

Phoenix Middle School



Instructors:

Seventh Grade

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Eighth Grade

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The three major goals of this course are to:

- Introduce and encourage practice of the four aspects of thinking: Creative Thinking, Abstract Thinking, Systematic Thinking, and Communicative Thinking.
- Encourage student inquiry through asking thoughtful, open-ended questions and thought experiments.
- Provide instruction and opportunities for students to practice and develop their discussion and questioning skills.

Learning Outcomes

7th GRADE

Semester 1 **Theme: CONNECT - How do I know what I know?**
Reading: [Learning How to Learn - How to Succeed in School...](#); [A Guide for Kids and Teens.](#) by Alistair McConville, Barbara Oakley PhD, Terrence Sejnowski PhD

Semester 2 **Theme: INTERACT - How do I interact with others to understand their perspectives?**
Reading: [Mindwise: Why We Misunderstand What Others Think...](#) by Nicholas Epley

- Understand Mastery Assessment and types of assignments in the learning cycle.
- Identify learning strengths and weaknesses and use that self-knowledge to develop effective study strategies.
- Develop techniques for organizing your personal space, your time, and your written notes.
- Describe what it means to be a critical thinker.
- Use source bibliographies and other background sources to locate additional information about topics.
- Properly cite sources and prepare a works-cited list.
- Develop Socratic skills to engage each other in sustained discussion of various issues.
- Detect logical fallacies or the use of any inappropriate rhetorical tactics or emotional appeals in real life arguments.
- Distinguish appropriate from inappropriate uses of statistical and causal reasoning.
- Judge the reliability of experts, authorities, or the media.
- Apply critical thinking tools to real life issues in a constructive way.
- Recognize, analyze, and evaluate arguments.

8th GRADE:

Semester 1 **Theme: IDENTITY - How do my choices reveal my identity?**
Reading: [The Complete Philosophy Files](#) by Stephen Law

Semester 2 **Theme: IMPACT - How do I impact the global community?**
Reading: [Where Am I Giving: A Global Adventure Exploring How to Use Your Gifts and Talents to Make a Difference...](#) by Kelsey Timmerman

- Continued development of discussion skills.
- Develop skills that foster critical thinking for problem solving and making decisions.

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- Understanding that the concept of wellness as it relates to health and well-being, is a combination of various aspects of one's life and social environment.
- Explore the interplay between nature and nurture in determining personality and behavior.
- Examine the dynamic quality between individuals and the environment, taking into consideration the influence of the social influences.
- Spot the presence of any cognitive or social biases behind our beliefs.
- Explore how social change can be achieved through democratic dialogue.

In a time of “alternative facts” and “fake news”, how can one decide what is correct and incorrect? How can we establish what is true or not true, when we find competing claims about the truth? How do we make sense of what is happening in the world, when there are so many different versions of current events in the news, on our social media, and in our daily conversations? We live in an era when many feel that it has become harder to trust the government, news media, and each other as reliable sources of information and knowledge—it is more important than ever for us to be aware of critical thinking and what it can do for us. Critical thinking helps to make clear how it is that we think and communicate about the world. Not only can critical thinking help us to navigate the claims that other people make, it can also help us to improve our own thinking and communication.

INSTRUCTION

The course includes reading and journal-writing, in-class and out-of-class writing activities, and Socratic discussions. The emphasis will be on sharing and discussing each other's ideas, writings and writing experiences in order to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaborative inquiry. We work to cultivate a sense of belonging among students and facilitate students' ability to engage productively with one another across their differences. The class will focus on practice not on lecture. It will emphasize students figuring out things using their own mind, not memorizing what is in a textbook. On a typical class day, students will be in both large and small groups practicing "disciplined" thinking.

I. SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Critical Thinking
- Types of Reasoning Skills
- Techniques of Persuasion
- Inductive and Deductive Argument
- Types of Reasoning (moral, legal, aesthetic, etc.)
- Techniques for Sparking Ideas, Solving Problems
- Defining Problems and Making Decisions
- Using Teams to Think Critically and Problem Solve
- Exploring Your Personal Critical and Creative Thinking Skills

II. APPLICATION (Sample Socratic Discussion and Writing Topics)

Merely knowing the principles that distinguish good and bad reasoning is not enough. Students might study in the classroom about how to swim, and learn about the basic theory, such as the fact that one should not breathe under water. But unless they can apply such theoretical knowledge through practice, they might not actually be able to swim.

Similarly, to be good at critical thinking skills it is necessary for students to internalize the above skills so that they can apply them in daily life. There are at least two ways. One is to do lots of good-quality exercises. Exercises include not just exercises in classrooms and tutorials. They also include exercises in the form of Socratic discussion and debates with peers and other people in their daily life. The other method is to think more deeply about the principles that they have acquired. In the human mind, memory and understanding are acquired through making connections between ideas.

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Sample Course Connections

Language Arts	Are you always yourself? Are you a fair and just person? Is it important to speak and write so you can be understood? How do you know who your friends are? How do you have a good relationship with self/your body? Should you always listen to the opinions of others? Should you be rewarded for your efforts in school? Is it your duty to give to charity? Will having fun make you happier than studying? Should you ever tell a lie? Are there times when you should be violent? What makes something you say true? If many people think something is true, is it true? Can something logical ever not make sense?
Social Studies	What is the social contract? Why do people who want freedom consent to be governed? What is it about power and success that creates ethical challenges for leaders? Why should we be ethical? What is a duty and how does it differ from a virtue? What is a categorical imperative? To what extent is the greatest good part of a leader's job description? What price are we willing to pay for the greatest happiness?
Science, Math, Technology	What makes mathematics and science different from other human activities? What can an experiment tell us about the world? Are impossible things ever possible? Can man "improve" upon nature? What constitutes "improvement"? Do human beings have a need for nature that implies an obligation to preserve it? Do future generations have a "right" to a clean and natural environment when their time comes? Do we control technology or does technology control us?
Global Cultures	Are there standards of right and wrong that apply everywhere, regardless of cultural practice? How do we make ethical judgments in and about foreign cultures? What are our ethical obligations to people in other cultures? Race and Racism. What moral characteristics should apply to leaders and leadership everywhere? Why can't we all just get along?