

Lesson Plan 3: Conversation

The Civic Knowledge Project: Winning Words

Time: 1 hour

Abstract: Review ideas discussed so far, gauge student comfort in discussion and interaction, develop rules for class discussion, and discuss the meaning of *rhetoric* and *dialogue*.

Recapitulation of wisdom and aporia (5-10 minutes)

Review last week's concepts with students and ensure that they have remembered the key points, or are able to refer to their notebooks in order to remember. Field any questions students have about the two words, keeping within their definitions as the class has discussed. Try, if possible, to get students to answer one another's questions, and fill in the gaps for students who failed to record the last class's main points.

Good conversation/name-learning¹ (15 minutes)

Remind students that the class is based primarily on conversation. However, as they have no doubt experienced in many classes, there are certain kinds of conversation that are not enjoyable, and highly frustrating. Hopefully, the collective understanding of the students in the class regarding the definition and purpose of conversation can assist in the creation of class rules for conversation. Ask students to stand up in a circle. As they sit down, have each student first say his or her name, followed by something that characterizes a "good conversation," and the reason for which that is true. After all students have done this, have them one-by-one stand back up, state their name, and one thing that does *not* happen during a "good conversation."

Note: If students are doing well with the subject matter covered so far, you might wish to simply continue with content. However, if students seem to be ill at ease in interaction and classroom discussion, you may prefer to devote more class time to getting the students acquainted with one another. If this is the case, see supplementary activity sheet 1 and augment curriculum as needed.

Rules for conversation (15 minutes)

Once you have recorded class ideas about "good conversation" on the board, have the students use them to generate a list of rules that will apply to conversation in the class. Assist students in the task of combining similar ideas into concrete rules that they can then record in their notebooks. A broader question for discussion: why must all students agree on certain rules for conversation? Would class discussion work if a single student disagreed with these class rules? Why or why not?

Words of the day: *dialogue* and *rhetoric* (20 minutes)

Dialogue. Be sure to emphasize the difference between dialogue and other forms of communication. Have students list people in their lives who communicate using dialogue, and people who use other forms of communication. What about famous people (the president, etc.)?

¹ There comes, perhaps late, in the third lesson, a formal name-learning exercise. This is because I want to convey that reasonable people, committed to philosophical inquiry and respectful of one another, can converse productively about ideas without knowing the details of one another's personal background. There was something new about this to my students, who wanted to know why we had yet to "play any name games."

Rhetoric. Quote dictionary definition: “the art of speaking or writing effectively; writing or speaking as a means of persuasion or convincing.” Have students think of examples of this kind of communication. Why is some speech “effective”? What is the goal of speaking or writing, broadly stated? Ask students to record a time that they used speaking or writing “effectively”—what did they accomplish? Return briefly to the rules formulated by the class for discussion, and discuss them in the context of the need for conversation to accomplish something, or be “effective.” Are the conversation rules conducive to “rhetoric”?

Closing

Collect all permission slips. Check in with students as to what they think of the class so far, and inform them that next class, they will learn about and discuss a strange and fascinating man named Socrates—one of the first official philosophers.