

# The Meaning of Life: Philosophy and Its Application in the Real World

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## I. Course Description:

This course will explore many of the philosophical issues, puzzles, and problems typically touched on in a college-level Introduction to Philosophy class. Rather than reading a bunch of ancient texts by some long deceased philosophers, our exploration will take place through the use of compelling stories, intriguing dialogue, and interactive learning experiences. We will approach the questions that have intrigued philosophers for centuries by generating the questions ourselves in our own philosophical community of inquiry. "The unexamined life," according to Socrates "is not worth living." Keeping this in mind, we will begin our journey using the skills of philosophy in an attempt to flesh out our meaning of life. A large part of our focus will be on the ways that philosophy can make a difference in our lives and our communities. Our hope is to come out of the course with some awareness of not only what it takes to be better philosophers, but also better friends, family members, and citizens.

## II. Texts:

We will use a number of stories and books to get us thinking philosophically, including, Carroll, Lewis, *Alice in Wonderland*, Estes, Eleanor, *The Hundred Dresses*; Kafka, Franz, *The Metamorphosis*; St. Exupéry, Antoine, *The Little Prince*; Steig, William, *The Real Thief*, Steig, William, *Yellow and Pink*; Tashlin, Frank, *The Bear That Wasn't*; Williams, Margery, *The Velveteen Rabbit*; Gardner, Justine, *Sophie's World*; the *Harry Potter* stories; Cohen, Martin, *102 Philosophy Problems*, and Matthew Lipman's *Philosophy for Children* books.

## III. Topics, Possible Readings, and Activities (subject to change)

### Day 1: What is Philosophy?

- *Alice in Wonderland*
- Sense and Nonsense
- Development of Principles for Doing Philosophy
- Development of vocabulary and community of inquiry
- Introducing our Central Question: What IS the Good Life?

### Day 2: How Do/Should We Think? (Logic and Critical Thinking)

- *Harry Stottlemeier*
- *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
- Development of principles for critical thinking
- Discussion of Fallacies in Reasoning
- Paradoxes

### Day 3: Who Am I?

- Kafka, Franz, *The Metamorphosis*
- Baum, Frank L, *Tin Woodsman of Oz*
- Computer Lab
- Puzzles about Identity

### Day 4: What Is Real?

- Williams, Margery, *The Velveteen Rabbit*
- Plato's Allegory of the Cave
- The Experience Machine
- The Brain in the Vat

### Day 5: What Is Truth? What is Knowledge?

- Strawberry exercise
- Steig, William, *The Real Thief*
- Tashlin, Frank, *The Bear that Wasn't*
- Lewis, C.S., *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- *Gettier Problems*

**Day 6: What Is Freedom? Are We Free? Do We Have Free Will?**

- Movie Clip: *Groundhog Day*
- Vaughn, Louis, *Doing Philosophy*
- Luck of the Draw Game
- Counterfactuals

**Day 7: What Is Time? What is Space?**

- Madeline L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*
- Cohen, Martin, *102 Philosophy Problems*

**Day 8: What is the Mind? What is Its Relation to the Body? Do Computers Have Minds?**

- Descartes, *Meditations*
- AliceBot
- *I, Robot*

**Day 9: What is Friendship?**

- Aristotle

**Day 10: What Is Art?**

- Blind Painter
- Puzzles About Art
- Visit to the EMP

**Day 11: What are our responsibilities to the environment? What are our responsibilities to animals?**

- Nature walk
- Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden*
- Last Man Argument
- Naylor, Phyllis, *Shiloh*
- Peter Singer

**Day 12: What Is the Right Thing To Do? Ethics**

- Estes, Eleanor, *The Hundred Dresses*
- Lifeboat Game Exercise

**Day 13: What is The Best Society? What is Justice?**

- Lowry, Lois, *The Giver*
- "What Do Rights Look Like?" Exercise
- Hand Dealt Game
- Fairness

**Day 14: What is the Meaning of Life?**

- St. Exupéry, Antoine de, *The Little Prince*
- Mills, Claudia, *Dinah Forever*
- "Existentialism is a Humanism," J.P. Sartre

**Day 15: Capstone Experience**

- Philosophy Colloquium/Conference/Think-Off/Journal

**IV. Capstone Experience**

We'll end the course with a mini Philosophy Conference, in which students will present and respond to philosophy papers they've written on topics of their own choosing.