes to the will of the people, but proceeds to confront their own moral and ethical biases, while challenging their perceived lack of conscience.

"The Apology" is Plato's perception of Socrates' experience. We do not know if Socrates'

defense happened as Plato describes it, but the monologue carries nuances, presents a structure and performs as a literary text that encompasses human universal truths and human experiences, social and political critique, and the history of democracy and law. For composition in particular, the monologue displays rhetorical devices used to communicate and express an argument and defense, which students can emulate. It also models the transactional cognitive and metacognitive activities that occur when we are engaged in dialogue and debate, and when we read. The monologue provides us with a triangular reflexive activity that promotes reading, thinking, and writing in multiple forms and for multiple purposes. For instance, Socrates' speech in the "Apology" is a portrayal of a traditional Athenian defense which follows common rhetorical patterns of its time, following a standard form—an introduction (to introduce one's self and to present the issue), a narration (review the situation and discuss their side of the story), a refutation (responds to the accusation), and a peroration (a final emotional appeal to the jury) (Redfield 97). Additionally, research has found that literary texts can increase cognitive and metacognitive processes that are fundamentally necessary for students to become better learners, thinkers, readers and writers (Zunshine 115). Later chapters of this thesis will further discuss the triangular reflexivity, cognitive, and metacognitive potentials Greek texts can evoke.

Furthermore, Greek literary texts have an interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary value that are inherent to the building of knowledge and which arm students with contexts, insights and access into a variety of disciplines. They prepare students to grapple with new abstractions and concepts in tandem with their pre-acquired knowledge in logically seamless ways. Another Greek literary text that serves the FYC course twofold is Aristophanes' *The Clouds*. *The Clouds* takes a more satirical approach and responds directly and humorously to Socratic philosophy. The value of pairing both texts is in the confluence of argumentation, debate, and intellectualism at the core of each drama. In addition, *The Clouds* and "The Apology" have the ability to stimulate cognitive and

metacognitive processes through their own unique devices and through interpretation of subtextual implications and ideas. *The Clouds*, structured in rhetorical theatrical dialogue, tells the story of a man (Strepsiades) who has found himself in a crisis of debt because of the cost of his son's athletic hobby, and who believes that his son should learn how to argue for the reduction of the debt. If he can defend his claim and present and articulate a persuasive argument, he can talk his way out of the debt. He asks the son, Pheidippedes, to enroll in the "Thinking Establishment" run by Socrates, where students learn how to finesse a weak argument into the strong one. Throughout the play the audience experiences multiple arguments. The bifurcation of ideas can be seen through "cultural polarities of Old and New, Tradition and Novelty, Peace and War, Country and City" builds a symmetry into the text that can inform first year writers about symmetry in their own writing (Marianetti 8). Through comedic devices and a subtext that lends itself to comparing and contrasting ideas, Aristophanes not only sheds light on the cultural dichotomies in Athens that translate into the discussion of dichotomies, but also emphasizes other rhetorical strategies, like argument, texts in conversation, and value in communication, which students of FYC are meant to learn as a matter of course content. While we do not want to encourage reductive pro and con conversations in FYC, we use these texts to begin to complicate the conversation, and gently unpack nuances as the conversation continues. When students begin to compose, they enter the writing process with some experience conceptualizing and considering multiple perspectives and with an understanding that ideas are multi-dimensional and layered.

Other Greek plays like Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, work well to enhance students' general knowledge and build context for other disciplines, thus preparing them more intimately for interdisciplinary learning. *The Oresteia* trilogy and *Oedipus Rex* are both immersed in psychological, political, and legal themes that lend themselves well to direct interdisciplinary content. The plot of these dramas provide identifiable intersections that engulf

students in the process by which our legal system and the moral codes it encompasses have been shaped and structured. *Oedipus Rex*, as we know, is about King Oedipus who is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. In an attempt to trick fate, his parents give him up, but destiny manages to interfere with the plan and Oedipus ultimately kills his father and marries his mother. The story has become a foundation for psychoanalytical theory, and the stories in *The Oresteia* apply similarly to common psychodynamic concepts. Moreover, The value of *The Oresteia* and *Oedipus Rex* to the introduction of law and democracy can play vital roles in students' perception of contemporary legislative and governmental structures implemented in western society. They also provide insights as to how the architecture of our modern systems and structures are relevant today, providing students with a framework to think about the contexts they live within. More systematic and inclusive approaches will be discussed in the next chapter.

Implications and Limitations:

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that incorporating Greek texts into the curriculum may feel counterintuitive if we are working to dismantle structures that have supported a language of power, a history that has been selectively constructed to suite the historically dominant agenda, a canon that has been exclusively whitewashed, or a curriculum that has ignored the voices and experiences of historically and still marginalized individuals and groups. But there are values in these texts, when taken in context, and if explored relationally and responsibly, where we intentionally reveal elements that have been traditionally suppressed, that can facilitate in deepening students' understanding of the world, the structures they live within, along with elevating their writing processes and developing as writers.

The teaching of canonical texts, especially those which are dominated by white male western writers, and which reinforce western cultural ideals, comes with understandable skepticism

and warranted criticism. As the traditional scholarly publications embrace and slowly expand critical studies in, race, gender, multiculturalism, and rhetoric, the argument to include Greek literature into composition classes may seem to contradict the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay's culturally relevant/responsive teaching and praxis and can mislead audiences/students if not carefully problematized and presented. Annaliese Kramer-Dahl, in the article "Teaching Literature against the Empire," acknowledges the university's role in perpetuating "dominant culture, the dominant way of reading the world, could hardly serve dominant interests more obviously" (230). However, Kramer-Dahl's attention is refocused and resolved not through what we read, but on how we read. The focus is on considering and guiding our students to examine texts with critical questions that illuminate contexts and positions that have been historically ignored, erased, and/or marginalized. Kramer-Dahl refers to Michelle Wallace's commentary on "classics" to further her point:

It's not a matter of being for or against western civilization. We are all victims of it. It's time to consider that the classics may, in fact, make more sense to some of us as records of blindness to the plight of the world's majorities, than as sublime masterpieces ... That does not mean, however, that we do not need to read and analyze them. It means that we need to keep our eye on the ball. (qtd. in Kramer-Dahl 240)

In harmony with Wallace, Kramer-Dahl suggests we unpack the history from multiple perspectives: exploring and acknowledging the "values [of canonical texts] and at the same time recognizing its complicity in the formation of national ideology which colonized cultural differences" (242); examining how these texts have been appropriated and constructed by the dominant culture; and demonstrating how the writers' may have been constrained or suppressed (243).

Gloria Ladson-Billings also addresses the canonical question in the chapter "Yes, But How

Do We Do it?”, explaining how culturally relevant teaching can be applied in classrooms to make learning a meaningful and relevant process and experience. Ladson-Billings’ theoretical framework says that “teachers engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy must be able to deconstruct, construct, and reconstruct the curriculum” (32). It is what we do with the texts and what teachers seek to accomplish using these texts that transforms the context for students. Both Ladson-Billings and Kramer-Dahl agree that the critical lens must be sharpened and exercised, so when teaching these texts we acknowledge the process by which these texts come to be “classics” or part of the “canon” and responsibly foster an environment that will allow for awareness and critical discourse to emerge, thrive, and inform ways we read these texts and how we might view them rhetorically and skeptically. Ladson-Billings acknowledges the careful balancing of criticality in traditional contexts when she says:

This same teacher might be quite explicit about the place of the text in the literary canon and the cachet and clout students acquire when they can speak intelligently about such texts. One of the major activities in the classroom of culturally relevant teachers is engaging in critique of texts and activities (34).

Asao Inoue, in his address at the 2019 CCCC conference, implicates compositionists in perpetuating and reinforcing the dominant language or the “language of power,” and further with impassioned contemplation, provokes us to consider the origins of our assessments and judgements. He contends that we may find ourselves relying on old tricks and hegemonic pedagogies, implicit and explicit pedagogies that have been constructed by dominant culture. Inoue asks “who has been allowed to name people, places, things, the processes of writing and revision, theories of rhetoric?” (Inoue 09:37-09:43). Greek literature positions us exactly where we need to be in order to examine who those inventors were and what they should or could mean to us after critically examining their roles historically and currently. Ladson-Billings discussed this

dissonance in “But That’s Just Good Teaching,” when she describes a sixth-grade teacher who has built her curriculum around making learning a culturally relevant experience for her students:

In her sixth-grade classroom, Lewis encouraged the students to use their home language while they acquired the secondary discourse of ‘standard’ English. Thus, her students were permitted to express themselves in language (in speaking and writing) with which they were knowledgeable and comfortable. They were then required to ‘translate’ to the standard form. By the end of the year, the students were not only facile at this ‘code-switching’ but could better use both languages. (161)

The threat is to withhold entry into any and all conversations. Students should be able to access and toggle between a variety of languages without feeling alienated or excluded from the genre, the audience, or the “experts.” However, the way we prioritize these values in the classrooms, what we emphasize, what we choose to teach, and what we exclude when we teach these texts, reduces the experience and reinforces the dominance of the western bias canon.

We are battling against the institutionalized corporatization of higher education, where administrators would love it if more instructors reduced their standards and eliminated complex text all together, often seen as barriers to “success” (success determined by graduation rates). As college instructors we look for ways to help our students enter conversations that are intentionally difficult to access, but simultaneously advance their cultural capital (Bourdieu 47). Rather than withholding or de-centering certain materials or content, we should be arming students with rhetorical and intellectual weapons that help them cut beyond meaningless buzzwords like “success,” so students know how to work a system, rather than work for a system that defines “success” by how fast one is able to graduate and on time.

The argument Lindemann presents, to me, is one that underestimates our students’ abilities and subsequently disempowers them by withholding tools by which they can navigate a world that

is not accessible or equitable. A world that requires them to “code switch” when necessary, in order to reap whatever they grow to value and prioritize. In order to create a holistically enriching academic FYC experience, we as FYC instructors must recognize the overlapping complexities Greek texts enact when we present them to our students. However, the placement of these texts in FYC, creates multiple pathways and opportunities for learning that cannot be overlooked or supplemented through traditional non-fiction instruction, or even from contemporary adaptations. Literature has been noted to encourage processes that are essential to learning, but Greek literature more specifically is a two-for-one deal we risk losing if we eliminate it from the curriculum altogether. The case is not being made to ignore writing instruction and the practicalities of how the course functions, or embedding versatile texts into the curriculum, but rather to recognize how Greek texts can be critical tools for writing instruction that lend themselves simultaneously and symbiotically to the intellectual development of first-year students in multiple ways. This is not to say that no other literary text can accomplish the same intellectual rigor or power, but the complexity of Greek literature can introduce students to a broad range of ideas, concepts, meanings, disciplines, and cognitive and metacognitive actions.

CHAPTER 2

GREEK LITERATURE AS A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY TOOL AND FOR BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

When I was a child, I hated reading. When the time came for me to learn the alphabet my mother sat me down at a short tiny round table located in my childhood bedroom, where my stuffed animals sat waiting for my company. She handed me a piece of paper and a pencil and said, looking up at the wallpaper alphabet border lining my ceiling, “copy those symbols pasted on your walls.” My mother carefully decorated my childhood bedroom with colorful hopscotch carpeting, displaying geometric shapes and numbers that looked like hieroglyphics to me. A wallpaper border framed the top of each wall and illustrated the twenty six letters of the alphabet, with an illustrative animal counterpart representing each letter. I had been visually taking all these images in for years before she actually ever sat me down. However, they were terribly foreign to me when it came to imitating them. I had no idea how she wanted me to copy anything. I didn’t even know what it meant to copy something *really*, or how I could use my hands to do it, or what those letters and numbers meant. I always focused on the associational picture of the terracotta lion for L and the black and white striped zebra that poked his head out from behind the monumental Z. There was this very thoughtful educational motif concentrated in my bedroom, of which my non-college-educated mother had spent time thinking and crafting; somehow, she knew that my cognitive development would be nurtured if I had been exposed to these symbols early on. But, when she sat me down, I couldn’t do what she asked. Instead the whole idea made me uncomfortable, and perhaps filled me with the earliest experience of anxiety that I can remember.

I was slow to learn to read and write. It took much longer than my peers to learn to decode

the alphabetic symbols and found myself often staring at a page for sixty minutes--spacing out, wandering in thoughts. Needless to say, I gave up many times. I practically went through all of elementary school unable to absorb anything I read. Careful not to further exacerbate my anxiety, my mom would always say, "Read anything, everything. It doesn't matter. Just read." After years of hearing her say this, I started reading commercial storefront signs from the car window, magazine covers, newspaper headlines. Then I graduated to Archie comics and read those voraciously. In between, my grandfather would tell me about his time in the concentration camp in Poland during world war II. I was something like eight years old when these painful stories provoked a curiosity in me about social issues. At eleven and twelve, I started researching skinheads and Nazis, then wrote to the Anti-Defamation League, who replied to my letter by sending me a very large box with books about skinheads and Nazis. To keep me reading, my mother heard about a comic book about the war, and bought me what we now know is a "graphic novel" called *Maus*. I devoured it quickly. When we learned about World War II in History class, I brought my knowledge of the intimate and intricate details my grandfather shared about the war to class—specific details that textbooks didn't really cover. This experience of learning to read, by reading only what actually interested me, gave me the foundation or prior knowledge which I needed in order to access the academic conversation and see myself in that conversation. It also prepared me to recognize and think critically about ways textbooks, curricula and teachers neglected or excluded perspectives, voices, experiences, and details that I knew belonged in the conversation. Although, the exclusion was painful and confusing, I understood more about this history than many of my classmates and teachers, and often I could draw parallels between other historical and contemporary injustices we learned about. In my self-directed learning, reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Maus*, *Night*, in tandem with informational texts, I was granted access into the experience, learned about the gradual development of systemic oppression, and how economics

and politics play critical roles in the health of a society. A new network of questions and inquiries grew as I continued to teach myself, branching out of the Jewish experience, came a deep desire to learn about other oppressed peoples and understand why and how such injustices and cruelty could ever occur. There was an unraveling towards an interdisciplinary thinking, where the political met the social; where the social met the economic; where the economic met the psychological; where the psychological met the historical. As I learned more, the intersections and departures became clear. I had only just begun to explore the complexities and layers embedded in social issues, and with it also came challenges to my own beliefs about people and systems power.

FYC as a *Contact Zone*:

Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone," is defined as a natural intersectional process of scaffolding and building knowledge through one's own personal, cultural and historical context. She says that the *contact zones* are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in context with highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). Pratt acknowledges that our intersectional identities and experiences in the world, with our individualized and shared meanings of history, frame our relationship to course content. Deepening our learning and understanding can happen in the *contact zone*, where our intersectional identities and histories, meet and challenge each other's frameworks. It can both affirm and challenge our perceptions and beliefs, expanding our base of knowledge and complicating the issues. In my own case, the struggle to read and build knowledge to facilitate the development of my reading comprehension, prepared me for traditional modes of learning. Informed by my own histories and cultural-religious intersections, my understanding of WWII and the Holocaust, as the conventional curriculum presented it, allowed me to engage and build on my prior knowledge from the classroom content, because I was already invested, holding enough prior knowledge to continue to build upon my

understanding of this time as it related to my position and connection to family, religion, and culture. Through an intrinsic culturally relevant approach, I recognized my place, and my family's place in the context, and in the curriculum, in which I, we, could feel a sense of presence and relevancy. The contact zone allowed me to enter the class conversations, with the ability to contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way, and participate in the knowledge building of my peers and myself.

Maintaining this meaningful and relevant experience in college is also a necessary step to effective teaching. At the community college where I teach an FYC classroom enrolls twenty-seven students, from a variety of backgrounds and from a variety of positions. Most are first generation college students; some are from outside the United States, who speak multiple languages; some are American born, but went to underserved and failing public schools; some are low income; some are middle income; some drive to campus; some travel one and a half hours on public transit; some live on the margins and some live close to campus. My students' contexts are diverse and come with a range of perspectives, unique to their intersectional identities, experiences and positions. So when we teach FYC, we must think about how we can tap into each of these lived experiences and persons through our content and curricula so that these students want, from an internal place, to engage in the process of learning, which can begin by constructing a FYC classroom that embraces and safely facilitates contact zones in which our students can feel that what they learn is important to them and others.

Alfred Ingberg asks in the article, "A Comment on 'Contact Zones' and English Studies" whether English and FYC can be the *contact zone* Pratt describes. Through literary texts we can create a "historically and socially defined contact zone" (601). Ingberg sees potential in capitalizing on the inherent interdisciplinary relationships submerged in texts, by encouraging students to exercise their prior knowledge and experiences from "[g]enre courses, historical

surveys, topically and thematically focused courses [that] might all continue to have a function in such a curriculum, mutually complementing and illuminating each other” (601). The work we do as writing teachers is inherently interdisciplinary, so while we may be focused on developing students’ writing skills, the texts we use in tandem can also assist in how deeply and intrinsically those skills evolve, and then how progressively they flourish on paper. With that, students can also reflect on their own past learnings, formative experiences, intersectional identities, cultural contexts and frameworks, to better understand the value of perspective and build their critical awareness of self, others, texts, culture, politics, economics, etc. If we only pay attention to a few disciplinary examples and neglect others, then we will see an uneven development in our students’ thinking, reading, and writing production. We can’t simply teach structure, style, voice, purpose, without first teaching students how to engage in complex thinking and divergent processes. Academic writing, as a locale for complex ideas, should be a place for critical discourses to thrive. This means problematizing histories, recognizing and acknowledging negligence and absence of nuances that foster the development of critical observation and an awareness of differing perspectives. The contact zone can help illuminate lesser known details, equalize the curriculum, and generate new ideas about content that might change the way students perceive the value and purpose of content in their own lives and experiences. The texts that writing instructors use in their classes have the potential to serve as activators of prior knowledge, to equalize uneven power dynamics and foster environments that invite positionality into the conversation, ultimately encouraging engagement with the content and the skills we are entrusted to refine. But the texts we choose have to be enmeshed in major themes that are relevant to students so they can latch onto them as they process the material. These themes should invite students to join the discussions, share their prior knowledge and past experiences, from their position, in order for the contact zone to serve as the space where substantial thinking can occur and then be communicated through

writing.

Greek Literature Nurtures the Contact Zone:

For a holistic introduction into college writing, we can use Greek literature to help accomplish these fundamental college writing goals. But, in addition we can also use Greek literature to find a variety of intersectional themes that inherently stimulate students' development as critical readers, thinkers, and writers, eliciting personal reflections that meet in the *contact zone*, where students can interact and make meaning of the reading and each other. The usefulness of Greek literature is that these texts can apply to all disciplines, evoking personal historio-cultural perspectives which students can share as they unpack historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical, judicial, literary, theatrical, political, or anthropological/archeological components embedded in the texts. Therefore, using multiple models, varying from *The Clouds*, to *Oedipus Rex*, to the "Apology," or *The Oresteia* can effectively work to accomplish *more* learning than what accredited institutions agree is sufficient or enough. The thematic value of these texts is inarguably built into other disciplines, and can foster the kind of learning and writing we try to teach students to acquire and practice in FYC in order to succeed in the academy and beyond. Pratt describes a course that "put ideas and identities on the line." She continues with "All students in the class had the experience of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students saw their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame" (39). As a pedagogical strategy, these crossroads allowed students to see themselves in the content through the context of class discussions, albeit unnerving and at times, uncomfortable. For the contact zone to be fully effective, it cannot avoid grappling with others' interpretations and meaning. It must be a place that allows

exercises in storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes

of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison; the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history, ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. (40)

When bringing both the prior and personal into the fore, students are able to utilize “knowledge from other contexts, other classes” (Ingberg 601), and other learning spaces, to inform and refine their perspectives on issues that turn up in these conversations. Then they can translate these ideas into their writing. All disciplines look for a basic structure in their version of academic writing, and so, as writing instructors, we are charged with the task of teaching both the elements of writing and argumentation, but also respecting the generation of ideas and nuance. We are meant to guide students to think about how discourses, across disciplines and position, shape newly formed perspectives. These principles and new ways of seeing apply to all writing across disciplines and can be mutually beneficial in teaching content, helping students access content, and solidifying and expanding new knowledge in their writing.

In reading Aeschylus’ drama *The Oresteia*, specifically *Agamemnon*, for the first time, the reader enters a Greek world filled with scandal, corruption, power imbalances, familial betrayals, sexual violence, and political instability. One of the overarching themes is *justice* and the play is a dynamic multi-representational microcosm of historical and contemporary politics. *Agamemnon* tells the story of the King and heir of the house of Atreus, who returns from Troy after a ten year war. While away, he kills his daughter Iphigenia to appease the gods, and upon his return, Clytemnestra his wife and the Queen Argos, plots to murder Agamemnon so she and her lover, Aegisthus, also Agamemnon’s cousin, can attain full control of Argos and avenge her daughter’s

death. The house of Atreus is said to be cursed and one of the running motifs in the play is the cyclical recurrence of death and war-- blood for blood—the notion that evils begets evil. When Agamemnon returns from Troy, he is viewed by the public as a hero, the one who saves Argos, but he is not a hero. In order to save the lives of his soldiers, he was instructed by Apollo to kill his daughter, Iphigenia, which immediately compromises our view of him as a fearless and admirable leader. Agamemnon's choices are emotionally and ethically entangling and captivating, produce conflicting reactions, and can be interpreted from multiple vantage points.

Since the typical FYC classroom meets students from everywhere, reading *Agamemnon*, will evoke and bring up unique perspectives, derived from students own personal contexts. It can also elicit prior and interdisciplinary knowledge, bring histories, socio-economic positions and place into the classroom. As a result, students' contributions to class discussions and approaches to writing about themes emerging in *Agamemnon*, will differ immensely, but the breadth of viewpoints can be useful for grappling with content, practicing critical reading of content, engaging in debate, and presenting supportive evidence. In my own courses, I have seen students draw from multiple knowledge bases and contexts when making sense of Agamemnon's choice to kill Iphigenia. Students naturally and vibrantly engage in a dispute about his actions, intentions, and talk about whether or not his choice was justifiable. When presenting their view of Agamemnon's guilt or innocence, students search the play for moments that support their position and rationale, a crucial and fundamental maneuver we want to cultivate in their writing. In these moments, they try to explain (verbally) how they see Agamemnon's action as heroic or cruel, and then when it is time to write about these moments, they can blend elements of whatever they have learned from these discussions, and understand why and how they want to integrate textual evidence into their writing to justify their arguments.

Hearing a spectrum of perspectives allows students to attempt to understand, exercise and

balance multiple sides, and work to reasonably unpack and explore oppositional arguments, and make sense of their purpose in the conversation, as they engage in their own process of learning. Students might even note a Game of Thrones episode in which Stannis Baratheon kills his daughter Shireen in order to redirect his fate—a scene adapted almost directly from *Agamemnon*.

Essentially, when students grapple with the text and its lessons, they can begin to see how these issues are coming up in popular culture or other fictions, and then perhaps guide them to identify and discuss relationships and similarities in more nuanced developed ways, even if the examples they discuss are fictional television shows. The first step for students is access. If we are to meet them where they are, we must accept and respect when students find correlations, in whatever form, so they are more likely to feel confident when they explain and develop their rationale in their arguments.

Furthermore, when one reads the play, without much context, the reader is thrust into what seems like a mystical and rather fantastical universe. However, when you surpass the fantastical elements, we are confronted with very relevant and complex political issues, which serve as a gateway into the contemporary civic engagement we often want to elicit from our students.

Agamemnon is aware of the common people and worries about their faith in his leadership, which reflects the current political strategies we are exposed to today. He says, “The voice of the people-aye, they have enormous power” (Aeschylus 933). Agamemnon reflects a politician we know today, one who is concerned with popular opinion, whose hands are quite dirty and who fears the masses. When students explore this line from the play, they are entering a familiar political battle, and can begin to draw their own observations about power and manipulative tactics, rhetoric that enlists their support by politicians they confront today and thus can refer to these moments when they compose in writing.

The complexity of Agamemnon’s character also brings out aspects of duality which

students consider as they try to make sense and assess his behaviors. Agamemnon is aware of his vulnerability and that his actions have consequences. If the people find his actions disingenuous, they will revolt and overthrow him, so the reader begins to question his seemingly genuine motives and learns to think more critically about the consequences of power. Using *Agamemnon* to access this conversation can give students a place to begin thinking about democracy, leadership, power dynamics, and rhetoric. We can use the play to examine Agamemnon's strategies and rhetorical moves otherwise undetected to the non-critical eye. In our students' exploration they are surpassing literary studies and embody questions about hierarchies, the realities of politics, political and legal structures, human behavior, crossing into disciplines intentionally. Before students can write analytically about disciplinary topics, they need to be introduced to these concepts and ideas more generally, and acquire some prior knowledge, so as to establish some foundational thoughts, opinions in which to build upon later. FYC and Greek literature in tandem, can help students engage topics more broadly and write about these issues more concretely, so that they continue the generative process of learning, arriving at informed conclusions, and communicating these new ideas in writing with a purpose.

Literature, the Contact Zone, and Interdisciplinary Potential:

Louise M. Rosenblatt, recognized the implicit potential literary texts had on interdisciplinary learning in 1938, when she published the chapter "The Challenge of Literature," in the book *Literature and Exploration*. This first chapter begins by describing the uncomfortable, yet inevitable, cross-disciplinary processes literary texts provoke in their readers. Literature, or specifically literary texts, capture readers through modes that enable emotional and sensual reactions. It is through imaginative and creative prose that readers can transcend time and space and learn through a cognitive transactional and experiential process. Transactional reading theory,

is the notion that reading is a process of exchange, when the reader and text essentially give and take from each other. Similar to Pratt's definition of the contact zone, Rosenblatt says that in order to be captivated by a text, readers come to the text with their own experiences, histories, contexts—elements which drives their reading of a text. While readers become absorbed in texts, they are immersed in historically rich contexts and experiences, ethical and philosophical negotiations, and the human condition, which they understand and engage through their own lenses and individualized and unique perspectives (8). As the reader imposes their own reading/meaning onto a text, the reading experience creates a gateway for new retrospective and introspective reflections which gives ways to questioning and thinking through a certain disciplinary lens. Rosenblatt suggests that teachers of literature, who feel uncomfortable teaching outside their area of expertise, “must resign themselves to the fact that they cannot avoid encroaching on these extremely important and interesting questions concerning human behavior” (15). It is to the detriment of the students' reading and learning experience, if teachers do not embrace these human and relatable intersections in meaningful ways. This means recognition of interdisciplinary modes and preparing to incorporate those modes into the curriculum flexibly. Rosenblatt suggests that without recognizing and acknowledging specific disciplinary relationships, we are missing a valuable opportunity to excavate literary texts and utilize their natural potential to encourage a thoughtful and complex reading of the text, so that students benefit most from the spectrum of possibilities, thereby universally equipping them for other subsequent courses.

When I was an undergraduate taking an FYC course, we read Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. The final writing assignment was to be a research paper. I didn't particularly enjoy reading *Frankenstein*. I remember declaring that Shelly's long-winded descriptions of forests and horizons were monotonous and tedious, but I also remember that I liked *talking* about the book, and the characters' inner worlds, their motivations, their behaviors, and the existential *god questions* Shelly

provoked by my classmates and by me. For the research paper, I proposed a psychoanalysis of Shelly, to better understand her gothic influences. This was before university databases comprehensively archived journal articles, so I had to actually go to the stacks and take out books about psychology in order to teach myself enough to inform my thesis and engage in a reasonable analysis. It is important to note that we did not talk about technical literary criticism in this class; we just talked about the book, generally. However, these conversations invited a literary critical examination without me realizing it. The book inherently activated an interest in understanding human behavior and the drives and the need for power. This desire to understand the concrete psychodynamics of the main character Victor, and the human attributes Frankenstein exhibited drove me to want to learn more about why humans behave in certain ways; where shame comes from; how and when shame transforms to anger. I even began to think about artificial intelligence and the existential discussions surrounding this phenomenon, a topic that felt very big and unfamiliar to me. Universal themes like these came up in class discussions often, which led me down a rabbit hole and towards thoughts about Shelly's messages and intentions. I was intrinsically motivated to support my own theories and ideas, which in turn created an enthusiasm to learn more about human behavior and psychology, so that I could compose an informed, complex, and persuasive research paper. Having the freedom to select my own topic, research questions, and explore various psycho-dimensions allowed me to take ownership of my own learning, and engage in an autonomously driven exercise. This is what I wanted to learn, so I was happy to do the research and learn all I could. I was essentially reading the text and integrating elements of psychology into my reading of *Frankenstein*.

Gerald Graff's article "Disliking Books at an Early Age" discusses the value of literary criticism, in that it encouraged and gave him the language to join what felt was an elite conversation; it gave him a way to look at the big questions and interdisciplinary social issues

emerging in texts; and literary criticism exposed him to the possibility and prevalence of multiple interpretations, views, and discussions about a text. Graff says that in order to access literature and respond emotionally to it the text had to be for him “a curiously triangular business; [he] could not do it directly but needed a conversation of other readers to give [him] the issues and terms that made it possible to respond” (45). Before Graff learned of criticism, he could not relate to the texts. He had no idea what he was supposed to take from them, or what issues were embedded in the text. “I continued to find ‘serious’ reading painfully difficult and alien” Graff says (42). Graff needed to hear the critics frame cultural and social issues, discuss texts with relevant theories in mind in order to feel as though he could meaningfully intervene in these conversations (47). The exposure to criticism for Graff, is the exposure any student needs before they recognize that they have something to contribute to the conversation. For Graff criticism was a scaffold, an introduction into literary studies and literary reading. For me, *Frankenstein* indirectly invited me into psychology and its foundational theories and concepts.

The transactional reading and the nature of my undergraduate FYC class discussions allowed me to use what I already knew about human behavior, even if the technical language was missing, and provoked me to ask nuanced questions, leading me to want to pursue answers in non-English locations. As a result, the use of imaginative literature can naturally guide students to think in a critical interdisciplinary way, seeking answers across fields as well.

The same potential arises too when we use Greek literature in FYC, since the texts are so deeply relevant to so many other disciplines. Writing instructors know that the process of learning content and creating meaning is reflexive. When we bring pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, when students attempt to articulate and compose responses that exhibit their thoughts and newly acquired knowledge in writing, the two processes together engender new ideas, new interpretations, and an even deeper thinking and ownership of knowledge which students can further build upon in

the next phase of their learning process.

Writing to learn:

Writing, as we know, helps people develop their understanding of abstract and nuanced ideas in order to actualize and build upon what was once unknown and cross over into the known. When students meet new content, instructors must find ways to help students learn, process, retrieve, and apply content in order to, as Maxine Greene calls it, “incarnate” something that “seem[ed] devoid of meaning” (105). Writing, in any form and style (essaying, paraphrasing, summarizing, researching, annotating, narrating, reflecting, editorializing, or simply freewriting), is known to enable thinkers to establish a broader and deeper connection and understanding of content and has the potential “to lead to learning in other domains” (105). Through daily writing, students are guided towards a deeper, even more comprehensive, learning experience because it can inspire learners to go beyond the content and immerse themselves in other related or unrelated subject matter. Maxine Greene in the chapter “Writing to Learn,” from the book *Releasing the Imagination*, describes the value of supplemental tools as a means to scaffold and induce learning processes, especially when we add writing as a practice that opens students up to learning. When Greene was seven, after reading the M volume of an encyclopedia, which taught her about Mexico and Mexican miners, Greene found herself inspired to write a novel about a seven-year-old from Guadalajara. When undertaking this project, she says the endeavor provided her with a depth of expertise about Mexico’s mining industry in the early twentieth century and Mexico’s geography and typography (106).

Driven by her own intrinsic curiosity and autonomy, Greene’s creative writing project led her to learn, “incarnate” the content she read, and make sense of a world she hadn’t previously known anything about. In order to prepare for another novel later in her life, Greene buried herself

in research, which indirectly exposed Greene to new ideas, histories and nuances that elevated her knowledge base once again, and opened her up to new ways of seeing the world and disciplinary content. Greene had cultivated a disciplinary lens for history after majoring in history. But it was through the process of “incarnating” her research for this second novel that she says she learned more about history than she had in any of her history classes.

Something very important happened for me in mediating great events through a single consciousness, viewing the personal in relation to the public, the public from a private point of view. I was beginning to recognize the importance of vantage point when it came to the dialogue that is history. (Greene 107)

While Greene’s examples illustrate the interdisciplinary potentials and context preparation necessary and inherent in any learning process, they especially highlight how learning occurs from the sidelines, in indirect and unintended ways. In Greene’s case, she accumulated knowledge through research, but it was through exposure and access to information about migrants and geography that awarded Greene a depth of knowledge to inform her prose and possess more knowledge. The point here is that even through creative writing exercises similar to Greene’s childhood projects, or in courses devoted to writing creative prose or poetry, learning about other subjects and disciplines can be nurtured through non-traditional methods, but only if we resource and encourage students to engage and experience these non-traditional exercises and opportunities.

While FYC may not ask students to write creative prose very often, the reading of Greek literature as a creative work, can be viewed as a non-traditional exercise to help generate students’ curiosities and introduce students to elements of other disciplines, while simultaneously developing as writers. Greek literature lends itself to indirectly teaching about ancient Greece, Greco-Roman history, Greek art, the Athenian cultural context and its subsequent influences on modern western civilization, democracy and law, the human condition, and so on.

For Greene, reading, writing and research for her own projects begot a new understanding of content she would have not happened upon otherwise. The reflexivity and cyclical nature of her individual process demonstrates the value of non-disciplinary or non-traditional methods that can help students access a broad range of content, theories, and social themes, from a range of source. We have to remember that FYC is a first-year writing course, which means students enter our classes with whatever prior knowledge they have each accumulated throughout their lives. The spectrum of what they know differs for each student, but with an introduction to foundational ideas, we can better prepare students for subsequent English classes and courses in other disciplines—something that has been shown to be a challenging aspects of college for students who have trouble understanding and different disciplinary expectations (Keller 132-133).

Knowledge Building to Inform Writing:

Greek literature prepares students to explore and build a spectrum of knowledge, engages a range of disciplinary perspective, and teaches students how to enter college level thinking and conversations, especially within a composition course and as an interdisciplinary bridge. Each discipline has its own culture of criticism, inquiry, and methodology, and as English instructors we may not feel we have the expertise to teach discipline-specific content. Yet, we can know enough about multiple disciplines to demonstrate interdisciplinary thinking, and work to cultivate critical habits of mind, which are necessary for most disciplines respectively. First-year composition has the potential to introduce students to disciplinary concepts in preliminary ways that will ultimately benefit students' critical abilities within composition, and across disciplines and facilitate in students' knowledge production. Using Greek literature as a primary source and principle text in an FYC course can serve as a tool for activating a variety of learning processes, including critical reading, writing, and thinking, which can ultimately advance students' first-year writing abilities

and experiences.

To establish a framework for criticality, I introduce students to what I call *critical questioning*. To follow through on developing critical habits of mind, I combine a critical analysis and museum project in my own second level FYC course. The objective is to get students to evaluate the museum, its artifacts, and draw parallels between the object and the primary sources we are reading, and arrive at some kind of conclusion. When we hold class in a computer lab, I ask students to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art's interactive website. I guide students to observe a few details on the site and then ask them to identify one or two pieces of art from the Greco-Roman exhibit. Before they work on the formal critical analysis, I ask them to take notes based on a few guiding questions. These notes will come attached to the formal written assignment so I can see that they engaged in the stages of the activity. First, I ask them to describe the pieces they select and point out notable details. Then I ask them to describe the artifact and create an image with words. Once they have recorded the details, they are guided to write about what they think is the functionality of the object, its utilitarian role in Greco-Roman society, and their assessment of its value today and in the past. They are guided by the prompt to observe and note: the object's placement on the website (how is the site set up [chronologically, thematically, functionally? Is it on the front page? Is it buried on page four? What do you notice about the way the site presents this artifact? Who and what objects seem to be privileged and centralized on the website? What do you think that means? Why do you think the museum made this choice?]) Observe and discuss the style of prose of the written content on the site. What information do you gather from the written content? What else do you want to know? What's been left out? And finally, what questions would you ask the curator of the exhibit? Once they have done some critical exploration, they can formulate an argument about the artifact and begin to construct a formal critical analysis, with a focus on how the artifact might be related or speaks to the Greek text we're reading for class.

Through this exercise students are introduced to a variety of disciplinary qualities, like, archeology, history, and critical analysis. While simultaneously learning new phenomena and content, they also write about their own critical observations, using the artifacts and the Greek texts as points of comparison. The title *The Libation Bearers* in and of itself introduces something new to students. Many do not know what libations are or its spiritual purpose. When they are perusing the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Greco-Roman gallery, they might come upon libation jar, an illustration of a figure bearing libations on a krater, or a limestone funerary headstone with figures carved out holding a libation jar. When students first begin to read Aeschylus' second play, *Elektra*, followed by the chorus pours libations on her father's grave. The ritual is central to the plot, so when students can see concrete artifacts, that display similar scene, the ritual moves from myth to reality, within the historical context it is tied to. The meaning of this object and the ritual become tangible, relatable, real for students and can begin to feel meaningful to them. When students write about these artifacts, looking closely at both artifacts to excavate clues and draw relationships between them, then discuss and support their own personal observations and meanings, they "incarnate" the information and the texts in a new way, scaffolding towards fuller understanding of the content.

Psychologist Jerome Bruner has said that we learn in three ways: "enactive—[...] 'by doing'; iconic—[...] 'by depiction in an image'; and representational or symbolic—[...] 'by restatement in words'" (qtd. in Emig 124). Bruner argued that meaningful learning occurs for students when they have a general sense of the "*structure* of the discipline" (Phillips and Soltis 72). Bruner described this "structure" as the foundation for nurturing scaffolds of knowledge. In order to make sense of complex ideas and find relationships between ideas, one must have a basic understanding of the idea. Using Greek texts in tandem with the museum exercise can help to bridge a historical knowledge gap and give students a place to start learning about relevant content

embedded in the texts. It can help them see the overlap between the primary source text and an artifact, like the one they simultaneously examined, gently guiding students to make meaning of these objects and understanding history, culture, and elements of archeology. Bruner says:

To learn new structures, is to learn how things are related.... In order for a person to be able to recognize the applicability and inapplicability of an idea to a new situation and to broaden learning..., [they] must have clearly in mind the general nature of the phenomenon with which [they are] dealing. (73)

The idea for me is to bring the phenomenon into the classroom through accessible methods, so students have a foundation in which to build their understanding and then have an easier way to understand the ideas of technical language they can use later.

The student indirectly learns about these universal phenomena first through the text and then through interdisciplinary modes, as a way to scaffold conceptual comprehension and knowledge building. Lev Vygotsky's theory of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) acknowledges that each student's potential cognitive development is not finite and limited, but rather with the help from "psychological tools," can increase their capacity and potential for learning. If the teacher can see where the student is stalled, the teacher can then intervene and add an element to help the student along, thus never assuming the student can't go any further than she/he/they has come. Vygotsky stressed that "much of what we learned we learn from others" (qtd. Phillip and Soltis 59)—which he sees as a type of "psychological tool" that help students read, navigate, and work through the world, and which D.C. Phillips and Jonas F. Soltis add has the potential to open "new possibilities" for the learner (59).

Language is one of the "psychological tools" we use to scaffold knowledge and create the mental pathways for new knowledge and ideas to emerge. In many cases, ideas and concepts that are difficult to understand cannot be directly deposited into the students' mind, but rather needs to

be gradually structured using “psychological tools” to increase understanding. To clarify:

children are taught some of the psychological tools of a society by being told [...] names (e.g. ‘exports,’ ‘energy,’ ‘social class,’ ‘capitalism,’ ‘Marxism’) without the experience of the concepts. Unlike familiar and readily experienced objects, these concepts are artifacts of a particular form of social life; they are not easy to learn about in direct ways. Nevertheless, it is these abstract and socially important psychological tools that we often try to teach in schools. (59)

Thus, the texts we choose in our classrooms are the psychological tools we offer that indirectly scaffold students’ knowledge about a topic or issue. In a similar way, teaching disciplinary terminology, as we do in psychology, without any layering or scaffolding, can undermine and waste a truly meaningful opportunity to understand the content and concepts. Instead, when and if we can find alternate and indirect methods that support such content and concepts, we are thereby increasing the students’ chances of embodying learning the material, owning their understanding of it, and giving them enough prior knowledge to access more complex terrain later on.

The Met presented a “Dangerous Beauty” exhibit, which displayed the trajectory of representation of mythical women from the archaic period through the twentieth century. The exhibit is contemporarily relevant to the #metoo movement, and it can simultaneously teach us about the historical and social contexts in which these artifacts existed and were created for. For students with either little or no experience with gender studies, the exhibit, alongside the Greek texts, can provide access into a conversation that may feel out of reach. Essentially, the exhibit displays Medusa’s transformations through the epochs chronologically (Hansen). If students choose to focus on mythical character like Medusa, they could see how she evolves through the ages and how her appearance changes throughout antiquity and into today. They can also notice a shift in gender when they read the three plays in *The Oresteia* sequentially. There is a very clear

shift in how women are portrayed in each play. So, we could critically examine, separately or in tandem, Aeschylus' choices in constructing Clytemnestra or Elektra's personas and characteristics, alongside Medusa's flexible appearances, discussing anything from how gender might be a social construct to how ideas about gender seem to change and what that means for us today.

But conversations like these cannot happen without having some kind of prior understanding or interest to motivate an unpacking of these complex and abstract ideas. The accumulation of knowledge is unique to students and dependent on where they are when they begin to explore. But the museum exercise is a ladder that invites students to begin thinking about concepts that may seem exclusionary if presented too formally and linearly. Once they have the foundation, new questions are generated, a deeper learning can then occur. The "nature of the phenomenon," as Bruner describes it, in this case, gender dynamics, are introduced through art and artifacts, and can be explicated through these modalities, and discovered organically, nurturing the basis of the student-centered approach, whereby the concept comes alive, through visible, real, physical, concrete history. The exercise also does what Joseph Schwab and Paul Hirst describe as,

[t]reat[ing] the disciplines as 'living' entities, as bodies of knowledge that are in constant flux, growing and changing, and with which the student has to learn to work. And to work with a discipline one has to have a 'feel' for its dynamics, and some 'mental map' of it. (75)

Together, the three theoretical perspectives, Vygotsky, Bruner, Schwab and Hirst's, explain the importance of building upon knowledge, and that without a foundational basis, content and abstractions are more difficult to reconcile and own. The more content students are exposed to, the better able students are to draw connections between content, concepts, and ideas, and see how they might be applicable in multiple domains. When students accumulate the language and can identify details of certain phenomena, writing becomes more concrete, specific, and informed. Reading Greek texts accentuates and illuminates relevant historical and contemporary issues and topics, but

when taught through another disciplinary lens, students thinking and writing become more nuanced and complex. With this in mind, if students are not offered an opportunity to explore, discover, and build knowledge, as to allow the regeneration of learning and thinking to continue, the process is stunted and learning becomes meaningless and much harder to attain.

Similarly, Daniel Willingham, Psychology Professor at the University of Virginia and author of “How to Get Your Mind to Read” reiterates the necessity of scaffolding knowledge in order to develop better reading comprehension. The basis for his argument is grounded in the notion that better readers know more about topics embedded in texts. He explains that reading requires two necessary skills— one, having enough prior knowledge to fill in when texts exclude information and two, having enough prior knowledge to provide context (1). To further correlate with Bruner’s theory (Emig 124), Willingham sites the famous Baseball study where students who were proclaimed weak readers, did better or the same as strong readers on a reading exam that measured comprehension on a topic that *was familiar* to the weak readers (baseball). The findings of this study, “implies that students who score well on reading tests are those with broad knowledge; they usually know at least a little about the topics of the passages on the test” (2). He continues to say that “comprehension is intimately intertwined with knowledge” (2). In a similar vein, in order to write about a topic, one must have “broad knowledge” to enter the discourse or to generate questions about the topic. If a student doesn’t have some idea about what to say or write, access into a conversation is stalled. I have had many students say they don’t know what to write or they don’t know anything about the topic or they have no opinion. This position comes from lack of exposure, a sense that there is a gap in what they know, which therefore makes them unqualified to talk about it. As a result, helping students gain familiarity with the topics, phenomena, contexts, and so on, will essentially reinforce the process of learning and its place in writing. Greek literature, without being too obvious, gently nudges students into learning more about things they

have not learned or were not able to wrap their heads around.

Even before we get started with the museum assignment, making learning accessible is fundamental to feeling comfortable with reading Greek texts that are often translated in English prose my students are uncomfortable with and which really feels quite foreign to them. So, to better prepare them to read Greek texts, enjoy them, and then write about them, my class and I, before we begin to read any Greek text, preview the text and engage in an inquiry session to help develop some preliminary knowledge and generate some inquiry. We practice reading and interpreting the text aloud. I take them through a gentle think aloud of the first few pages of *Agamemnon*. We discuss what we think we know, how we make sense of the stanzas, which words are familiar, which are new. We decode and define challenging vocabulary and we allow ourselves to stumble, and refine our thinking. Getting students comfortable and equipped to deal with the language is a necessary first step if I want them to read on.

To get a very rough sense for where my students are when they enter our class, I administer two brief preassessments. The first assessment, asks students to free-write about ancient Greece and to tell me what they know about it. The second assessment is a multiple choice survey that asks more concrete and specific questions relevant to other disciplines, like philosophy, psychology, geography, political science, criminal justice, and history. I really just want to know what they already know, so I might ask something like who is Socrates? What psychological theory applies to the period associated to the development of a girl's increasing love for her father and animosity for her mother, and a boy's increasing love for his mother and animosity for his father? In tandem, the two assessments give me a sense for where students are when they enter the classroom, so that I can know where to start.

Once I have reviewed these preassessments, I give a very brief lecture about Greece and its history and then ask students to individually write down questions they might have about Greece or

the ancient Greeks. Once the questions have been established, I group students together, and they each share their questions with their group members. They are told to discuss possible answers together and then research (either on their cell phones or at a computer (when we reserve a lab) to confirm, expand, or refine their responses. Each group then writes all their questions on a large poster post it which hangs on the wall nearby, where they have been working in groups. Then, we engage in a gallery walk, where we each individually review each group's questions, and tick off two questions we want to learn more about. A representative (the group determined "reporter") will present findings for the three questions that earned the most votes (tick marks). This exercise is meant to help all students construct background knowledge and help students begin to understand context through inquiry-based research, collaborative social learning, in an accessible and non-intimidating way. I do not want them to feel alienated or afraid of what they don't know, so I give them this time to get their gears in motion and begin to ask all the questions they might be personally interested in learning more about. This also focuses their attention on the content and brings a certain level of interest when we begin to read the first Greek text. Students start to read independently from a place of knowing, and perhaps intrigue, rather than from a place of discomfort.

Upon understanding the advantages and necessity of broadening range of knowledge, the use of Greek literature in FYC offers a viable avenue to engender and enrich competencies across disciplines by broadening knowledge and introducing students to certain phenomena with an opportunity to understand these unfamiliar frameworks. When we allow disciplinary overlap to occur in conversations, we can come to greater understandings and build a deeper base of knowledge so as to effectively learn how to critical think within FYC and across discipline. The entire scope of potentiality widens when we offer students gateways and intentionally scaffold the process for and with them.

Learning Across Disciplines from the Greeks:

The skills students acquire in any course hopefully become their own, so they can take these skills with them to the next course, or out into the world, or into their professional careers. But while studying, technical disciplinary language can often alienate students and leave students feeling unprepared for a course. Remembering all the different disciplinary terms, theories and studies, can be overwhelming and feel detached from the students' personal experiences, even when in fact much of what they learn are universally applicable in some capacity if they could see the connection more explicitly. Scaffolding, as Bruner reminds us (Phillip and Soltis 73), is the tool which students need in order to access seemingly complex content, so finding alternate avenues to help students visualize, actualize, and conceptualize theoretical frameworks and technical language, Greek literature assist with this process. BY introducing common disciplinary phenomena embedded in Greek literature, we can move students towards more focused specific disciplinary attributes and modes of thinking. While FYC is not meant to service other disciplines, composition and rhetoric is the study of all communication. This inherently places FYC in a position to facilitate habits of mind, conversations, and compositions that mirror critical components of other disciplines. Some call this integrative learning; others call it interdisciplinarity. Both allow composition and rhetoric to overlap with another discipline as a way to support students' learning of content and development as writers and thinkers.

Using Greek texts in our FYC classes prepares students for content courses in a unique way. The Greek texts can help exercise critical thinking habits, explicitly teach concepts and terminologies, and give students an avenue to explore these disciplinary modes in a low stakes environment. If we study Plato's "Apology" in our FYC course, we are preparing students for a philosophy course, a rhetorical writing course, a history course, a psychology course, a criminal justice course, a political science course, etc. The most valuable feature in the "Apology" is its

critical examination, universal questioning, and discussion of knowledge production. What the “Apology” does for students is illuminate the conditions and labor involved in developing knowledge and engaging in an active critical inquiry. Willian Hare suggests that reading the “Apology” introduces students to foundational questions and insights, and challenges new ways of thinking about that which we have become accustomed to seeing through our contexts, our bias, and our individual positions. It is through the “Apology” that we can begin to see the value in criticism and how we might restructure our own understanding of morality and virtue, or perceptions and truths. Hare suggests that the “Apology” lightly pursues valuable themes that challenge our preconceived notions about the meaning of life, themes like: the search for knowledge, morality, priorities and values, limitations of human mind, democracy, and debate in an open society (26).

The fact that Plato’s text does not indoctrinate students, is its most valuable asset. It gives students the opportunity to bounce these ideas for a while and come to their own conclusions. While it might not be enough to emulate expertise, it is a valuable tool in bridging old and new learnings, and serve as a sort of mentor text, at least structurally. And unintentionally, the process can become a personal one, which would intrinsically motivate students’ engagement in the process. Michael Polanyi, in his book *Personal Knowledge* states, “[I]nto every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known... this coefficient is no more imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge” (qtd. in Emig 126). Similar to Rosenblatt’s transactional reading, when the student is personally invested in the subject, there is an experience the student goes through, and thus the student then becomes a participant in his or her learning, which in turn establishes a more permanent and memorable place in the student’s prior knowledge (Emig 126). Therefore, we must strive to make learning a meaningful, permanent and memorable experience if we are truly interested in helping students master content in the

disciplines and develop their writing in composition and across disciplines. We can use composition as a place for exploration, discovery, and integration, with writing as the means for communicating what is being explored and discovered. In order for students to generate new ideas, they must interact with concepts and ideas that are intellectually challenging, and in some cases oppositional to their own beliefs. When students grapple with controversial or provocative ideas and themes, they become part of the process by which they are making meaning and transacting with the content. They are engaged in learning that becomes self-sustaining and permanent because it has earned its place in their growth and intellectual transformation.

Another way Greek texts support disciplinary entry, is as a psychology source. When students enroll in introductory psychology courses, they are presented with foundational concepts, terms, and theories which can feel like a stressful high stakes memorization and regurgitation marathon. We now know that learning is more effective when students are *doing*--lecture and memorization does not help students possess knowledge, but active learning has been proven successful. Through active process and application, students can begin to explore associations, and practice applying conceptual frameworks through reading and writing about Greek literature. More obviously, we know that Sigmund Freud coined the Oedipus complex and that Carl Jung followed up with the Electra complex, both direct allusions to the Greek myths (Willner 66). It has always struck me as strange that psychology courses did not include the actual primary sources, both the Greek manuscripts and the psychoanalytical source (Freud and Jung) to enhance the depth and breadth of understanding these very popular concepts students of psychology and liberal arts need to learn. The Electra complex, reflective of Electra as a Greek prototype, who in all the adaptations is devoted to her father and displays deep rooted rivalry towards her mother, provides technical psychological language to describe a girl's affections for her father and opposition to the mother. When we examine Electra in *The Libation Bearers*, this concept comes alive. We witness in

multiple locations where Electra displays the ingredients that mirror her namesake. If they have not learned it before, this is where they learn who Electra and Oedipus are—two very mainstream characters who appear in not only psychology, but also in English, theater, political science, history, gender studies, and also popular culture.

The student of FYC can benefit greatly from a curriculum that includes a balanced approach to the reading of primary source document like *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, or *The Orestiea* because it reveal the origins of psychodynamic theories and elevates the level of understanding through an intentional and unintentional interdisciplinary mode. As teachers of FYC, we can pair Freud’s analysis or a psychology textbook with these plays as a way to show how the texts intersect and inform each other. Freud’s reading of *Oedipus Rex* is a direct analysis of the text in combination with his theory. Freud’s theoretical work is both a presentation of theory and a literary analysis of Oedipus, offering readers a model for imitation. In his writings, Freud states:

There must be a voice within us which is prepared to acknowledge the power of fate in Oedipus.... And there actually is a motive in the story of King Oedipus which explains the verdict of this inner voice. His fate moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon us before our birth the very curse which rested upon him. It may be that we are all destined to direct our first sexual impulses toward our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and violence toward our fathers; our dreams convince us that we were. Kind Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jacosta, is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfillment—the fulfillment of the wish of our childhood. (qtd. in Willner 60)

Here we meet Freud’s actual analysis of *Oedipus Rex*, where he describes the audiences’ acceptance of the drama stemming from their own subconscious admissions. On a meta-level, this presents the reader/viewer with their own emotional psyche. On a theoretical level, the excerpt

guides the reader/viewer into the psychoanalytical interpretation of *Oedipus Rex*. In combining Freud's actual theory and reading the Greek myths in a FYC course, students are receiving a first-hand account of Freud's thinking and also doing analytical work simultaneously. Once the students have been introduced to the theory or concept, they can begin to identify the psycho-literary intersections through their own understanding of the text and through interpretation of Freud's meaning. We are essentially building a knowledge base for students to make the necessary thinking leaps we are hoping to see elaborated in their writing.

When I assign *Oedipus Rex* or *The Libation Bearers*, I also provide a chapter from a generic psychology textbook "Theories of Personality and Intelligence." We learn the terms and meanings of psychological defense mechanisms like: denial, repression, projection, displacement, regression, identification, compensation, and sublimation (Ciccarelli and White 389) so students begin to develop the language to discuss moments in the text when these defense mechanisms appear. In our class discussions, I will ask students to point out moments from the Greek text that illustrate Freud or Jung's theories, or ask who seems to be in "denial"? How does Aeschylus build these defense mechanisms into the play? Students then spot specific moments that seem applicable and develop explanations for their thoughts. We do this both verbally, through class discussion, and as a higher stake writing assignment.

One semester I presented these four writing prompts for the second essay assessment in my second level FYC course.

- A. Compare and contrast how Freud and the Neo-Freudians help us understand Electra, Orestes, or Clytemnestra's personalities (choose one character to focus on). And explain how the specific aspects of these theories apply to the character and how it explains the the character's choices, behaviors, actions, or feelings?

- B. Which of Freud's *Psychological Defense Mechanisms* do you think Electra engages in *The Libation Bearers*? What do the mechanisms do to enhance Electra's character? (choose three defense mechanisms in which you see both Electra's using in both plays).

- C. How does Orestes (in *The Libation Bearers*) demonstrate the workings of the Oedipus Complex and its respective defense mechanism (identification)? And in what way does it help us understand Orestes better?
- D. Why might one see Orestes (in *The Libation Bearers*) as the poster boy for Freud's Psychosexual Stages? How are the stages represented in both plays, and what insights does it give us about Orestes?

All of the prompts presented ask students to show some work with psychology theory and concepts, and provide logical examples from the text to reinforce that understanding. The act of drawing and explaining these connections in writing pushes students to apply, rethink, revise and refine their understanding of these concepts. By linking the two, students are engaging in a Freudian or Jungian reading of the text, and they are learning the content simultaneously. Electra and Orestes decide to kill their mother, and they go through with it. It is not without Electra *projecting* her guilt onto Orestes making him feel obligated to not only avenge his father's death, but also to take care of Electra that we can also interpret as *regression* on Electra's part. She is subconsciously seeking a male parental figure to take control of the situation and take care of *her* needs. Through writing about a character and analyzing and thinking about how the character illustrates and embodies certain psychological features, students process technical language and then think about how disciplinary components apply and to what degree they resonate with characters in the play. This process reinforces knowledge, stimulates students to explore dimensions of characters deeply, interpret and make meaning, and engage in developing their position and point of view. The process of learning the content and then writing about it is a generative exercise. If students take an intro to psychology class at the same time, or in the future, they enter with some prior knowledge and experience dealing with frameworks and conventions of the discipline, which will prepare students and also inform more nuances and complicated writing in composition, psychology, and other disciplines.

Before assigning these prompts, however, my students and I discuss various components of the plays and how they mimic psychological theory, so students are not thrust into the assignment without any prior scaffolding. We discuss Electra and Orestes' motives when they plot to kill their mother to avenge their father's death. We discuss family dynamics and the psychological influences our parents have on our development, which is built into the nature of Aeschylus' play. He has subliminally inserted psychological cues throughout his writings. They are even represented in structural choices, as we see in the *identification* scene--when Orestes shows himself to Electra upon his return from exile and they share a touching and dramatic moment of *recognition*. Once they recognize each other, they continue to strengthen their bond by commiserating over their father's death, the paternal love they have lost, and the way their evil mother has mistreated them since. Electra has been relegated to being a slave and Orestes has been exiled. Both these children feel scorned and hurt, and on the surface, blame their emotional turmoil on their mother. Undergraduate students can look at Orestes and Electra's behavior and locate moments when they both seem to act out or display mechanism like *displacement*, *denial*, *regression*, and *projection*. Learning how the psychological mechanisms work can help students grapple with and understand motives and drivers, as well as develop a new perspective on how we judge people and their actions. When students finalize and write to learn, they are moving beyond receiving information, to actualizing and transferring their new ideas from thought to paper. This generative process moves students into more complex terrain and prepares them to further build upon their knowledge base. While I believe using Greek literature in composition is advantageous, I am also encouraging instructors from other disciplines to incorporate Greek primary sources into their classes as a means to support content they must teach. By reading Freud alongside a psychology textbook, and for example, *The Libation Bearers*, students learn about important academic players, a variety of perspectives, and they learn how to apply and think about abstract concepts more deeply,

complexly, and critically. The themes in the Greek texts are just too relevant to ignore and can complement content and support course objectives better than simply teaching content in isolation.

Judge, Jury, Law:

As we unpack the psychology of the play, new issues begin to surface about criminal justice and law. Murder is committed within a family, and we are drawn into a situation we cannot easily assess through general discussions. Electra does not actually do the killing though. It is Orestes who is convinced to take blood onto his own hands. Electra has crafted a plan that relinquishes her responsibility and complicitness in the crime. The complexity of the situation brings on multiple disciplinary perspectives that instructors can use to challenge students' initial readings and judgements, which becomes especially complicated also because Orestes and Electra are children. In Aeschylus' adaptation, Electra is the architect and Orestes is the contractor. It is by design that she is purveying rather than acting. Moments of *regression* emerge when she bursts out in manipulative childish complaints:

I was an outcast,
worthless, leashed like a vicious dog in a dark cell.

I wept—laughter died that day...

I wept, pouring out the tears behind my veils.

Hear *that*, my brother, carve it on your heart!" (Aeschylus 433-437).

To enhance the regressive effect, the chorus addresses the two as "children" occasionally, in order to frame the context in which they behave. We don't actually find out how old either Orestes or Electra are in this adaptation, but they seem young. Robert Fagles describes *The Libation Bearers* in "A Reading of 'The Oresteia'" as the play that displays Orestes' "step from youth to maturity is the rite of transition in the trilogy" (3). In a class discussion we might talk about some

developmental milestones, and ask questions like: How old do Orestes and Elektra seem to be in Aeschylus' version? How might their ages play into their decisions, their motives, their behaviors? Should we trust them? Why do you think they behave this way? How might Athenian culture be directing some of the plot here? The questions instructors pose to a class can guide students into thinking about the stages of development and how or why they matter, and to what end they affect our judgements of these characters.

To further complicate matters, we might bring a real case to the fore, where a juvenile is tried as an adult or minor, and discuss the legal and psychological parameters built into the legal system. We should be continuously creating opportunities for students to build on knowledge and make meaning through applicable examples that are relevant and interdisciplinary to elevate students understanding. One could ask students to defend or prosecute Orestes, Elektra, Clytamnestra or Agamemnon in their writing, researching other criminal cases involving children in order to find parallels and specific laws to cite in their defenses. Some of the most interesting writing I've seen students present is when I ask them to take a position and argue Clytanmestra's innocence or guilt. The arguments students use are critical and well supported. They often feel a sense of urgency and value in their judgements, but also understand that the stakes are high, thus their supporting evidence is usually quite astute and specific. They are not willing to convict someone without doing their due diligence, and often they feel conflicted about committing to one side, when they are inclined to see the matter is complicated. Thereby, the students are actually building their knowledge and also beginning to understand the value in presenting a nuanced argument and contending with aspects of the situation, theory, or example that are not black and white. These moments display how students show that one piece of evidence cannot be used conclusively or definitively. This exercise alone has the interdisciplinary capability to broaden a students' knowledge about the legal system, to learn how to advocate, to understand rights, to

understand how to support and contend with complicated ideas and issues related to human behavior, the criminal justice system, and the ways in which our own contexts might frame and inform our perceptions. Greek texts provide entry into these conversations and give students a variety of locations to access the content.

Even the structure of the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides*, parallel Freud's stages of personality development (id, ego, superego), each also representing the development of a criminal justice system. *The Oresteia* mirrors these characteristics in what Fagles describes as a "rite of passage from savagery to civilization" (19). *Agamemnon* is the *id*-driven play, where instant gratification is sought and found. Clytemnestra is driven to kill Agamemnon as an instinctual response to his killing their daughter. It is not until the end of the play that regret begins to loom when we hear Clytemnestra say, "No more, my dearest,/ no more grief. We have too much to reap/ right here, our mighty harvest of despair./ Our lives are based on pain. No Bloodshed now" (1686-90). The second play, *The Libation Bearers*, is the transitional space for *The Oresteia* where we see change occur in each drama. It is where growth is evident for Orestes, and the stages of development are alluded to in the plot. *The Eumenides*, the final play in the trilogy, is the accumulation of experience and its effect on adulthood and illustrates a new democratic judicial system, one that introduces fairness and justice. It is the *superego* of the trilogy, the play that contemplates actions and measures remorse and guilt by way of reasoning, with a formal trial and jury.

The plot of Aeschylus' trilogy is rooted in justice. Each play in the trilogy deals with a different form of justice, culminating in *The Eumenides*, the third play, where we see the development of a recognizable judicial system. While *Agamemnon* and *The Libation Bearers* reflect justice in more brutal, irrational, instinctual and primitive terms, *The Eumenides* introduces us to a trial by jury and judge who arbitrates between the victim and criminal, where Orestes must

confront the matricidal crime he committed and face actual socially constructed legal and moral consequences. The legal focus imposed in *The Eumenides* activates the readers/the writers in such a way that they too begin to think about the origins of the western legal system, and they begin to think like a lawyer or judge as well, judging the characters' actions and choices as the student moves through the plot. According to Paul Gewirtz, *The Oresteia* is a special sort of literature for lawyers. But more encouragingly, *The Oresteia* teaches us about how the courts work, the implications of a system constructed by social cultural norms of a society, the religious derivation of laws, to reasoned discussions, to the biases built into a patriarchal legal structure, to the relative unethicity of law, and to questions about authorial commentary and intent (Gewirtz 1049-50).

The moral questions alluded to in *The Eumenides*, resonate for readers or playgoers quite deeply. Much, of what we see in *The Eumenides* and *The Oresteia* as a whole, deals with universal themes that could apply today. However, through a sort of lived experience, Gewirtz reinforces that “[l]iterature makes its special claims upon us precisely because it nourishes the kinds of human understanding not achievable through reason alone, but involving intuition and feeling as well” (1050). When they are confronted with Clytannestra's dilemma in *Agamemnon*, the readers/viewers are conflicted about her intentions and whether the latter are justified. Aeschylus creates a scenario where Clytannestra is victim and villain. She is designed to be multidimensional, human, and imperfect. Her motivation derives from her pain and anguish in losing a daughter at the hands of the biological father and husband, Agamemnon. When we present this dilemma to the audience, they are confronted with their own relationship to family, sentiments for children and what they believe is acceptable retribution for crimes. Students begin to contend with their own morals and values as they evaluate Clytannestra's case. But on the other hand, Clytannestra is conveyed as an evil woman, interested in accumulating power and furthering her and her lover's positions as leaders. The jury becomes the reader, and the reader learns to argue

their decision in writing courses when it comes time to explore their own ideas about these universal topics. Much of the debate I've seen emerge in classes has been grounded in justifying these characters' actions and choices. Students are often very torn between whether or not Clytemnestra is guilty or innocent. Some see her as mainly power-driven and corrupt, while others heavily sympathize with her and see her as a grieving mother. In many cases, these bifurcations are not superficially explained. When students write about Clytemnestra, students see the individual as complex, ambivalent, filled with contradictions and ambiguities, and they shuttle between these layers as they explore their stance.

I use this as an opening to begin to prepare for a larger debate and ask students to take one side at first, write about it and then place them on a debate team that represents the opposing side. I give students time to research cases so they not only cite the text as written record, but also use actual legal language and learn about laws to support their arguments. The judges are usually students who arrive late and who have not had time to do research in class before the debate begins, so we essentially come together to discuss effective arguments, points, details, testimonies and evidence to determine winners of the debate. It might seem unfair for unprepared students embody such a powerful role, but rather than exclude and alienate them, I see this as an opportunity for everyone to utilize what they have learned about composing, specifically focusing on the argument and forms of evidence available to them for such a purpose, in addition, to enhancing their critical thinking habits and elevating their critical observations. The debates are not only locations where we argue, but also a place to observe your opponents' strategies and note illogical claims and irrelevant citations. When students are immersed in this exercise, they are astutely listening to the other side, and often students will respond by calling out arguments and evidence that are too contrived or contradictory. When this occurs, the most interesting reactions come from the judges (the late classmates). I see them taking notes ferociously and muttering *good point* under their

breath. Even the late-comers begin to see how an argument develops and how an argument is lost. The goal is to reinforce writing habits by using Greek characters and tales as case studies. The habits of mind they are continuously exercising in the course are in turn applied when they write. The act of researching to develop informed positions, supporting arguments with concrete evidence, refining positions and claims, considering others' perspectives, and critically evaluating assumptions and conclusions, become habits students undertake more naturally, as they cognitively and intentionally process, and pursue communicating their thoughts verbally and in writing. Thus, the quality of ideas, the depth of explorations and divergencies, the process of unpacking nuanced characteristics and concepts, are enhanced and demonstrated in students writing.

Conclusion:

The role Greek literature can play in First-Year Composition is multifaceted and intricate. It brings multiple possibilities to the classroom and allows instructors to choose a variety of approaches to teaching first-year writing and the art of composing. But it also brings an additional advantage—knowledge—which advances composition and simultaneously gives students a stronger foundation to write from what they know. It breeds and supports a continuous process of learning, building knowledge, and preparing students for other courses they will take in college. There is a process by which I am trying to encourage students to go through so that a variety of transactions occur from the start of the semester until the end. This is all not to say that composition should be a “service” course, as many English professors have warned, but it is an appeal to reposition literature in composition, when and if the texts can support multiple functions and purposes. Composition is not exclusively a writing course; it is a place to explore, discover, question, refine ideas, and critically examine by way of writing as a mode of communication. Greek literature in composition is multipurpose and presents generative opportunities for

substantial, meaningful and memorable learning to occur as long as we approach teaching literature rhetorically and critically and guide our students to think critically and rhetorically as they explore, discover, conclude and communicate what they have learned effectively.

CHAPTER 3

TRIGGERING COGNITION AND METACOGNITION THROUGH GREEK LITERATURE

While the popular opinion has been to exclude literary texts from First-Year Composition (FYC), many First-Year Composition courses save their first-year literature seminars for their second level FYC writing course or offer literature as an elective. The trend has been to assign non-fiction prose that sometimes crosses disciplines in the general FYC course as a means to expose students to the types of prose they would be constructing and reading across the curriculum. However, a good deal of research has shown a decline in reading in college courses in the last decade, partially due to a change in students' attitudes about reading (Ihara and Del Principe 2, Bartolomeo 440-41; Anson 22). Chris Anson cites a 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement which indicated low reading compliance in college classes (22). Reasons and causes vary, but Ihara and Del Principe note a few studies that offer some further insights. Ihara and Del Principe's study in "I Bought the Book and Didn't Need it: What Reading Looks Like at an Urban Community College," found that half the student respondents said "lack of time" was a culprit in low reading compliance, and other studies indicate that students sometimes felt the readings were supplemental to the professors' PowerPoint presentations and lectures, often redundant and unnecessary to be successful in the course (Ihara and Del Principe 2). The challenge to get students to read more and complete the assigned readings is not new, but it has been well documented more recently. Alice Horning also admits in her edited anthology, *What is College Reading?*, that nationally and internationally, students have trouble reading and are generally reading less nonfiction prose (8). She examines both the national ACT exam's findings and the PISA's (Program for International Student Assessment) 2012 and 2015 findings, which both note that students reading proficiencies

are average across the globe, including the United States (10). So, in combination with both K-12's teaching of reading, and then with the reduced reading in college classes, students are not being given adequate instruction to hone their critical reading habits, thus inhibiting their cognitive and metacognitive processes from developing alongside their learning, which ultimately interferes with their learning overall. The fact that instructors are not consistently incorporating and instructing their students to read, undermines the value and necessity of reading as it correlates with learning, and so, in turn, students are not inclined to be reading compliant.

As an instructor of both Developmental English and FYC at a community college, I have noticed a resistance to reading in my own classes. With that in mind, I try to assign texts that will engage my students on a personal and intrinsic level so they are more naturally motivated to complete the reading assignments for the course. These courses, both Developmental and FYC, enroll students with a range of reading and writing skills, so I often have to find materials that will appeal to a broad range of learners. Anecdotally, I have found that students in general claim to *dislike* reading, but they are also able to recognize when they enjoy reading, which seems to occur when the reading process feels effortless and when students are immersed in a plot and invested in the characters, a book that engages students so much that they read the entire piece over one weekend, before we even get to class to go over it.

For many years, I've used a controversial play called *Fat Pig* by Neil LaBute in my courses. I have had many students tell me that they like my text choices and that they never thought they'd like reading. Truth be told, *Fat Pig* was one of the first self-selected texts I read when I was in high school, and I remembered it being absolutely captivating—a play I couldn't put down. The dialogue is not linguistically, syntactically, or transitionally challenging, and LaBute creates such a dramatic and realistic experience for his readers/viewers that it is almost impossible to not get wrapped up in the plot and the nuanced and complex personality traits of each character. The play

is about an overweight woman named Helen, and Tom, a typically attractive man. They fall in love, but while they date, Tom finds himself unable to overcome the stigma associated with dating a plus-sized woman. LaBute creates, within the dynamics of four characters, a microcosm of our social world and ends the play with a disappointing resolution—Tom leaves Helen because he cannot get past the social pressures and judgements of his peers. It's a conclusion that is quite common and realistic—so when students express their own emotional response to the ending, they can often understand how this ending could come to be. In turn, students have more to write about because they recognize these themes easily, and when they approach the essay assignment, they are more able to talk about issues that emerge in the play conceptually and as they relate to themselves and the society they live in. Using *Fat Pig* in my courses led me to think about why we exclude literary prose from the FYC curriculum. It seems to me that careful selection of texts, especially ones that capture students' attention, can increase reading compliance, and promote critical thinking about common social issues. As a preliminary stage in reading practice, especially for students who have not historically enjoyed reading, we first need to prove that reading can be enjoyable and exciting, and engage readers more naturally.

But while thinking about fiction and literature, I realize that *Fat Pig's* potential is limited. It does not do enough to promote the skills I want my FYC students to develop. For a Developmental course it can serve as a guiding text for emergent and nascent readers, but for FYC, the text does not challenge students enough, and therefore does not maximize the potential to read critically or expand cognitive and meta-cognitive processes since the play appears to be simple and straight forward. It also does not embed enough thematic nuances to allow students to think beyond socio-cultural contexts, and limits their capacity to think about other aspects of life. Of course, we can complicate any text, but it seems less advantageous to retrofit complexity, rather than use a text that require students activate multiple reading process immediately. It is too easy to read *Fat Pig*

superficially and believe you are making meaning that is conceptually complex. With that in mind, *Fat Pig's* creative and immersive potential indicates a necessity to select materials and texts that are going to create a desire to read; however, other literary texts, when carefully considered and examined for the FYC classroom, can actually accomplish the immersive and experiential component, while also serving to support other composition and literacy objectives that also enhance cognitive and metacognitive processes. While many Greek plays could serve well to support FYC objectives, *The Clouds* and the “Apology,” due to their thematic and historical relationships to *rhetoric* and *learning* motifs, are two of the best texts to choose to include in a FYC curriculum because they have the potential to encourage intellectual and critical habits of mind, and inherently stimulate a number of active reading processes that can reflexively work to generate writing processes and products.

When the Brain Reads:

The notion that what we read stimulates new thoughts and then informs our writing comes from Lev Vygotsky’s theory on thinking and writing. Maryanne Wolf reminds us that Vygotsky believed “the act of putting spoken words and unspoken thoughts into written words releases and, in the process, changes the thoughts themselves” (65). Essentially, Wolf’s paraphrasing suggests, a la Vygotsky, that as we learn to write, historically, and within our personal learning process, we expand our potential to come up with abstract and new thoughts and ideas. Essentially, as composition instructors, we are always reminding ourselves that reading and writing are symbiotic processes, and Wolf more specifically suggests that what it has done to our brains since its inception has helped us shape, revise, and develop sophisticated reading and writing systems (65).

Wolf, in her book *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, asserts that reading is an unnatural ability we must develop through guided practice overtime

(unlike speech), and when we read, we are essentially using different areas of our brain, related to memory, association, and analytics to conjure new thoughts. While our brain is challenged to decode (the first stages of reading development, where a person recognizes the way letters work to create sounds and pronunciations), and the faster we can do it, our brains become better able to make sense of what we read and thus we arrive at new ideas derived from what we have read. Reading and writing, therefore, cyclically energize each other. Wolf takes us through various historical paradigms in reading and writing, showing us that reading and writing began with the need to count and keep records. We see numbers through visual symbolic representations in order to keep track of counts. Then, actual words followed, using a sound-symbol structure that resembled oral language. The early writing systems appear to have been the product of economic needs and itemized recordings (26). But what it most displays is that the more heavily humans participated in reading these visual symbols and developed their writing systems, the more advanced their brains became, leading to the evolution of higher order thinking skills, which caused the brain to work more efficiently when we read.

The deep reading process requires a slow and thoughtful thinking practice, one in which readers can truly take in what they have read. When engaging in a deep reading habit, the reader is spending more time making inferences, unpacking analogies, and working on analytics and critically thinking. According to Wolf, early writing systems and the transformations and adaptations the brain has experienced over time, have impacted the development of our current intellectual culture today; “[f]rom the contemporary perspective of our own unfolding changes in communication, the story of reading offers a unique documentation of how each new writing system contributed something special to our species’ intellectual development” (25). Reading, although not hardwired in our innate abilities, has been evolving and strengthening our literacy capability over time. As the symbolic writing system got more intricate, the more complex the

writing system became (25). The composition classroom, as a place for developing writers, benefits from demanding and nuanced literary texts. The more students are exposed to complicated writing structures and linguistic patterns, the stronger their decoding skills must work, and as a result, the writing of ideas and syntax become more complex and refined. Wolf looked at tokens enveloped in clay that included markings of their contents from 8000-4000 BCE, which represented an early reading process, that according to Wolf,

demanded two sets of novel connections: one cognitive-linguistic and the other cerebral.

Among the long-established brain circuits for vision, language, and conceptualization, new connections developed and new retinotopic pathways—between the eye and specialized visual areas—became assigned to tiny token marks. (28)

The more complex the writing system, the more demanding reading becomes, especially when trying to learn to read deeply. The marked tokens were developed out of necessity. There was a need to track transactions and create a systematic recording system. The more people learned how to recognize these symbols, process them, and retain their meaning, the easier it became to build on these associations which then elevated the brain's function. But, it was with exposure and continuous practice that advanced the brain's processing of words and meanings. When we introduce texts like the "Apology," in which the language is found to be fairly challenging, students are making use of their cognitive potential and new circuits and pathways develop as a result, thus preparing students to read and understand complex texts better the next time they approach the difficult text and when approaching new more linguistically and conceptually challenging texts.

The cerebral gains are inherent in the process and work to stimulate other brain processes, so students, and general readers alike, *need* to push themselves beyond their comfort zone, to grow their repertoire of vocabulary and enhance their capacity to take in simple abstractions. When the Sumerian writing system died and the Akkadian writing system dominated, the Akkadian system

blended symbols from the Sumerian system. In order to process the blended language, readers had to work twice as hard to decode it and five to seven years to master it (Wolf 43). Essentially, to be efficient readers, we needed to be able to identify from memory at great speed. The Sumerian writing system was composed of symbols that Wolf says resemble chicken scratch. But with familiarization came fluency and the ability to linger and meander in the thinking process itself, which for Wolf is the goal (54). As we developed more concise writing systems, like a twenty-six-letter alphabet, we simultaneously advanced as readers/decoders (54), and elevated our potential to come up with novel thoughts and ideas (26). Through knowing this, we should encourage the teaching of literature since it requires multiple processes that can be transcribed or printed into alphabetic print text. We are comprehensively activating a series of useful techniques that will ultimately inform better writers.

Knowing the cognitive processes helps us understand the reflexive relationship between reading and writing and why it is so important to recognize the teacher's role to instruct both reading and writing reciprocally. Mariolina Salvatori firmly asserts that the teaching of literature in composition classrooms must be guided by principles of exploration, reflection, and understanding in order for students to develop as writers (659). She believes that students' growth as writers is a product of their "increased ability to engage in, and to be reflexive about, the reading of highly complex texts" (659). For her own purposes, she contemplates how we might use this relationship to improve students' writing ability. But the instructor needs to create the necessary scaffolds so students are guided through a recursive process that engenders critical reading that will ultimately lead to critical writing.

Cheryl Smith more concretely provides insights into how reading and "interrogating texts" informs students' writing. She lays out the framework of a lesson and illustrates the scaffolding she imbues onto the process. We see how she has layered her lesson to move from one process to the

next, and then how processes intersect. She starts with establishing understanding. After students have read a text at home, she asks them to summarize and paraphrase the text in class. Students then share their summary within a small group, where they will see that each group member has arrived at differing interpretations. The next stage is to reread the text and underline one sentence they believe is the “most important to the meaning of the entire piece” (67). In order to choose this line, students need to engage in the analytical work, where they must be able to recall their feeling and thoughts while they read the text and be able to explain why they see the one specific line as most important for meaning. As they proceed to discuss their responses, students justify their choices with textual evidence. The last stage asks “[W]hat questions does this essay leave you with?” The quality of questions students present demonstrates a deep cognitive shift they experience as they go along with the stages of the activity. Smith says, “What we see are various kinds of questions students were asking, from concrete (‘How old is the girl?’) to interpretive and analytical (‘Why didn’t she avoid the problem?’ and ‘What’s up with our country?’).” In another group, “[T]he students were asking questions within and beyond the text, and two or three were trying to solve larger social problems” (71). These are the sort of analytical reflective questions FYC papers are geared towards answering, and it is with practices like these that we facilitate the shaping of this type of thinking in our classrooms, which in turn help students read their own work with the same critical eye (61).

In the last chapter I talked about the interdisciplinary potentials of Greek literature through thematic and storytelling devices and how these devices correlate directly with other non-English disciplines. But what was not noted was the cognitive incline students experience as they work through or “interrogate” the text itself. When a student is reading *Agamemnon* or *The Libation Bearers*, in addition to and alongside building neural pathway, as they decode and stumble through more linguistically challenging language, they can also generate deeper thoughts and questions

about themes emerging in the text and their main characters. Questions related to Electra and Orestes ages are focal points in class discussions and then questions related to law and punishment, gender and society, or neglect and abuse can be extracted from these texts as well. We can also inquire about the larger social problems in Athens and how they have changed, and what they might look like contemporarily.

Greek Texts to Enhance Cognitive and Meta-cognitive Processes:

Many Greek texts can be adapted to fit in FYC, but the “Apology” and *The Clouds* are structurally, thematically, and conceptually advantageous. First, looking at “The Apology” as literature: a dramatic monologue or historical record, through Plato’s lens, we must critically contend with context, beliefs, values, ideology, psychology, and imagination. James Redfield describes “The Apology” as “the rhetoric of a philosopher writing history” (108). Using the “Apology” or *The Clouds* in a composition course takes good advantage of a symbiotic relationship that stimulate deep cognitive and metacognitive processes that enrich learning and the development and practice of writing. Both texts deal with education and intellectual pursuits, thereby introducing students to intellectual contexts and concepts, in addition to the world of ideas and discussion through Socrates’ and Aristophanes’ ancient Greek experiences. In fact, pairing these oppositional texts in a FYC course provides a complimenting juxtaposition between Aristophanes’ anti-neo-intellectual argument and Socrates’ pro-neo-intellectual argument. When we exclude literary texts from composition classes, we simultaneously reduce the value of the reader’s experience and limit their potential in becoming stronger academic readers and writers as Wolf suggests in her historical look at the relationship of writing and reading. In order to be a strong writer, we have learned, one must also be a stronger reader. And with the implementation of Greek literature in our writing classes, we offer students a depth and

breadth opportunity to build multiple intellectual skills, practices, habits of mind, and even new cognitive processes that in turn reflexively inform and engender writing habits and skills. _

The making of meaning is one of the most significant stages in the reading and writing process. But in order to enter this stage, students need to track their experience with a text. Therefore, the text needs to be both an academically generative and also one that can ignite a sensory experience relevant to the student in some way. Louise M. Rosenblatt's 1938 book *Literature as Exploration* examines the reading of literature as an experience that is shaped by multiple external and personal factors. It is the reader, she believes, who makes meaning based on their individual contextual framework, personal history, recent experiences, and mood. In the chapter "The Literary Experience," Rosenblatt describes the process of reading aesthetic texts as one that is *transactional* and dynamic; a reciprocal process that requires an exchange between text—words on a page—and the reader. She explains that "meaning emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the signs on the page" (26). It is via this back and forth of decoding and stimulating our memories that we derive a meaning, relate to a text, and contemplate the deeper relationships and motivations of human behavior (25). The literature teacher is meant to facilitate this reciprocal process and guide students to amend their interpretations when necessary, presenting the student with a space to explore their experience with a literary text. Through journaling or freewriting after reading, or annotating while reading, students can record their intuitive and preliminary reactions and responses as they experience(d) them. But there needs to be a sense of "‘living through’ what is being created during the reading," in order to captivate the reader enough to respond mentally and then verbally, to articulate their reaction. "Living through" the text creates the empathic experience that students can use to begin processing complex ideas and invest in the plot and nuances embedded in the text (33). Therefore, the text needs to be accessible enough to experience, but also challenging enough to foster thinking.

Although *The Clouds* was written for comedic dramatic effect, it serves the viewer and reader as both a historical depiction of Athens and a sensory stimulator. Scholar Raymond K. Fisher argues in his article, “The Relevance of Aristophanes: A New Look at Clouds,” that Aristophanes’ only intention in *The Clouds* was to make his audience laugh. While seemingly reductive, he recognizes that Aristophanes’ play does much more for the contemporary reader, and likely appealed to its audience as a culturally relevant adaptation, one the audience could relate to, of realistic Athenian philosophical and political life. He says:

techniques themselves would have highlighted cultural polarities and incongruities, and in the case of *The Clouds* they would have emphasized the dichotomy between empty theorizing of the new intellectuals and the practical needs (rhetorical skills and logical reasoning) of the law-courts and political life. (26)

Fisher posits that Athenians experienced the transactional process which Rosenblatt theorizes. For students today, the process of reading *The Clouds* can complement “The Apology” and contextualize Athenian culture and history more actively for students, bringing whatever features feel relevant to them to the forefront of their reading, whereby students come to reason their own meanings and intertextual coordinates. Rosenblatt argues that readers approach texts for two reasons: to collect and learn information, which she calls *effere*nt reading, and to experience the text, which she calls *aesthetic* reading (Smith 63). As a fictitious drama, the play itself, in its character design, clever dialogic craftsmanship, and controversial subtext invites students to engage in the “transactional” work and meaning-making Rosenblatt says readers do when they approach a text. By simply reading the drama, for the contemporary student, one is immersed in historical Athenian cultural themes and they are introduced to a satirical Athenian academic intellectual world. If you pair the text with more serious dramas like Plato’s “Apology,” Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, or Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* or *Antigone*, students can absorb and learn a great deal

about ancient Athenian Greek culture regarding law, gender, politics, mathematic and scientific innovations, or academic evolution through the various writing styles these authors chose when creating their theatrical adaptations through exposure to these rooted themes. If one is never exposed to something, the individual cannot begin to learn it and thus develop an understanding and draw conclusions about it. Greek texts serve as more than just drama, they are time capsules, artifacts, manuscripts that are rich with details that provide insight into the foundations of western civilization (through a critical lens and a historical one), and represents the framework for many of the institutions we sustain and participate in, like: democracy, academia, and law.

While *The Clouds* offers viewers and readers a humorous window into historical Athens, Fisher also admits that “[a]fter seeing *The Clouds* the audience might have been asking critical questions like, ‘What use is philosophy, and what is education?’” (26). Aristophanes’ intent far exceeds the Athenian audience, many of these themes are relevant today and thus the play can promote similar questions for audiences anywhere at any time. These are the types of critical inquiries and concerns we want to imbue in our students to become well informed critical writers, in addition to active and thoughtful citizens. The act of evaluation and measurement is what composition instructors work so hard to elicit in their classrooms through expository non-fiction texts. However, through the use of imaginative and fictitious literature, like *The Clouds*, our students would organically generate critical habits of mind through an imaginative text that does not hand over abstractions and explicate every theory or idea in linear lecture form, but rather works through dialogue, character development, and satire to construct an emotional and physical response, deployed through a capturing of the emotional and empathic parts of ourselves. It is with literature that reader/viewer can interact “aesthetically” with the issues emerging in the play. These techniques keep the wheels of the imagination turning, activating the images, sounds, and flavors craftily described with words. They inspire interpretations, inquiries and arguments plucked from

interesting allusions, vivid imagery, unusual personifications and symbolic dualities weaved throughout the plot. Without forcing our students, we are providing them with an opportunity to explore and experience these details, and live through the text, allowing them to engage sensually. The robust and immersive experience of transactional aesthetic reading would otherwise be reduced or muted if we tried to depict the same message through linear expository explicative texts.

First, and perhaps most important, is that reading literary texts can be fun. There is an assumption that learning is supposed to be hard, boring, and exclusionary. But more recently we are learning that play and fun facilitate the learning process as effectively as traditional education models. University of Kentucky Professor of English, Lisa Zunshine, whose research has focused on cognitive approaches to literary studies, argues in her book, *Why We Read Fiction*, that literature, specifically fiction, pushes our “mind-reading” potentials, otherwise known as Theory of Mind (ToM) or “mind-reading” theory. Essentially, fiction exercises our ability to infer and interpret, to *fill in* when words are lacking--a brain function individuals developed over time. Zunshine claims that our ability to interpret what we see

seems to be so effortless and automatic (in a sense that we are not even conscious of engaging in any particular act of ‘interpretation’) because our evolved cognitive architecture ‘prods’ us towards learning and practicing mind-reading daily, from the beginning of awareness. (56)

When we read fiction, we are applying our own culturally constructed assumption, our own contexts, our histories and prior knowledge into the holes in the text, which immediately inserts us into the plot. In a sense we have evolved to escape into the written word and gain “cognitive rewards” in the same way as when we “play” (115). Studying literary texts essentially stimulates and develops our imagination, in which we get to “‘try on’ mental states,” Zunshine says (115). Other play experts say that fantasy and play improve cognitive processes and brain flexibility as

well (Marantz Henig 2). By excluding literary texts from FYC, we are depriving students of an enjoyable learning process which can help to increase our students' reading for our classes and beyond, which can potentially result in more robust writing outcomes. Zunshine suggests that our readings of texts are reflective of our communication skills, in that we are building habits to detect moments of brain switching, which ultimately reflect a healthy brain.

Mariolina Salvatori, who has done extensive research on the reflexive nature of reading and writing, discusses in her article, "Reading and Writing a Text: Correlations between Reading and Writing Patterns" that the inclusion of literary texts in composition classrooms can ignite a sense of self-awareness and teach students how to develop "reflective habits of mind" (659). She refers to Andrea A. Lunsford's conclusion that students' level and ability to construct sentences is a reflection of their reading ability and a refined thinking process (659). In this sense, a refined thinking process enables a deeper and more thoughtful examination of text. In turn, the student/reader is inclined to go beyond what is easiest and push themselves to read critically, which in turn will elevate their critical writing habits. For both the mature and rudimentary reader, reading *The Clouds* and the "Apology" in a first-year writing course can introduce a model of critical examination and nurture an inquisitive environment that simulates an internal dialogue. The texts could demonstrate the procedural and transactional Socratic method, where students might mentally mimic the maneuvers they see appearing in text, internalizing and grappling with a new intellectual practice they may not yet be comfortable with.

By reading the "Apology" we are invited into Plato's idea of intellectualism, and we see how Socrates' back and forth strategy plays out. Rather than it being an abstract concept, we witness Socrates talking and asking difficult questions. Cheryl Hogue Smith, FYC instructor who coins the term "deferent reader," believes we should be showing students how competent readers "negotiate and construct meaning" (62). Socrates demonstrates in this monologue the process by

which one comes to new ideas; we see how one might arrive at fluid and concrete conclusions; how one might dissect and unpack evidence and logical fallacies; how one might question confusing or unfounded claims--ultimately leading toward more acquisition of knowledge and coming closer to what might be true. Socrates' defense forces the reader to activate multiple mechanisms, especially as a meta-tool for teaching us how to critically examine an argument. He shows us what thinking looks like through a think aloud meant to persuade a five-hundred-person jury. It is through seeing this famous philosopher and experiencing his methods that students can model their own writing process, learn to ask similarly complex questions and work to unpack answers that generate new questions, perspectives and more complex discussions.

As readers take in Socrates' speech, they are simultaneously associating, listening, and visualizing his experience, which fosters a cyclical production of their thoughts and responses as a result from absorbing his plea. During the defense, Socrates questions one of his accusers, Meletos, and emphatically declares, "Meletos, stand up here before me, and answer: Don't you think it very important that the younger generation should be as good as possible? 'I do' [Meletos replies]. Then tell these gentlemen, who is it makes them better?" Meletos stays quiet. During this interrogation Socrates attempts to undermine Meletos' accusation and intelligence by saying "you see Meletos, you are silent, you cannot say. Come say my good man, who makes them better?" (510-11). Meletos first answers "the laws," and Socrates quickly darts back and challenges each response Meletos gives, in what seems to be Plato's opportunity to highlight the Socratic dialogues, a way to examine and find "the good" (truth).

It is through this incessant questioning and answering that we see what it means to "interrogate." In addition, we witness Socrates reason, deconstruct and unpack ideas in order to get closer to the truth, which he uses in an attempt to prove his innocence. Moments like these present students with a model for understanding what it means to peel away logical fallacies, to critically

evaluate, to investigate, interrogate, and to examine—scrutinize language, tone, words—with the intent to expose what is not easily identifiable. They themselves are experiencing the exchange of ideas and with a sense of presence and involvement, “living through” the text, they experience what an interrogation of ideas looks like. After all, the argument Plato undertakes is not fraught with smoking guns, but rather a conceptual argument about how to find answers to difficult existential questions.

In my classes, in order to assess students’ understanding of Socrates’ methods and approaches, we talk about the questions Socrates asks and how effective they are in swaying their own belief of Socrates’ innocence or guilt. When we arrive at the conclusion of the defense, where Socrates is found guilty and sentenced to death, I have seen students become emotionally charged by the judgement. They are often sympathetic to Socrates’ cause and find his work admirable and fundamental to the social good. I use this as an opportunity to unpack the text further and examine where Socrates has lured us to his side, what rhetorical devices he seems to apply, and how effectively he uses these devices to persuade the reader. I then ask some students to assume the role of a prosecuting lawyer and consider questions they might ask Socrates to debunk his claims, while some other students play Socrates and think of how to respond. The simulation exercise gives students an interactive and dynamic means to consider the arguments Socrates makes more critically. Chris Anson, in the article “Writing to Reading, Revisited,” says that these types of creative exercises “propel students back into [the texts] words in the quest for fuller understanding—rethinking, reconsidering, and creating new meaning” and further stating that the exercise is “designed not to measure the outcome of reading but to provide a means to think more fully about it” (25). The ways students embody their roles and join the action engages a set of processes, Anson lists:

- read the [text];

- consider the fictitious but realistic interpretation of the [text];
- reread the [text], checking for sources of the ‘voices’s’ positions, opinions, and support (this requires reconsidering the methodology as well as the way the results are rendered);
- decide how to respond to the voice, agreeing or disagreeing with various points and correcting misinterpretations if necessary;
- render the response in a conversational genre in keeping with the case. (32)

These processes are multidimensional and necessitate a closer reading and understanding of the text. The more we ask students to engage and embody various roles to process text and make meaning, the more active the students become in constructing their own ideas and participating in their own exercise in reasoning. With respect to the reciprocal nature of reading to write and writing to read, using the “Apology” prepares students to experience the text and then contribute to making meaning of the text, and critically thinking about what sorts of techniques it applies and how they might engage in and attack these strategies in their own writing. The texts become an anchor to initiate multiple processes, which therefore enhances the learning experience, taking it from a superficial one to one that draws out nuances and criticality.

Students tend to read passively when they are confused or unsure of their interpretations of a challenging text, so engaging students in embodiment activities can provide an avenue that circumvents such passive non-active reading. Anson’s approach aligns with Cheryl Hogue Smith’s ideas about the immense value of “interrogating texts” in her article “Interrogating Texts: From Deferent to Efferent and Aesthetic Reading Practices.” She discusses what she defines as “deferent reading:” a superficial reading of a text where students look for concrete answers within a text, or they defer to others, conceding to their ignorance and unwillingness to work towards finding

meaning. While students tend to look for answers in texts. They often think there is a *correct* answer somewhere in the text, and in turn miss textual opportunities and experiences, and ultimately read superficially, gaining very little from their process. Smith's remedy is to guide students to focus on what they do not know in a text, rather than what they do understand (65). She calls this "interrogating the text" and suggests that through this practice students learn to read deliberately and patiently, in addition to enhancing their analytical skills, which plays out in their writing. This practice she asserts debunks students' belief in one interpretation, provides them with a safe place to misread and revise their interpretations, increase exposure to multiple perspectives, and of course ask difficult questions that lead to complex thinking about issues resonating in the text and in our world (Smith 67). In order to teach students to "interrogate texts" she instructs them to come up with questions about what they don't understand or know. Students share their questions in small groups and then discuss answers. As they discuss they realize everyone has different ideas and thus must each find supporting evidence from the text to explain their reasoning. By using Socrates as an example of an interrogation, and by asking students to simulate and embody Socrates or a prosecutor (through an exercise I mentioned earlier), students are not able to defer to someone else and they are encouraged to play within the context of the text, with an emphasis on asking questions, which is essentially allowing them to admit they do not know something or confidently encroach on a weak claim. The stakes are low, so students do not have to feel the pressure of a grade or arriving at correct answers, since they will see an assortment of possible interpretations and a variety of arguments.

Sheridan Blau claims that the knowledge we gain from reading literature can only be attained when students experience the text and learn actively. The tendency to learn passively in college, Blau asserts, only prepares students to acquire a "false knowledge," knowledge that is not actually produced or generated from or by students, but by professors who lecture and deposit their

knowledge onto students (271). In recognizing the weakness in lecture models in composition, first-year writing instructors tend to avoid using fiction altogether in FYC. However, we see that literature is a powerful active reading tool when used to encourage students to make meaning, rather than receive meaning from professors, which often fosters a passive reading/learning experience. With pedagogical intent to move students away from deferent and efferent reading toward activating maneuvers that encourage aesthetic reading, literature's flexibility and universality transforms the passive process into one that is interactive and dynamic. Smith and Jimenez add:

When Blau applies this principle to the teaching and learning of literature, he says that the way we earn true literary knowledge is through the experience of reading texts, which includes such processes as questioning the texts, identifying the problems in the texts, and having the capacity to work through those problems—even when, or especially when, those problems lead to confusion and more questions. (47)

Thus, the embodiment exercise, as an interrogation exercise, enhances the freedom to engage in the processes Smith and Blau see as fundamental to actively participating in acquiring knowledge. The interrogation Socrates embarks on, in its quest for understanding, models and lends itself to Smith's interrogation technique, offering students a first step towards this sort of grappling and thinking, and then producing their own understanding of the text's meanings.

This interrogation is also reflective of the Greek student-centered learning technique, the Socratic Method, which Social Scientist Jonathan Gorry explains in his article "Cultures of Learning and Learning Cultures: Socrates and Confucian Approaches to Teaching and Learning" as "the notion that a teacher is a facilitator whose job is to nurture an individualistic, enquiry-based approach to learning" (9). Through the reading of the "Apology" students are implicitly directed to reflect on their own thought processes by seeing Socrates engage himself and others in a "dialogic

pedagogy” (6). The text itself becomes a mentor in the process of inquiry. While defending himself, Socrates’ embodies many voices in the monologue. He talks with himself in order to captivate the jury and the reader, to follow along with his process and reasoning strategies in order to demonstrate the value of his work and the meaning of learning. In this same conversation with Meletos, Socrates redirects the examination in order to expose misconception or logical fallacies presented by the interlocutor and within their discussion Socrates embeds inversions which contradict claims against him, setting the foundation for establishing counter arguments that are strong or weak. For instance, in order to expose the misconception that he is “corrupting the youth” (Plato 510), he imparts a suspicious question against Meletos, indicating that his accusation seeks to support self-interest, rather than genuine concern for Athens. Socrates confronts Meletos and says, “But really, Meletos, that is enough to show that you never were anxious about young people, you show clearly your own carelessness—you have cared nothing about the things you impeach me for” (Plato 512). Through this process of “deductive logic” and “reflective judgement” (Gorry 6), Socrates plants seeds of doubt into the readers’ minds, forcing them to participate in the process of reasoning as well. This cross-examination is the foundation of Socrates’ pedagogy and he is proud and passionate about deep learning and challenging and refuting claims in order to arrive at a logical conclusion. In fact, Socrates says that he will never abandon his integrity and his work, and that even if he were to go free, he would continue to practice philosophy and maintain his role as inquisitor for the benefit of the collective Athenian society (Plato 517). For Socrates, it is the journey that matters, not the destination, a critical principle we try to impart on our students so they engage in process and see the value in the highly complex nature of learning. As Smith and Jimenez acknowledge, FYC students at her college appear indifferent to the process, and worry more about the final end grade than they do about their participation in their own learning (Smith and Jimenez 48-49). The “Apology” is not only a means to learn the structure of a cohesive

rhetorical argument, but it is a philosophically engaging and challenging text that fosters an awareness of students own learning process and what it can mean to them. FYC is not only a writing focused course, but a place where students can develop their thinking about their own learning and reflect on how learning happens to them.

Similarly, *The Clouds* too can draw out a metacognitive awareness for students about their own learning and approaches to writing. *The Clouds* is a play centered in academic culture, which works two-fold to invite students to think critically about the purpose of academia, along with their position in the academy. It can shape, and perhaps even ignite, internal debates about students' own roles and intentions in college, based on how they read the opposing viewpoints presented in Aristophanes' text alongside Socrates, viewpoints which are delivered in two very different forms and through the use of different devices. *The Clouds* offers students an imaginative and humorous look at the academy, through theatrical dialogue, offering subliminal permission to criticize institutional elitist education. These notions of dialogic structures become a prominent tool in both texts. The "Apology" is a speech that reflects Socrates' dialogic practices and *The Clouds* is a play in which dialogue *is* the main device used to communicate and express sub-textual ideas.

The Clouds quietly invites students into Socrates' "Thinking Establishment" where we find a pale malnourished student whom Aristophanes paints in a cartoonish manner. When Strepsiades knocks at the door to the new school, a student is portrayed as overly serious and foolishly obsessed with what he thinks is *important work*. The student announces, "In the name of Zeus, you are ignorant, whoever you are who has kicked the door so hard and thoughtlessly and destroyed an idea that was being born" (Aristophanes 20). These ideas, according to Aristophanes, are demonstrably foolish, petty and unimportant. The dialogue between the student and Strepsiades expose philosophical questions like "how far—in a flea feet—a flea can jump" (Aristophanes 21) or "whether gnats tootled through their mouths or through their butt" (Aristophanes 22). Strepsiades

humors the student and responds, “Therefore the asshole is the trumpet of the gnats. Oh thrice blessed the farter amongst mortals! It would be very easy for someone who knows intestinal tract of the gnat to escape trial” (Aristophanes 22).

By using *The Clouds* we are offering a safe, accessible and also challenging text to our students. The comedic nature provides a personable and lighthearted entry into a discussion about academia, education, learning, discovery and inquiry, critiquing Socrates’ and other philosophers’ overly serious and inherently exclusionary practices. As we read the text, we stumble on these sections and find surprisingly childish language inserted in the play. Usually, we act the play out in class, so we can see it come alive. Students are grouped up, and while in their groups they design and rehearse assigned scenes. Through this exercise, students need to pay attention to what they understand and in turn apply their understanding to the way they artistically depict the scene live. Learning is a social endeavor, so the collaborative work provides the small and intimate locations to contend with meaning. They can refine their understanding as they talk about language, design, setting, and rehearse lines. The rehearsals offer opportunities to reread and internalize the dialogue so they can work through the nuances at their own pace and under low stakes conditions. When they perform the scenes, there are always chuckles when we meet words like “butt” and “fart”. These are the moments where students can access the texts. They know what these words mean, and they become a little confused about this ancient text. Suddenly, they don’t see the Greeks as too stuffy and realize how humor transcends time. The scaffolded approach I take with *The Clouds* allows students to further hone their understandings from many different positions (as readers, thinkers, audience, actors, directors, set designers, and artistic directors), pushing them to contend with certain limitations, think through a certain lens, and resolve challenges that come in ways that support other interests.

Students may not immediately realize that Aristophanes intellectualizes the anti-intellectual,

until the viewer/audience laughs at the jokes and engages the criticism through the performance. Thus, questions about what it means to be educated or the likes, might come up once the play has been performed fully and students have been actively involved in enhancing the comedic effects through their own contributions and process, uplifting the performance. Smith posits that students often think there is one right answer or that they themselves cannot come up with their own interpretations to what the experts have already proposed, and thus retreat from the process (62). For Smith it is especially necessary to foster an environment where students can take risks, to see how (re)reading and revising one's understanding of a text helps them make analytical jumps. The more a student (re)reads a text, applies the mental moves necessary to scaffold their own individual understanding of the text, the more the gates to new ways of thinking about a text open up for them.

These new insights in tandem with themes that come up in Greek literature engender new philosophical questions that stimulate readers, create a heightened sense of curiosity and have the capability to transform and change the mind. Maryanne Wolf argues that reading introduces people to new realities to which they can cross over and experience something completely out of their norm, forever transforming them. She describes this transcendental moment:

While reading, we can leave our own consciousness, and pass over into the consciousness of another person, another age, another culture. 'Passing over,' a term used by the theologian John Dunne, describes the process through which reading enables us to try on, identify with, and ultimately enter for a brief time the wholly different perspective of another person's consciousness. (7)

Reading classical texts, like the "Apology" or *The Clouds*, alongside active learning and simulation exercises, offer an opportunity for student readers to transcend identity, time, and culture. It offers students a chance to enter into the mind of a great philosopher who asks difficult questions, and

gives them a chance to feel like participants in the discussion, rather than observers or repositories of information.

The transcendental experience enables readers to also feel deeply about issues and characters in texts as they read. While the closing argument of “The Apology” is not unlike the conclusion of a persuasive essay that models a conclusion for the readers, it also serves as the turning point or climax in the defense, where the readers are drawn into the defense emotionally. Socrates, in the earlier part of the defense, remains stoic and emotionally detached. However, the emotional undertone changes when the defense closes by foreshadowing the verdict. This moment builds Socrates’ as a hero, with integrity and virtue. Socrates compliments the jury and says, “I trust you, and the God himself, to decide about me in the way that shall best both for me and for you” (Plato 524). The ending leaves our reader with the freedom to come to their own conclusions after they have been presented them with a number of arguments and points to contend with. By the end, Plato’s depictions of Socrates is of a protagonist that readers empathize with him, and view as a victim of mob rule. Interesting questions come up in classes when we reach this point in the text. Students are confronted with moral questions, and while they may not necessarily go against the grain in their daily lives, Plato’s construction of Socrates’ character engenders a sense of social responsibility and critical awareness in students. We are transferred into the situation; we know the power of groupthink; we wonder what we would do if we were on the jury or if we were in Socrates’ place. Once our emotions have been triggered, we embody the difficult situation the character finds himself in and we become sentimentally invested in the outcome. The insertion of subjectivism alters the way we view the protagonist and how we approach the scenario. Rosenblatt states:

[T]he ability to understand and sympathize with others reflects the multiple nature of the human being, his potentialities for many more selves and kinds of experience than any one

being could express. This may be one of the things that enables us to seek through literature an enlargement of our experiences. (40)

The complexity drawn into the plot of the drama helps the reader go beyond the surface and dig deeper into the text. Blau believes this sort of wrestling of moral implications, a kind of cognitive dissonance, within texts encourage a deeper reading of the text. The internal debate or confusion leads the reader to interact with the text in a way that “foster[s] the development of the dispositions and intellectual traits that characterize all strong readers” (286). *The Clouds* is not as linear as the “Apology” and its satirical nature can make it both exciting and challenging to unpack and leave readers with a sense of uncertainty. It is its sarcasm that allows for multiple possible interpretations and readings, and presents students with permission to engage in the exaggerated view of intellectual hypocrisy and academic hyperbole. On the one hand, this offers students a view into the other side, perhaps, their side. Academia’s reputation for being a locus of hard thinking and deep analysis can be quite intimidating, and deter students from entering into and participating in its discourse with confidence. Blau’s critique of traditional literary studies confronts this view and reminds us that it is not in the best interest of the student to deposit meaning, but to allow for multiple possible interpretations in a supportive environment that cultivates and respects provisional and continuously evolving notions and the exchange of ideas (274). While confusion is often frustrating and discouraging, the value of texts that provoke us to ask simple to complicated questions is much more powerful than the reader might realize. The student’s active mind, one that is participating in meaning-making, even if they feel defeated, eventually learns that their questions assist in their own arrival at and understanding of text (286).

The root of the confusion students might experience can be tracked to different styles of prose. One way to elevate the challenge is to use texts that are syntactically and grammatically complex. In the case of the “Apology,” Plato and the translator take liberties which complicate

much of the monologue. The language and sentence construction, often feel unfamiliar to students and thus demand the reader work especially hard to make meaning. Blau asserts that it is with this kind of attention that readers develop:

a crucial habit of metacognition - of thinking about their own thinking and monitoring the state of their emerging understanding, even while they are discovering and practicing discursive strategies for addressing refractory and frustrating problems in constructing meaning as readers and writers. (286).

As a result, these mental moves will contribute to the formation of a stronger understanding of the multiple ideas emerging in a text like “The Apology,” and foster an internal motivational framework that strengthens readers, while also building upon each new discovery that leads to newer ideas. Asking students to write freely about what they do or don’t understand, in a reading journal or through a visual literacy exercise can help facilitate this process. I incorporate a visual literacy exercise into the unit, where students are asked to identify a quote or passage that stands out to them, or is especially memorable or meaningful, and then to write about what they think the quote means. Then I ask students to visually represent the quote through abstract or figurative graphics or symbols. I try to guide students to focus on the language and parts of a sentence, drawing from an image that appears in their mind based on the writing in the text. At first students feel uncomfortable drawing, but once I establish the purpose for the exercise, students humor me and go with it. I then select four to six of the most abstract illustrations and ask students to put their images on the board. We then get up, with the text in our hand, and we try to match the illustration to the specific quote or passage the artist chose. Students look through the text and find locations to read aloud and explain their thoughts about how the image communicates the meanings of the quote or passage. The goal is for students to look closely at language and try to see how the language is a vehicle for the idea and thus contributes to their overall understanding of the text. As

we discuss the illustrations, we also talk about what elements or details from the quotes are not visually represented, and how that changes the meaning of the quote and the illustration. An exercise like this hopes to get students to consider word choice and become comfortable with close reading, both necessary skills for composition and other disciplines. These mental moves allow our brains to process new information and come up with more sophisticated ideas and concepts. When we read complicated texts and then think about what we read, visualize and transcend, unpack and examine, students can then transfer their thoughts to paper in more concrete ways and apply newly formed perspectives and ideas to their writing.

Although, the cerebral gains from using literary texts in FYC are plentiful, there must be a deliberate intention to push students' cognitive limits through selected literature. While the practice of reading imaginative literature is in and of itself beneficial, FYC can and should allow the classroom to function as a laboratory for challenging students reading, interpreting, and writing processes through a text's wide-ranging potentials. Through creative pedagogical activities in tandem with students developing their habits of mind and practices, learning to read texts deliberately and write about them, we facilitate an environment that is conducive to activating many new learning processes that are both producing cognitive and metacognitive developments. The optimism of Wolf and Zunshine's brain science is in that they recognize the continuous and ongoing development of one's brain and that learning does not have to end at a certain age. Challenging students to read texts that are thematically, linguistically, and historically complex, can and will produce direct and indirect results within first-year writing and beyond. Greek texts could be the sorts of texts that contribute to this end most broadly.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

REFLECTION, PROBLEMS, LIMITATIONS, AND MOVING FORWARD

Culmination of Research:

Literary imaginative texts should be integrated into a variety of courses across disciplines. However, as composition is the location for beginning college writers, the inclusion of imaginative literature should be more commonly practiced in the FYC classroom as it supports, scaffolds, and fosters a number of first-year writing goals, and helps students build their knowledge base, develop cognitive and metacognitive processes, and model academic and critical writing, thinking, and reading. In particular, the use of Greek literature, with its universal themes, multidimensional characters, and complex plots, offers first-year writers a foundational experience that provides a broad range of possibilities, along with intertextual, intersectional, interdisciplinary pathways. As a case study, the explicit and implicit conversations emerging in “The Apology,” offer students a gateway to understanding the larger social issues we want them to explore. “The Apology” and *The Clouds* are both social commentaries, in conversation with each other, and both deal with universal issues. So, their role in the FYC classroom is even more beneficial since it can encourage a multitude of discussions, questions, debates, and draw out many cognitive processes that are beneficial to novice writers.

The enormity of cognitive functions exercised from reading literary texts should inform our teaching practices more centrally. The argument against literary texts in composition classes is reasonable, but it is also reductive, and one dimensional. To truly enhance students’ learning, on multiple levels in a deep and meaningful way, we need to activate these multiple functions, and using Greek literature appears to be a possible way to support the meaningful learning we are responsible for facilitating. We cannot ignore the value of Greek texts in that they provide students

with an opportunity to experience texts transactionally, enjoyably, and transcendently. These texts offer a model for critical reading, thinking, and writing, and provide context to make assumptive logical leaps. The process of reading itself refines thinking and stimulates the reflexive and symbiotic relationship between reading and writing, and thus engenders better writing competencies. It is imperative that we challenge our students to decode and learn how to contemplate ideas in order to generate new ideas so they can write original prose that simultaneously demonstrates sophisticated writing, understanding of concepts, original thinking, and integrate newly-built knowledge.

Limitations and Problem:

I have just begun to explore the potential of Greek texts in composition classes in this case study. However, to further this research and assess the merits and value in using Greek literature, a more rigorous and systematic study that closely examines students' academic writing, who are enrolled in an FYC course, could provide more insights in the merits and efficacy of reading Greek texts. Evaluating student course reflections, compared to pre and post assessments, could also garner a better understanding of students' development of new knowledge, the development of students' cognitive processes, and the development of students' writing abilities as they might emerge from reading imaginative literary texts. Without student samples or student reflections and a closer look at prior and post course knowledge data, we cannot see the immediate effects the literary textual choices have on students thinking and writing progress. More empirical data is needed to confirm that true and meaningful writing progress occurs when imaginative literature is assigned in a composition course.

In the longer term, a replication of the study using culturally relevant imaginative literature should also be tested, specifically constructing a reading list in tandem with interdisciplinary

content, that features underrepresented writers who may or may not be part of the canon. The issue with western canonical texts remains, even though Greek literature can be problematized effectively and often appeals to universal truths and themes. We are at a crossroads in education. The resources are not scarce, we just have to choose to use them and select applicable content and texts that provide access into the conversations we want to have in our classrooms. With intentional pairing and problematizing, we can implement an assortment of writers who have been traditionally suppressed and erased, and give our students entrance into the academic discourse through modes that feel familiar and which more organically appeal to their interests, histories, and cultures.

Reflection:

Greek literature was not something I was raised reading or a genre I had been exposed to beyond some small samples a high school teacher may have assigned. In fact, I did not read any Greek fiction until graduate school, when I took a Classical Cultures course. Before then, my experience with these western texts were limited to Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and "The Apology." As a graduate student reading Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes for the first time, I found myself wondering why I hadn't read these texts before and how helpful their inclusion could have been to my growth and learning during my undergraduate years. Had I read Oedipus Rex in an introduction to psychology course, I believe I would have understood theoretical frameworks more intimately. In some ways, I feel a little cheated out of the experience of analyzing and problematizing primary sources in that doing so would have enhanced my own knowledge base and critical abilities.

I realize that I am speaking from a graduate students' position, with more years of study than my undergraduate students, but I had no prior experience with Greek literature, or much experience

with canonical literature in general. My own undergraduate experience was grounded in creative writing and social sciences, and eventually an interdisciplinary degree focused on labor studies. The theoretical argument I am presenting, is grounded in elements of teaching and learning that fosters rigorous learning opportunities and offers accessible approaches to developing learners in multidimensional and complex ways. I am thinking about how to create experiences for different learners, from diverse and multicultural backgrounds that support students learning from a variety of locations and through an assortment of strategies. For me, Greek literature provides this opportunity and can function in an FYC classroom and across disciplines in profound ways, if we take the necessary steps to scaffold and contextualize so as to reap the most rewards.

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