The Docent Project

Vīta Cottidiāna in Pompeīs:
Classical Statues, Painting, and Jewelry
At the Metropolitan Museum of Art

A Guide for
Getting Started

There are many ways to get to know someone, and the same can be said for a group of people, an entire culture. Most importantly, though, we must listen; we must allow people to tell us about themselves, and we must pay close attention to what they say. When we learn a foreign language, we are developing the ability to communicate with others, to speak with and to listen to them. If that language is ancient, however, and its people and culture are from centuries ago, we have only what they left behind to learn more about them. Our listening becomes multi-dimensional: that is, we need to listen with our other senses, and we need to look into those things–those clues from long ago–if we are to know who they were.

Fortunately for us, the Romans left not only Latin, but also numerous artifacts from their own everyday lives and those of the Greek city-states, whose culture the Romans loved intensely, and whose art, literature, philosophy, and other teachings they consumed with a voracious appetite. Over the next couple of months, we will begin to explore these physical objects–specifically their statues, their paintings, and their jewelry, from Pompeii and elsewhere in the ancient Roman and Greek worlds–in order to get to know the people who made them and owned them.

Through observation, thoughtful research, and listening to your classmates, you will become a docent of classical art, from the Latin verb docet, meaning "teaches." You will have the chance to immerse yourself in these ancient cultures; and if we're lucky, we will be able to listen to the people from long ago through what we encounter together.

Here are the steps...

1. You will choose a work of art from the Met’s Greek & Roman online galleries that fits our theme of statues, paintings, or jewelry from the classical world. (We will begin this process in a moment.)

2. You will prepare a written background after researching your work of art and working with your research coach, Mr. Erik Sommer. (Mr. Sommer is a research librarian, a visual arts instructor, and an artist himself!)

3. You will teach your classmates–er, museumgoers–about your work of art! (For details, see the Form for Feedback, which we will also look at together in our next class.)

Due Dates

Since we will be turning Latin class into a virtual museum (well, the first twenty minutes or so, anyway) alongside our regular study of Latin, we’ll need to look at the calendar first and schedule each of your docent projects around that.

Also, an optional rough draft (if you’d like feedback from me before your lesson) is due no later than two class periods before your presentation, via old-timey paper or submitted via e-mail.

The final version of your written background presentation is due immediately following your lesson, via old-timey paper or submitted via e-mail.

But first, let’s head to www.metmuseum.org so you can choose your work of art. (We’ll do this together now.)

And so, please take out your laptops, pens and planners. Let’s get started!