CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Argonautica

Apollonius of Rhodes · *3rd century B.C.* · *R. C. Seaton*

Beginning with thee, O Phoebus, the poet will recount the famous deeds of men of old who, at the behest of King Pelias, sped the well-benched Argo through the Cyanean rocks. Seaton's 1912 prose is the hosted English of Apollonius, complete in four books, including the love of Jason and Medea.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What kind of heroism is a voyage for a fleece, and what does a goddess-kindled love do to the men who sail and to the woman who helps them?

"Beginning with thee, O Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men of old, who, at the behest of King Pelias, down through the mouth of Pontus and between the Cyanean rocks, sped well-benched Argo"

Book I, the poem's opening

The hosted text is R. C. Seaton's 1912 Loeb prose, PG #830, complete. Books I–II are the voyage to Colchis; Book III, the love of Jason and Medea, is the heart; Book IV, the return, including a terrible deed. Quote Seaton, including "well-benched Argo" and "O Phoebus." This is a Hellenistic epic, more inward than Homer in the Medea book, and not a children's Jason-and-the-Argonauts retelling. Medea's aid and the later killing should be taught with gravity, for older students.

KEY CHARACTERS

Jason
The leader of the Argo, whose heroism is mixed with dependence and a hard return.

Medea
The Colchian whose love, aid, and later deed are the moral center of the second half.

the Argonauts
The famous company, gathered in Book I, who share the voyage's costs.

Pelias and Aeetes
The king who sent the voyage, and the king who would keep the fleece.

WELL-BENCHED ARGO

> *"Beginning with thee, O Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men of old, who, at the behest of King Pelias, down through the mouth of Pontus and between the Cyanean rocks, sped well-benched Argo"*
>
> Book I

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Beginning with Phoebus

BOOK I, THE INVOCATION AND THE GATHERING

The poet begins with Phoebus and names the voyage King Pelias commanded. The heroes gather; the Argo is launched.

- The opening is exact in Seaton, including 'well-benched Argo.'
- The catalogue of heroes is part of the epic's furniture; it is not a delay only.
- Jason is a leader among many, not a lone knight.

> *"Beginning with thee, O Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men of old, who, at the behest of King Pelias, down through the mouth of Pontus and between the Cyanean rocks, sped well-benched Argo"*
>
> Book I

02

The Voyage Out

BOOKS I AND II

The run to Colchis: losses, landings, Amycus, Phineus, the Clashing Rocks. The sea is the first antagonist.

- These books are a true voyage-epic; keep the geography and the costs.
- Helpers and warnings (Phineus among them) prepare the later magic.
- Do not rush to Medea as if the going were nothing.

03

Jason and Medea

BOOK III

At Colchis the fleece is not to be taken by strength alone. A goddess-kindled love, a girl's courage, and a set of tasks become the plot.

- Book III is the poem's inward center.
- Medea is a will, not a charm only; teach her aid as a moral act with a price.
- Aeetes' tasks are the public face of a private turning.

04

A Fleece, and a Flight

THE TURN INTO BOOK IV

The taking of the fleece and the flight from Colchis already carry a shadow. What is won is not simply kept.

- The victory is mixed from the first hour of the return.
- Medea's place in the ship is now the moral problem of the poem.
- Seaton's English is the text to quote.

05

The Return

BOOK IV

The way home is long, and it includes a deed that cannot be softened. The hosted text is complete through the end of the return.

- The killing that secures the flight must be taught with gravity, for older students.
- This is not a children's retelling of a simple prize.
- Seaton 1912, PG #830, a complete four-book epic.

A Voyage | A Company of Heroes | A Goddess-Kindled Love | A Prize and a Price | A Hard Return

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is R. C. Seaton's 1912 prose (Project Gutenberg #830, Loeb), complete in four books. The opening is exact: "Beginning with thee, O Phoebus, I will recount the famous deeds of men of old, who, at the behest of King Pelias, down through the mouth of Pontus and between the Cyanean rocks, sped well-benched Argo." Quote Seaton, not a later English.
2. Books I–II are the voyage out; Book III is the love of Jason and Medea; Book IV is the return, including a killing that must be taught with gravity. This is for older students, not a children's prize-story.
3. The poet is Apollonius of Rhodes (this file may also say Apollonius Rhodius). Keep the work distinct from later Medea dramas and from simple retellings.

Quotations are verbatim from the R. C. Seaton, Project Gutenberg #830, The Argonautica, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/argonautica/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.