Aims

1. Understand who Socrates was and why he thought his mission was important.
2. Recognize the role of skepticism in science and philosophy.
3. Become famliar with the three main branches of philosophy and with representative questions in each.
4. Distinguish between two different ways in which a scientific claim can fail

Opener

- What would you do if cell phones suddenly disappeared?
- Would you be happier, healthier, more anxious, lonelier, more productive?
- Ask students to write down three positive and three negative things that would result. Randomly pick three people to respond with one point each.

5 minutes

Question everything?

- Socrates: the first philosopher.
- His mission: to find out and critically evaluate the assumptions that his fellow citizens made about how best to live.
- His method: challenging others to examine their assumptions. Often resulting in skeptical conclusions: the only thing he knew was how little he knew.
- His fate: eventually he pissed off enough people that they killed him for corrupting the youth.

15 minutes

What do we know and how do we know it?

Skepticism: a general attitude of questioning things instead of taking them for granted as true. What are its uses and limits?

Example: have cell phones destroyed a generation?

Skimming task.

- Read through cell phone article to find out:
  - Three effects that author claims cell phone use has had on the youngest generation.
  - What are the cut off dates of this generation?
  - What sources of evidence does the author use to base her conclusions on?
- How might we go about evaluating claims like this for scientific adequacy?

We need to answer two questions:

- Does the evidence support the claims made?
- Is the evidence itself reliable?

20 minutes

What is science anyway?

Science as organized skepticism.

Constraints on skepticism:

- Rejection of global skepticism
- Many eyes make all bugs shallow
- Hypothetico-deductive method
  - make claims explicit and testable
  - test them
  - put forward theories last
  - theories subject to revision based on new data, new theories, new ideas
  - aims towards integration of knowledge
- Naturalistic explanations only.

10 minutes

Philosophical questions about science

Brainstorming activity: come up with 2 of each kind of philosophical question

Questions should be:

- general
- about basic assumptions
- not the kind of questions that science answers
- the sort of questions inquisitive kids ask

Metaphysical questions: questions about reality, what exists, its basic nature and behavior

Epistemological questions: questions about knowledge, its possibility, its forms and their limitations

Axiological questions: questions of value, what matters, right and wrong, good and evil, justice, fairness, beauty

15 minutes

Conclusions

Question to think about: Why doesn't embracing skepticism have to lead to embracing relativism and giving up on truth?