



MEDEA SUM

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
THE MEDEA SUM METHOD.....	6
ITALY: REOPENING THE MEDEA CASE.....	11
BELGIUM: 2 APPROACHES, 1 COMMON OBJECTIVE.....	15
FRANCE: FROM INVESTIGATION TO PUBLIC TRIAL	21
EXTENDING MEDEA SUM TO PRIMARY EDUCATION EXPLORING MYTHOLOGY AND ETHICAL REFLECTION WITH 8–9-YEAR-OLD PUPILS	26
LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS.....	29



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INTRODUCTION

What happens when a story that is more than 2,500 years old is placed in the hands of today's young people?

This question lies at the heart of the Medea Sum project. Inspired by the myth of Medea and its many literary reinterpretations, the project invited students in France, Belgium and Italy to step beyond traditional classroom learning and become investigators, witnesses, lawyers, judges, journalists, and performers.

Rather than studying Medea as a fixed literary figure, participants were encouraged to reopen her case. Through inquiry, debate, role-play and theatrical performance, they explored a fundamental question: can we truly determine who is guilty, and on what grounds?

By combining literature, theatre, history, citizenship education and critical thinking, Medea Sum transformed an ancient tragedy into a living educational experience. Students analysed evidence, confronted conflicting testimonies, examined different versions of the myth and reflected on contemporary issues such as justice, responsibility, discrimination, power, gender, exile and misinformation.

The project was implemented in three different educational contexts across Europe. While each school developed its own approach, all pilots shared a common objective: helping young people engage with complex questions, consider multiple perspectives and build their own informed opinions.

This guide presents the main lessons learned from the pilot activities carried out in France, Belgium and Italy. It highlights the methodologies tested, the educational benefits observed, and the practical recommendations emerging from the experience.





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More than a project about Greek mythology, Medea Sum demonstrates how cultural heritage can become a powerful tool for developing critical thinking, creativity, communication skills and active citizenship.

As the pilots revealed, the most important outcome was not the verdict reached on Medea, but the journey students took to reach it.

The goal was not to decide whether Medea was guilty or innocent, but to learn how to question, analyse and debate complex issues together.





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THE MEDEA SUM METHOD

At the core of the Medea Sum project lies a simple idea: young people learn best when they are actively involved in constructing knowledge rather than simply receiving it.

Instead of presenting Medea as a character whose actions must be judged according to a predetermined interpretation, the project invites students to investigate the case themselves. Participants are encouraged to question evidence, analyse different sources, confront opposing viewpoints and build their own conclusions through dialogue and debate.

The methodology combines inquiry-based learning, role-play, collaborative investigation and creative expression. Throughout the workshops, students gradually move from the role of readers to that of investigators, witnesses, lawyers, judges, journalists or performers.



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1. Discovering the Myth

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Students analyse the motivations, interests and responsibilities of different characters. By considering several versions of the myth, they discover that complex situations rarely have a single interpretation.



4. Building the Trial

Participants collaboratively design a trial adapted to their educational context. They prepare arguments, testimonies and cross-examinations while developing skills in communication, cooperation and critical thinking.



5. Debating and Delivering a Verdict

The final trial becomes a space for dialogue rather than a search for a single correct answer. Students confront different viewpoints, justify their reasoning and reflect on the notions of justice, responsibility and citizenship.



KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE METHOD

- **Critical Thinking** : Students learn to question information, identify bias and evaluate evidence.
- **Active Participation** : Every participant contributes according to their strengths through speaking, writing, research, artistic creation or organisation.
- **Collaboration** : The project relies on teamwork, negotiation and collective decision-making.
- **Creativity** : Schools are encouraged to adapt the trial format to their own context and imagination.
- **Citizenship Education** : The activities create opportunities to discuss contemporary issues such as justice, discrimination, power, gender equality, exile and misinformation.

By transforming an ancient myth into a contemporary investigation, Medea Sum creates a learning experience that is both intellectually demanding and highly engaging, allowing students to develop essential skills for active participation in democratic societies.



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CONNECTING CLASSICAL HERITAGE AND EUROPEAN VALUES

Beyond its educational objectives, Medea Sum contributes to the promotion of shared European values through the exploration of Greco-Roman cultural heritage. Greek myths and classical literature form part of a common cultural foundation that has influenced European thought, literature, law, philosophy and democratic traditions for centuries.

By revisiting the myth of Medea, students are invited to engage with questions that remain highly relevant today: justice and fairness, individual responsibility, gender equality, migration and exclusion, the relationship between power and law, and the importance of dialogue in resolving conflicts. Through debate and critical inquiry, participants learn to respect diverse perspectives, challenge stereotypes and develop informed opinions.

The project therefore uses classical heritage not as a static object of study, but as a living resource for fostering democratic participation, critical thinking and intercultural understanding. By connecting ancient narratives with contemporary social issues, Medea Sum helps young people recognise both the diversity of European cultures and the values that unite them: human dignity, equality, inclusion, freedom of expression and active citizenship.





ITALY: REOPENING THE MEDEA CASE

CONTEXT

The Italian pilot was implemented between January and April 2026 at the San Francesco di Sales Institute in Città di Castello. The activities involved 37 secondary school students aged 15 to 18, including five students with specific learning difficulties (SLD). The project was integrated into an interdisciplinary educational pathway combining literature, theatre, law and civic education.

The workshops were facilitated by theatre professionals and developed in close collaboration with teachers from different subject areas, creating strong connections between classical culture and contemporary citizenship issues.





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FROM CERTAINTY TO INQUIRY

At the beginning of the project, students were invited to express their opinions about Medea after reading extracts from Euripides' tragedy. The results revealed a clear consensus: Medea was considered fully guilty, with no mitigating circumstances and no shared responsibility.

The purpose of the project was not to confirm this initial judgement, but to challenge it.

Through investigation notebooks, character analyses, thematic resources and collaborative discussions, students gradually discovered that the myth contains multiple interpretations and that different authors have presented Medea in very different ways throughout history.

As new evidence emerged, students began to question their assumptions, formulate hypotheses and consider alternative explanations. Rather than searching for a single truth, they learned to embrace complexity and uncertainty.





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INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Several pedagogical tools proved particularly effective during the Italian pilot:

Investigation Notebooks

Students worked in small groups using investigation notebooks that encouraged them to collect evidence, formulate questions and document their evolving understanding of the case.

Character Interrogations

Participants analysed the perspectives of different characters and simulated interviews between lawyers and witnesses. This activity helped them understand that each character possesses only a partial and subjective view of events.

Sequential Question and Insight Diagram

Using coloured sticky notes, students created visual maps linking questions, hypotheses and possible answers. This flexible method encouraged collaborative reasoning and helped make complex relationships visible.

Community Interviews

One of the most original aspects of the project was the decision to take the investigation outside the classroom. Students interviewed citizens in public spaces to collect contemporary opinions about Medea and her responsibility.

These exchanges demonstrated that the myth continues to provoke debate today and encouraged students to compare their own interpretations with those of different generations.





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THE FINAL PRODUCTION

Rather than organising a traditional courtroom trial, the students chose to create a television-style talk show inspired by contemporary media formats.

The production combined:

- character testimonies;
- journalistic investigations;
- interviews with members of the public;
- debates between different viewpoints.

Students were responsible for every stage of the process, including scriptwriting, role distribution, filming and performance.

This format enabled them to make the myth accessible to a wider audience while strengthening their communication and media literacy skills.

Key Outcomes & Takeaway

The Italian pilot demonstrated the value of combining investigation, debate and creative production.

Teachers reported high levels of engagement, collaboration and participation throughout the project. Students particularly appreciated the opportunity to work in teams, explore different perspectives and create a final product that could be shared with others.

Most importantly, the project helped transform Medea from a distant literary figure into a living subject of inquiry. Through dialogue, critical analysis and collective reflection, students developed a deeper understanding of both the myth and the contemporary issues it raises.

When students are encouraged to question rather than simply judge, classical texts become powerful tools for developing critical thinking, citizenship and democratic dialogue.





BELGIUM: 2 APPROACHES, 1 COMMON OBJECTIVE

In Belgium, the Medea Sum methodology was tested in two different educational contexts. While both pilots were based on the myth of Medea and the idea of putting her on trial, each school developed its own interpretation of the project.

At the Maison des Phénix in Brugelette, the focus was placed on creativity, inclusion and theatrical expression. At the Athénée Royal de Dour, students explored the myth through the lens of contemporary justice and legal reasoning.

Together, these two experiences demonstrate the flexibility of the Medea Sum approach and its capacity to adapt to different educational environments while pursuing the same objective: developing critical thinking, active citizenship and collaborative learning.



BRUGELETTE: MEDEA IN THE UNDERWORLD

Context

The pilot was implemented within a Latin class composed of 11 students aged 14 to 17. Particular attention was paid to inclusion, as the group included students with autism and ADHD.

The educational team adopted a flexible approach that allowed every participant to contribute according to their abilities and comfort level. Public speaking was never imposed, and collaborative work in pairs or small groups was encouraged throughout the project.



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Exploring Themes Beyond the Myth

Students worked with classical sources, thematic resources and extracts from Seneca's *Medea*. Discussions gradually moved beyond literary analysis to address broader themes such as:

- gender and power;
- foreignness and exclusion;
- identity and belonging;
- revenge and justice.

By connecting ancient questions to contemporary issues, students discovered how classical myths continue to resonate with modern society.

Reimagining the Trial

One of the most original aspects of the Belgian pilot emerged when students were invited to design the setting of Medea's trial. After discussing several possibilities, they chose to stage the trial in the Underworld. This creative decision allowed every character to participate in the proceedings, including those who had died during the story. The Underworld became a symbolic space where all voices could be heard and where unresolved conflicts could finally be addressed. Students designed masks, costumes and character profiles before collaboratively writing the script and preparing the performance.

Final Verdict & Key Takeaway

After hearing all testimonies and debating the evidence, the students reached a nuanced conclusion: **Medea is guilty, but Jason also shares responsibility.**

Rather than identifying a single culprit, students recognised the complexity of the tragedy and the interconnected responsibilities of the different characters.

Providing space for creativity and multiple interpretations helps students engage more deeply with complex literary and social issues.





DOUR: MEDEA IN COURT

Context

At the Athénée Royal de Dour, 11 students aged 15 to 16 participated in a pilot that combined literature, theatre and legal education.

The workshops brought together teachers, a theatre facilitator, a guest author and a practising lawyer, creating a rich interdisciplinary learning experience.

Understanding Different Versions of the Story

The project began with an exploration of the many versions of the Medea myth.



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Students discovered that some ancient sources challenge the commonly accepted narrative and suggest that Medea may not have been responsible for the death of her children. This revelation immediately encouraged students to question the reliability of sources and the construction of historical narratives. Discussions also explored contemporary issues such as: justice, responsibility, prejudice, gender roles, family violence, or social exclusion.

Learning Through Theatre

Before preparing the trial, students participated in theatre activities designed to strengthen:

- listening skills;
- emotional expression;
- confidence in public speaking;
- argumentation.

Through role-playing and debate exercises, they learned how to defend a position, respond to counterarguments and support their claims with evidence.

Discovering the Justice System

The most distinctive feature of the Dour pilot was the direct connection with the real judicial system. Students spent a full day at the Criminal Court of Mons, where they observed actual court hearings and discovered the roles of judges, lawyers, prosecutors and court clerks. Later, a lawyer introduced them to key legal concepts such as:

- criminal responsibility;
- premeditation;
- mitigating circumstances;
- aggravating circumstances;
- criminal liability.





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This experience enabled students to approach Medea's case not only from a moral perspective, but also from a legal one.

A Trial in a Real Courtroom

The final performance took place in an actual courtroom. Wearing lawyers' robes and following judicial procedures, students organised themselves into prosecution, defence and judges. They presented their arguments, examined the evidence and delivered their verdict.

Final Verdict & Key Takeaway

The students concluded that Medea was: **Guilty, but with mitigating circumstances.** This verdict reflected the complexity of their discussions and their growing understanding of how justice systems evaluate both actions and context. Connecting literary works to real institutions helps students understand how democratic societies examine responsibility, evidence and justice.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE BELGIAN PILOTS

Although very different in form, both Belgian experiences produced similar outcomes. Students demonstrated increased confidence in expressing their opinions, greater openness to multiple perspectives and a stronger ability to support their arguments with evidence.

Most importantly, both projects showed that there is no single way to implement Medea Sum. Whether through theatrical imagination or direct engagement with legal institutions, the methodology successfully transformed an ancient myth into a meaningful learning experience for contemporary young people





FRANCE: FROM INVESTIGATION TO PUBLIC TRIAL

The French pilot, implemented at Albert Vinçon Middle School in Saint-Nazaire, transformed the study of Corneille's *Médée* into a large-scale collaborative investigation. Over several weeks, students gradually moved from literary analysis to role-playing, debate and public performance, following a process inspired by both judicial procedures and investigative inquiry.

Unlike a traditional classroom approach, the project invited students to reopen a case that had supposedly been closed for centuries.



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REOPENING THE CASE

The project began with an unexpected event.

Students received a letter from an elderly judge who confessed that he might have condemned Medea too quickly many years ago. Consumed by doubt, he asked the students to reopen the investigation and answer a simple but challenging question:

"Medea is guilty, but guilty of what?"

This fictional framework immediately transformed students into investigators. Rather than studying a literary text from a distance, they became responsible for gathering evidence, analysing testimonies and preparing a new trial.

BUILDING THE INVESTIGATION

Students worked in small groups and received an investigation file containing:

- the judge's letter;
- documentary evidence;
- extracts from Corneille's play;
- character profiles;
- investigation notebooks.

Each group was assigned a specific character through a random draw and had to analyse the case from that character's perspective.

Among the characters represented were:

- Medea;
- Jason;
- Creusa;
- Aegeus;
- Nerine;
- Corneille himself.





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Students quickly discovered that each witness possessed only part of the truth and that every account contained ambiguities, omissions or contradictions.

The investigation progressively revealed a much more complex picture than the simple opposition between an innocent victim and a guilty criminal.

GIVING VOICE TO THE WITNESSES

As the project progressed, students explored the motivations, interests and responsibilities of the different protagonists. Working from character sheets and documentary resources, they prepared witness statements and developed arguments to defend their assigned character.

The objective was clear: **Defend your character. Anything is allowed except lying.**

This rule encouraged students to distinguish facts from interpretation while developing their skills in argumentation and persuasion. The exercise also fostered empathy by requiring students to understand and represent viewpoints very different from their own.

LEARNING THROUGH CONFRONTATION

One of the most innovative phases of the French pilot was the organisation of a large-scale cross-examination. Students prepared questions for every other character and participated in a series of structured exchanges inspired by judicial hearings.

The format resembled a form of "judicial speed-dating":

- each group questioned another group;
- roles rotated regularly;
- students had limited time to formulate arguments and respond;
- evidence and testimonies could be challenged.

This highly dynamic activity encouraged active listening, rapid reasoning and collaborative problem-solving.





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The intensity of the debates also provided valuable opportunities to discuss respect, disagreement and constructive dialogue.

Students learned that challenging an argument does not mean attacking a person, an essential skill for democratic participation.

FROM CLASSROOM TO COURTROOM

The project culminated in two public performances.

For the first performance, students transformed the classroom into a courtroom and staged the trial using masks representing the different characters. Representatives from each character group formed a panel of judges responsible for guiding the proceedings and moderating the debate.

The second performance took place during the project's multiplier event and brought together teachers, educators, youth workers and students from the school's theatre programme.

Audience members were welcomed by excerpts from Marc-Antoine Charpentier's opera *Médée* before being invited to participate as members of the jury.

Rather than remaining passive spectators, they were encouraged to evaluate the arguments, ask questions and contribute to the final discussion.

BEYOND LITERATURE & KEY TAKEAWAY

Throughout the project, students developed a wide range of skills:

- critical reading and textual analysis;
- public speaking and oral communication;
- argumentation and debate;
- teamwork and collaboration;
- empathy and perspective-taking;
- critical thinking and decision-making.





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Most importantly, they discovered that literary works can become spaces for inquiry, discussion and civic engagement.

By the end of the process, the question was no longer simply whether Medea was guilty or innocent.

The real challenge had become understanding how responsibility is shared, how narratives are constructed, and why different interpretations can coexist.

Transforming a literary work into an investigation encourages students to become active participants in the learning process. By questioning evidence, confronting viewpoints and defending arguments, they develop the critical thinking and democratic skills needed to engage with complex issues both inside and outside the classroom.





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Extending Medea Sum to Primary Education

Exploring Mythology and Ethical Reflection with 8–9-Year-Old Pupils

WHY TEACH GREEK MYTHOLOGY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

In France, Greek mythology has long been part of children's literary culture and is widely used in primary education. National curricula encourage pupils to encounter major founding narratives, develop their understanding of cultural heritage, and engage with literary texts that raise universal human questions. Collections such as *Le Feuilleton d'Hermès* by Murielle Szac are regularly used in French primary schools to introduce pupils to Greek myths through age-appropriate storytelling. These narratives help children develop reading comprehension, vocabulary, historical awareness, and critical thinking skills.

Although Greek myths often contain episodes of violence, betrayal, jealousy or revenge, they are not taught as models of behaviour. Instead, they provide opportunities to discuss complex emotions, moral dilemmas, responsibility, justice, friendship and family relationships. With appropriate guidance from teachers, pupils learn to distinguish between understanding a character's motivations and approving of their actions. The Medea Sum project demonstrated that even a particularly challenging myth such as Medea can be explored with younger learners when approached through discussion, questioning and creative expression. Rather than focusing on violence itself, the activities encouraged pupils to reflect on ethical choices, consequences, empathy and justice.



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A PRIMARY SCHOOL EXPERIMENT IN TRIGNAC (FRANCE)

As an extension of the Medea Sum project, a Year 3 class (CE2, pupils aged 8–9) from Léo Lagrange Primary School in Trignac explored the myth of Medea after spending the school year discovering Greek mythology through *Le Feuilleton d'Hermès*.

The project unfolded in several stages:

- Pupils first revisited the key episodes of Medea's story and collectively reconstructed the narrative.
- They then took part in an ethical discussion inspired by the project's methodology.
- Finally, they created and performed a theatrical adaptation of the myth, focusing on the perspectives and motivations of the main characters.

The ethical discussion revealed the pupils' ability to engage with complex questions. Rather than simply identifying heroes and villains, they explored themes such as manipulation, responsibility, betrayal, revenge, fear and justice. Many pupils questioned the role of the gods in Medea's fate and reflected on whether difficult experiences can explain – but not excuse – harmful actions.

The theatre performance allowed pupils to embody different viewpoints and deepen their understanding of the characters. By speaking through the voices of Medea, Jason, Aétès, the gods and other figures, they developed empathy, oral expression skills and a nuanced understanding of the story.

The project concluded with a public performance presented to another Year 3 class, creating an opportunity for peer learning and discussion around mythology, ethics and citizenship.





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KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Discovering Greek mythology as part of European cultural heritage.
- Developing ethical reasoning and critical thinking.
- Learning to debate respectfully and listen to different perspectives.
- Strengthening oral expression through theatre.
- Understanding that complex situations rarely have simple answers.
- Exploring emotions, responsibility and consequences through literature.

WHAT THE PUPILS DISCUSSED

- Why did Hermes cover his eyes and ears when he foresaw Medea killing her children?
- Why did Medea choose revenge against innocent people instead of Jason?
- Can someone who has suffered violence become violent themselves?
- Does love excuse harmful actions?
- Can we understand Medea without agreeing with what she did?





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LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

The pilot activities carried out in France, Belgium and Italy demonstrated that the Medea Sum methodology can be successfully adapted to different educational contexts while producing similar learning outcomes. Despite variations in format and implementation, several common success factors emerged that may help teachers, educators and cultural practitioners replicate the experience.

START WITH QUESTIONS, NOT ANSWERS

One of the most effective aspects of the project was its inquiry-based approach. Rather than presenting Medea as either guilty or innocent, students were invited to investigate the case themselves.

This encouraged curiosity, critical thinking and intellectual engagement from the very beginning.

Recommendation: Resist the temptation to provide definitive interpretations. Allow students to explore uncertainty and build their own conclusions.



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GIVE STUDENTS MEANINGFUL ROLES

Across all pilots, students became investigators, witnesses, lawyers, judges, journalists or performers. This active participation transformed them from passive learners into protagonists of the learning process.

Recommendation: Ensure that every participant has a meaningful role, including students who may be less comfortable with public speaking. Research, writing, design and organisational tasks are equally valuable.

USE ROLE-PLAY TO DEVELOP EMPATHY

By defending the viewpoints of different characters, students learned to understand motivations and circumstances that differed from their own perspectives. This process helped them move beyond simplistic judgements and recognise the complexity of human actions and decisions.

Recommendation: Encourage students to defend positions they do not necessarily agree with. Some of the richest discussions emerge from this exercise.

CONNECT ANCIENT MYTHS TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Students engaged most deeply when they recognised links between Medea's story and current social questions.

Topics frequently explored during the pilots included:

- justice and responsibility;
- gender equality;
- migration and exclusion;
- power and authority;
- misinformation and competing narratives;
- violence and revenge.





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Recommendation: Use the myth as a starting point for discussion rather than an end point. Encourage students to identify contemporary parallels while maintaining critical distance.

MAKE LEARNING VISIBLE THROUGH A FINAL PRODUCTION

Whether through a theatrical performance, a public trial, a television-style debate or a courtroom simulation, the final production gave meaning to the entire process.

The prospect of presenting their work to an audience significantly increased student motivation and engagement.

Recommendation: Plan a public presentation whenever possible. Even a small audience of peers, teachers or parents can create a strong sense of purpose.

CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR DEBATE

The project demonstrated that disagreement can become a powerful learning tool when managed respectfully.

Students learned to challenge arguments rather than individuals, support their claims with evidence and listen to opposing viewpoints.

Recommendation: Establish clear discussion rules from the beginning and regularly remind participants of the distinction between role-play and personal opinions.

ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION

The most successful activities were those that required students to work collectively to analyse evidence, prepare arguments and build performances.





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Collaboration helped students develop communication skills while exposing them to diverse perspectives.

Recommendation: Alternate between individual reflection, small-group work and collective decision-making throughout the project.

ADAPT THE METHODOLOGY TO YOUR CONTEXT

One of the main strengths of Medea Sum is its flexibility. The project was successfully implemented through a television talk show in Italy, a trial in the Underworld in Belgium, a real courtroom experience in Belgium, and an investigative trial process in France.

Each version remained faithful to the project's objectives while responding to local needs and opportunities.

Recommendation: Adapt the format, resources and activities to your educational environment rather than attempting to replicate a model exactly.

WHY IT WORKS

Across all three countries, the project consistently produced high levels of engagement, participation and reflection because it combines several powerful educational approaches:

- inquiry-based learning
- collaborative problem-solving
- role-play and creativity
- public speaking and debate
- cultural heritage education
- citizenship and democratic participation

By transforming an ancient myth into a contemporary investigation, Medea Sum enables young people to develop critical thinking, communication skills, empathy and active citizenship while discovering a shared European cultural heritage.



