An Inquiry into Inquiry: An Observation of Applied
Virtue Epistemology in Two Twelfth-Grade Honors
Classes

An Honors Thesis

by

Kathryn M. Davis

Juli K. Eflin

Ball State University
Muncie, IN

May 2004

May 8, 2004
Abstract

Epistemic virtues, through reflective thinking and actively “walking the path” of knowledge, are shown in two Honors AP English classes, using T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and Collette’s “The Bracelet.” The theory behind observing the students’ active role in inquiry is explained by my definition of “justification,” as well as by my claim that an active, dynamic, reflective, and responsibilist virtue epistemic framework is required of students to grow epistemically. Also noting different pedagogical methods such as ReQuest, reflective journaling, think alouds, and Socratic Seminars, I ultimately choose the Socratic Seminar to chronicle the development of student epistemic self-awareness along with their progress in successful inquiry. I find that the students cooperatively learn (as opposed to individually) while also discovering and reflecting on the virtues (values) that underlie their inquiry and discussion.

Acknowledgements

- I would like to thank Dr. Juli Eflin for helping me develop my theory and encouraging me to put it to practice. Thanks for being my advisor and mentor!

- I thank Dr. Cathy Siebert for supporting my thesis and providing some feedback as to how the Socratic Seminar is a great tool for the classroom.

- I also thank Dr. Susan Mullarkey for allowing me to put my research into action in her AP classes and for the excellent conversations that followed my study.

- I give my thanks to the forty-six AP Honors participants who not only surprised their student teacher, but also told her that the Socratic Seminar was the best discussion tool they’ve had (which was encouraging, if not to say the best compliment I’d received throughout student teaching).

- Lastly, I thank my fiancé, Eric Lutton, who provided wonderful feedback on my virtue epistemology theory in its earliest stage. I love you, sweetheart.
An Inquiry into Inquiry

Kids ask lots of questions. As the lower rung of humanity’s ladder, children naturally want to know what is going on, how it is so, why it is so—ad infinitum. Kids feel like they are being thrown into a movie during the middle, constantly interrogating their parents and teachers to know what has happened before their time so that they may understand the world in which they live. They want to know the beginning of the movie that is humanity’s history, but they are frustrated when they cannot learn it in one easy answer. When kids are a certain age, they are inquisitive, curious, and excited to learn about the movie—but then puberty and middle school hits. At this age, students are less inclined to ask questions and more disposed to shy away from showing any intellectual fervor—for anything. It is not that they are bored with the movie: they just don’t want to seem like they are too interested in it; they cannot be seen to ask questions about it, or relate the movie’s contents to their own lives. By the time these kids are high school students, they aren’t even fazed by the movie anymore: they merely go through the motions and take in the movie as if it were blind fact. So when did asking questions and wishing to know the world become passé? For years teachers have been trying to tackle this question, and for some, they succeed in instilling in their students a sense of intellectual curiosity; however, most teachers become frustrated that their students are not as interested in the movie as they are. As a future teacher of Language Arts, I hope to be one of those teachers who, through certain methods of pedagogy, instill certain intellectual virtues into her students so that they may know how to ask the questions about the world. Through applying virtue epistemology to Language Arts, I hope to construct a philosophical matrix that may explain the approach that a teacher must take
when introducing methods of inquiry into the classroom. Perhaps with virtue
epistemology as my pedagogical backdrop, my students may intuit that asking questions
and learning about life's "movie" will give fulfillment and meaning to their erudition and
even their lives.

The Theory

Christopher Hookway states that "knowledge is true belief which is produced or
sustained through the exercise of our intellectual virtues" (3). While his definition is true
of many virtue epistemologists, namely, those who purport that virtue epistemology is the
use of intellectual virtues to produce knowledge, I do not think this is so. To declare that
the use of intellectual virtues is involved in the production of knowledge is to say that
intellectual virtues are inextricably linked with the body of knowledge itself, as leaven is
involved in bread-making.

Perhaps what Hookway is missing from his assertion about virtue epistemology is
the very way in which it differs from other schools of epistemological thought, and that is
the mode of "justification." In the aforementioned quote, he does not mention the
justificatory process at all, ultimately asserting that knowledge is merely true belief that is
produced through the use of intellectual virtues, but using virtues while gaining
knowledge of the world requires a certain mindset—a certain inclination toward the
virtues themselves. This inclination can be thought of the approach in using virtues as a
path to the inquiring of knowledge—not the presupposition that virtues are within the
body of knowledge itself. This is where justification comes into play. Justification, in
my epistemological view, is not merely a rationale or argument to explain the validity or
soundness of the issue of how one derives knowledge. “Justification” is the attitudes and intellectual inclinations, as well as the expression of one’s virtues, that lead one toward belief. While writing this paragraph, for example, I am using the intellectual virtue “courage” to express my opinions (quite candidly, at that) about how knowledge is gained. Using an intellectual virtue does not come out of some vacuum, for it is driven by a certain intellectual impetus—an inclination toward being intellectually courageous. In my very essence, I was curious and wanted to know how to characterize “justification,” and thus, intellectually “traveled” through this curiosity to become intellectually courageous enough to opine my beliefs about “justification.” This inclination, along with the virtue, is what I call “justification.” In other words, justification is the itching, curiosity-piqued attitude one has at a particular question, along with the virtue that helps her express the need for answering it.

Though I place an emphasis on justification as the chief method in producing and sustaining virtues, I do not allege that just because I put “justification” into the virtue-epistemological “mix” that I view virtue epistemology as a complete and hierarchical knowledge structure. Quite the contrary. As mentioned previously in the paper, virtue epistemology is not directly involved in the production of knowledge, but rather, it is involved as a guiding pathway toward the body of inquiry one may call “knowledge.” If knowledge is “true justified belief,” I am asserting that virtue epistemology’s role in epistemology is linked with the “justification” aspect, not the “belief” aspect. That being noted, virtue epistemology cannot stand alone. Linda Zagzebski in her articles notes that in “pure virtue theory the concept of a right act is defined in terms of the concept of a virtue or a component of virtue such as motivation,” (qtd. in Eflin 58) and, when
translated into epistemological terms, this view can be seen as “in pure virtue theory the concept of a right belief structure is defined in terms of the concept of a virtue or component of virtue.” Though I do agree with her account insofar as she notes the connection between the inclination (motivation) toward expressing a certain virtue and justification, I do not suppose that by merely conceptualizing one’s expression of virtues that that very action defines the belief. Zagzebski, in Rooney’s terminology, is viewing virtue epistemology in a “noun sense” in that Zagzebski is striving toward a “final” definition of what a belief is through the use of virtue epistemology. Eflin states: “Since her epistemic project is showing that virtues lead to justified belief, and she has given necessary and sufficient conditions for a belief to be justified, Zagzebski is still trying to meet skeptical challenges” (58). Thus Zagzebski views virtue epistemology not as a dynamic act in attaining knowledge, but as an inert, rigid belief structure that must be “defined” and redefined in order to meet skepticism’s attacks.

Virtue epistemology is ultimately action-oriented. As mentioned previously in this paper, the very notion of “justification” requires that one actually engage in a certain behavior (curiosity), which is then manifested in an intellectual virtue that drives one toward certain beliefs. When a person tries to justify a belief, then, she is actively tapping into her motivation or inclination, as well as using virtues to seek out the “true belief.” It is this distinction that makes my view of virtue epistemology one which is dynamic and action guiding. Analogously, virtue epistemology is the walking down the path of a rainbow in order to get to the pot of gold. It is not merely the path of the rainbow or the walk, but the walking down the path that makes it a distinct, “verb-sense” epistemic enterprise.
Though virtue epistemology is dynamic and active, it must have an explanatory role in order to consider it as a tool to get to “true belief.” In this way, virtue epistemology must also be “noun-sense” in that it vies for an explanation into the way in which one justifies his beliefs. Though this is an attempt at a fixed “definition” of what virtue epistemology is, I would assert that that is not necessarily so. Returning to the rainbow analogy, I can tell someone what I am doing while still performing the act, i.e. that I am walking down a rainbow path to get to a pot of gold. This is not to say that my action is subverted by my explaining it: I can do both and still assert that virtue epistemology is action-oriented—despite the fact that I am trying to describe it. The same can hold true for virtue epistemology’s explanatory role. Using virtues while trying to decipher a true belief from a false one is vital for understanding one’s own epistemic framework, since it fosters good practices and habits when asking questions or formulating concerns about what a person believes. Steutel noted that “practising these virtues will increase the chance that our opinion-forming practices...result in beliefs that are true or well-justified” (401).

If virtue epistemology’s role, then, is to provide an active pathway toward knowledge, and if that pathway requires that someone understands his own method of justification, then virtue epistemology must be a type of internalism (weak). Delving into questions that tackle certain issues requires that one look at her own virtues and motivation and control the way in which those virtues are carried out. Intellectual courage while expressing a belief is noble on certain occasions, but when one is not within the proper authority to evaluate a belief (i.e. a plumber vs. an epidemiologist asserting what causes breast cancer), then intellectual courage could easily take the shape
of intellectual foolhardiness. The use of virtues while ascertaining a belief requires “the deliberate exercise and development of the virtues” (Eflin 59)—that is, that a person is aware and observant of how she asks or answers a question, or of how she forms habits that lead her toward a more cohesive and complete epistemic framework.

A person can also learn to assess whether or not her epistemic virtues are sophisticated enough in dealing with certain questions by reflecting and meditating on external aspects to the knower. Eflin calls this external component to virtue epistemology the “success” factor (59). If I am epistemically virtuous in asserting that I know the ingredients to make a flavorful meatloaf, then I can evaluate the success of my knowledge by making and tasting the meatloaf. Eflin states that “if one is epistemically virtuous, then one is successful in gaining knowledge” (59), but what if the result of one’s assertions is ultimately wrong, and therefore, unsuccessful? Being a bad cook, I may think that I am virtuous in my knowledge of a good meatloaf, but my product can prove to be a culinary disaster. That said, I could still evaluate my failed product and make the proper adjustments to my growing and expanding “virtue-bank.” If I am intellectually courageous in asserting a wrong belief, and then later realize that it was wrong, then I will be humbled to make changes to my epistemic framework, and will, in effect, alter the pathway toward knowledge in the future, for, if that belief is wrong, then I may not be so intellectually courageous (which was actually intellectual foolhardiness) in the future. Thus, an unsuccessful manifestation of knowledge, as well as a successful one, can aid in the developing and exercising of one’s virtues.

In addition to the askeptical, action-oriented nature of virtue epistemology is its agent-centered aspect. Though a few virtue theorists fall into the reliabilist camp—that
is, they consider reasoning, inference patterns, and the senses to be virtues—most realize the personal, contextual nature of virtue epistemology (Eflin 61). Due to the individual nature of justification, as well as the intimate way in which people evaluate their own paths to knowledge, my view is a responsibilist one in that I take into consideration a person’s context, the habits of mind that he forms, and the intellectual character he enacts. There is no “impartial, idealized knower,” since the individual’s context is embedded into the virtues he uses to gain knowledge. Epistemic virtues themselves are not “idealized” either, for they develop and become more prominent as the person becomes more aware of his habits of mind and the way in which he asks questions about the world.

**The Practice**

To link the theory with the pedagogical practice, I’ll start with the notion of “justification” and the idea that virtue epistemology is one’s walking the path toward knowledge. As I mentioned in my metaphor about “life’s movie,” children at a young age ask many questions about the world and why it is so. They are inclined toward certain intellectual virtues, because, if they were not, they would be lost as to how to minimally get by in the world. Thus, children try to understand the basics of how the world works; however, when these same children become teenagers, they seem used to the world as it appears to them. They ingest life’s problems and ambiguities prime facie without asking questions, since doing so would vex and annoy the very people that determine their social status (i.e., their peers). Teenagers also become somewhat jaded in how the world works, since they realize that it is not the huge playground that they once
knew it to be. So why ask questions about it? "We live in the world—that’s all," they would probably say.

Teachers should realize this growing angst that a student feels toward her environment, as well as the boredom that streams from a classroom that is stale and teacher-centered. Encouraging and modeling methods of inquiry and good epistemic virtues can instill in the students a sense of purpose in the classroom—as long as the teacher adequately explains what the students are doing and why they are doing it. For example, a pedagogical method known as ReQuest actively engages the students in a question-asking procedure that escalates from simple, literal observations (i.e., what happened in chapter two) to concerns that traverse beyond the confines of the text (i.e., how the “man vs. himself” theme appears in the real world or in other texts). With ReQuest, first the teacher asks the students a question, the students answer it, and then the student asks the teacher a question. Usually the student will ask a question that is similar in complexity; thus, it is the task of the teacher to model and instruct the students in producing questions that constantly challenge and push the boundaries of their intellectual inclinations.

Another aspect of virtue epistemology that is reflected in teaching practices is its internalist and externalist nature. While it is important for students to realize for themselves that their thinking may not be as sophisticated as they think it is (which they do, for we all were teenagers once), teachers can help students delve into themselves and discover links between the material learned in class and their own lives. Through reflective techniques such as journal-writing the students can begin to look at their thinking processes daily and assess the minor changes and improvements that they have
made in their methods of inquiry. Teachers can also model a technique called a think-aloud, whereby they take a text, read it aloud, and run the mental gamut—stumbling over words and references that are vague, noticing certain techniques outlined by the author or narrator, redefining confusing passages in one’s own words, and most importantly, relating the material to their own lives and how they think about the world. It is this last aspect—relating and reflecting about my own thinking toward the world around me—that requires the students to exercise the virtues which lead them toward knowledge. That said, both methods are internalist in that they force the student to think about how they think about the text, and they are externalist in that they have an artifact (journals, discussion) to which they can refer when evaluating their own progression in sophisticated thinking.

As the *theory* of virtue epistemology is action-oriented and dynamic, so must the *practice* be active. One way in which to enact the reciprocal and fluid nature of virtue epistemology is by engaging in a Socratic Seminar. Students are split into two camps, the observers and the participants; the participants gather in a circle in the middle of the room while the observers surround the participants in the outer circle. The facilitator of the seminar, usually the teacher, brings with her a question which “has no right answer; instead, it reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the questioner” (“Socratic Seminars”). He then lets the question loose on the students, who then dialogue and try to link their “answers” to what they know about the text—or the world—in order to express their view in a clear and cogent manner. The observing students evaluate the discussion, noting high points and low points, who carried the conversation, what types of questions were asked, etc. The following day is used for debriefing the activity and what it
accomplished for the students. This technique is especially effective for students in
developing their intellectual virtues because not only are they using their virtues in
claiming to know a position (the participants), they are also reflecting on the ways in
which they ask questions and the motivation toward certain “answers” about what they
know (the observers). In this way, students can also reflect on why one person wanted to
focus on one aspect of the text while another chose a different subject to tackle.

Students who engage in a Socratic Seminar are encouraged to be open-minded
and suspend judgment so that a higher form of reasoning and thinking about one’s own
thinking processes is achieved (“Socratic Seminars”). It is this aspect of the seminar that
is resembled in virtue epistemology’s agent-centered nature. Students must be wary of
being intellectually foolhardy through reflecting upon their own thinking and discovering
the virtues (through her own motivation) that counterbalance the intellectual vice. If
students are intellectual drunks, whereby they hop from view to view that they are
immediately exposed to, they have a chance to improve and develop the part of their
character that may be lacking. But no student wants to be made fool of. Those students
who realize their own intellectual virtues and vices will use that to their advantage during
a session where ideas are thrown out and challenged, but in a regulated environment as
the Socratic Seminar is, that “advantage” is questioned and observed; therefore, having
an open-minded session from the get-go is vital to the higher-order understanding
required for the seminar to work. Conversely, students who may not have conceptualized
their own thinking processes before have a chance to do so, and may learn that the
process of learning is personal, dynamic, and ever-expanding. Perhaps they will learn a
little about *themselves* while learning about the "big" questions of a text, which is the ultimate goal of education.

A potential issue that could arise from asserting that virtue epistemology must be involved in the classroom is that it could be construed as a form of indoctrination. Critics may think that by engaging the students in certain activities they will then "think" how the teacher wants them to think. But how can one teach understanding and open-mindedness? It is almost foolish to think that just because a teacher asks the students to be open-minded for an activity that the students will ultimately be open-minded for everything. Also, if virtue epistemology is agent-centered and "non-idealized," it would be a contradiction to assume that a teacher can create little clones of herself while asserting that others' contexts matter. The teacher, then, becomes the "ideal" knower; however, she also has a context from which *her* virtues stem. Rather, the teacher becomes the mentor or model, and the student can emulate the epistemic practices they see as positive.

The true nature of enlisting virtue epistemology as the philosophical backdrop to Language Arts pedagogy is the way in which teachers instruct students in how to reflect upon their own thinking. The actual *teaching* going on is not one in which the teacher tells the students, "These are the intellectual virtues; use them while doing your assignment." It is one in which the teacher observes the progress and learning of the student through journals, class discussion, and projects, as well as the modeling of metacognitive techniques that force students to look within themselves and ask questions about the world. Teachers hope to have the students come to certain realizations about knowledge themselves—all the while expanding and enriching their intellectual virtues.
Perhaps the father of progressive education, John Dewey, said it best:

In general, there is [in educators] a disposition to take considerations which are dear to the hearts of adults and set them up as ends irrespective of the capacities of those educated. There is also an inclination to propound aims which are so uniform as to neglect the specific powers and requirements of an individual, forgetting that all learning is something which happens to an individual at a given time and place. (qtd. in Hildebrand 378)

These few sentences summarize the very core of what teachers should consider when conducting her classroom. Not only is virtue epistemology linked with the learning process, but it is also involved in the inclination toward asking questions of a deeper nature. It is the constant reevaluation of the self while the self is evaluating another substance. Intellectual virtues not only should be modeled by teachers, but they should be modeled in the classroom through certain techniques that highlight and place at the forefront inquiry and metacognition.

The Application

While preparing for the application of virtue epistemology within my Honors AP senior English classes at Anderson High School in Anderson, Indiana, I taught the students rudimentary philosophical terms and theories. Starting with a graphic organizer I crafted to guide my lectures on philosophy for the whole semester, I defined and referred to terms in the six basic "schools" of philosophy—aesthetics, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, political philosophy, and logic. I introduced Descartes’
radical doubt in conjunction with *The Matrix*, as well as instructed the students on logical fallacies and proper argumentation techniques through playing a game called “Mafia.” In a lesson involving Nietzsche and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I urged the students to look at the theory presented and apply it to the material (the film). In teaching the students certain philosophers’ theories, I strove to have the students begin to look at the literature as depicted in a conceptual matrix and not out of a vacuum. Teaching theory and the literature side by side also strengthens a student’s interpretive skills, which will make her more successful in choosing and reflecting on the “context appropriate” epistemic virtues to use while “walking the path to knowledge.”

After teaching the students how to hone in on their interpretive skills, I thought about how I was to observe and record the epistemic virtues that the students often use while discussing the “big” issues of a text as well as the virtues that the students found were to be important in sustaining a good, insightful conversation. I chose to craft my unit based on the writings of Modernist authors, because the authors’ focus on war and chaos had a direct correlation with the students’ present world of September 11th and the war on terrorism. Using one lesson to observe my students’ use of epistemic virtues, I decided to use the Socratic Seminar technique to teach the students how to reflect on their own inquiry practices while discussing the material. I then chose “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” by T.S. Eliot and “The Bracelet,” by Collette to serve as the material the students were discussing within the seminar.

After choosing the material for the seminar and constructing the context of the discussion with a lecture on Modernism, I prepared for the Socratic Seminar. Though different models exist with respect to conducting a meaningful discussion, I adopted the
participant/observer model, because the students' responses in the observer role were vital in determining the application of virtue epistemology in my pedagogy. I fashioned the worksheets that would help facilitate the students' questions and discussion, though one question on the Observer Role Sheet was the most important piece in my research: “After watching the participant group, what factors contribute to “good questioning”? What values (i.e. trust, open-mindedness, etc.) must one have to produce good questions? Why these values?” For the purpose of my observation, I used the word “value” to mean “intellectual virtue” so that I would not have to spend time trying (unsuccessfully) to define what an intellectual virtue was.

On April 6, 2004, I conducted the Socratic Seminar in both of my Honors AP classes. In order to make the discussion successful, I informed the students that they were going to be formally evaluated based on the number of times they spoke, as well as by the level of conversation in which they were engaged. Before the lesson began, I altered the room so that the chairs were arranged in two concentric circles. I then placed on an overhead projector the guidelines and procedures in having a successful Socratic Seminar, emphasizing the idea that a seminar is to be cohesive and cooperative. As I read to them the purpose and function of the lesson, the students diligently checked their questions so that they were of an interpretive quality rather than a literal one, meaning that the extent of their questions does not merely reach the “plot” level, but to a level where the students must think in between the lines of the text and come to conclusions about it. I also noted that the students would be responsible for the discussion, ultimately meaning that I would not “rescue” the conversation if it happened to waver.
To kick off the seminar, I asked the students a question that did not necessarily have to do with the T.S. Eliot poem; however, with discussion, examples, and inquiry, the students could make a connection between the question, their lives, and the literature. I asked, “What does it mean to follow the course of one’s life?”—to which the students responded with confusion (at first) and then with a determination to “make” their answers fit with the context of the poem. Their answers spawned more questions, and though every once in a while I would throw out another question that seemed to be unrelated to the text, the students would try to answer them or ask their own “seemingly unrelated” question. While the participants discussed the Eliot poem, the observers recorded the strongest question, the weakest question, the most interesting discussion piece, and their thoughts about the epistemic virtues that underlie asking “good” questions. After the participants finished their discussion, I asked for volunteers from the observer group to comment, and they provided key information as to how to ask “good” questions, as well as encouraging remarks to those who actively participated in the conversation. The students then switched roles, and the new participant group was charged to discuss the question, “What is a good marriage?” in response to Collette’s “The Bracelet.” The second participant group responded to the text, after which I asked for the observers’ comments once again. After the seminar, the class debriefed the activity.

Observations

As I was watching the seminar, two epiphanies surfaced: one, the students were not only being reflective in their questions and comments, but they were noting the personal, contextual aspect of inquiry; and two, the students were actively seeking the
answers to their questions. In one of my classes, a student responded that my opening question was “deep,” but that “it had to be; good dialogue stems from questions you can’t easily answer.” This student knew that interpretive and philosophical questions, rather than literal questions, pave the way to good inquiry as well as expands one’s mind in learning how to ask good questions. The intellectual impetus that drives the students to ask those “deep” questions lies in the fact that the students must be constantly reflecting on the questions. One student, on her Observer Role Sheet, notes, “Questions that spark people to think are good questions. Those deep questions like, ‘How much is enough love,’ makes people not only reflect on the story but on love and marriage that relates to everybody. You have to reflect on everything, not only in the story, but on life itself. If you are open to reflection and deep thinking, then you will be able to think of questions that require reflection and deep thought.” Though this student does not depict a value (virtue) that one must harbor to produce good questions, she acknowledges the reflective process necessary to expand one’s own epistemic framework.

In addition to the reflective component of inquiry, several students also noted that learning occurs personally and contextually. One student notes: “A good question to me does two things: it is very open-ended and leaves no short answers—whichever route you go it [question and discussion] must be able to go farther. Second, it [the question] should be able to be related to us, not just the story.” Another student says: “One of the factors leading to good questions is the possibility of multiple answers, answers that each participant must create themselves.” Both students realize the personal aspect to learning, and though the discussion itself was external to the knower, the students
understand that the learning process occurs internally through reflective thinking and active engagement in the dialogue.

An interesting anomaly within my observation, though, was that the students also realized that “walking the path” to knowledge also requires other people. Respect was listed as a major virtue for students to maintain an open, friendly environment. One student noted that “one must have open-mindedness and respect for others in order to keep producing good questions.” Though it had not occurred to me that in order to expand one's epistemic framework the virtues she uses must be cooperative and not just personal, I began to look more closely at the responses from the students and realized the definite peer influence on learning. For example, not only could intellectual respect be regarded as esteeming one’s own intellectual conclusions, but it could also describe the esteeming of a group’s intellectual conclusions. Also, intellectual friendliness is definitely a virtue that does not solely reside within one person for its full development: other people are involved with creating one’s intellectual friendliness, for can one truly be friendly by oneself, or must one be friendly to someone else? According to the progression of the seminar—in addition to the students’ written comments—the individual student could not fully develop his inquiry skills without the cooperation of the entire group.

In answering the last question on the Observer Role Sheet, I noticed that the students listed values that could be grouped with personal, contextual virtues or cooperative virtues. Below is a list of the intellectual virtues along with a comment made by a student.
Personal Epistemic Virtues

*Intellectual humility* (the epistemic virtue by which one must be deferent to views that may be more complex than ones held in a person’s epistemic framework): “A value that one must have is the willingness to admit ignorance because that is how true learning occurs.”

*Intellectual open-mindedness* (the epistemic virtue by which one must not close his/her epistemic framework off to new ideas): “You can actually achieve answers to your questions if you listen.”

*Intellectual courage* (the epistemic virtue by which one presents a thought or idea unashamedly): “Pretty much just being brave enough to ask a question will help produce good questions for a good discussion or dialogue.”

*Intellectual respect* (the epistemic virtue by which one esteems her own epistemic conclusions): “Respect fosters a good questioning environment.”

Cooperative Epistemic Virtues

*Intellectual open-mindedness*: “You must be open-minded because other ideas could be better than yours.”

*Intellectual friendliness* (the epistemic virtue by which one sharing knowledge from his epistemic framework is met with equal knowledge-seeking fervor from another person): “This allows people to be comfortable and talk.”

*Intellectual respect*: “If they can respect questions from each other, then things will flow much more smoothly.”

By allowing the students to participate in a Socratic Seminar, I accomplished many goals. I wanted to create an environment where the students would control the
dialogue. I also wanted to give the students the chance to reflect upon their own epistemic practices while creating "good" questions. Though I could have derived many conclusions about their epistemic virtues, I would have been remiss to do so. The very nature of virtue epistemology is to reflect upon one’s own epistemic framework, and by allowing the students to observe the level of questioning that occurred within the discussion of the literature, the students, and not I, recorded the change and growth in inquiry as well as with their own thoughts about inquiry. Since by nature, virtue epistemology challenges one to reevaluate oneself while the self is evaluating another entity, the students’ participation in the Socratic Seminar definitely created some avenues for epistemic growth.
Modernism Unit
Honors AP 12th-Grade World Literature
CARS/Honors Thesis Project

**Topic:** Modernism in poetry, prose, and plays

**Time Frame:** Two weeks

**Rationale:** Modernism—the age that changed literature from being informative and pedantic to being free-spiritied, individualistic, and psychological. Stream-of-consciousness writing rued the day while pulp fiction emerged as an actual acknowledged convention. Modern writers crafted the world as if it had been wedged with a chisel and hammered into a hundred pieces; their chaotic image of the world was reflected in writers like Faulkner, Woolf, James, and Hemingway. The authors that the students will be studying—Collette, Eliot, cummings, Pasternak, Akhmatova, and Ibsen—all have contributed to the major literary genres. On April 6th, I will be conducting my action research project with both sections of my honors class.

**Goals:** In this unit, the students will be able to:
- watch a taped production of *A Doll’s House*.
- write an essay about the feminism of *A Doll’s House*.
- complete practice exercises about verbs.
- gloss modern poetry by Pasternak and Akhmatova.
- participate in a Socratic Seminar with “The Bracelet,” e.e. cummings, and T.S. Eliot.

**Standards:** 12.1.1, 12.2.2, 12.2.5, 12.3.1, 12.3.2, 12.3.3, 12.3.4, 12.3.6, 12.3.7, 12.3.9, 12.5.2, 12.6.1

**Resources:** laptop, PowerPoint projector, World Lit book, Language book, overhead, transparencies, handouts

**Evaluation:** The essay, grammar exercises, and participation in the Socratic seminar will be graded.

**Calendar:**

Mar. 29 – Literature: “A Doll’s House” – Acts I and II

Mar. 31 – Literature: “A Doll’s House” – Acts III and IV, start reading *Siddhartha*

Apr. 2 – Literature: The Modern World, pp. 1031-38; Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak
AP Stuff: In-class essay

Apr. 6 – Literature: “The Bracelet,” c.e. cummings, T.S. Eliot, collect essay on “A Doll’s House”
Language: Verbs – pp. 111-119, exercise A, p. 113; exercise A, p. 115; and exercise A, p. 117; collect exercise p. 106 and exercise A, p. 110

Reflection: (to be completed after unit)
Lesson One: Introduction to *A Doll’s House*

**Objectives:** In this lesson, the students will be able to:
- watch a filmed version of Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House.*
- answer questions based on the film and the play.

**Procedure:**
1) I will cue the VCR to show the film, and the students will have to follow along in their books in order to fully understand the story (at times the filmed version sounds muddled).
2) I will stop the tape once in a while to ask questions to check for student understanding.

**Resources:** VCR, tape, World Lit book

**Assessment:** I will be informally assessing the students today.

**Evaluation:** The students will receive no grade today.

**Reflection:** (to be completed after lesson)
Lesson Two: *A Doll’s House* Discussion

Objectives: In this lesson, the students will be able to:

- watch a filmed version of *A Doll’s House*.
- respond to full-class discussion of the play.
- receive on their next essay.

Procedure:

1) I will cue the film to the spot where the classes left off, and after the viewing, we will have a full-class discussion of the film and its feminist implications.
2) I will then give the students the next essay assignment, which is to trace Nora’s feminist leanings in *A Doll’s House*.

Resources: VCR, tape, World Lit books, handouts

Assessment: I will informally assess the students’ understanding of the responses to the discussion, and the essay will receive a formal assessment.

Evaluation: The essays will receive grades.

Reflection: (to be completed after lesson)
Constructing the Essay:
Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*

Your task for this assignment is to construct a solid essay based on Nora’s budding feminism. Some avenues to consider are:

- Nora’s “freedom” (this word is used in the play, but not consistently)
- Nora’s defiance against her husband
- Nora’s defiance against society
- Views on feminism: Mrs. Linde vs. Nora
- Tying “women’s rights” history (from Ibsen’s time, of course) into Nora’s story
- Torvald’s treatment of Nora and her subsequent reactions
- Minor characters’ influence on Nora’s decision at the end of the play
- Nora as the standard feminist character
- Symbolism of the door at the end of the play

I will be evaluating you based on this rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceeds the five-paragraph limit</td>
<td>Exceeds the five-paragraph limit</td>
<td>Writes at least five paragraphs</td>
<td>Writes at least five paragraphs</td>
<td>Does not write at least five paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encompasses topic of essay in a well-constructed thesis statement</td>
<td>Encompasses topic in a well-constructed thesis statement</td>
<td>Encompasses topic in a thesis statement (needs work)</td>
<td>Does not have a clear thesis statement</td>
<td>Does not have a clear thesis statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibits few grammatical errors</td>
<td>Exhibits some grammatical errors</td>
<td>Exhibits many grammatical errors</td>
<td>Exhibits many grammatical errors</td>
<td>Exhibits many grammatical errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successfully illustrates connections between feminism and the play</td>
<td>Successfully illustrates connections between feminism and the play</td>
<td>Illustrates connections between feminism and the play</td>
<td>Illustrates some connections between feminism and the play (strays from topic)</td>
<td>Illustrates very few connections between feminism and the play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is consistent with diction and vocabulary</td>
<td>Is consistent with diction and vocabulary</td>
<td>Is somewhat consistent with diction and vocabulary</td>
<td>Is somewhat consistent with diction and vocabulary</td>
<td>Is not consistent with diction and vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successfully incorporates at least one rhetorical strategy</td>
<td>Does not incorporate at least one rhetorical strategy</td>
<td>Does not incorporate at least one rhetorical strategy</td>
<td>Does not incorporate at least one rhetorical strategy</td>
<td>Does not incorporate at least one rhetorical strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson Three: The Modernist Movement

Objectives: In this lesson, the students will be able to:
- listen to short lecture of Modernist art and literature.
- gloss and discuss poetry by Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak.
- complete a practice exercise over verbs.
- write an in-class essay to prepare for the AP Exam.

Procedure:
1) I will cue up the PowerPoint projector and discuss the underpinnings of the Modernist movement.
2) The class and I will discuss and gloss the poetry by Pasternak and Akhmatova.
3) I will review verbs with them and assign the exercise from the book.

Resources: World Lit books, Language books, overhead, transparencies, laptop, PowerPoint projector, disk

Assessment: I will informally assess the students today by observing their questions and discussion.

Evaluation: The grammar exercises will receive a grade.

Reflection: (to be completed after lesson)
Lesson Four: Eliot, Collette, and the Socratic Seminar
CARS-Honors Thesis Lesson / Videotaped Lesson

Objectives: In this lesson, the students will be able to:
• speak freely about the selections from Eliot and Collette within a Socratic Seminar.
• record responses to questions made by other students.
• observe other students’ responses and question-asking.
• examine and discuss two e.e. cummings poems.
• complete three exercises over verb forms, moods, and active and passive voice.

Procedure:
1) I will go over the grammar lesson for the period. I will ask students not to take notes for the sake of time. They will be instructed to do exercise A, pgs. 113, 115, and 117.
2) I will let the students know that this lesson will be a scripted lesson, meaning that it will be conducted in a very formal, structured manner, with much of my oral instruction planned ahead of time. I will remind them that they will be evaluated based on their participation, and I will pass out the rubric and explain to them exactly what I mean by “participation.” Script begins: The activity will be worth 50 points, with the bulk of the points resting on your comments, how informed they are, and the observations (written and oral) that you make about your classmates’ comments. Notice that you are arranged in two concentric circles. The reason for this lies in the activity that we will be doing today concerning your reading. For today, you were to have read Collette’s “The Bracelet” and T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” as well as have written three interpretive questions for each selection. An interpretive question extracts from the text an ambiguity about the author’s meaning, a question about a different interpretation of the poem or story, or literary elements like mood, tone, or symbolism—the interpretation of which may differ from person to person. Interpretive questions are not questions that have a “definite” right answer, though some answers are more grounded in the text than others. Interpretive questions raise issues that occur in-between the lines of the poem or story; thus, literal questions like “What happened to Madame Augilier when she went to get the blue bracelet?” are not suitable for this discussion. An acceptable question would be: “Why does Madame Augilier feel that she ‘does not love her husband enough’?” I’d like for you to take a few minutes to peruse your questions to check their interpretive quality.
3) Background: The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates’ theory that it is more important to enable one to think for him/herself than to merely fill someone’s head with "right" answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of...
answers. This process encourages divergent thinking rather than convergent thinking. You are given the opportunity to "examine" a common piece of text, whether it is in the form of a novel, poem, art print, or piece of music. After "reading" the common text, open-ended questions are posed.

Understand that this format is based on dialogue and not discussion/debate. Dialogue is exploratory and involves the suspension of biases and prejudices. Discussion/debate is a transfer of information designed to win an argument and bring closure. Americans are great at discussion/debate. We do not dialogue well. However, once you and I both learn to dialogue, we find that the ability to ask meaningful questions that stimulate thoughtful interchanges of ideas is more important than "the answer." Participants in a Socratic Seminar respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. You are encouraged to "paraphrase" essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement.

Members of the dialogue look each other in the eyes and use each other names. This simple act of socialization reinforces appropriate behaviors and promotes team building ("Socratic Seminars").

4) **Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar:** Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute. Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session. You will be asked to observe for some of the activity. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking. Listen carefully. Speak up so that all can hear you. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it ("Socratic Seminars").

5) **Roles:** At your seats are papers describing the roles of the seminar. For those of you in the inner circle, you will be the participants, meaning that you'll start off the seminar with discussion. Please put your name at the top of the paper, write your three questions about the selection, and await further instructions. For those of you in the outer circle, you will be the observers, meaning that you will observe the progression of the dialogue, taking specific notes on which conversation pieces have been most successful and what kinds of questions have garnered the most response. Please put your name at the top of the paper, read the directions, and await further instructions.

6) I will act as the facilitator of the seminar, and my primary role is to start you off, but not rescue you when the conversation lags. When there may be a hole in the dialogue, reflect quietly on the literature, taking note of some places where good dialogue can be generated. If and only if there is a severe lack of discussion will I intervene and ask a question about the text. You are encouraged to refer back to the text as much as you can, but if you have stumbled upon a subject that is reflected in the literature and may not be
explained by the text alone, you can go off on that tangent and bring in your own knowledge about the subject.

7) Now that you know the gist of the seminar, my first question for the Eliot group is: “What does it mean to follow the course of one’s life?”

8) The Observer group will now discuss the different questions and answers that were successful. Now switch roles. The new Participants will have a dialogue about Collette’s “The Bracelet.” Please write down the questions that you had for this story. My first question for this group is: “What is a good marriage?”

9) We will now hear from the second Observer group about their findings. And now to debrief the session…

10) If there is time, we will discuss the e.e. cummings poems.


**Assessment:** I will be informally assessing the students by observing their discussion. Their formal assessment will be their points earned through the discussion.

**Evaluation:** Their grade is based on their participation within the group.

**Reflection:** (to be completed after lesson)
Dialogue vs. Debate

- Dialogue is collaborative: multiple sides work toward shared understanding. Debate is oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
- In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground. In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
- Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change. Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
- In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions. In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.
- Dialogue respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend. Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
- Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to a greater understanding. Debate assumes a single right answer that somebody already has.
- Dialogue remains open-ended. Debate demands a conclusion.

(Source: http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/wjhs/depts/socialst/ams/Skills/SocraticSeminar/SocraticSeminarIntro.html)
Guidelines for Participants in a Socratic Seminar

1. Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.

2. It's OK to "pass" when asked to contribute.

3. Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.

4. Do not stay confused; ask for clarification.

5. Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.

6. Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.

7. Listen carefully.

8. Speak up so that all can hear you.

9. Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.

10. Discuss ideas rather than each other's opinions.

11. You are responsible for the seminar, even if you don't know it or admit it.

(Source: http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/wjhs/depts/socialst/ams/Skills/SocraticSeminar/SocraticSeminarIntro.html)
## Rubric for Socratic Seminar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Level Participant</th>
<th>Participant offers enough solid analysis, without prompting, to move the conversation forward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant, through her comments, demonstrates a deep knowledge of the text and the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant, through her comments, shows that she is actively listening to other participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant offers clarification and/or follow-up that extends the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant’s remarks often refer back to specific parts of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-50 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peaks at least 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level Participant</td>
<td>Participant offers solid analysis without prompting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-44 points</td>
<td>Through comments, participant demonstrates a good knowledge of the text and the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant has come to the seminar prepared, with questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant shows that he/she is actively listening to others and offers clarification and/or follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-39 points</td>
<td>Participant offers some analysis, but needs prompting from the seminar leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Through comments, participant demonstrates a general knowledge of the text and question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant is less prepared, with few questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant is actively listening to others, but does not offer clarification and/or follow-up to others’ comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant relies more upon his or her opinion, and less on the text to drive her comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level Participant</td>
<td>Participant offers little commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-34 points</td>
<td>Participant comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the text and question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant does not listen to others, offers no commentary to further the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant distracts the group by interrupting other speakers or by offering off topic questions and comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or F Level</td>
<td>Participant ignores the discussion and its participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Source: <a href="http://www.teachnlearn.org/socratic_seminars.htm">http://www.teachnlearn.org/socratic_seminars.htm</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Role Sheet

It is your responsibility throughout the session to keep the dialogue going. Please write down the questions that you had for T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Use these to start with. Another way to prolong the conversation is to jot down ideas that you may have for discussion, but be sure to bring them up only when all ideas for the last piece of discussion have been heard.

Three Questions:

1. 

2. 

3. 

Ideas that I’d Like to Discuss:

* 

* 

* 

*
Observer Role Sheet

It is your responsibility to observe the participants’ comments and consider the strengths and weaknesses of their questions and answers. Please refrain from naming specific people in your observation.

Points to Observe:

What was the weakest question asked? Why?

What was the strongest question asked? Why?

What was the most interesting question asked? Why?

After watching the participant group, what factors contribute to “good questioning”? What values (i.e. trust, open-mindedness, etc) must one have to produce good questions? Why these values?
Works Cited


Bibliography


