

Three Little Words: Conversations with High School Students about Gender, LGBTQIA+ Issues, and the Inherent Problems Associated with the Use of "They" as the Singular Pronoun for Non-Binary Individuals in the Second Language Classroom

This paper reflects both the available research and real-time discussions with young language learners about the confusion, confliction, and inherent problems associated with applying the pronoun "they" as a singular form for the non-binary or gender fluid individual, when learning an engendered language.

I am lucky. I am lucky because I teach at an independent school that is embracing change. At the school where I teach, Phoenix Country Day School, a mostly urban independent school in Phoenix, Arizona, we are deep in DEI work. For over six years now, we have been investigating our biases- both personal and professional, evaluating and augmenting our curricula, and implementing changes in order become allies to our students, faculty, and staff. Not only do we want to attract a more diverse clientele, but we want to become a school where everyone feels as if they are seen, heard, understood, respected, and appreciated. Have we made progress? Yes. Are we done? No. Will we ever be done? Probably not. Will we ever stop trying? Never!

In 2019, our administration asked the faculty to look at what we teach, whom we teach, and how we teach. We were then given the specific task to consider this one objective.

- What can we, as a community, do to recognize and promote diversity, equity, and inclusivity with respect to the curricula of our classrooms?

As such, I took the objective a bit further and with a more precise focus.

- What can *I* do to promote diversity, equity, and inclusivity within the Classics classroom?
- What can *I* do to encourage enrollment by students of color, females/women, and individuals of

the LGBTQIA+ community my Classics courses and programs?

- What can *I* do to make my curriculum more accessible to everyone in our community?

Initially, I identified things I was already doing/teaching, which supported all three objectives. Within my high school Latin program, some topic/themes I address with my students include:

- Slavery in the Classical World
- Role of Women in the Classical World
- Gender and the Identification of Gender in the Classical World
- Plebeians and Patricians, Populares and Optimates: Voting Rights and Wealth Inequity in the Classical World
- Spirituality: Is it a Religion or is it a Cult?
- The Spectrum of Ethnicity Across the Classical World
- Cleopatra: A Woman at Odds with Power
- Roman Colonization: The Environmental Impact
- Roman Engineering: The Earliest Acts of Globalization

Ideally, we will approach all of these topics during the panel discussion.

Through my school's data collection, we have determined we have done everything in our power to encourage and enable students of color (BIPOC students) to enroll at our school and to make our curricula accessible. Our current focus is on gender and socio-economic factors. I have chosen to address the inherent problems with assigning and/or creating a grammatically accurate pronoun to use in place of the singular "they" pronoun currently adopted for the

non-binary or gender fluid individual. Through this panel, I hope to be part of a group of instructors, who will explore and make suggestions about the issues that arise when trying to use the singular "they" within the confines of an engendered language.

Selected Bibliography:

Kleinrock, Liz "Start here, Start Now: A Guide to Antibias and Antiracist Work in Your School Community." Heinemann. May 2021.

James, Patricia "The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom: Building Resilience with Compassionate Teaching." Norton and Company. November 2018.

Feldman, Joe "Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms." Corwin. October 2018.