



Creativity and Classics through #ClassicsTober

**by Cora Beth Fraser and
Laura Jenkinson-Brown**

Introductory note from the editors:

The CUCD Bulletin carries a range of articles which celebrate Classics and Classicists largely within the world of education. We publish obituaries, stats of those taking various courses, pedagogical discussions, and other pieces of interest about the development of the subject within its academic context. But we much more rarely consider the relationship between Classics and the broader world, and particularly the creativity, joy, and excitement that Classics can bring to people in general. Awareness of Classics in the wider world and of public engagement activities is important for many reasons. We are all involved in Classics at least in part because elements of the subject have captivated us at some point. Those elements often include the stories, the characters, and the material culture of the ancient world. Whether it's reading Homer, Mary Renault or Roger Lancelyn Green, for example, or watching Hercules or Gladiator, many of us came to Classics through an awareness that there was no one interpretation of a story, no one right way to portray a character. The constant reinvention of our subject and subjects has brought poets and playwrights, artists, architects, dramaturges, novelists and many others together outside of education, and also increasingly in dialogue with the academic discipline. This blending of academic and creative approaches to the ancient world comes alive in initiatives such as ClassicsTober. From well-known figures like Achilles, about whose heel Cressida's y3 daughter will happily wax lyrical (potentially in song form), to lesser known figures like Asterion, who has inspired the Neurodiversity in Classics hub which bears his name, ClassicsTober blends ways of teaching people more about the classical world with a fun, creative, inspiring project which has multigenerational, interdisciplinary and international impact in a very tangible way. This is Classics and the real world, and as such, it asks us to reconnect with our own joy in the subject, to share that with others, and to remember that our subject in particular, and Humanities in general, is about more than academic endeavour; it's about living and participating in a rich cultural world. Asking Cora Beth and Laura to showcase ClassicsTober therefore seemed an appropriate act for a publication whose open access status itself enables broad engagement with the discipline. We were delighted that they agreed, and feel that the following account reminds us of the joy, creativity, and public reach possible with anything to do with the ancient world.



Social media has never been a wholly comfortable space to inhabit, and these days it's perhaps more challenging than ever. But for some of us, a bright spot in the calendar is the annual social media challenge known as #ClassicsTober.

#ClassicsTober started in 2021 as an art challenge proposed by teacher/illustrator friends Laura Jenkinson-Brown and Cora Beth Fraser. It followed the pattern of the popular Inktober and Drawtober initiatives: a one-word prompt for each day of October, to inspire people to create and share a picture. We (Laura and Cora Beth) didn't want to follow one of the general prompt lists; instead we wanted to customise the prompts to give us a Classics-themed challenge. That year we posted our prompts and illustrations online, every day through October, and a few other people joined in on Twitter and Instagram too.

The following year we decided to do it again, and more people joined in – far more than we were expecting, in fact! It seemed that people had been looking forward to it. We tweaked the rules so that instead of just posting drawings, people were also able to post poems, or songs, or original translations. We also encouraged people to post art, artefacts and texts from the ancient world, connected in some way to each day's prompt. The result was a daily deluge of classical inspiration, mixed in with creative responses to the prompt words.

This year we had no idea whether people would join in again - but on the first day of October the response was overwhelming, with hundreds of people posting pictures, music, poetry and all sorts of other things, from cross-stitch to candles to [Latin and Greek paradigms](#)! Over the course of the month, schools and colleges joined in; museums and institutions contributed pictures from their collections; scholars from around the world talked about their research; and artists and novelists posted original work. Famous contributors across various forms of social media, including Natalie Haynes, Elodie Harper, Caroline Lawrence and Adrienne Mayor, drew even more attention to the daily prompts. We were also delighted that this year, for the first time, #ClassicsTober spread to video, through YouTube and TikTok, where the hashtag had over 600,000 views.

Our theme this year was Greek Mythology, and each day's prompt was the name of a mythical character.

Classics* -tober3

Ancient	1	Cassandra	16	Circe
Greek	2	Medusa	17	Atalanta
Myth	3	Asterion	18	Phaedra
Characters	4	Lycaon	19	Sisyphus
	5	Chiron	20	Odysseus
	6	Medea	21	Psyche
	7	Persephone	22	Midas
	8	Icarus	23	Orpheus
	9	Achilles	24	Hephaestus
	10	Asklepius	25	Talos
	11	Pandora	26	Thetis
	12	Theseus	27	Pygmalion
	13	Arachne	28	Nyx
	14	Helen	29	Nemesis
	15	Prometheus	30	Tiresias
			31	Hecate

**meaning Ancient Greece and Rome because no one's come up with a better term yet, but if you want to add additional Ancient Med cultures then yes please - especially if you can link them to versions of these myths/characters!*

#ClassicsTober #ClassicsTober23

Share or create any style of media inspired by the prompt for the day - illustration, story, poetry, artefacts, video, translation, anything! Do as many as you like. Share with #

Graphics from Greek Myth Comix

Responses came in across social media: on X (formerly Twitter) where at one point #ClassicsTober was trending; on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Threads, and Blue Sky; and also on TikTok and YouTube. We received contributions by email from schools, as children in school Classics clubs drew entries for us to post anonymously on social media. Charlie Andrew of Maximum Classics hosted a [schools-facing website](#) updated every day of October, giving background to each prompt and offering ideas and inspiration, as well as showcasing school entries.

With all of this activity, it would be impossible to give individual credit to all of the #ClassicsTober participants! But some do deserve special mention for their unique contributions...

A highlight of this October has been the contribution of Helen Forte, the artist behind the much-loved Minimus the mouse. Every day, Helen posted a photograph of Minimus dressed up as a mythical character, accompanied by a descriptive sentence with some Latin vocabulary. The combination has won Minimus a lot of new fans!



Minimus as Medea, by Helen Forte

On a different note, Jeremy Swist has given us a 'Metal #ClassicsTober', posting lyrics online every day from Metal songs and albums which connect to the daily prompt. After a month of this, he has built up an impressive list of myth-related Metal tracks, which he has compiled into a public [Spotify playlist](#) for streaming.

Another highlight of #ClassicsTober23 has been the involvement of artist Flora Kirk, known on social media as Flaroh, whose illustration of Achilles for Day 9 was a huge hit on Twitter, picking up more than 100,000 views and 2,000 'likes'.



Achilles by Flaroh

#ClassicsTober23 has also offered people an interesting way of viewing the art of the ancient world, producing sometimes surprising results. Virginia Campbell customised the challenge to focus specifically on Vesuvian wall art, and wrote up her reflections at the end of the month for her blog, [Pompeian Connections](#). She observed some interesting patterns in the myths and characters that were popular in Pompeii and Herculaneum, along with some surprising omissions. The Hesiodic characters, in particular, were conspicuous by their absence, while certain other characters featured only in particular scenes or episodes. Among other conclusions, she sees this as further evidence to support the idea that sample books were used by painters in and around Pompeii: 'Within the context of mythological figures, the variation of who is painted on the walls and how is far less than I had imagined.'

For us as organisers, #ClassicsTober is about community-building and encouraging others - but it's still a personal art challenge! This year Laura chose to focus on the sources, setting out for people the design elements from vase paintings and other ancient art which have made it into her own line-drawn versions, and generating some really interesting discussions online in the process.

#CLASSICSTOBER23

28: Nyx



GREEK MYTH COMIX

Nyx and Hespera, by Laura Jenkinson-Brown. Laura has turned this design into greetings cards which are available to buy in her [Saturnalia Shop](#)

Cora Beth decided to create a series of silhouette pictures which she has since been turning into other things, including a little book of illustrations and a series of laser-cut coasters.



Circe, by Cora Beth Fraser

We started #ClassicsTober as a bit of fun, but over the years it's turned into something else. It's become a way of stepping into the ancient world for a month - and it's open to absolutely anybody, with no qualifications, experience or expertise required. It's a month in which we discover new artists and rediscover old treasures; a month in which we connect with people from all over the world and from all different age groups.

People have been asking us whether we intend to organise #ClassicsTober again in 2024. No doubt we will! But even if we didn't, #ClassicsTober would probably still happen, driven by the enthusiasm that exists all over the internet for Classics in all its forms.