



# Philosophy and Thoughts

## iPrepare

### Scenarios

Watch a video clip about the scenarios on the online course before class. Then think about what you need to learn from this unit in order to fulfill the tasks mentioned in the scenarios.



### Learning objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

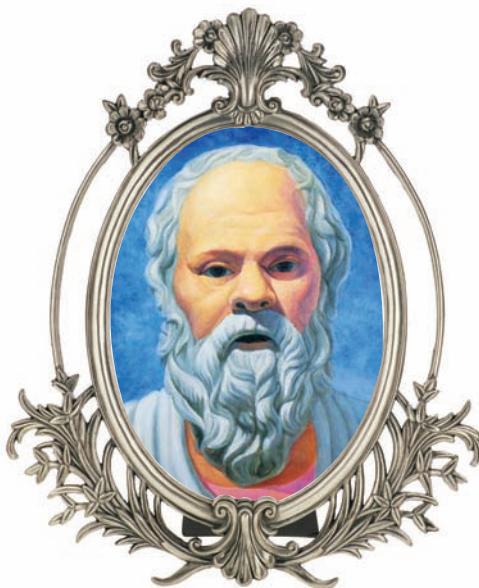
- introduce Socrates and his major achievements
- introduce Confucius and his essential ideas
- compare these two philosophers and their thoughts



# iExplore

## VIEWING

1 Are you familiar with the name Socrates? What do you know about him? Read the following descriptions and check (✓) the ones that you believe are right about him.



- 1 an ancient Greek philosopher
- 2 living in Rome
- 3 author of *The Republic*
- 4 was interested in science
- 5 was good at asking questions
- 6 was sentenced to death

2 Watch a video clip in which some primary school students in the United States share what they know about Socrates. Then work in pairs and share what you know about Socrates and his major contributions.

### NEW WORDS

**hemlock** /'hem,lɒk/ *n.* 毒芹

**negative** /'negətɪv/ *n.* 负数；负量

## READING

### Socrates and his pursuit of truth

The ancient Greek philosophers have played a pivotal role in the shaping of the Western philosophical tradition. They initiated investigations into how knowledge is acquired and what knowledge consists of. One of the most influential ancient Greek philosophers is Socrates. Below is a text on this great thinker. Read this text to gain a basic knowledge of Socrates and his pursuit of truth.

# The man who asked questions

Nigel Warburton

- <sup>1</sup> About 2,400 years ago in Athens a man was put to death for asking too many questions. There were philosophers before him, but it was with Socrates that the subject really took off. If philosophy has a patron saint, it is Socrates.
- <sup>2</sup> Snub-nosed, podgy, shabby and a bit strange, Socrates did not fit in. Although physically ugly and often unwashed, he had great charisma and a brilliant mind. Everyone in Athens agreed that there had never been anyone quite like him and probably wouldn't be again. He was unique. But he was also extremely annoying. He saw himself as one of those horseflies that have a nasty bite — a gadfly. They're irritating, but don't do serious harm. Not everyone in Athens agreed, though. Some loved him; others thought him a dangerous influence.
- <sup>3</sup> As a young man he had been a brave soldier fighting in the Peloponnesian War against the Spartans and their allies. In middle age he shuffled around the marketplace, stopping people from time to time and asking them awkward questions. That was more or less all he did. But the questions he asked were razor-sharp. They seemed straightforward; but they weren't.
- <sup>4</sup> An example of this was his conversation with Euthydemus. Socrates asked him whether being deceitful counted as being immoral. Of course it does, Euthydemus replied. He thought that was obvious. But what, Socrates asked, if your friend is feeling very low and might kill himself, and you steal his knife? Isn't that a deceitful act? Of course it is. But isn't it *moral* rather than *immoral* to do that? It's



a good thing, not a bad one — despite being a deceitful act. Yes, said Euthydemus, who by now is tied in knots. Socrates by using a clever counter-example has shown that Euthydemus' general comment that being deceitful is immoral doesn't apply in every situation. Euthydemus hadn't realized this before.

<sup>5</sup> Over and over again Socrates demonstrated that the people he met in the marketplace didn't really know what they thought they knew. A military commander would begin a conversation totally confident that he knew what "courage" meant, but after 20 minutes in Socrates' company would leave completely confused. The experience must have been disconcerting. Socrates loved to reveal the limits of what people genuinely understood, and to question the assumptions on which they built their lives. A conversation that ended in everyone realizing how little they knew was for him a success. Far better than to carry

on believing that you understood something when you didn't.

<sup>6</sup> At that time in Athens the sons of rich men would be sent to study with Sophists. The Sophists were clever teachers who would coach their students in the art of speech-making. They charged very high fees for this. Socrates in contrast didn't charge for his services. In fact he claimed he didn't know anything, so how could he teach at all? This didn't stop students coming to him and listening in on his conversations. It didn't make him popular with the Sophists either.

<sup>7</sup> One day his friend Chaerophon went to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The oracle was a wise old woman, a sibyl, who would answer questions that visitors asked. Her answers were usually in the form of a riddle. "Is anyone wiser than Socrates?" Chaerophon asked. "No," came the answer. "No one is wiser than Socrates."

- <sup>8</sup> When Chaerophon told Socrates about this he didn't believe it at first. It really puzzled him. "How can I be the wisest man in Athens when I know so little?" he wondered. He devoted years to questioning people to see if anyone was wiser than he was. Finally he realized what the oracle had meant and that she had been right. Lots of people were good at the various things they did — carpenters were good at carpentry, and soldiers knew about fighting. But none of them were truly wise. They didn't really know what they were talking about.
- <sup>9</sup> The word "philosopher" comes from the Greek words meaning "love of wisdom." The Western tradition in philosophy spread from ancient Greece across large parts of the world, at time cross-fertilized by ideas from the East. The kind of wisdom that it values is based on argument, reasoning and asking questions, not on believing things simply because someone important has told you they are true. Wisdom for Socrates was not knowing lots of facts, or knowing how to do something. It meant understanding the true nature of our existence, including the limits of what we can know. Philosophers today are doing more or less what Socrates was doing: asking tough questions, looking at reasons and evidence, struggling to answer some of the most important questions we can ask ourselves about the nature of reality and how we should live.
- <sup>10</sup> What made Socrates so wise was that he kept asking questions and he was always willing to debate his ideas. Life, he declared, is only worth living if you think about what you are doing. An unexamined existence is all right for cattle, but not for human beings.
- <sup>11</sup> Athens as a whole didn't value Socrates. Many Athenians felt that Socrates was dangerous and was deliberately undermining the government. In 399 BC, when Socrates was 70 years old, he was sentenced to death. He was put to death by being forced to drink poison made from hemlock. Socrates said goodbye to his wife and three sons, and then gathered his students around him. If he had the choice to carry on living quietly, not asking any more difficult questions, he would not take it. He'd rather die than that. He had an inner voice that told him to keep questioning everything, and he could not betray it. Then he drank the cup of poison.

Source: Nigel Warburton, "The man who asked questions," *A Little History of Philosophy*. Yale University Press, 2011.

## NOTES

### Peloponnesian War (431 BC – 404 BC):

an ancient Greek war fought by Athens

and its empire against the Peloponnesian

League led by Sparta (斯巴达). After the defeat in the Peloponnesian War, Athens found itself completely devastated, and never regained its pre-war prosperity. The fighting engulfed virtually the entire Greek world, and it was properly regarded by Thucydides, whose contemporary account of it is considered to be among the world's finest works of history, as the most

momentous war up to that time.

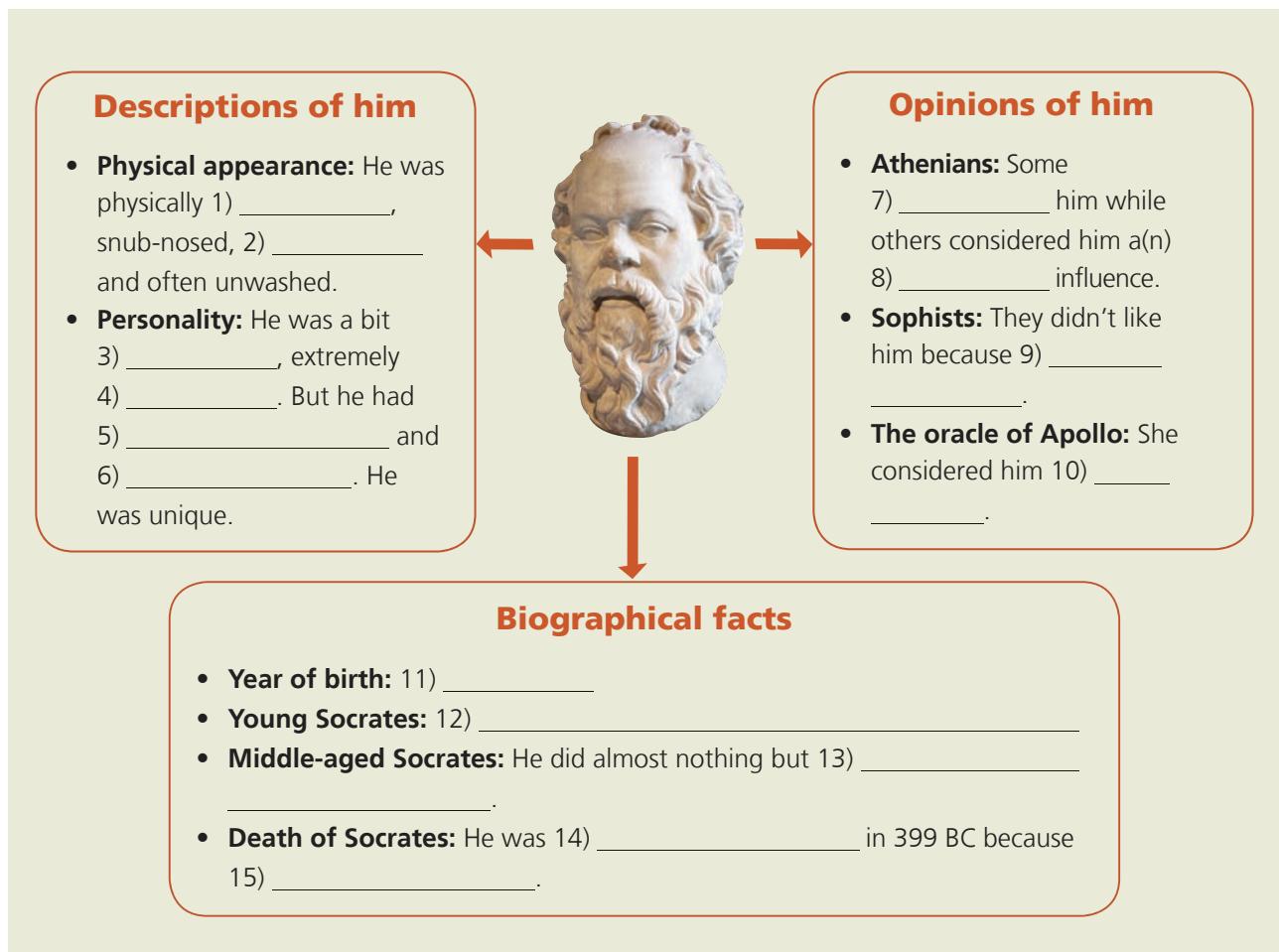
**Euthydemus:** a fleet commander for Athens during the Sicilian Expedition (西西里远征), which took place during the period from 415 BC to 413 BC

**Chaerophon:** an ancient Greek best remembered as a loyal friend and follower of Socrates. He is known only through brief descriptions by classical writers.



## Identifying and synthesizing information

1 How much do you know about Socrates? Complete the following chart based on the information given in the text.



2 Socrates has been called “the man who asked questions.” How and why did he keep asking questions? Answer the question by filling in the blanks with information from the middle part of the text.

### How did Socrates ask questions?

- Socrates' way of questioning:  
Socrates did almost nothing but 1) \_\_\_\_\_ the marketplace, stopping people and asking them seemingly 2) \_\_\_\_\_ questions that are actually 3) \_\_\_\_\_.
- An example of his questioning:  
Socrates asked Euthydemus whether 4) \_\_\_\_\_ could be counted as 5) \_\_\_\_\_. Euthydemus said yes. Then Socrates used a clever 6) \_\_\_\_\_ in which he asked whether it is moral when 7) \_\_\_\_\_ Again, Euthydemus replied yes, but this time he felt that he was tied in 8) \_\_\_\_\_. Through the conversation, Socrates showed that 9) \_\_\_\_\_.

## Why did Socrates ask questions?

- Through asking questions, Socrates  
10) \_\_\_\_\_ what people really understood and 11) \_\_\_\_\_ on which people built their lives.
- He considered it a success when a conversation ended in 12) \_\_\_\_\_ and it is far better than to 13) \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3 Based on the last three paragraphs, answer the following questions.

- 1 What is wisdom in Socrates' eyes?
- 2 What is the value of Socrates' questioning?
- 3 What made Socrates so wise?
- 4 How did Socrates react to his death penalty? Why do you think he did so?

## Building your language

### Words and expressions

1 Complete the following sentences with appropriate words from the paragraphs indicated in the brackets. Change the form when necessary.

#### FUNCTION: Describing people

- 1 Leaders often have \_\_\_\_\_, an attractive quality that makes other people admire them and want to follow them. (Para. 2)
- 2 A person who has a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ mind can do extraordinary things that no one with a normal mind can imagine. (Para. 2)
- 3 It matters little whether people are physically beautiful or \_\_\_\_\_, because people's minds and souls are more important. (Para. 2)

#### FUNCTION: Describing questions

- 4 When faced with \_\_\_\_\_ questions in a conversation, we often get stuck. (Para. 3)
- 5 Unfortunately, this apparently \_\_\_\_\_ question turns out to be harder to answer than one might suppose. (Para. 3)
- 6 We cannot attempt to predict all the \_\_\_\_\_ questions children will ask. (Para. 9)

2 Complete the following sentences with appropriate expressions given in the boxes below. Change the form when necessary.

#### FUNCTION: Describing ways of asking questions

begin a conversation use a counter-example debate (one's) ideas

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ to a proposition or claim is to use an example that proves that the proposition or claim is not true.
- 2 In order to challenge others' opinions on one issue and make yours reasonable, you should \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 When you have to \_\_\_\_\_ with nothing to talk about, you may try to ask brief questions, tell an interesting story or make some random comments.

#### FUNCTION: Describing purposes of asking questions

reveal the limits understand the nature question the assumption

- 4 In order to \_\_\_\_\_ of Aristotle that the heavier object has a higher falling speed, Galileo did an experiment in the Leaning Tower of Pisa.
- 5 A paper published in *Physics Today* challenges how physics is taught and states that teaching fails to \_\_\_\_\_ of our understanding.
- 6 In London, where the family was reduced to poverty, Karl Marx continued writing his theories to explore and \_\_\_\_\_ of society.

3 Complete the following sentences by choosing the right words from the ones given in the brackets.

- 1 Huxley was at first an opponent of any evolutionary change at all, but after reading the *Origin of Species* he got tied (on, in) knots and his reaction was "How stupid of me not to have thought of that."
- 2 Dr. Dewdney looked closely at eight problems that reveal the (limitations, limits) of human understanding in his new book.

- 3 As Socrates' prized student, Plato came under Socrates' spell at about 20, deciding to devote himself (for, to) philosophy.
- 4 Freudian scholar Donald Levy argues that some critics fail to understand the (nature, feature) and importance of the concepts of resistance and transference (移情), and that their critique of Freud's scientific credibility is incoherent.
- 5 The role of the newly-built center is to provide a cross-disciplinary forum wherein scholars gather to exchange and (dispute, debate) ideas generated from the areas of philosophy, history, politics, sociology as well as international and cultural studies.
- 6 Unlike those who came before him, Kepler questioned the (conception, assumption) that planets moved in uniform circular motion, replacing it with elliptical (椭圆形的) motion.

## Extended box

Read the following sentences that might be useful for you to complete the tasks in this unit. Pay special attention to the structures and expressions in bold.

### FUNCTION: Giving a person's biographical information

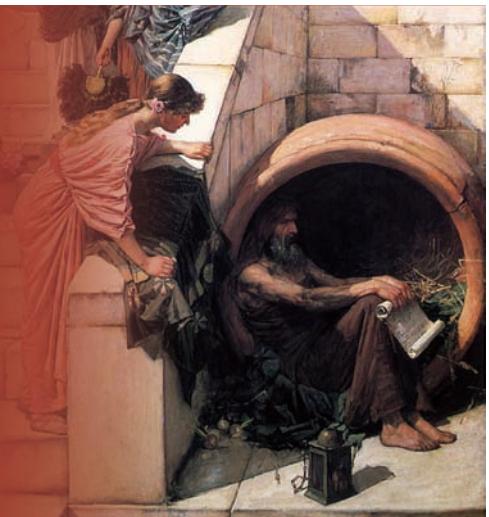
- **About 2,400 years ago** in Athens a man was put to death for asking too many questions.
- **As a young man** he had been a brave soldier fighting in the Peloponnesian War against the Spartans and their allies.
- **In middle age** he shuffled around the marketplace, stopping people from time to time and asking them awkward questions.
- The philosopher **came from** one of the wealthiest and most politically active families in Athens.
- He was a French lawyer, man of letters, and political philosopher **who lived during** the Age of Enlightenment.

### FUNCTION: Introducing a person's contributions

- There were philosophers before him, but **it was with Socrates that** the subject really took off.
- If philosophy has **a patron saint**, it is Socrates.
- Philosophers today are **doing more or less what Socrates was doing ...**
- Along with his teacher Socrates and his most famous student, Aristotle, Plato **laid the foundations of** Western philosophy and science.
- Hegel's idealist account of reality **revolutionized European philosophy** and **was an important precursor to** Continental philosophy and Marxism.

## Preparing for the structure

**H**ow to organize a brief account of a great thinker and his or her major achievements? Below is a short introduction to Diogenes, an ancient Greek philosopher, and his contributions to the Western philosophical tradition. Read the following passage and figure out its structure by filling in the blanks in the right column.



Diogenes was a Greek philosopher and the most famous exponent of Cynicism. The doctrine of Cynicism holds that the purpose of life is to live a life of virtue in agreement with nature. This means rejecting all conventional desires for health, wealth, power, and fame, and living a life free from all possessions and property.

Introduce Diogenes and his philosophy

Diogenes developed a reputation through his philosophy of practice. He lived in great poverty, and rejected all forms of luxury. For example, he discarded eating utensils, drank from his hands, and lived like a dog. In winter, he walked barefoot in the snow; in summer, he rolled in the hot sand. Once, a disciple asked him if he was overdoing it. He replied that he was like a teacher of choruses, who had to sing louder than the rest so that they may get the right note.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

Diogenes proved to his followers that happiness has nothing to do with a person's material circumstances. He not only influenced his contemporaries, but also served as a source for the development of Stoicism, which is one of the most enduring schools of Greek philosophy.

2) \_\_\_\_\_

## Sharing your ideas

After learning about Socrates and his contributions to the Western philosophy, do you feel confident in joining the conversation about Socrates and his philosophy with your international friends as mentioned in "Scenario One"? Please prepare a two-minute oral report introducing this great thinker and his contributions. Try to make full use of what you've learned from this section by selecting relevant information from the text, modeling the structure of the passage in "Preparing for the structure," and using words and expressions in "Building your language" exercises.



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YOU CAN  
REFER TO  
THE ONLINE  
COURSE FOR  
MORE EXERCISES.

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