



Philosophy Department

Suggested Reading & Viewing - Open to Grades 9, 10 and 11

In the weeks ahead one may wish to deepen one's acquaintance with philosophy. Below is a short list of books with annotations that may guide you. There is always more to read and each of these books could guide you to other authors.

Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, 1995.

This popular novel by Norwegian writer Jostein Gaarder has been translated into 59 languages as well as made into a movie. Fourteen year old Sophie begins to learn philosophy from Alberto Knox. As the lessons progress her understanding of reality must change. An amazing amount of philosophy is recounted in this imaginative and captivating novel.

Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, 2014.

Currently this book has 17,247 ratings on Amazon and retains 4.5 stars, so it is popular and well-received. Harari takes a couple steps back from history to see the big picture in human development. He identifies imagination and the capacity for cooperation as responsible for its rapid development. He distinguishes four phases, the Cognitive Revolution (c. 70,000 BC), the Agricultural Revolution (c.10,000 BC), the Unification of Humans (c.1500), and the Scientific Revolution (c.1500). If Philosophy addresses the meaning of life, this may be counted as Philosophy. Are we really organizing our lives with imaginative and compelling fictions?

Stephen Law, *The Philosophy Gym, 25 Short Adventures in Thinking*, 2004.

Law is a philosopher with a considerable gift for taking complex and sophisticated ideas and presenting them in a way that everyone can understand. In this work he examines through dialogues and short explanations, many of the great issues in philosophy: the nature of reality, morality, art, the existence of God, etc. The chapters can be read in any order. It is an excellent guide for learning to think more rigorously about important issues in life.

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 1912.

Lord Russell was an aristocrat and philosopher who could express ideas with rare grace. In 1950 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In this book, which may be found for free at archive.org, he identifies and lucidly explains some of the classic problems in philosophy. More than a hundred years old, the book is still helpful for students of all ages.

Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* 2008.

Sandel has been called the most popular professor at Harvard University. He uses an adaptation of the Socratic Method (this adaptation emerges in the Renaissance in teaching clinical medicine) to involve an enormous number of students in discussion of crucial ethical and political issues.

[The videos of lessons are posted online and, yes, they are free.](#)