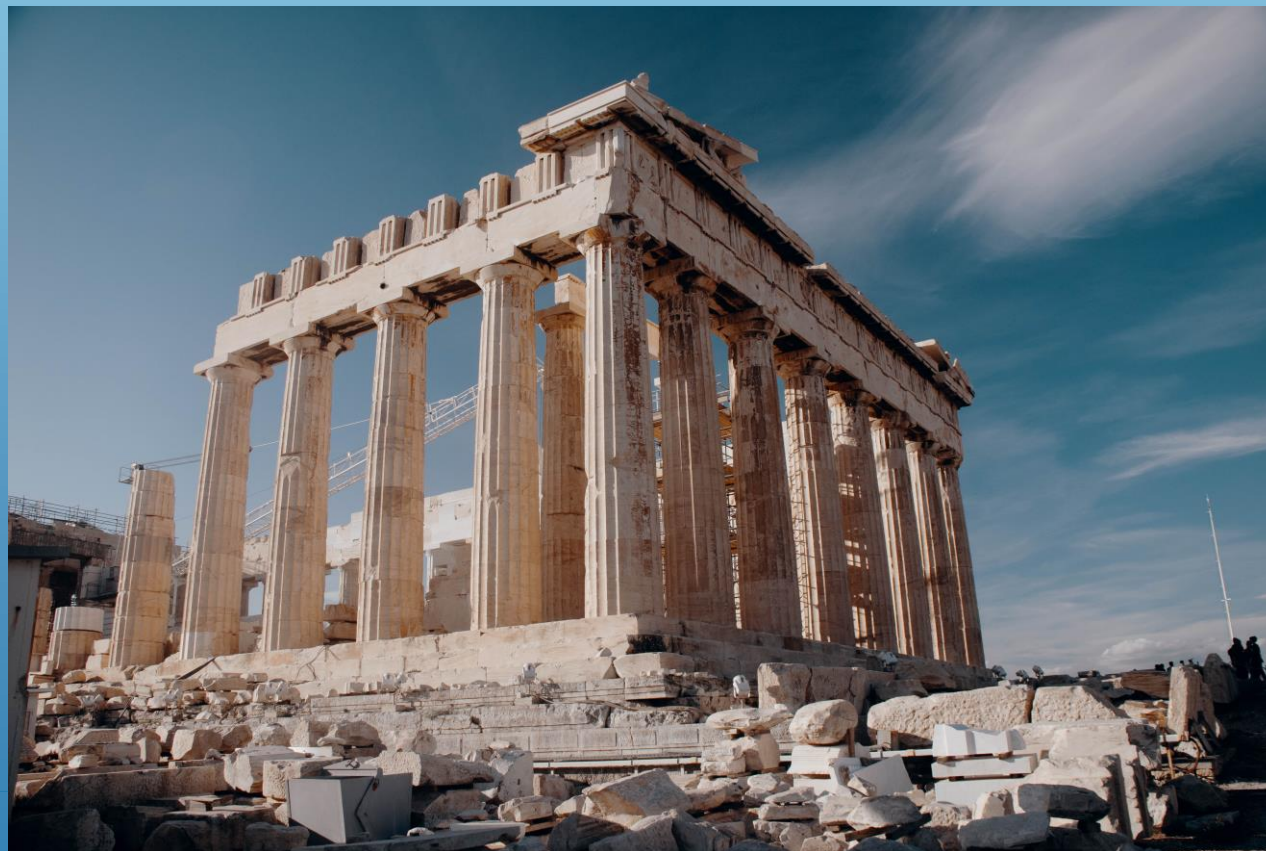


Marcia Roberts Gregorio, MA, MFA  
Retired Gifted Support/English/French Teacher

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# Philosophy:

## The Perfect Subject for Gifted Minds



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# A strong caution from the American Philosophical Association:

“It is essential to have training in philosophy. While this may seem obvious, teachers are often ill-prepared to handle the subtleties of teaching philosophy, and run into problems when trying to teach philosophy as an extension of a class in another discipline. If you don't have at least an undergraduate minor in philosophy, consider very carefully whether you have an adequate understanding of philosophy and what is involved in teaching it. It is as serious and difficult a subject as mathematics, physics, or history. Imagine teaching one of these subjects without any appropriate formal training.”



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However . . .

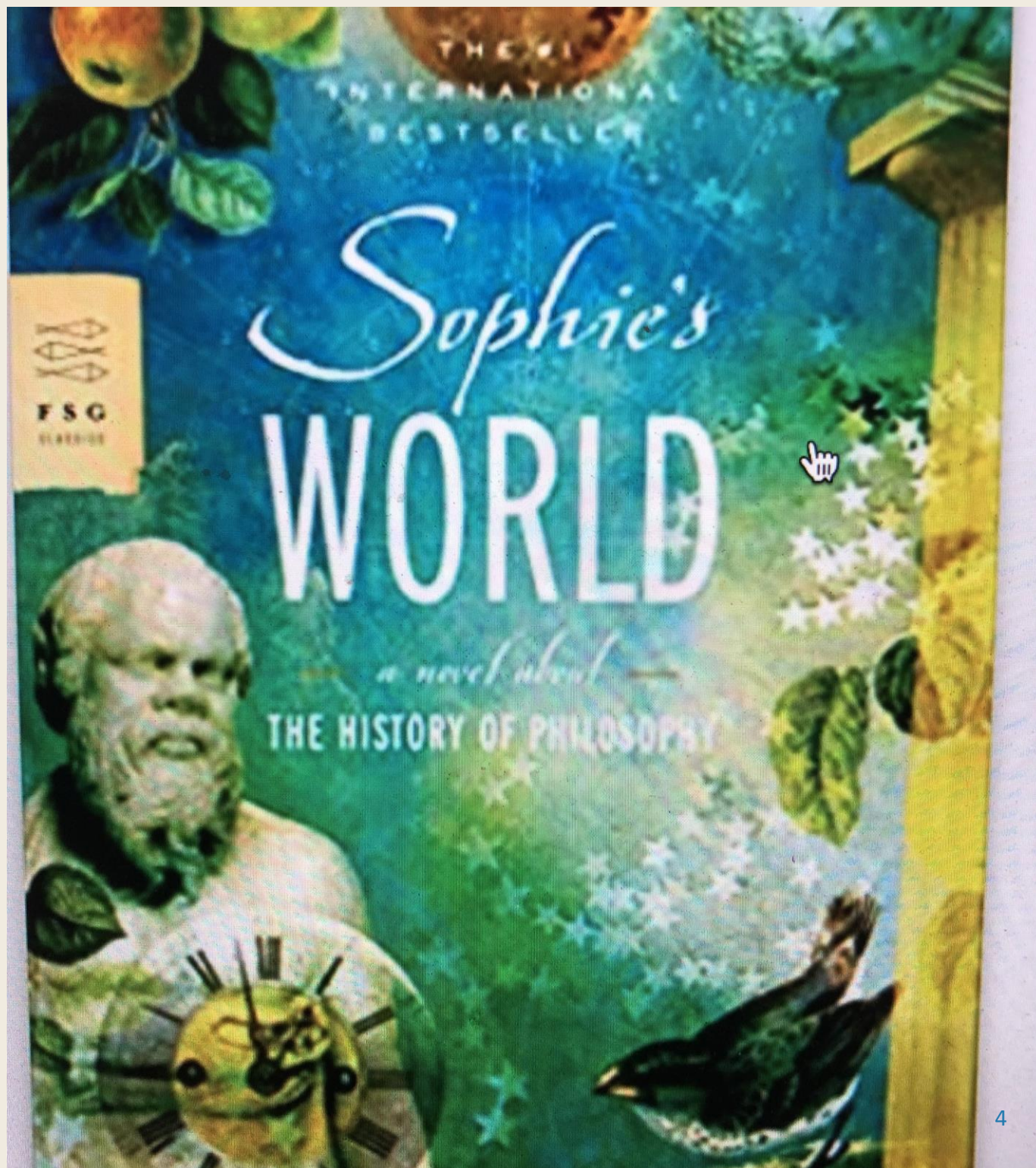
Should high school students have to wait until college to study philosophy?

Is the study of philosophy a “hands off” topic for public schools in today’s political climate?

How my course evolved --







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It's a novel.

It's a mystery story.

It explores the history of philosophy from the pre-Socratics through the mid-20th century.

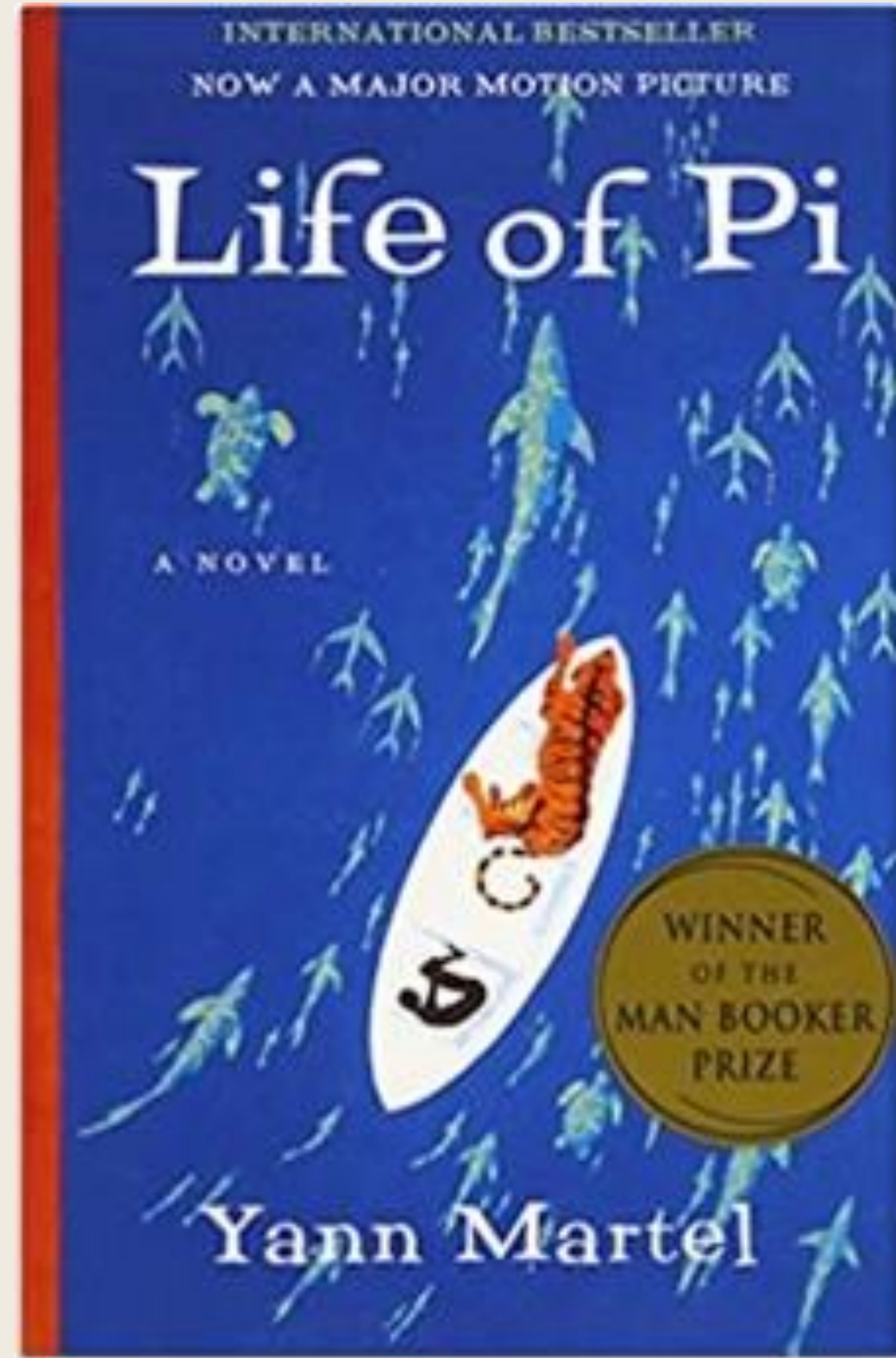
It contains the most ingenious plot-twist of any book I've ever read. I never saw it coming.

My daughter was right.

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- *Sophie's World* became our “textbook” for Western Philosophy, and *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel helped to fill out a global perspective.
- In *Life of Pi*, a young Indian boy explores Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam — and so much more.
- The novels gave us context, but discussions were the backbone of the class.



- Both novels deal with questions that public schools generally avoid: *What do you believe? Who are you? Where do we come from? Why are we in the world? How do we know what we think we know?*
- See government guidelines: teaching *about* religious beliefs vs. teaching religious beliefs
- <https://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/teachersguide.pdf>

## Why did you sign up for this class?

Interest

To let me express my views and teach me new ways of thinking

Wanted to learn more about philosophy

I enjoy higher level thinking

I'm still trying to figure out how I see the world, and I knew I could learn, or begin at least, with dabbling in philosophy

Others recommended it

I've never been exposed to philosophy

It's something I didn't get much of in other classes

I wanted to shift gears from regular classes

I wanted an elective that wouldn't bore me to death

I like reading and thinking about new things

To help prepare me for college

To keep me writing in a semester when I didn't have English

## Where else have you studied philosophy?

Some in AP European History, but not much

None

Some in 10th grade World History

Minimally

Try an exercise like this to initiate discussion.

Finish the sentence in as many ways as you can:

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_





Read over your list. Which 3 descriptions define you most significantly?

Can you narrow to one?

What does your choice tell others about what you believe?

About what's important to you?

*“Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth.”*

- Alan Watts

## Discussion Starters

How do you define “philosophy”?

You can find these words in a thesaurus as synonyms. Do any of them come close to your definition?

Beliefs   Code   Doctrine   Ethics   Outlook   Rites  
Values   Knowledge   Laws   Principles   Wisdom

Dictionaries call it:

1. Pursuit of wisdom
2. Search for truth through logical reasoning rather than factual observation
3. An analysis of the grounds of and concepts expressing fundamental beliefs
4. Beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group
5. Discipline comprising logic, aesthetics, ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology



## Discussion Questions – Small or Large Group – or Journal Entries

What are some things you believe?

How do we come to believe what we think we believe?

Do our beliefs change?

Are there any beliefs that do / do not change?

What are some ways in which we communicate our personal philosophy to others?

How could a tee shirt represent your philosophy?

How do writers communicate philosophy through fiction?

Do you have a philosophy of life?

*There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.*

*They are for you to prod and ponder.*



In the novel *Sophie's World*,

Sophie receives questions from her “mysterious philosopher.” These can form the basis for great discussions.

The novel gives us this natural springboard into these questions.

(But the same questions can be framed in other contexts that you may locate.)



# Sophie's Test

- Make a list of the things we can know. Then make a list of the things we can only believe.
- Indicate some of the factors contributing to a person's philosophy of life.
- What do we mean by "conscience"? Do you think conscience is the same for everyone?
- What do we mean by "priority of values"?

The above questions are given to Sophie in the novel.

Each one can be a springboard for a discussion.

Suggestion: Have students answer these questions on their own before they read Sophie's responses, perhaps in a journal they might keep throughout the class.

Share in small groups or large group, always allowing students to refrain from sharing personal beliefs if they are not comfortable doing so.

Things we can know.

When my car is out of gas, it won't run.  
Tomorrow will be Monday.  
There is an afterlife.

Things we can only believe.

When I put my car in drive, it will go forward.  
I will wake up tomorrow.  
There is an afterlife.



. . . while we're on the topic of how we know what we know

A scientist and a chef are out for a drive in the country.  
The chef remarks, "Oh look! Those sheep have been shorn."  
"Yes," says the scientist. "On this side."

## Suggestion for Structure

As the novels we read together as a class introduced new philosophers, thinkers, and innovators, I located pieces of literature that reflected these ideas and used them as vehicles for discussion.

For example, the pre-Socratic philosophers dealt often with the idea of change vs. permanence.

The poem “Trying to Name What Doesn’t Change” became a way to talk about those ideas with a bit of credibility.



## Trying to Name What Doesn't Change

BY [NAOMI SHIHAB NYE](#)

Roselva says the only thing that doesn't change  
is train tracks. She's sure of it.  
The train changes, or the weeds that grow up spidery  
by the side, but not the tracks.  
I've watched one for three years, she says,  
and it doesn't curve, doesn't break, doesn't grow.

Peter isn't sure. He saw an abandoned track  
near Sabinas, Mexico, and says a track without a train  
is a changed track. The metal wasn't shiny anymore.  
The wood was split and some of the ties were gone.

Every Tuesday on Morales Street  
butchers crack the necks of a hundred hens.  
The widow in the tilted house  
spices her soup with cinnamon.  
Ask her what doesn't change.

Stars explode.  
The rose curls up as if there is fire in the petals.  
The cat who knew me is buried under the bush.

The train whistle still wails its ancient sound  
but when it goes away, shrinking back  
from the walls of the brain,  
it takes something different with it every time.

Naomi Shihab Nye, "Trying to Name What Doesn't Change" from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems* (Portland, Oregon: Far Corner Books, 1995). Copyright © 1995 by Naomi Shihab Nye. Reprinted with the permission of the author.



Example:<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48599/trying-to-name-what-doesnt-change>



Name some things that don't change.

Name some things that you wish would change.

How would you change these things?

Can a person's way of thinking change?

Explain why or why not and give an example.

Is change good, bad, or indifferent?



## Responding to Naomi Shihab Nye

(Use a template like this one if your students need more structure.)

Train tracks aren't the only things that don't change.

Lots of things don't change, like

The rocks in Devil's Den, the flag waving in the square,

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.

Some things are fine the way they are,

Like \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

But there are things I'd love to change, eradicate, or conquer,

Like \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Or \_\_\_\_\_.

Only \_\_\_\_\_ can change these things.

Change requires \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

People fear change because \_\_\_\_\_.

But I hope that \_\_\_\_\_ always stays the same.

## GRADING

- Plan assessments accordingly: if you are not a philosophy teacher, do not test on content of philosophy.
- Assessments could include essays, presentations linking philosophy to real life, a final project in lieu of a traditional final exam.
- Some might have to adjust to the discussion format.

# In-class Presentation

- Locate a poem, a brief short story, or a page from a novel that you feel illustrates a particular outlook or philosophy.
- Have the text available for class to read.
- Prepare an explanation in writing that you will hand in for a grade. (Specify length)
- For your presentation:
  - Introduce your selection to the class.
  - Explain what philosophy you see in this piece of literature. (Extemporize or read from your prepared work.)
  - Ask for questions or comments.



# POETRY IS A RICH SOURCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PONDERING

## The Wayfarer

The Wayfarer,  
Perceiving the pathway to truth,  
Was struck with astonishment.  
It was thickly grown with weeds.  
“Ha,” he said,  
“I see that no one has passed here  
In a long time.”  
Later he saw that each weed  
Was a singular knife.  
“Well,” he mumbled at last,  
“Doubtless there<sup>33</sup> are other roads.”

Stephen Crane

In this poem —

What do you notice?

What lines are puzzling?

Are there any words that you're not sure of?

How would you describe the tone of this poem?

Read it again.

Do you sense a conflict in this poem?

**AVOID** asking “What does this poem mean?”

# Ode to the Past

By Pablo Neruda

Time

is divided

into two rivers:

one flows backward, devouring

life already lived;

the other

moves forward with you

exposing

your life.

For a single second

they may be joined.

Now.

This is that moment,

the drop of an instant

that washes away the past.

It is the present.

It is in your hands.

Racing, slipping,

tumbling like a waterfall.

But it is yours.

# Create your own avenue for exploring philosophy and philosophical movements.

Connections to history through social upheavals and movements

- French Revolution
- Civil Rights Movement
- Fall of Soviet Union

Use your expertise in history to find readings, essays. Pull ideas from these time periods. Discuss, evaluate, agree, reject.

Is your expertise in art? Find great works and build your class around these ideas.

- Raphael's *The School of Athens*
- Picasso's *Guernica*
- Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*

Research the philosophies driving these artists and use that to supplement and enhance the assigned readings.

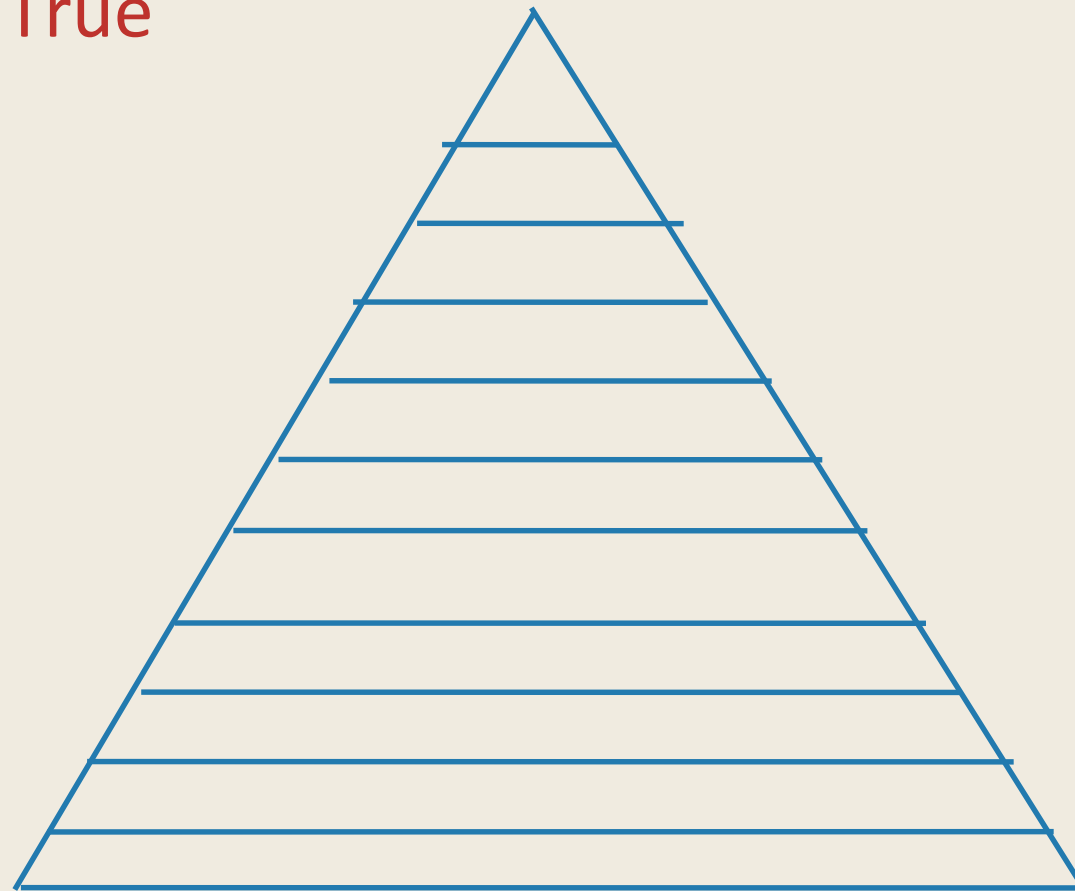


Pull statements from the books you are reading, such as *Sophie's World* and *Life of Pi*, and use them as discussion points, as ideas to evaluate, to accept or reject. This keeps the content open and fluid as opposed to dogmatic.

1. If we choose to live a planned life, we will never grow.
2. Without diversity, we can't progress.
3. There is no real difference between faith and superstition.
4. A God should not be feared.
5. We all steer the course of our own history.
6. "Accidents" are not accidental: they were meant to happen by a master plan that some people call "fate."
7. We can carry "acceptance" of other people to a bad extreme.
8. Belief in a spiritual life-after-death of some sort makes sense to me.
9. Our school offers an atmosphere where people can exchange ideas without fear of being put down.
10. Religion brings people together.

# Pyramid Prioritizing

More True



Less True

Rank the statements by placing each # on the pyramid according to how much you agree with what it states.

Qualify, if you feel you must.

## Statements from *Life of Pi*

1. When you've suffered a great deal in life, each additional pain is both unbearable and trifling.
2. That which sustains the universe beyond thought and language, and that which is at the core of us and struggles for expression, is the same thing.
3. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.
4. There is no greatness without goodness.
5. All religions are true.
6. Socially inferior animals are the ones that make the most strenuous, resourceful efforts to get to know their keepers.
7. All living things contain a measure of madness that moves them in strange, sometimes inexplicable ways.
8. There are no grounds for going beyond scientific explanation of reality and no sound reason for believing anything but our sense experience.
9. The cruelty of children comes as news to no one.
10. When you are lonely, "the moon distresses you by silently reminding you of your solitude."



## Written Assessment

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Turn this discussion activity into a graded assessment by having students select one of the statements and either defend it or reject it in a persuasive essay.

They may use arguments that arise in discussion to support their position.



## Decision Grid Discussion Tool

*Read the following statements. You must Strongly Agree with 2 of them, Agree with 2 of them, Disagree with 2 of them, and Strongly Disagree with 2 of them. Record the statement numbers on the grid from 1 to 8, using each number only once, and using all of the numbers 1 through 8.*

1. The study of philosophy should be required in all public high schools.
2. Philosophy is not taught in public schools because it could challenge belief systems held by many parents.
3. The variety of truths and perspectives presented in the study of world philosophy can make students question their own beliefs.
4. Most high school students are not mature enough to study philosophy.
5. The study of philosophy helps students think critically and prepares them for understanding world problems more deeply.
6. Philosophy, like religion, should be left to individual families and parents to teach.
7. It is impossible for most teachers to teach logic, philosophy, and ethics without imposing their own personal judgment and bias on students.
8. Public schools avoid teaching philosophy because it cannot be taught through rote learning but through discussion and experience.

STRONGLY AGREE     \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_

AGREE                                 \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_

DISAGREE                                 \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_

STRONGLY DISAGREE     \_\_\_\_\_ AND \_\_\_\_\_

In small groups, come to a consensus on your decisions.

Credit for discussion design to Dr. Linda Hoover, Shippensburg University.

## Decision Grid

<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Read the twelve statements, taking time to reflect on each one. Then decide whether you **strongly agree** with the statement, **agree** with it, **disagree** with it, or **strongly disagree** with it. Record your decisions within the circles on the Decision Grid by placing the numbers of the statements (1 through 12) on the grid. You may place only one number in each circle, and you must use each number.

# The Labyrinth by WH Auden

Anthropos apteros for days  
Walked whistling round and round the Maze,  
Relying happily upon  
His temperment for getting on.

The hundredth time he sighted, though,  
A bush he left an hour ago,  
He halted where four alleys crossed,  
And recognized that he was lost.

"Where am I?" Metaphysics says  
No question can be asked unless  
It has an answer, so I can  
Assume this maze has got a plan.

If theologians are correct,  
A Plan implies an Architect:  
A God-built maze would be, I'm sure,  
The Universe in minature.

Are data from the world of Sense,  
In that case, valid evidence?  
What in the universe I know  
Can give directions how to go?

All Mathematics would suggest  
A steady straight line as the best,  
But left and right alternately  
Is consonant with History.

Aesthetics, though, believes all Art  
Intends to gratify the heart:  
Rejecting disciplines like these,  
Must I, then, go which way I please?

Such reasoning is only true  
If we accept the classic view,  
Which we have no right to assert,  
According to the Introvert.

His absolute pre-supposition  
Is - Man creates his own condition:  
This maze was not divinely built,  
But is secreted by my guilt.

The centre that I cannot find  
Is known to my unconscious Mind;  
I have no reason to despair  
Because I am already there.

My problem is how not to will;  
They move most quickly who stand still;  
I'm only lost until I see  
I'm lost because I want to be.

If this should fail, perhaps I should,  
As certain educators would,  
Content myself with the conclusion;  
In theory there is no solution.

All statements about what I feel,  
Like I-am-lost, are quite unreal:  
My knowledge ends where it began;  
A hedge is taller than a man."

Anthropos apteros, perplexed  
To know which turning to take next,  
Looked up and wished he were a bird  
To whom such doubts must seem absurd.

## Puzzlers for gifted thinkers:

“The Labyrinth” by WH Auden

In this poem, we learn that a man is wandering around in a maze for a few days, and eventually realizes he is lost. We can see this idea as a metaphor for humans wandering around through life, not sure of where they are going. If we accept this metaphor, then we can begin to explain what is going through the speaker’s mind as he puzzles through the ideas that come to him. Read through the questions, and just jot down some responses on this paper. Then incorporate your responses and observations into an essay reflection on the poem as a metaphor for finding one’s way (or finding one’s own truth) in life.

What does the field of *metaphysics* tell the wanderer?

Why does the wanderer think this maze (life) is a “universe in miniature”?

What is the wanderer questioning regarding sensory data?

How can *history* or *mathematics* help?

How can *art* help?

The wanderer then comes to the conclusion that humans “create their own condition.” How does this change how the wanderer views the search for direction?

Do you think the wanderer really *wants* to be lost?

How are the statements “I am lost” and “a hedge is taller than a man” fundamentally different? Why is “a hedge is taller than a man” in fact all the wanderer knows? What does this say about the wanderer and how do you think the wanderer feels about that?



# Chronic Meanings by Bob Perelman

The single fact is matter.  
Five words can say only.  
Black sky at night, reasonably.  
I am, the irrational residue.

Blown up chain link fence.  
Next morning stronger than ever.  
Midnight the pain is almost.  
The train seems practically expressive.

A story familiar as a.  
Society has broken into bands.  
The nineteenth century was sure.  
Characters in the withering capital.

The heroic figure straddled the.  
The clouds enveloped the tallest.  
Tens of thousands of drops.  
The monster struggled with Milton.

On our wedding night I.  
The sorrow burned deeper than.  
Grimly I pursued what violence.  
A trap, a catch, a.

Fans stand up, yelling their.  
Lights go off in houses.  
A fictional look, not quite.  
To be able to talk.

The coffee sounds intriguing but.  
She put her cards on.  
What had been comfortable subjectivity.  
The lesson we can each.

Not enough time to thoroughly.  
Structure announces structure and takes.  
He caught his breath in.  
The vista disclosed no immediate.

Alone with a pun in.  
The clock face and the.  
Rock of ages, a modern.  
I think I had better.

Now this particular mall seemed.  
The bag of groceries had.  
Whether a biographical junkheap or.  
In no sense do I.

These fields make me feel.  
Mount Rushmore in a sonnet.  
Some in the party tried.  
So it's not as if.

That always happened until one.  
She spread her arms and.  
The sky if anything grew.  
Which left a lot of.

No one could help it.  
I ran farther than I.  
That wasn't a good one.  
Now put down your pencils.

They won't pull that over.  
Standing up to the Empire.  
Stop it, screaming in a.  
The smell of pine needles.

Economics is not my strong.  
Until one of us reads.  
I took a breath, then.  
The singular heroic vision, unilaterally.

Voices imitate the very words.  
Bed was one place where.  
A personal life, a toaster.  
Memorized experience can't be completely.

The impossibility of the simplest.  
So shut the f—ing thing.  
Now I've gone and put.  
But that makes the world.

The point I am trying.  
Like a cartoon worm on.  
A physical mouth without speech.  
If taken to an extreme.

The phone is for someone.  
The next second it seemed.  
But did that really mean.  
Yet Los Angeles is full.

Naturally enough I turn to.  
Some things are reversible, some.  
You don't have that choice.  
I'm going to Jo's for.

Now I've heard everything, he.  
One time when I used.  
The amount of dissatisfaction involved.  
The weather isn't all it's.

You'd think people would have.  
Or that they would invent.  
At least if the emotional.  
The presence of an illusion.

Symbiosis of home and prison.  
Then, having become superfluous, time.  
One has to give to.  
Taste: the first and last.

I remember the look in.  
It was the first time.  
Some gorgeous swelling feeling that.  
Success which owes its fortune.

Come what may it can't.  
There are a number of.  
But there is only one.  
That's why I want to.

## “Chronic Meanings”

This poem can be very frustrating to read. You find yourself wanting to finish the lines, but Perelman doesn't finish them intentionally. By the time you get to the end, you just want to throw it across the room. Now think about what Perelman might be doing in this poem.

Why does he put periods at the end of each line if they are not complete thoughts?

Why does it have to be so long? Wouldn't we get the message after 3 or 4 stanzas?

What themes seem to repeat themselves? Do you see the same ideas coming up?

Find a few lines that you feel you **MUST** finish. What are they? How would you end them?

Do you think Perelman is trying to make a point?

Is he trying to say something about life –or the modern world –or human beings in this century?

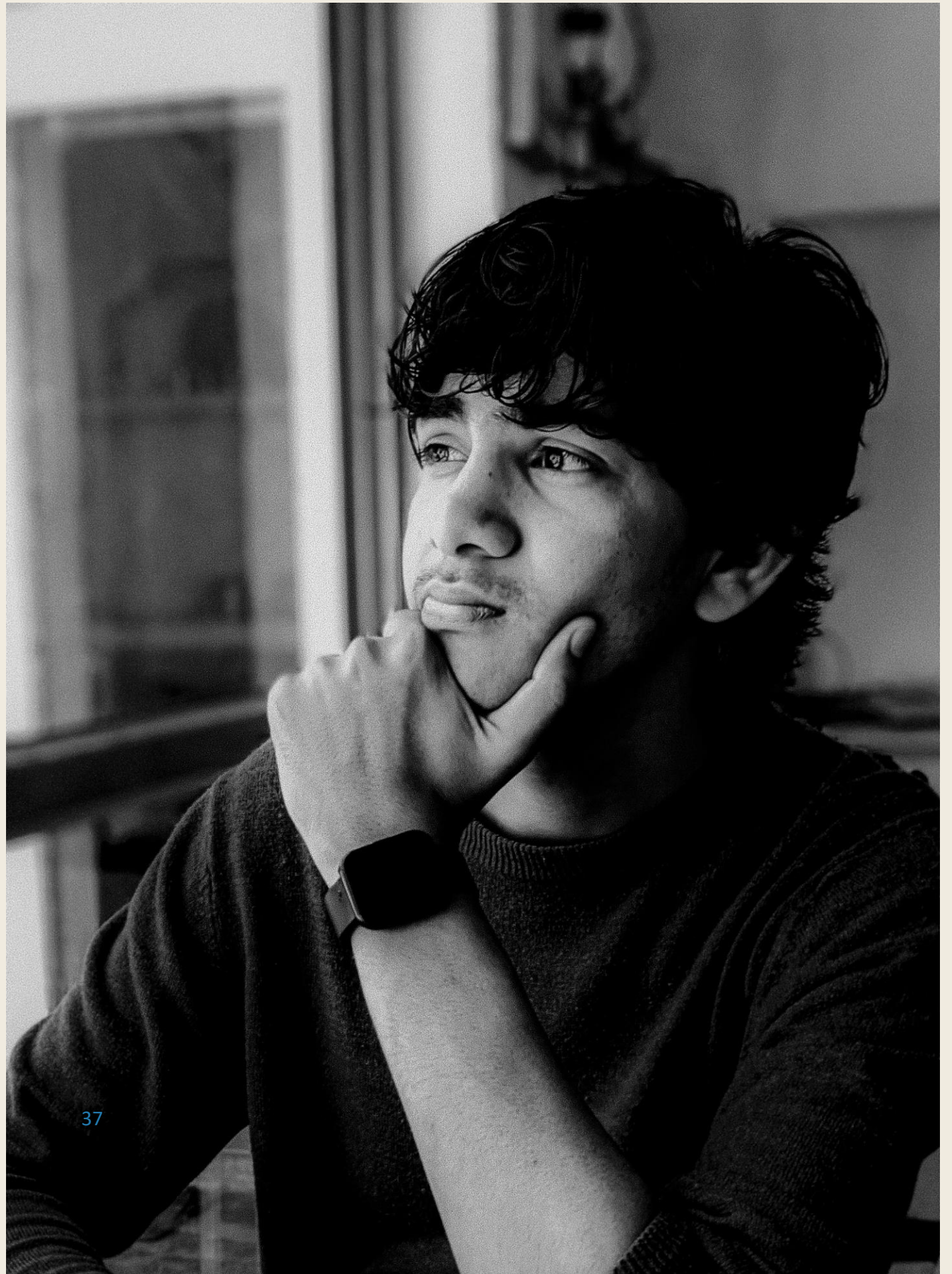
Poetry is interesting in that it sets up a conflict that readers have to try to resolve. What is the conflict here?

Can you make any sense of this conflict?



## Comparison

In what ways are the poems  
“The Labyrinth” and  
“Chronic Meanings” similar?  
What connections can you  
make between the two?





## Philosophy through Music

Song lyrics can be a rich resource in exploring philosophy.

Surely allow the students to do the heavy lifting on this one.

Students love sharing their favorite music in the classroom.

A list of appropriate titles is endless.





*Sophie's World* introduces the students to the following philosophers/movements/cultures:

Xenophanes	Zeno	David Hume	<b>EASTERN AND MIDDLE EASTERN PHILOSOPHERS</b>
Thales	Aristippus	George Berkeley	
Anaximander	Epicurus	The Enlightenment	Zoroaster - 628-551 bce
Anaximenes	Plotinus	Immanuel Kant	Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) - 563-4893 bce
The Eleatics	The Indo-Europeans	Romanticism	Confucius - 551-479 bce
Parmenides	The Semites	Georg W. F. Hegel	Lao-Tzu - 6th century bce
Heraclitis	Jesus	Soren Kierkegaard	Mo-tzu - 470-391 bce
Empedocles	Paul	Karl Marx	Chuang-tzu - 4th century bce
Anaxagoras	Saint Augustine	Charles Darwin	Hsun-tzu - 298-230 bce
Democritus	Saint Thomas Aquinas	Sigmund Freud	Muhammad - 570-632
Herodotus	Hildegard of Bingen (a woman!)	Friedrich Nietzsche	al-Kindi - 800-866
Thucydides	The Renaissance	Martin Heidegger	al-Razi - 865-925
Hippocrates	Nicolaus Copernicus	John Rawls	al-Farabi - 878-950
The Sophists	Johannes Kepler	Simone de Beauvoir	Sei Shonagon - 966-1013
Protagoras	Galileo Galilei	Jean-Paul Sartre	Ibn Sina or Avicenna - 930-1037
Socrates	Isaac Newton	Existentialism	Ibn Rushd - 1126-1198
Plato	Martin Luther		Chu Hsi - 1130-1200
Aristotle	Erasmus of Rotterdam		Wang Yang-ming - 1472-1529
Hellenism	The Baroque Period		Mahatma Gandhi - 1869-1948
The Cynics	Leibniz		Nishida Kitaro - 1870 - 1946
Antisthenes	Descartes		Ghose Aurobindo - 1872-1976
Diogenes	Baruch Spinoza		Nishitani Keiji - 1900 - 1990
The Stoics	John Locke		

# Light-hearted Activities to Engage Students

Identify these philosophers by their email addresses.

[ownimage@gods.com](mailto:ownimage@gods.com)

[h20@allwet.com](mailto:h20@allwet.com)

[redhotstone@athens.com](mailto:redhotstone@athens.com)

[allaboutpleasure@liveforthemoment.com](mailto:allaboutpleasure@liveforthemoment.com)

[avoidpain@myteachersocrates.com](mailto:avoidpain@myteachersocrates.com)

[linearviewofhistory@visitnorthafrica.com](mailto:linearviewofhistory@visitnorthafrica.com)

[gowomen@middleages.com](mailto:gowomen@middleages.com)

[ilovemyteacheralfred@faithandreason.com](mailto:ilovemyteacheralfred@faithandreason.com)

[gopoland@circularorbit.com](mailto:gopoland@circularorbit.com)

[circularorbit@lunarpulllooney.com](mailto:circularorbit@lunarpulllooney.com)

[itoldyouso@sotheregalileo.com](mailto:itoldyouso@sotheregalileo.com)

[noindulgence@germanrules.com](mailto:noindulgence@germanrules.com)

[ithinkthereforeiam@reason.com](mailto:ithinkthereforeiam@reason.com)

[historiocriticism@jewishphilosopher.com](mailto:historiocriticism@jewishphilosopher.com)

[empiricism@friendofberkeleyandhume.com](mailto:empiricism@friendofberkeleyandhume.com)

[impressionsandideas@experience.com](mailto:impressionsandideas@experience.com)

[spaceandtime@perception.com](mailto:spaceandtime@perception.com)

[thesisantithesis@synthesis.com](mailto:thesisantithesis@synthesis.com)

[hmsbeagle@evolve.com](mailto:hmsbeagle@evolve.com)

[creasterbad@subjectivetruth.com](mailto:creasterbad@subjectivetruth.com)

[lookoutrichies@classless.com](mailto:lookoutrichies@classless.com)

Cheat Sheet:

Xenophanes

Thales

Anaxagoras

Epicurus

Aristippus

St. Augustine

Hildegard of Bingen

Aquinas

Copernicus

Galileo

Kepler

Luther

Descartes

Spinoza

Locke

Hume

Kant

Hegel

Darwin

Kierkegaard

Marx

There were times in my “Philosophy through Literature” journey when I felt like a fraud.  
Who was I to be “teaching” this material to students who deserved a more well-prepared educator?

Then I would read this journal entry from a 10th grade student responding to the prompt:

How was your summer?

What are you looking forward to this year?

*“Every summer I am reborn. Lying outside in the grass, I reflect on the trials and tribulations of the year, and occasionally spot animals in the clouds. I am quite often never the same, my habits not set in stone - for good reason. While watching the bees buzz and the contrails etch across the sky, I amalgamate my new philosophy. Yet each outlook lasts only until next summer, luckily too, for there are many more philosophies than there are summers. Certainty killed the cat, it also killed the warrior, the priest, the politician. That’s why every summer I am reborn.*

*This year, I am looking forward to learning something new.”*

*B.G.*

**WE OWE THEM ALL SOMETHING NEW!**

PhD Physics, Harvard University

Assistant Professor of Theoretical Physics, Stanford University

I hope he learned something new, if not from me, then from the experience  
of exploration that a class like this provided.

## **Philosophy Through Literature - Mrs. Gregorio**

### **Final Project**

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What do I believe?

These are the questions that philosophers have pondered since the beginning of time. For your final project, you will have the opportunity to answer these questions. In doing so, you must make reference to three philosophers whom we have explored throughout the course. Their ideas should shed light on your answers to the above questions, but you do not necessarily have to agree with the philosophers you choose; you might be inspired by a philosopher with whom you disagree.

You may fulfill this assignment in a creative or traditional manner. Remember that each format must incorporate the ideas of 3 philosophers, and each format must answer the questions: “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” and “What do I believe?”. Here are some ideas:

- an essay of 2-3 pages that answers the questions
- a video with accompanying script
- a collage with attached one-page explanation
- an original drama
- an original piece of artwork with attached one-page explanation

If you have other ideas, please check with me first.



facebook

SISYPHUS



WALL INFO PHOTOS NOTES



SISYPHUS UGH. FREAKIN' ROCK ROLLED DOWN AGAIN.



ZEUS LIKES THIS



ATLAS DUDE, TRY CARRYIN THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD ON YOUR SHOULDERS.



PERSEPHONE ROCK?? ROLL? HAS THE GOD OF MUSIC HEARD ABOUT THIS? LOL.



SISYPHUS THIS IS GETTING OLD.



SISYPHUS PUSHING THE BOULDER BACK UP THE HILL.



ZEUS LIKES THIS

SCOTT  
HILBURN

12/27

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# Essay Suggestion

Hugo Bedeau: *Thinking and Writing about Philosophy*

- **Idea** - Select an idea from among the many we have read and discussed. [For example, Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”]
- **Definition** - Define the idea you want to consider. Try to be as direct and as clear as possible. If this idea is defined in the book, **use** that definition, but then put it in your own words as well. [In this case, define what you think Socrates meant by “the unexamined life.”]
- **Contrast** - You can get a better idea of something by looking at its opposite. Someone who disagrees with Socrates’s statement might make a contrasting statement: “On the other hand, if we scrutinize our life choices too much, perhaps that kind of life is not worth living.”

- **Examples and Analogy** - Give examples of an unexamined life. What does that look like to you. Can you create an analogy that helps explain your view? [If we live haphazardly without examining the effects of our actions, we could be damaging others or ourselves. If we never seek a higher level of introspection, we are missing out on a great deal of what it means to be human. A company that continues to make profits but doesn't realize the harm it is doing to the environment is a company that is not worth its so-called value.]
- **Counterexamples** - Give an example of the kind of life that would tend to disagree with Socrates' original idea. [What's wrong with just living life the way you want, not worrying about the rest of the world, and just going for the gusto? You only live once. Why not enjoy as much as you can?]
- **Questions** - Philosophers always ask questions. What questions remain unresolved in your exploration of the original idea? Put them in writing and answer them the best you can.

Credit to Hugo Bedeau from *Thinking and Writing about Philosophy*

Share your ideas in a podcast, an essay, a graphic essay, or other format.

## Venn Diagram Learning Tool

Have students select 3 philosophers or religions or politicians - ?  
Put them in a Venn diagram and have them sort out the similarities and differences.  
Share with the class.

## Quote Quibbles

Select 2 quotes on the same theme that convey subtle differences. Have the students  
Discuss or write about how they feel the 2 are different.  
Does either quote seem particularly poignant? Illustrate with a personal example.

Example: On Knowledge

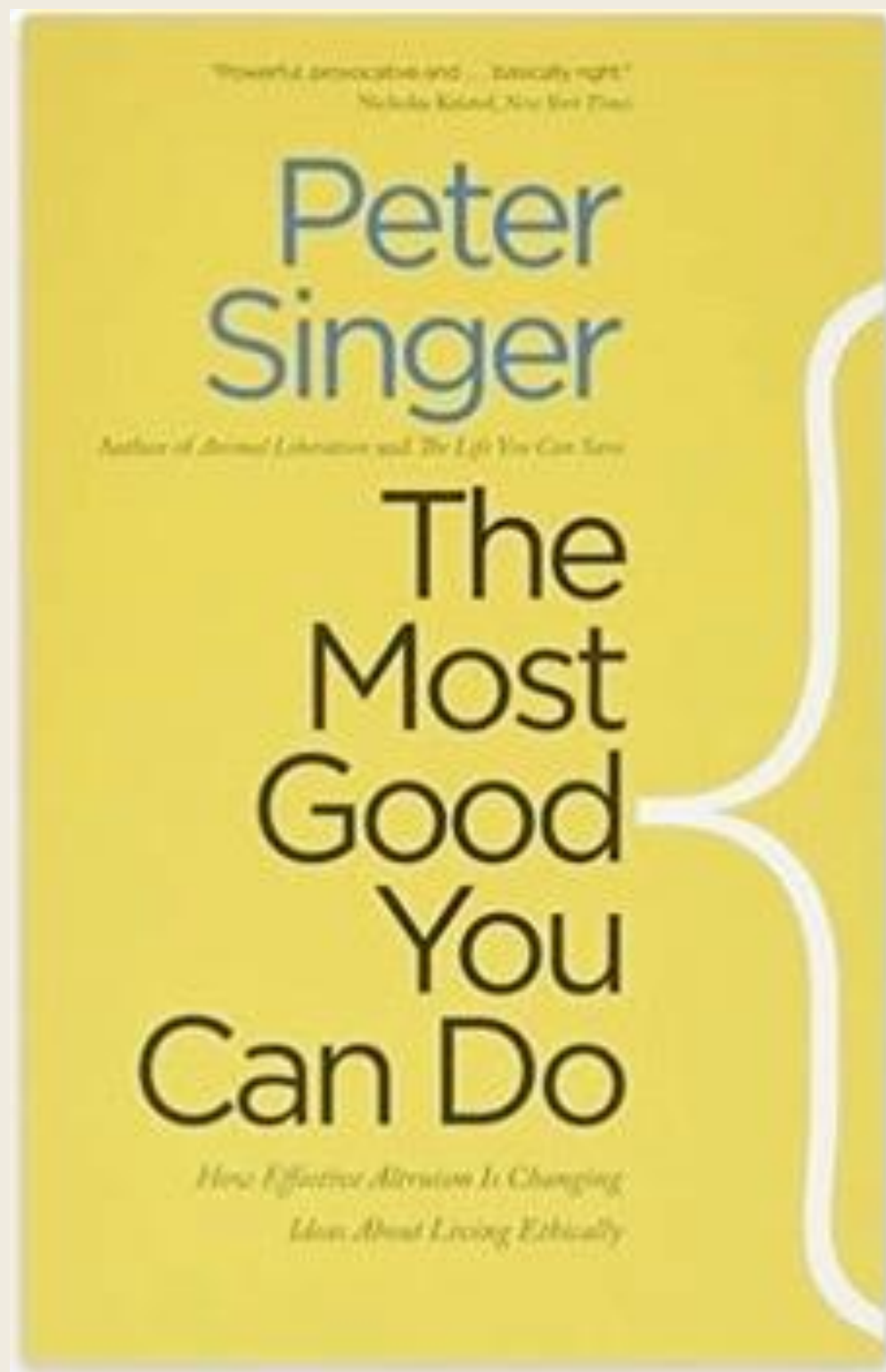
“The superior man is distressed by his want of ability.” - Confucius

“To be ignorant of one’s ignorance is the malady of the ignorant.” - Bronson Alcott



## Suggestions:

- The beauty of using *Sophie's World* as a teaching tool is that the narrative is set up to demonstrate how a philosopher would teach a child about philosophy. You don't have to be the lesson-planner. The mysterious philosopher does that for Sophie - and for you and your students. Your expertise in the area of philosophy (or lack thereof, as in my case) should determine the direction you take in building on the subject matter presented.
- And the beauty of *Life of Pi* is that it takes you to the other side of the world and gives you balance and absolute genius.
- Invest in a comprehensive survey of philosophy for your own use, but don't attempt to cover it all. It will enhance your own understanding of "the philosopher's" lessons.
- Ask your Media Specialist to find appropriate websites for your students and to pull appropriate print resources for their use.
- Remember that you are not a philosophy teacher. You are facilitating the exploration of a field where your students will require formal training for a full understanding of this subject matter.



## *The Most Good You Can Do*

”How Effective Altruism is changing ideas  
About living ethically”

by Peter Singer

Philosophy doesn’t have to remain lofty and impractical.  
Questions of ethics are everywhere – and students  
delve into these discussions wholeheartedly.

## **Suggested Resources (an admittedly incomplete list)**

*Sophie's World* - Jostein Gaarder

*Siddhartha* - Hermann Hesse

*Life of Pi* - Yann Martel

*The Sunflower* - Simon Wiesenthal

*Thinking and Writing about Philosophy* - Hugo Bedeau

*The Philosophies of Asia* - Alan Watts

*A Short History of Philosophy* - Solomon and Higgins

*The Story of Philosophy from Antiquity to the Present* - Delius, Gatzemeier, Sertcan, and Wünscher

Writers and Readers Documentary Comic Books:

*Structuralism and Poststructuralism for Beginners* - Donald Palmer

*The Tao Te Ching*

*The Tao of Pooh* - Benjamin Hoff

*Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar: Understanding Philosophy Through Jokes* - Cathcart and Klein

<https://suggestedreads.com/best-philosophy-books-for-beginners-to-start-with/>

Many youtube.com lectures - a wonderful source - but screen them first

[marciaRgregorio@gmail.com](mailto:marciaRgregorio@gmail.com)

Marcia Roberts Gregorio

I'm happy to answer any questions – feel free to email me!