

Each year my Latin III class reads excerpts from Cicero's Catilinarian speeches, excerpts from Sallust's Bellum Catilinae, and bits of actual Roman law pertinent to Catiline's conspiracy in 63 B.C. They then hold a trial that should have taken place in 58 B.C. when Clodius brought his plebiscite that ultimately led to Cicero's exile for his responsibility in the execution of five Roman citizens without a trial.

I assign the characters to the students, and they begin preparations for the trial. Throughout all this is a two-day exam (vocabulary one day, grammar and translation the next), two days in which the students recite a memorized portion of their choice from In Catilinam I, and assassinations. Any character who is assassinated becomes a member of the jury.

This year, 2016, the student I had given the role of Catullus turned out to be a poet, although I had not known this about him. Each day he put a poem on our board to the great delight of teacher and students alike.

Day 1

First they were living
 All in quiet peace
Then they found meaning
 And cut each other to pieces.
~ Catullus

Day 2

The class is put to the test
 Following a weekend of rest.
Assassinations are afoot.
 To death one will be put.
~ Catullus

Day 3

Things had come to a T.
 Knowingly, I look on with glee;
Dead soon would be he.
 Then on day four
Conditions shall prove poor,
 And one man will be no more.
~ Catullus

Day 4

This morning the sun rose red
 For today, blood will be shed,
And one man's life be bled.
 From his wife I took a bribe,
For she could no longer suffer his diatribe.
 His hubris and rudeness repels her;
Truly, his honor is quite meager.
 To death, I will put Caesar.
~ Catullus

Note: The student playing Catullus had been bribed by the student playing Pompeia to murder "Caesar." In an unexpected twist, the student playing the brother of executed conspirator Publius Lentulus killed Catullus. That student has red hair, which is important to know for the next poem

Day 5

Woe, for I entered the abyss.
 Oh, what life I will dearly miss.
No! From the man topped with red I took this diss.
 Low I go, no longer will he know bliss.

Through rot and mire I will inspire
 For I tire of resting upon this pyre.
Death is quite costly, but I am the buyer.
~ Catullus (Ghost version)

Day 6 *(This was the day of our recitations.)*

Speak out and dispel your doubt,
Embrace this bout and do not pout.
From Cicero words you do recite,
Exceed expectations most might.
Project, speak loud, you are great.
Clear and with passion, articulate.
Though the words you might hate,
Don't worry. You'll do well, mate.
~ Catullus (from the spooky ghost land)

Day 7

Scheming and plotting and planning a lot,
Shsh-ing and hushing and trailing voices.
Left, right, east, and west.
Up, down, worst, and best.
Who will complete their quest
And kill at a friend's behest?
~ Ethereal Catullus

Day 8

A week goes by, two are dead,
At its peak, the slaughter fed.
Alone now stands the prosecution.
Will he obtain an execution?
Cicero shall justly defend;
To his will, the jury must bend.

Day 9 *(The day of our vocabulary exam)*

I forgot the poem and I'm tired so...
Roses are red
Violets are blue
I kinda studied
And so should you

Day 10 *(The day of our grammar and translation exam)*

I hope you studied
Else your grade may be muddied.
I believe in all of you
And give my support, too.
So I make this proclamation:
You will do well on your examination!
~ Ghost (see-through) Catullus

Day 11

Titled: "Apathy"
[insert dope poem here]
~ Busy, spooky Catullus

Day...something?...13? 22? 9,837?

Prepare yourself, speak on the morrow,
Allegiance and words you will borrow.
Of your witness ask a question.
To the jurors, teach a lesson
And sway this congression.
~ More dead than usual Catullus

Final Day (*The day of the trial*)

“At Long Last”

Oh, hey! What will I say, speak could I may...
Okay, I lay out these words, keeping the day at bay.
Cicero and Clodius engage in a battle of wit at this time.
To be fair, to us, it could hardly be considered sublime.
Each other they will mock and mime, rolling in the grime.
These weeks have passed, the trial here at long last.
Thinking fast, at these deaths I am aghast.
Even though that red-handed, red-headed man slew me,
To write these poems, I was happy as could be.
Thank you for the thoughts and praise. You make me smile with glee.
~ For the last time, Catullus

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