CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Aeneid

Virgil · *c. 29–19 BC* · *John Dryden verse translation*

After Troy falls, "pious" Aeneas carries his father and his household gods out of the burning city and sails west under the gods' command to found a new home in Italy, the seed of Rome. Storms, a forbidden love in Carthage, a descent to the underworld and a bitter war test his duty to heaven, to his father and to his people.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does faithfulness to a calling cost — and can duty alone make a man just?

"Arms, and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate, / And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate, / Expell'd and exil'd, left the Trojan shore."
The poet's opening · Book I

Aeneas gives up Troy, Dido and his own wishes to obey; yet the poem ends in a burst of wrath, not mercy. Virgil honors duty and grieves its cost. Christian readers find the fuller answer in a mercy that overcomes wrath.

KEY CHARACTERS

Aeneas
pietas: duty to gods, father, people

Anchises
the father carried and obeyed

Ascanius (Iulus)
the son and the future

Dido
a noble queen undone by passion

Juno
divine resentment

Venus
the hero's divine mother

Turnus
valor driven by fury

Pallas & Evander
a young ally and his trusting father

The Sibyl
guide to the underworld

ROME'S CALLING

"To tame the proud, the fetter'd slave to free: / These are imperial arts, and worthy thee."
Anchises, foretelling Rome · Book VI

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

01
Storm and Carthage
BOOK I
A goddess's hatred, a queen's welcome.

- **Juno**, hating the Trojans, raises a storm that scatters **Aeneas**' fleet
- The survivors land in Africa
- His mother **Venus** guides him to Carthage, the new city of Queen **Dido**
- On the temple walls he sees the war of Troy painted, and weeps
- Dido welcomes the Trojans and asks to hear their story

> *"Endure, and conquer! Jove will soon dispose / To future good our past and present woes."*
> **Aeneas to his men** · Book I

02
The Fall of Troy
BOOKS II–III
Out of the fire, carrying his father.

- The Greeks leave a wooden horse; the priest **Laocoon** warns against it and is killed by serpents
- Greeks pour from the horse; Troy burns
- Aeneas carries his father **Anchises** on his shoulders and leads his son **Ascanius** out
- His wife **Creusa** is lost; her ghost tells him of a new kingdom in the west
- Years of wandering follow; Anchises dies in Sicily

> *"Trust not their presents, nor admit the horse."*
> **Laocoon** · Book II

03
Dido
BOOK IV
Love that forgets duty.

- Dido falls in love with Aeneas and forgets her vow to her dead husband
- Sheltering from a storm in a cave, they come together
- **Mercury** brings Jove's command: leave for Italy
- Aeneas obeys, grieving; Dido curses him
- She dies by her own hand on a pyre

> *"But call'd it marriage, by that specious name / To veil the crime and sanctify the shame."*
> **The narrator, on Dido** · Book IV

04
The Underworld
BOOKS V–VI
The dead show him why he must go on.

- Funeral games honor Anchises in Sicily
- At Cumae the **Sibyl** leads Aeneas, bearing the golden bough, below the earth
- Dido's shade turns from him in silence
- Anchises shows him the souls of future Romans and Rome's calling

> *"The gates of hell are open night and day; / Smooth the descent, and easy is the way: / But to return, and view the cheerful skies, / In this the task and mighty labour lies."*
> **The Sibyl to Aeneas** · Book VI

05
War in Latium
BOOKS VII–X
A promised land that must be fought for.

- King Latinus offers his daughter **Lavinia** to Aeneas
- Juno sends a Fury to stir up **Turnus**, Lavinia's suitor, and war begins
- Aeneas allies with King **Evander**, who entrusts him with his son **Pallas**
- Venus brings Aeneas a shield showing Rome's future history
- Turnus kills young Pallas and strips his sword-belt

06
The Last Duel
BOOKS XI–XII
Mercy, almost.

- The warrior maiden Camilla falls
- A truce is broken; Aeneas is wounded and healed
- Aeneas and Turnus meet in single combat
- Beaten, Turnus begs for mercy, and Aeneas hesitates
- Seeing Pallas' belt on Turnus, Aeneas kills him in rage

> *"Yet think, O think, if mercy may be shown, / Thou hadst a father once, and hast a son."*
> **Turnus, begging Aeneas** · Book XII

Duty (Pietas) | Fathers & Sons | Fate & Providence | Love & Sacrifice | Exile & Home | Wrath & Mercy

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Watch the epithet "pious" attached to Aeneas. What does his piety include, and what does it cost him?
2. Compare Aeneas carrying Anchises out of Troy with Aeneas leaving Dido. Is each choice an act of the same virtue?
3. In Book VI, ask what Anchises says Rome is for, and measure the poem's last scene against it.
4. Track Juno's anger from Book I to Book XII. What do Virgil's gods suggest about the source of human suffering?
5. Notice fathers and sons throughout (Anchises, Evander, Turnus' plea). How does the final scene turn on that bond?
6. Ask why Virgil ends the poem with a killing and not a wedding or a founding.

Quotations are verbatim from the John Dryden verse translation, Project Gutenberg #228, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-aeneid/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.