

CLASSICAL LITERATURE

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A Classical Literature student will no longer be impaled on the horns of a dilemma; fail to untie a Gordian Knot; be unable to cross the Rubican; fear the Ides of March; feel cheated by a Pyrrhic victory; wonder when "at the Greek Kalonos" could be; fear to cross the Styx. He will understand Homeric laughter and a Roman holiday as well as comprehend the jovial, the mercurial, and the saturnine; appreciate a Junoesque woman and a "pocket Hercules"; avoid the wiles of a Circe, admire the charms of a Venus; and he is an Appollo, a Nestor or a Mentor, engage in a Socratic argument, appreciate an Aristotelian handbook of knowledge, know the eloquence of Demosthenes and recognize a Ciceronian style!

## CLASSICAL LITERATURE

1. Impaled on the Horns of a Dilemma - a difficulty of such a nature that whatever way you attack it you encounter an equal amount of disagreeables. Macbeth, after the murder of Duncan, was on the horns of a dilemma.
2. Fail to untie a Gordian Knot - an oracle was read in Phrygia that a wagon would bring a king. Shortly afterwards Gordius appeared in a wagon and the people proclaimed him king. Gordius dedicated the wagon to Zeus in the Acropolis of Gordium. The pole of the chariot was fastened to the yoke by bark and whoever could untie it was to rule all over Asia. Alexander the Great cut the knot and said it was he who would rule Asia.  
Thus 'cutting the Gordian Knot' has come to mean solving a complicated problem by bold or extraordinary means.
3. Unable to cross the Rubican River - ancient name of a river in Italy. Caesar crossing the stream, then the northern boundary of Italy, finally committed himself to civil war.  
So the phrase to 'cross the Rubican' means to take the decisive step by which one commits himself to a hazardous enterprise.
4. Fear the Ides of March - said as a warning of impending and certain danger. The allusion is the warning received by Julius Caesar before his assassination. Is the 15th of March.
5. Feel cheated by a Pyrrhic victory - ruinous victory. Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, after his victory over the Romans at Asculum (279 B.C.), when he lost the flower of his army, said to those sent to congratulate him - "one more such victory and Phrrhus is undone".
6. At the Greek Kalonos - it means NEVER - to defer anything to the Greek Kalonos is to defer it without fixing a date - it is virtually forever.
7. Fear to cross the Styx - name applied to the principle river in the nether world. Souls going to the infernal regions were ferried across by Charon. Was thought to be virulently poisonous and could dissolve any vessel. If the gods swore by it they dared not break the oath. They would be insensible for a year and then banished for nine years.

8. Homeric laughter - irrepressible laughter; the reference is to the Iliad bk. 1: "helpless laughter seized the gods"
9. Roman holiday - an allusion to Byron's Childe Harold, IV, CXL1, where he describes the death of a gladiator in the arena, "butchered to make a Roman holiday."
10. Comprehend the jovial - having the nature, disposition or aspects that according to astrology is determined by Jupiter. It means merry and sociable, like those born under the planet Jupiter. It is the happiest of natal stars.
11. Mercurial - light hearted, gay, volatile; such were supposed by the astrologers to be born under the planet Mercury.
12. Saturnine - grave, phlegmatic, gloomy, dull, and glowering. Applies to those born under Saturn.
13. Appreciate a Junoesque woman - marked by stately or voluptuous beauty and generous proportions. Refers to Juno - Italian goddess - the wife of Jupiter.
14. Pocket Hercules - refers to a ~~pocket-sized idol~~ <sup>god</sup> that is carried on the person to give him strength.
15. Avoid the wiles of a Circe - famous sorceress, who by drugs could change people into forms of wolves or lions, and with these beings her palace was surrounded.
16. Admire the charms of a Venus - Roman goddess of love and had the power of granting beauty and irresistible charms.
17. Appollo - highest god - was above all the averter of evil. Predded over religious law. Talked to man through prophets and oracles about the future. No God except his father Zeus had greater respect, dread, or awe.
18. Nestor - king of Pylos, in Greece; the oldest and most experienced of the chieftains who went to the siege of Troy. Hence his name is frequently applied as an epithet to the oldest man of a company.
19. Mentor - a guide, a wise and faithful counsellor; so called from Mentor, a friend of Ulysses, whose form Minerva assumed when she accompanied Telemachos in his search for his father.
20. Engage in a Socratic argument - leading your opponent in an argument by simulating ignorance, so that he 'ties himself in knots' and eventually falls an easy prey - a form of procedure used with great effect by Socrates.

21. Appreciate an Aristotelian Handbook of Knowledge - was a Greek philosopher. His writings covered every branch of human knowledge known in his time. Delved into philosophy and logic, natural science, studied body anatomy and functions, and laid the foundation to the science of Psychology. So a handbook of this type would cover every aspect of human knowledge.
22. Know the eloquence of Demosthenes - was the greatest of the ancient Greek orators. Had to overcome a stammering speech defect and a weak voice to attain his eminence. He used his ability to warn Greece of the plan of Philip of Macedon to overpower Greece.
23. Recognize a Ciceronian style - Cicero was a Roman orator and statesman who was responsible for developing a style in Latin prose that has become the basis of literary expression in the languages of Europe.