

## **Panel Response**

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At this summer's ACL Institute there were four lovely presentations on how artistic and epigraphic evidence can illuminate the lives of and practices for memorializing the dead, most interestingly, those of the non-elite. I am here in my role as a high school teacher, and many of my remarks relate to this material's application in the classroom, especially as someone whose school's motto is knowledge and character. My first comment: please note first that this is a free resource, a fact which makes it as useful for secondary teachers as for college faculty.

Ann Raia's paper put a light on the shared humanity we find in this evidence: it was economic difference, not class, which made the primary distinction in the grandeur of a person's memorial. As such, people were asked to view these monuments for people of all classes. Graves were not exclusively shut off in private areas, nor were they seen as unapproachable or apart from one's daily life. Many were put in high traffic areas, often the best place could afford.

Further, these texts represent "common" facts and sentiments about the deceased, information spurned by our most revered surviving authors—what Anne Leen called "sub-literary" texts. People of all levels made an effort to be memorialized or to memorialize their loved ones, so we have information about a wide spectrum of people. One aspect which should make an immediate connection with us today is the idea of burial associations; they are a bit like our pre-paid funerals.

The point that the tomb decorations were colorful and lively also struck a cord for me. We laugh at ads like the "devoted soccer fan," which features an old woman and her son in mourning clothes. He translates for her as she talks about her husbands devoted nature—then we see the old man in his coffin in shorts, face paint, and holding a soccer ball. It seems that his

devotion was to football, and not, as we had presumed, to family or such concerns.<sup>1</sup> Is, however, this joyful representation closer to the truth for the ancients? The obvious question for a class then emerges: how have attitudes to memorials changed today? We too live in a society where status is in many ways based economic factors, but attitudes to death, funerals, and memorials vary widely even within the U.S. When you open the discussion to include world practices, the picture widens exponentially. All of these aspects can be brought out with students, things which can make them more aware of the world around them as well as the ties among diverse cultures.

I want to borrow Ann Raia's own words as to why this material will work in a high school classroom. Sociologists and demographers use funerary inscriptions to extrapolate statistics. The *Companion* helps them appear as individuals, as does the very nature of what survives for us to view. These pictures of non-elite women invite the reader to look beyond statistics and stereotypes and to envision the human experience.

Judith Sebesta's paper again reminded us that in this material we see all levels of society and different life stages. As such, I am fascinated by the "potential" curse—it may indeed be the parents' political statement, but it will resonate with children and the social/mental battles they face (e.g. the "mean girls" syndrome). We can therefore turn this curse into a quick character lesson by comparing it to modern life, a lesson on gratitude, perhaps, and certainly the fact that you have to look past the surface to see the hidden commentary. Not every lesson has to be grand, after all; the little comments add up in character development as much as the larger lectures.

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<sup>1</sup> I could not remember the item advertized at the time of the Institute, but I later discovered that it was for Hyundai. I still think that it is not a great sign for the ad itself that I could not remember the product but only the joke.

Through this material we can discuss health, history, and mythology. We also can discuss slave treatment, the treatment of women, and even a seemingly “light” topic as the life of actors through that of the mime. The topics of a freedperson’s indebtedness, rape, and sexualization on stage of someone so young are going to push the limits with high school classes, but they *can* be approached with careful wording and a previously developed understanding of/with your students. In fact, these topics can be especially fruitful if we are ready to address similar trends and dangers in the treatment of women in our own society.

Anne Leen and the description of the development of a project by her student, Alex Rice, completed the main papers. I was most struck by Anne’s beautiful statement: “It was quite a useful professional development project in that at this point in my career I both have the time to do this kind of work as class preparation, and I am anxious to branch out and enrich my pedagogy.” As such, her paper ultimately calls to us all to remember that professional development can equate to developing ourselves further as teachers-bravo to that! Both a primary or secondary teacher who continues their education and a college professor who turns to a deepened pedagogical arsenal contribute to that effort.

There are so many ways to incorporate this material into your classroom. As to the Latin itself, you can talk about spelling changes [e.g. *vellit* and *aput* (Raia, ex. 2) and *saevos* (Sebesta, ex. 1)] and specific vocabulary [*vernas* (Sebesta, ex. 1)]. This material also reaches out to students and teachers who look for a little variety in the daily classroom of a first year course, even if you do not make it the basis of your whole course at the upper levels. It is a way to have a unit on Roman nomenclature, to take an extended look at the *cursus honorum*, and to study conventional formulas in epitaphs as well as other abbreviations. The styles of funerary monuments, portraits, and decorative elements provide great potential for visual learners as well

as class projects for all.<sup>2</sup> Even if you do not have time to devote weeks to this sort of project in a class, it can be approached as a group project. Divide the topic areas which need to be addressed, and have the class pool their knowledge in tackling an epitaph. True, these units would force many of us increase our knowledge in the areas of epigraphic and artistic conventions. They also demand a certain nimbleness in our historical knowledge—you will move beyond the end of the Republic and the early Principate here. In sum, this material is a door into social, cultural, and political history as well as epigraphy, art, and mythology, and, as these topics are inherently interesting to our students, it is well worth the effort on our part. A teacher can make any material live or die by their approach; these four papers have shown us how to make dead material live, after all.

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<sup>2</sup> Note the idea of visual biography and its potential with differentiated learning styles.