Glenn’s “Classical Rhetoric Conceptualized, or Vocal Men and Muted Women” explore the contributions to what we know as rhetorical practice. Very little of the work of Sappho and Aspasia survived, but this does not mean that they did not contribute to rhetoric. This reading draws attention to what the author describes as the “precodified roots” of rhetorical tradition by drawing a connection between rhetoric and eloquence. If a speaker “manipulates the medium solely and purposefully to ensure that the message has the most favorable reception,” and if the author does this to address an audience, then the author “enjoys the power of eloquence as well as rhetoric” (19). Glenn argues that due to the nature of rhetoric, and its use of language to produce a specific reaction from the audience, the basic principles of rhetoric are easily found in the literature of ancient Greece.

This is not only an important connection between the basic principles of rhetoric and literature of the time, but of the ways in which rhetoric existed before it was practiced and discussed as a theory, or approach, to discourse. If we can view rhetoric as a practice that existed before it was ever discussed as such, then we can include other authors, and speakers in the conversation. Under this view of rhetoric the voice that Sappho sought in her poetry now has a place in our discipline. With Sappho addressing the political turmoil she is a rhetor speaking on issues that impact society much like the men of the day that were allowed to do in courts and in the government. Her use of language to reach her audience, and her use of the “woman’s voice” is an example of the ways in which she sought to reach her audience in a way they would comprehend.

In this respect, Sappho’s work finds a place not only the world of literature and poetry, but as another example of the ways in which basic principles of rhetorical theory, language use and appealing to one’s audience, predate other prominent historical figures in rhetoric. More importantly, expanding this understanding, or definition, of rhetoric allows for more voices to be included.

1. How does Glenn’s idea that rhetoric existed before it was considered a discipline change your definition, or understanding, of rhetoric? Glenn refers to this as rhetoric that existed before “rhetorical theory was codified.”

2. Do you agree or disagree that Sappho’s work reflects an understanding of rhetoric?