



Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

Text: “The Goods of the Mind,” an excerpt from *A Guidebook to Learning*” by Mortimer J. Adler

Grade/Subject: Adult

Ideas, Values: Information, Knowledge, Understanding, Wisdom, Time

Date of Origin: 4/23/2018

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:

Have participants read nine quotes arranged in a grid, mark them *agree* or *disagree*, discuss them with others to be persuaded or confirmed. (*Activity attached*)

Ask participants to mark the box with an asterisk that contains the quote that resonated most, or that they were most persuaded by.

Ask for each to write a personal definition of *wisdom*

Inspectional Read:

Ask participants to scan the document and discuss what they anticipate in the reading. Briefly discuss the title. Number the paragraphs (1-11). Read the whole text aloud and slowly.

Background Information:

Mortimer Jerome Adler (1902–2001) was an American philosopher, educator, and author. As a philosopher he worked within the Aristotelian and Thomistic traditions. He lived for long stretches in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, and San Mateo, California. He worked for Columbia University, the University of Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, and Adler's own Institute for Philosophical Research. Mortimer Adler founded the National Paideia Center at

UNC in 1988. Along with authoring *A Guidebook to Learning* (1986) he authored *How to Read a Book*, *The Paideia Proposal*, *How To Speak*, *How To Listen*, and many other books.

Vocabulary:

Highlight words, phrases, and sentences of import and interest. Use context clues to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words. Create a list of unfamiliar words (including: *purveyed*, *knaves*, *nefarious*, *moratorium*, cultural pluralism, intellectual heterodoxy etc.) on the board. Have teams define these terms and share with the whole group, while all note definitions on their copies of the text.

Analytical Read:

Read this text a second time and take detailed notes on your reactions to the points made. Underline any phrases that stand out to you. Put question marks by points that either you do not understand or do not agree with.

Pre-Seminar Process:

- ✓ **Define and State the purpose for the seminar.**

“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.

“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.

- ✓ **Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.**

“I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes. “I am asking you to think, listen and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other’s names.

“You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak, rather, the discussion is collaborative in that you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.

“You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, ‘I disagree with Joanna because...,’ focusing on the ideas involved not the individuals.

- ✓ **Have participants set a Personal Goal.**

“Now, please reflect on how you normally participate in a discussion as a group. What goal can you set for yourself that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar? “Please consider the list of personal participation goals – either on the Speaking and Listening Checklist or on the board.”

- ✓ To speak at least three times
- ✓ To refer to the text
- ✓ To ask a question
- ✓ To speak out of uncertainty
- ✓ To build on others’ comments

“Is there one that is relevant for you? Please choose one goal from the list or that you feel is best and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have... write down (or circle) your personal goal.”

- ✓ **Agree on a Group Goal.**

For this seminar, I will suggest our group goal (select display for all to see).

Seminar Questions:

- ✓ **Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):**
- ❖ Which one phrase from this excerpt do you think most clearly captures Adler’s attitude towards learning? (Round-robin response)
- ❖ Why do you think that sentence or phrase is intriguing? (Spontaneous discussion)

- ✓ **Core (Analyze textual details):**
- ❖ Do you agree that there is no such thing as a wise criminal? (follow up: what about Martin Luther King? Robin Hood? Ghandi?)
- ❖ In paragraph 6, Adler mentions the possible moratorium on scientific research such as was proposed after the atomic bomb was developed. Based on this article, would you agree or disagree with a current moratorium on scientific research? Why or why not?
- ❖ Reread paragraph 9, “Understanding anything presupposes some information or knowledge about it, but not the other way around. Being informed about something or even knowing it does not entail an understanding of it.” Based on this passage, how

would you describe the “method” Adler has in mind to reach an understanding of something? Refer to the text. Is this the primary job of a teacher?

- ❖ Based on this text, what should characterize life in 21st C America? If not the “Information Age,” what should it be? Why?
- ❖ Which of the goods of mind do American school systems place as a top priority: information, knowledge, understanding, or wisdom? Has it always been this way?

✓ **Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):**

- ❖ Based on what we’ve read and said, do you believe that wisdom is something that you can only acquire with time and experience? Why or why not?
 - OR
- ❖ What percentage of our schooling should be devoted to developing each of the four goods of the mind: information, knowledge, understanding, wisdom? Why?

Post-Seminar Process:

“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar”.

✓ **Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal goal.**

“As part of the post-seminar process, I would first like to ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion. Please review the goal you set for yourself and reflect in writing to what extent you met the goal. In addition, note why you think you performed as you did”. (Pause for reflection.)

✓ **Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of the seminar.**

“Now I would like us to talk together about how we did in relation to the group goal we set for ourselves (insert your group goal). On a scale of one to five, five being perfect, how would you say we did? Why?” (Pause for discussion.)

“Now, would someone be willing to (volunteer) to share your personal self-assessment and reflection?”

✓ **Note reminders for the next seminar.**

Post Seminar Content:

✓ Transition to Writing:

Give a few minutes for everyone to write down things they thought, read, or heard that help them explain further their thinking about Information, Knowledge, Understanding, Wisdom, Time.

✓ Writing Task:

After reading and discussing “The Goods of Mind” assess a lesson you’ve recently taught to see where the majority of your students’ learning experiences fall. How might you adjust at least two key components of your plan to further advance in the “scale of values.” Use at least one reference from the text.

✓ Brainstorm:

Talk in pairs about what the writing task is asking you to do and your beginning thoughts about what you will edit or modify about your lesson plan.

✓ Structure the Writing:

Discuss with participants possible designs (or outlines) for their lesson plans. Allot a few minutes for all to create designs or edits for their plans. Have participants draft their edits and modifications on paper and use them to refine their thinking. Discuss an individual that you might be open to sharing this updated lesson plan with.

✓ First Draft:

Spend 10-15 minutes putting your thoughts on paper about what edits are actionable and realistic.

✓ Personal Revision:

Have participants make modifications to their lesson plans focusing on the anticipated change in one of the goods of mind. Give time for full revisions resulting in a new draft that is ready to be used in class.

✓ **Post-Teaching Edit:**

After reflection on the outcome of the lesson, make final adjustments to your lesson plan and prepare the plan to be shared with a teammate or colleague.

✓ **Publish:**

Share the plan and solicit feedback once the plan is reviewed or used to teach with.

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

Name: **Jeremy Spielman**

Organization: **National Paideia Center**

***Text is attached if open sourced.**

***Text is cited if it needs to be procured.**

An excerpt from *A Guidebook to Learning* by Mortimer J. Adler

The Goods of the Mind

As health, strength, vigor, and vitality are bodily goods, so information, knowledge, understanding and wisdom are goods of the mind—goods that, acquired, perfect it.

A moment's reflection will discern that these four goods are not coordinate, not of equal value. Rather, as just named, they ascend in a scale of values, information having the least value, wisdom the greatest.

This view of the matter may run against the grain in this age of ours, which we praise for its superabundant information and for the knowledge explosion that distinguishes it from all its predecessors. No one has ever said that it is an age in which understanding has been enlarged or enhanced. Even less would any one dare say that wisdom has at last come into its own in the twentieth century.

Information—usually acquired bit by bit—is obviously of the least value among the goods of the mind listed above. There is a great deal of useless information, much of it purveyed by newspapers, magazines, and programs on radio and television, and given exaggerated importance in a popular game rightly called Trivial Pursuit. There may be some useless knowledge and understanding, but it is difficult to think how that could be; and certainly there is no useless wisdom.

Of course, there is a great deal of useful information, too, but when it is put to use it can be used for either good or evil purposes. Villains, knaves, and scoundrels have to be well-informed to succeed in their nefarious activities. Understanding can seldom be misused; and to speak of a “wise criminal” is a contradiction in terms. What has just been said about information also applies to knowledge to a certain extent. I am using the word “knowledge” to designate what we might also refer to as a body of knowledge, such as a particular science or a particular branch of philosophy. Unlike information, which comes to us bit by bit, organized knowledge is acquired—or at least put together—in a more systematic fashion. The way in which its component parts are related to one another, their sequence and interconnection, has some intelligible rationale.

There may be no useless knowledge, as there certainly is useless information, but there can be no doubt that knowledge, like information, can be put to good or evil use. Examples of how knowledge applied technologically can be used to the detriment of mankind and even the destruction of civilization are too obvious to need mention. In this century, when we have become acutely aware of this fact, controversy has occurred over the issue of whether a moratorium should be imposed on scientific research that carries with it the promise of technological applications that threaten the future of mankind.

There is another way of perceiving the ascending order in which these four goods of the mind stand. One can have bits of information without having knowledge in the sense defined; and even without possessing a body of knowledge that incorporates such information in its organization. On the other hand, bodies of knowledge—historical, scientific, or philosophical—involve a great deal of information, but always much more than that.

One can have knowledge without understanding the significance of knowledge possessed, or without understanding its significance as fully as possible. Knowledge accompanied by such understanding is certainly better than bare knowledge in the absence of it; and the greater the understanding that enlightens the knowledge, the better.

Understanding anything presupposes some information or knowledge about it, but not the other way around. Being informed about something or even knowing it does not entail an understanding of it.

Wisdom stands at the top in this sequence of the four goods of the mind. It presupposes having the information, knowledge, and understanding requisite for attaining the most fundamental insights that our minds can achieve.

The cultural pluralism and intellectual heterodoxy of the twentieth century may cause us to be intolerant of other hierarchies in the domain of human learning, but it is difficult to see how we could be led to dismiss the ascending scale of values that puts information at the bottom and wisdom at the top, with understood knowledge superior to bare knowledge in the middle. This obviously has a bearing on the value we place upon historical knowledge, the scientific knowledge we possess by means of empirical or experimental research, and the understanding achieved through philosophical reflection about our historical and scientific knowledge.

This lesson plan and its contents are intended for the use of the individual Paideia Seminar Plan Subscriber. Any disclosure, reproduction, distribution or other use of this lesson by an individual or entity other than the intended subscriber is prohibited.

Agree/Disagree/Change of Mind Rotations Directions:

1. Mark each box with an A for Agree or a D for Disagree in the bottom left corner of each box.
2. Move around the room and find someone who has an opposing stance for a given box. Have a brief discussion to better understand, and to see if you can come to an understanding or a change of mind.
3. Mark an X in the box if you changed your mind or see the other side (opened your perspective). Square the box [] if your stance is hardened by the dissenting discussion (closed off your perspective).
4. Attempt to get at least three in a row. If there's time attempt to mark more boxes with and X or [].

<p>“Data is not information, information is not knowledge, knowledge is not understanding, understanding is not wisdom.”</p> <p>- Clifford Stoll</p>	<p>“Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.”</p> <p>-Albert Einstein</p>	<p>“To attain knowledge, add things everyday. To attain wisdom, remove things every day.”</p> <p>–Lao Tzu</p>
<p>“Knowledge is power.”</p> <p>— Abraham Verghese</p>	<p>“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.”</p> <p>— Socrates</p>	<p>“All information is good even when it is bad.”</p> <p>- Neil Degrasse Tyson</p>
<p>“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”</p> <p>— Søren Kierkegaard</p>	<p>"Knowledge acquired by reason will dispel ignorance and thus destroy the greatest evil— fear, whose source is superstition."</p> <p>- Hannah Arendt</p>	<p>"Information is the currency of democracy."</p> <p>-Thomas Jefferson</p>