

Veteran Latin teacher Rose Williams provides advice on how to teach the new AP Latin curriculum. She recommends building students' skills with Vergil first and then taking on Caesar's more complex prose.*

Vergil before Caesar

As secondary teachers try to rearrange classwork to take into account the new AP readings, it may be advisable to reconsider the traditional approach to classical authors. In the Dark Ages, some fifty years ago, the first unadapted (or almost unadapted) author taught in late second year classes was Caesar, with perhaps a bit of Nepos as an introduction. The next major author was Cicero, usually taught in the third year, perhaps in conjunction with some Sallust, and Vergil appeared in the fourth year. Various poets were scattered here and there in the standard texts.

But as I dutifully followed this order in the textbooks of the day, I came to the conclusion that all the poets, up to and including Vergil, use much simpler grammar than do the major prose authors. Vergil's vocabulary is very large, but with a few simple word formation rules and a good dictionary, students can deal with his vocabulary with very little trouble. Moreover, if one uses either Barbara Weiden Boyd's *Vergil's Aeneid: Selected Readings from Books 1, 2, 4 and 6* or the famous Pharr's *Aeneid*, the frequency vocabulary pull-out and the same-page vocabulary minimize problems with Vergil's vocabulary. His grammar is rarely more taxing than noun, pronoun and adjective declensions, indicative verbs, and participles and infinitives.

Meter, scansion, and figurative language need to be covered, but again, these are much simpler to present to students than are the grammatical gymnastics found in Cicero and to a lesser extent in Caesar. When considering preparing students for the AP test, or even when simply moving forward with them toward a fuller understanding of the language, "Vergil First" is my battle cry.

Teachers who use Hans-Friedrich Mueller's *Caesar: Selections from his Commentarii De Bello Gallico* will appreciate the AP Connections found in the teacher's guide. These notes link Caesar to Vergil and raise questions about similarities and differences.

Rose Williams