

News and Reports

The East London Classics Summer School 2023

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This is a review of the activities and successes of the 3rd East London Classics Summer School, which took place in Hackney from Monday 31st July to Friday 4th August 2023. Specifically, it covers our typical teaching arrangement, lectures and trips, and it also acknowledges the generosity of those supporting our initiative.

We are absolutely delighted to report that the ELCSS 2023 was another great success, and that we were pleased to have received another diverse cohort of dedicated and committed students, of whom we are so proud. We welcomed students from a number of schools in the London area (and one from as far as Birmingham!) to an intensive GCSE Latin 5-day revision course in Hackney. We were so pleased to have been able to offer a number of full and half bursaries this year, courtesy of the Classical Association, the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, Professor Mary Beard, and a handful of some other generous individuals.

The students

The students have to come first! The commitment and enthusiasm of this industrious batch was exceptional. We were thrilled that we were able to welcome such a wide range of students. 86% of our students were from state schools, who travelled to come to our offices in Hackney. A number of our students come from families who need financial assistance and we were happy to have been able to support them. These were students who had either Free School Meal eligibility, had Pupil Premium funding status, were from single-parent families, or were disadvantaged in some other way. We awarded full bursaries to 50% of the students, and half bursaries to 14%. We are pleased that more and more students are coming to us for assistance and we hope to be able to continue our support.

'I understand what sorts of questions I will have to do in the exam now.'

'I now understand aspects of grammar I felt weak in (eg. participles).'

'Thank you so much for this amazing opportunity!'

'Playing memory games was fun to help learn vocabulary etc.'

'Having all the resources on hand for us to take home was very useful.'

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The sessions

Over the course of the week, the summer school covered essential grammar from the GCSE specification in four language sessions a day, in preparation for the all-important examination in 2024. Sessions were initially teacher-led, which then developed into tasks that encouraged group collaboration, as well as independent study to allow students to really get into the intricacies of the grammar in an unseen passage.

'Golden Time'

Of particular note this year was the 'Golden Time' lecture series, which welcomed university academics to our offices in Hackney to speak to the students about an aspect of the Classical world. Our first lecture was delivered by Professor Fiachra Mac Góráin from UCL, who spoke about the Greek god Dionysus, and all the wonderfully mysterious and dark features of his persona from his birth and infancy right through to ritual Maenadism and his association with the afterlife.

Dr Will Wootton (KCL) delivered a spectacular session on the making of ancient mosaics, and Dr Ben Kolbeck (Cambridge) spoke on the *sagae Thessalae* in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, which is the prescribed prose text for the literature component of the GCSE.

The 'Golden Time' series has proved to be increasingly well received and all our speakers commented particularly on the enthusiasm and energy of the students who had so many questions and thoughts about the different topics. There were also many questions about university life and admissions, which was most encouraging. The speakers were so giving of their time and went out of their way to encourage the students to envisage going to a university, studying a Classical subject. The students were mesmerised and were hanging off their every word. Inspired.

The trip

We were treated on the Thursday afternoon to a lecture by Professor Daniel Orrells at Kings College! Daniel spoke on the set verse text, which is the story of Echo and Narcissus in *Metamorphoses* III. He drew our attention to the key themes of absence and presence, of desire, reflection and sex, and also spent some time talking to the students about university life and admissions, which was very welcome. He also kindly took us on a tour of the college, which included exclusive terrace views of London in the sunshine, a visit to the college chapel, and a little party at the end to congratulate the students on their hard work throughout the week! We are very grateful to all of our speakers who gave of their precious time and



Figure 1. Students and teachers at King's College London.

answered a whole array of different questions, inspiring the group of really keen budding Classicists (Figure 1).

Special guest!

The week ended with a pub-quiz style game which included a range of different questions pertaining to the Classical world and knowledge acquired over the course of the week, and we bought pizzas for the whole cohort. A surprise appearance from Professor Mary Beard at the end of the week congratulated our students on their outstanding work ethic and dedication over the five days. She also spoke about the importance of Classics in her life and its relevance to modernity, citing empire, race, gender, and power in her message. The students were on the edge of their seats as they listened to her weighty words, and we all felt incredibly motivated.

At the end of the week, the students were presented with achievement certificates to recognise the progress they had made as

well as a bespoke valedictory report detailing their strengths. Students and parents unanimously agreed that the summer school had been a very positive experience and, most notably, that it boosted their confidence in the subject. Some of our students also expressed the intention to continue with a Classical subject at A Level and even university, which was fantastic to hear!

A heartfelt 'thank you' to all of our sponsors and supporters of our initiative.

Our warmest thanks go to the tutors and the speakers for giving up their holiday time to join ELCSS for these 5 days. It was a truly rewarding experience and we look forward to more times ahead. Thanks again to all our sponsors for making it all possible.

We now look forward to welcoming students to our two-day Easter Revision course, which will take place on 2nd and 3rd April 2024. For further details, please visit our website: www.eastlondonclassics Summerschool.com and, if you have any questions, or would like to support us in any way, email us at eastlondoncss@gmail.com.