

Dr. J's Illustrated Guide to the Classical World
<http://lilt.ilstu.edu/drjclassics>

“Not intimidating,” “lively,” “unconventional,” “friendly,” “useful and aesthetically pleasing,” “absorbing,” “fascinating,” “outstanding, helpful, and vital,” “interesting,” “FUN,” “lively,” “a remarkable burst of energy,” “an excellent adventure,” “a magical journey.” Such reactions by visitors to *Dr. J's Illustrated Guide to the Classical World* are heartening because my goal is to instruct and delight, to use the careful integration of text and image to make the ancient world come alive for others as my trips abroad and schooling have made it come alive for me. It all began in December 1998 with the posting of a single web page about my hike up Mt. Olympus. Still my sentimental favorite, that page today joins more than 5500 files (including 3200 images and counting). Another important goal of my website is to show that the ancient world is both accessible and relevant. My website is a collection of inter-related pages – a self-contained *nexus* (< L. necto, nectere, nexi, nexus, “to bind”) divided into sections (Sites, Texts, Lectures, Course Materials, and Projects). Over 13,000 internal hyperlinks join the individual pages in a united whole. The *design* of the website attempts to reflect the curious intersection of myth, history, politics, science, religion, philosophy, and topography that flavors the literature, art, and architecture of the ancients. The *content* of the website is entirely determined by my experiences as a student and teacher of classics.

If the site traffic on my website is any indication of a trend concerning educational use of the internet, its impact on teaching and learning in the 21st century promises to be enormous. From July 2002 - July 2003, *Dr. J's Illustrated Guide to the Classical World* logged 377,546 visits made by 154,141 “unique visitors.” 21,121 people visited multiple times. The average number of visits per day was 1034, and the average length of each visit was about 9 minutes. 20% of visitors surf over from foreign shores (the UK, Canada, and Australia have all provided over 10,000 visits each, followed by Germany, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, New Zealand, and Spain). Web squatters have even taken over my www.drjclassics.com domain (please change your links!), mistakenly concluding that such a popular site must certainly also be lucrative.

A constant (and appreciated) flow of unsolicited email expresses gratitude for the materials and requests permission to re-use them (mostly in class instruction and student reports, but five have been re-published in print, most recently in the January 2003 issue of *Antike Welt*). Visitors praise the effectiveness of the integration of text and image. In addition to the expected classics, survey and core curricula courses, visitors report the use of my website in a wide range of unexpected courses: Critical Thinking, History of Interiors, Introduction to Speech and Theater, New Testament, History of the Built Environment, Shakespeare and Myth, Restitution Law, American history, and Drama History. It appears to be useful to students and teachers at all levels, from elementary through university. My lectures have even been translated into Korean.

My website attracts so much traffic because it is listed on and linked from hundreds of classics resource pages: gateway sites, departmental resource pages, national, state, regional and local classics associations websites, library subject resource lists (both on-line and in print), educational clearing house sites, and individual teachers' websites and on-line syllabuses. Another 128,606 visits this past year were generated by search engine referrals (20,401 indexing visits were made by automated spiders and web-bots last year).

Specific information concerning the use of my website as a teaching/learning tool was collected in responses to an on-line user survey. 80% of visitors who identified themselves as “not academically affiliated” said the website “made learning fun”. 90% of teachers surveyed consider my website to be an effective teaching tool. 65% of surveyed students “always/often” agree (another 22% rate it as “sometimes” effective). 57% of students report that essays on this website “always/usually influence my thinking.” 62% report they accomplished “more than their

teacher asked them to” and 70% report that they learned “more than they expected to.” 72% claimed their interest in classics had increased because of a visit to this website and 84% of those said they would follow up by reading a book or taking a class.

But 76% of the students surveyed admit to not checking my credentials before relying on the information on my website. 66% used a search engine, 13% followed a link from a classics resource page and 21% followed their teacher’s recommendation. In addition, 57% of the teachers surveyed admit to not checking my credentials either. Surfers tend to consider the inclusion of a URL on a resource page as a full endorsement, and a high page ranking by a search engine as a guarantee of reliability. But the popularity of a website does not necessarily deem it valuable as a pedagogical tool, nor does it necessarily translate into professional affirmation.

Since 88% of teachers surveyed came to my website “to gather instructional material” (and 25% to do research) and 62% of students identified the internet in general as “sometimes, usually, or always” their first research stop, the time has come to consider a formal system of evaluation for pedagogical websites (93% of the teachers surveyed agree). A system of pre-publication peer evaluation, such as being considered by Tela Latina for Latin Language pedagogy sites, would both legitimize the efforts/achievements of (tenure-track) web authors and provide a standard of excellence on which surfers can depend.