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TEACHING LITERATURE BOOK AWARD 2015 COMMENDATION

Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Fiona McHardy, eds. *From Abortion to Pederasty: Addressing Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2014.

Great works of literature explore the complexities of cultures past and present, raising important issues that speak directly to readers—personal agency and responsibility and the complexities of friendship and marriage. Many of our most enduring works also present violent episodes and unfamiliar practices that in their brutality or alien values can unsettle students. This unsettling potential in literature creates challenges for teaching.

Focusing on the classical world, the winner of the inaugural 2015 Teaching Literature Book Award demonstrates the clear benefits of grappling with the disturbing content of so many ancient texts. The book prepares instructors to teach a range of topics related to ancient Greece and Rome, providing advice on how to deal with topics students can find troubling—topics such as rape, death, disability, and homosexuality in classical times.

Authored by distinguished scholars from around the globe, the edited collection *From Abortion to Pederasty: Addressing Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom* presents a range of strategies that teachers might use when raising difficult subjects. How might instructors prepare to teach a class on representations of death and dying, when some of their students may have recently lost a loved one? What are some strategies for teaching Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a work with repeated scenes of sexual and emotional violence? Teachers sometimes avoid teaching topics because of their potentially unsettling nature, but these are precisely the areas where students need the most help in order to come to terms with disturbing subject matter in a rigorous yet supportive context.

The authors consistently present insightful advice on working with specific students who find the topics discomfiting—how to ready them for class discussion, or if they cannot handle the material, how to opt out. Writing in clear, jargon-free prose, the contributors expertly combine up-to-date Classics research with pedagogical practice, providing advice related not only to the classroom, but also to university infrastructure, helping students navigate between their coursework and their day-to-day lives.

The authors demonstrate an exemplary command of subject matter alongside admirable openness about their own classroom experiences, describing successful strategies as well as lingering questions and uncertainties. The essays present strategies that will help teachers of literature as well as other subjects rethink their approaches to a wide range of topics and texts. The volume also discusses a broad range of institutions—spanning the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa—so that instructors should be able to find one similar to their own.

Addressing Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom is a timely and welcome book that college-level instructors in any area of literary studies and in a wide range of other fields will find relevant to their work with students at all levels.

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The 2015 Teaching Literature Book Award is a nationally juried award presented biennially by the faculty in the M.A. and Ph.D. programs in English and the teaching of English at Idaho State University. The 2015 external reviewers were: Tanya Agathocleous, associate professor of English, Hunter College, City University of New York; Jennifer Holberg, professor of English, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and founding coeditor of the journal *Pedagogy*; and Steven Lynn, professor of English and dean of the South Carolina Honors College, University of South Carolina.