Plato’s Allegory of the Cave: From Pictorial to Socratic Seminar:

This unit is based on an excerpt from Paul K. Chappell’s book, *The End of War: How Waging Peace Can Save Humanity, Our Planet, and Our Future*, in which he discusses Plato’s famous Allegory of the Cave. Chappell’s reading of the Allegory paints a picture of voluntary slaves staring mindlessly at shadow images on a cave wall. These images are manipulated by a puppet master, standing on a ledge between the wall and a fire near the cave’s opening. Outside the cave, unbeknownst to the slaves, the sun shines brightly.

I made an illustration of Plato’s Cave, drawn on butcher paper, as the introductory background for a narrative unveiling the Allegory’s components: the voluntary slaves, the shadow images, the puppet master, the fire, and the cave’s exit.

This unit spans four lessons. I have also created a pictorial presentation available for download that walks you through the lessons and gives you a better sense of the visual component of the unit.

The completed pictorial of Plato’s Cave (above).

Objectives

- Describe the components of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave
- Generate questions for discussion
- Hold respectful dialogue in small groups

Peace Literacy Objectives

- Learn that we are conditioned by our culture
- Learn that this cultural conditioning is designed to keep us from recognizing that we are conditioned
- Learn how this conditioning keeps us from critical thinking and wisdom
- Learn how to question this conditioning

Essential Questions

- How is Plato’s Allegory of the Cave relevant today?
- How does Plato’s Allegory of the Cave apply to your life individually, at school, and in the world?
Lesson One:

- Create a full size outline of the Plato’s Cave pictorial, including the slaves, on butcher paper.
- Make large color copies of the features that are found in the cave and the definition for the word metaphor.
- This lesson plan makes use of a Socratic Seminar which involves a formalized, student-driven Q/A modeled after the teaching style of Socrates.

1. Preparation for the Plato’s Cave Pictorial

   - Tape the butcher paper outline of Plato’s Cave onto a wall, white board, etc.
   - Introduce the title of the lesson, “Plato’s Allegory of the Cave,” and attach to the top of the butcher paper.
   - Ask students to define the word metaphor. A metaphor is the comparison of one thing to another without the use of like or as.
     - Attach this definition to the butcher paper.
     - As a class, come up with two examples of metaphors.
   - Define the word “allegory.” An allegory is an extended metaphor. (This is an extremely simplified definition.)
   - Introduce the title of the reading/pictorial. Tape the title to the top of the butcher paper.
   - Introduce Plato. Tape a picture of Plato to the left of the butcher paper.
     - Plato was born in roughly ________.
     - He is the original author of The Allegory of Plato’s Cave (hence, the name.)
     - Plato and Play-Doh are not the same thing. The cave is not made of Play-Doh.
   - Introduce the author of this version (Paul K. Chappell) and a few pictures of the author in the top-left corner of the butcher paper.
     - He was born in 1980, making him ____ years old. (Do the math ahead of time.)
     - He retired as a captain of the U.S. Army.
     - He is a direct descendent of slaves. He is only three generations removed from slavery.
     - He is multi-racial; half-Korean, one-quarter black and one-quarter white.
   - Introduce the books that the author has written and tape copies of the covers to the butcher paper, or introduce the book, The End of War, from which the excerpt is taken.
     - Other book covers that can be added include:
       - Will War Ever End?
       - Peaceful Revolution
       - The Art of Waging Peace
   - Remind students at the start: “As we are going through the pictorial of Plato’s Cave, think about how something written over 2,000 years ago could still be relevant today.”
❖ Introduce the components in the allegory:

 o **The voluntary slaves**
   - Introduce and draw the voluntary slaves before the students on the butcher paper, or have them pre-drawn with the cave outline
   - Tape the following quote to the butcher paper next to the voluntary slaves:
     ➢ “This man is the worst kind of slave – a voluntary slave who doesn’t understand that he is control of his own destiny, who doesn’t realize that he is not bound by any chains other than those he forges for himself.”
     ➢ Possible pair-share:
       ✓ Turn to your neighbor and explain who the people in the cave are, and what it means to be a voluntary slave. Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.

 o **The shadow images on the wall**
   - Introduce and tape the shadow image to the wall of the cave
   - Tape the following quote to the butcher paper next to the shadow image:
     ➢ “In front of the slave is a wall on which shadow images appear: shadow ideals, shadow wealth, a shadow life.”
     ➢ Possible pair-share questions:
       ✓ What does the wall with the shadow images remind you of?
       ✓ Do you know anyone that spends a lot of time watching television? Explain why somebody that watches hours of television could be considered a voluntary slave.
       ✓ Have you ever wanted something, or purchased something, because you saw it on tv? Turn to your neighbor and share what it was you wanted or bought. (The pair-share here is due to the fact that every kid will want to share everything they have seen on tv that they, at some point in time, wanted or got.)
       ✓ According to the quotes we have read so far, would buying something you saw on tv make you a voluntary slave? Turn to your neighbor / partner and explain your thinking. Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.
       ✓ Have you ever been a voluntary slave? Explain your thinking.

 o **The puppet masters**
   - Introduce and tape the puppet master to the cave platform
   - Tape the following quote to the butcher paper next to the puppet master
     ➢ “The puppet masters represent those in society with the ability to control and manipulate information.”
Possible pair-share questions:

- Turn to your neighbor and explain who the puppet masters are.
- Thinking back to your thoughts on television being the shadow images on the cave wall, who are the puppet masters of those tv shows? Who are the puppet masters of the commercials you see on tv?
- What makes (these people) puppet masters? Are these people the ones manipulating the information? Is there anybody else that could be controlling or manipulating the information? Who decides what shows are on any given television channel?
- Are there people in our school that are puppet masters? What kind of person in our school might be considered a puppet master? Can a student manipulate information? Explain.

The fire

- Introduce and tape the fire to the far left shelf on the cave outline.
- Tape the following quote to the butcher paper beneath the fire:
  - “The fire represents distorted knowledge, which makes the images... twisted and flawed.”
- Possible pair-share questions:
  - What does the fire represent?
  - Do you think people on tv ever lie? What kinds of people on tv might feel the need to lie or distort information? What kind of tv shows distort knowledge or information? Why would they feel the need to lie or distort the information?
  - Do advertisers ever lie or distort information? Why?
- Mini-Lesson on how truth can be distorted:
  - “People rate statements they have heard repeated just once as more valid than things they’ve heard for the first time. They even rate the statements as truer when the person saying them has been repeatedly lying (Begg et al., 1992).” The Illusion of Truth
  - Easy to understand – simple ideas are easier to comprehend than complex ideas, so we believe the simpler idea over the complex idea
  - Word choice – the words we use can cloud the truth: alternative fact vs. lie
  - Strategy of displacement – when asked a question, you never really answer the question, or you blame someone for something without answering, so the listener’s attention is displaced. What you end up doing is dividing people.
Make sure to remind students to focus on the strategies used in this clip, and remember that the clip is not about the politics. Many people, regardless of political beliefs, use these strategies.

- **The cave opening**
  - Point out the cave opening. Color it yellow with a highlighter to make it stand out.
  - Tape the following quote to the butcher paper next to the cave opening:
    - “There is a way out of the cave. This... light represents the power of truth and wisdom.”
    - Possible pair-share questions:
      - What does the opening to the cave represent?
      - How do you acquire wisdom? What types of things do you do to become wise? Could having wisdom imply that you are educated? Explain your answer.
      - Can somebody that has been to college still be a voluntary slave? Why?
  - **Closing question:** Why is “The Allegory of Plato’s Cave” still relevant in our time, in our society, even though the original story was written over 2,000 years ago when there was no television?

2. **Sample questions to go along with the pictorial of Plato’s Cave in one list**
   During the presentation of a narrative/pictorial, have students frequently turn to share what they just heard/learned with their partners as a way to immediately process the new information. Anytime students are asked to process information, set the expectation that students share their answers to the posed questions with their partners, be able to explain their thinking when asked, and be prepared to share their thinking and/or discussion with the entire class.
   - If you know what a metaphor is, raise your hand. What is a metaphor?
   - (After providing a simple definition of the word ‘allegory’)
   - Turn to your neighbor and share your understanding of an allegory.
   - As we are going through the pictorial of Plato’s Cave, think about how something written over 2,000 years ago could be relevant (still apply) today.
   - Turn to your neighbor / partner and explain who the people in the cave are, and what it means to be a voluntary slave. Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.
   - What does the wall with the shadow images remind you of? (Almost everyone answered ‘tv.’)
❖ Do you know anyone that spends a lot of time watching television? Explain why somebody that watches hours of television could be considered a voluntary slave.
❖ Have you ever wanted something, or purchased something, because you saw it on tv? Turn to your neighbor and share what it was you wanted or bought. (The pair-share here is due to the fact that every kid will want to share everything they have seen on tv that they, at some point in time, wanted or got.)
❖ According to the quotes we have read so far, would buying something you saw on tv make you a voluntary slave? Turn to your neighbor / partner and explain your thinking. Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.
❖ Have you ever been a voluntary slave? Explain your thinking.
❖ Turn to your neighbor and explain who the puppet masters are.
❖ Thinking back to your thoughts on television being the shadow images on the cave wall, who are the puppet masters of those tv shows? Who are the puppet masters of the commercials you see on tv?
❖ What makes (these people) puppet masters? Are these people the ones manipulating the information? Is there anybody else that could be controlling or manipulating the information? Who decides what shows are on any given television channel?
❖ Are there people in our school that are puppet masters? What kind of person in our school might be considered a puppet master? Can a student manipulate information? Explain.
❖ What does the fire represent?
❖ Do you think people on tv ever lie? What kinds of people on tv might feel the need to lie or distort information? What kind of tv shows distort knowledge or information? Why would they feel the need to lie or distort the information?
❖ Do advertisers ever lie or distort information? Why?
❖ What does the opening to the cave represent?
❖ How do you acquire wisdom? What types of things do you do to become wise? Could having wisdom imply that you are educated? Explain your answer.
❖ Can somebody that has been to college still be a voluntary slave? Why?
❖ Why is “The Allegory of Plato’s Cave” still relevant in our time, in our society, even though the original story was written over 2,000 years ago when there was no television?
Lesson Two

1. Reading “The Allegory of Plato’s Cave”
   - Hand out the text and explain to students that in Lesson 4 the class will be having a Socratic Seminar dialogue about the reading and pictorial. Their task today is to develop a thorough understanding of the text.
   - Read Chappell’s “The Allegory of Plato’s Cave” as a class.
   - Have students underline any vocabulary words they don’t know, and as a class, define the words and write down the definitions.
   - Working in groups of 2-4 students, give students 1-3 minutes to identify the main idea in the first paragraph and share their thoughts briefly with the class. Students can use this information to annotate the text. Repeat this process for each major paragraph.
     - Emphasize that quality dialogue requires understanding the text, and that they are capable of developing this understanding.
   - At the end of the period, have students identify any questions they still have about the text or pictorial. Share with the table group or class.

Lesson Three

1. Generating Questions for Socratic Seminar
   - Review notes on the vocabulary and reading of “The Allegory of Plato’s Cave” from the previous day.
   - Explain to students that in Lesson 4 the class will be having a Socratic Seminar dialogue about the reading and pictorial. Their task today is to come up with questions to ask during the discussion.
   - Hand out Question Starters for Socratic Seminars and review with students (There are a number of examples available online)
     - Emphasize that good discussion/dialogue questions come from Levels 2 and 3 of Costa’s Levels of Thinking (Level 1 = gathering info; Level 2 = processing info; Level 3 = applying info)
   - Working in pairs, have students generate questions for the reading and pictorial using the questions starters.
   - Periodically, have each group share two questions that they generated, and add these to a class list of questions.
   - At the end of the period, have students rank order (1,2,3) their top 3 questions that they believe would make the best discussion questions. Share with the table group or class.
Lesson Four

1. **Preparation for Socratic Seminar**
   - Have students break into groups of 5-7 students.
   - Have students review the pictorial, reading, notes from Pair-Share discussions, and generated questions from earlier in the week.
     - Review/introduce expectations for Socratic Seminars and pass out (or review) Academic Language Scripts for Socratic Seminars (there are a number of these Scripts available on-line).

2. **Socratic Seminar**
   - Begin by having every student read his/her best question to the group.
   - Ask for a volunteer to pose the first question.
   - Monitor groups to ensure that dialogue is occurring and that the dialogue remains on topic. When necessary, encourage students to use the Academic Language Scripts.
   - At the conclusion of the discussion, have students complete the Socratic Seminar Discussion Debrief.
     - Note: This could be homework.