

Meditations on Marcus Aurelius

Jo-Anne Cameron

A bit bored with the annual study of Augustus, Jo-Anne Cameron decided to focus her Senior Ancient History class on the lesser-known but fascinating Marcus Aurelius. In the following pages, Jo-Anne explains her decision and presents some of the key materials related to the curriculum unit.

Setting the Context

*At dawn of day, when you dislike being called, have this thought ready:
'I am called to man's labour; why then do I make a difficulty if I am going out
to do what I was born to do and what I was brought into the world for?'*

Marcus Aurelius Meditations 5.1 in Benario 2001

At the end of Term 1, 2007 an extraordinarily lucky exam supervision roster provided me with some time to think - as opposed to marking, which I probably *really* should have been doing but ! What I chose to focus on was where I would be heading for the second inquiry with my Yr 12 Ancient History class. The Theme is: A Study of Political Centrism in Rome. In my work program, this inquiry is described thus: 'The manner in which the rules of particular emperors reflected the nature of, and helped shape the character of the Roman Empire'. Like many other Ancient History teachers, who have been around for a while, the emperor who has usually received my greatest focus has been Augustus but . . . really I'm a bit 'over' Augustus and was trying to determine who might be worthy of in-depth investigation.

At the same time, I was conscious that every teacher at The Gap SHS was expected to contribute a unit of work, which would reflect various aspects of the Dimensions of Learning (ways of teaching thinking and learning skills) approach. As it has in many other schools, this has been adopted by The Gap, and, in the last couple of years we have built a bank of lesson plans. The logical progression of this was to have a bank of unit plans. The template for this was provided by the DOL organising team and, though I have adapted this in some ways that I thought appropriate, this is why the unit that follows is set out in the manner that it is.

I had a short list of potential replacements for Augustus and then serendipity took over. Accidentally I came across a quote from *Meditations* in something I was reading for quite another purpose. Eureka; decision (almost) made. A bit more searching and reading and thinking convinced me that a unit focused on 'a philosopher in arms' held real possibilities for something truly worthwhile (in many ways) for my class of 24, quite wonderful Ancient Historians.

There is an evaluation of the unit at the end of the plan, which follows. In summary, it was wonderful to really have to be a student myself; to learn about the topic; to read and evaluate the sources (including a re-reading of *Meditations*); to plan the unit from the start taking into account the various requirements of the 2004 Ancient History syllabus; and to teach it to students who could and did grasp the many influences and complexities facing people in the multiple roles they must fulfil. In short, it was a joy. I hope it will be for you also if you choose to use it.

About the author

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Unit plan

Subject:

Yr 12 Ancient History

Timing:

Sem 3 2007

Unit length:

3 weeks

Teacher's Name:

Jo-Anne Cameron

Unit title:

Marcus Aurelius – A 'Philosopher in Arms'

Unit Overview:

This unit is based on one specific Roman emperor. The key question that guides the inquiry is: 'How did people, institutions and 'big ideas' shape the character of Roman life and achievement during the time/rule of Marcus Aurelius?' This inquiry sits within a broader examination of the Roman Empire and the historic and other factors that not only influenced particular rulers but also how they shaped the world in which they and others lived.

Unit sequence	Core content	Suggested learning experiences	How will I incorporate DoL to enhance students' learning?	Resources
Setting the Scene and Tuning In	<p>1. Overview of the Roman empire and the role of emperors.</p> <p>2. Briefly investigate the lives and achievements of one of the emperors from the 'list'.</p> <p>3. Brief exposition overview from teacher about significant eras and 'groupings' of the Roman emperors.</p>	<p>1. Read extract from Scarre, pp. 6-13.</p> <p>2. Research activity.</p> <p>3. Sharing evidence with other students in groups.</p> <p>4. Students to prepare concise OHP and speak to class about the most significant aspects of the rule of 'their' emperor. This was done over several lessons, a few at a time, as other activities were occurring.</p>	<p><i>Dimension 2:</i> Building declarative knowledge – various graphic organisers.</p> <p><i>Dimension 3:</i> Inductive reasoning; constructing support.</p> <p><i>Dimension 4:</i> Investigation</p> <p><i>Habits of Mind:</i> Accuracy, Clarity, Taking a position</p>	<p>1. OHT 1 – Marcus Aurelius Overview – setting the scene for the inquiry.</p> <p>1. Extract from Scarre, C. 1995 <i>Chronicle of the Roman Emperors</i>, Thames and Hudson, London. 937 SCA</p> <p>2. Website www.romanemperors.org</p> <p>3. OHT 2 – List of emperors and focus of research issues.</p>
Focused Learning Experiences	<p>1. The life, writings and rule of Marcus Aurelius.</p> <p>2. The significance and legacy of Marcus Aurelius as an emperor and Stoic philosopher.</p>	<p>1. Each student to read one book from MA's <i>Meditations</i>. Working with another student who has also read the same book, they are to do a summary of the key ideas, significant direct quote and write a modern version.</p> <p>2. Read extract from Scarre, pp. 112-119.</p> <p>3. Identify, categorise, comprehend and evaluate the sources on Marcus Aurelius identified within this source.</p>	<p><i>Dimension 2:</i> Building declarative knowledge</p> <p><i>Dimension 3:</i> Comparing; classifying; inductive reasoning; constructing support; analysing perspectives</p> <p><i>Dimension 4:</i> Decision making; investigation</p> <p><i>Habits of Mind:</i> Identify what</p>	<p>1. Copies of books from <i>Meditations</i> available from http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au</p> <p>2. Extract from Scarre <i>Chronicle of the Roman Emperors</i> 937 SCA</p> <p>3. The film <i>Gladiator</i></p> <p>4. OHT 3 – MA Aspects of Inquiry</p> <p>5. OHT 4 – Marcus Aurelius – A Philosopher in Arms.</p> <p>6. Handout 1: 'Habits of Heart' handout.</p> <p>6. Handout 2 – Source Analysis Exercise. All students had written a paragraph on 'The problematic nature of the sources on Marcus Aurelius. From this, I selected 3 and essentially re-typed them 'as is'. They contained some errors though were essentially accurate. This was given to all students who then analysed, critiqued and learnt from what others in the class had</p>

		<p>3. Read, identify and comprehend significant backgrounds, continuities and changes for MA in his life in the period leading up to him becoming emperor. (Scarre pp. 112-115)</p> <p>4. Build a chronology/timeline of the significant events during the reign of MA. Identify the significant identities involved, causes and consequences of these events. Reach a judgement on the most significant event and person. Justify.</p> <p>5. Consider how 'Habits of Mind' and 'Habits of Heart' may have influenced MA in the decisions that he made, actions that he took and <i>Meditations</i>. (Handout 1)</p> <p>6. Research activity – locate, evaluate and extract additional evidence on the life, rule and writings of MA from 3 websites and/or print sources.</p> <p>7. Source analysis writing task. This also was informed by the visit of a 'real' historian who shared with the students some of the issues of evaluations of sources which he</p>	<p>habits of mind MA includes within his <i>Meditations</i>.</p>	<p>thought and written.</p>
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		confronts and must deal with in his work. (Handout 2)		
Consolidation and Review	1. Aspects of an Extended Written Response to Historical Evidence (see OHT 4). 2. Review of the life, writings and rule of Marcus Aurelius (see Handout 3).	1. Teacher exposition, student discussion, group consideration of possible essay topics.	<i>Dimension 2:</i> Consolidating declarative knowledge <i>Dimension 3</i> Constructing support; analysing perspectives <i>Dimension 4:</i> Decision making <i>Habits of Mind:</i> Identifying what habits of mind <i>they</i> would need in order to succeed with the assessment item.	1. OHT 4 2. Handout 3

Assessment activities

Category 1: Extended Written Response to Historical Evidence. Task sheet attached.
Sources not attached. (If you are interested in finding out more about these please contact Jo-Anne Cameron – jcame25@eq.edu.au)

Adjusted assessment activities for exceptional learners

Students can choose to present their Meditations 'translations' in a range of ways. Exceptional learners may 'translate' to poetry, drama, visual art of some genre, DVD: whatever their imaginations can create.

Evaluation:

I really enjoyed teaching this unit and I think the students also really enjoyed learning it. It was the first time I had examined MA in such depth and only did so because I was 'sick of' Augustus and thought the way my work program was written I could have students examine Marcus Aurelius and his life, work and writings equally beneficially. I really tried to model the various aspects of inquiry and various dimensions of learning approaches within the unit. At the same time students were doing this inquiry, they were also working on their major written research papers (Theme: Groups) and I think that the quality of both these research assignments and the Extended Written Responses to Historical Evidence benefited from this. Overall, many did very well on both tasks. And we had a good time doing it. What more could any (Ancient) History teacher ask for?

Roman Emperors to be Investigated – ‘Rapid Fire’

What to Look For

- Time they ruled
- Interesting personal details, qualities, attributes
- Significant aspects of their rule
- ‘Greatest’ claim to fame?
- Eclectic Extras
- Sources for their rule

The List

Augustus

Tiberius

Gaius (Caligula)

Claudius

Nero

Vespasian

Domitian

Titus

Trajan

Hadrian

Diocletian

Constantine

Marcus Aurelius A 'Philosopher in Arms'

Aspects of Inquiry: Backgrounds? Continuities? Changes?

Clearly the emperors who had ruled before MA, the state of the empire when he assumed power, his family background, life experiences, personality and values all played critical roles in shaping the way he acted as emperor.

Backgrounds?

The emperors who ruled before MA? The 'Five Good Emperors':

- Nerva (96 - 98 CE)
- Trajan (98 -117 CE)
- Hadrian (117 -138 CE)
- Antoninus Pius (138 – 161 CE)
- Marcus Aurelius (161 – 180 CE)

The state of the empire MA inherited?

Scarre 1995, pp.112-115
Meditations
Other sources?

His family background?

Scarre 1995, pp.112-115
Meditations
Other sources?

Life Experiences?

Scarre 1995 pp.112-115
Meditations
Other sources?

His personality, values and priorities?

Scarre 1995 pp.112-115
Meditations
Other sources?

OHT 4

Marcus Aurelius A 'Philosopher in Arms'

As we approach the 'day of reckoning' of the assessment, a reminder that the *key question* that has *guided this inquiry* is:

'How did people, institutions and 'big ideas' shape the character of Roman life and achievement during the time/rule of Marcus Aurelius?'

- Who are the people who were particularly important in Marcus Aurelius' life and achievements?
- Which institutions were central in his life and rule?
- What 'big ideas' can you identify that shaped him and that he, himself, shaped?

Do YOU feel confident that you could respond to a question that is focussed on any or all of the aspects of this key question?

You SHOULD be.

Aspects of Historical Inquiry

The following are *examples* of focus questions which could grow out of an examination of each of the following aspects of inquiry into Marcus Aurelius:

Effects

- During his own lifetime and in the era immediately following what impact did Marcus Aurelius have on the lives of Romans and the other peoples with whom he had contact?
- In the era since his death how have his actions and writings been influential?

Interests and Arguments

- Who benefited from the life, actions and legacy of Marcus Aurelius?
- Is there anyone who was disadvantaged or marginalised by him?

Reflections and Responses

- What have you learnt about Marcus Aurelius and his historical significance?
- Do you think that Marcus Aurelius had a significant impact on his own times?
- How great was the legacy that Marcus Aurelius left for those after him?
- How has this study helped your understanding of Roman history, the Roman emperors and Roman philosophy?
- Has this inquiry helped you to live your own life purposefully/differently? How?

Marcus Aurelius ‘A Philosopher in Arms’ ‘Habits of Heart’

The first rule is, to keep an untroubled spirit; for all things must bow to Nature’s law, and soon enough you must vanish into nothingness, like Hadrian and Augustus. The second is to look things in the face and know them for what they are, remembering that it is your duty to be a good man. Do without flinching what man’s nature demands; say what seems to you most just – though with courtesy, modesty and sincerity.
Marcus Aurelius Meditations VIII.5 in Scarre 1995, p. 118

As you continue your inquiry into the life and achievements of Marcus Aurelius it is worth considering what ‘big ideas’ influenced each of these. While we might identify a number of ‘Habits of Mind’ that Marcus Aurelius displayed, consider also how ‘Habits of Heart’ might also have been motivating forces.

Tasks

1. To what extent can you find evidence of the following ‘Habits of Heart’ (HOH) in the life, beliefs, writings and actions of Marcus Aurelius. In your books, note each of the following HOH. Beside each HOH concisely but specifically identify instances where this HOH was in evidence. Some may have more examples than others. Try to get at least one for each and no more than three for any single HOH.

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. Balance | 2. Compassion | 3. Courage | 4. Courtesy |
| 5. Determination | 6. Discipline | 7. Empathy | 8. Fun |
| 9. Generosity | 10. Gratitude | 11. Honour | 12. Hope (Optimism) |
| 13. Humility/modesty | 14. Humour | 15. Integrity | 16. Joy (Happiness) |
| 17. Loyalty | 18. Love | 19. Passion | 20. Patience |
| 21. Respect | 22. Responsibility | 23. Sincerity | 24. Wisdom |

2. Select the five (5) HOH that you believe were of greatest significance for Marcus Aurelius. Justify your judgement. You may quote judiciously from Scarre, *Meditations* or any other sources in order to validate your position.
3. Select the three (3) HOH that you think are of greatest importance for people with power. Justify your judgement.
4. Select the three (3) HOH that you think are of greatest importance in your life. Justify your judgement.
5. Are there any HOH on the list which you think are unimportant? Which ones? Why? Are there any additional HOH you would add to the list? Which ones? Why?

The assessment

Topics (***)**

Select one (1) of the following topics. Formulate and test an appropriate thesis of your own creation.

Either

A Explain and assess the validity of the following:

Plato believed that it would only be when 'a philosopher became a king or a king became a philosopher that the sufferings of mankind would end'. Marcus Aurelius may have believed this and even attempted to action it but, if he did, he failed.

Justify your judgement.

or

B Explain and assess the validity of the following:

It may appear at first examination that Stoicism was the most significant guiding force in Marcus Aurelius's life and rule. In reality, it was the actions of other people and how Aurelius responded to these that truly shaped the character of his rule and legacy for Rome.

Justify your judgement.

Planning:

The Gap State High School

Yr 11 Ancient History
Semester 3 2007

Formative Assessment

Time: 90 minutes

Category 1

Extended Written Response to Historical Evidence

Length: approx. 600 words

Student's Name:

Teacher's Name: Ms Cameron

Topic Chosen: A B (Circle your choice)

Source 1

Source 2

Source 3

Source 4

Source 5

Source 6

Source 7

Source 8

Source 9

Source 10

Source 11

Source 12

Teacher Comments:

DIRECTIONS

1. Date of Assessment Instrument: Wed 30 May 2007
2. Time Allowed: **90 minutes**
3. You should separate the sheets of this exam so that you have clear and on-going vision of the questions, the stimulus material and criteria sheet as you select your topic, interpret the sources, plan and write your essay.
4. Thoroughly examine the sources on the accompanying page. Using the knowledge you have gained during our class inquiry and the evidence you select and use from these sources, write an essay of approx. 600 words in response to one (1) of the questions over the page.
5. Make regular and specific reference to the evidence from your chosen sources. You should reference them by using their source number eg Source 1. You **MUST** evaluate, use and refer to a *minimum* of three (3) of the sources but you should *use more*.
6. You are advised to annotate the questions and sources in a manner that assists you in the completion of this essay.
7. How you allocate your time is your decision. You will have time to plan but not draft your essay before you begin your good copy.
8. The standards that will be used to determine your levels of achievement appear on the accompanying criteria sheet. This sheet must be attached to the front of your essay. Make clear which topic you have selected by circling its letter.
9. Your essay must adhere to the conventions of a formal, well structured historical piece of writing.
10. Read carefully; answer the question that has been asked; think calmly; plan intelligently; compose your thoughts before you write carefully, accurately and precisely; breathe deeply; and remember – if you are prepared
YOU CAN DO THIS.
11. Levels of Achievement:
Criterion 2: Forming historical knowledge through critical inquiry
Criterion 3: Communicating historical knowledge

MAIN COMMON CURRICULUM ELEMENTS:

- recalling/remembering
- explaining to others;
- using appropriate vocab;
- using correct spelling, punctuation and grammar;
- inter-relating ideas/themes/issues;
- interpreting the meaning of words and pictures;
- hypothesising;
- analysing;
- synthesising;
- justifying; reaching a conclusion;
- judging/evaluating.

Theme:

A Study of Political Centristism
in Rome

Inquiry Topic

Marcus Aurelius
A 'Philosopher in Arms'



The Gap SHS

Year 12 Ancient History

Category 1

Extended Written Response To Historical Evidence (Summative Assessment)

Semester 3 2007

NAME

Teacher: Ms Cameron

Marcus Aurelius A 'Philosopher in Arms'

*At dawn of day, when you dislike being called, have this thought ready:
'I am called to man's labour; why then do I make a difficulty if I am going out to do
what I was born to do and what I was brought into the world for?'*
Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 5.1 in Benario 2001

Some Issues to Keep in Mind re an Extended written response to historical evidence:

1. You must come to the testing with a good prior knowledge of Marcus Aurelius. If you are fully prepared you will feel more confident.
2. Where relevant, you will synthesise this prior knowledge with the 'new' evidence that emerges from the sources in the testing.
3. It is essential for you not only to use but also to evaluate (RARAR) the sources on which you base your response.
4. The RARAR test should be applied to *all* sources – primary, ancient, secondary, literary, non-literary/archaeological.
5. Select the sources you use wisely – of course they must be relevant but they must also be characterised by breadth – minimum of 3; more if you are aiming for Bs or As.
6. Plan before you begin to write. The structure and conventions of the analytical essay which you have 'practised' often are required. You will not have time to draft BUT there may be time to commit to paper the 'brilliant' opening or closing sentence.
7. Show you know what is implicit in the sources and incorporate them into your writing as you would in a research task eg

Source 1

'While the Parthian conflict was satisfactorily resolved, the victorious troops returning to Rome, brought with them a scourge that would have disastrous effects for the city and the rule of Marcus Aurelius.'
Cassius Dio

If you chose to use this source you might use it as follows:

*"... As Cassius Dio (Source 1) explains, the Roman troops who had been victorious under Verus and Avidius Cassius brought with them the plague, probably smallpox. While Dio, writing early in the 3rd century, was sometimes guilty of pure invention, apart from the Historia Augusta, he is a most important source for the rule of Aurelius. He derived his value from his assiduity as a compiler of facts and on the issue of the devastating effects of the plague is corroborated by the Historia Augusta.
..."*
(Extract from student essay)

8. In a way, this is another practice for the QCS Writing Task. Think of the various principles you have learned in relation to it and apply them to this task. This double dipping can help ensure a 'win/win' scenario.

To be really thoroughly prepared:

1. Remember that the *key question* that has *guided this inquiry* is:

'How did people, institutions and 'big ideas' shape the character of Roman life and achievement during the time/rule of Marcus Aurelius?'

If you cannot currently answer the following, there is still time for you to address this situation:

- What have you learnt about Marcus Aurelius and his historical significance?
- Who are the people who were particularly important in Marcus Aurelius's life and achievements?
- Which institutions were central in his life and rule?
- What 'big ideas' can you identify that shaped him and that he, himself, shaped?
- During his own lifetime and in the era immediately following, what impact did Marcus Aurelius have on the lives of Romans and the other peoples with whom he had contact?
- In the era since his death how have his actions and writings been influential?
- Who benefited from the life, actions and legacy of Marcus Aurelius?
- Is there anyone who was disadvantaged or marginalised by him?
- Do you think that Marcus Aurelius had a significant impact on his own times?
- How great was the legacy that Marcus Aurelius left for those after him?

2. If you would like to read a broader examination than Scarre (1995, pp.112-119) provides, you might like to read Herbert W Benario ('Marcus Aurelius' in *De Imperatoribus Romanis* 2001):

<http://www.roman-emperors.org/marcaur.htm>

It is not mandatory nor even essential that you do this but it will not hurt. (Unless you have done so little preparation to this point in time that you really need to focus on the 'basics' and not think about anything beyond this!)

3. Read carefully; answer the question that has been asked; think calmly; plan intelligently; compose your thoughts before you write carefully, accurately and precisely; breathe deeply; and remember – if you are prepared, YOU CAN DO THIS.

THINK PLAN WRITE THINK PLAN WRITE THINK PLAN WRITE

GOOD LUCK

Source Analysis Exercise – Samples of student responses

Source (for) Marcus Aurelius

The sources of (evidence) for Marcus Aurelius are many and varied, though not all sources might be reliable. The sheer variety in the types of sources from written histories and gossip columns to busts and statues are enormous and all must be observed with a careful eye. Though some sources maybe more reliable than others, sources such as the “Historia Augusta” must be regarded very carefully as it is known to contain passages of dubious (accuracy). The statues of Marcus Aurelius must also be regarded with suspicion. Such objects were quite obviously created with a certain bias. The atmosphere and accuracy of such works of art (this must also be stressed) were made with the purpose of glorifying him as an ‘imperator’. All the sources (on) Marcus Aurelius should be regarded (as reflecting) a certain prejudice and though some sources can be considered biased, there are still many elements of accurate information.

Bainbridge-Robb 2007

When analysing ancient sources it is essential to take into account the nature of the sources and the motives behind them. This can be applied when studying Marcus Aurelius, as the sources for him are quite varied. One of the sources is the “Historia Augusta”, a series of imperial biographies that was supposed to have been written by six authors but is now thought to have been written by just one (in the late fourth century). The confusion (about) the author(ship) of this source is a clue to its reliability., as the motives behind it would be difficult to determine. Also, if it was written by six authors then it may have varying opinions or points of view or it may be more reliable because the (six) men (could) corroborate each other. On the other hand, the different authors may have left gaps or inconsistencies in the text. If there was only one author then it would only be one person’s view of the events and may need to be corroborated (by) other sources. The “Meditations”, Marcus Aurelius’s own books, are also useful sources. Though it is clearly biased and might not (reveal) much about his rule, it gives a window into the mind of the man himself because it is a first hand account. Other sources such as primary archaeological evidence in the form of statues, busts, reliefs (and coins) also provide clues into Marcus Aurelius’s rule but their (purpose), for example (as) propaganda, have to be taken into account.

All ancient sources are useful and can (reveal) something about the (era) being studied. Sometimes the value of the sources and (the motives of those who created them) can provide answers that would not be found by just reading text or looking at sculpture. Analysis of sources is (imperative) in the study of (Marcus Aurelius just as it is in all other inquiries into the lives of the ancients).

Gourlay 2007

Problematic Nature of Marcus Aurelius

Before using any historical sources, good historians should always evaluate their sources for problematic elements. When looking at the sources (relevant to) the life and times of Marcus Aurelius, the key sources involved are the “Historia Augusta” and Aurelius’s own “Meditations”. The “Historia Augusta” is extremely problematic, because of the large amount of invalid human interaction which has diminished its reliability. (Nevertheless) it provides many details of his rule. The “Meditations” (provide) an insight into the emperor’s thoughts they they included few details about his actual rule. The sources (for) Marcus Aurelius are mildly problematic and should be dealt with cautiously by historians.

Turner 2007