VIDEO TUTORIAL: THE GREEK ALPHABET, WITH JOEL CHRISTENSEN

CLAUDIA FILOS: This is Claudia Filos. I work for the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington, DC.

Today, I am here with Joel Christensen. He's a professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio, and he is here to talk to us today about the Greek alphabet. Thanks so much for being with us here, Joel.

JOEL CHRISTENSEN: Good: thanks for having me. Let's just get straight to it today. We'll talk a little bit about the Greek alphabet. I'm going to start by just going through the alphabet with you to familiarize you with it.

And then we'll talk about pronunciation, and then have a couple of opportunities to practice the pronunciation.

So you'll see on this table of contents slide what we have going on, but we can just move on to the next slide and see the alphabet.

CLAUDIA: One moment please.

The Alphabet
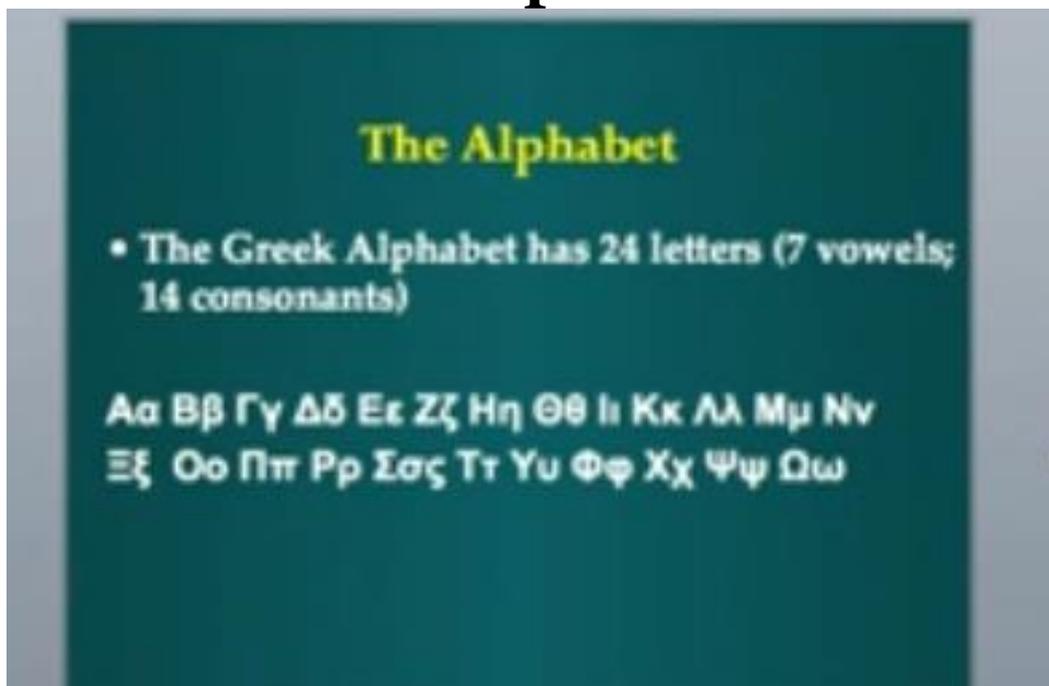
JOEL: The Greek alphabet is just a bit shorter than our Roman alphabet. It has 24 letters. 7 are vowels. 14 are consonants. And you can see it right here [*referring to the Power Point display that occupies the entire screen*].

I'll just go through the letters with you quickly, and then we'll look at them again on some other slides.

...the alphabet is:

Αα *alpha (AL-fa),*

Ββ *beta (BAY-ta),*

Γγ *gamma (GAMM-a),*

Δδ *delta (DEL-ta),*

Εε *epsilon (EPP-sill-on),*

Ζζ *zeta (ZAY-ta),*

Ηη *ēta (AY-ta),*

Θθ *theta (THAY-ta),*

Ιι *iota (ee-OH-ta),*

Κκ *kappa (KAPP-a),*

Λλ *lambda (LAHM-dah),*

Μμ *mu (MOO),*

Νν *nu (NOO),*

Ξξ *xi, (KSEE)*

Οο *omicron (OH-me-cron),*

Ππ *pi (PAI),*

Ρρ *rho (ROH),*

Σσς *sigma (SEEG-ma),*

Ττ *tau, (TAUW)*

Υυ *upsilon (OOP-si-lon),*

Φφ *phi (PHAI),*

Χχ *chi (CHAI),*

Ψψ *psi (PSAI),*

Ωω *ōmega (oh-MAY-ga).*

So those are the 24 letters.

A lot of times when Greek teachers teach the alphabet, we like to talk about the categories of sounds that the letters fall into.

Types of Consonants (1.52)
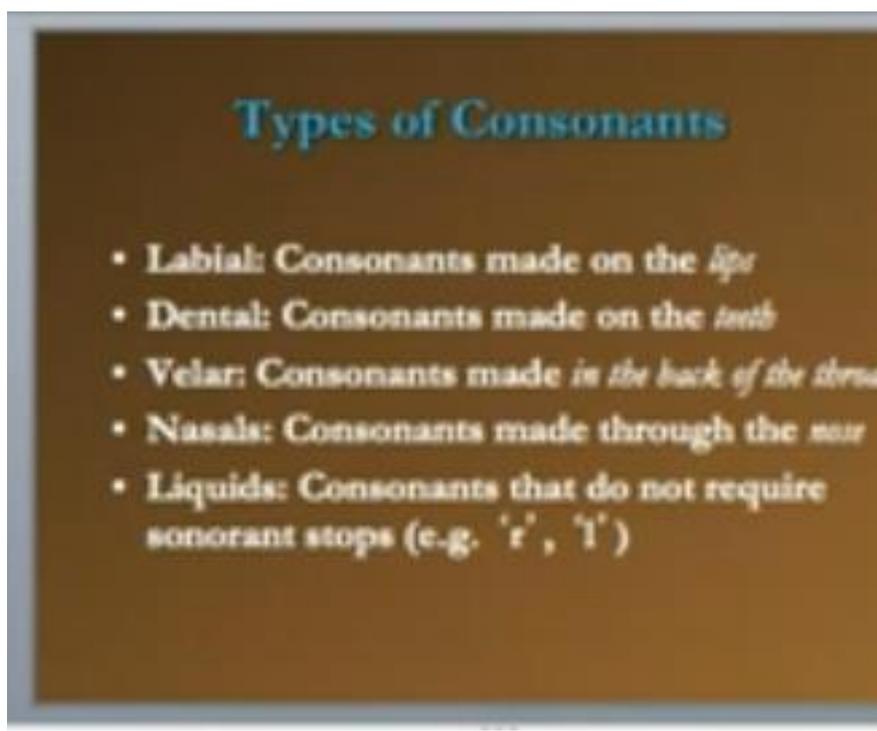
I don't want to overwhelm people with some phonology. But it's good just to think about where the letters are made in your mouth when you articulate. This will become important later when we look at the way that Greek sounds combine and assimilate and become new sounds, at least in the representation in the alphabet.

So the categories we talk about in consonants are labial, dental, velar, nasals, and liquids. And these are just basically phonological terms that describe where in the mouth the sounds originate from.

So labial sounds are sounds that start on the lips.

Dental sounds are consonants made on the teeth.

Velar are consonants made in the back of the throat.

Nasals are made through the nose.

And liquids are sounds that do not require stops like r and l.

This is important in Greek especially, because these letters, these categories when combining with other sounds like the "S" sound or sibilants, or "H" sounds or aspirates actually give us new letters.

So we go to the next slide where we can see some where some of this is important.

Qualities of Consonants (3.12)
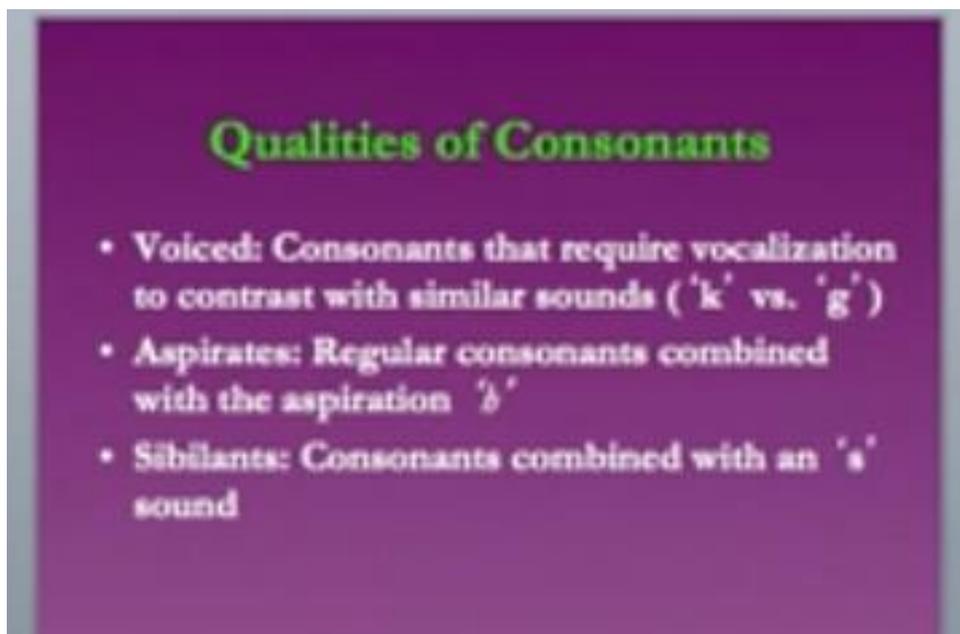
One of the things that is important to understand is that alphabets represent sounds. But they are not exact representations or exact let's say mapping of those sounds on to a graphical interface. So as any learner of English will find out, the way we spell our words is often alienated from the way they sound.

In Greek, this isn't as bad as it is in English. But there are some cases, when we get surprising transformations. So phonologists—linguists who work on the sound of words and letters—have noted that various sounds can have special qualities.

So a consonant can be voiced or unvoiced and that's the contrast between a "k", which is just a [k] [*Here, Joel is pronouncing the sound of a "k" when it is unvoiced, as in k̶i̶t̶*] and "g" which is a [g] [*i.e. the voiced "g" sound in g̶o̶o̶d̶*]. They are essentially the same sounds. They come from the back of the throat. They are called velars, but one is not voiced. One doesn't have the "uh" sound that you make. It's just a stop, "[k]". And this is important because letters like "p" and "b" in English come from the same place, but their difference is voice.

In the same way, consonants can have distinctions based on aspiration. So a "p" with an aspirate can become a Greek φ [*phi*], OK?. So [pə] [*the p sound in "p̶u̶t̶"*] and [fə] [*"f" sound in f̶o̶o̶t̶*]. In English the sound is a little different as Greek does not make as much of a distinction.

Sibilants are when consonants have added to them the sound we have as σ/ς sigma, an English "s". They can go from a π *pi* ("pai") to a ψ *psi* ("psee") just by adding an **s** to it.

And this is significant, as you'll see in the next slide…

Consonant 1: Labial Stops--consonants made on the lips (4.58)
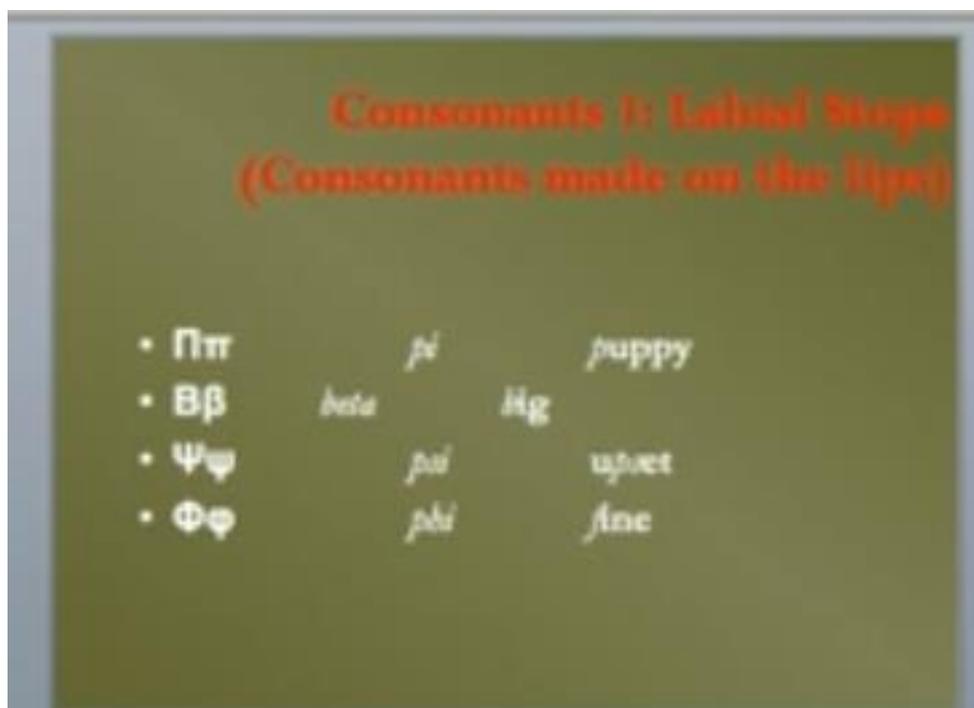
...because just by adding slightly different variations in the sound quality, Greek generates new letters that are still related to each other.

So we'll start focusing on the sounds of Greek by looking at our related letters.

The first letter we'll talk about is Ππ *pi* which is the sound we have in English, "puppy", right? Notice that this sound starts in your lips, a [p] (*i.e. the p sound in "put"*). But it doesn't have a voice, it is not a [bə] (*i.e "bu" sound in "but"*).

So the labial consonant—the sound you make with your lips, that has a voice—is the Ββ *beta* which comes from our English sound in "big", alright? So listen to the difference between Ππ *pi* and Ββ *beta.* You have "puppy" with no voice, and "big" with a voice. But these letters are still related because they come from the front of the lips.

The next sound that's related in this group is Ψψ *psi* ("PSEE") which is similar to our English sound in the complex, "upset". This is a voiceless consonant. It is essentially a Ππ *pi* plus a little bit of a Σσς *sigma.* And in English we don't pronounce the derivatives of this sound like in "**psy**chology" so we leave the "p" out. But it is there in some of our consonant clusters, like in "upset".

A similar combination happens when a labial consonant, a Ππ *pi*, or even a Ββ *beta* meets an aspiration. That's where we get Φφ *phi* ("FEE") from. Some reconstructions in the Greek language have a very soft reading on this. So they reconstruct it more as a [pʰ], instead of a [f] which is what we get when we if call Φφ *phi*, the equivalent to the English "**p**ine". There are complex linguistic, phonological reasons for this. But in most Greek classes I've taught and been in, pronouncing a Φφ *phi* as an "f" in English is acceptable. So it's not too much to get worried about. So, those are the labial stops.

Consonants 2 :Dental Stops
(Consonants made on the teeth)
(7.16)

Moving on back in the mouth we get our dental stops, Ττ *tau,* Δδ *delta,* Ζζ *zeta,* and Θθ *theta.* And they work on a similar principle to what I just discussed in the labial group. Ττ *tau* has no voice. And it's similar to the sound we make when we say the English word "**t**en**".**

Δδ *Delta* has a voice, so it's similar to the English word...to the English sound in "**d**o~~g~~". So again, think "**t**en-**d**og", "**t**en" is just made by putting your tongue at the top of your mouth and the voice comes when you make the vowel sound, "**t**e"

With "dog" or Δδ *delta*, the voice starts with a "d"... "dog". and continues through the vocalic sound.

Ζζ *Zeta* isn't a pure sibilant—it's a more complex sound—but it's like the "s"+ "d" sound in our English word "a**ds**".

And Θθ *theta* is similar in quality to what we said about Φφ *phi*. You have a Ττ *tau* sound, a dental sound, plus an aspirate. So some people reconstruct it as a [tʰə[(*as in ~~tut~~*) rather than a "thu" (*as in ~~thought~~*).

And in many languages that distinction between what's actually called a fricative, a "th" and an aspirate, a "tʰ" is really important. But in English we don't really make the distinction. So if you're just pronouncing Greek for yourself or in a baby Greek class then saying Θθ *theta*/ "think" is perfectly acceptable.

Consonants 3: Velar (Palatal) Stops: Consonants made at the back of the throat. (8.51)

If we move to the back of the throat to the velar group, this same sort of process repeats itself. Κκ *Kappa* is like the sound we make in English, "kit-cat". And those of you who learned English as a second language have been maddened at some point by the fact that "c" can be hard, like "k", or not. But the Greek Κκ *kappa* is a true stop. It is never soft. And it contrasts with *gamma*, again, in that Κκ *kappa* is

voiceless, has a "k̶a̶t̶" sound, and Γγ *gamma* has a voice, it's like our English word, "g̶o̶r̶g̶e̶".

If you add a Σσς *sigma* to either a Κκ *kappa* or a Γγ *gamma* you get the Greek letter Ξ ξ *xi*. And we don't have the sound regularly in English except in some complex clusters, like in "c̶o̶a̶x̶", or "t̶a̶x̶i̶". The best way to transliterate Ξ ξ *xi* is with a "ks". So we don't confuse it with the English letter, "x", which is a different sound.

The aspirated form of this is the letter Χχ *chi* ("chai") or *chi* ("khi", *pronounced* kʰee) which again is more complicated than we usually have in English. But the best sound you find is in the compound "b̶a̶c̶k̶h̶a̶n̶d̶". So, Χχ *chi* [kʰ*i*], again, is just a little bit of an aspiration. It doesn't have to be a full guttural (Joel makes a guttural sound) like some people do. It can just be a slight [kʰ]. And again it's about personal preference or depending what kind of reconstructive fidelity you are looking for. The important thing—I think the best way to transliterate it— is using a "kh". That way we can't confuse it with some of those other letters.

Now, those are the basic stop consonants in Greek, which means your mouth actually comes to a close when you pronounce them.

Consonants 4: Nasals, liquids and sybilants (10.46)

If we move on to the remaining consonants, we have slightly different sounds which are nevertheless very important. We have what we call nasals, liquids, and an additional group, sibilants.

Nasals are sounds you make when you close your lips and you push your voice through your nose.

Mμ "M" is a sibilant (sic) (he means nasal), so just say "moo" like a cow — you know what kind of sound you're making. The Greek *mu* is similar to the English "m". It's the sound we make in "meter".

Nν *Nu* is similar to English. It's the sound we make in "night"; and it's the nasal you make when you put your tongue at the top of your mouth and go "nnnn".

Now the final two letters are sort of similar. It's Λλ *lambda* and Ρρ *rho* . And these are called liquids because there is no real stop in the movement...like "swimming" I

guess. They're constantly in motion. There's *lambda* which is the sound we have in "**l**iquid", and then there's *rho* which is the sound we have in English "**r**ight". Some reconstructions of Greek will highly trill or roll the *rho* in certain situations. I cannot roll my Rs, so I cannot do it.

CLAUDIA: Neither can I!

JOEL: It sounds pretty, which is I think why people do it. But there is some justification to it. If you notice the way we write *rho*, we have an "h" next to it (i.e. "rho"). Oftentimes there is a breathing accompanying that "r" that indicates to us that there is a stronger sound than some of our Rs. And there is—as those of us who grew up in New England know—it's really easy to drop our Rs.

CLAUDIA: Right.

JOEL: We just let them go.

Consonant Clusters (12.49)
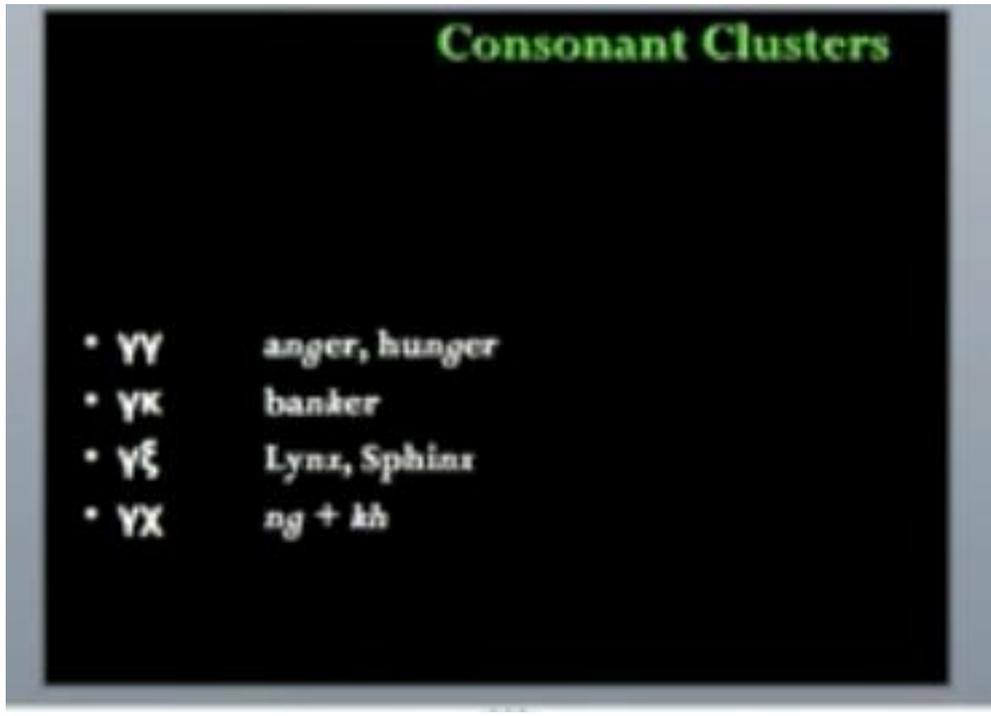
Now, so far it's pretty simple. But of course, nothing works as simply as it should. As we move to the next slide, we can see there are a couple of combinations of Greek letters that don't result in new signs. If you add a sigma to a pi you get ψ (*psi*) a new sign for a sound cluster in English that we represent with two letters. But there are lots of sounds that languages can't represent graphically. Otherwise you would end up with a very complex system of writing. And anyone who has learned some Sanskrit and tried to learn Devanāgarī knows that the list expands in order to be more descriptive and faithful to the language and it becomes more difficult.

In Greek, consonant clusters that give us problems are combinations of nasals and velars. When we get sounds like "**ng**" in "a**ng**er" or "**ank**" like in ~~banker~~. This is something we always forget about when we're teaching Greek. But γγ *double gamma* gives you an "ng" sound, and the easiest example of this is the word ἄγγελος [*angelos*], which in English becomes angel. So γγ *double gamma* makes the sound, as in "a**ng**er" or "~~hung~~er".

Similarly, a γ *gamma* plus a κ *kappa* gives you the sound that we have in "~~banker~~". If you think "banker" to yourself, you will notice there is an "ng" that has dropped out. You don't say "ban- ker", you say "bang-ker". So that again is a good example of where our signs don't faithfully represent our sounds. This is really what's going on in these consonant clusters in Greek.

The last two are sounds that we really don't have that much in English: a γ *gamma* plus a ξ *xi* gives you what we can best represent as an "ngksi" or something. But we have the words sometimes in words derived from Greek like "Lynx" and "Sphinx". And "ks" is the best way we would say it in English, but our English signs don't map on to the sounds we make.

CLAUDIA: And these rules get easier to remember once you start learning these sounds in context of words. Once you start learning to say some words, they start to become natural.

JOEL: It becomes very obvious. And these are exceptions. These are not that common. Especially this last one you won't see very frequently, and that's the *gamma, kappa,* sorry, γ χ *gamma-chi* combination. It's most like that symbol--that Egyptian symbol—"*Ankh*" (pronounced "awngkh"). So γ χ,(pronounced "ungkh") something that's not comfortable in English, but not too far off from what we do in "anchor", but with more voice to it than we have in the English language.

So those are the consonants, and that is really the hardest part. Because Greek vowels are much more faithful than English vowels.

Vowels (15.41)
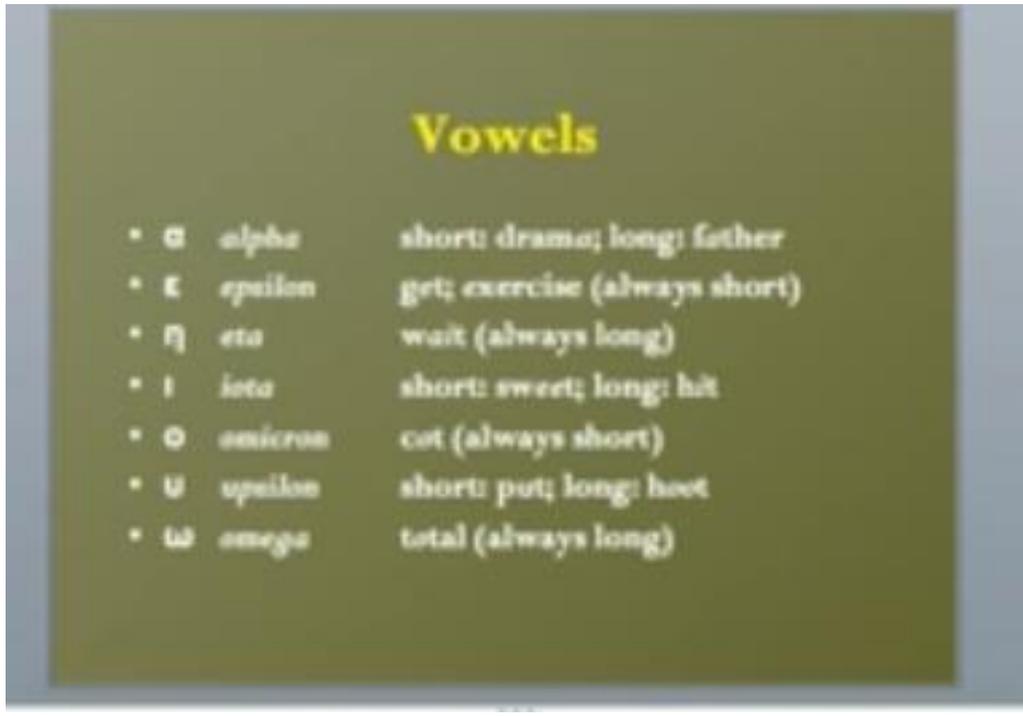
I don't want to get too much into vowels, but in English, most of our vowels aren't true vowels: they're diphthongs, which means they're actually combinations of different vowel values.

Greek vowels are closer to what you find in modern Spanish where you have some fidelity in vowel sounds between what's written and what's pronounced. So Greek vowels always give English speakers problems because we want to make them into English vowels. So let's just get into them, all right?

The vowels are Αα 'alpha, Εε epsilon, Ηη ēta, Ιι iota, Οο omicron, Υυ upsilon, and Ωω ōmega.

And each one has a simple, pure pronunciation.
So Αα alpha, unless it's long—and we'll talk about long vowels in a minute—is almost always short. It's the sound in "dram<u>a</u>". And that last "a" is pronounced like [ə] . It's just an [ə] sound. When we say "a" ("ay") in English, that's a diphthong, and that's

never the way the Greek pronounces the letter alpha. If it's a long alpha, the sound will be "ah", like in f<u>a</u>ther. So it's either ə, or ah, for *alpha.*

Εε *epsilon* is also really simple. It's just an **e** sound as in the English word "g<u>e</u>t" or "<u>e</u>xercise". And it's always short. It's just "e".

The letter Ηη *ēta* is represented in English by our diphthong in "w<u>ai</u>t". It's always long....the sound we make when we say our letter "A" ("ey"). So the sound for *ēta* is "ey". If you say the letter, *ēta*, the sound is there: *ēta*. OK? That's always the sound.

Ιι *Iota* is short a lot of the time. So when it is short it is just the "i" sound, as in "Sw<u>i</u>ss". The slide is flipped around: the short is "h<u>i</u>t". The long is "ee", as in sweet (*Here Joel notes that the slide is wrong, and this spoken explanation is correct*). All right, so "i" and "ee". Those are your short and long iotas.

Οο *Omicron* and Ωω *ōmega* are, as you might have noticed, are for small O, *omicron*; and big O, *ōmega*. Οο *Omicron* is always short, as in "o" as "c<u>o</u>t". Ωω *Ōmega* is always long, such as in our English word, t<u>o</u>tal. So Ωω *ōmega* is like our letter word, "Oh"; and Οο *omicron* is "o". So a pretty simple "o" and "oh".

Υυ *upsilon* can be short or long. Short is like our English word "p<u>u</u>t". And long is "h<u>oo</u>t". But we don't see it long very frequently.

For those of you who are worried about long and short— most of the time a good dictionary will mark it long for you, with the long versions of *upsilon* and *iota*. What you have to do over the long term is just memorize it. But they are a small group of cases. Not much to worry about.

CLAUDIA: When you say they are marked, what do you mean, Joel?

JOEL: I mean they will have a long mark over the letter , ī *iota*, or over the letter ū *upsilon.* So, a good example is the Greek verb ἀμύνω. It's not (pronounced) "am<u>unn</u>o". It's "am<u>oo</u>no" (i.e. with a macron bar over the "u"). And if you look it up in the dictionary, it will have a long mark over that upsilon.

Now, the interesting thing about the vowels is that they do relate to one another...if we go to the next slide.

Vowel Lengthening (19.27)
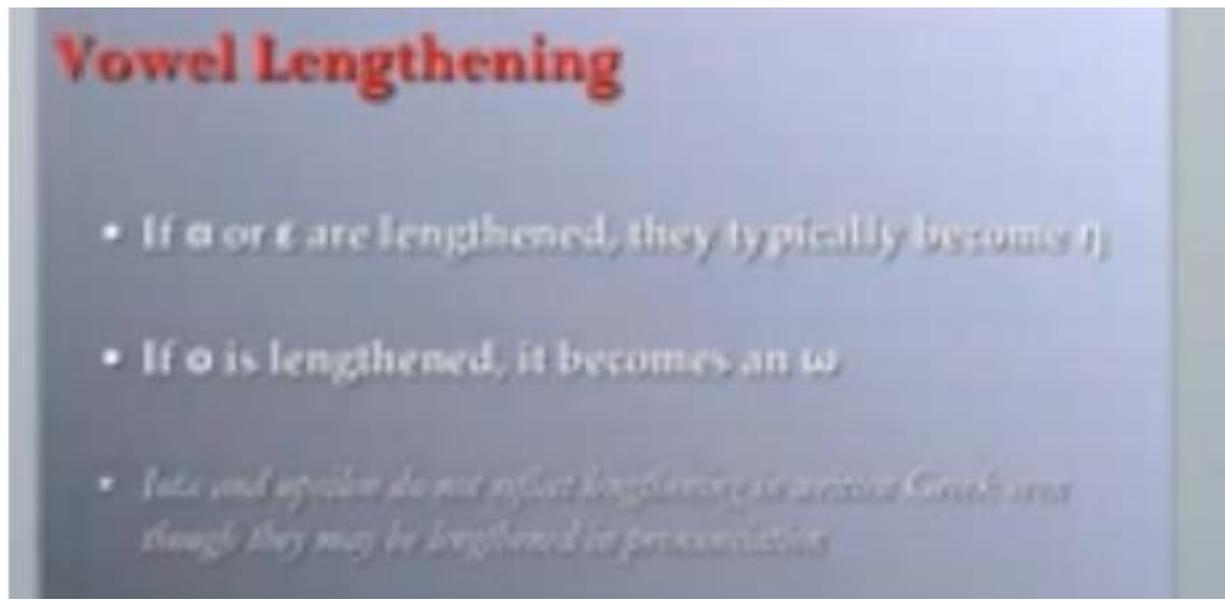
And as you'll find as you learn a lot of Greek, different dialects treat the vowels slightly differently. So one will have an η [*ēta*] instead of an α [*alpha*], or an α [*alpha*] instead of an η [*ēta*]. And sometimes they'll do different things with the ι [*iotas*]. But basically what happens is this...if you lengthen an Αα [*alpha*] or an Εε [*epsilon*] for any reason, if it's used grammatically in a different way, the letter turns into an Ηη [*ēta*]. If an Οο [*omicron*] is lengthened, it becomes an Ωω [*ōmega*]. OK?

Now, at this point in time, it's not something that's too important to know. But if you learn Greek, you'll find that words have what are called declensions, and they have different inflections, different endings to show how they work in a sentence. And sometimes some of these these endings change the vowel's value so they can lengthen, and can move from an Αα *alpha* to an Ηη *ēta*, or something like that.

Diphthongs (20.22)

If we go to the next slide, Greek does give us some different vowel values by combining letters together to make new sounds. These are pretty easy because most involve the addition of ι [*iota*] or υ [*upsilon*] to one of the other letters. So the combination you see a lot in Greek, αι [*alpha-iota*] is the sound we get in our English long "i" in "p<u>i</u>ne". So, αι [*alpha-iota*] is "ai". And for those of you who know Latin, it is the same sound as in *-ae* in Latin endings.

When you add an ι *iota* to an ε *epsilon*, you get the same sound as η *ēta* which is confusing but morphologically significant. So ει [*ei*] is the same sound as in "w<u>ei</u>ght".

If you add an ι [*iota*] to an ο [*omicron*] you get οι "*oi*", as in "t<u>oy</u>".

And if you add an ι [*iota*] to an υ [*upsilon*], oftentimes if it is the beginning of a word you get a "w" sound for "wi-". The most famous example of this is the word for son, υιος pronounced "<u>whi-os</u>".

In the middle of words sometimes you get a "wi" sound as well. Sometimes though, both letters will be pronounced, but this will marked with accents.

If you add an υ [*upsilon*] to an α [*alpha*], the sound is αυ "*ow*", as in "c<u>ow</u>" or "pl<u>ow</u>".

And the next two sounds are the hardest ones for English speakers to pronounce. An ε *epsilon* with an υ *upsilon* gives, to the best of my approximation, an "eohw"[note: you can hear this sound at 21.15]. I'll say it again, ευ "*eohw*". And again, we don't have this sound in English.

If you lengthen it, which is what you get with an η [*ēta*] plus an υ [*upsilon*] we get ηυ "ēohw". When we simplify this, as in the English approximation of the Greek word ηὑρηκα "*heohwreka*"—we say "Heureka"—we get rid of that initial epsilon sound completely. So work on it though. The simplest way to go is just to go "eow", like you say "eeoo", but make it a little farther in the back of your throat.

And then, the final diphthong to worry about—it's easy as well—is an ο *omicron* plus υ *upsilon*, as in "boot". And it is almost identical to that υ *upsilon* alone if it's long.

So those are the basic vowel sounds, together.

Additional Rules (25.01)
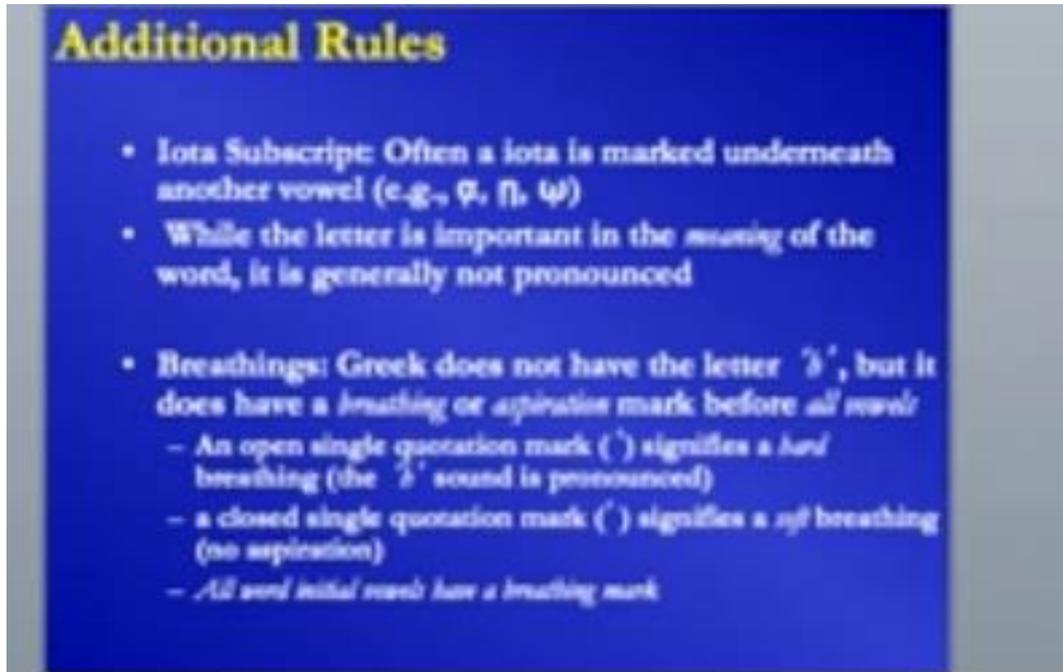
And there are a couple of rules to help you read Greek. Now, one of the things that Greek does, but not consistently throughout its history, is mark the loss of the ι [*iota*] for meaning reasons, which is called a iota *subscript.* So you'll find, as you see on the slide, the letters ᾳ *alpha,* ῃ *ēta* and ῳ *ōmega* with an *iota* mark underneath it. Certain Greek dialects and certain printing companies will put what is called the *iota adscript* there instead—especially with Hellenistic authors.

CLAUDIA: What does that mean, an *adscript*?

JOEL: An adscript is when you just restore the ι [*iota*] to where it might have been one day.

CLAUDIA: And stick it right next to the other letter, right?

JOEL: Right. So instead of having an ᾳ *alpha* with a subscript you'll have an α [*alpha*] plus a ι [*iota*]. If you're not expecting this, it can be a little confusing, but it is just a different way of representing this value. The significance though is that most of us

do not pronounce any difference between an α [*alpha*] without a *iota* subscript, or one with one. We treat them exactly the same. You don't pronounce the subscript.

CLAUDIA: OK.

JOEL: And then Greek has one more mark we would consider a letter, and that's the equivalent of our letter, "h"—the breathing mark in Greek. And basically, it's like our closed apostrophe '. So any Greek word that begins with a vowel is going to have a breathing mark. It's either going to be closed, so have the convex part to the left, which means it's a ἁ "**ha**". Or it's going to be open, so it'll be facing the other way, to signify a soft breathing.

A lot of times, people want to ignore the breathing marks. But they are important because they can make a difference between a word meaning one thing, and meaning another. And they are also important because sometimes when words end with one consonant and begin with a breathing mark, you can actually get a transformation of different letters. But again that's not too much what you want to worry about right now.

To illustrate many of these rules we can move on and try some practice pronunciation. Let's just skip the accents for now, because those can be a little confusing.

Pronunciation Practice 1 (25.39)

JOEL: The font came up a little strange, so we'll just practice them as they come. I'm going to move left to right.

On the first line, that first letter, if you notice, starts with a soft breathing. It's a short *alpha.* It's ἄνθρωπος "*AN-thrō-pos*" . Now when pronouncing Greek, you want to get balance between when the accent falls and the length of the vowels.

So in the next one (again, notice the soft breathing) it's Ἀγαμέμνων "*Ah-gah-MEM-nōn*". So you want to give an accent to the έ [*epsilon*], because that is where the accent is. But you also need to give some extra space to that long ω [*ōmega*] in Agamemnōn.

Now if you look at "Ah-gah-MEM-nōn" right here which is obviously the name, Agamemnon, you could be confused because there are so many letters. But what I try to get students to focus on is closing off consonant and vowels. So just pronounce "Agah", then "mem" together, "nōn". So any time you get two consonants together that might challenge you, just split them up into two different

syllables. So you can say, "Agah-MEM-nōn", and then just speed it up as you get more comfortable.

The next word we get our word "bible" from, is βιβλίον [*biblion*] ("BIB-lee-on").

Following to the next line we have the word we get "drama" from. It's δράματα *dramata*—a simple *alpha*, "ah". (DRAH-ma-tah) And notice the accent falls on that first ά *alpha*. We don't say "drah-MAH-tah", we say "DRAH-mah-tah".

Our next word is fun. I like this one. Anyone who knows Latin, or takes Greek class with me knows I call Latin a barbarous tongue because it's not Greek! [*laughs*]: βάρβαρος "BAR-baros". This is the Greek onomatopoeic word, or word drawn from sound, for any language that isn't Greek. Because they used to think that everyone went "ba-ba, ba-ba" all the time. So we get "barbarian" from this!

Next under δράματα [*dramata*] there, starting with the γ [*gamma*], γραφική [*graphikē*] "gra-fee-KEH". Now in English we want to say "graphic", because that's what we know. But notice we have that long *alpha* [sic: *ēta*] at the end and the accent is off the κή "k*ē*".

Similar in pronunciation in the next line we find ἔπιστολή *epistolē*. Now notice I give a little extra emphasis on that *sigma tau* in "e-PIS-toh-leh" because that's where the rhythm of the language falls. And when you have consonant clusters, it slows things up a bit. If you get to the point where you start reading Homer and other Greek poets in meter, you'll find this is really important.

Now, the next word gives us our first rough breathing. Notice where what looks like an apostrophe in English falls. It tells is there's a [h] sound at the beginning of the letter, so we get Ἕκτωρ [*Hectōr*] "*HEC-tohr*". And notice we don't say "HECt<u>er</u>" in Greek. We say "HEC-<u>tohr</u>" because it has got that long ω *ōmega* in his name.

The next word, λωτός [*lōtos*], "loh-TOS" is the Greek word for lotus, that plant that makes Odysseus' companions forget his homecoming.

And if we move to the next line, we have another rough breathing with an initial vowel, Ἤ [ēta]. This is the name for the Greek demi-god, Herakles. But in Greek it's Ἡρακλῆς "Hera-KLASE".

Following that, we have the word θεός [theos] ("thay-OSS") for god.

And then we can get into some more complex consonant clusters with the word, Κύκλωψ [Kuklōps] ("KOO-klōhps"). Now this is always hard for English speakers because we say, "Cyclops". But in Greek, they say, "KU- klōhps". So you have the accent on the ύ [upsilon], "koo", and then the long ω [ōmega] in "o". "KOO-klōhps".

And the final two words that are showing up on this page…again a rough breathing with an accent, starting out with Ὅμηρος Homēros (HO-meyr-os), which gives us Homer. Or in some traditions the word for someone who has been abducted.

And then we have finally ὕμνος [humnos] "HUHM-nos" where we get our English word "hymn" and helps to explain why our English word has that ending. In English we just say "hymn", but Greek gives you those two syllables: "HUHM-nos".

CLAUDIA: That's beautiful. I love how just these few words can teach us so much about our English language. It's really amazing, isn't it?

JOEL: It is. It is.

Pronunciation Practice 2 (30.43)

If we go to the next slide, we are going to raise the level of difficulty just a bit before we move on. There are some fun words in here that I love.

The first word gives us an English word, "ethereal". I left the accent on it. The word is αἴθηρ [*aithēr*] "AI-thair" and it means the sky, bright shiny firmament.

Following that, the name immortalized in the song, "Come on Irene", actually comes [laughs]...um, this is the Greek word for "peace", it's εἰρήνη [*eirēnē*] "ay-ray-nay". Notice in this word two different signs, ει [*epsilon, iota*] and η [*ēta*], with the same sound. It's essentially just the same vowel sound throughout: εἰρήνη "ay-ray-nay".
If you want we can get a little more accent, "ay-RAY-nay", but all the vowels are pretty evenly weighted here.

If you move on to the next one, you have is οἶνος [*oinos*] "OY-nos". Notice what happens when you get a … vowel cluster at the beginning of the word, with αἴθηρ *aithair,* εἰρήνη *eirēnē* and οἶνος [*oinos*]. If a vowel group, or two vowels gather in a diphthong, you accent and mark the breathing on the second letter of the diphthong. It just shows that the sound is going together, So *oinos* is the Greek word for wine.

If you look above the breathing mark, you see that circumflex accent there. The reason that is there is that there used to be a consonant between the ο [*omicron*] and the ι [*iota*]. That consonant was the ϝ [*digamma*]. Now, the *digamma* gives us…is like our English letter "w", and is one of the ways we know that οἶνος [*oinos*] is related to Latin *vina* and English "wine".

And for those of you who like complicated English words, we have the word that some pronounce "enophile". Or it could also be "oenophile". It could also be "oinophile" that we get from οἶνος [*oinos*], which means someone who likes wine. And as my Greek teacher often used to say, it often goes well with a "turophile", which is someone who likes cheese!

So the next one, we have a consonant cluster again. Say it with me. It's ψεῦδος [*pseūdos*] "pseohw -dos". So start out by moving to that high sound, then to your sigma. ψεῦδος [*pseūdos*]. We get a nice range of English words from this—the most famous one of course being pseudonym, or false name. And it means lie or falsehood. It's an important word in Greek poetry.

The next one I talked about earlier. We get our English word, "eureka" from this one. But in Greek this is a past tense version of the verb εὑρίσκω [*heuriskō*], which means "discover". Notice the rough breathing, [h], mark on that second letter so that it's ηὔ "Heoow". ηὔρηκα "Heoowrēka". "Heoowrēka". That's a difficult one.

Next, we have the name of Kronos' father. Οὐρανός [*Ouranos*] ("OO-rah-noss"). Notice I didn't say "Yur-annus" or anything like that because in Greek the name is Οὐρανός [*Ouranos*] ("OO-rah-noss"). We get the planet name from Latin.

Now the next word, beginning with ζ [*zeta*], is ζῷον [*zōön*] ("ZOH-on"). This gives is a whole range of English words like zoo, zoological. And it means a living thing. I put this one here because I wanted you to see that you don't pronounce that *iota* subscript underneath the ῷ [*ōmega*]. So: "ZOH-on". When you're hitting a ζ [*zeta*] at the beginning of sentence you can pronounce it sort of like an English "z". It's easier that way.

Now, the next one... I want you to note where the accent falls. It is not marked over the *iota*, The breathing mark and the accent come before the Ἄ [*alpha*]. This tells us that the *alpha* and the *iota* are not in a diphthong. So we have to pronounce each letter independently. So it's actually Ἄιδης "Ah-i-dēs". And this is one of the variations for the name of the god, Haedes, the place Haedes. And it is important because the α *alpha* is called *alpha privative*. It's when an *alpha* negates things as in the English "amoral", as opposed to "immoral". So Ἄιδης *Aidēs* literally means the "unseen one", "one under the earth". And this is a good example of what we call *alpha privative*, and separating those two letters when the accent doesn't follow on the second vowel.

CLAUDIA: And also because we have the capital first letter, right?

JOEL: Yes. The capital lets us know it's a god. But if it were a diphthong, we could still have the accent on the other side.

CLAUDIA: Right. Exactly, But that's why the accents are in front.

JOEL: Right.

So, the next one looks complicated. Remember the double gamma is an "ng" sound. This is actually σπόγγος [*spongos*] ("SPONG-gas") This gives us our word "sponge". That *double gamma* becomes an "ong" sound.

We're going to stay with those double sounds in the next word, which is λύγξ [*lunx*] ("LOOnx"). We get our word "lynx" from it.

And the final one on that line is ὄγκος *onkos* [ONG-kos]. Now ὄγκος is the Greek word for a mass or a tumor and it is actually where our English word "oncology" comes from. So if you ever have—and I hope you won't—the misfortune of going to an oncologist, you'll know that it comes from a Greek word, and you'll know who to curse.

Not to end with that, I'll go to one of my favorite Greek words which is ἔγκέφαλος [*egkephalos*] ("eng-KEF-a-loss") So it starts with an "eng" sound: "eng-KEF-a-loss", and it literally means the stuff in your head. κέφαλος [*kephalos*] means "head". So the stuff in your head is your brains. I usually joke with my students that Greek zombies would say ἔγκέφαλος.

CLAUDIA: Awesome

JOEL: So that's the pronunciation of those words I've given you. Of course there are going to be more challenges. But the best thing you can do is to just look at some Greek, piece it together, and work it out yourself. The main goal is not having to transliterate, but to recognize the letters and hear the sounds in your head. And the best thing you can do to accomplish that is reading aloud to yourself. Even if you feel embarassed, don't worry about it. Even sometimes when I'm preparing for Greek class, I'll read some passages ahead, aloud to myself and to my children and they laugh at me. But they'll do that anyway!

CLAUDIA: And that's the main thing, right? To feel it's OK to make mistakes. It's OK. Everyone starts off in that same way.

JOEL: Right. And again, we don't know what the language sounded like for real. So the important thing for us, people who want to learn to read the Greek language and appreciate Greek literature, is to just match up the signs with the sounds that we know so we can recognize the meaning of the words and read the text without having to transliterate.

CLAUDIA: And even if someone is not interested in learning how to read all of Greek literature in a very fluent way, there is still a benefit to understanding the alphabet,

understanding the way these sounds work together, and also being able to then use tools such as Perseus and other tools online, right?

JOEL: Also, you understand variations in the spellings of names at the very least. You also understand why we pronounce them differently, and transliterate them the way that we do. And there are also amazing morphological research tools that are being offered on places like Perseus and some of the affiliated websites. It just gives you a little bit of an edge and saves some of your time, and starts to pull back the curtains of mystery over the language. You know, it is a beautiful language. It's melodic, it's musical. And once you just start pronouncing it to yourself and see the way it works, you get extra bits of insight into the way the poetry works.

CLAUDIA: And that's so important, right? It wasn't something that you would read aloud and it was something that was performed, right?

JOEL: Right. And just reading aloud to yourself, reading and speaking activate very different parts of your brain. So when you start reading things aloud to yourself, you're going to remember them in different ways. And you'll meet a lot of people who learned Greek who just memorized passages, and they've stayed with them for the rest of their life. That's something that's really valid.

CLAUDIA: Thanks Joel for taking the time to do this. I really appreciate it. And what you've done is so helpful for us. And we're looking forward to your sharing more expertise with our community.

JOEL: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

CLAUDIA: Thank you. Goodbye.