

◆◆ Chapter 20

Socratic Questioning

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Abstract

Socratic questioning is at the heart of critical teaching. In this paper, published as a chapter in the Critical Thinking Handbook series, Paul and Binker explain its nature and significance. Three types of Socratic questioning are described, uses of Socratic discussions are suggested, a taxonomy of Socratic questions is provided, and three extended examples of Socratic discussions are given.

◆ *Introduction*

Socratic discussion, wherein students' thought is elicited and probed, allows students to develop and evaluate their thinking by making it explicit. By encouraging students to slow their thinking down and elaborate on it, Socratic discussion gives students the opportunity to develop and test their ideas — the beliefs they have spontaneously formed and those they learn in school. Thus, students can synthesize their beliefs into a more coherent and better-developed perspective.

Socratic questioning requires teachers to take seriously and wonder about what students say and think: what they mean, its significance to them, its relationship to other beliefs, how it can be tested, to what extent and in what way it is true or makes sense. Teachers who wonder about the meaning and truth of students' statements can translate that curiosity into probing questions. By wondering aloud, teachers simultaneously convey interest in and respect for student thought, and model analytical moves for students. Fruitful Socratic discussion infects students with the same curiosity about the meaning and truth of what they think, hear, and read and gives students the clear message that they are expected to think and to take everyone else's beliefs seriously.

Socratic questioning is based on the idea that all thinking has a logic or structure, that any one statement only partially reveals the thinking underlying it, expressing no more than a tiny piece of the system of interconnected beliefs of which it is a part. (See the chapter on Background Logic.) Its purpose is to expose the logic of someone's thought. Use of Socratic questioning presupposes the following points: All thinking has assumptions; makes claims or creates meaning; has implications and consequences; focuses on some things and throws others into the background; uses some concepts or

ideas and not others; is defined by purposes, issues, or problems; uses or explains some facts and not others; is relatively clear or unclear; is relatively deep or superficial; is relatively critical or uncritical; is relatively elaborated or undeveloped; is relatively monological or multi-logical. Critical thinking is thinking done with an effective, self-monitoring awareness of these points.

Socratic instruction can take many forms. Socratic questions can come from the teacher or from students. They can be used in a large group discussion, in small groups, one-to-one, or even with oneself. They can have different purposes. What each form has in common is that someone's thought is developed as a result of the probing, stimulating questions asked. It requires questioners to try on others' beliefs, to imagine what it would be like to accept them and wonder what it would be like to believe otherwise. If a student says that people are selfish, the teacher may wonder aloud as to what it means to say that, how the student explains acts others call altruistic, what sort of example that student would accept as an unselfish act, or what the student thinks it means to say that an act or person was unselfish. The discussion which follows could help clarify the concepts of selfish and unselfish behavior, the kind of evidence required to determine whether or not someone is acting selfishly, and the consequences of accepting or rejecting the original generalization. Such a discussion enables students to examine their own views on such concepts as generosity, motivation, obligation, human nature, and right and wrong.

Some erroneously believe that a Socratic discussion is a chaotic free-for-all. In fact, Socratic discussion has distinctive goals and distinctive ways to achieve them. Indeed, any discussion — any thinking — guided by Socratic questioning is structured. The discussion, the thinking, is structured to take student thought from the unclear to the clear, from the unreasoned to the reasoned, from the implicit to the explicit, from the unexamined to the examined, from the inconsistent to the consistent, from the unarticulated to the articulated. To learn how to participate in it, one has to learn how to listen carefully to what others say, look for reasons and evidence, recognize and reflect upon assumptions, discover implications and consequences, seek examples, analogies, and objections, discover, in short, what is really known and distinguish it from what is merely believed.

Socratic Questioning

- raises basic issues
- probes beneath the surface of things
- pursues problematic areas of thought
- helps students to discover the *structure* of their own thought
- helps students develop sensitivity to clarity, accuracy, and relevance
- helps students arrive at judgment through their own reasoning
- helps students note claims, evidence, conclusions, questions-at-issue, assumptions, implications, consequences, concepts, interpretations, points of view — the elements of thought

◆ *Three Kinds of Socratic Discussion*

We can loosely categorize three general forms of Socratic questioning and distinguish three basic kinds of preparation for each: the spontaneous, the exploratory, and the issue-specific.

SPONTANEOUS OR UNPLANNED

Every teacher's teaching should be imbued with the Socratic spirit. We should always keep our curiosity and wondering alive. If we do, we will often spontaneously ask students what they mean and explore with them how we might find out if something is true. If one student says that a given angle will be the same as another angle in a geometrical figure, we may spontaneously wonder how we might go about proving or disproving that. If one student says people in the U.S. love freedom, we may spontaneously wonder exactly what that means. (Does that mean, for example, that we love freedom more than other people do? How could we find out?) If in a science class a student says that most space is empty, we may be spontaneously moved to ask what that might mean and how we might find out.

Such spontaneous discussions provide models of listening critically as well as exploring the beliefs expressed. If something said seems questionable, misleading, or false, Socratic questioning provides a way of helping students to become self-correcting, rather than relying on correction by the teacher. Spontaneous Socratic discussion can prove especially useful when students become interested in a topic, when they raise an important issue, when they are on the brink of grasping or integrating something, when discussion becomes bogged down or confused or hostile. Socratic questioning provides specific moves which can fruitfully take advantage of the interest, effectively approach the issue, aid integration and expansion of the insight, move a troubled discussion forward, clarify or sort through what appears confusing, and diffuse frustration or anger.

Although by definition one cannot pre-plan for a particular spontaneous discussion, teachers can prepare themselves by becoming familiar and comfortable with generic Socratic questions, and developing the art of raising probing follow-up questions and giving encouraging and helpful responses. Ask for examples, evidence, or reasons, propose counter-examples, ask the other students if they agree with a point made, suggest parallel or analogous cases, ask for a paraphrase of opposing views, rephrase student responses clearly and succinctly. These are among the most common moves.

- If you see little or no relevance in a student comment, you may think, "I wonder why this student mentioned that now?" and ask, "What connection do you see between our discussion and your point that ...?" or "I'm not sure why you mentioned that now. Could you explain how it's related to this discussion?" or "What made you think of that?" Either the point is germane, and you can clarify the connection, or only marginally related, and you can rephrase it and say "A new issue has been raised." That new issue can be pursued then, or tactfully postponed, or can generate an assignment.

- If a student says something vague or general, you may think, “I wonder about the role of that belief in this student’s life, the consequences of that belief, or how the student perceives the consequences, or whether it has any practical consequences at all” and so may ask, “How does that belief affect how you act? What, for example, do you do or refrain from doing because you believe that?” You might have several students respond and compare their understandings, or suggest an alternative view and have students compare its consequences.

Because we begin to wonder more and more about meaning and truth, and so think aloud in front of our students by means of questions, Socratic exchanges will occur at many unplanned moments in our instruction. However, in addition to these unplanned wonderings we can also design or plan at least two distinct kinds of Socratic discussion: one that explores a wide range of issues and one that focuses on one particular issue.

EXPLORATORY

Exploratory Socratic questioning enables teachers to find out what students know or think and to probe into student thinking on a variety of issues. Hence you may use it to learn students’ impressions of a subject to assess their thought and ability to articulate it, you may use it to see what students value, or to uncover problematic areas or potential biases, or find out where students’ thought is clearest and fuzziest. You may use it to discover areas or issues of interest or controversy, or to find out where and how students have integrated school material into their belief systems. Such discussions can serve as a general preparation for later study or analysis of a topic, as an introduction, as review, to see what students understood from their study of a unit or topic before a test, to suggest where they should focus study for a test, as a basis for or guide to future assignments, or to prepare for an assignment. You might have students take (or pick) an issue raised in discussion and give their own views, or have students form groups to discuss the issue or topic.

This type of Socratic questioning raises and explores a broad range of interrelated issues and concepts. It requires minimal pre-planning or pre-thinking. It has a relatively loose order or structure. You can prepare by having some general questions ready to raise when appropriate by considering the topic or issue, related issues, and key concepts. You can also prepare by predicting students’ likeliest responses and preparing some follow-up questions. Remember, however, that once students’ thought is stimulated no one can predict exactly where discussion will go.

Here are some suggestions and possible topics for Socratic discussions:

- “What is social studies?” If students have difficulty, ask, “When you’ve studied social studies, what have you talked about?” If students list topics, put them on the board. Then have students discuss the items and try to group them. “Do these topics have something in common? Are there differences between these topics?” Encourage students to discuss details they

- know about the topics. If, instead of listing topics, they give a general answer or definition, or if they can give a statement about what the topics listed have in common, suggest examples that fit the definition but are not social studies. For example, if a student says, "It's about people", mention medicine. Have them modify or improve their definition. "How is social studies like and unlike other subjects? What basic questions does the subject address? How does it address them? Why study social studies? Is it important? Why or why not? How can we use what we learn in social studies? What are the most important ideas you've learned from this subject?"
- When, if ever, is violence justified? Why are people as violent as they are? What effects does violence have? Can violence be lessened or stopped?
 - What is a friend?
 - What is education? Why learn?
 - What is most important?
 - What is right and wrong? Why be good? What is a good person?
 - What is the difference between living and non-living things?
 - Of what sorts of things is the universe made?
 - What is language?
 - What are the similarities and differences between humans and animals?

Sometimes you may not know whether to call a discussion exploratory or issue-specific. Which you call it is unimportant. What is important is what happens in the discussion. For example, consider this group of questions:

- What does 'vote' mean?
How do people decide whom to elect? How should they decide? How could people predict how a potential leader is likely to act? If you don't know about an issue or the candidates for an office, should you vote?
Is voting important? Why or why not? What are elections supposed to produce? How? What does that require? What does that tell us about voting?
Why have elections? Why is democracy considered good? What does belief in democracy assume about human nature?
How do people become candidates?
Why does the press emphasize how much money candidates have? How does having lots of money help candidates win?
Why do people give money to candidates? Why do companies?
Is voting the same thing as marking a ballot?

These questions could be the list generated as possible questions for an exploratory discussion. Which of them are actually used would depend on how students respond. For an issue-specific discussion, these questions and more could be used in an order which takes students from ideas with which they are most familiar to those with which they are least familiar.

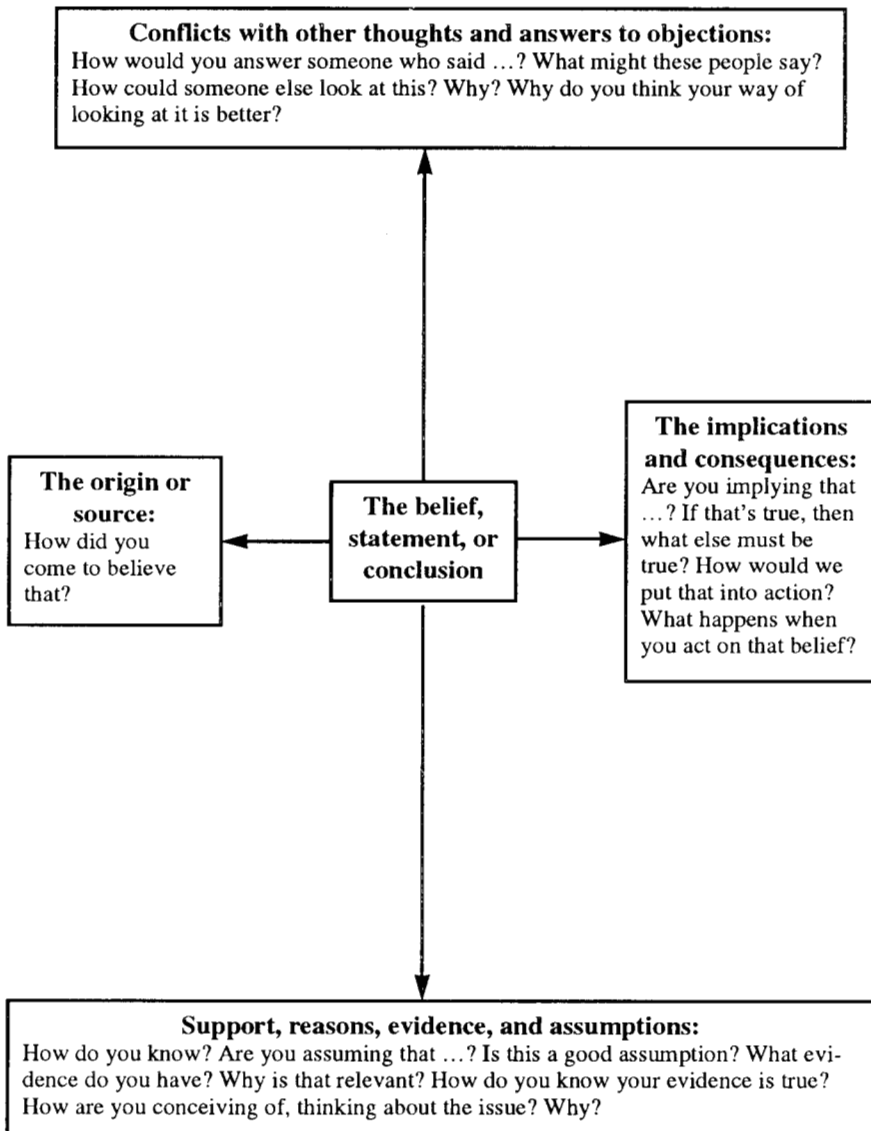
ISSUE-SPECIFIC

You will often approach your instruction with specific areas and issues to cover. This is the time for issue-specific Socratic questioning. To really probe an issue or concept in depth, to have students clarify, sort, analyze and evaluate thoughts and perspectives, distinguish the known from the unknown, synthesize relevant factors and knowledge, students can engage in an extended and focused discussion. This type of discussion offers students the chance to pursue perspectives to their most basic assumptions and through their furthest implications and consequences. These discussions give students experience in engaging in an extended, ordered, and integrated discussion in which they discover, develop, and share ideas and insights. It requires pre-planning or thinking through possible perspectives on the issue, grounds for conclusions, problematic concepts, implications, and consequences. You can further prepare by reflecting on those subjects relevant to the issue: their methods, standards, basic distinctions and concepts, and interrelationships — points of overlap or possible conflict. You may also prepare by considering likeliest student answers.

All three types of Socratic discussion require developing the art of questioning. They require the teacher to develop familiarity with a wide variety of intellectual moves and sensitivity to when to ask which kinds of questions, though there is rarely one best question at any particular time.

Some Suggestions for Using Socratic Discussion

- Have an initial exploratory discussion about a complex issue in which students break it down into simpler parts. Students can then choose the aspects they want to explore or research. Then have an issue-specific discussion where students share, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize their work.
- The class could have a “fishbowl” discussion. One third of the class, sitting in a circle, discusses a topic. The rest of the class, in a circle around the others, listens, takes notes, then discusses the discussion.
- Assign an essay asking students to respond to a point of interest made in a discussion.
- Have students write summaries of their discussions immediately afterwards. They could also add new thoughts or examples, provide further clarification, etc. They could later share these notes.



Socratic Discussion

There are four directions in which thought can be pursued.

◆ *A Taxonomy of Socratic Questions*

It is helpful to recognize, in light of the universal features in the logic of human thought, that there are identifiable categories of questions for the adept Socratic questioner to dip into: questions of clarification, questions that probe assumptions, questions that probe reasons and evidence, questions about viewpoints or perspectives, questions that probe implications and consequences, and questions about the question. Here are some examples of generic questions in each of these categories:

QUESTIONS OF CLARIFICATION

- What do you mean by _____?
- What is your main point?
- How does _____ relate to _____?
- Could you put that another way?
- Is your basic point _____ or _____?
- What do you think is the main issue here?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean _____ or _____?
- How does this relate to our discussion (problem, issue)?
- What do you think John meant by his remark? What did you take John to mean?
- Jane, would you summarize in your own words what Richard has said? ... Richard, is that what you meant?
- Could you give me an example?
- Would this be an example: _____?
- Could you explain that further?
- Would you say more about that?
- Why do you say that?

QUESTIONS THAT PROBE ASSUMPTIONS

- What are you assuming?
- What is Karen assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming _____. Do I understand you correctly?
- All of your reasoning depends on the idea that _____. Why have you based your reasoning on _____ rather than _____?
- You seem to be assuming _____. How would you justify taking this for granted?
- Is it always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?
- Why would someone make this assumption?

QUESTIONS THAT PROBE REASONS AND EVIDENCE

- What would be an example?
- How do you know?
- Why do you think that is true?
- Do you have any evidence for that?
- What difference does that make?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- What other information do we need?
- Could you explain your reasons to us?
- Are these reasons adequate?
- Why did you say that?
- What led you to that belief?
- How does that apply to this case?
- What would change your mind?

- But is that good evidence to believe that?
- Is there reason to doubt that evidence?
- Who is in a position to know if that is so?
- What would you say to someone who said ____?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that response?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
- How could we find out whether that is true?

QUESTIONS ABOUT VIEWPOINTS OR PERSPECTIVES

- You seem to be approaching this issue from ____ perspective. Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?
- How would other groups/types of people respond? Why? What would influence them?
- How could you answer the objection that ____ would make?
- What might someone who believed ____ think?
- Can/did anyone see this another way?
- What would someone who disagrees say?
- What is an alternative?
- How are Ken's and Roxanne's ideas alike? Different?

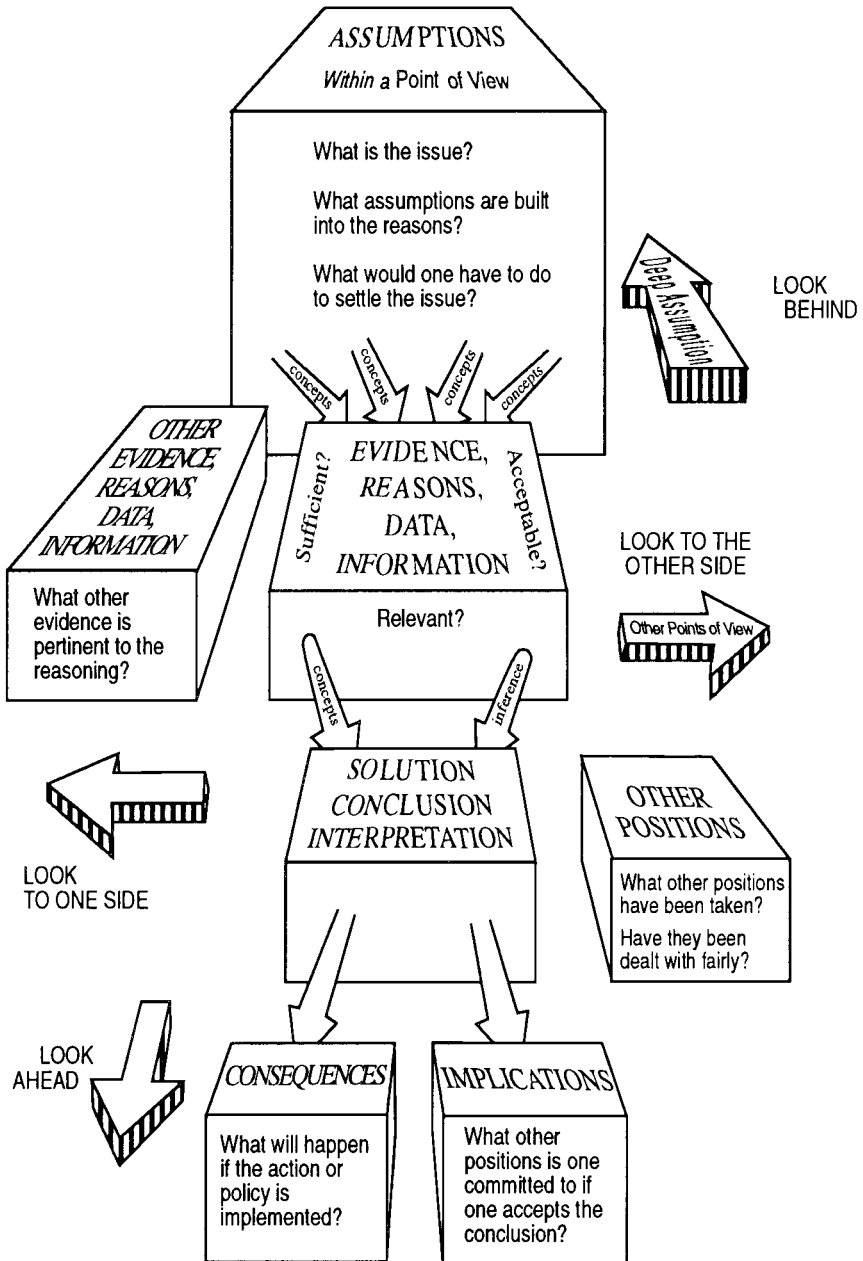
QUESTIONS THAT PROBE IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

- What are you implying by that?
- When you say _____, are you implying _____?
- But if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have?
- Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
- What is an alternative?
- If this and this are the case, then what else must also be true?
- If we say that *this* is unethical, how about *that*?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE QUESTION

- How can we find out?
- What does this question assume?
- Would __ put the question differently?
- How could someone settle this question?
- Can we break this question down at all?
- Is the question clear? Do we understand it?
- Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why?
- Does this question ask us to evaluate something?
- Do we all agree that this is the question?
- To answer this question, what questions would we have to answer first?
- I'm not sure I understand how you are interpreting the main question at issue.
- Is this the same issue as ____?
- How would ____ put the issue?
- Why is this question important?

The Elements of Reasoning Within a Point of View



* A modified version of a schema originally devised by Ralph H. Johnson; design and layout by J. A. Blair

◆ *Wondering (and Wondering About Your Wonderings)*

As a blossoming critical thinker, you will find yourself wondering in many directions. You will often, however, be unsure about how to share many of these wonderings with your students. You certainly don't want to overwhelm them. Neither do you want to confuse them or lead them in too many directions at once. So when do you make the wonderings explicit in the form of a question and when do you keep them in the privacy of your mind?

There is no pat formula or procedure for answering these questions, though there are some principles:

- "Test and find out." There is nothing wrong with some of your questions misfiring. You won't always be able to predict what questions will stimulate students' thought. So you must engage in some trial-and-error questioning.
- "Tie into student experience and perceived needs." You may think of numerous examples of ways students can apply what they learn, and formulate questions relating academic material to students' lives.
- "Don't give up too soon." If students don't respond to a question, wait. If they still don't respond, you could rephrase the question or break it down into simpler questions.

You should use care and caution in introducing students to Socratic questioning. The level of the questions should match the level of the students' thought. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that students will be fully successful with it, except over a considerable length of time. Nevertheless, properly used, it can be introduced in some form or other at virtually any grade level.

To participate effectively in Socratic questioning, one must:

- listen carefully to what others say
- take what they say seriously
- look for reasons and evidence
- recognize and reflect upon assumptions
- discover implications and consequences
- seek examples, analogies, and objections
- seek to distinguish what one *knows* from what one merely *believes*
- seek to enter empathetically into the perspectives or points of view of others
- be on the alert for inconsistencies, vagueness, and other possible problems in thought
- look beneath the surface of things
- maintain a healthy sense of skepticism
- be willing to helpfully play the role of devil's advocate

◆ Socratic Interludes in Class

#1 Helping Students Organize Their Thoughts for Writing

INTRODUCTION

The following Socratic interlude represents an initial attempt to get students to think about what a persuasive essay is and how to prepare to write one. Of course, like all Socratic questioning it goes beyond one objective, for it also stimulates students to think critically in general about what they are doing and why. It helps them to see that their own ideas, if developed, are important and can lead to insights.

TRANSCRIPT

(A Reconstruction)

T: You are all going to be writing a persuasive essay, so let's talk about what you have to do to get your ideas organized. There are two ways to persuade people of something, by appealing to their reason, a rational appeal, and by appealing to their emotions, an emotional appeal. What is the difference between these? Let's take the rational appeal first, what do you do when you appeal to someone's reason?

John: You give them good reasons for accepting something. You tell them why they should do something or what they can get out of it or why it's good for them.

T: But don't they already have reasons why they believe as they do? So why should they accept your reasons rather than theirs?

Bob: Well, maybe mine are better than theirs.

T: Have you ever given someone, say your mother or father, good reasons for what you wanted to do, but they just did not accept your reasons even though they seemed compelling to you?

Susan: Yeah, that happens a lot to me. They just say that I have to do what they say whether I like it or not because they're my parents.

T: So is it hopeless to give people good reasons for changing their minds because people will never change their minds?

Grace: No, people sometimes do change their minds. Sometimes they haven't thought about things a lot or they haven't noticed something about what they're doing. So you tell them something they hadn't considered and then they change their minds ... sometimes.

T: That's right, sometimes people do change their minds after you give them a new way of looking at things or reasons they hadn't considered. What does that tell you about one thing you want to be sure to do in deciding how to defend your ideas and get people to consider them? What do you think, Tom?

Tom: I guess you want to consider different ways to look at things, to find new reasons and things.

T: Where can you find different ways to look at things? What do you think, Janet?

Janet: I would look in the library.

T: How? What would you look for, could you be more specific?

Janet: Sure. I'm going to write about why women should have the same rights as men, so I'll look for books on feminism and women.

T: How will that help you to find different ways to look at things, could you spell that out further?

Janet: I think that there will probably be different ideas in different books. Not all women think alike. Black women and white women and religious women and Hispanic women all have their own point of view. I will look for the best reasons that each gives and try to put them into my paper.

T: OK, but so far we have just talked about giving reasons to support your ideas, what I called in the beginning a 'rational appeal'. What about the emotional side of things, of appealing to people's emotions? John, what are some emotions and why appeal to them?

John: Emotions are things like fear and anger and jealousy, what happens when we feel strongly, or are excited.

T: Right, so do you know anyone who appeals to our emotions? Are your emotions ever appealed to?

Judy: Sure, we all try to get people involved in feeling as we do. When we talk to friends about kids we don't like we describe them so that our friends will get mad at them and feel like we do.

T: How do we do this, could you give me an example, Judy?

Judy: OK, like I know this girl who's always trying to get her hands on boys, even if they already have girl friends. So I tell my friends how she acts. I give them all the details, how she touches them when she talks to them and acts like a dip. We really get mad at her.

T: So what do you think, should you try to get your reader to share your feeling? Should you try to get their emotions involved?

Judy: Sure, if you can.

T: But isn't this the way propaganda works? How we get people emotional so that they go along with things they shouldn't? Didn't Hitler get people all emotional and stir up their hate?

Judy: Yeah, but we do that too when we play the national anthem or when we get excited about Americans winning medals at the Olympics.

T: So what do you think of this Frank, should we or shouldn't we try to get people's emotions stirred up?

Frank: If what we are trying to get people to do is good we should do it, but if what we are trying to get them to do is bad we shouldn't.

T: Well, what do you think about Judy's getting her friends mad at a girl by telling them how she flirts with boys?

Frank: Are you asking me? ... I think she ought to clean up her own act first. (laughter)

Judy: What do you mean by that?!

Frank: Well, you're one of the biggest flirts around!

Judy: I never flirt with boys who have girl friends and anyway I'm just a friendly person.

Frank: Yes you are, *very* friendly!

T: OK, calm down you guys. I think you better settle this one in private. But look, there's an important point here. Sometimes we do act inconsistently, sometimes there are contradictions in our behavior, and we criticize people for doing what we do. And that's one thing we should think about when writing our papers, are we willing to live by what we are preaching to others? Or another way to put this is by asking whether our point of view is realistic. If our point of view seems too idealistic then our reader may not be persuaded.

We don't have much time left today, so let me try to summarize what I see as implied in what we have talked about. So far, we have agreed about a number of things important to persuasive writing: 1) you need to give good reasons to support your point of view, 2) you should be clear about what your reasons are, 3) you should consider the issue from more than one point of view, including considering how your reader might look at it, 4) you should check out books or articles on the subject to get different points of view, 5) you should consider how you might reach your reader's feelings, how what you say ties into what they care about, 6) following Judy's example you should present specific examples and include the details that make your example realistic and moving, 7) in line with Frank's point, you should watch out for contradictions and inconsistencies, and 8) you should make sure that what you are arguing for is realistic. For next time I would like you all to write out the introductory paragraph to your paper in which you basically tell the reader what you are going to try to persuade him or her of and how you are going to do it, that is, how the paper will be structured. Don't worry that your first draft is rough; you will be working in groups of threes to sharpen up what you have written.

◆ #2 *Helping Students to Think More Deeply About Basic Ideas*

INTRODUCTION

We tend to pass by basic ideas quickly to get into more derivative ideas. This is part of the didactic mind set of giving-students-content-to-remember. What we need to do, in contrast, is to stimulate student's thinking right from the start, especially about the most basic ideas in a subject so that they are motivated from the beginning to use their thinking in trying to understand things, and so that they base their thinking on foundational ideas that make sense to them.

TRANSCRIPT

(A Reconstruction)

T: This is a course in Biology. What kind of a subject is that? What do you know about Biology already? Kathleen, what do you know about it?

Kathleen: It's a science.

T: And what's a science?

Kathleen: Me? A science is very exact. They do experiments and measure things and test things.

T: What other sciences are there besides biology? Marisa, could you name some?

Marisa: Sure, there's chemistry and physics.

T: What else?

Blake: There's botany and math?

T: Math ... math is a little different from the others, isn't it? How is math different from biology, chemistry, physics, and botany? Blake, what would you say?

Blake: You don't do experiments in math.

T: And why not?

Blake: I guess 'cause numbers are different.

T: Yes, studying numbers and other mathematical things is different from studying chemicals or laws in the physical world or living things and so forth. You might ask your math teacher about why numbers are different or do some reading about that, but let's focus our attention here on what are called the life sciences. Why are biology and botany called life sciences?

Peter: Because they both study living things.

T: How are they different? How is biology different from botany? Jennifer, what do you think?

Jennifer: I don't know.

T: Well, let's all of us look up the words in our dictionaries and see what it says about them.

(Students look up the words)

T: Jennifer, what did you find for biology?

Jennifer: It says: "The science that deals with the origin, history, physical characteristics, life processes, habits, etc., of plants and animals: It includes botany and zoology."

T: So what do we know about the relationship of botany to biology? Rick?

Rick: Botany is just a part of biology.

T: Right, and what can we tell about biology from just looking at its etymology. What does it literally mean? If you break the word into two parts "bio" and "logy". Blake, what does it tell us?

Blake: The science of life or the study of life.

T: So, do you see how etymology can help us get an insight into the meaning of a word? Do you see how the longer definition spells out the etymological meaning in greater detail? Well, why do you think experiments are so important to biologists and other scientists? Have humans always done experiments do you think? Marisa.

Marisa: I guess not, not before there was any science.

T: Right, that's an excellent point, science didn't always exist. What did people do before science existed? How did they get their information? How did they form their beliefs? Peter.

Peter: From religion.

T: Yes, religion often shaped a lot of what people thought. Why don't we use religion today to decide, for example, what is true of the origin, history, and physical characteristics of life?

Peter: Some people still do. Some people believe that the Bible explains the origin of life and that the theory of evolution is wrong.

T: What is the theory of evolution, Jose?

Jose: I don't know.

T: Well, why don't we all look up the name Darwin in our dictionaries and see if there is anything there about Darwinian theory.

(Students look up the words)

T: Jose, read aloud what you have found.

Jose: It says, "Darwin's theory of evolution holds that all species of plants and animals developed from earlier forms by hereditary transmission of slight variations in successive generations and that the forms which survive are those that are best adapted to the environment."

T: What does that mean to you ... in ordinary language? How would you explain that? Jose.

Jose: It means the stronger survive and the weaker die?

T: Well, if that's true why do you think the dinosaurs died out? I thought dinosaurs were very strong?

Shannon: They died because of the ice age, I think.

T: So I guess it's not enough to be strong, you must also fit in with the changes in the environment. Perhaps fitness or adaptability is more important than strength. Well, in any case why do you think that most people today look to science to provide answers to questions about the origin and nature of life rather than to the Bible or other religious teachings?

Shannon: Nowadays most people believe that science and religion deal with different things and that scientific questions cannot be answered by religion.

T: And by the same token, I suppose, we recognize that religious questions cannot be answered by science. In any case, how were scientists able to convince people to consider their way of finding answers to questions about the nature of life and life processes. Kathleen, you've been quiet for a while, what do you think?

Kathleen: To me science can be proved. When scientists say something we can ask for proof and they can show us, and if we want we can try it out for ourselves.

T: Could you explain that further?

Kathleen: Sure, in my chemistry class we did experiments in which we tested out some of the things that were said in our chemistry books. We could see for ourselves.

T: That's right, science is based on the notion that when we claim things to be true about the world we should be able to test them to see if, objectively, they are true. Marisa, you have a question?

Marisa: Yes, but don't we all test things. We test our parents and our friends. We try out ideas to see if they work.

T: That's true. But is there any difference between the way you and I test our friends and the way a chemist might test a solution to see if it is acidic?

Marisa: Sure, ... but I'm not sure how to explain it.

T: Blake, what do you think?

Blake: Scientists have laboratories; we don't.

T: They also do precise measurements and use precise instruments, don't they? Why don't we do that with our friends, parents, and children? Adrian, do you have an idea why not?

Adrian: We don't need to measure our friends. We need to find out whether they really care about us.

T: Yes, finding out about caring is a different matter than finding out about acids and bases, or even than finding out about animal behavior. You might say that there are two different kinds of realities in the world, the qualitative and the quantitative, and that science is mostly concerned with the quantitative, while we are often concerned with the qualitative. Could you name some qualitative ideas that all of us are concerned with? Rick, what do you think?

Rick: I don't know what you mean.

T: Well, the word qualitative is connected to the word quality. If I were to ask you to describe your own qualities in comparison to your brother or sister, would you know the sort of thing I was asking you?

Rick: I guess so.

T: Could you, for example, take your father and describe to us some of his best and some of his worst qualities as you see them?

Rick: I guess so.

T: OK, why don't you do it. What do you think some of your father's best qualities are?

Rick: To me he is generous. He likes to help people out when they are in trouble.

T: And what science studies generosity?

Rick: I don't know. None, I guess.

T: That's right, generosity is a human quality, it can't be measured scientifically. There is no such thing as generosity units. So science is not the only way we can find things out. We can also experience qualities in the world. We can experience kindness, generosity, fear, love, hate, jealousy, self-satisfaction, friendship, and many, many other things as well. In this class we are concerned mainly with what we can find out about life quantitatively or scientifically. For next time, I want you to read the first chapter in your text book and I want you to be prepared to explain what the first chapter says. I will be dividing you up into groups of four and each group of four will develop a short summary of the first chapter (without looking at it, of course) and then we will have a spokesperson

from each group explain your summary to the class. After that, we will have a discussion of the ideas mentioned. Don't forget today's discussion, because I'll be asking you some questions that will see if you can relate what we talked about today with what was said in your first chapter. Any questions? ... OK, ... See you next time.

◆ #3 *Helping Students to Think Seriously
About Complex Social Issues*

INTRODUCTION

In the following extended discussion, Rodger Halstad, Homsted High School Social Studies teacher, Socratically questions students about their views about the Middle East. He links up the issue with the deathcamps of WWII and, ultimately, with the problem of how to correct one injustice without committing another.

PART ONE

I thought what we'd do now is to talk a little about the Middle East. And remember we saw a film, and title of the film was, "Let My People Go". And in the process of seeing that film, we took a look at some of the things that happened in the concentration camps; in the death-camps of Nazi Germany during World War II. Remember that? It's pretty hard to forget, so I'm sure that you do remember that. Who do you hold responsible for what happened to the Jewish people during the holocaust, the Nazi holocaust of the 1940's and the late 1930's? Who do you hold responsible for that? Laura?

Laura: Everyone. Um ...

What do you mean, everyone?

Student: It started in Germany. I would ... My first thought goes to Hitler; then it goes to the German people that allowed him to take control without ... without seeing what he was doing before it was too late.

Let's see if we understand. Are you talking now about what I call moral responsibility, that they hold some moral responsibility for what happened, or are you talking about legal responsibility? What I'd like to really have us talk about is legal responsibility. Who would you punish for the responsibility for what happened to the Jewish people? Would you punish all Germans? No. OK, then who would you punish?

Student: Hitler.

Hitler. OK, if he had been alive and we'd been able to capture him, you would have punished him.

Student: Absolutely.

OK. I think probably we'd all agree to that, alright? Anybody else?

Student: Probably his five top men. I ... I'm not sure

Well, whatever. Whether it's five or six or ten or whatever. The top guys, the SS

Student: (several talking) Well, that's a good question ... and, there are a lot of Nazis out there.

Well, are you sure everyone was a member of the Nazi party? Not all Germans were.

Student: Well, not all Germans were ... um ...

Want to think about it?

Student: Yeah.

How about somebody else? First of all, we all agree that somebody should have been punished, right? Alright, these are not acts that should have gone unpunished. OK, Steve?

Steve: Well, it'd be kind of hard, but, like, I think that every soldier or whatever, whoever took a life, theirs should be taken. (Several speaking)

Every person who ... every ... every Nazi soldier who was in the camps

Steve: Who had something to do with ...

Who had something to do with the killing of the people in the camps. The Jews, the gypsies, the opponents of Hitler, all those people. All the 12 million killed. Anybody that had a direct ... played a direct role. You would punish them. What if we had a corporal here, Steve, and the corporal said, "The reason I did this is because I was ordered to do it. And if I didn't do it, my family was going to be injured, or something was going to happen to my family." Are you going to punish that corporal?

Steve: Well, I guess ... well, I mean ... ah, they ... They still took a life, you know, but they're ... what they're ... You know, they were just following the rules. What ... (Laughter) Yes, but I mean ... I, I, I believe that, you know, if you take a life ...

What if they didn't take a life? What if they just tortured somebody?

Steve: Then they ... then ... then they should be tortured in the same way.

So you say anybody who was directly responsible for any injury, torture, murder, whatever in the camps, they themselves should get a similar kind of punishment. What about the people who were in the bureaucracy of the German government who, uh, set up the trains and the time schedule of the trains? What about the engineer on the train? You're looking at me, Amy. I'm not sure if ...

Amy: Well, yeah, I guess

All those people?

Amy: Yeah, because if you think about it, if they hadn't of done that, they couldn't have gotten the people there.

OK, and what about the people standing on the streets while the Jews had to get in the trucks ...?

Amy: No, I think that's going a little too ...

OK, so anybody who participates in any way in the arrest, the carrying out of all these activities, including even people who, uh ... what about people who typed up the memos?

Amy: Yeah, I guess.

(Several Speaking)

No, says Manuel. Why not no? Why no?

Manuel: Like, for example, if they're put under a lot of duress. Like, uh, "We're going to kill your family, we're going to hurt your family, put them in a concentration camp, too"

Yes. Yes?

Manuel: It, it's just total ... you just can't hold them responsible because their family ... it's just like, uh ... the next, the closest thing to them, and you can't just say you have to punish them because I don't think they did it on purpose. They didn't do it because we hate the Jews, we don't like you ... we're not doing it because we want to see you suffer. They're doing it because they don't want to see their family suffer.

Anybody who enjoyed what they were doing, Manny, clearly needs to be punished, in your ... right? What if I do it, but I don't enjoy it? "Oh, God! I don't want to do this! Ohhh! But you made me do it."

Manuel: I don't think they should be punished.

OK, the war's over, Manny. Let's get the man in here for a second. The war's over, Manny, and we now have the rest of these people. Leslie, did you do that because you wanted to do that? (jumps to Rodger)

(Laughter)

Student: No.

No. Gail, did you do it because you wanted to do it?

Gail: No.

Did you do it because you wanted to do it, Ariel? Did you do it, Laurel? 'Cause you wanted, Brad?

Student: No.

Manny, what we got? None of them did it because they wanted to. They all did it because it was orders.

Manuel: Well, uh ...

How do we know?

Manuel: That's a good question.

You want to get off the hot seat for a second, Manny?

Manuel: Yeah.

OK, I don't know ... eeny, meeny, Stacy?

Stacy: Well, ah ... that's why I think that it should maybe just be the leadership because they're the ones ...

Just Hitler, and the ...

Stacy: Yeah, 'cause they're the ones who made up the concentration camps, and they're the ones who tell the people to do it. And some people will want to do these things, and some people won't, and you can't determine who wants to do it and who doesn't.

Student: Yeah, but how far do you go down?

Stacy: See ... Well, that's why you just do ... it'd just be those top ...

Student: What's the top ...?

Stacy: Hitler and his five or six men.

Stacy, would I gather that you agree with Manny that if somebody really enjoyed doing it and wanted to do it, 'doing it' meaning hurting, killing, torture; if they really wanted to do it and enjoyed it, those people should be punished.

Stacy: Yeah, they should, but you can't decide, you can't tell who really wanted to be ...

OK, someone who did it reluctantly, you shouldn't punish them, is that right?

Stacy: Right.

Suppose you and I are in the mafia. And suppose you and I are in the mafia, and I order you to kill ... uh, Katherine. OK?

Stacy: OK.

You happen to be ... uh, acquaintances with Kathy, and you don't want to do it, but I order you to do it. And, in fact you do, you carry it out because I tell ya, if you don't do it, I'm going to pull your fingernails out, and your toenails, and I'm going to shoot off your kneecap. And so you kill Katherine. Now, along comes Brad. He's a policeman. And he

arrests you for killing Katherine, OK? And you say, "I didn't want to do it. My toenails were going to go out, my fingernails were going to go out, my kneecaps were going to go." Should we say, "You're home free, Stacy."?

Stacy: No, I'd lead them to you, is what I'd do.

So, they're going to arrest me?

Stacy: Yeah.

Alright. Now should you be arrested? Should we just say, "I'm sorry, Stacy." Should you be arrested? Should you be punished?

Stacy: Yeah, I should be arrested but maybe not You should be *really* punished, yeah.

Really punished?

Stacy: Yeah.

Should you be punished too?

Stacy: I'm in the Mafia, I shouldn't be in the Mafia.

So anybody who is in the camp who does these deeds because even though they did it because they did not want to do them they should also be held responsible and punished.

Stacy: You can't. There are too many of them. It's stooping to the Nazi's level by killing, by punishing all these people.

So will you let some of them go free because you can't punish all?

Stacy: Right, you can't, you can't punish a whole entire group of people that's like millions of people.

Why can't you do that?

Stacy: Because it's doing what they were doing to the Jewish people.

We'll get some disagreement here. Jeannette?

Jeannette: If you can't call a person responsible for making a decision, where does that leave society?

What kind of decision?

Jeannette: They made a decision to follow the order.

And you are saying we can't be responsible for a major ...

(voices)

Oh, I'm sorry. Oh you have to ... the front row is answering ... why must you hold them responsible?

(Laughter.)

Jeannette: Because they made the decision, they did it.

But what if they did it under duress?

Jeannette: They could've ... faced the responsibilities, you have to face responsibilities either way, you can't just do something.

Suppose, suppose I say to you, "Jeannette you, I want you to uh pull Bill's eyeballs out of his head. (Laughter) And if you don't do that, I am going to kill you, Jeannette."

Jeannette: I am responsible.

Are you responsible?

Jeannette: I'm responsible.

You're going to die!

Jeannette: I'm responsible!

So we should punish you because you do this deed even though you would have died if you hadn't done it?

Jeannette: No! it's still my decision.

Student: Yeah.

Stacy: But they, what if they were drafted into being in the Nazi camps and they were forced to do that — and they did not want to do that?

Student: How did they force ...

Stacy: Just like we had American troops in Vietnam, they were killing people.

Student: And they were drafted. A lot of people ran, though

Student: A lot of people didn't.

Time out! Time out, we have a real important discussion and that is the issue of the people who — what about the people who did not willingly do it, who did it because of orders, are they or are they not responsible?

Student: No.

Jody: I agree with Jeannette. They are responsible, they made the decision to do it, — they have a choice but some people, I'm sure, made the choice to die rather than to do this. I'm sure there were people that did that. And that was their decision because they could not go through with the order. You can't live with that. They went through it and made that decision. They have to live with what they did and they have to be punished for it because they took the lives of other people.

Wait a minute, no, no, no, no, no. Do you know the story of Patty Hearst at all? I know its ancient history to you. She was kidnapped by a group call the SLA. She was brainwashed and she was beaten. She was abused and eventually she joins the group and they rob a bank and she had a part in the bank robbery up in Carmichael, California, it's up near Sacramento. And in the process of doing that — after she is freed, she argued that during the bank robbery they had a gun on her and she didn't have any choice.

Now, she's arrested for the bank robbery and she's going to be put on trial. Is she responsible for her acts in that bank robbery Jody? Does she go free or do you punish her for the bank robbery?

Jody: That's a hard question. (yeah, no fair) Was it proven that there was a gun on her?

Yes, they had tape. It was not clear whether there were bullets in the gun or so forth. There is tape of a gun.

Jody: Well, if there's really proof, that's different.

What do you mean that's different?

Jody: Well, than someone who was a Nazi.

No, no, no, let's not get to Nazis yet. You're on a jury, Jody, are you going to vote guilty or innocent?

Jody: Innocent.

Why?

Jody: Because there was proof that she was forced; it wasn't a threat that something was going to happen. She was forced.

Did she do it under threat of her own life?

Student: Yes.

All right. Leslie here is a Nazi. OK, Gayle is just a neutral. Leslie tells Gayle if you don't kill Ariel the Jew, you will be punished. Gayle kills Ariel the Jew. The reason she does, is, because Leslie told her to do it.

Jody: No, I guess.

Leslie held the gun on her. Are we not going to punish Gayle — Gayle "Patty Hearst"?

Jody: No. I would probably have to say that she would have to be responsible.

Patty Hearst? Patty Hearst?

Jody: Yeah.

Because you see the inconsistency with the previous position and you want to hold the position that in fact everyone who does things even under

orders and compulsion are responsible for what they do. Is that right? Would I be clear that in any future argument with your parents, you will not argue a line that might say, "The reason I did that is because somebody else told me I had to do that." You'll never argue that?

Jody: Your parents always say, "But it was your decision."

And you agree to that.

Jody: And you don't have to listen to what everyone else says.

And you believe that.

Jody: Yeah.

And you will follow it?

Jennifer.

Jennifer: Um, I agree with Janet, but I think its conditional because ...

What is conditional?

Jennifer: Well, that, that the people are ultimately responsible for their actions because in the Patty Hearst case, she umm, it was a bank robbery, and that wasn't directly, I mean that was, — you're not supposed to steal people's money and that would affect people but it's not physically, its not physical pain and it's not, you know, killing them, and so I think they should of, um, punish all the people who are in the Nazi camp because they were responsible for — physical pain and uh their deaths.

Now let's see. Let's change it just slightly to make sure we understand. So far, we have pretty wide — all the leaders get punished, right? We had some disagreement on who in the camps will be punished and some of you think all the people involved in the camps and others think not quite all the people. Anybody beyond that? What about Germans who knew what was going on and did nothing to stop it?

Student: (many voices)

Student: It's too broad.

It's too broad?

Student: Yeah.

Is there anybody in the room right now who thinks that we should punish all the Germans who knew what was going on and did nothing to stop it. OK, so obviously you would not agree to punish Americans who knew about it, right? Or the British, right? So you're keeping your level of punishment to the leaders and those who are directly involved, and you have some disagreement on who is directly involved and should be punished. Have I got it right?

PART TWO

You're in the U.N. It's 1947. You have now been given the legal right, whether you believe it is the moral right or not, you have been given the legal right to decide what to do with Palestine. OK, we are not talking about moral. No, we are talking about legal. You are a country, you are going to have to vote on what to do with the state of Palestine. What are you going to do?

Student: Vote for the Arabs.

For the Arabs. You are going to vote that the Arabs have — why?

Student: Additionally, I would give the Jews a piece of Germany.

OK, OK, Would you today be somewhat sympathetic to a Palestinian who comes to you and says, "My land has been taken wrongly from me and I have been driven off my land by a people and by an organization for an act that I had no responsibility for." Would you be sympathetic to a Palestinian who said that?

Jeannette: Yes.

What would you say to the Palestinian, other than to say that I am sympathetic?

Jeannette: I would say what my Daddy always says to me, that life is not fair.

So the world is not fair and life is not fair. We do the best we can. Do the Palestinians have, in your mind, some right to oppose what was done to them?

Jeannette: Yes.

Do they have the right to use force to try to, uh, change what was done to them?

Jeannette: They have a right.

In your mind?

Jeannette: Yes, they do.

How do we get out of this dilemma?

Jeannette: I don't know.

It is a real dilemma isn't it?

Jeannette: Yeah.

Anybody else? John.

John: No wait, I want to clarify a couple of things first.

OK.

John: OK, the land that is, uh, that is in question, Palestine, was once the Jews'. If we go back far enough ... it was their holy land, right?

Yes. Correct.

John: And the Arabs drove them off a long time ago.

Well, actually the Romans drove them off.

John: The Romans drove them off, OK, but they've had a history of persecution, so isn't that ...

Student: The Jews?

John: Isn't that — yeah the Jews — isn't that the significance of giving them that piece of land instead of a piece of Germany is because that's originally theirs and they have pride and heritage there and they were driven off ...?

John, would you then argue the proposition that anybody who, any group of people, who have been persecuted and driven off their land, at some time in the future should be given that land back?

John: No.

That's not your proposition?

John: That's a Halstead generalization.

Well, I thought that's what you said; did I not get what you said correct?

John: I'm talking about the Jews specifically.

All right, explain it to me again, let's see if I hear it right.

John: OK, the Jews have been burned all through history.

All right.

John: You agree with that?

Yes, I do.

John: OK, and you agree that that was once their holy land.

I agree to that.

John: So, if in fact, the UN decides to give them a piece of land, which they did, the significance of giving them that land in contrast to giving them a piece of Germany is because it was once theirs and it was, it had some significance to them, in fact we're trying to compensate for 'em, not just push them into the corner, OK.

I agree to all that, now are you saying to me that you personally, if you had been a delegate in the UN would have voted to give a portion of Palestine to the Jewish people because of that argument?

John: Correct.

Is that an argument that is valid for any other group of people or is that argument only valid to the Jewish people?

John: It's, yeah, it depends.

Well, I ... suppose ... suppose I can find, John, suppose I can find another group of people who have been persecuted for a good portion of their life and had their land taken away by another group and now these people are trying to find someplace to live where they in fact can live a fruitful life, would you in fact agree to those people getting their land back?

John: Yeah.

All right, let's talk about the American Indian. Were the American Indians persecuted?

Class: Yes.

Were they driven off their land?

Class: Yes.

Were they put in reservations?

Class: Yes.

Have we taken their land away from them?

Class: Yes.

John: And I'm not saying that's right.

Are the, are the American Indians today that are alive basically on land areas where they are not able to survive fruitfully as a people? Should they be given their land back?

Student: Some.

John: Seems logical, I mean ...

Am I correct then that, John, that you're arguing, that you would agree that we in the United States should give this land back to the American Indian because of all those circumstances?

John: They should get something, in proportion to the size of their people.

They should get something, something of the United States ... and they should get something that is worthwhile and fruitful and that they can live and survive not some junk land down in the desert ... is that correct?

Class: Yes.

Would you agree perhaps maybe Santa Clara Valley? Would you personally, John, be willing to move out of your house and turn it over to the Indians?

Class laughs.

Student: Give Ohio.

Well, that's too easy for John to give away Ohio. Would you give away your home?

John: I wouldn't be happy about it.

No you wouldn't, you would feel wronged if it happened, right?

John: Right.

Would you, would you, if the government came down and said "John Rimenshutter and family, your house has just been given away to an Indian couple". Would you feel right in taking some force against that Indian couple at a later time to get your house back?

John: Yeah.

Laurel: I wouldn't, I would ...

Laurel, you wouldn't what?

Laurel: I wouldn't.

You wouldn't what?

Laurel: I wouldn't feel comfortable using force to get my house back from the Indian couple. I would go to the government.

John: Well, yeah.

Laurel: And, and Well, but the question was, would you feel force ...

Laurel, you're in the UN. Would you vote to give a piece of that land to the Jewish people, or would you vote to give it to the Arabs in its entirety?

Laurel: I really ... I want to be able to feel good about giving that homeland to the Jews.

All right.

Laurel: I think they deserve it ... and I think I would vote no because the Arabs are there and it is Arab land.

So then what do we do with the Jews? It's 1946, 1947.

Laurel: And you know a lot of the time ... Jody was telling me a lot of Jews didn't want to go back to their homes that they've been ... they didn't want to go back to their German homes.

Is that rightfully so? Would you, would you agree that there is logical reason why they would not want to go back?

Laurel: Absolutely, oh absolutely

So what do we do with them maybe we've got thousands maybe hundreds of thousands of Jews who were in the camps they don't want to go back to Germany, they don't want to go back to Poland?

Laurel: Maybe ...

John has raised what is actually true, they want to go back to where is their historical place.

Laurel: Right, right.

You do not believe that's right, because the majority of the people who live there are Arabs now. So what are we going to do with the Jews?

Laurel: Somehow, uh ...

It's a heck of a dilemma, isn't it?

Laurel: Somehow, split up Israel so that, um, the Arabs, but yeah, but, but they didn't do that totally, I mean a lot of, there's like what, in Lebanon there's a lot of — there's many camps up there for, for ...

Palestinians.

Laurel: Palestinians and I don't think that that's fair.

OK.

Laurel: And, um, I think somehow both sides ...

In trying to correct one injustice have we created another injustice?

Laurel: Yes!

And do we, do we have in the Middle East, two groups of people who believe rightfully so, that they have been injured, and that there is a solution to their problem and that is that the solution to their problem, for both of them, is to have the land of Palestine? Now the Palestinians feel injured because their land was given away and their solution is to give them back Palestine, and the Jews feel that they have been injured historically and specifically the Holocaust and the solution to them is to give them Palestine. Haven't we got a heck of a dilemma on our hands? Yeah, Katherine.

Katherine: Well, not all of the Jews that live in Israel are survivors of the Holocaust.

I agree.

Laurel: I mean they're from, it's their homeland for people from all around the world so now they can practice freely and have a place, a place to be without being persecuted. And, when I was there, the feeling is that they are more than willing to live with the Arabs only as long as they can just be there, but, the Arabs, it seems that the Arabs only they want to be in there and they don't want — they don't — they aren't willing to live with the Jews.