

Why Wiki? Exploring Collaborative Technology in the AP Classroom

The uninformed and the unenlightened may assume that Latin teachers are teaching a dead language that is dead useless, dead to technology, and dead to innovation. We, however, know this is far from true. Each year classicists reach to utilize anything that enhances the learning of Latin and makes it more accessible to a wider audience of students, and that includes technology in any form or fashion. [\[close up of technology\]](#).

Over ten years ago I began using quia.com [\[quia slide 1\]](#), which perhaps many of you use as well, to build review material for vocabulary and grammar. [\[quia slide 2\]](#) I do make a great number of in-context vocabulary quizzes [\[quia slide 3\]](#) to test the more important skill of whether a student can understand how a word or a group of words is being used in reference to its sentence. This skill is one that can and should be actively developed and not just assumed will happen if one diligently applies knowledge of morphology.

When I began teaching AP Vergil a few years ago I was looking for a way to expose students to art that utilized scenes from the Aeneid. This led to the development of some Hidden Pictures [\[hidden pictures 1\]](#) such as this one. The process of looking for the items leads to inadvertent exploration of the painting. For instance, if we look for the items listed on the right – the buffalo skull [\[hidden pictures 2\]](#), the crown [\[hidden pictures 3\]](#), the cuttlefish [\[hidden pictures 4\]](#), the garlic [\[hidden pictures 5\]](#), the hibiscus [\[hidden pictures 6\]](#) and (my signature) the squirrel [\[hidden pictures 7\]](#) (and I apologize for the low quality resolution of this screen capture) – we will have explored the clothing of each character. But this is really just a fun side-venture afforded by the internet and access to artwork in an electronic format. It is, however, certainly more exposure to art than I received as a high school student. [\[hidden picture full\]](#) But admittedly some technology is just playtime. [\[technology\]](#)

With the development of iPhones, iPads, and other smart phones, we have been blessed with some pretty useful and slick apps for classics. The SPQR [\[SPQR main\]](#) app I find particularly useful for AP Latin, though unfortunately only available for iPads and iPhones. Within this one relatively inexpensive app (\$5.99?), you have dozens [\[Caesar Latin\]](#) of Latin authors (as you can see from the list on the left hand side), a good selection of their works, plus [\[Caesar English\]](#) for major authors an English translation as well with a simple click on the crisscross arrows at the top right. You can click on a word and it will give you an initial definition. If you are dissatisfied with that first finding, [\[dictionaries\]](#) you have access to Lewis and Short, Whitaker's Words, plus an English to Latin dictionary, should you need it. There are other features too [\[menu bar\]](#), including a grammar drill section, an ability to make vocabulary flashcards, *A New Latin Grammar* by Allen & Greenough, *New Latin Grammar* by Charles Bennett, not to mention Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. I still wonder at the ease of accessing all that I need to in one small hand held device that used to take an entire bookshelf. I am personally fond of the iPhone version [\[iPhone Caesar Latin\]](#), since it means I can prep [\[iPhone English\]](#) for my AP class anywhere [\[SPQR full\]](#) I am so long as I have my phone with me. [\[full screen\]](#)

But still we are not discussing *collaborative technology*. [\[collaborative close\]](#) Technology yes, and we will see even more useful applications and innovations as our textbooks are converted into e-format. And one may ask whether it is on our shoulders to pursue additional technology farther than what is available at one's fingertips and is immediately and obviously applicable. I think the answer is yes, because what we are missing here is the human element of learning and exploration.

The Texas Education Agency has set forth for Texas students, as I am sure other states have done for their own constituencies, a set of guidelines for technology use and learning. They are generalized as follows:

1. Creativity and Innovation: [\[TEKS 1\]](#) The student uses creative thinking and innovative processes to construct knowledge and develop digital products.
2. **Communication and Collaboration:** [\[TEKS 2\]](#) **The student collaborates and communicates both locally and globally using digital tools and resources to reinforce and promote learning.**
3. Research and Information Fluency: [\[TEKS 3\]](#) The student acquires and evaluates digital content.
4. **Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making:** [\[TEKS 4\]](#) **The student applies critical-thinking skills to solve problems, guide research, and evaluate projects using digital tools and resources.**
5. Digital Citizenship: [\[TEKS 5\]](#) The student practices safe, responsible, legal, and ethical behavior while using digital tools and resources.
6. **Technology Operations and Concepts:** [\[TEKS 6\]](#) **The student demonstrates knowledge and appropriate use of technology systems, concepts, and operations.**

Schools are without question pushing all teachers, and not just technology teachers, towards addressing these guidelines, integrating current innovations into our own curriculum. It was with these guidelines in mind that I ventured into experimenting with creating a WIKI for my AP Latin 4 class utilizing a package called Epsilon. [\[Epsilon main\]](#) I was introduced to Epsilon during in-service training at the beginning of the year, and immediately saw it as a tool which I could use to address the new essential questions and themes as outlined in the AP Course Guideline. The new syllabus, which features both Caesar's Gallic Wars and Vergil's Aeneid, still has a lot of lines to cover, thus limiting class time for discussions.

The Epsilon interface provides a protected environment for students to utilize features of the internet without the possibility of spam and other negative aspects that protective parents or timid young teens might fear. (Ok, admittedly just the parents.) Students must log-in and sign-up for our AP Latin group, [\[Epsilon 2 AND 3\]](#) before being able to access the WIKI, here listed in the left sidebar [\[Epsilon 4 AND 5\]](#).

I set the WIKI page up as you see it here [\[WIKI 6 / Salvete!\]](#), complete with instructions on what my expectations were for both their English entries and their Latin support. I provided links to online Latin texts to facilitate ease of providing Latin. The seven themes or topics cover Literary Genre and Style, Roman Values, War and Empire, Leadership, Views of Non-Romans, History and Memory, Human Beings and the Gods. Before we look at the good things that came out of

this experiment, I want to discuss some of the problems and setbacks. First, I did not begin utilizing the Wiki immediately, thinking that we needed to get a little Caesar under our belts before any meaningful instruction could begin. If I had assigned contributing to the Wiki from the very beginning of the year, I might have been able to address some of our difficulties in a more timely fashion.

Early assignments were supposed to be done over the weekend. However, students had difficulties logging in. Therefore we decided we would devote one class to working on the Wiki in the computer lab in order to insure that everyone had the school's preassigned passwords, and understood the interface. It was there we discovered the main drawback to using a Wiki format: only one person can be logged in at a time to edit the page. Therefore while one person was adding material, the others were composing what they would add when it was their turn, saving it to their email temporarily. Students were instructed to pick a color to use for their entries and to initial each entry. Thus students could build off of each other, if they so choose, and I could still differentiate which student contributed what information.

In this example, [[Wiki C What points of view...](#)] three different students contributed to the question "What points of view do Vergil and Caesar take when describing events? How do they represent themselves and for what purposes?" I had suggested students post with regards to the storm scenes in both the de Bello Gallico and the Aeneid, which we had discussed in class. [READ THE PASSAGES/ENTRIES] The first student here is considerably weaker in her Latin skills than the other two, but nonetheless contributed, albeit solely in English and perhaps rather simplistically. The second student provided Latin passages from both the authors, supporting the first student's statement. The 3rd student (who let me mention is a talented linguist already, being bilingual English-Hungarian, with 3 years of French, and 4 of Spanish, and is in AP Latin after a crash course of Latin 1 through 3 last year), provided a more personalized response. Admittedly I was looking for something more like the kind of writing I demand on their essays, but the format almost invited a more informal, less rigid or systematic look at the topic, for better or worse.

Under the subtitle of Leadership [[Wiki Leadership](#)] slide, I (as M for Magistra) provided some suggestions or directions for approaching the questions of leadership. We had, as you can tell, just finished reading about Sabinus and Cotta in de Bello Gallico. (The top entry is once again from my linguist.) [READ ENTRIES] But sometimes I left the questions without direction, as in the section on Human Beings and the Gods [[Wiki Human Beings](#)]. [READ ENTRIES] Without question, though, we were having difficulties with consistency and quality.

A few weeks ago we decided that the Wiki interface via Epsilen [[Epsilen full screen](#)] was prohibitive and not conducive to the purpose of this experiment: to have a useful, fruitful discussion of the AP Essential Questions and Themes in a format that we could all build upon and then all use to review and study for the AP exam [[big Wiki](#)]. Instead of simply throwing our hands in the air and quitting, I asked the students if they could think of a better forum for a project of this sort. It was decided that we would try moving our discussions to Reddit, believe it or not [[Reddit 1](#)]. Another of my natural linguists (English-Spanish bilingual) set up our new

Reddit subgroup [\[Reddit 2\]](#), and I added the topics [\[Reddit 3\]](#) However, even that has its drawbacks because of the districts filters and blockers.

Admittedly I have been disappointed with the unforeseen hurdles this project presented [\[full Wiki screen\]](#), but I am not discouraged with regards to future ventures into collaborative technology. This summer I intend to explore other avenues for a collaborative project. Perhaps, for instance, if the WIKI had contained a separate page for each of the themes, more students could have been working on the project at the same time. Or maybe the Reddit subgroup will take off. The students agreed that the idea of using collaborative technology to more fully discuss these themes outside of class is truly a good one, one many expressed frustration at not being able to access better or participate in more fully. They likewise agreed that our direct work with the Latin was more worthy of the majority of our classtime.

After all this is an AP Latin class [\[AP screen big, then 1, 2, 3\]](#). The AP coursework is supposed to be equivalent to an upper-intermediate college Latin course and thus my main focus was on developing the skills to create solid readers and translators of Latin literature, with an eye towards detail and phrasing and the shape of the Latin before them. I want them to appreciate Latin as a vital language and the words of Caesar and Vergil as something timeless. I want them to be able, as they are, to appreciate fresh applications of these words as they might see in, say, a Ryan Gosling poster or two [\[Ryan G posters\]](#).