



David Hicks: Commentary on Hospitality, Education History, and Classical Architecture

Lesson 5: Reading and Teaching Homer

Outline:

What recommendations do you have for teaching Homer?

- David was in the practice of always re-reading the Iliad or Odyssey with each new class he taught.
- With each chapter book assigned, he effectively applied the Oxford tutorial method in giving his students a question that could be argued in a number of ways.
- The question had to be answered in a concise paragraph rather than essay form so they would fit on the board for an exercise David called the “public execution,” or a class critique.
- Before offering a critique, the first rule of engagement for the class was to comment on what was notable or well-expressed in the argument.
 - First, it accomplished close reading by the students.
 - Second, it taught students writing because it had to be concise, clear, and supported.
 - Third, it equipped students to handle criticism and ideas from one another, not just from the teacher.
 - An exercise in criticism is preparation for life in both accepting and giving it without offense.
- The questions David assigned his students were always in relation to the moral universe because they led into good class discussions where students were engaged emotionally. Examples include:
 - “Can you give me some specific examples where you feel your suffering was a result of ‘the gods,’ or where you made it worse because of how you responded to that hardship?”
 - “How have you responded to an enemy in a way that hurt you?”
- David quips that he would tell his students *they* were coming into work the next day because his work to re-read the book and come up with the question was finished.
- David draws upon the Stoic idea in his concluding thought on moral questions that the point of having enemies is to pull us out of the world and to send us to God.

Can you comment on the reading of Homer by Timothy Patitsas in his book *The Ethics of Beauty*?



- David notes he was still teaching at the time the book *Achilles in Vietnam* was published in which he began looking at Homer in new light.
- It is probably the book that most influenced Timothy Patitsas to reflect deeply on the experience of men who were gravely wounded by the violence of war and doesn't believe he can add anything to what Timothy has said.
- While the violence in *The Iliad* is a turn off for many people, David uses it to instruct his students in human greed and folly, the nature of conflict, and the beauty of friendship.
- In closing, David shares his view that as far as a national curriculum goes, there should be a very short list of books that every school is absolutely required to teach so that strangers in their country can wrestle with texts in common.