

Essential Question: What makes a thing a thing?

What is an Axe?¹

Last summer I broke the handle of my axe while chopping off this guy's head in my backyard. Since there are only two parts to an axe you can imagine this wasn't going to make the process any easier. As for the guy I was decapitating, he was already dead; I was just making sure that the six bullets I put in him did the job. After I finished with the broken-handled axe, I buried him and brought the axe in to be fixed. I returned the following week to pick up my axe with a brand new handle.

I put the axe on my kitchen windowsill where it stood unused for four months until I saw the nastiest bug I'd ever seen. I used the axe to kill it because the thing was huge. In the process I broke the blade, so I took the axe back to axe-fixer on 5th Ave and he replaced the blade for a reasonable price.

Two weeks ago, while I was doing the dishes, my nemesis kicked in the door. His head had been sewed onto someone else's body. It was pretty gross looking. I grabbed the axe from the windowsill and as I charged towards my nemesis said, "that's the axe that slayed me!"

Discussion Question: Was my nemesis correct to think that this was the same axe I used last summer?

(5 minutes)

Independent Thinking

Students should read, "What is an axe?" and write a response to the discussion question.

(10 minutes)

Pair sharing

Students should exchange papers and write responses to the first response. After three minutes have the pairs that are ready start discussing. After 5 minutes make sure that all of the pairs are discussing. Groups that are "finished" before the ten minutes, tell them that they will start the large group discussion so they should

¹ This story is a modified version of the opening scene from the movie *John Dies in the End* (2012).

prepare what they are going to say. If it's very disjointed (some pairs just starting to talk while others are done) try to create groups of four.

(5-10 minutes)

Whole group discussion

Students should discuss the ideas raised in pair sharing. The direction of the discussion should be to avoid taking a stance but instead focus on the underlying questions. What are the assumptions in declaring that the same axe was used? What are the assumptions for arguing that it's a different axe?

(10-15 minutes)

Mini-lesson

Teacher should deliver a short mini-lesson on Descartes' first and second meditation. It would be nice (and probably a fire hazard) to light an actual candle during the lesson for the visual effect.

Big Ideas

- Descartes (D's) usage of doubting everything and starting from nothing.
- D's questioning the outside world- God, D, evil deceiver...brain in a vat
- Cogito ergo sum (I think therefore I am).
- D's discussion about what makes a candle a candle.

(10 minutes)

Independent writing

Students should free write attempting to answer the question "What makes a candle a candle?"

(10-15 minutes)

Group work

Students should go around and share their thoughts on the question. While one person is sharing the others take notes. Once everyone has shared they should discuss the question always asking the question: what's assumed in what was stated?

(Remainder of class)

Wrap-up

Students should discuss the question as a whole class calling on one another to speak.

Take away content: "I think therefore I am," is pretty much accepted as indubitable.

Take away question: What makes a thing a thing?