Theory of Knowledge

Students in TOK will focus on the process of knowing and the ways in which knowing is applied to various academic courses of study (areas of knowledge), the world, their communities and themselves. Students can see how new knowledge relates to the world of knowledge as a whole.

Students will also understand that perception, reason, logic and language are all valid ways of knowing and all have a particular purpose and place and are often impacted by those very qualities. They will be trained in the critical evaluation of knowledge, so they can see how different types of knowledge have to be judged in different ways. Critical evaluations will also allow them to assess new knowledge claims as they relate to specific knowledge issues.

TOK is not about acquiring and conveying facts, but is about developing in the student the qualities of metacognition and critical thinking. It is about discovering who they are as a knower. This will be achieved through a multitude of strategies, including teacher and guest lecture presentations, varied readings, films, and media, journaling, and mainly – discussion and Socratic seminars. However, most essential is that students learn how to actively approach knowledge issues themselves.

Topics

Ways of Knowing
Unit 1 – How do we know we know?
  • Knowers and Knowing
  • Theories of truth
  • Impersonal Propositional Knowledge
  • Various forms of Personal Knowledge

Unit 2 – Perception as a way of Knowing
  • Is Seeing Believing?
  • Plato’s Allegory of the Cave
  • The Matrix
  • Optical Illusions

Unit 3 – Language as a way of Knowing
  • Features of Language
  • Purpose of Language
  • Language as communication

Unit 4 – Reason as a way of Knowing
  • Analogy, Induction, & Deduction
  • Logical Fallacies
  • Syllogisms

Unit 5 – Emotion as a way of knowing
  • Reason v. Emotion
Areas of Knowledge
Unit 6 – Natural Science
• The Scientific Method
• Real Science v. Pseudoscience
• Research methodology

Unit 7 – Mathematics
• Math – A universal language?
• Mathematical methods for knowing

Unit 8 – The Human Sciences
• The nature of Human Sciences
• Experimentation
• Psychology – Freud & Jung

Unit 9 – History
• Narratives and Perspectives of History
• Historical Sources

Unit 10 – Literature, Music, & Art
• Visual Arts as a Way of Knowing
• Music as a way of Knowing
• Subjectivity v. Objectivity

Unit 11 – Ethics and Morality
  o Moral Dilemmas

Assessment

There are two parts to the assessment:

Part 1 - External assessment: Essay on a Prescribed Title. Students are asked to write an essay of 1200-1600 words in length, on a title prescribed by the IB. In addition, students will be given practice essay prompts in which to hone various writing skills needed for the final product and related to the writing process. (40 pts)

Part 2 - Internal assessment: The Presentation. Each student is required to make a 10-minute presentation of a knowledge-related topic. Although only one presentation is required for the internal assessment, students will give two presentations (one for each semester of TOK). (20 pts.)

Resources


*What the Bleep Do We Know?* Directed by Will Amtz, 2004.
