Plato’s Republic: Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 9-12  Curriculum Focus: Ancient History  Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description
The Republic has intrigued, provoked, appalled, and inspired readers since it was written in ancient Athens 2,500 years ago. Its author, Plato, has simultaneously been called the father of philosophy, the first fascist, a revolutionary, and the original idealist. The questions Plato first posed in this book of ideas address conflicts people grapple with today.

Onscreen Questions
Before watching the video
- In The Republic, Plato raises questions about justice, morality, and virtue. As you watch the program, consider his questions and formulate your own responses.
- Prepare to become a philosopher by anticipating opposing views and forming your rebuttal.

After watching the video
- Socrates regarded philosophers as kings of the ideal republic. Does modern society value intellectuals in the same way he did?
- What are the advantages to having a philosopher as a king or political leader? What are the disadvantages?

Lesson Plan
Student Objectives
- Review and discuss the main ideas and principles of The Republic.
- Try to create a new ideal society.
- Contribute to presentations on this society.

Materials
- Computer with Internet access
- Poster board, markers
- Paper, pens, pencils
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Procedures

1. Begin the lesson with a class discussion of The Republic, in which Plato presents an ideal structure for human society. Ask students to define “utopia” (a place of ideal perfection, especially in laws, government, and social conditions), and remind them that The Republic is the first utopia in literature.

2. Challenge students to recall some of the main ideas of the book. Write their ideas on poster paper or the board and keep them on view. Students’ ideas may include the following:
   - The three classes that make up the ideal society
   - The education of leaders in the ideal society
   - Appearance versus reality; the theory of Forms
   - Knowledge through reason versus knowledge through sense experience
   - The problem with art

3. To provide students with more background, as well as the times in which Plato lived, suggest the following Web sites:
   - [http://www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu) (Use the Search function to find material on Plato and The Republic.)
   - [http://eawc.evansville.edu/grpage.htm](http://eawc.evansville.edu/grpage.htm) (Click on Plato and His Dialogues.)
   - [http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html](http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html) (Read the introduction for a description of the Argument and the Characters.)

4. Ask volunteers to share what they learned about Plato and his work from the Web sites. If time permits, discuss the philosopher and his work and ideals.

5. Explain to students that since Plato wrote The Republic almost 2,500 years ago, it may be time for a sequel—and they can write it. Tell them that they will have a chance to adopt, modify, or reject Plato’s views as they describe another ideal society: Utopia High School.

6. Have students brainstorm the topics to cover for their ideal society. Write their ideas on another piece of poster paper or the board and keep them on view. Their ideas may include the following:
   - People at Utopia High (students, teachers, staff)
   - School schedule
   - Curriculum
   - Extracurricular activities
   - Facilities (libraries, labs, lunch areas)
   - Admissions requirements
   - Reasons for detention or expulsion
7. Divide the class into groups, and assign each group at least one topic that emerged from the discussion. For each topic, have groups list three to five details, including a defense. For example, for “school schedule,” a group could list the number of hours a day that students must attend class; the number of weeks a year that students will attend classes; and the frequency of holidays and school days off. Then have them explain the rationale for their schedule.

8. Have each group select one student to give an oral presentation of the details and rationale to the class. Students in the audience should take notes on each presentation.

9. After the last presentation, help students discern whether any proposals conflict. If they do, lead a discussion about ways to resolve the conflicts.

10. Ask for volunteers to summarize in outline form on the board or on poster paper the description of Utopia High School that has emerged from the groups and class discussions.

11. Lead a final class discussion on the following themes:
   - Recall Socrates’ views on the qualities that make up a good and just person. How relevant are those qualities in today’s world?
   - The rulers in *The Republic* have no money and are denied all luxuries. Why are those with money ineligible to rule? How does this differ from the leaders of the United States? What rules concerning money and leadership would you establish in a utopian society?
   - Plato makes the claim that we are “prisoners of our culture.” Discuss both the meaning and the implications of this idea.

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions, demonstrated proficiency in using the Internet as a research tool, and worked efficiently and cooperatively in their groups to provide details and rationales for topics of their utopia.
- **2 points:** Students participated in class discussion, demonstrated an understanding of how to use the Internet as a research tool, and worked somewhat efficiently and cooperatively to provide details and rationales for topics of their utopia.
- **1 point:** Students participated little in class discussions, had difficulty using the Internet as a research tool, and had trouble working efficiently and cooperatively in their groups to provide details and rationales for topics of their utopia.

**Vocabulary**

**allegory**

*Definition:* The expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence

*Context:* The “Allegory of the Cave” revealed Socrates’ ideas about the role of the philosopher, whom he regarded as an enlightened one.
dialogue
*Definition:* A written composition in which two or more characters are represented as conversing
*Context:* "The Republic" features a series of imaginary conversations, or dialogues, in which Socrates expresses his philosophy.

philosopher
*Definition:* A person who seeks wisdom or enlightenment
*Context:* Both Plato and Socrates were philosophers who thought extensively about the ideal world.

republic
*Definition:* A sovereign state ruled by representatives of a widely inclusive electorate
*Context:* For Plato, the ideal republic was one in which those who ruled had nothing.

utopia
*Definition:* A place of ideal perfection, especially in laws, government, and social conditions
*Context:* Plato described his utopia in "The Republic."

**Academic Standards**

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link: [http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp](http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp)

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History — World History: Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 BCE
- Language Arts — Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, gathers and uses information for research purposes

**The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to [http://www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)