

Narcissus: Working from text through image and situation

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Demo:Dram Workshop summary

The workshop aims to explore a short part of a classic text from the Metamorphoses by Ovid. Participants create depictions based on the text and then turn these into contemporary situations. The aim is to find the contemporary connections to a classic text through working with image and situation.



Pic. 1 Narcissus at the lake (by G. Csoszó)

Target audience

Classic Greek literature is taught at the age of 14-15 in Hungary, this is the target age-group of this workshop.

What are the aims/overall goals of the workshop?

- Analyse a part of a classic text closely.
- Find central concepts through creating images and situations based on the text.
- Locate and understand contemporary dimensions of a classic text.

What are the objectives/stages of the workshop?

- To make classic texts more accessible through close reading and analysis of a short segment.
- To highlight the contemporary relevance of classic texts.
- Offer creative opportunities in dealing with classic texts to highlight how they are reworked and feed contemporary literature and culture.

Why this workshop; what is the rationale?

Teachers often find it quite hard to make classic texts accessible to teenagers. This workshop aims to provide a model for working with short segments of a text and making them accessible through transforming them into images and situations. This creates the possibility of a creative approach to the text which can create the desire to find out more or create a deeper understanding of different interpretations.

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

The workshop starts with reading a short section of the text from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It is useful if the facilitator doesn't explain too much about it but just reads the text and asks the students to respond to it:

Here—for the chase and heat had wearied him—
The boy lay down, charmed by the quiet pool,
And, while he slaked his thirst, another thirst
Grew; as he drank he saw before his eyes
A form, a face, and loved with leaping heart
A hope unreal and thought the shape was real.
Spellbound he saw himself, and motionless
Lay like a marble statue staring down.

Ovid: Metamorphoses, Oxford Classics (translated by A. D. Melville) page 63.

Discussion about the text. Is it clear what is happening? Are all the words understandable? What is text about? What is the most powerful for them?

Group work: The facilitator asks the participants to create groups of 4-6 people and to create a depiction from one of the moments of the text. They should be thinking of it as a painting they are creating. They should feel free to use themselves or objects in creating an expressive painting that shares what they find the most interesting in this text/story. It is important that everyone takes part in creating the image, but not everyone has to be in the final image produced.

Sharing the 'paintings': The groups should share the images that they have created. They can explain any element of the painting that is not visible. The facilitator can also ask question in this direction (eg. how sharp are the lights in the painting? Are all parts visible or is there a part that is hidden? Is the texture of the paint visible? etc.)

Whole group work: The facilitator chooses one of the paintings and asks the group which made it to re-create it. She/he asks the rest of the group to imagine it is exhibited in a museum, and asks them how people would react to this painting. Which part would they be interested in? What comments would they make? How would they react to? Rather than explaining, participants can try these out as improvisations.

Discussion: What is this text really about? What are the elements that the paintings reflected on the most? Is there any difference in what seemed important in the text and what seemed important in the paintings?

Group work – creating a still image: The facilitator asks the groups to create a still image now rather than a depiction. This still image should be like a photograph of an actual, real life moment that could have been taken during the previous week. It could have been taken in a home or on the street, or anywhere else. The only important criteria is that it should reflect the text in some way and be a 'real life moment'.

Sharing: The groups share their real life moments as still images with each other.

Group work – development of image into situation: The facilitator asks the groups to work further with the still image they created and develop it further into a situation. The still image can be the starting moment or the final moment, or an interim moment of the situation, but it should be in it. The scene should not be longer than 20-30 seconds.

Sharing: the scenes are shared, and the facilitator can lead a discussion about how they reflect the story. Which elements of the stories are alive today? What has become of the reflection in the lake?

The facilitator can share further parts of the story of Narcissus or other stories from the Metamorphoses and also talk about how these stories have been reworked and used in different ages by different artists.

Resources to support the workshop

There are many different translations of Ovid's Metamorphoses from different ages and also an immense amount of analysis of the texts and narratives and their reinterpretations online.

Post workshop ideas

SA research task for the participants could be to find and share different painting, sculptures, books or films that rework the story of Narcissus in different ages. What do these say about the story and what do they say about the age in which they were created in?

Creative task: Participants could choose another story from the Metamorphoses and create a short modern-day video that reflects that story. They could choose the form they use to record it, and also whether they use the actual texts or some lines or words from it. And think about many different aspects of creating a short video and also the layers of the specific text.

