

Greek

“Had Greek civilisation never existed, we would never have become fully conscious,” W.H. Auden

Some may argue that Auden is exaggerating here – but to those initiated into the glory that is Greece, his words make perfect sense. And making the choice to study Classical Greek at A level offers that opportunity to become fully conscious in an intellectual and scholarly way.

Course content

The wonderful thing about Greek A level is that it really is a genuinely multi-disciplinary subject. It involves significant language work of course, in order to bring your Greek to a standard where you can confidently read original texts; but it also encompasses literature, philosophy, history and some elements of sociology, in order fully for you to understand this complex and multi-faceted cultural explosion.

For the language side of the course, you will become an ever more confident and adept user of Greek, increasingly eager and able to translate with finesse and precision; and to offer your own nuances and interpretations of complex and debated passages. Throughout the course, you will read passages from a variety of Greek authors, which will not only expose you to different linguistic styles, but also to a variety of literary and historical sources, thus extending not only your linguistic ability but also your knowledge of the ancient world. Of course, you will need to expand your grammatical understanding and your breadth of vocabulary, but this will come through regular learning and also constant experience of a variety of Greek. You will also be honing the skill of translating into Greek throughout the two years: it is only through translating into the language that you can become fully conversant with its idioms and patterns of meaning, truly enabling you to start to think like a Greek...

In the literature lessons, you will have the opportunity to study both poetry and prose literature; and a substantial text of each. This year, the set texts are Plato's *Crito*, a dialogue exploring justice and the importance of the rule of law, and Homer's *Odyssey*, books 16 and 22, giving you a chance to read about Odysseus' homecoming and explore his relationship with his son in particular. Studying these texts will begin with the need to translate and understand the Greek fully, but it will quickly go beyond mere understanding, requiring you to consider the possible multiple meanings of key words, the images and word choices of the authors and the key themes, ideas and questions addressed in their writing. You will also have the opportunity to read more of their work in English, allowing you to explore further and consolidate your understanding of their ideas.

Skills developed

As a student of Greek, you will have an excellent training in rigorous analytical skills and detailed linguistic understanding; you will understand where words come from and how significant they are as a way of constructing reality. You will build a full vocabulary and an excellent grammatical understanding of the language. Moreover, you will also enhance your literary critical faculties, gaining an appreciation of literature and an insight into a culture which holds an endless fascination, both for the ways in which it differs from ours and for its huge and continuing influence on our world.

What a good Greek student looks like

We don't want to typecast anyone who wants to study Greek. Of course, we know that you probably love language; that you don't mind learning by rote and memorising odd verb endings, or learning the word for the place where the waves break on the beach. We suspect too that you are intrigued and excited by the mysterious world of gods and heroes, which somehow manages to coexist alongside the first stirrings of science, philosophy and ethics – all of which, for the sake of convenience, we call Greek...

Assessments

There are four examinations, all taken at the end of the two-year course. Two are language papers and two are literature papers.

The first language paper, worth 33% of the total A level, is 1 hour 30 minutes and is an unseen paper in which you are required to translate two original pieces of Greek literature, sometimes slightly adapted, into English; one prose, one poetry. The authors will be specified in advance (for examination in 2027 they will be Xenophon and Euripides). The second language paper, worth 17% of the total A level, will offer a choice: you can either do another shorter translation into English of a Greek passage of prose and then answer a number of comprehension and grammar questions on it, or translate a short passage of English into Greek. We strongly encourage you to opt for the translation of English into Greek – it is the best way fully to immerse yourself in the language.

The two literature papers, each worth 25% of the full A-level qualification, both follow the same pattern, one focusing on poetry and one on prose. You will need to know your set texts well, in order to answer translation and analysis questions on each; and then to write an essay about the text, informed by your wider reading of an additional specified portion of the text in English translation.

Entry requirements including skills

You will need a GCSE in Greek to take this course, and ideally you will have enjoyed that GCSE, especially the precision of the vocabulary learning and the rote memorising of odd noun or adjective patterns. You will have the skill of learning by heart; and also the skill of exploring words, both as individual beings and in the bundles we call literature. You will be eager to express your ideas about texts, out loud as well as in writing, and you will be daring enough to argue with us about them.

Beyond the classroom

Beyond the classroom, you are likely to have the opportunity to visit the British Museum in London as part of your course; we also make a point of attending any Classical plays in translation we can find being shown, as well as joint symposia and lectures with Winchester College. There's the opportunity to get involved with and even run a Classics society; and of course, to help the younger years with their work too.

Future Options

Again, we don't want to typecast you – but you might well be thinking about doing a Classics degree. Though of course you could also be considering a degree in a wide range of other subjects – your Greek will definitely make you someone different to consider whatever your plans are. Beyond degree level, you might be thinking about research, teaching or museum work – or maybe you will

simply use the analytical skills, the huge breadth of your learning and your wide-ranging understanding to take you on to any number of possible jobs. Even prime minister...

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit,” said Aristotle; what better way to live your life?

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