

Lesson Plans 13: Philosophy and Life

The Civic Knowledge Project: Winning Words

Time: 1 hour

Abstract: Students will discuss and demonstrate the relationship between active life and the Socratic method; they will also get a substantive start on their final project.

Ideas and actions (15 minutes)

No doubt students have heard the expression “think before you act.” Why is this such a popular injunction, and what makes it worth (or not worth) heeding? Have two volunteers stand at the front of the class. One student proceeds through all of the daily activities that he or she does “automatically” or, without carefully thinking about them first. Invite the other student to play Socrates, subjecting the poor first student’s routine to exhaustive interrogation. Is this what Socrates means by “the examined life”?

Final presentation work (30 minutes)

Work with students on final presentation material. Ideas can range from one-on-one Socratic interrogation, to a class skit or performance that highlights some question and subjects it to some kind of scrutiny, to a demonstration of student capacity for self-aware sophisticated argumentation.

One useful method for initiating student contribution is to have students come up with one word, idea, or question that is somehow relevant to them. Give students ten minutes to write freely about this idea in notebooks, and say “stop” when finished.

Abandoning beliefs (15 minutes)

What are some things that are absolutely, unquestionably true? Have students brainstorm some of these ideas, such as “it is wrong to kill a person.” What would Socrates say about this? Hopefully, some students will acknowledge that all ideas require examination. Are we wise enough to know that it is wrong to kill a person? Is this good or bad? Is it important to simply take some things for unquestionable truth? What would the world be like if we didn’t simply *know* some things to be true? What would it be like if we were all Socrateses?

Closing

Ask students to complete a short homework assignment. Have them write in their notebooks about a time when they had to give up an idea that they wished were true, but to their disappointment, was false. Are they better, worse, or the same for having done this?