Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

Text: “Theseus' Ship” adapted by Plutarch

Grade/Subject: HS / ELA

Ideas, Values: Alteration, Change, Essence, Identity, Journey, Paradox

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity:
Ask participants to jot down and discuss the following…
“How do you determine if someone is no longer the same person he or she used to be?”

Inspectional Read:
Distribute the text and ask participants to anticipate what they expect this reading to be like, How is it organized? How is it similar and different to other text they know?
Students are to label the paragraphs 1-5.

Background Information:
Plutarch, (upon becoming a Roman citizen, Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus) AD 46 – AD 120, was a Greek historian, biographer, and essayist. He is considered a Middle Platonist. Plutarch's surviving works seem to have all been originally written in Koine Greek.
The Ship of Theseus, also known as Theseus' paradox, is a thought experiment that raises the question of whether an object which has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object. The paradox is most notably recorded by Plutarch in Life of Theseus from the late first century.

The paradox had been discussed by more ancient philosophers such as Heraclitus, Socrates, and Plato prior to Plutarch's writings; and more recently by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Several variants are known, including "grandfather's axe".


Vocabulary:

Provide (or mine participants for) definitions for Context/Rare Words: slayer, Minotaur, labyrinth, Knossos, plank, dismantled, reassembled.

Analytical Read:

(Post directions.) Have participants mark words and points of interest (!) as well as puzzlement (?), limiting these to three each. Participants should also consider independently how the text is organized, and write a title word in the margin that best captures each of the five paragraphs. Finally, based on the text, have students craft a possible question they could put forth in seminar or post-seminar.

Pre-Seminar Process

Define and state purpose for Paideia Seminar.

Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.

Have participants set a Personal Goal.

Agree on a Group Goal.
Seminar Questions

Opening (Identify main ideas from the text.):

- What important ideas do you take away from this account?

Or

- In your own words, what question or questions is the reader being asked?

Core (Analyze textual details.):

- What part of the text do you strongly …
  Agree with,
  Disagree with,
  Feel uncertain about?

- Does time impact identity? How might the text support your thinking?

- Where can you identify paradoxes, obvious or not, within the text?

- Is there a difference between a lost identity and a changed identity?
  Which might describe this text best?

Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas.):

- Is there a marker as to when we lose our identity—as a student or a school? How do we know when that has happened—when we’ve lost our identity?

Post-Seminar Process

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

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

- Note reminders for next seminar.
Post-Seminar Content

Transition to Writing:
Participants are encouraged to revisit notes they jotted on their text, as well as from the Launch Activity. Ask students to link the Launch ideas to the text and discussion in one way. Jot that connection down.

Writing Task:
After reading and discussing “Theseus’ Ship”, write a letter to a not-yet-determined fellow student in the class in which you define identity and explain your answer to Plutarch’s question (Theseus, though, sailed in only one ship. Which one?) as it relates to your definition. Support your discussion with evidence from the text.

(LDC Task#: 12)

Brainstorm:
Participants can use their notes from the Transition to Writing as well as class discussion to begin to unpack the challenges associated with defining identity.

Structure the Writing:
Allow a few minutes for all to revisit the text, draft an outline for their writing, and refine their thinking. Have students use an organizational template as needed.

First Draft:
Challenge all to draft their essays by writing the paragraphs defined by their outlines.
**Collaborative Revision:**

Have participants work in pairs to read their first drafts aloud to each other with emphasis on reader as creator and editor. The reader should make a special note to signify to the listener his or her paraphrased definition of identity and connection to which ship was truly Theseus’. The listener says back one point heard clearly, how it is supported by the text, and asks one question for clarification. Roles are then switched. Give time for full revisions resulting in a second draft.

**Edit:**

Once the second draft is complete, have participants work in groups of three or four and this time take turns reading each other’s second drafts slowly and silently, marking spelling or grammar errors they find, with a limit of 5 per page. (Have dictionaries and grammar handbooks available for reference.) Take this opportunity to clarify/reteach any specific grammar strategies you have identified your students may need. Give time for full revisions and editing, resulting in a third and final draft.

**Publish:**

Publish the final copies of the resulting personal essays. Distribute the final draft essays to students, removing names. Have 3-5 students paraphrase the essay they received. As a student offers the verbal paraphrase, have listening students stand up if they think that essay could be theirs. Call on several students to explain why that essay might be theirs—what key ideas did the reader mention that are included in their essay? You can reverse this as well, having people stand up if the essay is definitely not theirs, articulating why the ideas differed so much from their own. Remember, paraphrasing and isolating 1) big ideas agreed upon; 2) disagreed upon; and/or 3) not previously considered.

**This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:**

Name: Kelly Foster
Organization: National Paideia Center
Theseus’ Ship by Plutarch

Theseus is remembered in Greek mythology as the slayer of the Minotaur. For years, the Athenians had been sending sacrifices to be given to the Minotaur, a half-man, half-bull beast who inhabited the labyrinth of Knossos. One year, Theseus braved the labyrinth, and killed the Minotaur.

The ship in which he returned was long preserved. As parts of the ship needed repair, it was rebuilt plank by plank. Suppose that, eventually, every plank was replaced; would it still have been the same ship? A strong case can be made for saying that it would have been: When the first plank was replaced, the ship would still have been Theseus’ ship. When the second was replaced, the ship would still have been Theseus’ ship. Changing a single plank can never turn one ship into another. Even when every plank had been replaced, then, and no part of the original ship remained, it would still have been Theseus’ ship.

Suppose, though, that each of the planks removed from Theseus’ ship was restored, and that these planks were then recombined to once again form a ship. Would this have been Theseus’ ship? Again, a strong case can be made for saying that it would have been: this ship would have had precisely the same parts as Theseus’ ship, arranged in precisely the same way.

If this happened, then, then it would seem that Theseus had returned from Knossos in two ships. First, there would have been Theseus’ ship that has had each of its parts replaced one by one. Second, there would have been Theseus’ ship that had been dismantled, restored, and then reassembled. Each of them would have been Theseus’ ship.

Theseus, though, sailed in only one ship. Which one?

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