**Chapter Two Overview Video Transcript**

Chapter 2, The Origins and Early History of Rhetoric, considers the sophists as early teachers, practitioners, and theorists of rhetoric. There's 2 key insights that I'd like to highlight concerning chapter 2.

First, the chapter locates rhetoric's origins in ancient Greece. Think about why that might be. If we know that rhetoric as the art of persuasion, as symbolic influence is practiced by pretty much all humans whenever they get together. Why do we locate rhetoric's origins in ancient Greece and not anywhere else?

Now, scholars certainly debate locating rhetoric's origins in ancient Greece, and that debate can make for rich classroom conversations, to be sure. But we suggest the origins of rhetoric should be located in ancient Greece for a couple reasons. Some of them are practical. So the Greeks wrote things down. They have written records, and archaeologists and historians have found those written records. The Greeks were also some of the first to experiment with democracy and, like I said, write down their experiences experimenting with democratic self-governance.

So right there, there's some, I think, helpful instruction on the relationship between rhetoric and democratic self-governance. In conventional, authoritarian, top-down hierarchical governing systems, rhetoric is not that important as long as you can control your population through coercion, violence, or the threat of violence. But when people can represent their interests in a polity, rhetoric becomes that much more important.

And then finally, we locate rhetoric in ancient Greece, because the Greeks were some of the first, not just to practice rhetoric, because again, whenever humans get together, rhetoric gets practice, but the Greeks were some of the first to theorize rhetoric. So not just practice it, but theorize rhetoric. And what I mean by that is the Greeks, especially the sophists, I'll talk about shortly, were some of the first to try to extract generalizable principles from the practice of rhetoric that they could then teach across different contexts.

To illustrate what I mean by that, let me then pivot to the second most important thing from chapter 2, and that's the specific study of the sophists and the impact that the sophists from ancient Greece still have on your education today. Now, the chapter concedes, and it's important that there were some differences amongst the different sophists. At the same time, some of those similarities, like I said, are still with us today.

So who are the sophists? Generally speaking, and the chapter gets into more detail on this, but the Sophists were traveling speech teachers in ancient Greece that came from elsewhere. They weren't Hellenistic. They were perceived to be foreigners or outsiders that traveled around ancient Greece, and promised to teach people how to speak more eloquently, make more persuasive arguments, and therefore, as we discussed in chapter one, empower themselves.

Now, they had a lot of enemies. They had a lot of critics in ancient Greece. And we'll get into more of that when we get into chapter 3. And in their historical moment, the sophists were actually kind of plagued by a nefarious reputation. They weren't, at least some of them, they weren't thought of very highly. And again, there are important differences amongst some of the sophists. But let's just say that sophists definitely had some enemies. They definitely had their critics.

And yet, if you think about what has happened after the sophists introduced their approach to not just teaching rhetoric, but theorizing rhetoric, their legacy is still with us today. And you'll notice that, most importantly, in the section in chapter 2 that talks about truth via persuasion. We introduced this a little bit in chapter one, but there's an idea that truth is objective, static, and knowable, truth with a capital T. The sophists come along and they say, well, truth is actually more relative. It's more subjective, and it can be argued over.

And so, if you think about some of the ways that education understands truth today, some of the ways that we teach truth and knowledge acquisition in higher education today, we are very much kind of ancestors of this sophistic approach to truth, or at least the social construction of truth, as it's kind of woven throughout comprehensive liberal arts education.

Now, more on that will come in chapter 3, because at the end of chapter 2, we then transition to Plato's specific response to the sophists. So look forward to discussing that in Chapter 3.