TRADITION OF SEARCHING

Philosophy – Lesson 3 - Socrates



DIOCESE OF KERRY
POST PRIMARY RESOURCES

1. Lesson Overview

Area	Details
Subject	Religious Education / The Tradition of Searching – Philosophy
Topic	Socrates: ethics, the search for truth, dialogue, the soul and virtue
Suggested level	Senior Cycle / adaptable for Junior Cycle
Suggested duration	Two lessons of 60–70 minutes, or one extended double lesson
Learning focus	Socrates' background; ethics and universal truth; difference between Socrates and the Sophists; dialogue and Socratic ignorance; the soul, wisdom, virtue and happiness; continuing influence.
PowerPoint sequence	Background → ethics → universal justice → Socrates and the Sophists → dialogue → Socratic ignorance → virtuous life and soul → wisdom and happiness → 'unexamined life' → influence → exam questions.

Learning Intentions

- Understand key background information about Socrates and how we know about his life.
- Explain why ethics was central to Socrates' philosophy.
- Describe Socrates' belief in the search for universal truth, particularly in relation to justice.
- Compare Socrates' views with those of the Sophists.
- Explain how Socrates used dialogue and Socratic ignorance to search for truth.
- Understand the importance Socrates placed on the soul, wisdom, virtue and true happiness.
- Interpret 'The unexamined life is not worth living'.
- Recognise the influence of Socrates on later philosophical thought.

Success Criteria

- I can identify key facts about Socrates' life and explain why Plato is an important source.
- I can define ethics and explain why Socrates focused on it.
- I can give two differences between Socrates and the Sophists.
- I can explain dialogue and Socratic ignorance.
- I can describe the relationship between wisdom, knowledge and virtue.
- I can explain how Socrates linked virtuous living with true happiness.
- I can apply Socrates' ideas to a contemporary situation and support my view with reasons.

Key Vocabulary

Term	Meaning
Ethics	The study of moral behaviour; concerns right and wrong, values, principles and virtues.
Universal truth	A truth or principle that can be applied to all people in all situations.
Relative truth	The view presented in the PowerPoint that what is right may differ from person to person.
Dialogue	A conversation through which ideas are examined and truth is explored.
Socratic ignorance	Socrates' practice of presenting himself as ignorant and asking questions to reveal gaps in another person's knowledge.
Virtue	Moral goodness; for Socrates, linked to wisdom and knowledge.
Soul	Something Socrates considered important to care for through virtuous living.
Common good	What benefits people collectively rather than merely satisfying an individual.
Reason	The human ability to think, question and make judgements.

2. Suggested Lesson Sequence

The content is best taught across two lessons to allow students time to explore the ethical questions and practise dialogue.

Stage / Time	Teacher & Student Activity	Resources
Lesson 1 – Starter (5 mins)	Display 'The unexamined life is not worth living'. Students write what they think it means; invite initial responses.	PowerPoint quotation slide
Background (8 mins)	Present the biographical details: Socrates wrote nothing himself; much of what is known comes through Plato; he served as a soldier and refused payment for teaching.	PowerPoint
Ethics and universal truth (10 mins)	Define ethics. Explore right/wrong, justice/injustice, courage/cowardice and Socrates' search for a universal definition of justice.	PowerPoint + Activity 1
Activity 1 (10 mins)	Students sort statements into Socrates' views or the Sophists' views and justify choices.	Worksheet 1
Dialogue and Socratic ignorance (12 mins)	Explain conversations with people regarded as experts, Socrates' questioning and his practice of appearing ignorant.	PowerPoint + Activity 2
Lesson 1 plenary (5 mins)	Complete: Socrates believed…; The Sophists believed…; One question I would ask Socrates is…	Exit ticket
Lesson 2 retrieval (5 mins)	Recall ethics, dialogue and Socratic ignorance.	Key vocabulary
Activity 2 (12 mins)	Pairs examine a claim through open questions, definitions, examples and counterexamples; then swap roles.	Worksheet 2
Soul, wisdom and virtue (10 mins)	Explain the presentation's connection between caring for the soul, gaining wisdom, living virtuously and achieving true happiness.	PowerPoint
Activity 3 (12 mins)	Groups apply Socrates' ideas to contemporary moral scenarios and consider reason, virtue and the common good.	Worksheet 3
Influence and exam practice (10 mins)	Discuss Socratic ignorance and the influence of Socrates. Plan the 2018 Higher Level exam response.	PowerPoint + exam prompt
Plenary (5 mins)	Return to the quotation and explain it using at least three key terms.	Exit ticket

3. Classroom Activity 1 – Socrates or the Sophists?

Name: _____ Class: _____

Instructions: Write S for Socrates or P for the Sophists. Choose two statements and explain your answer.

Statement	S / P	Reason / evidence
1. There is no universal truth; what is right can differ from person to person.		
2. There is an absolute, universal truth that can apply to all people.		
3. The strongest argument should win.		
4. We should search for a universal definition of justice.		
5. What pleases us is not necessarily what is actually good or right.		
6. Justice is in the interest of the stronger.		
7. We should act for the common good of all.		
8. Dialogue and questioning can help us discover truth.		

Think further: Why might Socrates have believed that the Sophists' approach could damage Athenian society?

4. Classroom Activity 2 – The Socratic Method: Question Everything

Purpose: Give students experience of dialogue and Socratic questioning rather than simply exchanging opinions.

The process

1. Student A makes a claim from the list below.
2. Student B asks questions to clarify what the claim means. Do not immediately agree or disagree.
3. Ask for a definition, an example and a reason.
4. Test the claim with a different situation or a counterexample.
5. Student A explains whether the original claim has changed or become more precise. Swap roles.

See the accompanying cards for this activity.

Choose a claim

- Being popular means being happy.
- Everyone should always tell the truth.
- Being fair means treating everyone exactly the same.
- Rules should never be broken.
- Doing the right thing is always easy.
- Having lots of money makes a person successful.

Question prompts

- What do you mean by…?
- Can you define that word?
- Can you give an example?
- Is that true in every situation?
- Could someone disagree? What might they say?
- Does your example prove the claim?
- What might happen if everyone acted this way?

Reflection

What did you discover that you had not considered before?
Did your view change or become more precise? Explain.
How did asking questions help you think more carefully?

Choose a Claim

Read the statements below and choose one to discuss:

- Being popular means being happy.
- Everyone should always tell the truth.
- Being fair means treating everyone exactly the same.
- Rules should never be broken.
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Question Prompts

Use these questions to explore and challenge the claim:

- What do you mean by...?
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- Can you give an example?
- Is that true in every situation?
- Could someone disagree? What might they say?
- Does your example prove the claim?
- What might happen if everyone acted this way?

5. Classroom Activity 3 – Wisdom, Virtue and True Happiness

Purpose: Apply Socrates' ideas about wisdom, virtue, reason and the common good to everyday choices.

Reminder: The PowerPoint links virtue with knowledge. Knowing what is good was understood as the same as doing what is good. True and lasting happiness comes through moral living.

Divide the class into groups – give them out the accompanying scenario cards. You can give each group and different scenario and swap them around if you want to extend the activity.

Scenario A – The group chat

A student sees a cruel message about another student in a class group chat. Everyone is laughing. The student could join in, stay silent or challenge the message.

What would a wise and virtuous response look like?

How might this response promote the good of others as well as the individual?

Scenario B – The lost wallet

A student finds a wallet containing money and identification. Nobody has seen them pick it up.

What would a wise and virtuous response look like?

How might this response promote the good of others as well as the individual?

Scenario C – The shortcut

A student has an opportunity to cheat on a test. It would improve their grade, and they believe they will not be caught.

What would a wise and virtuous response look like?

How might this response promote the good of others as well as the individual?

Scenario D – The party

A young person is pressured to do something they believe is unsafe because friends say it will make the night more enjoyable.

What would a wise and virtuous response look like?

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A student has an opportunity to cheat on a test. It would improve their grade, and they believe they will not be caught.

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Scenario D – The Party



A young person is pressured to do something they believe is unsafe because friends say it will make the night more enjoyable.

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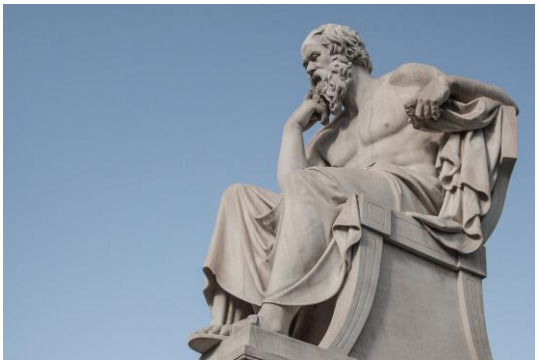
6. Reading Comprehension – Socrates: The Search for Truth and the Virtuous Life



Socrates was a well-known Greek philosopher whose thinking continues to influence philosophy. He did not write down his own ideas. Much of what is known about him comes from the writings of his best-known student, Plato. The presentation describes Socrates as a moral and courageous person who served as a soldier in the Athenian army. Unlike the Sophists, he refused to accept payment for teaching and became poor in later life. He was eventually put to death by the Athenian government. He was known as a ceaseless questioner and is associated with the statement: 'The unexamined life is not worth living.'

The central focus of Socrates' philosophy was ethics: questions about right and wrong, justice and injustice, courage and cowardice. He believed that each person had a duty to explore the truth about these matters. He wanted to discover a universal definition of justice – a definition that could apply to everyone, rather than changing from person to person or situation to situation.

This put Socrates in disagreement with the Sophists. The PowerPoint describes the Sophists as believing that truth was relative, that the strongest argument should win and that justice served the interests of the stronger. Socrates believed instead that there was an absolute, universal truth. He argued that what pleases an individual is not necessarily good or right. People should act for the common good of all, not simply for their own advantage.

Socrates searched for truth through dialogue. He spoke with people who were considered experts in a particular subject. During these conversations, he often pretended to be ignorant. This approach is known as Socratic ignorance. By asking clear and simple questions, he could reveal that people who claimed to know a great deal did not always understand the subject as well as they thought. The aim of the dialogues was to discover how people should lead a good moral life. Socrates encouraged everyone to question their own beliefs and knowledge.

Socrates also believed that the soul was important and should be cared for. He taught that people should lead a virtuous life. For Socrates, virtue was connected to wisdom and knowledge: knowing what was good was the same as

doing what was good. He believed that true happiness came not simply from pleasure, but from moral living. People needed to be honest with themselves, use reason and educate themselves about the world and matters that mattered in their lives.

The presentation uses alcohol as an example. Drinking may bring short-term pleasure, but constant drunkenness can damage health, create dependence and work against the human ability to use reason. It therefore does not lead to humanity's true good or lasting happiness. Socrates' statement about the examined life means that people should reflect on their lives, search for meaning, educate themselves and be true to themselves if they hope to live virtuously and find true happiness.

Socrates' influence continued after his death. The idea of acknowledging what we do not know has influenced philosophy and science. The presentation also notes that later thinkers, including Aristotle and the contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, engaged with ideas about virtue associated with Socrates.

Questions

1. Why is Plato an important source for what we know about Socrates?

2. Give two details about Socrates' life from the reading.

3. What was the main focus of Socrates' philosophy?

4. What did Socrates hope to discover about justice?

5. Give two ways in which Socrates' views differed from those of the Sophists.

6. What is dialogue, and how did Socrates use it?

7. Explain the meaning of Socratic ignorance.

8. What was the aim of Socrates' dialogues?

9. Why did Socrates believe the soul should be cared for?

10. Explain the connection between wisdom, knowledge and virtue in Socrates' thinking.

11. Why does the reading suggest that constant drunkenness does not lead to true happiness?

12. In your own words, explain 'The unexamined life is not worth living'.

13. Name one later thinker or area of thought influenced by Socrates, as described in the reading.

7. Teacher Answer Key

Activity 1 – Suggested Answers

Statement	Answer
1. No universal truth; varies person to person.	P – Sophists
2. Absolute, universal truth.	S – Socrates
3. Strongest argument should win.	P – Sophists
4. Search for universal definition of justice.	S – Socrates
5. What pleases us is not necessarily good or right.	S – Socrates
6. Justice is in the interest of the stronger.	P – Sophists
7. Act for the common good of all.	S – Socrates
8. Dialogue and questioning help discover truth.	S – Socrates

Activity 2

- There is no single correct response: assess the quality of questions, clarification, examples, counterexamples and reflection.
- Students should show that dialogue can test assumptions and refine a claim, rather than simply becoming a debate to win.

Activity 3

- Accept a range of responses. Strong answers apply wisdom, reason, virtue, moral living and the common good.
- Students should distinguish short-term pleasure or personal advantage from true and lasting happiness as described by Socrates.

Reading Comprehension

6. Plato was Socrates' best-known student and much of what is known about Socrates comes through Plato's writings.
7. Any two: Greek philosopher; served in Athenian army; father was a sculptor; mother a midwife; refused payment for teaching; described as moral/courageous; was put to death by the Athenian government.
8. Ethics.
9. A universal definition of justice that could apply to all people.
10. Any two: Sophists saw truth as relative; Socrates believed in absolute universal truth; Sophists emphasised the strongest argument; Socrates emphasised dialogue and truth; Sophists linked justice to the stronger; Socrates promoted the common good.
11. Dialogue is conversation. Socrates used conversations with people regarded as experts to examine ideas and search for truth.
12. He acted as if he did not know and used questions to reveal gaps in the other person's knowledge.
13. To discover the truth about how to lead a good moral life.
14. He believed the soul was important and should be cared for through a virtuous life.
15. Virtue is linked to wisdom and knowledge; knowing what is good was understood as doing what is good.
16. Because it can damage health, create dependence and undermine the use of reason, so it does not lead to the true good or lasting happiness.
17. People should examine their choices and beliefs, search for meaning, educate themselves and live honestly and virtuously.
18. Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre, philosophy or science; accept a response supported by the passage.

8. Homework / Exam Preparation

PowerPoint Homework Questions

19. Why was asking questions so important to Socrates?
20. Why did Socrates describe himself as ignorant?
21. How did Socrates believe the Universal Definition of Truth could be reached?
22. How did Socrates differ from the Sophists?

Video follow-up

Watch the video linked in the PowerPoint and identify three new points or pieces of information to add to your notes on Socrates.

Exam Practice – 2018 Higher Level (40 marks)

'The unexamined life is not worth living.' Imagine Socrates was alive today and giving a talk on this topic. Based on your knowledge of Socrates' thinking, outline two points that he would make about the purpose of life for people today.

Planning prompts:

- The need to question our beliefs, choices and assumptions.
- The importance of searching for truth and living morally.
- The connection between wisdom, virtue, caring for the soul and true happiness.
- The importance of education, reason and being true to oneself.

Further Exam Practice – 2021 Higher Level (40 marks)

The development of philosophy can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Explain why two other points in time can be described as key moments in the development of philosophical thought. The PowerPoint identifies this question but does not provide the two other historical moments; students will need additional course notes to complete it accurately.