

## Lesson Plan: Saturnalia: “Libertas Decembri”

By Evan Dutmer

<b>1. Culture Product, Practice and Perspectives</b>		
<b>Product</b> What is it?	<b>Practice</b> What do people do with the product? Or what practices are described in the cultural product?	<b>Perspectives</b> What are underlying beliefs and values imbued within the cultural product and practice?
<p><u>Horace, <i>Satires</i>, 2.7</u></p> <p>(Compare with Frederick Douglass’s reflections on Christmas in the antebellum US South in his <i>Narrative</i>, ch. 10)</p>	<p><i>Libertas Decembri</i> “December Liberty” (Horace, <i>Satires</i> 2.7.4) and “free speech” at the banquet.</p> <p>Slaves were treated to a late December “role reversal,” where they were served and treated like masters for roughly one week. General “merrymaking” was also encouraged—slaves were encouraged to prank their masters and dress like them, and were at times invited to deliver critical speeches on their masters (“free speech”).</p>	<p>Saturnalia was a festival of “liberty” which represented cathartic release of the year’s resentments between masters and their slaves. For enslaved peoples, it represented one of the few times in the year where they could exercise agency. For masters, it alleviated concerns about a slave uprising and served as a reminder of their ultimate power in the home upon the arrival of the new year.</p> <p>An engaging summary of Saturnalia beliefs and values: <a href="https://followinghadrian.com/2017/12/17/io-saturnalia-2/">https://followinghadrian.com/2017/12/17/io-saturnalia-2/</a></p> <p>Importantly, this “merrymaking” festival was explicitly temporary. Any return to “role reversal” after the end of Saturnalia would be strictly punished, reinforcing the social order. (Epictetus, <i>Discourses</i> 4.1.58)</p>
<b>2. Teaching Context</b>		
Language taught	Teaching context (immersion/ heritage/world language, etc.)	Student proficiency level (ACTFL proficiency guidelines)
Latin	World Language	Novice-Intermediate

### 3. Integrate Culture 3P in Class

Culture Theme	Social Class, Chattel Slavery, Gender, Time/Season, Value
Language support/scaffolding	“dominus” “servus” “libertas” “servitudo” “December” “donum” “toga” “pilleus” “liber” “honor” “cupiditas” “alienus” “ducere”
How do you avoid stereotypes?	Explicitly address and introduce the Greco-Roman institution of chattel slavery & compare with the institution of chattel slavery in the southern US. Explicitly address similarities and differences between “Roman/non-Roman”, “civilized/barbarian”, “master/slave” and “native/foreign”, “white/black”, “civilized/savage” dichotomies and distinctions.
Potential class activities	1. Art analysis of the following product (a depiction of banquet practice during a celebration in Pompeii):



Fresco showing a dinner party with painted message: FACITE VOBIS SUAVITER EGO CANTO and EST ITA VALEAS (make yourselves comfortable; I am singing; go for it!), AD 40–79, Pompeii, House of the Triclinium.” <https://followinghadrian.com/2017/12/17/io-saturnalia-2/>  
Engage students in a compare and contrast of this image with the depiction of Horace in Davus’s speech in the *Satires*. How does Davus challenge free Roman life? What features of this fresco signal Roman aristocracy? How do these images connect to the Saturnalia feasts of a Roman December?

2. In-class close reading of Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* passage on the suppressive effect of Christmas celebrations for enslaved persons. Structured discussion on connections between the tension of the *Satires* 2.7 scene and the release of frustration Douglass outlines in the “December liberty” of the Christmas season.
3. Deepen students’ encounter with Saturnalia through a short introduction to the Roman March 1 holiday of *Matronalia*, a holiday which celebrated the *ancillae* or enslaved mistresses.

	Consult Dolansky 2010 for instructive readings. Why would the Romans celebrate two holidays for their enslaved laborers?
Resources	Catullus 14.15, Horace <i>Satires</i> 2.7; Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave</i> (1845); Fanny Dolansky, “Celebrating the Saturnalia: Religious Ritual and Roman Domestic Life” in <i>Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds</i> (Wiley 2010). <a href="https://followinghadrian.com/2017/12/17/io-saturnalia-2/">https://followinghadrian.com/2017/12/17/io-saturnalia-2/</a>