

## INNOVATIVE NEW NINTH GRADE HONORS PROJECT CONNECTS ANCIENT WORLD TO TODAY

What happens when you take *The Odyssey*, cross it with Pre-AP Global History and send it to the High School Library? The 9th grade students in Mrs. Cardillo's ELA 9 Honors class and Mr. Hutchinson's Pre-AP Global History 9 class get a unique opportunity to practice the reading, writing and critical thinking skills essential to academic success through a new, innovative, cross-curricular research project connecting the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome to the politics and pressures of today.

"When I started my new 9 Honors teaching assignment, I quickly realized by coincidence that my students came right from Mr. Hutch's class. In the opening few days of school, I visited Mr. Hutch to let him know of this alignment and gauged his interest for some cross-curricular projects and activities, and he was fully on board," said Mrs. Cardillo.

"Research and research writing are both crucial skills in the 21st century, especially for college bound students," said Mr. Hutchinson. "Being able to collaborate with Mrs. Babbie and Mrs. Cardillo has been and will continue to be very beneficial for our students as they will have an opportunity to learn multiple strategies to hone their skills in reading, writing and analytical thinking. I have also found that being able to block out the full hour a day has also been very beneficial as it provides students with an environment that feels less rushed and gives them an opportunity to ask questions that they normally might not have."

So how do you connect the Punic Wars of the early Common Era with modern news headlines? By exploring ties between the rich literary themes in *The Odyssey* and enduring issues that change, but remain the same throughout history. Over the past several weeks, Mrs. Cardillo and Mr. Hutchinson worked together, along with High School Librarian Mrs. Babbie, to guide their 9H students through a research-driven exploration of both *The Odyssey* and enduring issues which are defined as historical issues that have shaped societies across the globe.

As Mrs. Cardillo shared, "In truth, the literary themes of *The Odyssey* – including power, loyalty, vengeance, hospitality, and antiquated gender roles, among countless others -- are already naturally linked to timeless ("enduring") issues through the historical lens, such as conflict, desire for power, alliances, interconnectedness, and inequity, among so many potential others."

Under Mrs. Cardillo's guidance, students identified and analyzed *The Odyssey's* literary themes, while Mr. Hutchinson led them in connecting these themes to enduring issues. Mrs. Babbie then supported students' research and critical thinking skills in finding and evaluating credible information resources.

"Being a critical consumer of information is such an essential skill for our students today. They are bombarded by millions of pieces of information, and use that information to make decisions that impact their lives," said Mrs. Babbie. "By giving them the time and space in class to practice finding and evaluating sources, this project helps them build the skills they need to make sound decisions, both now and as adults."

In the second leg of the project, the team engaged the students in the lengthy and sophisticated task of reading and annotating their research sources to later synthesize the information they found along with their new understandings of the enduring issues in a mini research-style essay.

"This project is focused on empowering our students to be critical thinkers and develop a mindset of inquiry and life-long learning," said High School Principal Michael Flagg. "We want students to be able to form their own opinions and ideas, and they need to know how to access authentic information. This will prepare our kids to not only know how to best receive information, but also help them to be better producers of information and use their talents and skills to make an impact. It has also been wonderful to see how Mrs. Cardillo, Mr.

Hutchinson, and Mrs. Babbie are modeling all of these skills as they collaborate on this project. The energy and enthusiasm they have shown is infectious!"

Students have expressed how working on this project has influenced their learning. When asked, students were eager to share. One student explained, "Doing this project has helped me go deeper into my work." Another said, "(This kind of thinking) has helped me be more patient and take time to find what I need with my sources." A third student stated, "I can see that I used to think I had good sources, but when you really need to know what you are looking for, you know you might need more information so you can make a better decision."

"This project was an organic way for students to see how literature teaches us about values and challenges that have persisted across generations," said Mrs. Cardillo. "It also helped to develop the critical skills associated with reading and writing for informational and argumentative purposes – skills that will be essential to students in their future experiences."

