Solon’s laws: a model of justice, balance between rich and poor.

Decorated pots: a care for the beauty of objects around them.

The standing Kouroi: the beauty of the human body. Even the gods share our form.
The Symposium—a dialogue

Background:
Plato (428-348 BCE)
Student of Socrates (died 399 BCE)
Culture of Athens in the 5th-4th century BCE

- Skipping ahead to the following era
- Age of Pericles
- Persian War to Peloponnesian War
- Upper class life
Life for the Wealthy in Athens

Private education for young men
Democracy in action
Marriage arrangements
Homosexuality as model of friendship/mentorship—set duration

Erastes
- Older, active

Eromenos
- the boy, passive
Three Forms of Love

**Agape**— love of a spouse or family, or affection for a particular activity [note Christian use]

**Eros**— sexual love

**Philia**— an affection that could denote either brotherhood or generally non-sexual affection
The Symposium as a literary form

As drama— a lived account
As rhetoric— individuals compete with their speeches
As dialectic—the Socratic method of working through a problem.

PROBLEM: What is love and how it is central to the human experience?
The Chinese box character of this dialogue:

Apollodorus tells person X about a previous exchange with Glaucon that occurred several days past when he had shared the story from Aristodemus who attended the party 10 years ago (but had fallen asleep during it anyway!)

Everyone get that?
Imagery

The Path of story telling on the road--Journeys, places gatherings
Skolia—poems at symposiums that zigzag around
Enkomia—formal eulogies of praise
Eros/eros—love, erotic love (God/concept)
Erastes—older pursuing lover
Eromenos—younger, receiving beloved
Paideia—pedagogy, education ➔ literary and cultural accomplishments
Sympotic literature—words around and about the table
Decoding the Stories I

Characters and order of their speeches:

- Phaedrus (1) and Eryximachus (3)
- Agathon (5) and Pausanias (2)
- Aristophanes (4)
- Socrates (6)
- Alcibiades (7)

Each speech has two levels: the surface story in mythic narrative and the internal meaning.
Decoding the stories II

As each character offers his speech in honor of love, we explore the essential nature of love and relationships, an account of what matters—through the lens of concrete individuals, each of whom defines love from the perspective of his own interests.

How might you see “beauty” factoring into the discussion topic?
The story begins...

Describe the opening scene:
Who is throwing the party and why?
What is Socrates doing?
When the guests all arrive what do they decide to do (or not do!) and why?
Love is the oldest of Gods
The power of love to bond people together in insurmountable ways
We become good, better people, because we want to be worthy of those we love
His examples of lovers include?
Phaedrus’ pairs

Love is the oldest of gods and inspires us to be better people so as to live up to the expectations of our lover.

Alcestis and Admetus
Orpheus and Eurydice
Achilles and Patroclus

Love and virtue go together.

Would you rather love or be loved?
Two kinds of love: heavenly and earthly
The better kind of love- heavenly love, dedicated to the improvement of the beloved.
Outlining the proper lover-beloved relationship: scripting relationships

Do we have scripts for “proper love?”
Interlude

Aristophanes has the hiccups—why?
Eryximachus offers medical advice and offers to go before him.
Eryximachus’ speech

The doctor Eryximachus offers his view on love

The scientific view of love:

- Love as the organizing principle of life: balance and repletion
- Love in medicine, music, seasons, religion
- Note how “love” is moving beyond the interpersonal experience towards a more abstracted notion
- Love is in every aspect of human affairs, governing and balancing

How do scientists describe love?
Aristophanes’ speech

Before we can understand love, we have to understand humans

Three kinds of humans:

- male-male, sons of Helios
- female-female, daughters of Mother Earth
- male-female (androgyne), children of the moon
The Origins of Love

https://youtu.be/_zU3U7E1Odc
What does Zeus decide to do to humankind and why?

The result: distraught and unhappy, incomplete beings

The solution?

The consequence: longing for and looking for our “missing half”
Aristophanes’ conclusion

Aristophanes concludes that Love represents the completion of a whole. We are only partial beings without our special partner.

Do you believe in soul mates?
Agathon is the celebrated poet; the party is in his house and in his honor.

Love is the youngest of the gods
--the most beautiful in looks and demeanor
--delicate, supple, flowery
--character of moral excellence: just, temperate, brave and wise
--love makes us poets

Read his culminating summary, 197 d-e
A Kouros
Socrates expresses dismay that the speeches are not about truth but simply glossy showcases. He questions Agathon about his description of love on a number of points.
What is wrong with Agathon’s claims?

Love is love of something not obtained, a yearning. Love seeks the beautiful and the good, therefore must not already have those!

Agathon is deflated. Does that mean love must be ugly and lacking in goodness if it desires it?
Socrates account of Love

Socrates as a student of Diotima:
Between wisdom and ignorance, lies --?
Between beauty and ugliness lies --?
Love as a spirit, neither god nor human. Daimons bind the universe together...
Part I--The story of Love

Love is the child of Wherewithal (handsome young man) and Want (needy young woman)

By nature neither mortal nor god

Love is between wanting and having

Those who seek wisdom are like Love, between knowing and ignorance... the Philosopher
The universal desire among humans
Our limited concept of “love” is analogous to our concept of ‘art’ We think that “art” means pictures whereas it can really include any creative work just as we think “love” refers only to how we feel about a person
How does Diotima expand “love” beyond the sexual? ---Love of business, money, sports, etc. “Love is the desire for permanent possession of the good..” (206b)
Part III- What is love’s aim and what does it accomplish?

Love and beauty, desire to create, to be god-like

Love is our yearning for immortality, preservation, bodily/animal urges to pro-create. Yearning to learn, to “replenish” what has disappeared.
Evidence for love as yearning for preservation

1. Parents caring for their young; their ambitions for their children
2. Pursuit of honor, glory, fame— the hero

Potency in physical creation, fame, art, wisdom...
Ascent of Love

Beautiful body - the lover
Beautiful soul, person
Giving birth to virtuous ideas
Appreciation for human beauty
Beauty of laws, cultures, customs
Beauty of the branches of knowledge
Beauty of knowledge itself
Ascent upward leads to...

The Form of beauty itself: eternal, infinite, whole, independent

The metaphor of a ladder: 211b-212a

What might this search for beauty/love possibly be?
Alcibiades enters

The flirtation with Agathon... and Socrates

His speech in praise of Socrates

- How does he upend the tradition of lover/beloved?
- What attracts Alcibiades about Socrates?
- What stories of Socrates does Alcibiades share?
- What image of Socrates do we receive?
What do we learn about Socrates at the very end of the dialogue?

How does love, beauty, wisdom convene into a sense of universal human search for Truth?

How does Philosophy ultimately represent our search for understanding, beauty and consolation in our lives?

What does this dialogue reveal about the nature of the Athenians?