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Hospitality in the Classroom: Speaking of Homosexuality

According to the ancient practice of hospitality, one is obligated to receive strangers as guests and offer them what they need even before asking their identity. As teachers, we are obligated to welcome with respect the students who are our guests. For some of us, some of the time, this includes dealing with both ancient and modern issues of homosexuality.

Our ideas separate us. Our stories bring us together. In the field of classics we are fortunate in the texts we teach. When a student snickers about the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, when Aristotle defines the ideal form of friendship, when genders are repeatedly bent in the *Bacchae*, when we consider the close of Vergil's *Aeneid*, we have appropriate opportunity to talk about the social codes of ancient homosexuality. It takes some practice to do this in a calm way that invites confidence.

In my presentation I will tell stories from experiences in the classroom and academy in which homosexuality—ancient or mo—was at issue. From both students and other faculty I have observed appropriate ways to share information, defuse anxiety, and demonstrate hospitality. I have found also that I must continually check my own assumptions, prejudices, and habits as I seek to treat everyone around me with respect.

Without engaging in argument, we in the academy can devise ways to plow around the mean stumps of hurtfulness with the continuing hope that the stumps will eventually turn into humus. The ancient Athenians understood that free speech in public assemblies was crucial to full humanity and also to the success of cities. The ability to speak calmly about homosexuality promotes the well-being of all individuals in our classrooms as well as the social context in which we teach them.