**Planning on starting A level Philosophy & Ethics next year?**

Philosophy & Ethics is a great subject to help you build a wide range of skills, including improving your skills as a writer, speaker and thinker.

You can read, watch and listen to interesting ideas and think about the opinions expressed. How far do they match your own views? What might someone say if they had a very different opinion? Keep up your writing skills by putting your ideas down on paper – try, if you can, to handwrite, just to keep up the practice of handwriting so that your writing isn’t completely illegible by the time you go back to school.

**Reading** good quality writing is the best way of improving your own writing. As you read a good writer, you will gain a better understanding of the meanings of new words and the ways in which carefully chosen words and punctuation can add real emphasis to someone’s argument. Different writers express themselves in different ways, and by reading them you will develop your own ‘voice’. Reading also helps with more basic skills such as spelling, because if you see a word written down often enough, you will know when it ‘looks right’ when you write the same word yourself.

**Thinking skills** can be developed if you try to take a questioning attitude to the things you watch, hear and read. Do you agree with what’s being said? If you watch a film where people have different attitudes towards something, which do you agree with most, or least, and why?

Here are some different activities and exercises for you to complete during the summer break. In Philosophy & Ethics, some of the topics can be quite sensitive, so please be mindful of this before you begin your research.

**Reading activities**

Here are some books and some online resources you could try, if you can get hold of them.

Reading ***anything*** of good quality, even if it’s a novel or a book about an entirely different topic, is always helpful for improving your skills, because you are practicing your comprehension skills as well as practicing understanding diverse ways in which writers express their ideas. Your own writing will improve, the more you read.

These are just *some* ideas – the expectation is that you read **at least one** of the suggestions we have made:

**The Brothers Karamazov – Fyodor Dostoevsky**: a huge and important ‘classic’ book, which takes time and effort and is well worth both. Raises issues of God, evil, rivalry, loyalty …

**Sophie’s World – Jostein Gaarder** – A great introduction to philosophical questions and where it leads us to.

**The Puzzle of… - Peter Vardy** – this series of non-fiction books is about issues in religion and philosophy, very readable and you don’t have to be an expert to enjoy them. You can dip in and out of different chapters rather than having to start at the beginning and work through to the end.

**Republic – Plato** – A fantastic insight into the routes of philosophical thought, written by a classical philosopher, who is considered to be the father of philosophy.

**Critical thinking skills**

Here are a couple of activities to try, to start you off, and then a selection of other directions you might like to take:

**Activity 1.**

This is the first episode of a documentary about attitudes towards homosexuality.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMPl25oraVc>

This is the first episode of Stephen Fry’s series ‘Out There’, where he explores attitudes to homosexuality in different parts of the world.

Questions to think about and/or write about – try to support your answers with reasoning:

1. Do you think there is a ‘right’ attitude and a ‘wrong’ attitude towards homosexuality? What is it that makes these attitudes right or wrong?
2. Some people might argue that different cultures have different ideas about morality, and that these different cultural beliefs should be respected even if we don’t agree with them. Do you think we should always respect the beliefs and attitudes of cultures different from our own, or should we try to persuade them to adopt our own beliefs instead?
3. What do you think are the aims of this television series? Do you think they are good aims? Do you think this first episode is successful in achieving its aims?
4. What religious reasons do people sometimes give for opposing homosexual relationships? How would you support or oppose these views?

**Activity 2**

Watch this documentary, ‘Barra Boy’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhGX1YCsvAM>

1. Do you think the story provides convincing evidence for reincarnation? Why, or why not?

2. What do you think counts as ‘convincing evidence’ for life after death (e.g. scripture, near death experiences, nothing)? What makes evidence convincing or unconvincing?

3. Read the accounts in the Gospels of the resurrection of Jesus (you could use biblegateway.com if you don’t have a Bible at home)

Matthew 28:1 – 10

Mark 16: 1 – 8

Luke 24: 1 – 10

John 20: 1 – 18

4. Do you find these stories convincing? Why, or why not?

5. Do you think the stories contradict each other, or are they just told from different points of view, in your opinion? What might account for the differences and the similarities between the stories?

**Now some books to help develop your thinking skills:**

**The pig that wants to be eaten – Julian Baggini**

**50 Philosophy Ideas you must know - Ben Dupre**

**Think – Simon Blackburn**

**The Blind Watchmaker, and/or The God Delusion – Richard Dawkins**

These suggestions are only a few of the very many available, so don’t worry if you can’t get hold of these specific titles.

**And some online resources:**

**The Philosophy Man** - **thephilosophyman.com**

This website gives you lots of different ideas to think about. Some are for younger children but you could try the ‘brainsqueezers’. These are good if you don’t have too much time, or if you’re finding it difficult to settle to anything more concentrated.

**Philosophers Magazine – philosophersmag.com**

Try the games on this website, and read the commentaries that go with them. Lots to think about!

**Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**

Created by Stanford University. This provides an excellent database of all the major themes in Philosophy and Ethics.

**Some things to watch and think about:**

All kinds of films and series have philosophical and religious ideas in them, so follow your own interests! You could try these, or choose something else, but try and use them as a stimulus for thinking and writing, rather than just sitting in front of them:

The Good Place

The Matrix

Unorthodox

Twelve Angry Men

The Island

**TED talks** – these are usually wonderful, with plenty to stimulate your questioning and reasoning skills.

Some favourites:

Elizabeth Loftus – how reliable is your memory?

Dan Gilbert – why we make bad decisions

Richard Dawkins – militant atheism

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – We should all be feminists

Damon Horowitz – Philosophy in prison

There are loads of talks on here, so use the search engine to find topics that interest you. Practise note-taking; write notes as you listen, just as you would if you were listening to a real-life lecture, and practise the skill of jotting down key points at speed. Ask yourself questions when you get to the end: what were the speaker’s key messages? Do you agree with the speaker? What might someone who disagreed say, and what might their reasons be?

**Research skills**

There are all kinds of resources online and in books to help you, if you want to start to learn a little more about some of the philosophers you will meet in your A Level course.

Use Wikipedia as a starting point and follow some of the links in the articles. You could do some research about:

Plato

Aristotle

Aquinas

Bentham

Mill

Hume

Kant

Practice using a range of sources to find out about a single person. When you have gathered together a range of information, try and synthesise it into a single piece of writing of your own.

The BBC has some great podcasts available:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01f0vzr>

(They are quite long and heavyweight, don’t worry if this activity isn’t for you)

Practice your note-making skills by pausing and writing a summary of what you’ve heard so far. Think about whether you agree with what the philosopher is saying.

Listen to whatever takes your interest. Don’t feel you have to listen to all of the podcast:

Plato’s Republic St Thomas Aquinas

Augustine The Ontological Argument

The Soul Redemption

Kant Relativism

Utilitarianism William James

Nietzsche Al-Ghazali

Duty Good and Evil

Altruism Feminism

Evil Empiricism

David Hume Logical Positivism

Mill

**Extended Research Task – Must be completed as will be used in the first session**

Using the research, you have conducted from the resources outlined above, answer the following question:

*“Philosophy has no use in the modern world”*

You may handwrite or type this, but it cannot be more than 1 page long (A4).

If you are concerned about sourcing the reading material, please see Miss Bowler as you are able to use her A Level library to book out books that will be of use.