

Critical Thinking and the Discussion Packet Teaching Method.



Mark Saiki
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1. Better Angels of Our Nature.

The Socratic Teaching Method, and even more so for my Discussion Packet Teaching Method, is designed to take teaching to a higher level; it is designed to raise the pedagogical bar.

The main purpose of lecture and note taking is to get students to listen to you. It assumes that the teacher and/or professor has factual information, on subjects such as spelling, grammar, and math, which students need to know. Students must pay attention and process information. By contrast the Socratic Teaching Method builds on that foundation, and it takes it to a higher plane: Listen to what I say, and at the same time critically examine what I am saying to you. Evaluate my words, question my authority and decide for yourself, what value my words have. The ultimate question in each Socratic and Discussion Packet lesson is: How is the student going to apply my ideas, concepts, theories and interpretations in the real world.

In this paradigm shift, my Discussion Packet Teaching Method merely provides textual material to set-up Socratic Discussions. In comparison to garden-variety textbooks, my Discussion Packets are fact dense, information rich, hot quotes, which summarize complex arguments, interpretations and ideas into a ten-to-twenty page lesson. They focus interpretations around themes, which I hope that students will actively discuss, process for themselves, and apply to their own lives. The message in my Discussion Packet Lessons, is not that I am the wise man on the hill, but instead that Students must critically evaluate my lessons, and decide for themselves what their merits are. In this sense, the Socratic Teaching Method shifts the Student Teacher Relationship, from a Top-Down Management Model, to a collaborative, peer-to-peer academic journey. It tells the Students: Do not judge my works (lessons or books) by their cover, evaluate for yourself what their worth is. In the sense of Edward Demming's Total Quality Control model, the workers themselves must assume responsibility for assuring optimal product quality. In summary, this shift from listen to my words, and implicitly believe that I am telling you, to pay attention to what I say, take it with a grain of salt, and Question my Authority, while you evaluate my credibility.

Lecture and Note Taking	Listen to What I Say Process It	Memory
Socratic Teaching Method	Listen to what I say	Memory

	Evaluate, Criticize It Question Authority	Process it Evaluate It Criticize It Apply It
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Some of the goals of nurse education are the fostering of autonomy, professional competence (Snowball et al 1994, Wong et al 1995) and self-directedness in nurses. Little & Ryan (1988) believe that facilitation is the most appropriate teaching technique to be used to inculcate these qualities. In this study, it is used to develop the critical thinking of the students through writing (diary keeping) and group discussion (reflective sessions). It is hoped that facilitation as a teaching tool will enable the students to become more aware (Durgahee 1992, 1996) of their patients' needs, the impact of context on the quality of care given, and appreciate and develop their own nursing philosophies. Taleb Durgahee, British Nurse Educator, University of East London, "Facilitating Reflection: From A Sage On Stage To A Guide On The Side," *Nurse Education Today* (1998) 159.

A Sage on the Stage is the wise man on the hill: The Nursing Professor knows the most about quality nursing practice, so they tell their students how it is done. By contrast, a guide on the side: is a peer-to-peer relationship, where the Professor steps down off their soapbox (or stump [as in political stump speech]). Often the Professor leads discussions reflecting on the nurses' practical knowledge, which they learned in clinical rotations in real hospitals, and reflecting on learning from each others' experiences.

2. Retention: Activity creates a hierarchy of brain activity. Psychologists tell us that memory and cognition are largely a function of creating more neural pathways toward the same and connected ideas. This simplifies into a ladder of teaching methods. The more active the teaching method, the higher student retention. Also, I argue that my Discussion Packet Teaching Method (herein DPTM) raises the bar even further, by providing lessons in critical thinking. At a minimum, however, my DPTM is arguably at least ten times more effective than Lecture in fostering student retention and creating a better neural network.

Teaching Method	24-hour	Mark Saiki Comments on Student Activity Levels (Notice the Progression upwards)
Peer Teaching	90%	A lesson is reinforced by a small group of students actively functioning as teachers.
Practice Activities	75%	A lesson is reinforced by activities, which are designed to support the lesson.
Discussion Groups	50%	The Teacher actively Prepares a lesson. The Teacher actively delivers the lesson. Maybe 20% of the time is spent on teacher-talk and Socratic

		Guiding Questions. 80% of the time is ideally spent on student discussions, where they actively process, evaluate and critically examine the lessons presented.
Demonstration	30%	Students must process audio and visual information, which is reinforced by demonstration and examples.
Audio Visual Aids	20%	Students must process audio and visual information
Lecture	5%	Teacher actively prepares a lesson. Teacher actively delivers a lesson (lecture). Students passively listen. Students arguably actively take notes, which begins the process of comprehending lesson.

Renee T. Ridley, a Lecturer at Murray State University, Department of Nursing, Murray, Kentucky, MSN, APRN, BC, CFNP, "Interactive Teaching: A Concept Analysis," *Journal of Nursing Education*, May 2007, Vol. 46, No. 5, 204.

I would also denote a difference between sterile student discussions, where students take a detached interest in the subject, while my Discussion Packets are designed to peak student interest, by getting their blood boiling. My lessons are designed to empower students to apply my theories to the real world. For example, my Discussion Packet: Non-violent protests Pro and Con, deals with Martin Luther King's non-violent protests, during the Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s). And I make clear that this issue has equal application to the 2016 Protests against Donald Trump. I raise the current issue: Did the University of Chicago violent protests effectively resist Donald Trump's racist, sexist, bigoted and xenophobic messages, or do they make those violent students look like thugs who should be ignored and marginalized?

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3. Critical Thinking. I have simplified my definition of critical thinking as follows:

a) Objective Truths	b) Subjective Truths
Objective Truths refers to Questions, which have defined answers. Such as math, logic and laws of science. In general, any question, which has an objective answer, is one, which does not rely on critical thinking.	Every question, which falls outside of the ambit of column A, requires critical thinking: a pro and con weighing of intangibles. Questions of: history, politics, economics, business, marketing and almost all Social Sciences require critical thinking.

For that narrow range of questions, which fall under column a), those may be taught with either lecture or note taking, or my DPTM (there certainly are advantages to teaching both math and science using the Socratic Teaching Method). However, for teaching all Social Sciences beyond the fifth grade, the Socratic Teaching Method has proven to be more effective. This is why Law Schools, Medical and Nursing Schools use it. Beginning in Middle School, students should not accept what the Teacher tells them at face value, but instead they should take it with a grain of salt. Not that what teachers tell you is intentionally false, but increasingly what they tell you are not objective truths, but subjective truths, interpretations, opinions, and ideas which should be challenged. You should not swallow any theory or interpretation whole, but instead you need to process it, digest it, modify and qualify it, before you think about applying it to the real world, or to your own life.

As an example, Peano's axioms in math tell us that by definition two plus two equals four. However beyond this bottom the "correct answer" becomes more a question of memory and defined answers. For example, you can tell a college freshman class, that democracy is the best form of government. On a multiple choice exam, you can answer that the United States has the world's best form of government, because that is what our Professor lectured to us, we recorded the answer in our notes, and thus we have achieved congruence. However, if you hold this process up to objective scrutiny, the defined correctness quickly unravels. Even if we postulate that democracy is the best form of government in the world, do we mean the electoral college, caucuses, primaries, state elections, federal elections, parliamentary democracies, and/or the Democratic government set up by the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederation. Also, just what criteria are we using to evaluate governments' comparative efficacy?

This dilemma has its parallel in the My Lai Massacre and in the present debate over whether or not an American soldiers should obey Presidential Orders to torture, to waterboard prisoners of war, or to execute family members of known terrorists. The somewhat objective Geneva Conventions provide a clear answer, and likewise the slogan: "Marines don't question why, ours is to do or die." Unfortunately these two "correct answers" point in diametrically opposite directions. I suggest is that each soldier is required to critically evaluate each order. Most orders

are to be obeyed, however orders, which are determined to be “unlawful” should not be obeyed. If Lt. William Calley, or President Donald Trump orders soldiers to shoot unarmed civilian wives, daughters, babies and children, of enemy combatants, ideally the soldiers must salute and say, “I am sorry, sir, but I have a duty to the US Constitution, the Geneva Conventions, the Bible, and to the American People, which in this case I believe overrides your orders (William Seward’s higher law, and Abraham Lincoln’s Better Angels of Our Nature). I will gladly take this issue to a Court Martial, where commanding officers will decide this issue, but I will not fire upon unarmed, not hostile, non-combatants.” This bottom line parallels the development of American democracy. The Colonists and our Founding Fathers resented being governed by a King’s Orders; instead, they chose to govern themselves through a representative republican form of government, which is anchored by the US Constitution. This means that citizens, including military personnel must obey the US Constitution, whenever they justly perceive a conflict between Truth, Justice and the American Way, and the orders of just One Branch of Government. In John Marshall’s words, it is the province of the Judiciary to determine what the US Constitution means, not the President.

In sum, my DPTM provides fact dense comparative history for students to evaluate. My lessons are designed around a theme, and my Socratic Guiding Questions are designed to allow students to critically evaluate the merits of each lesson. My DPTM provides textual material, which supports and makes the Socratic Teaching Method more efficient.

4. What are Discussion Packets? A discussion packet is a format, which I created. I have used my teaching method, at a variety of high schools: Arvada High School (War Crimes and the Geneva Conventions), Jefferson Academy (Legal and Political Analysis of the Dissent in the Gay Marriage Supreme Court case), Central High School (in both World and US History), Roosevelt High School (Geopolitics and Industrial Location, Lobbying and Social Class, What is Geography?), Cherry Creek High School (You Call It Corn, We Call It Maize), middle schools, at the University of Northern Colorado (You Call It Corn, We Call It Maize, and Big Ideas Behind the Constitution), at Front Range Community College: American History I, Earth Day (Global Warming), Critical Thinking Seminar (Social History of the Civil Rights Movement), at the Unitarian Church (Social History of the Civil Rights Movement and The Bible: Middle Ground Between Creationism and Evolution), and at the Episcopal Church (Cooperation, Compliance and Resistance at Amache). My use of Discussion Packets at Middle and High Schools is often limited to working with my peers, in those rare instances, when I am able to speak with the regular teacher and get my lesson plan approved.

I told my own Front Range Community College students, that history is about competing ideas, theories, and interpretations. The job of the historian is to objectively analyze and interpret discordant voices, decide what happened and what it ultimately means. Discussion Packets are designed to foster active learning, by including a variety of pro and con arguments and interpretations. Students learn to think critically, and they are assessed by essay tests. By contrast, lecture is passive learning. A student takes notes and memorizes “facts,” which are generally evaluated by multiple-choice tests. The former relies on students, who must decide which competing truths to accept, and they form their own opinions based upon their individual assessments of the weight, which they choose to give to each author. Most Discussion Packets contain direct quotations from the original participants.

I began creating the Discussion Packet Teaching Method (herein the DPTM) in Fall 1994, when I was a student teacher at Aurora Central High School. I used it to teach two sections of World History and one of American History. My seminal idea for Discussion Packets came in the Spring 1976 with the American History textbook [Allen F. Davis](#) and [Harold D. Woodman](#), *Conflict and Consensus in American History* (June, 1997). I liked the approach; that textbook featured differing viewpoints, on an essay-versus-essay basis. My fascination with comparative history continued in 1977, with Colorado College's Block System, where students discuss topics for three-hour block classes. In 1979, at the University of Colorado Law School, I was introduced to the Socratic Teaching Method, but the background reading materials were case law, which covered a variety of points and issues. In 2001, at the University of Northern Colorado, I earned my Masters of American History, through discussion classes, where one book at a time was discussed one class at a time. From these roots, I developed my DPTM.

The great advantage of my lessons is that they foster intensive discussions. On a paragraph-by-paragraph basis, students analyze bits of comparative history. My points of contrast are far sharper, than teaching materials, which require students to compare: essays, case law or books. Instead of requiring students to wade through reams of materials, I have done the background research for them. I have selected hot quotes and main ideas to compare. My DPTM focuses student attention on carefully selected reading materials. They evaluate, compare, contrast, and selectively incorporate chosen portions of the concepts and ideas, which we discuss. Students are responsible to apply these theories and interpretations to the real world and to their own lives. Student time is concentrated upon critical reading and analysis, instead of requiring them to spend the bulk of their time identifying the main ideas, while wading (skimming and scanning) through copious pages. Their mental energy is directed toward quality analysis, instead of sifting through many pages, in order to discover the important points. In short my Discussion Packets are made of concentrated wheat germ, instead of the whole wheat stalks: leaves, stems, husks and roots.

5. Discussion vs. Lecture. My Discussion Packets mimic the critical thinking skills taught in law schools. At the University of Colorado School of Law, as at virtually all such institutions, you are given a number of court cases. You read the cases, put them in your own words, brief the cases (note taking) and then discuss the legal concepts in class. My Discussion Packets follow this same procedure. The critical difference is that you do not have to boil down a thirty-page decision, down to the red meat in a three-page brief. I have already condensed the reading materials down to a manageable level. With any luck students can critically scrutinize the main ideas, from competing authors, in a single class period.

By comparison, most textbooks provide a narrative account of famous names, dates and events. Seldom do they contain specific factual information, which explains how conflicts were resolved. The purpose of a lecture is reinforce main ideas from the text, by selectively dropping bread-crumbs. A lecturer generally disseminates (scatters) factual information, some percentage of which will be asked on a multiple-choice test. If a student attends each class, reads the textbook, and takes good notes, then the student will be able to provide the "correct" answer on a multiple-choice test. Only in exalted situations do students critically think and evaluate what the textbook and teacher are actually saying. Instead, they accept the written words of the text, and

the spoken words of the teacher, as true; then, they behave accordingly. The Professor presents, that, which they themselves believe are correct interpretations, and what they define to be as correct answers.

By contrast, my Discussion Packets present diverse perspectives and interpretations. My students critically analyze and evaluate the merits of each. My Discussion Packets set up small and whole class discussions. First, the purpose, of my small group discussions, is for them to hash out ideas, and to evaluate, refine and discuss every issue, which is raised by their numbered section. Second, the purpose of my whole class discussions is to get students to critically analyze, evaluate and critique my points. They need to ask themselves: “How will I apply Mark Saiki’s theories and interpretation to the real world?”

The central tenet of my teaching philosophy is that the value of a lesson should not be measured by the brilliance of the professor, or even by the gravity of the words they utter, instead, it should be measured by the quality of thoughts, which a lesson provokes in our student population. In simple terms, lessons should be evaluated not by the wisdom of the words spoken by the Professor, but by the quality of critical thinking, which our lessons foster among our own students.

6. Need for Critical Thinking. The problem is that lecture is designed to give our students factual information, which has a very short shelf life. Students face problems, in the real world, and make complex policy decisions, based upon their ability to think critically. Seldom do they resolve complex situations, by recalling the ready-made solutions, which they learned in class.

On the other hand, the Socratic Teaching Method and my DPTM is designed to teach Critical Thinking. My Discussion Packets provide a process, which students can use to formulate their own opinions, solve their own individual problems, and answer their own questions. Just like Confucius, lecture gives students a fish, whereas my DPTM teaches students how to fish (which will of course feed them for life).

Unfortunately, most higher education is headed in the opposite direction. Advance Placement courses push coverage over depth. Many college courses are reduced to teaching definitions (jargon) and briefly mention theories, without ever explaining the discordant voices, that went into resolving those conflicts. Whereas industry, politics and our culture needs divergent thinkers who second-guess the status quo; they instead produce “yes men” and technicians who are trained to implement given policies.

The structure of most colleges is basically that we teach terminology, definitions and factual information in 100 and 200s courses. In 300 and 400s classes, and in graduate school, we start to analyze and evaluate concepts. By contrast, my position is that we need to teach critical thinking skills in Middle Schools, High Schools and even in introductory college courses. And the way we should do that, is by using my Discussion Packet Teaching Method.

In summary, my discussion packet teaching method is geared toward fostering critical thinking and discussion, which prepare students to answer essay questions. As an alternative to the traditional lecture and note taking, my technique promotes active learning; it is designed to peak

students' curiosity and interest. History is not a series of names and dates to be memorized, instead it is designed to encourage active inquiry, passionate discussion, and formation of an individual's own worldview.

7. Essay Answers. What do you need to create good essay answers? Given my background in high school and college debate, law school and twenty-seven years working as an attorney, I suggest that you need opposing viewpoints, supporting evidence, divergent thoughts and discordant voices. Not only are Social Studies textbooks bereft of specific information, numbers, and footnotes, they are devoid of divergent viewpoints and evidence. In comparison, my Discussion Packets contain comparative history, discordant voices and diverse interpretations and perspectives.

8. Emotional Discussions v. Soma. Much of secondary education is carried out under the influence of soma. Discussions are sterile, because students have conditioned into a lifetime of compliance. Ideal behavior is to passively listen to lecture, and arguably to "actively" take notes. If you listen close, I will tell you the secrets to success. By contrast, my Discussion Packets actively engage students in authentic, emotional discussions. My lessons are tailor-made to allow students to see how they can apply my ideas and concepts, to the real world. They have a voting interest in determining for themselves, how, and to what extent, they are going to apply my theories and postulates for themselves. Students learn critical thinking, by testing and by evaluating their merits, of interpretations and theories, which are presented by each Discussion Packet. I constantly tweak my lessons, to reach more students (to sell more bananas). Each lesson is redrafted and tailored for each class.

Another activity I undertook, as a Guest Teacher, was to spend my planning periods watching other teachers, such as Cherry Creek High School's multiple awarding winning Teacher of the Year: Eric Coble. He would lecture his students during class, and then after class, he would "hold court." Groups of students would discuss the ideas he presented in class. His gift was that students understood that he did not present himself as the wise man on the hill, instead his interpretations were subject to challenge after class. History Teacher Eric Coble was much like my Contracts Professor Jonathan Chase, whom other students said that I was the first Law Student to "pull his chain." On the other hand, my gift is to draft Discussion Packets, which put students on a level playing field, by letting them directly scrutinize statements by participants (primary sources) and scholarly interpretations.

9. Format. Embedded within each paragraph is a point, which I would like students to consider. Every quotation presents an opportunity to consider another facet of this discussion, which in some way advances our consideration of the issues. Each section is arranged on the principle of primacy and retention. The most likely paragraph, which students will select to read and analyze, is the first section. Therefore, the paragraph, which contains the best explanation, that supports my pre-selected thesis, is in the first paragraph. Retention is achieved through discussion. My Guiding Socratic Questions are designed to tweak students' own analysis.

The reason, for three or four paragraphs, per numbered section, is a compromise of depth vs. coverage. In written material, and by authoritative hot quotes, many different viewpoints and "fact" are presented. Orally, during our whole class discussion, we only go over selected main

ideas (generally one paragraph), per numbered section for our whole class discussions.

On the left-hand margin is a quote. Most of the statements are direct quotes, followed by formal citations. The right-hand margin is reserved for student notes. On most right-hand margins there are question guides. For example, in my Leadership in History packet, the student is supposed to write down the main idea, underline the key words, and state whether or not they agree or disagree. If they agree with the quotation, they need to cite an example from their own lives, which demonstrates the main idea. If they disagree, they need to amend it so that they would agree. For example:

<p>a. Mao Tse Tung. Every Communist must grasp the truth: Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, 1965.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis: Example/Amend:</p>
<p>Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive one; it is man and not materials that count. Mao Tse-Tung, Lecture 1938.</p>	
<p>b. Lao-Tzu. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.</p>	<p>Main Ideas: Key Words: Analysis: Example/Amend:</p>

On the Hammurabi Code packet the student is to write down the purpose of the legislation, evaluate whether or not they think it is a good law or a bad law, explain their reasoning, and then suggest amendments to improve that legislation.

<p>c. If a free man accused another free man and brought a charge of murder against him, but has not proved it, the accuser shall be put to death.</p>	<p>Good Law/Bad Law: Evaluation: Amendments:</p>
<p>d. If a free man came forward with false testimony in a case and has not proved the word, which he spoke, if that case was a case involving a life, that free man shall be put to death.</p>	

	<p>My Discussion Packets follow a three-step formula.</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Discussion Packets provide authoritative hot quotes, which enable students to discuss, evaluate and criticize the concepts presented.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Professors use guiding Socratic questions to probe, question and sharpen student analysis.</p> <p>Use Socratic Guiding Question to connect: What Students already know to your</p>

	bottom line? What you want them to get out of the lesson? How can you help them evaluate and criticize the merits of the pro and con interpretations, which you present?
3	The end result is to get students to critically think for themselves, and to draw their own conclusions, based on the information presented. In the best of all possible worlds, Discussion Packets create Transformative Intervals (Teachable moments), where students evaluate and criticize the points, which the Discussion Packet’s creators have embedded in these materials.
<p>10. Participation.</p> <p>a) Some students reach the comfort zone of being able to speak their minds and share their opinions immediately.</p> <p>b) Some students need to go through a transition phase, at their own pace, where they start off by just reading their selected passage (paragraph). They are patiently coaxed into more participation by watching the process, and by observing other students. They eventually become comfortable with the process by osmosis, and their level of participation increases over time.</p> <p>c) Some tiny minority of students will never actively participate in discussion.</p>	
<p>11. Group Mind. My DPTM relies on the Group Mind, and in Abraham Lincoln’s words, the “Better Angels of Our Nature.” In my experience, when the marketplace of ideas, is actively open for business, weak ideas like the Evacuation and Relocation of Japanese-Americans tend to be rejected in favor of Equal Protection of the Law. Likewise, the Ku Klux Klan’s view of race relations is generally not preferred over the NAACP’s interpretation. Even if I were to travel to small towns in Indiana, my goal would not be to convert Klan members to my philosophy, but merely to get them to consider and discuss the merits of my opposing arguments.</p>	
<p>12. Procedure. I generally make one copy of each discussion packet for each student. At Front Range Community Colleges, and for seminars, I will post downloadable copies on the Internet. I split the class up into as many small groups as there are numerical sections. I tell them to write notes in the right hand margins. Each group works on one section and then we discuss. I generally allow fifteen minutes for small group deliberations, and the remaining time is used for whole class discussions (presentations).</p> <p>Each group selects students to speak. They generally read one chosen paragraph and analyze it for the class. My comments are generally in the form of Socratic guiding questions, which are designed to lead them to points I would like them to understand, and to develop their own lines of critical thinking.</p> <p>I have attached a mini-discussion packet to support the points, which are made in this memo.</p>	