



Implementing Philosophy into the High School Curriculum: Guiding Philosophical Discussion in the Core Subjects

Why Integrate Philosophy in Existing Curriculum?

While the benefits of philosophical engagement are well-documented, budgetary concerns, resource availability, and skepticism from administration often pose barriers to the creation of dedicated philosophy classes in high schools. One way to work around these barriers is to integrate philosophy into the existing curriculum. This approach carries the added benefit of encouraging students to reflect on the value of what they are learning and helping students to develop a greater degree of personal investment in their regular courses than they otherwise might. In addition, this approach helps students see the ways that philosophy can be connected to other aspects of their lives.

Math

Math is perhaps the easiest discipline to integrate philosophy into, as formal logic is already very similar to many math classes at the secondary level. It can be helpful to first integrate philosophy here and expand outward, as a background in logic can allow students to begin doing philosophy in all their classes.

Philosophical Questions for Math Classes:

1. What distinguishes deduction from induction?
2. What is meant by the terms “validity,” “soundness,” and “distribution”?
3. Explain how we can test for validity using rules and Venn diagrams.
4. What is existential import, and why is it important for understanding the difference between traditional and modern logic?

Reading for Math Classes:

1. Patrick Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*

Science

Like math, science also lends itself well to discussions of logic. It can also be a good space to raise questions about our presuppositions and how they influence research or how we know our methods to be reliable.

Philosophical Questions Science Classes:

1. What do we mean by “scientific knowledge” and “scientific progress”?
2. Does science continuously lead us toward more accurate explanations of reality? Or does it give us useful ways of seeing the world without necessarily implying that our theories are getting closer to the truth about nature?
3. Why should we study science? What exactly are we learning about when we study science?

Readings for Science Classes:

1. Karl Popper, “Science as Falsification” in *Conjectures and Refutations*
2. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

History

History provides a nice segue into discussions about value, where we can examine historical conceptions of the good life or evaluate the morality of governmental systems. History can also be a place to examine the history of ideas as well as an opportunity to use our logic chops to evaluate the rhetoric used to support these ideas.

Philosophical Questions for History Classes:

1. How do thinkers use the state of nature as a starting point for considering the aim of government? Is this a legitimate starting point? What does it tell us about each thinker’s view of human nature and natural law?
2. What makes a government a legitimate authority



over its citizens?
3. What is private property? How does something become “yours”? Do we have a right to property? Is ownership always a good thing?
4. How has European colonialism shaped our understanding of history and

the world?

5. Do we have an ethical obligation to try to change unjust societal institutions?

Readings for History Classes:

1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
2. John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government and Letter on Toleration*
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality and The Social Contract*
4. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*
5. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

English

Philosophy can be of great use in the English classroom as it allows for better literary analysis. It is often easy to find philosophical themes in literature and these can be used to springboard into a variety of discussions. English perhaps offers the greatest variety of possible philosophical topics to cover. Below are examples of questions centered on the Problem of Evil and how it relates to Elie Wiesel’s *Night*.

1. What is the problem of evil? What is a theodicy?
2. Is the “free-will defense” a plausible theodicy?
3. After the Holocaust, can we still consider God a moral being?

Different texts lend themselves well to different questions and areas of philosophy. Plato’s *Republic* is both a classic and a wealth of interesting philosophical topics. *To Kill a Mockingbird* raises both ethical and epistemological questions. Aesthetics can be explored by comparing *Beowulf* to the graphic novel *300* and asking why they are

valued differently as works of art.”

Many philosophically important texts are also of great literary importance. Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* is a prime example of this. The same is true for many works of non-Western philosophy such as the *Tao Te Ching*, and important text in Taoism, which is attributed to the Chinese philosopher Laozi.

Finally, because the curriculum of English classes is often more flexible than a math or science class, they can be prime venues for a dedicated unit on philosophy. Existentialism can be an extremely enriching, if challenging, area of philosophy for high schoolers to explore. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity* is a standout contribution to this field.

Foreign Languages

While foreign language classes may seem like a less obvious venue for integrating philosophy, there is in fact a great deal of potential for philosophical engagement. Philosophy can be used to encourage students to not just see foreign language as a code to be cracked but rather as an alternate set of tools for describing and understanding the world. The implications of this set students up nicely for exploring philosophy of language.

Philosophical Questions Language Classes:

1. Is speaking a different language really just a matter of switching names?
2. Does the underlying thought of those names remain the same no matter the language?
3. Do we even learn language by learning what things are called?
4. If switching from one language to another is not about switching names, then what are we doing when we translate?
5. What are we referring to when we speak of non-existent entities? Why is this a problem?

Readings for Foreign Language Classes:

1. Augustine, *Confessions*
2. Robert Martin, *There Are Two Errors in The Title of This Book*

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