

Summary

Core theme - knower and knowledge

Subject	Year	Start date	Duration
Theory of Knowledge	IB1	Week 2, September	3 weeks 6 hours

Course Part

Core Theme

Description

The core theme of this topic is **Knowledge and the knower**. You will start your survey of knowledge by stepping back from all of it to engage yourself in these important knowledge questions (although perhaps not quite as far as the brain in the video above!): How far does knowledge reach in its **scope**, and what kinds of knowing does it include? Are there limits to what we can know?

You will then engage yourself in the multiple **perspectives** offered by the innumerable communities of our world. Can knowledge be separated from human knowers, with all their diversity in constructing knowledge from innumerable different vantage points? Can examining perspectives help you to understand better how humans frame knowledge, and how they interact in the exchange of knowledge? You will have reason to reflect on your own worldview and on the importance of keeping an open mind.

Inquiry & Purpose

Inquiry / Higher Order Questions

Type

Inquiry Questions

Concept-based

How do you build knowledge? What do you do, then, with your knowledge? Do you have any moral obligation to use it in any particular way? Does knowing carry any ethical responsibilities to consider?

Curriculum

Aims

The aims of the TOK course are:

- to expose students to ambiguity, uncertainty and questions with multiple plausible answers

- to equip students to effectively navigate and make sense of the world, and help prepare them to encounter novel and complex situations

Objectives

Having completed the TOK course, students should be able to:

identify and explore links between knowledge questions and the world around us

develop relevant, clear and coherent arguments

Syllabus Content

Core theme: Knowledge and the knower

The core theme—knowledge and the knower—provides an opportunity for students to reflect on what shapes their perspective as a knower, where their values come from, and how they make sense of, and navigate, the world around them.

Importantly, this theme does not focus exclusively on the individual knower. It also considers aspects such as the impact of the different communities of knowers to which we belong, and how knowledge is constructed, critically examined, evaluated and renewed by communities and individuals. This includes reflection on how our interactions with others and with the material world shape our knowledge.

This theme encourages careful and critical consideration of claims, provoking students to reflect on how we distinguish between claims that are contestable and claims that are not. It highlights the importance of not simply accepting claims at face value, and then explores how this can be reconciled with a recognition that many situations require us to make decisions without possessing absolute certainty.

The core theme has been explicitly designed to provide rich opportunities for teachers and students to make links to the IB learner profile. Students are encouraged to consider both the power and the limitations of the tools that they have at their disposal as knowers and thinkers, and to become more aware of their own biases and assumptions. They could also consider what it really means to be open-minded or consider the importance of caring about how knowledge is used and controlled.

An interesting focus for discussions in this theme could be misinformation and disinformation, deliberate deception and manipulation, and how we know who/what to trust. This could include reflection on which sources of knowledge (books, websites, personal experience, authority figures, and so on) students consider most trustworthy, and why.

It could also include reflection on how advances in technology have brought these issues into sharper focus through, for example, discussion of “fake news” and its machinery.

Another interesting focus for discussions could be to explore how we perceive and construct our understanding of the world. This could include consideration of the way that culture can be seen as a lens through which we look at the world, or the impact of filters, image manipulation and propaganda.

For example, students could consider at what point filters become more important than what really exists, or the influence of hidden assumptions in shaping us as knowers.

There are many possible ways to approach and structure the core theme in the classroom. For example, teachers may choose to “bookend” the TOK course with the core theme—using it as a way to start and end the course, as well as spiralling back to the theme at relevant moments throughout the optional themes and areas of knowledge.

Additional guidance and examples on how the core theme could potentially be approached can be found in the Theory of knowledge teacher support material.

Whatever approach to the core theme is taken, it is crucial that the focus remains clearly on knowledge. Teachers must also ensure that within their exploration of the theme, they engage with the four compulsory elements required in every part of the TOK curriculum: scope, perspectives, methods and tools, and ethics.

Suggested knowledge questions for each of these elements are provided in the following table, but these should not be taken as prescriptive or exhaustive.

IB DP TOK class of 2022 VIM (IB1)

ATL Skills

Approaches to Learning

Thinking

- In this unit, we will

ask students to formulate a reasoned argument to support their opinion or conclusion

give students time to think through their answers before asking them for a response

reward a new personal understanding, solution or approach to an issue

ask open questions

set students a task which required higher-order thinking skills (such as analysis or evaluation)

help students to make their thinking more visible (for example, by using a strategy such as a thinking routine)

require students to take an unfamiliar viewpoint into account when formulating arguments

ask questions that required the use of knowledge from a different subject from the one you are teaching

include a reflection activity

Developing IB Learners

Learner Profile



Risk-takers (Courageous)



Balanced