The Journal of Classics Teaching (2026), 1–8
doi:10.1017/S2058631026101366

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Research Article

Queering the Classics classroom: a six-week curriculum framework for teaching gender and sexuality through myth

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Abstract

Responding to concerns that weak curricular and institutional authorisation can leave LGBTQIA+ inclusion dependent on individual teacher initiative, this article examines how LGBTQIA+ inclusion can be meaningfully integrated into the Classics classroom through the lens of Global Citizenship Education (GCED). Drawing on ancient texts by Homer, Ovid, and Sappho, alongside modern receptions such as Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, the article proposes a structured six-week curriculum framework for early secondary education (e.g., KS3 Classical Civilisation). The framework is presented as a practical curriculum design that teachers can adapt to different classroom contexts. By bridging classical literature with traditions of classical reception, the module provides a structured pedagogical infrastructure for discussing gender and sexuality. Drawing on a critical-GCED orientation, it uses historically grounded Classical inquiry as a basis for dialogue and applied inquiry on questions of norms, power, identity, cultural difference, and social justice, including opportunities for action-oriented work where appropriate. Weekly objectives, Jigsaw text analysis, and Socratic seminars translate this approach into concrete classroom practice.

Keywords: Inclusive Classics; LGBTQIA+; Global Citizenship Education (GCED); Classical Civilisation; Dialogic Pedagogy

Introduction: reimagining the canon for the modern classroom

The Western literary canon, particularly within the study of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, has historically been interpreted and taught through frameworks that privilege male and implicitly heterosexual perspectives (Parker 2001; Thonemann 2019). Over the past decades, however, classical scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that Greek and Roman societies organised gender, sexuality, and desire through historically specific roles, practices, and norms that do not map neatly onto modern sexual and gender categories (Cantarella 1992; Halperin 1990; Ormand 2018; Williams 2010). In Greek and Roman contexts, distinctions involving status, age, masculinity and femininity, and sexual role could structure how behaviours and persons were made socially legible; the *kinaidos/cinaedus*, for example, cannot be reduced to a modern homosexual identity category (Richlin 1993; Sapsford 2022). Despite these developments within academic research, the teaching of Classics – especially in secondary school contexts – often continues to present Antiquity through simplified narratives that obscure the complexity of ancient constructions of gender and sexuality (Hunt 2016).

This gap between contemporary scholarship and classroom practice has broader implications for educational environments. Research on school climate consistently indicates that LGBTQIA+ students experience higher levels of harassment and exclusion than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, contributing to documented disparities in mental health outcomes (Baams 2018; Görlich et al. 2026; Kosciw et al. 2022; Myers et al. 2020; Rivers and Cowie 2006; Robinson and Espelage 2011; Russell and Fish 2016; Snapp et al. 2015; Stańczykiewicz and Senczyszyn 2024). A national survey further reveals that a substantial proportion of LGBTQIA+ students do not feel safe at school, with many delaying or avoiding reporting bullying due to a perceived lack of effective intervention by school staff (Pizmony-Levy and BeLonG To Youth Services 2019). These findings suggest that curricular representation may play a crucial role in shaping inclusive educational environments and in challenging the cultural assumptions that sustain identity-based prejudice (Kosciw et al. 2022; Leung et al. 2022; Snapp et al. 2015; Tabaac et al. 2023). Within this context, literature and the humanities can serve as powerful pedagogical tools, an approach aligned with the global priorities for inclusive education outlined by UNESCO (2014, 2016, 2019). As scholars of inclusive education have argued, texts function simultaneously as 'windows' and 'mirrors': they allow students to encounter perspectives different from their own while also providing marginalised students with opportunities for recognition and validation (Banks 2009; Blackburn et al. 2009; Blackburn and Schey 2017). For marginalised students, this representation can offer a form of validation, countering what has been termed a 'structure of silence' (Vare and Norton 2004). In the case of Classics, engaging critically with ancient representations of gender, desire, and embodiment can encourage students to question modern assumptions about sexuality and to recognise the historical variability of social norms

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Cite this article: Leone S (2026). Queering the Classics classroom: a six-week curriculum framework for teaching gender and sexuality through myth. *The Journal of Classics Teaching*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631026101366

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(Surtees and Dyer 2020). The very categories through which we understand sexuality and gender today are not universal but are products of specific historical and cultural contexts – a fact that becomes strikingly clear when juxtaposed with the different logics of the Greco-Roman world (Halperin 1990; Holmes 2012).

However, translating these interpretative possibilities into everyday pedagogical practice remains challenging. Studies on teachers' experiences show that discussions of gender and sexuality are frequently perceived as pedagogically sensitive or institutionally risky – particularly in secondary school contexts where clear curricular guidance may be lacking – leading to self-censorship, avoidance of spontaneous questions, and reliance on 'safe' curricular framings that reproduce heteronormativity (Fox and Riley 2026; Zingaretti and Frear 2025).

Consequently, even though classical scholarship offers rich resources for exploring gender diversity in the ancient world, these perspectives often remain absent from classroom teaching.

In response to this gap, this article proposes a structured six-week curriculum framework designed to foreground historically situated representations of gender, desire, and embodiment in Graeco-Roman texts and their reception, while distinguishing these ancient materials from modern LGBTQIA+ identity categories. The framework aims to support teachers in approaching the ancient world as a space for critical reflection on gender and sexuality within familiar Classical practices, while linking that disciplinary inquiry to the wider critical Global Citizenship Education (GCED) concerns of social norms, cultural difference, power, inequality, and citizenship. More broadly, the proposed curriculum is designed to reduce dependence on isolated teacher initiative by providing a more structured disciplinary and pedagogical framework.

Pedagogical framework: critical GCED, legitimacy deficits, and queer pedagogy

Overcoming the 'presbyopic' nature of GCED

The theoretical foundation of this curriculum design rests on GCED. Within international educational discourse, GCED has emerged as a key framework for promoting inclusive and socially responsible learning (UNESCO 2014). In particular, it is closely linked to the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 within the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, which calls for education systems to promote human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity, and global citizenship. In the UK educational context, these ideas are often discussed under the broader label of *global learning*, which emphasises critical engagement with global issues, cultural diversity, and social responsibility in classroom practice.

However, as Tarozzi (2025, p. 49) observes, GCED often risks functioning as a 'presbyopic concept' (author's translation): normatively compelling at the level of policy discourse, yet blurred and under-specified at the point of classroom enactment. In the absence of concrete pedagogical practices, GCED may become what has been described as an 'empty shell' (Leone forthcoming), or be diluted into depoliticised discourses of tolerance that leave existing power relations largely unexamined. To address this risk, the present curriculum adopts a critical GCED perspective (Andreotti 2006; Pashby et al. 2020), which foregrounds the role of education in interrogating power structures, cultural hierarchies, and systemic inequalities, moving beyond what has been termed 'soft' GCED. Within this framework, the Classics classroom is approached not merely as a space for transmitting historical knowledge, but as a site where students can critically examine how cultural norms and social identities are constructed, negotiated, and contested across time. This critical-GCED orientation guides the movement from examining norms and representations in particular texts to cross-case dialogic inquiry and, finally, possible application, keeping questions of power and inequality visible across the sequence.

Navigating 'risk geographies' and legitimacy deficits

Despite the growing prominence of GCED within educational discourse, its implementation in classroom practice remains uneven. One major obstacle concerns teachers' preparedness to address gender and sexual diversity within educational settings. Research consistently shows that educators frequently feel underprepared to engage with LGBTQIA+ issues, particularly in contexts where policy guidance and institutional support are limited (Barozzi and Ruiz Cecilia 2020; Goldstein-Schultz 2022).

From a sociological perspective, this situation should not be interpreted simply as an individual skills deficit. Building on theoretical accounts of symbolic authorisation and recognisability (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Butler 2009), a related empirical study involving seven newly qualified Humanities teachers in northern Italy develops the concepts of a 'legitimacy deficit' – associated with limited curricular authorisation, uneven institutional protection, and the individualised responsibility for LGBTQIA+ inclusion – and 'risk geographies' shaped by school context, leadership culture, parental influence, religious presence, and professional precarity (Leone forthcoming). Although small and context-specific, the study helps clarify the problem addressed by the framework. The lesson sequence itself was developed in 2024; the later study informs how its rationale is articulated here.

Under these conditions, teachers may avoid or cautiously frame curriculum-based work in anticipation of parental disapproval or professional vulnerability (DePalma and Atkinson 2010), a pattern also identified in a systematic review of the literature (Markland et al. 2022). Against this background, the curriculum proposed here offers a practical response to this challenge. By anchoring discussions of gender and sexual diversity within canonical classical texts – such as Homeric epic and Ovidian myth – it places these questions within familiar disciplinary practices, allowing these topics to be explored within the recognised disciplinary boundaries of classical studies.

Queering the Classics curriculum

To support teachers in this endeavour, the framework is informed by Queer Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy. In this context, 'queering' does not simply involve the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ themes in the curriculum. Rather, it functions as a critical orientation that seeks to disrupt normalising assumptions embedded in knowledge production and educational practice (Britzman 1995; Kumashiro 2002).

Drawing on Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity (1990) and recognisability (2009), the curriculum encourages students to analyse how gender norms are historically constructed and culturally contingent. This approach builds on classroom-based research demonstrating the power of engaging with queer-inclusive texts in educational settings (Kenney 2010). Classical texts provide particularly fertile ground for such inquiry. Figures such as Tiresias – whose bodily transformation can be examined in relation to ancient gender categories and through modern gender analysis – and the complex relationship between Achilles and Patroclus – whose exceptional Homeric bond became the subject of erotic interpretation in later ancient reception – invite students to reflect on how ancient narratives and their receptions complicate modern

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assumptions about identity and desire (Fantuzzi 2012; Giusti 2018). Pedagogically, students compare ancient evidence with later reception and modern interpretations, treating categories and ambiguity themselves as questions for inquiry.

In addition, the module draws on Freire's concept of critical consciousness (Freire 2001), encouraging students to recognise how social norms are produced through historical and cultural processes. To support this aim, the curriculum moves away from traditional teacher-centred lecturing and instead employs active pedagogical approaches such as Jigsaw reading, Socratic seminars, and project-based learning. These methodologies provide structured opportunities for students to compare evidence and interpretations collaboratively and to connect close reading with wider questions of norms and power.

Critical inquiry as disciplinary framing

A central challenge for this curriculum concerns the relationship between critical pedagogy and institutional legitimacy. While the framework encourages students to interrogate cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality, such inquiry is carefully positioned within the established aims of classical education.

Rather than introducing external ideological agendas, the module foregrounds core disciplinary practices of classical studies: textual interpretation, reception analysis, and historical contextualisation. Dialogic pedagogies such as Socratic seminars are therefore framed as structured forms of historical inquiry, enabling students to examine how cultural norms – both ancient and modern – shape the interpretation of literary texts.

For example, when students analyse myths such as the story of Tiresias, the objective is not to prescribe contemporary values but to explore how different societies construct meaning through narrative and myth. In doing so, students develop critical literacy, interpretative reasoning, and historical perspective – capacities aligned with Nussbaum's (1997) wider defence of education for critical reflection. Morley (2018) provides a complementary, discipline-specific rationale for this approach: Classics matters not only for understanding the ancient past but also for examining its continuing influence on the cultural, social, and political worlds of the present.

By embedding discussions of gender and sexuality within these established disciplinary practices, the curriculum reframes potentially contentious topics as part of the broader intellectual inquiry that defines the study of the ancient world.

Recent initiatives within the discipline, such as the Classical Association's *Queering the Past(s)* (QTP) project (Queering the Past(s) Team 2025), reflect a growing interest in integrating LGBTQIA+ perspectives into classical teaching, providing modular resources organised around particular themes and sources. Its chapters and Teacher Guides combine contextual information, ancient evidence, reception, inquiry questions, classroom activities, scaffolding, and assessment, and can be used selectively within wider curricula. QTP also encourages teachers and students to question how far modern identity categories can be applied to ancient people. The framework proposed here complements this work at a different curricular scale, as it links Achilles and Patroclus, Tiresias, Sappho and Callisto, cross-case synthesis, and application within a single six-week progression explicitly articulated through critical GCED and queer pedagogy. A teacher might, for example, use QTP's Achilles and Patroclus materials to deepen the source and reception work in Week 2, while using this framework to connect that case to the later texts and the cross-case discussion in Week 5.

The six-week curriculum breakdown

The lesson sequence presented in this article was originally developed as part of the British Council's *Stronger Together* programme, through its *Leadership for Gender Equality* course (2024), which supported social action projects promoting gender equality. The present article expands that sequence as an adaptable six-week framework shaped by the critical-GCED principles and queer-pedagogical perspectives set out under 'Pedagogical framework: critical GCED, legitimacy deficits, and queer pedagogy'. It is not intended as a prescriptive scheme of work: the core version runs for approximately two hours per week over six weeks, although teachers may extend it to six to eight weeks or select individual components depending on available curriculum time and context.

For practical purposes, the module is organised into two interconnected mini-units, each built around a set of interpretative questions:

Unit A (Weeks 1–3): Norms, Desire, and Embodiment in the Ancient World

- Introduction to Diversity and Gender Equity
- Intimacy, desire, and reception: Achilles and Patroclus
- Transformation and embodiment: Tiresias

Unit B (Weeks 4–6): Voice, Power, and Critical Inquiry

- Desire, voice, and power: Sappho and Callisto
- Dialogic Pedagogy and Critical Reflection
- Applied Inquiry and the Gallery Walk

Pupils move from questions of social norms and categories to close reading and reception, then into comparative dialogue and possible application. The progression keeps the critical-GCED focus on norms, power, inequality, and participation visible without displacing the Classical material. Each section below outlines the contextual presentation for the teacher and the proposed active methodologies. A detailed set of lesson plans, including learning objectives, differentiation strategies, and formative assessment approaches for each week of the module, is provided in Appendix A, illustrating how the module can be translated into concrete classroom practice.

Week 1: introduction to diversity and gender equity

- Presentation: Before introducing ancient texts, Week 1 establishes shared vocabulary for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), with a specific focus on LGBTQIA+ identities. Clear ground rules and a choice of ways to participate help teachers manage sensitive discussion. Pupils use public, fictional, and hypothetical examples to explore how categories and social norms shape inclusion, inequality, and participation, providing a starting point for the critical-GCED questions that run through the module, without requiring pupils to discuss their own identities or experiences.
- Methodological Proposal: The lesson may begin with a short gamified activity ('Odd One Out') using images depicting various aspects of diversity to prompt possible classifications and discussion of the assumptions behind the criteria they use. Pupils then use digital tools (such as Padlet or MindMeister) to create student-led mind maps. To support perspective-taking, the class works with fictional, third-person scenarios that challenge stereotypes, analysing them before developing short response

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role-plays focused on possible peer, teacher, or school responses rather than simulating marginalised identities; this is followed by structured peer interviews focused on comparing interpretations and responses to the scenarios. Adaptive teaching is embedded through flexible grouping where appropriate and through alternative response formats (e.g., verbal or visual reflections), with support adapted to identified pupil and task needs.

Week 2: intimacy, desire, and reception: Achilles and Patroclus

- Presentation: This week examines Achilles and Patroclus in Homer, ancient reception, and modern reinterpretation. Pupils explore excerpts from Homer's *Iliad*, Book 18 (trans. Lattimore 2011), focusing on Achilles' grief alongside Madeline Miller's modern reception, *The Song of Achilles* (2011). In Homer, Patroclus has exceptional emotional importance for Achilles, but the relationship is not explicitly defined as sexual (Fantuzzi 2012). Later, ancient reception did include erotic interpretations. Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* survives only in fragments and testimonia, while Phaedrus' speech in Plato's *Symposium* (180a) reports – and disputes – Aeschylus' assignment of lover and beloved roles to Achilles and Patroclus (Leitao 2018); Miller reconfigures this ancient erotic interpretative tradition through a modern framework of gay identity (Delbar 2023), allowing pupils to compare how the relationship changes across text and reception.
- Methodological Proposal: The lesson uses a 'Jigsaw' text analysis strategy. Pupils are divided into 'expert groups' to analyse specific text excerpts, then return to their 'home groups' to teach their peers. To integrate digital literacy, pupils synthesise their findings through a three-part visual or digital comparison of Homer, later ancient reception and Miller's modern reception. Initial engagement is sparked through interactive polling tools (Kahoot! or Mentimeter), ensuring immediate formative assessment. Scaffolding is provided via guided note-taking templates and guiding questions.

Week 3: transformation and embodiment: Tiresias

- Presentation: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 3, trans. Raeburn 2004) provides a lens for examining bodily transformation and gendered embodiment. Tiresias is transformed from male to female and back again within an explicitly male/female conceptual structure, allowing pupils to examine how gendered roles and embodied experience are culturally organised (Giusti 2018). A selected transformation passage from Kae Tempest's opening poem 'Tiresias', in *Hold Your Own* (2014), then provides a concrete modern reception through which pupils can examine what a contemporary writer retains, transforms, or foregrounds in the Tiresias tradition. The comparison creates a basis for considering modern trans, non-binary, and gender-fluid readings while keeping those interpretative vocabularies distinct from Ovid's own terms and categories.
- Methodological Proposal: Following a guided text exploration of Ovid, pupils use a 'Think-Pair-Share' activity to compare the ancient episode with a selected passage from Tempest's 'Tiresias', identifying what the modern reception retains, changes, or makes newly salient. Broader trans, non-binary, and gender-fluid readings can then be introduced as contemporary interpretative possibilities rather than as labels for the ancient Tiresias. The lesson culminates in a pupil-selected three-part synthesis in a visual or digital format, distinguishing Ovid's ancient representation, Tempest's modern literary reception, and broader contemporary interpretation. Where pupils need support accessing the text, teachers can provide text annotations, chunked summaries, vocabulary support, and graphic organisers; EAL pupils may also first make notes or draft a response in their home language before sharing their ideas in English.

Week 4: desire, voice, and power: Sappho and Callisto

- Presentation: To counter the male-dominated narratives of Antiquity, this week juxtaposes two different configurations of female experience, desire and power. Pupils analyse Sappho's Fragment 31 (trans. Carson 2002), in which the poetic speaker expresses intense female-directed desire, alongside Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Book 2 (trans. Raeburn 2004). Sappho offers a female poetic voice whose relationship to modern sexual categories can itself become a question of interpretation (Boehringer 2021; Mueller 2021). In Ovid, Jupiter assumes Diana's appearance to approach Callisto, creating a scene with homoerotic signification shaped by deception, coercion, unequal divine power, and bodily consequences (Boehringer 2021; Oliver 2015). Comparing the two texts allows pupils to explore how desire, voice, appearance, agency, and power interact differently across the two narratives.
- Methodological Proposal: After an interactive review of previous concepts, pupils undertake a close reading of the two texts before creating a thematic map comparing desire, voice, embodied affect, appearance, agency, coercion, and power. The core activity is a structured 'Comparative Debate' in which pupils defend different evidence-based interpretations of the texts. Questions may address how voice affects agency, how Jupiter's use of Diana's appearance shapes the Callisto episode, or how modern sexual categories illuminate or obscure the ancient evidence. Resources, sentence stems, and preparation time scaffold the debate, which culminates in a short evidence-based reflection.

Week 5: dialogic pedagogy and critical reflection

- Presentation: Week 5 brings the previous cases together through dialogic pedagogy. Pupils compare how the earlier lessons approached intimacy and reception, transformation and embodiment, and voice, agency, and power, asking where different interpretations depend on evidence, historical context, and modern assumptions. The discussion makes the critical-GCED emphasis on norms, power, and multiple perspectives explicit through cross-case inquiry into evidence, historical context, reception, and competing interpretations.
- Methodological Proposal: The primary strategy is a *Socratic Seminar* in which pupils form inner and outer circles, switching roles halfway: the inner circle discusses open-ended questions across the cases studied in Weeks 2–4, while the outer circle observes how claims are supported, challenged, or refined through textual evidence, historical context, and reception. At the beginning of the seminar, the teacher frames the activity as an exercise in historical and literary inquiry. Pupils are invited to approach the texts as historically informed readers, analysing how cultural norms and assumptions shape both ancient representations and later interpretations of gender and sexuality. The objective is not to judge whether ancient perspectives were 'right' or 'wrong', but to understand how particular cultural

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frameworks shaped what could be represented, interpreted, and made meaningful. This reinforces the disciplinary framing discussed under 'Critical inquiry as disciplinary framing', by keeping close reading, contextualisation, and reception at the centre of the discussion. Following the Socratic Seminar, pupils participate in a *Philosophical Chairs* activity, built around interpretative propositions about the texts rather than personal identities or beliefs. They may indicate a provisional position physically, on a response card or in writing, justify it through textual or contextual evidence, and revise it where a stronger argument can strengthen, qualify or revise an interpretation.

Week 6: applied inquiry and the gallery walk

- Presentation: Building on Week 5, the final week connects critical reflection with application, an important strand of critical GCED. Pupils choose a creative, analytical, or action-oriented project that applies their learning in a form suited to their classroom and school context.
- Methodological Proposal: Rather than a traditional written exam, the final assessment is project-based. Pupils might produce an analytical presentation or podcast, a reception-based reinterpretation, a visual or creative piece, or, where appropriate, a service-learning initiative or wider-school project. Whatever the format, assessment focuses on historical and source accuracy, interpretation, reception, ethical justification where relevant, audience awareness, communication, planning, and revision. The module concludes with a 'Gallery Walk' where pupils showcase their projects and peers provide constructive feedback using sticky notes or digital forms. A final reflective journal entry asks pupils to consider how their interpretations, use of evidence, and project choices developed across the module.

The three routes below offer different degrees of public engagement. Because 'risk geographies' vary between settings, teachers can determine which routes are appropriate to their school context, taking account of local sensitivity, feasibility, and professional risk, while pupils choose among the available routes.

Option A – Classroom-based creative project:

- illustrated myth retelling
- zine
- short story from a mythological character's perspective

Option B – Analytical or media project:

- digital presentation
- podcast
- myth reinterpretation

Option C – Wider-school/public project:

- awareness campaign
- exhibition
- student panel discussion

Differentiating the curriculum (adaptive teaching)

A common critique of teaching Classical Civilisation is that it relies heavily on dense, continuous prose, which can inadvertently exclude students with lower reading ages or specific learning needs. In alignment with the Teachers' Standards regarding adaptive teaching (Department for Education 2011), the framework is built on the premise that adaptive teaching is about providing equitable access to the same high-level concepts, with support adapted where needed.

The six-week module embeds specific scaffolding strategies to address the realities of a mixed-ability classroom:

- Supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND): Support should be matched to the individual pupil and the demands of the task. Depending on need, teachers might use annotated texts, visual support, chunked instructions, additional processing time, or alternative response formats. These adjustments can make dense texts and multi-step tasks more accessible while keeping the same conceptual questions in view.
- Supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) Learners: Useful strategies include explicit vocabulary, glossaries, annotated texts, visual aids, translation where appropriate, sentence stems, and opportunities to make notes or draft a response in a pupil's home language before reporting in English. Flexible response formats – including mind maps, visual work, or verbal explanation – can also help pupils show what they understand.
- Formative assessment is highly flexible for students with SEND and for EAL pupils: rather than relying solely on written essays, students can demonstrate understanding through digital mind-mapping, comic strips, visual collages, or verbal reflections.
- Engaging and Supporting FSM/PP Students: The framework also keeps equitable access and participation in view for students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and/or attracting Pupil Premium (PP) funding. Clear task structures, accessible in-school resources, and different ways to participate can be used across the module, with additional scaffolding where teachers know an individual pupil needs it. Tasks should not assume that all pupils have the same resources or experiences available outside school.
- Stretching Higher-Attaining Pupils: Adaptive teaching must also provide genuine intellectual stretch. During the Socratic Seminars and Philosophical Chairs debates, high-attaining pupils can compare a wider range of sources, evaluate competing interpretations and reception traditions, and develop more independent and sophisticated arguments.

Assessing student learning

Assessment is used both to see what students understand and to inform the next steps in teaching. Within the context of GCED, alongside recall of historical information, the framework assesses critical thinking, interpretative reasoning, and reasoned engagement with questions of cultural difference.

For this reason, the module incorporates a combination of formative and reflective assessment strategies. Formative strategies such as digital polling tools, exit tickets, and structured classroom discussions allow teachers to monitor students' evolving interpretations of classical texts and their engagement with questions of identity, cultural norms, and historical context, and to identify where further clarification, contextualisation, or challenge may be needed. This reflective work can provide opportunities for the forms of ethical reasoning associated with 'ethical literacy' (Franck and Osbeck 2018). Such approaches align with research emphasising the importance of formative assessment in supporting learning and informing subsequent teaching (Black and Wiliam 1998).

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Reflective writing activities, including short journals or response paragraphs, further support this process by encouraging students to articulate how their interpretations of classical texts and narratives develop over time and what evidence informs those changes. Comparing work from earlier and later in the module can show whether pupils are using evidence more precisely, contextualising material more securely, and distinguishing ancient evidence from later reception or modern readings.

Collaborative activities also serve a formative function. Peer-feedback exercises, such as the Gallery Walk included in the final week, provide opportunities for students to articulate and respond to interpretations and for teachers to observe key disciplinary competencies of classical studies, including textual analysis, argumentation, and historical contextualisation.

Importantly, assessment within this framework does not aim to measure students' personal beliefs about gender or sexuality. Instead, it focuses on disciplinary competencies: accurate use and interpretation of classical sources, historical contextualisation, analysis of reception traditions, comparison of competing interpretations, and construction of evidence-based arguments. Applied work may also be judged on ethical justification, communication, audience awareness, planning, and revision. Reflective writing is assessed for the development of interpretation and reasoning, not for personal attitude change.

Together, these approaches keep assessment aligned with the core aims of classical education – close reading, critical interpretation, and historical inquiry – while helping teachers decide what to revisit or extend. They also support the interpretative and reflective work central to critical GCED. Classroom assessment, however, is not evidence that the curriculum itself is effective; questions about effects on student learning, teacher preparedness, or professional risk would require separate implementation and evaluation research.

Conclusion: from ancient texts to global citizenship

If the aim of GCED is to cultivate learners capable of critically engaging with complex social realities, the Classics classroom offers a particularly valuable space for such inquiry. The historical and cultural distance of ancient myths and literary traditions allows students to explore sensitive questions – such as gender, identity, and social norms – within a mediated framework that encourages reflection rather than immediate moral judgement.

This article has argued that classical texts can play a meaningful role in this process. Authors such as Homer, Ovid, and Sappho provide texts through which students can examine how societies construct and interpret human identities. By engaging with questions of intimacy, desire, and reception through Achilles and Patroclus; transformation and embodiment through Tiresias; and desire, voice, and power through Sappho and Callisto, students are encouraged to recognise that cultural understandings of gender and sexuality have always been historically contingent and open to interpretation.

Importantly, the curriculum framework proposed here does not seek to replace traditional classical content with contemporary social concerns. Rather, it aims to extend the interpretative possibilities already present within the classical canon. Through structured pedagogical strategies – including collaborative text analysis, dialogic discussion, and reflective learning – students engage in the core disciplinary practices of classical studies: close reading, historical contextualisation, and reception analysis.

At the same time, the framework acknowledges the institutional constraints that teachers often encounter when addressing sensitive topics in the classroom. By anchoring discussions of gender and identity within canonical texts and clearly defined learning objectives, the curriculum provides explicit disciplinary and pedagogical framing intended to support educators in exploring complex themes while remaining aligned with established curriculum goals and professional standards.

Ultimately, rethinking how classical literature is taught does not require abandoning the canon, but rather recognising its interpretative richness and pedagogical potential. When supported by structured teaching strategies and reflective assessment practices, the study of the ancient world can foster historical knowledge and provide opportunities for critical interpretation, perspective-taking, and historically contextualised reasoning in culturally diverse societies.

More broadly, this article suggests that inclusive pedagogical approaches need not stand in opposition to disciplinary traditions. Instead, by situating discussions of gender, identity, cultural difference, and power within historically grounded textual and reception analysis, the framework shows how Classics can contribute meaningfully to the wider aims of critical GCED. It creates opportunities for students to engage critically with different perspectives, social norms, and cultural assumptions through interpretation, dialogue, perspective-taking, and ethical reasoning. Future research may examine how the framework is implemented and evaluated across different educational contexts and classical traditions.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S2058631026101366.

Acknowledgements. During the preparation and revision of this work, the author used Google Gemini and OpenAI ChatGPT to assist with translation, copyediting, language refinement, and editorial consistency checking. The author reviewed and edited all outputs and takes full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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Competing interests. The author declares none.

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