

Now on to Philosophy

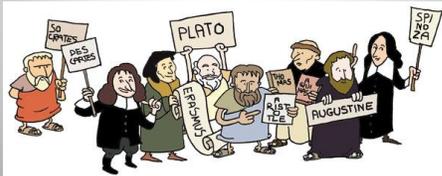
First, get comfortable, grab some snacks and **work through the philosophy slide show below *(double click to open)**. Then read notes from Socrates Café (next two pages) and get one going. The picture below shows harrellland students at their first classroom café.



Philosophy

Socratic paradox:

“I know that I know nothing at all.”



***I've discovered the slideshow imbedded in this PDF won't open, so you will need to use the free-standing philosophy slide show in this section. It looks like the image above.**

Here, for your enjoyment, is a parody about thinking.

My Addiction

It started out innocently enough. I began to think at parties now and then to loosen up. Inevitably though, one thought led to another, and soon I was more than just a social thinker.

I began to think alone –“to relax,” I told myself –but I knew it wasn't true. Thinking became more and more important to me, and finally I was thinking all the time.

I began to avoid friends at lunchtime so I could read Thoreau and Kafka. I would return to the office dizzied and confused, asking, “What is it exactly we are doing here?”

Things weren't going so great at home either. One evening I had turned off the TV and asked my wife about the meaning of life. She spent that night at her mother's. I soon had a reputation as a heavy thinker. One day the boss called me in. He said, “Skippy, I like you, and it hurts me to say this, but your thinking has become a real problem. If you don't stop thinking on the job, you'll have to find another job.” This gave me a lot to think about.

I came home early after my conversation with the boss. “Honey,” I confessed, “I've been thinking...”

“I know you've been thinking,” she said, “and I want a divorce!”

“But Honey, surely it's not that serious.”

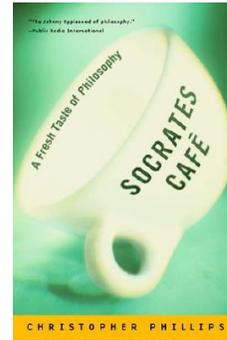
“It is serious,” she said, lower lip aquiver. “You think as much as college professors, and college professors don't make any money, so if you keep on thinking we won't have any money!”

“That's a faulty syllogism,” I said impatiently, and she began to cry. I'd had enough. “I'm going to the library,” I snarled as I stomped out the door. I headed for the library, in the mood for some Nietzsche, with a PBS station on the radio. I roared into the parking lot and ran up to the big glass doors...they didn't open. The library was closed.

To this day, I believe that a Higher Power was looking out for me that night. As I sank to the ground clawing at the unfeeling glass, whimpering for Zarathustra, a poster caught my eye. “Friend, is heavy thinking ruining you life?” it asked. You probably recognize that line. It comes from the standard Thinker's Anonymous poster which is why I am what I am today: a recovering thinker. I never miss a TA meeting. At each meeting we watch a non-educational video; last week it was “Porky's.” Then we share experiences about how we avoided thinking since the last meeting. I still have my job, and things are a lot better at home. Life just seemed... easier, somehow, as soon as I stopped thinking.

Socrates Café (Christopher Phillips)

Some beginning notes that Mrs. Harrell jotted down while reading.
This is a super book. We need to get Socrates Café going around town.



Part 1

- Can I ask you a question? Socrates
- **The unexamined life isn't worth living.** Socrates
- Few men can sustain the life of pure reason for more than very brief periods. Aristotle
- The Dialogues are “not about any chance question, but about the way one should live”
Socrates in Plato's *Republic*.
- Expand intellectual and imaginative horizons.
- “Know thyself” Delphic oracle

~Socrates didn't ask questions that had never been asked, rather he devoted his life to answering certain questions in a way that had rarely before been attempted.

~Socrates is intellectual integrity personified. He calls for common sense and common speech--the highest degree of mental alertness, sincerity, humility, courage. (Replace sincerity with honesty since one can hold a conviction sincerely without examining it.

- Every single person has a somewhat different take on each and every concept under the sun. ☐ Socrates' method is cross-examination that reveals people to themselves; that makes them see what their opinions really amount to. A moral reformatory purpose. There are many more ways and truths and lights by which to examine any given concept that we had ever imagined.
- **Socrates teaches one to listen. Our views form, change, evolve, as we participate in dialogue.**
- We are forced in an exhilarating way—dialogue, drama, books, art, dance—to explore perspectives.

~Yossarian in *Catch-22* was a “collector of good questions which he used to wring knowledge out of people” but superiors made a rule that only people who didn't ask questions could ask questions. (You are seeing what the phrase, catch-22 means, right?)

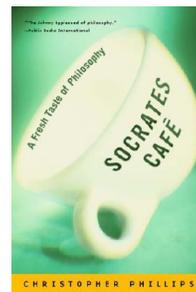
- Hannah Aarendt wrote that Socrates makes public in discourse the thinking process—the dialogue that soundlessly goes on within me, between me and myself.
- **Love the questions; have a passion for challenging even our most cherished assumptions. You must have the courage of your convictions but also the courage to have your convictions challenged.**
- Plato spoke of “divine madness—possession by the Muses” He said this was indispensable to producing poetry.
- **Rekindle the childlike—but by no means childish—sense of wonder....vibrant, relevant philosophy that often left curious souls with more questions than they'd had at the outset.**

~Questions often reveal more about us and the world around us than answers.

~**Discovering your mind can be like discovering a new universe.**

Some questions:

1. What is insanity? Was Hitler insane or was society insane to tolerate him? Was Poe insane? van Gogh? Was insanity a key to their genius? Is it possible to be sane and insane at the same time?
2. Questions to ask: What do you mean? How...? What does this mean? What speaks for and against it? Are there alternative ways of considering it that are even more plausible and tenable?
3. Is it a choice between moderation and sanity in life? In Plato's, Phaedo, Socrates says that a combination of sobriety and madness impels the soul to philosophize. Don Quixote was mad. But his madness was of a type that made him immortal.
4. One thing Socrates knew beyond a shadow of a doubt was that he didn't know anything beyond a shadow of a doubt; yet he wasn't a skeptic. Truths can be elusive, subject to new developments, information, alternatives. There is always more to discover. What is truth? Put perplexities into better focus, make will-informed life choices, see potential for excellence, self-awareness. Ever expanding spiral giving replenished outlook on life.
5. Are we more concerned with formulating fruitful and reflective questions than with formulating absolute answers.
6. What are the big questions and what makes them so?
7. Who am I?
8. Socrates asked his questions in order to make people think about ideas they took for granted.
9. Seek a deeper understanding of what constitutes the good life.
10. Any question can be plumbed Socratically. Explore the ramifications...offer compelling objections and alternatives. In many ways this resembles the scientific method, but science maintains that what can't be measured can't be investigated. This fails to address paramount human concerns as sorrow and joy and suffering and love.
11. How can we overcome alienation? Do we always want to overcome it? Are there types and degrees of alienation? Do you want to overcome some types and not others? What is alienation? What does it mean to overcome alienation? Why would we want to overcome alienation? What are some types of alienation? Is it possible to be completely alienated?
12. Give kids a question and let them ask spiraling questions about it...
13. What is enough?
14. Why question? (sample discussion on p. 26 ff)
15. Is there such a thing as human nature?
16. What if anything is the nature of individuality?
17. When is life not worth living?
18. What is the nature of transcendence?
19. Does human nature vary across time or cultures?
20. "Doesn't it seem like if we did nothing else the entire evening but ask one question after another we might reveal more about who we are than if we tried to answer any one of them?"
21. Maybe you're not asking the question in the right way. Maybe you first need to ask and answer other questions. What is the meaning of life? What gives my life meaning? What can I do to give my life the kind of meaning that makes my spirit soar, that makes me feel like I'm making this world at least a little bit better place to live in?) Ask the question in a way that leads to meaningful answers.



Live full and real...I have such confidence in you students, my 8th graders in 2010. I think there is world changing potential in this group. I love you all. *Forgive me if you read this and wonder why it's here. I kept the note here to remember my first delving into the Café with students I love.*