

A Literary Interlude: Enobarbus Describes Cleopatra (Shakespeare)

Once upon a time young pupils (aged 12? 13?) in American schools would routinely be tasked with memorizing such passages, and declaiming them with suitable expression. And now? Now they're learning to program.

Antony and Cleopatra, Act II, Scene 2:

Enobarbus describes Queen Cleopatra

Enobarbus: I will tell you.
The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar'd all description: she did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature: on each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.