

Demo:Dram Workshops

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Demo:Dram Workshop summary:

This workshop has been designed and implemented in the framework of teaching **Homer's Iliad** to **Year 2, Junior High School** pupils in Ellinogermaniki Agogi. Students worked extensively with the device of *still images*.

The focus is the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, concerning Chryseis' return to her father.

In the first book of the Iliad, during the distribution of the booty brought by Achilles, she was given to Agamemnon by unanimous decision in view of his kingly office. As a war prize, Agamemnon who admitted that she was finer than his own wife Clytemnestra, enslaved Chryseis and refused to allow her father to ransom her even though the priest of Apollo offered the Mycenaean king gifts of gold and silver. Apollo then sent a plague sweeping through the Greek armies and Agamemnon was forced to give Chryseis back in order to end it. He sent Odysseus to return the maiden to Chryses. Agamemnon compensated himself for this loss by taking Briseis from Achilles, an act that offended Achilles who refused to take further part in the Trojan War (2019).



Pic 1. Chryseis, British Museum, Chryseis restored to her Father

Target audience

This educational activity aims to engage **Junior High School students (age 12-15)**. In the Ellinogermaniki Agogi Junior High School, 28 13-14 year-old pupils participated during the implementation. It is worth mentioning that the entire class participated in the activity.

What are the aims/overall goals of the workshop?

The aims of the activity are:

1. To examine the social, political and moral values of the Homeric Period.
2. To examine these values both synchronically and diachronically.
3. To relate the Homeric values to our historic present. Through constructive dialogue, the pupils learn how to interact with the Homeric text and examine if the Homeric values correspond to present human needs. Some of the questions examined were:
 - Which Homeric values can be nowadays deemed obsolete and why?
 - Can we justifiably distance ourselves from them?
 - Do we meet some of them in our present social and political environment? If yes, which form do they take?
4. To support all pupils in exploring their personal value system in a critical fashion, addressing core critical thinking skills.

What are the objectives/stages of the workshop?

The activity followed a four-step approach, extending to a period of 3 to 4 teaching hours

A Preparation

As our pupils were not fully familiar in such activities, due to curriculum restrictions, we spent some introducing the following:

- The content of the activities
- The stages of the activities
- Methods concerning class cooperation
- The aims and how to approach them.
- Their role and contribution towards adapting and improving the activities.

B Implementation

The pupils, divided in groups of six, were supported in the dramatization of the scene of the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, each group forming a still image. The first three groups were called to present the conflict scene in its historical context and the other three in the present: a conflict between two people nowadays.

Using the classification by Dorothy Heathcote (Five levels of meaning), our pupils were called in a guided conversation to express thoughts and opinions over such levels of meanings: action-motivation-investment-model-stance.

During this leg of the procedure, we tried to approach the aims of immersiveness, realization of Homeric values and their connection to the present world.

C Self Reflection

The completion of the activity was followed by free conversation in order to self reflect on the ideas of the Homeric text. We examined the relevance of the Homeric ideas to our society and ourselves.

Emphasis was put on the question of up to what extent the Homeric ideas and values can trigger a discussion in the class about our behaviour.

Evaluation

During stages B and C, our pupils were evaluated, according to the following parameters:

- a) Inner motivation towards the activity
- b) Competence (based on maturity) to cooperate with the other members of the team
- c) Competence of grasping, self-reflecting and connecting with their personal experience and their moral values.

Why this workshop; what is the rationale?

Dramatization through the technique of “still images” was chosen, because it is suitable for realization of narrative texts, such as the Iliad. The choice of the specific scene is relevant to the themes of power, absolutism, social/political conflict and, in the long run, of democracy itself. At the same time, the scene can be an optimal chance to discuss the notions of “egotism”, “honour”, “social coexistence” and “ways of resolving conflicts in a society”. For all the above reasons, this activity can be of help, in order for our pupils to reflect on their relations with their fellow pupils and their teacher in the classroom.

Description of workshop process: what we did and how we did it

The activity begins by dividing the pupils into groups of 3-4 people. In our class we had 6 such groups. In each group a handout containing the Homeric text (A 123-145) was given. We asked each group to choose a verse delivered either by Achilles or by Agamemnon. The groups were further divided into larger groups of three. The first three groups dramatized the scene, using “still images”. The aim is for all pupils to participate, because in the scene were also silent people were present, which in the Homeric text are charged with passive behavior. Each group has few minutes to prepare. The first group dramatizes the scene and the pupil who impersonates either Agamemnon or Achilles recites the chosen verse. At this point, the teacher is addressing the others some questions, according to the classification by Heathcote, Gillham and Gee:

1. What does the hero do in the scene?
2. Why does he do it?
3. What is he gaining or losing with his behavior?
4. How does his stance relate with the social values of his era?
5. How does his stance relate with the social values of our era?

A brief discussion follows and the procedure is continued likewise with the second and the third groups. In this phase, the pupils are asked to observe and note differences in the expression and acting of the scene. Of the other three groups is asked the dramatization of the scene in the context of contemporary society, without altering or compromising the meaning of the scene. Each group has some minutes for preparation; then dramatization and the previous series of questions follows.

After the completion of the procedure, self reflection based on the differences among presentations follows with the aim to think about the correlation between Homeric values and our own.

Resources to support workshop

A suitably arranged space to function as “stage” and some props (i.e. chairs) are needed.

Post workshop ideas

The “still images” technique has the advantage that can be carried through in a few hours (even in an hour, given the proper preparation). It can be implemented in the Odyssey, in the theatrical plays and in almost all narrative literature.

Further reading

Chryseis. (2019, April 03). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chryseis>

Gillham, G (1997) What Life is For - An Analysis of Dorothy Heathcote’s Levels of Explanations, *SCYPT Jurnal* (34) 9-16

Gee, M (2011) The contribution of drama, in: Fautly, M., Hatcher, R., and Millard, E. (eds.) *Remaking the Curriculum: Re-Engaging Young People in Secondary School*. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham Books

Homerus, Murray, A. T., & Wyatt, W. F. (2001). *Iliad*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



Pic 2. Homer