

Sample passages handout

1)

“Now, where the bank supplies easy approaches, a devastating throng ransacks all the depths for fish ill-sheltered — alack! — by the river’s sanctuary. This man far out in mid-stream trails dripping nets and sweeps up shoals of fish, snared in the knotty folds; but this, where the river glides with peaceful flood, draws his seines, buoyed up with floats of cork; while yonder on the rocks one leans over the waters which flow beneath, and lets droop the curved tip of his pliant rod, casting hooks baited with deadly food. All unsuspecting, the wandering finny tribe rush upon them agape; and when — too late!—their opened gullets feel the concealed barbs pierce deep within, they struggle, and their struggles are betrayed above, when the wand bends in response to the tremulous vibrations of the quivering line. Straightway the boy skilfully whisks his prey from the water, swinging it sidelong with a whistling stroke: a hissing follows on the blow, even as the breeze whines and whistles when sometimes a scourge is whirled through empty space and disturbs the air. The dripping catch flounders on the parched rocks and quakes at the deadly shafts of light-bringing day. Beneath his native waters, his strength endured: enfeebled by our atmosphere his life wastes away in the air he gasps. Now his weakening body quivers with feeble beats, now his nerveless tail endures its last throbs: his gaping mouth no longer closes: his panting gills give back the air they have drained and blow forth the death-dealing breath of day. Even so, when the blast fans a smithy-fire, the valve of wool which plays in the hollow of the beechen bellows alternately sucks in and confines the winds now by this hole, now by that. I myself have seen fish, already quivering in the throes of death, summon up their last gasp and, leaping high into the air, cast themselves with a somersault into the river beneath, gaining once more the waters which they never looked to find again. Thereat, impatient at his loss, the lad impetuously plunges in from on high, seeking—poor fool—to catch them as he swims. So Glaucus of Anthedon, the fisher of the Boeotian sea, having tasted Circe’s deadly herbs, when he had plucked those plants cropped by his dying fish,¹ plunged into the Carpathian sea, there to find a new home: that fisherman, so skilful with his hooks and nets, who ransacked Nereus’ hidden depths and swept the surface which is Tethys’ realm—that spoiler tossed on the waves amid the shoals he once took captive.” (Mos. 240-82)

2) “Howbeit, though fixed upon the depths, the eyes grow weary with straying after fishes who in slippery shoals sport midway between. But their many kinds, their slanting course in swimming, and those companies which ascend up against the stream, their names, and all the offspring of their countless tribe, it is not lawful for me to declare, nor does he permit to whom passed the charge of the second element and the safe-keeping of the watery trident. Do thou for me, O Nymph, dweller in the river’s realm, declare the hosts of the scaly herd, and from the depths of thy watery bed discourse of those throngs which glide in the azure stream” (Mos. 75-84)