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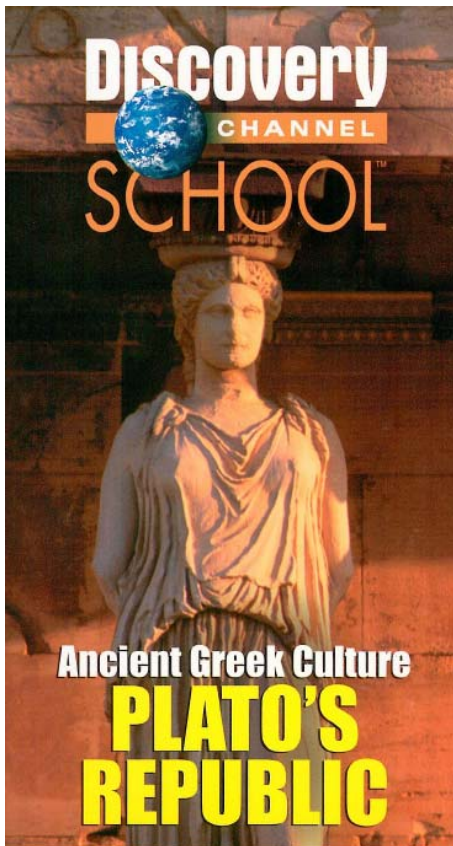
#11772
PLATO'S REPUBLIC

DISCOVERY SCHOOL, 1996
Grade Level: 9–12
26 Minutes

Raphael's *Plato in The School of Athens.* Plato gestures to the heavens, representing his belief in The Forms.

"Necessity... is the mother of invention."
Plato

PLATO'S REPUBLIC

The Republic has intrigued, provoked, appalled, and inspired readers since it was written in ancient Athens 2,500 years ago. Its author, Plato, has simultaneously been called the father of philosophy, the first fascist, a revolutionary, and the original idealist. The questions Plato first posed in this book of ideas address conflicts people grapple with today.

CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

#10837   VOCABULARY BUILDERS IN SIGN LANGUAGE: AMERICAN HISTORY/GOVERNMENT
#11117   GRAVITY: HISTORY OF IDEAS
#11641   ESSAY WHAT?

TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:
Plato

LENGTH OF LESSON:
One class periods

GRADE LEVEL:
9-12

SUBJECT AREA:
World History

CREDIT:
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OBJECTIVES:
Students will understand the following:

1. In *The Republic,* Plato described the ideal society.

2. Today's readers can adopt, modify, or reject Plato's views.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Computer with Internet access

Chalkboard, whiteboard, or overhead transparency and projector

PROCEDURE:

1. Review with your students the major ideas that you and they have discussed in your exploration of Plato's *Republic.* These may include the following:

- The three classes that make up the ideal society
- The education of leaders in the ideal society
- Appearance versus reality; the theory of Forms
- Knowledge through reason versus knowledge through sense experience
- The problem with art

2. Explain to students that because Plato wrote *The Republic* 2,500 years ago, the time may be right for a sequel and that you will give them a chance to adopt, modify, or reject Plato's views as they describe another, smaller ideal society: Utopia High School. To get started, conduct a whole-class brainstorming session in which students identify the subtopics to cover in their descriptions. A partial brainstorming list might look like the following:

- Categories of people at Utopia High (e.g., students, teachers, and so on)
- School schedule
- Curriculum
- Extracurricular activities
- Facilities (e.g., libraries, labs, etc.)
- Admission requirements
- Causes for expulsion

3. Divide the class into groups, and assign to each group one or more of the subtopics that come out of the preceding brainstorming session. For each subtopic, the group must list three to five points, or details, along with a defense. For example, for "school schedule," a group might, first, detail the number of hours per day that students must be in class, the number of weeks per year that students will attend classes, and the frequency of time off and, second, explain the rationale for those proposals.

4. Ask each group to select one student to orally present the details and rationale to the class. Students in the audience should take notes from each presentation.

5. After the last presentation, help students figure out if any of the proposals are in conflict with one another. If so, lead a discussion on resolving those conflicts.

6. Select one student who will use outline form on the board or on an overhead transparency to summarize the description of Utopia High School that has emerged from

the small-group and whole-class discussions.

ADAPTATIONS:

Instead of asking students to envision an ideal high school, invite them to describe an ideal year in one class—say, in English or social studies. Have them specify class size, characteristics of the teacher, resources available to the class, material to be covered, grading system, and so on. As with the 9-12 students, ask for the reasons behind each proposal.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Create a Venn diagram in which you explore the similarities and differences between the Utopia of Plato's *Republic* and the United States of today. Create another in which you compare Utopia with your own community.

2. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. What did he mean? To what extent do you agree or disagree with his statement? Have you ever examined your own role in society?

3. Plato indicated that he would not allow poets to be part of his ideal society. Why did he say this? Who would you be sure to include in a utopia of your own design?

4. Explain Socrates' views on the qualities that make up a good and just person. How relevant are those qualities to the world today?

5. The rulers in *The Republic* have no money—they are denied all luxuries. Why are those with money ineligible to rule? How does this differ from the rulers of the United States today? What rules concerning money and leadership would you establish in your own utopian society?

6. Plato makes the claim that we are "prisoners of our culture." Discuss both the meaning and the implications of this idea.

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate your students in their group work using the following three-point rubric

- **Three points:** significant contribution by all students to the group discussion; more

than three details suggested for each subtopic; well thought out and articulated rationale for suggestions
- **Two points:**adequate contribution by all students to the group discussion; three details suggested for each subtopic; well thought out rationale for suggestions
- **One point:**less than total participation by all students in the group discussion; fewer than three details suggested for each subtopic; inadequate rationale for suggestions
You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining criteria for significant contribution to group discussion and well thought out rationales for suggestions.

EXTENSION:

Plato Online
If your classes have access to or can set up e-mail communication among themselves or real-time online discussion (as in a MOO or a MUD), ask one student to play the role of Socrates, who will ask questions of the other students. The goal is to develop dialogues that deal with questions such as the following:

- What is justice?
- How should good people behave?
- To what extent should one help friends and hurt enemies?
- What are the important jobs in a society?
- What should be the role of art in society?

Plato Live!
Ask your students to imagine that Plato's publisher has announced a series of scheduled TV appearances for Plato to promote his new book, *The Republic.*Have your students work in groups of two or three to prepare for and then role-play Plato's visit to a series of TV shows with different formats: news magazine show, daytime talk show, late-night show, evening news broadcast. One student can play the role of Plato, one of an interviewer, and one of a producer. Ask each group to submit in writing its plans to you, the "executive producer," for advance approval. The plans must indicate what aspects of Plato's philosophy the program will explore, what quotations or paraphrases from *The Republic*Plato will include, and how the interviewer will challenge Plato or disagree with him. Then have each group present its three-to-five-minute segment to the rest of the class.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Plato for Beginners
Robert Cavalier. Writers & Readers Publishing, Inc., 1998.

A totally teen-friendly handbook with bold, fun illustrations and graphics to accompany every page, this book offers young adult readers an understanding of Plato's philosophy and the ways in which it connects to our world today.

Plato in 90 Minutes
Paul Strathern. Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996.
This concise guide to Plato's ideas, writing, and life is written in an entertaining fashion for beginning philosophy readers. Readers may take advantage of time lines, direct quotes, an index, and a recommended reading list.

WEB LINKS:

Perseus Project: An Evolving Digital Library
A massive set of texts, images, plans, and maps resources for the study of the ancient world.
http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/

Greek (Attic/Hellenic) Sites on the WWW
This site presents materials on Greek mythology and literature. There are sections on archaeology, art, maps, The Odyssey, and drama.
http://www.webcom.com/shownet/medea/grklink.html

Exploring Ancient World Cultures: Greece
This site takes a critical look at the great philosophers, teachers, and writers of ancient Greece. The information on Plato, Aristophanes, and Socrates can be used as a supplement for students and teachers of the ancient and medieval worlds.
http://eawc.evansville.edu/grpage.htm

Plato's Republic
A electronic version of Plato's Republic. Students can use this text to annotate and compare/contrast it to other utopian models.
http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html

Plato's Republic Restated in Plain English
The title says it all, The Republic in plain English.
http://members.xoom.com/the_republic/

VOCABULARY:

allegory
The expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence.
Context:
The "Allegory of the Cave" revealed Socrates' ideas about the role of the philosopher,

whom he regarded as an "enlightened one."

censorship
The institution, system, or practice of censoring.
Context:
Plato felt that censorship had a place in the ideal world, since it would allow children to hear only heroic and uplifting tales, while also banning all rowdy music.

dialogue
A written composition in which two or more characters are represented as conversing.
Context:
*The Republic*features a series of imaginary conversations, or dialogues, where Socrates expresses his philosophy.

philosopher
A person who seeks wisdom or enlightenment.
Context:
Both Plato and Socrates were philosophers who thought extensively about the ideal world.

pragmatism
An American movement in philosophy founded by C.S. Peirce and William James and marked by the doctrines that the meaning of conceptions is to be sought in their practical bearings, that the function of thought is to guide action, and that truth is preeminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief.
Context:
Pragmatism is a school of thought that stresses dealing with the practical world as it appears to be.

republic
A government having a chief of state who is not a monarch and who in modern times is usually a president.
Context:
For Plato the ideal republic was one in which those who ruled had nothing.

utopia
A place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions.
Context:
Many philosophers have sought an ideal place, or utopia. Plato described his in *The Republic.*

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level:
9-12

Subject Area:
world history

Standard:
Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 B.C.

Benchmarks:
Benchmark: Understands the legacy of Greek thought and government (e.g., the importance of participatory government in Greek city-states for the development of Western political thought and institutions; the essential ideas in Plato's *Republic*and the influence of this work on modern political thought; Athenian ideas and practices related to political freedom, national security, and justice; how the maturing democratic institutions in Greece resulted in greater restrictions on the rights and freedoms of women).
Benchmark: Knows significant Greek writings, literature, and mythology (e.g., the prominent ideas of Greek philosophers; the significance and major works of Greek historians; significant Greek tragedies and comedies, and the values and lessons they transmitted; aspects of daily life in Greece between 600 and 200 B.C. as they are represented by playwrights of the time).
Benchmark: Understands the characteristics of religion, gender, and philosophy in the Hellenistic era (e.g., the significance of the interaction of Greek and Jewish traditions for the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity; the changes in the status of women during the Hellenistic era, their new opportunities, and greater restrictions; what different Greek philosophers considered to be a "good life").

Grade Level:
9-12
Subject Area:
language arts

Standard:
Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Benchmarks:
Benchmark: Identifies and analyzes the philosophical assumptions and basic beliefs underlying an author's work.
Benchmark: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Grade Level:
9-12
Subject Area:
life skills

Standard:
Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument.

Benchmarks:
Evaluates the overall effectiveness of complex arguments.

Grade Level:
9-12
Subject Area:
behavioral studies

Standard:
Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.

Benchmarks:
Understands that cultural beliefs strongly influence the values and behavior of the people who grow up in the culture, often without their being fully aware of it, and that people have different responses to these influences.

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