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

A Peace Literacy Unit for Middle School Students
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peaceliteracy.org
What are the benefits of using Plato’s Allegory of the Cave?

• It’s a framework for understanding the world
• Metaphors encourage students to think critically
  ➢ About social media
  ➢ About information
  ➢ About manipulation
• It’s engaging!
Essential Questions for Adults in the Audience:

How do you see Plato’s Allegory of the Cave tying into Peace Literacy Skills and the vocabulary of peace?
Essential Questions for Students:

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?
Hang the background template
Add the title

Plato's Allegory of the Cave
Ask students what a metaphor is, have them give examples, and define ‘allegory.’
Introduce Plato
Introduce the author, Paul K. Chappell, and provide students with background information.
Introduce the first component of the cave.
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.
Turn to your neighbor and explain who the people in the cave are, and what it means to be a voluntary slave.

“This man is the worst kind of slave – a voluntary slave who doesn’t understand that he is in control of his own destiny, who doesn’t realize that he is not bound by any chains other than those he forges for himself.”

Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.
What does the wall with the shadow images remind you of?

Do you know anyone that spends a lot of time watching tv or YouTube, on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter or playing video games?

Explain why somebody that spends hours on social media could be considered a voluntary slave.
Have you ever wanted something, purchased something, or believed something because you saw it on tv or social media? Turn to your neighbor and share what it was you wanted, bought or believed. According to the quotes we have read so far, would buying something you saw on tv or believing something you saw on social media make you a voluntary slave? Turn to your neighbor and explain your thinking. Be prepared to share your thinking with the class.

Have you ever been a voluntary slave? Explain your thinking.
Under what conditions could you be a voluntary slave if you play video games?

"In front of the slave is a wall on which shadow images appear: shadow ideals, shadow wealth - a shadow life."

"This man is the worst kind of slave - a voluntary slave who doesn't understand that he is in control of his own destiny, who doesn't realize that he is not bound by any chains other than those he forges for himself."
Turn to your neighbor and explain who the puppet masters are.

Thinking back to your thoughts on tv and social media being the shadow images on the cave wall, who are the puppet masters of those shows and posts?

Who are the puppet masters of the commercials you see or the video games you play?
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 TV channel, or what the content of a YouTube video is?

"The puppet masters represent those in society with the ability to control and manipulate information."

"In front of the slave is a wall on which shadow images appear: shadow ideals, shadow wealth - a shadow life."

"This man is the worst kind of slave - a voluntary slave who doesn't understand that he is in control of his own destiny, who doesn't realize that he is not bound by any chains other than those he forges for himself."
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 puppet masters represent those in society with the ability to control and manipulate information."

"The fire represents distorted knowledge, which makes the images... twisted and flawed."

"In front of the slave is a wall on which shadow images appear: shadow ideals, shadow wealth - a shadow life."

"This man is the worst kind of slave - a voluntary slave who doesn't understand that he is in control of his own destiny, who doesn't realize that he is not bound by any chains other than those he forges for himself."
“The fire represents distorted knowledge, which makes the images... twisted and flawed.”

What does the fire represent?

Do you think people on tv or social media ever lie? Do you think people ever give false explanations unknowingly?

What kinds of people on tv or social media might feel the need to lie or distort information?

What kind of 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

• **Repetition** - “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.**
“There is a way out of the cave. This... light represents the power of truth and wisdom.”

“The puppet masters represent those in society with the ability to control and manipulate information.”

“In front of the slave is a wall on which shadow images appear - shadow ideals, shadow wealth - a shadow life.”

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“This man is the worst kind of slave - a voluntary slave who doesn't understand that he is in control of his own destiny, who doesn't realize that he is not bound by any chains other than those he forges for himself.”
“There is a way out of the cave. This... light represents the power of truth and wisdom.”

• 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 answers.

• Can an educated person still be a voluntary slave? Why?

• How is discernment a form of truth and wisdom?

• Can you be in the cave in one area of your life, and out of the cave in another area of your life?
Mini-Lesson: The Power of Discernment

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. There is a higher burden of proof.
WOMAN ARRESTED FOR TRAINING SQUIRRELS TO ATTACK HER EX-BOYFRIEND

45-year old Janice Smith was arrested this morning by officers of the Detroit Police Department for allegedly capturing numerous squirrels and training them to attack her former lover.

The victim, 51-year-old James Robinson, was presumably attacked by the rodents on more than a dozen occasions over the last month.

These attacks caused him many serious injuries, including the loss of two fingers and one testicle, bitten off by his attackers.

The poor man had no idea why squirrels kept attacking him until he saw his ex-girlfriend, a former circus animal trainer, cheering the animals during one of the attacks.

“She was partially hidden behind some bushes, but I could clearly see her and hear her. She was yelling orders at the squirrels and telling...
them to attack me."

Realizing that his life could be in danger, Mr. Robinson filed a complaint with the police who later paid a visit to Ms. Smith.

In her residence, they found a dozen cages, holding a total of 27 squirrels. They also found two training dummies with pictures of Mr. Robinson taped over their faces.

Detroit Police Chief James Craig confirmed that Janice Smith had admitted that she was responsible for the attacks and confessed her strange plot.

The 45-year old woman is now facing a variety of criminal charges linked to criminal harassment and using animals as weapons.

DPD Chief James Craig admitted this morning in a press conference, that this case was probably the strangest that he'd seen in his career.

Janice Smith’s lawyers have demanded for her to undergo a psychological evaluation, claiming that she was unfit to stand trial.

“Ms. Smith confessed to capturing and training squirrels to harass and attack her ex-boyfriend. She used to train lions for a circus, so it was easy for her to make the animals do as she wanted. She said she hoped to raise an army of up to 50 or 100 animals.”
Is this story true?

How do you go about checking the validity of a story?

- Where is the story from?
- Is the source reliable?
- Does the story support or reject the source’s World View? Your world view?
- Is it supported by a peer reviewed scientific study?
- Has the story been debunked?

They say that her choice of training squirrels instead of dogs or bears suggests that she might be suffering from mental problems.

If she is judged fit to stand trial, Ms. Smith will be facing a maximum of 65 years in prison.
Newspaper apologizes for ‘shameful’ coverage of lynchings

MALLORY MOENCH

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Alabama’s capital-city newspaper has published an apology for its “shameful” coverage of mob violence against African-Americans, delivering the message on the same day that the first memorial to America’s lynching victims opened nearby.
The Montgomery Advertiser editorial board wrote “we were wrong” for the way the paper covered lynchings from the 1870s through the 1950s. The board apologized for the paper’s “careless” and dehumanizing coverage of lynchings, which it said fed a false narrative about African-Americans and often assumed the victim was guilty of a crime.
“We propagated a world view rooted in racism and the sickening myth of racial superiority,” the editorial said.
Founded in 1829, the newspaper was edited by a Confederate veteran after the Civil War. Executive editor Bro Krift said the paper was “clearly complicit” as it failed to hold those who committed mob violence accountable.
“We wrote stories with loaded words,” Krift said in an interview. “We were making assumptions about what was going on. That’s fundamentally what you’re not supposed to do as a journalist. You’re supposed to be non-biased.”
The editorial concluded a series on the legacy of lynchings and the opening of the United States’ first memorial to its victims. The Montgomery-based legal advocacy organization Equal Justice Initiative opened the memorial and a museum for about 4,400 lynching victims countrywide, including more than 300 people killed in Alabama between 1877 and 1950.
Bryan Stevenson, executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, said Monday he was proud of the newspaper for acknowledging its past failings in covering lynchings.
In one case reported on by the Advertiser, a group of masked men shot Oliver Jackson after he was accused of killing someone in 1894. The paper’s coverage at the time described Jackson as being a born murderer even though his parents were quiet and hard-working.
Krift said he knew from the beginning of the project that the paper needed to apologize for its past.
“If we’re thinking about where we are as a community, we thought it was good to own up. It’s part of the healing process,” Krift said.
— The Associated Press
In the future, because of new technology (AI, realistic fake videos which could lead to cascading negative consequences), discernment will be more important than ever.

**Questions to consider include:**

1. Who made this (video, post, story)?
2. Is it real? If it is not real, why would this person be trying to manipulate you?
3. Are you being asked to do something you wouldn’t do under normal circumstances?
4. Are you being asked to do something morally wrong? Is “it” encouraging, promoting, or actually telling you to hate or assault another human being?
5. If so, you need to stop and ask:
   - Who are the puppet masters behind this?
   - Who are they trying to deceive?
   - What groups are they trying to divide?
   - Who does this benefit?
   - How do they benefit?
Closing question for students: Why is “Plato’s Allegory of the 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, no YouTube, no Facebook, no social media, no video games?
Provide students with an 11x17 copy of the initial drawing of the cave. Allow them to take notes at the end of the pictorial presentation.
Reading Plato’s Allegory of the Cave

Purpose: At the end of this unit, the class will hold a Socratic Seminar dialogue about the reading and pictorial. Today’s task is to develop a thorough understanding of the text.

Read Plato’s Allegory of the Cave as a class.

1. Underline any vocabulary words you don’t know.
2. As a class, define the words and write down the definitions.
3. Working in groups of 2-4 students, you have 1-3 minutes to identify the main idea in the first paragraph.
4. Share their thoughts with the class.
5. Use this information to annotate the text.
6. Repeat this process for each major paragraph.

NOTE: Emphasize that quality dialogue requires understanding the text, and that they are capable of developing this understanding.

At the end of the period, identify any questions you still have about the text or pictorial. Share with your table group or class.
Generating Questions

Purpose: In order to have a quality discussion, we must have quality questions.

Look at your Level 2 and Level 3 questions starters.

Working in groups of 2-4 students, write 3-5 L2 and 3-5 L3 questions for the Socratic Seminar on Plato’s Allegory of the Cave.
Level 2 Question Starters

· Compare and contrast ______________ with ______________.
· Explain why _______________ happens in ____________.
· Explain how _______________ happens in ____________.
· How do the ______________ and the ______________ work together?
· How is _______________ different from _______________?
· What happened, and why did it happen?
· What information or data support (your claim goes here)?
· What is the most important part of the _______________? Why?
· Infer the author’s intent based on what you have seen/read/heard.
· Infer the consequences of _____ based on what you have seen/read/heard.
· What is a counter-argument for _____?
· How is this argument developed?
· What are the results of _____?
Level 3 Question Starters

Note: All L3 questions must be supported with 2-5 pieces of evidence.
· What would happen if ____?
· Evaluate the author’s purpose for ____.
· Evaluate the significance of ____.
· Judge the quality of ____.
· Why is ____ the most important / the best, etc.? Explain.
· What are the strengths and the weaknesses of ____?
· How does this idea connect with ____?
· What is the most important part of the ________________? Why?
· What are the problems, conflicts, or issues with ____?
· How can you verify or prove _____ (that assumption)?
· What generalizations can you make about ____?
· Based on what you know, hypothesize what is likely to be causing ____.
· Justify the reasons for ____.
If you realize that you are in control of your own destiny and escape the manipulation of the puppet masters and get out of the cave, couldn’t you still fall back into the cave by falling prey to a different form of manipulation? Is the cave about a cycle of self-awareness?
Student Generated Questions

- How do puppet masters control you by controlling wealth?
- When can you tell if information is being manipulated?
- Who do you think suffers more: the puppet masters or the voluntary slaves? Explain.
- Are the puppet masters forced to do what they do? Explain.
Generating Questions

In your group, place a star next to the 3 questions you think will provide the richest, most interesting discussion.

Have each group share the first of their three questions with the class. Repeat with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} interesting questions.

Be prepared to answer these questions.
The Socratic Seminar

Divide the class into 4 groups.

Choose a leader for each group. The leader will have each person share their most interesting question. Then the group chooses a question to answer first. Anybody can share, and the leader can encourage a person to share their thoughts.