

The Civic Knowledge Project Winning Words

Thinking, Speaking, and Acting Philosophically

Mission

As public education in the United States tends ever more toward reliance on rote learning and assessment by standardized testing, young Chicago students face a dearth of classroom opportunities for considered self-expression, rational, cooperative conversation, and thoughtful self-examination. By placing University of Chicago students at the head of small classes of schoolchildren, the Civic Knowledge Project's Winning Words after-school program aims to facilitate their access to the rich resources of philosophy, the humanities, and the verbal arts. Philosophical dialogue, particularly the Socratic method in various forms, is one of the premier verbal arts, and is featured in the program along with debate, rhetoric/oratory, dramatic reenactment, and teacher-directed classroom reading and discussion.

Course Goals

Students will engage with philosophy by learning its historical significance, analyzing philosophical texts, and by practicing philosophy themselves. Through group discussion, individual reflections, writing, and formal dialogue, students will develop and carefully consider a variety of life's important questions. After the first quarter of content, in which lessons, reading and discussion focus on the nature and usage of Socratic method, coaches are permitted to freely explore disparate philosophical ideas from varied sources and epochs, by way of assorted activities, readings, projects, and discussion topics. Areas of emphasis can be expected to include politics, love and emotion, education and learning, and ethics. The best class will be student-based and student-led, but teacher-guided. The best instructors will foster a respectfully critical environment so that students can wonder and search together. The ideal curricular result is a flexible set of lessons that are organized, and organically complementary.

The first eight to ten weeks of lessons will culminate with a student presentation of well-reasoned dialogues derived from fundamental philosophical questions in Socratic format like *What is good?* or *What is happiness?* Students' philosophical presentations will demonstrate a beginning mastery of verbal arts and will make use of the knowledge of Socrates that they have gained by way of class reading and discussion. A successful presentation will reflect on the previous lessons' discussions, activities and conclusions, and demonstrate the students' creativity, philosophical knowledge, and capacity to clearly communicate well-thought-out ideas they have developed with the help of their teacher.

Preliminary Checklist

Important information for all new recruits!

1. Visit the Civic Knowledge Project website at <http://civicknowledge.uchicago.edu/> to learn more about CKP's mission and programs.
2. Visit the Winning Words blog at <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/winningwords/> to access important documents and exchange ideas with other CKP instructors.
3. Read Bart Schultz's administrative checklist found on the blog. Don't forget about those

- signed release forms, also found on the blog!
4. **Become a fan** of Winning Words on Facebook, and tell all of your friends to do the same. Search for Winning Words, or use this condensed URL: <http://is.gd/fwmiA>
 5. Please be sure to refresh your memory of Plato, the Socratic method, and the main philosophical principles contained featured in the pre-developed curriculum. Browse the works listed below as well as the other articles within this packet.
 6. Send an introductory email to the school teacher with whom you are working. Be certain to include all of your contact information. Keep in constant contact with him or her, and request explicit answers to any questions you may have as to school policy or the school's expectations regarding your role there.

Further Reading

(*contained within this packet, or available upon request)

Plato, *Republic*. Trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.

Plato, *Theaetetus*. Trans. Bernard Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992.*

Plato, *Crito*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. From *The Dialogues of Plato*. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1900.*

Plato, *Euthyphro*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. From *The Dialogues of Plato*. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1900.*

Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. From *The Dialogues of Plato*. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1900.*

Shorris, Earl. *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000.*

Isaacs, William. "A Conversation with a Center, Not Sides." *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Currency, 1999.

Brown, Juanita and David Isaacs. *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations that Matter*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2005.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Taylor, C. C. W. *Socrates: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University

Press, 2000 (available in the CKP office).

Vlastos, Gregory. "The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All." *Socratic Studies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. *

Vlastos, Gregory. *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Talisse, Robert. "Socratic Citizenship." *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 13.2 (2006): 4-10.*

In-School Resources

At times, philosophical discussion with students might lead to deeper, more troubling issues. Should you become concerned with the health or well-being of a student, please contact the following immediately:

1. On-Site Guidance Counselor. Many of the after school locations will have a psychologist on staff. This trained professional would be the one of the best resources to consult.
2. On-Site Resource Consultant working with the Winning Words program.

A PRELIMINARY PRIMER ON SOCRATIC METHOD

Our curriculum is based in part on a certain interpretive perspective on Socrates and the Socratic method (elenchus). If you are in any doubt as to the meaning of the Socratic method, please consult the works on the reading list and note the following definitions.

1. "Socratic elenchus is a search for moral truth by question-and-answer adversary argument in which a thesis is debated only if asserted as the answerer's own belief and is regarded as refuted only if its negation is deduced from his own beliefs. . . . First and foremost elenchus is *search*. The adversary procedure which is suggested (but not entailed) by the Greek word (which *may* be used to mean 'refutation,' but may also be used to mean 'testing' or, still more broadly, 'censure,' 'reproach') is not an end in itself. If it were, Socrates' dialectic as depicted in Plato's earlier dialogues would be a form of eristic, which it is not, because its object is always that positive outreach for truth which is expressed by words for searching ... inquiring ... investigating ... This is what philosophy *is* for Socrates." (Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All," p. 4).
2. "Thus elenchus has a double objective: to discover how every human being ought to live *and* to test that single human being, who is doing the answering—to find out if *he* is living as one ought to live. This is a two-in-one operation. Socrates does not provide for two types of elenchus—a philosophical one, searching for truth about the good life, and a therapeutic one, searching out the answerer's own in the hope of bringing him to the truth. There is one elenchus and it must do both jobs, though one or the other will be to the fore in different phases of it. From this point of view, too, the 'say what you believe' requirement makes sense. How could Socrates hope to get you to give, sooner or later, an account of your life, if he did not require you to state your personal opinion on the questions under debate?" (Vlastos,

“The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All,” p. 10)

3. “Socrates walks up to a leading politician—a person who 'seems knowing and clever to many people, and especially to himself.' He engages him in questioning about his alleged expertise, asking him no doubt, as Socrates does so often, for a coherent, contradiction-free account of some central legal and political concepts, concepts such as equality, justice, and law. The expert proves unable to answer Socrates' questions in a satisfactory way. Socrates professes surprise. He goes away, concluding that he is after all a little more knowing than this expert, since he at least knows how difficult the concepts are, and how much his own understanding of them stands in need of further clarification, whereas the expert lacks not only an adequate understanding of the concepts but also knowledge of his own inadequacy. Socrates concludes that he is a very useful for democratic government to have around—like a stinging gadfly on the back of a noble but sluggish horse.... Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being. In other words, this life of questioning is not just somewhat useful, it is an indispensable part of a worthwhile life for any person and any citizen.”

(Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, pp. 20-21).