

Resources for Pre-College Level Philosophy Teachers

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Bio: Bruce Grigsby majored in history at California State University at Northridge, and completed a Master's Degree in liberal arts at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which is renowned for its distinctive "great books" curriculum. For thirty-seven years, he has been teaching at Montrose High School: he teaches both AP English (for thirteen years) and a general, introductory course in philosophy (for twenty-five years) in which he incorporates as a core technique the use of opening questions and Socratic seminars which he learned at St. John's.

We begin with about three weeks of formal deductive logic and then work through the Meno and the Socrates trial and execution trilogy from Plato's dialogues, followed by fairly extensive segments from the *Republic*. We do a quick look at excerpts from the *Tao te ching*, the *Analects*, and the *Encheiridion*. Then we argue about the existence of God (some Anselm and Aquinas) and finish up with a fairly good chunk of *Utilitarianism*, excerpts from Nietzsche, and finally William James' "The Will to Believe."

We begin the class with a three week segment on the basics of inductive and especially deductive logic with a brief examination of common fallacies such as *argumentum ad hominem*, and complex questions (eg. "Have you stopped beating your wife?").

Following the logic section, we launch into Greek philosophy and work chronologically through samples of philosophical thinking, ending with William James' essay, "The Will to Believe," as indicated in the following reading list:

Basic Text: *Classics of Western Philosophy*, sixth edition., Steven M. Cahn, Editor, Hackett Publishing

Platonic dialogs:

*Meno**

Apology

*Crito**

Phaedo (excerpts)

The Republic (excerpts as presented by student panels)

Aristotle:

Nicomachean Ethics (Bks I, II, VII (on "Friendship", X*))

Classical Chinese:

Excerpts from *The Analects*, and *The Tao te Ching* (these are not in the Cahn text – I use photocopies from various outside sources.)

Stoicism:

Epictetus: *The Encheiridion*

Medieval Theology:

St. Anselm: *Proslogion*, “Gaunilo’s Reply,” “Anselm’s Reply to Gaunilo”

St. Thomas Aquinas: from *Summa Theologiae**

Descartes: Excerpts from *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Utilitarianism:

Bentham’s Hedonistic Calculus (not in text)

John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism (Chpt. I, II), from *On Liberty*

Friedrich Nietzsche:

from *Twilight of the Idols* (“The Problem of Socrates”)*

William James:

“The Will to Believe”

- * Selections are used for in-class Socratic seminars. Prior to seminars, students prepare a summary of a close reading of the text, select a specific passage, and conclude with an opening question for the seminar. Students then read each other’s opening questions, then select three or four to begin the seminar. Seminars and opening questions are a basic part of the course. Other activities include individual and small group presentations. Students are also required to share selections from the Chinese philosophy section and *The Encheiridion* with someone outside the class and report to the class as to the course of the dialogue.

These are brief highlights of the course. I would be happy to discuss specific lessons and activities further as might be of interest to individuals.