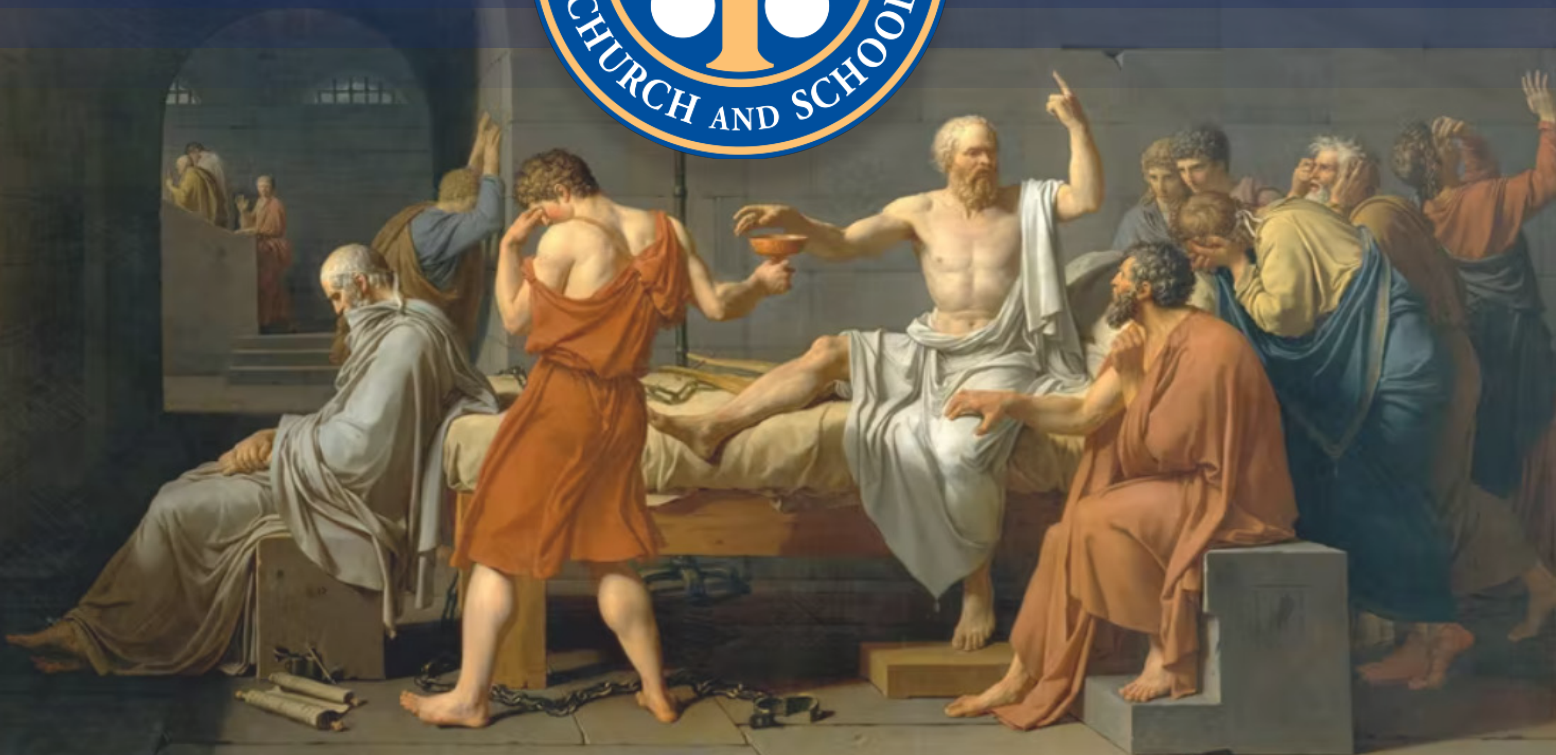
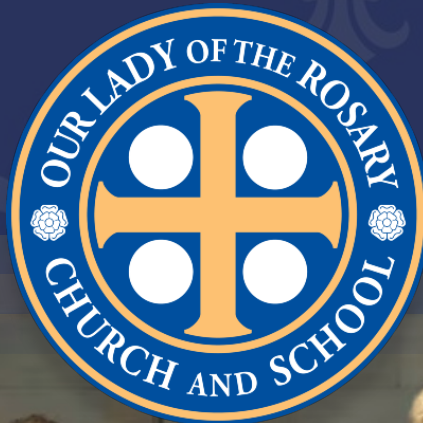




Philosophy Curriculum

Grade 12



Course Overview

Course Description


This course explores the Western philosophical tradition through two guiding questions: What is most real? and What is the good life? Beginning with the Pre-Socratics' turn from myth to reason, students examine how Plato and Aristotle pursued truth, the soul's nature, and human flourishing through rational inquiry. Plato's dialogues confront justice, death, and the examined life, while Aristotle offers a vision of virtue rooted in purpose and order. The course concludes with modern thinkers—Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche—who challenge the foundations of truth, morality, and meaning. Students are called not only to study philosophy, but to live wisely.

Why We Teach It...

We teach this course because every human person longs to know what is true, what is real, and how to live well. In an age dominated by distraction, relativism, and skepticism, students need the tools to think clearly, seek wisdom, and order their lives toward the good. By engaging directly with the foundational texts of Western philosophy, students learn to ask enduring questions with seriousness and humility. They encounter a tradition that affirms the intelligibility of the world and the dignity of reason, while also exposing the limits of purely human understanding. This course forms students not only intellectually, but morally and spiritually, challenging them to live examined lives, pursue virtue, and prepare for citizenship in both the City of Man and the City of God.










Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

-  Articulate the central philosophical questions concerning reality, truth, and the good life using precise and thoughtful language.



Course Objectives | Continued...

-  Trace the development of Western philosophical thought from the Pre-Socratics through the modern period.
-  Compare mythological and philosophical explanations of the cosmos, emphasizing the transition from mythos to logos.
-  Interpret primary texts from Plato, Aristotle, and key modern thinkers with clarity, depth, and attention to context.
-  Analyze arguments related to metaphysics, ethics, the soul, and the nature of knowledge using sound logic.
-  Distinguish between classical and modern understandings of truth, virtue, and the human person.
-  Apply principles from classical virtue ethics to concrete moral questions and daily life.
-  Defend reasoned positions on philosophical questions through oral dialogue and written expression.
-  Evaluate the philosophical consequences of rejecting metaphysics, objective truth, and divine order.
-  Cultivate the habits of the examined life by pursuing wisdom, intellectual humility, and moral integrity.

Source Material

Pre-Socratics

The Apology, Plato

Phaedo, Plato

The Republic, Plato

Metaphysics, Aristotle

Physics, Aristotle











Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle



Source Materials | Continued...

Meditations on First Philosophy, Descartes
Enquiry Concerning Human Reason, David Hume
On the Genealogy of Morals, Friedrich Nietzsche

Central Themes

-  The Search for Truth – Man’s desire to know what is real, true, and unchanging.
-  The Examined Life – The necessity of self-knowledge and reflection for human flourishing.
-  The Nature of Reality – The tension between the visible and invisible, the material and immaterial.
-  Unity and Diversity – The problem of the One and the many in understanding the cosmos.
-  The Immortality of the Soul – The soul’s nature, purpose, and destiny beyond bodily life.
-  Virtue and the Good Life – The formation of moral character through right reason and right desire.
-  Order and Design in Nature – The intelligibility and teleology of the created world.
-  The Limits of Reason – The recognition of reason’s reach and its boundaries without divine aid.
-  The Rejection of Metaphysics – The rise of modern doubt and its impact on truth, morality, and meaning.
-  Philosophy as a Way of Life – The call not merely to study ideas but to live wisely and well.



Key Concepts

Metaphysics
Epistemology
One & Many
Logos
Mythos
Physis (Nature)
Socratic Method
Examined Life
Form & Matter
Substance

Accidents
Four Causes
Teleology
Virtue (Arete)
The Golden Mean
Eudaimonia
Soul (Psyche)
Dualism
Materialism
Immortality
Justice

Forms as Ideas
Idealism
Plato's Cave
Tripartite Soul
Philosopher King
Modern Skepticism
Cogito Ergo Sum
Empiricism
Categorical Imperative
The Death of God

On Writing

All written work in this course integrates Our Lady's Writing Curriculum, a program rooted in the tradition of the classical oration and the progymnasmata—the ancient exercises that trained students in the art of eloquence, clarity, and persuasion. Students will be guided through structured stages of composition, learning to narrate, describe, argue, and exhort with both precision and grace.

Writing is not treated as a mere skill, but as a moral and intellectual discipline—a means of pursuing truth and communicating it rightly. In keeping with the classical model, students will imitate excellent forms, internalize timeless principles, and ultimately express their own judgments with charity, courage, and rhetorical power.



Assessments

Summative: 45%

- Unit Exams
- Persuasive Essays
- Expository Essays
- Recitations

Formative: 35%

- Seminars/Debates
- Concepts Quiz
- Essay Process

Conscientiousness 20%

- Homework
- Classwork
- Participation



Scope & Sequence

Unit 1

The Search For the Most Real

3 Weeks

Week 1

Overview: The Darkened Room

Philosophy begins with the humble recognition that all knowledge arises within the limits of belief, as we awaken in darkness and grope our way toward truth through experience, reflection, and wonder.

Theme

Philosophy is man's attempt to understand the human experience.

Great Question(s)

Is all knowledge grounded in belief?

Sources: *Lecture Notes*

Week 2-3

Overview: The nature of Nature-Intro to the Pre-Socratics

By turning from myth to reason, the Pre-Socratic philosophers introduced the great metaphysical questions of unity, change, and cosmic design, laying the foundation for all future philosophical inquiry.

Theme

The Pre-Socratics set the proverbial "menu" for the history of philosophy.

Great Question(s)

What is the difference between the One and the many? What is most real? What is the principle of design for the cosmos?

Sources: *Pre-Socratics Primary Sources (handouts)*



Unit 2	The Elevation of Rationality In Western Thought	11 Weeks
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Week 4-6 **Overview: Philosophy is Living the Examined Life**
Through Plato's Apology, students encounter Socrates' fearless pursuit of truth, his critique of public opinion, and his claim that a good man cannot be harmed by evil, even in death.

Theme

The Truth is Valuable at all costs!

Great Question(s)

Why is Socrates weary about a majority mindset?

How can Socrates call death a blessing?

Can a wicked man hurt a good man, even if he kills him?

Sources: *The Apology, Plato*

Week 7-10 **Overview: Is not Philosophy the Practice of Death?**
In Phaedo, students explore the soul's immortality, the philosopher's preparation for death, and the idea that true life consists in detaching from bodily desires in order to seek what is eternal and unseen.

Theme

The afterlife is more real than this life.

Great Question(s)

Why is pain necessary and not pleasure in a good life?

What does it mean that the Philosopher practices for death?

In what ways is the soul tyrannized by the body?

What are the arguments for the immortality of the soul?

How can we be citizens of heaven while being citizens of earth?

Sources: *Phaedo, Plato*



Week 11-14 Overview: Justice as the Good Life

In the Republic, Plato presents a profound inquiry into the nature of justice, the structure of the soul, and the purpose of education by building an ideal city as a mirror of the well-ordered soul, ultimately guiding the reader from political debate to metaphysical illumination through the allegory of the cave.

Theme

Justice is the harmonious order of the soul and society, discovered through the ascent from illusion to truth and grounded in the philosopher's pursuit of the Good.

Great Question(s)

Is Justice something good in itself, or only for its consequences?

How is the soul like a city, and what does it mean to be rightly ordered?

Can a person live well without knowing what is truly good?

What is the philosopher's responsibility once he has seen the truth?

Sources: *The Republic, Plato (excerpts)*



Week 15-17 Overview: The Philosophy of Identity

In response to the paradoxes of Parmenides and Zeno, Aristotle develops a language of substance, form, and potency that allows us to speak meaningfully about change, identity, and being itself—grounding existence not in mere appearance, but in immaterial form as the principle of intelligible unity and ultimate reality.

Theme

Immaterial forms ground existence.

Great Question(s)

What is the identity of a thing—a response to Parmenides & Zeno.

What is the ultimate principle of existence?

What are the innovations in language that Aristotle introduces to resolve paradoxes introduced by the Pre-Socratics and Socratics?

Sources: *Physics, Aristotle; Metaphysics, Aristotle*

Week 18-19 Overview: Teleology & Nature

Aristotle argues that nature is not governed by chance but by intrinsic purposes and intelligible order, showing that even apparent randomness presupposes a deeper teleological structure guiding all natural things toward their ends.

Theme

Nature functions by means of an inherent order/intelligence.

Great Question(s)

Can randomness exist without a deeper level of order that sustains it?

Is there teleology in Nature, hence, design?

Sources: *Physics, Aristotle; Metaphysics, Aristotle*



Week 20-22 Overview: Virtue Ethics

Aristotle teaches that the good life is not achieved by knowledge alone, but by the cultivation of virtuous habits that enable us to feel and act rightly—pursuing excellence through the mean between extremes, guided by reason and ordered toward human flourishing.

Theme

The good life is to experience emotions at the right time, right occasion, toward the right person, and in the right manner.

Great Question(s)

Why is knowledge alone not enough to live the good life (treatise on habits)?

Why is virtue always found with the mean of two extremes?

Why are some actions never good?

Sources: *Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle*



Week 23-26 Overview: The Masters of Suspicion

In this unit, students confront the radical shift from classical realism to modern subjectivism as thinkers like Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche dismantle traditional metaphysics—revealing how beginning the pursuit of truth in the isolated mind leads to skepticism, the denial of objective meaning, and ultimately, the rejection of God.

Theme

If you begin the search for truth in the mind, then you will end in skepticism and a rejection of metaphysics, and thus, a rejection of God.

Great Question(s)

Where should truth start, in the mind or in the world?
Does human subjectivity destroy the possibility of metaphysics?

What are the consequences of a society that embraces the rejection of God?

Sources: *Meditation on First Philosophy*, Descartes;
Enquiry Concerning Human Reason, David Hume; *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics*, Immanuel Kant;
On the Genealogy of Morals, Friedrich Nietzsche



Course Catechism

This section is structured as a series of questions and answers—intended to cultivate wisdom, virtue, and a love of tradition in the soul of the reader. Drawing from classical education, Christian orthodoxy, and the accumulated insights of Western civilization, this catechism aims to form not only the mind but the moral imagination.



Each question is crafted to provoke contemplation, and each answer is more than mere information—it is a small liturgy of truth, designed to be memorized, internalized, and lived. In the tradition of ancient catechisms, this section assumes that learning is not just for passing tests, but for becoming someone.

Section I | Becoming a Lover of Wisdom

Q: What is philosophy?

A: *Philosophy is the love of wisdom and the search for what is most real and most true.*

Q: Why must every man be a philosopher?

A: *Because every man lives by what he believes to be true, whether he admits it or not.*

Q: What is the beginning of philosophy?

A: *The beginning of philosophy is wonder, and the humility to know that I do not know.*

Q: What does philosophy seek?

A: *Philosophy seeks the highest things: truth, goodness, beauty, and the good life.*

Q: Can philosophy save a man?

A: *Philosophy cannot save a man, but it can prepare him to hear the truth when it speaks.*



Section II | The Search for the Most Real

Q: What is it to wake in a darkened room?

A: *To wake in a darkened room is to begin the journey of philosophy—by groping toward the light.*

Q: What did the Pre-Socratics seek?

A: *The Pre-Socratics sought the origin, unity, and order of all things.*

Q: What is the problem of the One and the Many?

A: *The problem is how one world can hold both unity and difference without contradiction.*

Q: What does it mean that the world is intelligible?

A: *It means the world was made to be understood by the mind of man.*

Q: Why does philosophy begin with nature?

A: *Because nature is the first teacher of the soul that seeks wisdom.*

Section III | The Rise of Rationality

Q: What is the examined life?

A: *The examined life is a life lived in search of truth, no matter the cost.*

Q: What does Socrates teach about death?

A: *That death is not the worst evil, but to live unjustly is worse.*

Q: Why does the philosopher practice dying?

A: *Because to seek wisdom is to loosen the soul's grip on what is passing away.*

Q: What is justice, according to Plato?

A: *Justice is the harmony of a soul rightly ordered under reason.*

Q: What is the duty of the philosopher?

A: *The philosopher must ascend to the light—and then return to the cave.*



Section IV | The Grand Synthesis

Q: What does Aristotle teach about being?

A: *That being is spoken in many ways, but is grounded in form and purpose.*

Q: What is substance?

A: *Substance is what exists in itself and bears the weight of change.*

Q: Why does nature act for an end?

A: *Because all things, by nature, seek their good.*

Q: What is virtue?

A: *Virtue is the habit of choosing the good with wisdom, courage, and moderation.*

Q: What is happiness?

A: *Happiness is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, over a complete life.*

Section V | The Decline

Q: Where does modern philosophy begin?

A: *It begins in the mind and ends in doubt.*

Q: What did Descartes seek?

A: *Descartes sought certainty by doubting all things, including the world.*

Q: What does Hume deny?

A: *Hume denies that reason can reach beyond experience.*

Q: What does Nietzsche proclaim?

A: *That God is dead, and man must now make meaning from his own will.*

Q: What is the consequence of rejecting metaphysics?

A: *A world without metaphysics is a world without truth, without purpose, and without hope.*



Section VI | Recitations

Q: What is the true aim of education?

A: *“Anyone who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light... Education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes. No, education is turning the soul around from the world of becoming into the world of being, and helping it to look toward the light.”*

- *The Republic, Book VII, Plato*

Q: Why must the philosopher examine his life?

A: *“I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other things about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing a man can do—and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living.”*

- *The Apology, Plato*

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Q: How does modern man begin his search for truth?

A: *“I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in deceiving me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams... I will remain resolute in this meditation and take care not to give in to old habits.”*

- *Meditations on First Philosophy, Descartes*



Section VI | Recitations (Continued...)

Q: What is virtue, and why is it difficult?

A: *“Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect... to feel anger, or fear, or desire at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right way—that is not easy, and that is virtue.”*

-Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle



Week 1

Weekly Logos

The Darkened Room

Students will understand philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom that begins in wonder and belief. Through the metaphor of the darkened room, they will explore how human knowledge arises from experience, memory, and interpretation, and they will reflect on the limits and foundations of what we claim to know. By the end of the week, students will be able to articulate the relationship between belief and knowledge and explain how this analogy mirrors the task of philosophy.

What Are We Assessing?

The Facts

Philosophy begins in wonder.

The metaphor of the darkened room
– This analogy represents the human condition at the start of inquiry.

All knowledge is grounded in belief

The soul seeks intelligibility

What Are We Assessing?

The Skills

Interpret Philosophical Metaphors

Distinguish and express the distinction Between Knowledge and Belief

Construct Philosophical Definitions & Questions

Engage in Socratic Dialogue

Annotate philosophical texts



What Are We Assessing? | The Truths

We do not begin with certainty—we begin in darkness. Yet even in darkness, the soul reaches out for light.

As we grope through the unknown, we discover that all knowledge rests on unseen pillars of belief.


These truths unify every element of the lesson:

True knowledge begins with humility, not confidence.


All understanding is built upon belief—faith precedes sight.

We explore not to master the world, but to become rightly ordered within it.


Assessments | Suggested Types


 **Task:** Students will memorize and recite the “Truths Assessed — The Darkened Room” passage aloud in class.

Assesses: Mastery of course content, rhetorical expression, and internalization of key truths.

 **Task:** Students will write their own precise definitions for the following terms: philosophy, belief, knowledge, and wonder.

Assesses: Conceptual clarity, logical distinction, and articulation of abstract ideas.

 **Essay as Prep:** How does this image represent the beginning of human knowledge? 2 page expository.

 **Seminar:** “Is it possible to know anything without first believing something?”

Format: Students will participate in a guided Socratic discussion, using textual references and responding thoughtfully to peers.

Assesses: Oral reasoning, dialogue skills, use of philosophical vocabulary.



Pacing | By Week

<i>Day</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Homework</i>
Monday	Introduce philosophy as the love of wisdom and the pursuit of what is most real.	None
Tuesday	Explore the difference between belief and knowledge and the role of humility in learning.	<i>Define in your own words: belief, knowledge, and truth (1–2 sentences each).</i>
Wednesday	Practice philosophical dialogue and defend claims with reason.	Begin drafting expository essay for Friday’s seminar.
Thursday	Solidify conceptual foundations through truth statements and precise definitions.	Continue working on Friday’s seminar essay.
Friday	Seminar & Reflection: Is it possible to know anything without first believing?	Reflect and Journal on this week’s seminar discussion.



Teacher Tips

Recite Foundational Truths: Treat “Truths Assessed – The Darkened Room” as liturgical—assign lines for group recitation to build memory and reverence.

Ask Epistemological Questions: Can anyone know anything with certainty? What if everything I believe is false? Why trust our senses?

Link Ignorance to Wonder: Use the dark room to show that ignorance is not failure—it is the beginning of inquiry, humility, and longing.

Highlight the Role of Belief: Emphasize that belief is not irrational; it is the ground beneath reason—faith precedes sight.

Model the Philosopher’s Posture: Sit in silence with students for a full minute; let them feel the discomfort and invite reflection: What are we afraid to face?

Use Socratic Dialogue: Guide the week’s discussion with open-ended questions that have no quick answers. Let students struggle well.

Connect to the Spiritual Life: Reflect on how the soul, like the mind, often begins in darkness and must be trained to seek light and truth.

Encourage Interior Examination: Assign reflective journaling: What do I assume to be true, and why? Let students discover their unseen foundations.





Reinforce the Central Question: Write “Is all knowledge grounded in belief?” at the top of the board every day—let it haunt the week.

Appendix

Capstone Research Paper | Overview





The senior capstone essay is the culminating intellectual work of your classical education. In this 12–15 page formal paper, you will pursue the question that has animated the philosophical tradition for over two thousand years: What is the good life? Drawing upon your years of reading, discussion, and contemplation, you will offer a thoughtful, well-argued thesis that defines and defends your vision of human flourishing.

This is not simply a personal opinion or autobiography—it is a serious philosophical argument grounded in the wisdom of those who have asked this question before you. Your task is to enter the great conversation. You must have the following:




-  **Primary Sources:** You must engage meaningfully with three primary texts you have read in past classes.
-  **External Source:** You must incorporate one additional, external source of your choosing and it must be approved by Mr. Beach.
-  **Structure:** Your essay must follow the five-part form of the classical oration:
-  **Format and Citation:** Your paper must be written in MLA format, annotated with proper citations and a complete Works Cited page. Use 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins.

Capstone Research Paper | Continued...

Proposal Requirements: You must submit a Capstone Essay Proposal that includes:

-  Your working thesis
-  A brief explanation of each of your three primary texts and your external source
-  The reader of your choice (must be a teacher at the school)
-  A signature of approval from Mr. Beach

Defense and Panel Discussion: Upon completion of your essay, you will participate in a capstone panel, where you will:

-  Present and defend your thesis before a panel of faculty and peers
-  Respond to questions and objections in a spirit of reason and charity
-  Demonstrate mastery of your sources, coherence of thought, and seriousness of purpose



Prompt I

In what sense does philosophy begin in darkness, and how does it prepare the soul for death?

Objective: This essay asks students to synthesize the foundational philosophical insights encountered in the first 10 weeks of the course—tracing man’s movement from confusion to clarity, from belief to knowledge, and from ignorance to examined life. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the philosophical task by articulating the nature and necessity of philosophy in the human experience, especially as it relates to the soul, death, and the pursuit of wisdom.

Students must analyze the metaphors, dialogues, and arguments presented in this unit and demonstrate how they shape our understanding of truth and the good life.

Sources: The metaphor of the Darkened Room (Week 1 lesson material)

Pre-Socratic philosophy (Weeks 2–3) – Concepts such as the One and the Many, physis, logos, change and permanence

Plato’s Apology (Weeks 4–6) – Themes of justice, truth, majority opinion, and the examined life

Plato’s Phaedo (Weeks 7–10) – The soul’s immortality, death, and the philosophical life

Requirements: Length: 4–6 pages, double-spaced

Format: MLA style with proper in-text citations and Works Cited page

Structure: Classical Oration

