

School Philosophy Certificate Short Course

Course aims

1. To provide a short introduction to central ideas in philosophy and a brief overview of some influential philosophers
2. To explore some debated questions in philosophy
3. To encourage students to engage in discussion and debate as a way of learning how to think philosophically
4. To provide students with an opportunity to respond to the material they have learned with a personal philosophical project
5. To provide students with an opportunity to present their work to their class in an appropriate format (a display of their research, a video, a podcast or an oral presentation)

Approach to teaching

Students are expected to learn through inquiry, through participation in group discussion, through independent research, as well as through direct instruction, especially when it comes to foundational elements of the subject. In general terms, the pedagogical model follows that of the *Trivium 21st C* model described by Martin Robinson:

Grammar – learning the foundational elements of philosophy; key terms, central ideas, elements of the history of philosophy and the context within which philosophical investigation takes place.

Dialectic – learning to engage in philosophical argument; learning to join a conversation about significant ideas; learning to interpret the ideas of others, both ideas from the canonical texts, and ideas shared by fellow students; learning to identify and clarify the logical structure of an argument; looking for counter-arguments.

Rhetoric - learning to put forward ideas, both in response to material studied, and as an attempt to begin developing a personal philosophical outlook; learning to engage in academic conversation; learning to use the elements of logos, ethos and pathos in the persuasive presentation of one's own ideas; learning as well to reflect on one's own philosophical development.

Whilst these elements are each present throughout the course, they also serve to provide a model for progress in learning. The first phase of the course, ***philosophical foundations***, is chiefly concerned with the exploration of the grammar of philosophy. The second phase, ***philosophical debates***, develops students' dialectical skills, as well as furthering their knowledge of the grammar of philosophy. Finally, through their ***personal philosophy project*** and ***concluding presentation***, students further develop their knowledge, engage in argument and have an opportunity to add their own voice to the philosophical conversation.

Philosophical Foundations

Allow up to 6 lessons for this part of the course, or time for private study

1. Learning by questioning

This lesson introduces Socrates, and the Socratic method. Students are given direct instruction about how to carry out a philosophical inquiry in the classroom. 3 Socratic dialogues are presented; they are invited to choose 1 to continue for themselves. One member of the group should record the flow of the discussion. The lesson ends with the introduction of the philosophy journal and a chance for them to make an initial entry.

2. Philosophy in an Ideal Form

This lesson introduces Platonic idea of the Ideal Forms. Is the world which we experience around us real, or is reality something beyond it? After an introduction to Plato, and discussion of his cave allegory, the issue of reality is explored by reference to mathematics. Are numbers real, or are they something we create?

3. Back down to earth

A contrast is made between Plato and Aristotle and this is used to provide a brief introduction to the debate between rationalism and empiricism. The lesson includes a discussion of the question: 'Is the universe eternal?' and 'What makes an object the same object at different times?'

4. The rise of science

This lesson gives a brief overview of the shift in understanding of knowledge from the Scholasticism of the medieval era to the scientific outlook of the modern world. This sets the stage for an understanding of the debate in the early modern period about the foundations of knowledge.

5. The foundations of knowledge

This lesson provides a brief introduction to Descartes and the method of doubt. Discussion includes: can we know anything for certain? If knowledge is possible, what is it based on?

6. Reason and experience

Hume's proposal that all knowledge and ideas derive from experience is explained and explored. Do we have any knowledge of things outside our own experience? What about things that lie outside our experience, like the future? Can we ever have knowledge of such things?

Philosophical Debates

Allow 6 – 8 lessons for this part of the course, or time for private study

The philosophical debates provide an opportunity for students to engage dialectically with specific controversies within philosophy. It is not anticipated that all of these will be taught; the class, in conjunction with the teacher, can choose from the list below. Alternatively, some of these could be run as whole class discussions, with a few lessons given over to allowing students to research and discuss these in small groups, perhaps presenting the outcome of their inquiry to the rest of the class.

Choose 6 - 8 from:

- Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?
- What is truth?
- Is there a God?
- Is there life after death?
- Is the mind the same as the brain?
- Do animals think?
- Is the world made by language?
- Is it ever OK to cheat?
- Is it ever OK to lie?
- Should we experiment on animals?
- Is it more important to be good than to be happy?
- Do we have free will?
- Do we need governments?
- What is the point of school?
- Is my blue the same as your blue?
- Can machines think?
- Does the mind control the body?
- What is time?
- What makes me me?
- Does everything happen for a reason?
- What is the difference between right and wrong?
- Is gender fixed or chosen?

- What is fairness?
- Does the earth have rights?
- What is art?

Personal Philosophy Project

The estimated time for exploration of ideas, research, development and production of the project is of the order of 20 hours.

The choice philosophy project is largely up to the student, with the following pointers to be borne in mind:

1. The project is an inquiry into a philosophical topic or problem, and should be organized around a central philosophical question.
2. The project should contain the following elements:
 - a. An introduction in which the question is explained, key terms are defined and the reasons for choosing the project are outlined. (approx. 200 words)
 - b. Research (typically using 8 – 12 sources), with a bibliography and in-text citations (approx. 600 words)
 - c. Discussion of arguments for and against (approx. 800 words)
 - d. A conclusion in which the students' own point of view is summarized. (approx. 100 words)
3. The project does not need to be a written report. Presentations, podcasts, videos, posters can form the outcome.
4. Group projects are allowed (3 max) but this needs agreement with the teacher and each student should have a clearly defined role in the group. Students should colour code their written work to show which student was responsible for which section.
5. If the project is in the form of a presentation, students will be asked to show this to their class.
6. Creative projects should be supported by evidence of planning, research and a record of development explaining the decisions that were taken (e.g. about presentation content and style).

Marking Criteria

Grade 7 – 9	An impressively managed project, showing commitment and dedication throughout, with a clearly focused aim and careful thought about the choice of question. Sources are explained carefully (not simply summarized) and are relevant. Sources are carefully and fully referenced and the bibliography is complete. The student shows care in their choice of sources and uses a good range (10 – 12; not simply easy to access websites but sources with good academic content). They explain the background to the question and summarize arguments for and against in a clear, logical manner. They state a clear conclusion which can be defended using the evidence provided. If a creative project has been done, there is good explanation of the creative decision making process.
Grades 4 – 6	Project management is reasonable, with some degree of commitment shown. There is a reasonably clear aim and some thought goes into the choice of question. There is some explanation of source material and source material is largely relevant. There is a reasonable range of sources (7 – 9) and some of these have some reasonable academic content. The project includes some background and presentation of arguments for and against. There is a reasonably clear conclusion. If a creative project has been done, there is reasonable explanation of the creative decision making process.
Grades 1 – 3	There is some evidence of project management and a limited degree of commitment is shown. An aim for the project is discernible and a question is chosen. Most of the material is collected from sources rather than explained and some of it is not relevant to the chosen question. The source range is modest (3 – 6 sources) and the sources tend to be easy to access website with only limited academic content. There is some presentation of arguments and a conclusion is given. If a creative project has been done, there is limited explanation of the creative decision making process.

Sources

- [1] **Trivium 21st Century**, by Martin Robinson <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Trivium-21c-Preparing-people-lessons/dp/178135054X>
- [2] **Philosophy**. Edited by David Papineau <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Philosophy-Professor-David-Papineau/dp/0195368851>
- [3] **Philosophy: The Basics** by Nigel Warburton <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Philosophy-Basics-Nigel-Warburton/dp/0415693160>
- [4] **Philosophy: The Classics** by Nigel Warburton <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Philosophy-Classics-Nigel-Warburton/dp/0415356296>
- [5] **What does it all mean?** By Thomas Nagel <https://www.amazon.co.uk/What-Does-All-Mean-Introduction/dp/0195174372>

Web Sources

Early Modern Texts

<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/>

Crash Course Philosophy

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8dPuuaLjXtNgK6MZucdYldNkMybYIHKR>

John Taylor's Youtube Philosophy Short Course

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJ__so98WtdU-cMgMQ6C0bJqWPx47AoL4