

WHAT IS
THE MEANING
OF LIFE?

Deep Thoughts

Springboard:

Students should study “The Sophists” and answer the question.
(Another word for sophist is “teacher.” Answers to the second question may vary and include: they were very advanced, sought “truth,” examined the world scientifically, were interested in learning; etc.)

Objective: The student will be able to explain contributions of Greek philosophy.

Materials:

- The Sophists (Springboard handout)
- The Trial of Socrates Act I (handout)
- The Trial of Socrates Act II (handout)
- The Trial of Socrates Act III (handout)
- Witnessing the Events (handout)

Terms to know:

- Socratic method** - a way of reasoning to find truth by asking and answering questions.
- corruption** - moral ruin; dishonesty and bad judgment
- philosophy** - the study of knowledge and ideas
- political science** - the study of government and politics
- biology** - the scientific study of living things

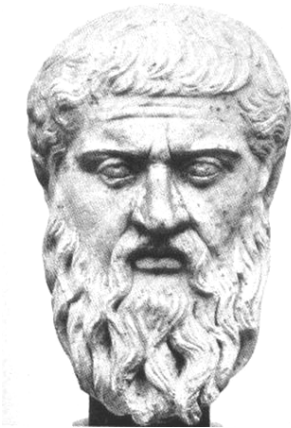
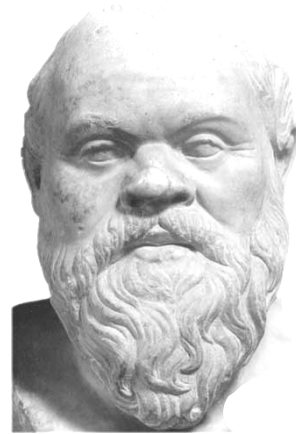
Procedure:

- While reviewing the Springboard, explain that the Greeks were the first people to separate ideas and knowledge from religion and superstition. They believed that humans could use reason to understand the world around them. The first and perhaps most famous of these philosophers, or seeker of reason and knowledge was Socrates. Go on to explain that this lesson, will take a closer look at the trial and death of Socrates.
- Refer the student(s) to “The Trial of Socrates Part I.” **For group instruction** assign parts to perform or have students read the play in groups. **For individualized instruction** have the student read the play, or the parent/instructor can read with the student.
- Then refer to the “Witnessing the Events” page and have the student(s) complete the questions for Scene I individually, in pairs or small groups.
- Have them read “The Trial of Socrates Part II” and complete the questions for Scene II.
- Have them read “The Trial of Socrates Part III,” study the picture, and complete the questions for Scene III.
- Have the student(s) share and compare their ideas from “Witnessing the Events” and discuss.

THE SOPHISTS

Socrates

- Taught his students to know themselves and examine their deepest beliefs.
- Developed the Socratic Method, helping students learn by asking questions that lead them to draw their own conclusions about information.
- Taught his students to questions everything and to think for themselves.
- Sentenced to death in 399 B.C. for teaching “false religion and corrupting the youth of Athens.”

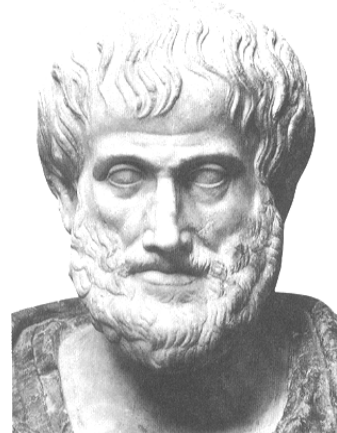


Plato

- A student of Socrates, he wrote down everything his teacher said and taught.
- Left Athens for many years after Socrates' death. Eventually came back and opened the “Academy,” a school of mathematics and philosophy.
- Wrote one of the first works of political science called “The Republic” in which he argues that society should be governed by the wisest, not the richest or most powerful.

Aristotle

- Was a favorite student of Plato at the Academy.
- Eventually opened his own school called the “Lyceum.”
- An excellent example of what the Greeks considered a well-educated man, he studied many different subjects (mathematics, political science, philosophy, medicine, and biology).
- First to classify living things into genus and species.



1. What is another word for “Sophist?” _____
2. What conclusions can be drawn about Ancient Greece based on these men’s works?

The Trial of Socrates Part I



Characters: Heron (citizen of Athens) and Nicodemus (citizen of Athens)

Setting: Early afternoon at the Athens agora, 399 B.C.

Heron - Where is everyone today, Nicodemus? Why is the marketplace so quiet and empty?

Nicodemus - Could you have forgotten? Today begins the trial for that busybody, Socrates.

Heron - Oh indeed, now I remember. It will seem strange to see him answering questions for a change. Usually, he's here in the marketplace walking around asking everyone hundreds of annoying questions when they're trying to do business. It will be satisfying to see the judges asking the questions and he having to come up with the answers. Perhaps that will end his ceaseless queries!

Nicodemus - I know what you mean. I was talking with Adonis the other day about how wonderful our democracy in Athens is, and out of nowhere the old man shows up. He almost frightened us to death because you can never hear him coming! He doesn't wear sandals you know because (*rolling his eyes*) he prefers to have his bare feet touch the earth. He thinks that the closer you are to the earth, the closer you are to truth. What does he mean by that anyway?!

Heron - I couldn't tell you. So, what were you saying about speaking with Adonis?

Nicodemus - Right, well, as I was saying, we were talking about our democracy and that pesky Socrates asks us, "What is democracy?"

Heron - How could he not know what democracy is? Every Athenian knows what it is!

Nicodemus - Of course we do, but he kept asking us to explain it. Finally I told him that democracy is when we are all free, equal, and ruled by those whom we elect.

Heron - Did that satisfy him?

Nicodemus - It's obvious that you have never been questioned by Socrates. He never stops asking questions! What is free? Who do you mean by "we"? What is equality? He just went on and on and on until Adonis and I were so confused, we couldn't remember what we had been talking about!

Heron - What did the old loon do then?

Nicodemus - He just smiled and shuffled away. We saw him head towards two other unsuspecting citizens. I tell you, I felt sorry for them!

Heron - You know, he really isn't a bad old guy. He's obviously quite smart, but those annoying questions! All-in-all they're harmless though, don't you think?

Nicodemus - No, I must disagree with you my friend. Those questions plant thoughts in people's heads, thoughts that could grow into dangerous, new ideas. The law needs to do something about the way he harasses the good people of Athens. I think it is about time they've dealt with him. Would you like to go and watch the trial?

Heron - Yes, I would. I came into town to see about buying a new slave, but this ought to be much more entertaining, although I still think he truly is a harmless old man.

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from "I Think: World History – Ancient Greece"

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The Trial of Socrates Part II



Characters: Judge 1 Plato (Socrates' student)
Socrates Apollodorus (Socrates' student)
Judge 2 Xanthippe (Socrates' wife)

Setting: That afternoon in the Council Hall of Athens. All are seated, courtroom style.

Judge 1 - Socrates, come here. (Socrates approaches the judge.) You are on trial today for the crime of corrupting the youth of Athens. How do you answer this charge?

Socrates - I am hurt. My entire life has been spent seeking truth and wisdom. I care most deeply about my students and about my city. I could no more seek to corrupt them than I could plunder the Parthenon. The only thing I want for our youth is that they find truth!

Judge 2 - That may be so, but what you have done is encourage them to question the council, the leaders, and the democracy of Athens itself! These young people follow you, listening to your questions; they want to be like you! What will happen when they are grown? We depend upon them to lead and participate in the democracy in the future. What will happen if they lack respect for it due to your constant questioning of it?

Socrates - I do not wish to make them disloyal to Athens. I am simply ask questions to make my students think and make ideas clear to them. How can this corrupt them?

Judge 1 - I'm warning you old man! Do not start questioning us! (*Noise from the back of the room breaks out as Plato and Apollodorus run up to the judges*) Who are these young men?!

Plato - I am Plato and this is Apollodorus. We are two of Socrates' most devoted students.

Judge 1 - Well what do you want? We are in the midst of a trial here.

Apollodorus - We've come to speak on behalf of our beloved teacher. We can help you understand what he does and see for yourselves that he is not corrupting anyone!

Judge 2 - All right then. Speak.

Apollodorus - Thank you your honor. Socrates is a wonderful man who would never do any wrong to anyone! Yes, he teaches us to question, but only so we can learn the truth. He makes us think about ourselves and our world by having us, "What is justice? What is truth? What is courage?"

Judge 1 - Has he ever encouraged you to question our democracy?

Plato - He encourages us to come to our own conclusions. He never pushes his views upon us. (*A woman enters.*) Xanthippe! What are you doing here? We told you we would plead his case.

Xanthippe - Judges, please forgive me, but I have come to plead for my husband's life! I know he can be troublesome, but he is a good man and an honorable citizen. Please, I beg of you to let him go. He is an old man. I will take him home and keep him out of trouble for the few years he has left... (*Socrates interrupts*)

Socrates - I am tired and I have heard enough. Either let me go or condemn me, but I will not change my ways, so hurry up and make up your mind. (*The crowd stirs.*)

The Trial of Socrates Part III



Judge 1 - Enough! We've heard enough. The council must now vote.

Characters: Plato Socrates
Crito (friend of Socrates) Guard

Setting: Three weeks later, in a small prison cell.

Plato - Socrates, my dear Socrates, how can you be so calm? Every day your students come to see you, expecting you to speak of your death. Yet you continue asking questions of us as always; you continue on as if nothing has happened and nothing dire is going to happen.

Socrates - Why should I be anything but calm? I am not afraid to die. I'd much prefer to die now while I still have my mind and can still think and teach, than die an old man who's lost his head and cannot do those things! *(Crito rushes in)*

Crito - Socrates, I have wonderful news! I have bribed the guards! I am here to save you. Come with me now; you can escape, but we must hurry!

Plato - Wonderful Crito! Hurry now Socrates, it is our last hope to save you!

Socrates - Wait! Wait, my young friends. Let us take a moment to think about this. In what way would my escape further the truth?

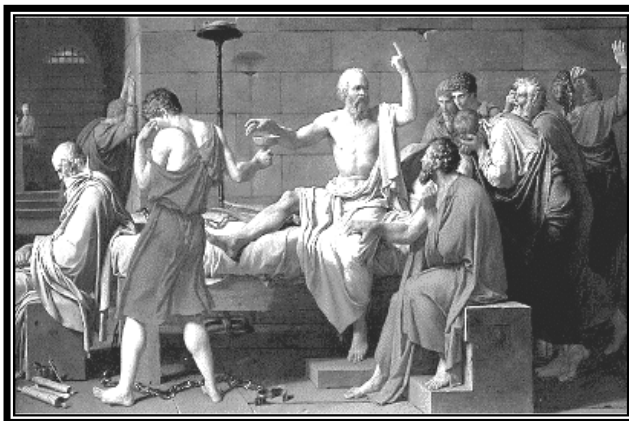
Crito - Socrates, there is no time for this! We can discuss truth later. Come, we must leave this place right now!

Socrates - Have you two forgotten all that I have taught you? We should always act on reason, not impulse. If I were to run away now, it would be an act of impulse, not a thoughtful one. I cannot run away. My life is and always has been here in Athens, and my purpose was and remains to pursue truth and wisdom. Everyone thinks I am just an old man, a crazy nuisance. And yes, I know that I am a bother, and my questions annoy some. But I have stirred Athens to action when she became too settled in her thoughts, too sure that she was always in the right. Those who judge me think I do not care for this city, but the truth is that I love Athens and could not live without her. *(A guard enters carrying a goblet of hemlock, a poison.)*

Guard - Here, Socrates, drink this. *(hands the cup to Socrates)* It is hemlock; the poison does not take long to do its work.

Socrates - As I drink this hemlock, my thirst will be quenched forever. *(Socrates drinks from the goblet, sits quietly for a few moments, and then dies.)*

“The Death of Socrates”
a painting by
Jacques Louis David



Witnessing the Events



SCENE I QUESTIONS:

? Explain, in your own words, what Socrates is accused of.

? Why do you think some Athenians would have considered Socrates a “pest”?

? Which man’s view of Socrates do you most agree with: Nicodemus or Heron? Why?

SCENE II QUESTIONS:

? Why do you think Socrates is hurt by the charges against him?

? What points are Plato and Apollodorus trying to make about Socrates?

? If you were a judge, how would you vote in this trial? Why?

SCENE III QUESTIONS:

? Explain why Socrates isn’t afraid to die.

? Why isn’t Socrates concerned about being seen as a pest?

? Look at the painting, the *Death of Socrates*, and create a caption for it. What do you think Socrates is saying in this scene?

This is one InspirEd lesson from “I Think: World History – The Holocaust.”
Below is the Table of Contents for the entire unit, which is available for purchase at

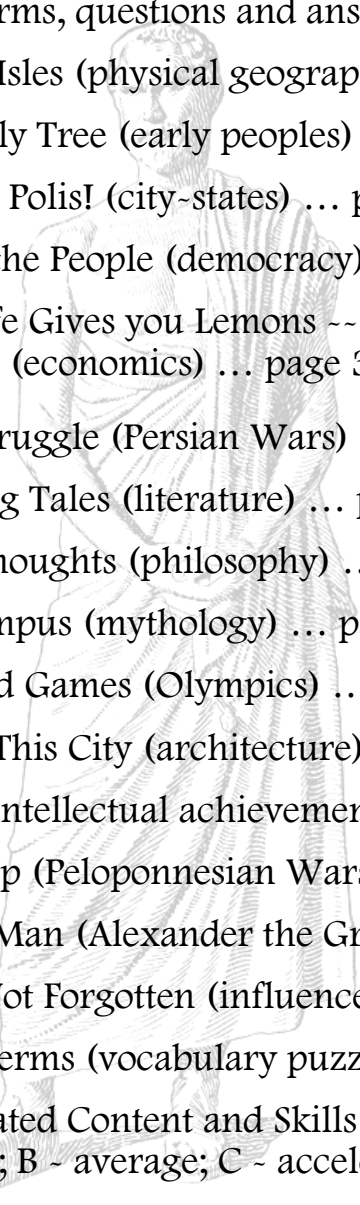
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I Think: World History - Ancient Greece

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