

Pedagogy

ACL Workshop, 2001

“You really expect me to read all that Latin!”—Reading Strategies for *Ecce Romani* and Other Texts

I. PRE-READING EXERCISES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL AND BEYOND

I. Introduction

The primary long term goal for most Latin teachers is to enable their students to read long passages of Latin. That is why a reading text like *Ecce Romani* introduces long passages early. When students are faced with such passages, their natural tendency is to assume that the major issue is vocabulary: if they only knew all the vocabulary they feel they would be able to handle everything. The purpose of the series of presentations at ACL (of which this was the first) was to show that there are all kinds of other factors to be considered by both student and teacher. The first factor is that of prior knowledge that the student may—or may not—bring to the reading experience.

II. “You really expect me to read that!”

We can simulate the experience of our students by making ourselves see how much we can in fact handle of the reading below. As you look at it, you may well have the same reaction regularly heard about Latin in your classroom, ... “It’s all Greek to me...”—actually, this time: Russian.

Is there even a starting point to build on? Let us remind ourselves just how much prior knowledge we really have at our disposal to give us at least some understanding.

VI.

Латышь из моды вышла ныне:
Так, если правду вам сказать.
Он знал довольно по латыне,
Чтоб эпитафы разбирать,
Поголковать об Ювенале.
В конце письма поставить *vale*.
Да помнил, хоть не без греха,
Из Энеиды два стиха.
Он рыться не имел охоты
В хронологической пыли
Бытописание земли:
Но дней минувших анекдоты
От Ромула до наших дней
Хранил он в памяти своей.

Пушкин

- We can look at the form, and tell that this is...a poem.
- Counting the lines, we can even say it is a sonnet.
- We can tell that the poem rhymes by noting the repetition of shapes of syllables at the end of succeeding lines—and identify the rhyme scheme.
- We can tell that the author is...Pushkin, for even if we don’t know the Russian alphabet, we can recognize ‘pi—П’ and the K, and the vowels—especially if we have already some knowledge of the Greek alphabet.
- Based on the date, and the literary form, we can even predict something about the content, or at least preclude some options: it is not a computer handbook, nor about airplane travel.
- In fact, we can even find other clues as to content. For example, there is one word in the poem that is not in the Cyrillic alphabet: *vale*, (l. 6).
- Since this paper is designed for Latin teachers, there is a higher probability that this is *vale* meaning, “Goodbye”, and not the poetic English word for a valley—even though it is in a poem.
- Now, if we look at the rhyming patterns, and notice that it is possible that *vale* rhymes with the previous line, we have another clue. We can deduce the Cyrillic letter for ‘L’, (l.5).
- If we combine this information with the inclusion of a Latin word in the poem, we can arrive at both the possible topic of the poem, and, indeed, transliterate if not actually translate the first word of the poem itself: Latin. Why not Romulus...and, there he is: from Greek we can identify the first three letter of his name in line 13, remembering that ‘P’, is actually ‘R’.
- When we know the topic of a passage, we can begin to make predictions about content, and thus vocabulary that might be included. For example, a poet who is writing a brief poem on Latin, might include items of history and literature. Can we predict the most likely historical figures or writings he might mention?
- Why not the *Aeneid*? This is harder to identify, but we can recognize something similar to the Greek Δ in the middle of the second word on line eight.

This is such a delightful poem that a rough translation is in order at this point:

By now Latin was out of style:
I'll be frank with you,
He knew enough Latin
To work out epigraphs,
5 To chat about Juvenal,
To end his letters with *vale*,
And he even remembered, though not without error,
Two verses of the *Aeneid*.
He had no desire to dig
10 Through the chronological dust
Of the ancient texts of the earth:
But anecdotes of days past
From Romulus to our day
He preserved in his memory.

A. S. Pushkin, "Evgenii Onegin." *Sochineniia*. Vol. I.
Ed. M. D. Filina, Mosckva: Vechc, 1999. 295 (Russian text)

Two final items could be deduced about the vocabulary of the poem. Based on the subject matter, one could anticipate that Greek derivatives such as *epigraph* and *chronological* might be employed by the poet, if they exist in Russian—and a quick glance at lines four and ten confirms our guess. One could even go further, and deduce many letters of the alphabet based on the words that can be recognized.

In contrast, if a teacher were to place the following three sentences on the overhead, his or her students would breathe a sigh of relief: no long passage, just an exercise, and probably a simple, transitive sentence—subject, verb, and direct object.

1. Норвежские женщины пьют пиво.
2. Русские женщины обсуждают политику.
3. Американские женщины покупают кока-колу.

If we know that Russian, like Latin, is an inflected language, we can recognize repeated morphology in the patterns of the final syllables of parallel words in each sentence. In fact, each of these sentences employs a nominative feminine plural noun as subject (the second word in each sentence), modified by an adjective of the same case, a third person plural present tense verb and a feminine accusative singular noun as a direct object. We can note the endings of these different forms, and also observe that the adjectival endings, as is sometimes the case in Latin, do not match the noun endings. However, unlike the passage, we have no clues at all as to content. If, on the other hand, we are told that the subject is the Russian word for 'women', and that in each sentence that noun is modified by a different adjective giving nationality, we might be able to see that the last sentence is speaking about...American women. When we get to the translation, we find out that there was in fact a little more that we could have predicted.

1. Norwegian women drink beer.
2. Russian women discuss politics.
3. American women buy Coca-Cola.

It is not improbable that Russians would discuss 'politics'—and now that we know what it means, we realize that the word, both in Russian and in English, is clearly a Greek derivative. We can also see that 'Coca-Cola', is a logical topic in the same sentence as the adjective 'American'.

We may conclude that while sentences are less daunting, we would probably rather know what Pushkin said than read these simple sentences—at least that is the premise behind a reading method utilized by *Ecce Romani* which hopes to engage the students' interest in the story of a Roman family with children of school age. Further, if the ultimate goal is to learn to read passages, students should practice exactly that—even though the sight of the long passage makes them gasp, "You really expect us to read all that Latin?"

The one point that this paper attempts to emphasize is this: pre-reading is valuable in reassuring students that they are much farther along than they realize. They already possess prior knowledge which can enable them to begin the process of constructing meaning from a whole passage. But the second point to note is that it was precisely that prior knowledge of literary genre and history combined with the fact that most of the participants in the ACL workshop were familiar with the Greek alphabet, that enabled us all to get as far as we did, even though practically no one knew any Russian. Thus, part of pre-reading may be to make sure students have sufficient background to make sense of a new passage.

In my middle school classes, I also sometimes use pre-reading to enable students to identify and practice the various skills that are needed to understand the story as a whole. Examples of possible exercises of all kinds, prepared for select chapters of *Ecce Romani* are attached at the end of this document.

III. The Concept of Prior Knowledge

I have found no better summary of the concept than those offered in an excellent website from the *Project Better Series, A Summary of Current Research on Thinking and Learning*, on the School Improvement in Maryland website, http://www.mdk12.org/practices/good_instruction/projectbetter/thinkingskills/index.html. (This site is a highly recommended resource for information all aspects of teaching and learning, and in particular for the attention given to reading strategies.)

*"PRIOR KNOWLEDGE can be explained as a combination of the learner's preexisting attitudes, experiences, and knowledge."*¹

*"Prior knowledge (in the form of schemata) influences our comprehension to a much greater degree than earlier research would have suggested....So powerful is the influence of prior knowledge on comprehension that Johnston and Pearson have found that prior knowledge of topic is a better predictor of comprehension than is either an intelligence test score or a reading achievement test score."*²

Although these excerpts are from articles on reading English, they are valid for understanding how we make meaning out of a passage in any language. Teachers of Latin can encourage their students to tap consciously into such prior knowledge, offer them strategies to bridge the gap successfully from old to new knowledge, and so help them make the new knowledge their own. This concept is especially valuable in the middle school environment where the cognitive maturity of students may not have reached the level where they can comfortably manipulate abstract grammar concepts—without an apparent context—and then apply them to a passage. Research does seem to indicate that students at this age very much need hands-on experience of making meaning—which stories can provide. Pre-reading is a way of scaffolding the complex task of reading, as well as a way of providing students with a sense of accomplishment in small tasks as part of the whole.

There is much more that could be said both on Prior Knowledge theory, and Middle School strategies, but at this point in the ACL workshop, participants were offered time to reflect on how to incorporate pre-reading strategies into a chapter in *Ecce Romani*, Book I, to decide what prior knowledge they thought their students would and/or should bring to this reading.

IV. Identification of Prior Knowledge Essential for Success in Specific Reading Passages

Workshop participants were given a copy Chapter 15 of *Ecce Romani*, selected because it seems to be one of the stories in the book where students are confronted with the reality that there is a break-down in the strategy of simply matching Latin vocabulary with English meanings—because it is in this chapter that neuter nouns are introduced and understanding of the significance of case endings becomes paramount. The ending *-a* no longer simply denotes a nominative singular noun: it can also signify nominative as well as accusative plural. To further complicate matters, *-um* is now used as a subject, and is also found on the adverb, *tantum*. Tense markers (imperfect vs. present), though introduced in the previous chapter, are also a factor since students have

¹ Strategic Teaching and Reading Project Guidebook. (NCREL, 1995, rev. ed.).

² Anderson, R. C., and P. D. Pearson, (1984). A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading comprehension. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.) Handbook of Reading Research.

so far had little time for practice. Faced with such ambiguities, we can see how valuable it is to confirm at the start what is known about morphology (1st declension, feminine singular, for example,) and then alert students' attention to the fact that they will find something different in this passage. As the story is read, students can then discuss what other uses the *-a* could have.

As with the Russian selections, workshop participants noted that there were several areas for this chapter where prior knowledge existed and could make all the difference for comprehension. Merely knowing the context is very helpful, since it enables the reader to develop expectations in the area of content. Textbooks such as *Ecce Romani*, which employ the 'Reading Method' of foreign language instruction deliberately develop a narrative that builds up the reader's knowledge of one Roman family, so that students know their names and personalities and are familiar with the contrast between Roman and modern times. Students can therefore predict some content and comment on cultural items shown in the illustration before tackling the text. Proficiency in areas of vocabulary and syntax is of course essential, as is consolidation of new material—all of which will comprise prior knowledge for the passage in the subsequent chapters.

The discussion was summarized by organizing possible areas of useful prior knowledge under five headings. These headings are listed below, along with pre-reading goals and activities suggested by participants. This is by no means an exhaustive list. There are, of course, many ways to set the stage for reading new passages—tapping into prior knowledge is only the one of them. The next two presentations in the workshop dealt with other skills designed to promote success with the 'Reading Method'.

V. Possible areas for fruitful pre-reading exercises

1. CONTENT

- **Goal:** Students will predict the content of the passage based on prior stories in the sequence, the illustration, punctuation (e.g. quotation marks, question marks), new vocabulary.
- **Activity:** *List the participants; predict their conversation, based on the picture and on the new vocabulary; or: assign an adjective and a verb to each of the participants, based on the picture and vocabulary.*

(See sample activities for *Ecce Romani*, Chapters 12 & 14 below.)

2. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL

- **Goal:** Students will review their knowledge of the ancient world and compare and contrast items found in the story with similar items in the modern world.
- **Activity** *–List similarities or differences in two columns and/or draw the modern equivalent of the Roman item. It may be appropriate to point out where items do not have an exact modern equivalent and where it is appropriate to use the Latin term—e.g., toga, raeda, paterfamilias.*

3. VOCABULARY

- **Goal:** students will see how their knowledge of English enables them to understand new Latin vocabulary.
- **Activity:** *Identify the new vocabulary words in the chapter that are the source of a list of derivatives.*
(See sample of this kind of activity for *Ecce Romani*, Chapters 33 and 34 below.)

4. MORPHOLOGY

- **Goal:** students will consolidate recognition of different tenses or cases in the same story, and get a head-start on the translation of the whole.
- **Activity:** *Locate all verbs; arrange in columns according to tense; translate each verb.*
(An example of an activity designed for *Ecce Romani*, Chapter 14, is included below.)

5. SYNTAX

- **Goal:** Students will be alert to sentence structure and to clause and phrase boundaries.
- **Activity:** *Any or all of the following:*
 - ✓ *color code the kernel items (subject, verb, and complement or direct object where applicable) of all main clauses*
 - ✓ *put square brackets around subordinate clauses*
 - ✓ *put parentheses around prepositional phrases*
 - ✓ *circle coordinating conjunctions; draw arrows from modifiers to their head; —use with any chapter.*

Activity: Identifying Areas of Prior Knowledge as a Basis for Generating Pre-reading Exercises

ECCE ROMANI
CHAPTER 15
VEHICLE SPOTTING



(p. 112 in student book)

Dum raeda in fossā manebat, Marcus et Sextus vehicula *expectābant*.
Longum erat silentium.

Diū nūllum vehiculum *appāret*. Tandem Marcus murmur *rotārum* audit et
procul nūbem *pulveris* cōspicit.

Sextus, "Quid est, Marce? Estne *plaustrum*?"

Marcus, "Mīnimē, fatue! *Plaustra onera* magna ferunt. *Tarda* igitur sunt.
Sed *illud* vehiculum celeriter appropinquat."

Sextus, "Ita vērō! *Praetereā* equī illud vehiculum trahunt. *Bovēs* plaustra
trahunt. *Fortasse* est raeda."

"Nōn est raeda," inquit Marcus. "Nam *quattuor* rotās habet raeda. Illud
vehiculum *duās tantum* rotās habet".

"Est cisium!" clāmat Sextus. "Ecce, Marce! Quam celeriter appropinquat!
Fortasse est vir *praeclārus* quī ab urbe *Neāpolim* iter facit."

"Mīnimē, Sexte!" respondet Marcus. "Nōn est vir *praeclārus*, nam tunicam,
nōn togam gerit. *Fortasse* est alius *tabellārius*."

Praeterit cisium. Tum nūbem *pulveris* tantum vident et murmur *rotārum*
audiunt. Tandem silentium. *

Italicized words are new to this chapter, and are listed in order of appearance below the story in the book.
The only new grammar items are neuter nouns of second and third declensions (all cases, singular and plural).

Goal—to list possible areas for fruitful pre-reading exercises. Students are often encouraged to find out that they are more prepared than they thought, when they begin to identify individual bits of prior knowledge that will get them a long way toward understanding the story as a whole.

Procedure: Working as though you have never seen the text before, take five minutes, and identify the following:

1. What prior knowledge will students bring to this passage?—remember to consider attitudes and general experience as well as (presumed) knowledge of the Latin by this stage in Latin I. Will some of these areas need review? Why?
2. What tensions may arise from prior knowledge?—for example: what they already know about Latin noun forms; their understanding of how English works; modern life, society and dress.
3. Based on the picture and the new vocabulary, what can we predict about content? What senses might be engaged? What might the boys say to each other?

"Activating relevant prior knowledge means calling to mind what is already known about a topic. Because comprehension is essentially a process by which meaning is constructed using background knowledge as well as information from the text and context, it is critical that readers are aware of what they already know about what they will read. Prior knowledge enables readers to predict the contents of text and confirm predictions through reading."

[Best Practices School Improvement in Maryland]

Ecce Romani, Chapter 12, p. 89 What is going on?

Before we read the story, see if you can find out the main characters, and at least TWO *verbs* that tell what each one is doing. Then look for *adjectives* that describe them. Write them in the chart below.

<i>Character-</i>	<i>Verbs—what are they doing?</i>	<i>Adjective(s) describing him/her</i>

Now that we have been through the story together, find and list in the boxes below:

- ✓ All the nouns in the genitive case that follow and modify another noun. Write both nouns. The first noun may be in any case.
- ✓ All the nouns in the *ablative* case.
- ✓ Give the case of each noun, and then *translate* each word or group of words that you find. Two are done for you.

line	Word or phrase	Case	Meaning
6	<i>in horto et agris et vineis</i>	<i>ablative</i>	<i>in the garden and fields and vineyards</i>
6			
6			
7	<i>in arboribus vinearum</i>	<i>ablative and genitive</i>	<i>in the trees of the vineyards</i>
8			
9			
10			
11			
13			
14			
16			
17			
17			
18			

ECCĒ ROMANI 14 Who is to blame?

Ubi dēscendit raeda in fossam, concidunt omnēs. Nēmō tamen ē raedā cadit. Mox cūctī in viam ē raedā dēscendunt, sollicitī sed incolumēs. Cornēlius, quamquam gaudet quod omnēs sunt incolumēs, raedārium miserum reprehendit.

“Age Syre! Nōlī cessāre! Extrahe raedam statim ē fossā.”

Syrus igitur equōs incitat. Equī raedam strēnuē trahunt, sed frūstrā. Raeda haeret in fossā immobilis. Syrus eam movēre nōn potest.

“Ō sceleste!” inquit Cornēlius. “Tuā culpā raeda est in fossā. Quid tū faciēbās ubi cisium appropinquābat? Dormiēbāsne?”

Interpellat Sextus, “Syrus non dormiēbat, sed per viam placidē ibat dum appropinquābat cisium. Egō et Marcus spectābāmus cisium quod celerrimē appropinquābat. Deinde tabellārius equōs ad raedam nostram dēvertēbat. Periculum erat magnum. Syrus cisium vitāre poterat et iam nōs omnēs sumus incolumēs quod Syrus raedam magnā arte agēbat.”

Tum Cornēlius rogat. “Tūne cisium spectābās. Marce, ubi appropinquābat?”

“Ita vērō, pater!” respondet Marcus. “Omnia observābam. Erat culpa tabellārīi, nōn Syrī. Syrus raedam magnā arte agēbat.”

Sed Cornēlius, magnā irā commōtus, virgam arripit et raedārium miserum verberat. *

What is happening now, and what happened to cause the accident? The clues are in the verbs—where the action is!

present singular	present plural	imperatives/infinitives	imperf. 3 rd p. sing & pl	imperf. 1 st & 2 nd s. & pl.

Who is to blame? Make a guess, based on the last episode. Give a possible reason for everyone. Look back at Chapter 13. Respondē Latinē!

- ✓ Cornēlius quod _____
- ✓ Sextus Marcusque quod _____
- ✓ Syrus quod _____
- ✓ Aurēlia Cornēliaque quod _____
- ✓ Tabellārius quod _____

*Reproduced with permission from
Ecce Romani I, Chapter 14. ©Prentice Hall 2000

UBI SUNT VERBA??

Look through Ch. 14 (p. 105). Locate all verbs with a person ending and all imperatives. (Infinitives don't count in this exercise.) Write them in the spaces below, circle the tense (present or imperfect) and translate. The numbers in parentheses tell you which line to look in.

Remember: 1. The imperfect tense is **BAck in the past** 2. **WKUB**¹, Rome's Imperfect Radio Station.

- 1) (1) _____ pres/imp _____
- 2) (1) _____ pres/imp _____
- 3) (1) _____ pres/imp _____
- 4) (2) _____ pres/imp _____
- 5) (2) _____ pres/imp _____
- 6) (3) _____ pres/imp _____
- 7) (3) _____ pres/imp _____
- 8) (4) _____ pres/imp _____
- 9) (4) _____ pres/imp _____
- 10) (4) _____ pres/imp _____
- 11) (5) _____ pres/imp _____
- 12) (5) _____ pres/imp _____
- 13) (6) _____ pres/imp _____
- 14) (6) _____ pres/imp _____
- 15) (7) _____ pres/imp _____
- 16) (7) _____ pres/imp _____
- 17) (7) _____ pres/imp _____
- 18) (8) _____ pres/imp _____
- 19) (8) _____ pres/imp _____
- 20) (9) _____ pres/imp _____
- 21) (9) _____ pres/imp _____
- 22) (10) _____ pres/imp _____

¹ Was running, Kept running, Used to run, Began to run

23) (10) _____ pres/imp _____

24) (10) _____ pres/imp _____

25) (11) _____ pres/imp _____

26) (11) _____ pres/imp _____

27) (12) _____ pres/imp _____

28) (12) _____ pres/imp _____

29) (13) _____ pres/imp _____

30) (14) _____ pres/imp _____

31) (14) _____ pres/imp _____

32) (14) _____ pres/imp _____

33) (15) _____ pres/imp _____

34) (15) _____ pres/imp _____

35) (15) _____ pres/imp _____

36) (16) _____ pres/imp _____

37) (17) _____ pres/imp _____

38) (17) _____ pres/imp _____

PRE-READING—DERIVATIVES YOU MIGHT KNOW FROM ECCE ROMANI, CHAPTERS 33 & 34

inveni a(b)

Each derivatives comes from a new vocabulary word in these chapters. Locate the word and meaning. Give the meaning of the English word—use a dictionary if necessary, or guess, based on the original Latin.

List any other derivatives you can think of. Some you may not know are listed for you.

<i>derivative</i>	<i>Latin word + meaning</i>	<i>meaning of derivative</i>	<i>(Other deriv. if any)</i>
company			
pullet			
oval			ovulate
circumference			
pulchritude(n)			
reign			regnant
infernal			
casual			
oil			oleo, linoleum
stratum			
ignite			
animated			
plural			
succumb			
emulsion			
disgusting			gustatory
disperse			aspersion
urbane			
pestilence			
location			
edible			
complete			complement
rupture			
irate			irascible
etc.			
concoct			
scissors			
fortuitous			
proximity			
situated			
investiture			divest
ululate		(same as Latin)	
vulnerable			
sanguine			
procession			
deride			