

Socrates Café (Christopher Phillips)

Some beginning reading notes from Mrs. Harrell. This is a super book.

We need to get a Socrates Café going at PKY!

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. 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? (Try this after the 1st activity with the star)
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. Mrs. H