

The Plain Vanilla Philosophical Inquiry Process

“Plain Vanilla” (Jackson, 2001) represents one strategy for eliciting topics for philosophical discussion, and how to proceed from there. The process generally follows this sequence of events:

1. Students read (or are exposed to some sort of stimulus, such as art, music, video);
2. Each student creates a philosophical question in response to the reading (we teach that philosophical questions 1) Use the Good Thinker’s Toolkit 2) Move beyond the “text” or use the text to question a larger issue 3) Are something they truly want to think about.
3. Students vote democratically on the question they want to discuss. Each student gets two votes and can place them both on the same question or two different questions. We typically just go around the circle and let every student vote.
4. Once the question is selected, the students write a response to it. The response should have some examples, identify assumptions, seek clarification, ask more questions...
5. The person whose question is chosen begins the inquiry. They explain where the question came from and provide the first response;
6. Students and teachers use the evaluation criteria to reflect on and evaluate the inquiry.