

# HOLY CHILD

EDUCATING YOUNG WOMEN OF CONSCIENCE AND ACTION

## English 12 Summer Assignment: Philosophy Through Literature and Film

Dear Seniors,

I am so pleased to work with you next year, and excited about our new set of senior electives in English. You are enrolled in Philosophy Through Film and Literature. The basic goal of this course is to think philosophically about a text, whether poem, novel, non-fiction, drama, painting, photo, or film. All of these are essentially art, and the class will provide a sense of art as a site of philosophical reflection and discovery, a space to think about the human condition. That is what philosophy does, explore our place in the world, by asking “the big questions.” To that end I have assigned a text, that mixes non-fiction (the thoughts of actual philosophers) with a fictional story, a mystery. This text, *Sophie’s World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*, by Jostein Gaarder, will essentially be our guide throughout the course. **You must buy a copy**--ISBN is below. It is not a difficult text, as it was written especially for high school students in philosophy, but it must be read carefully and with attention to detail. The summer assignments are designed to help you cull the philosophical information you need into one place, and follow the story. I have enclosed the review from Goodreads.com.

*Sophie’s World: A Novel About the History of Philosophy*

By Jostein Gaarder

Publisher: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Reprint edition

ISBN-13: 978-0374530716

“One day fourteen-year-old Sophie Amundsen comes home from school to find in her mailbox two notes, with one question on each: “Who are you?” and “Where does the world come from?” From that irresistible beginning, Sophie becomes obsessed with questions that take her far beyond what she knows of her Norwegian village. Through those letters, she enrolls in a kind of correspondence course, covering Socrates to Sartre, with a mysterious philosopher, while receiving letters addressed to another girl. Who is Hilde? And why does her mail keep turning up? To unravel this riddle, Sophie must use the philosophy she is learning—but the truth turns out to be far more complicated than she could have imagined.”

**Purpose:** To help build confidence and competence as readers of complex texts  
To give you, when you enter the class in the fall, an immediate basis for discussion of literature  
To set up a basis for comparison with other works we will read during the year  
Last, but not least, to enrich your mind and stimulate your imagination

**Format:** Please, use a proper heading on all of the assignments and MLA formatting.  
Proper heading (see below)

12point, Times New Roman Font  
1" margins  
Double-spacing  
Retype the questions in bold for all assignments  
Submit the assignments the assignments in the following order:  
1. Philosophers Chart  
2. Notes on characters, plot, setting and connections  
3. After the novel questions

**Grading:** During novel work = test grade  
After novel work = test grade  
Thoroughness, completeness, depth, detail, format, grammar, correctness, and content all count.

**\*\*\*Plagiarism:** Any student found to have used another person's ideas or words including classmates or online resources will receive a zero for the assignment.

**Heading:** Please use this MLA format heading for all papers.

Name  
Course Name (Journey from Darkness; Philosophy through Literature and Film )  
Ms. Calvosa  
Assignment Title  
Date

**DUE:** All assignments are due the first day of English class. Have both your book and the assignments with you to hand in during your first English class of the school year.

**Directions:** Please complete Assignments #1 and #2 below while you are reading Sophie's world, and complete Assignment #3 after reading the novel.

During your reading:

I have attached reading questions below to guide you in your reading and help you think about the reading and the assignments below. You do not have to write out answers to these questions.

### **ASSIGNMENT 1: SW Philosopher Chart**

Create a Philosopher Chart (sample below) for each of the philosophers Sophie studies in her correspondence course. Include the following information and format as in the example below.

- the philosopher
- date of birth/death
- their classification and its meaning (what philosophy they are identified by? ex: Natural Philosophy, Empiricism, Materialism, and what that means)
- their philosophical view of life: that is, what each believed; what is each philosopher's project? (main beliefs of each individual philosopher)

PHILOSOPHER	dates	PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF LIFE
-------------	-------	----------------------------

<b>Natural Philosophers (Early Greek Philosophers Pre-Socratics)</b>		“The aim of the early Greek philosophers was to find natural, rather than supernatural, explanations for natural processes” (p.27).
Xenophanes		Men have imagined the gods in their own image.
Thales (Milean)		Source of all things was water.  Proposed that “all things are full of gods” because he imagined the earth was filled with tiny invisible “life-germs.”  Calculated the height of a pyramid by measuring its shadow at the precise moment when the length of his shadow was equal to his height; also accurately predicted a solar eclipse in 585 B.C.
Anaximander (Milean)		Anaximander thought that our world was only one of a myriad of worlds that evolve and dissolve in something he called the <b>boundless</b> . “Because all created things are limited, that which comes before and after them must be “boundless,” so it is clear that this basic stuff could not be anything as ordinary as water” (p. 34).
Anaximenes (Milean)		Anaximenes thought that the source of all things must be “air” or “vapor.” He further theorized that water was condensed air. Rain is the result of pressed air. “When water is pressed even more, Anaximenes thought, “it becomes earth” (p. 35).
Parmenides (Eleatic) “Nothing can come out of nothing...”		Parmenides thought that everything that exists had always existed. Greeks believed “that everything that existed in the world was everlasting” (35). This was compatible with other Greeks who more or less thought that all creations were everlasting. Nothing can change; our sensory perceptions must therefore be unreliable. --believed that our senses gave an incorrect picture of the world, a picture that does not tally with our reason. Perceptual illusion.
<b>Rationalist</b>  <b>Rationalism</b>		“Someone who believes that human reason is the primary source of our knowledge of the world” (p. 36).  “is the unshakable faith in human reason. A rationalist is someone who believes that human reason is the primary course of our knowledge of the world” (36).

### ASSIGNMENT 2: SW Chapter Journals

- Keep written notes for each chapter about the characters, setting, and plot.
- Your written notes must connect the fictional story about Sophie to her study of philosophy. In other words, show how Gaarder illustrates his “lectures” on

philosophy within the story of Sophie and Alberto. What plot elements are used to illustrate the philosophy?

Example: after Alberto explains to Sophie that Aristotle was the first great organizer in that he attempted to classify things in the natural world, thereafter Sophie classifies and organizes her closet.

### **After reading the novel**

#### **ASSIGNMENT 3: SW Reflection Questions**

Answer the six reflection questions. Please retype the question in bold face, then answer it. Questions must be typed and be a minimum of  $\frac{3}{4}$  page and maximum length of one page.

#### AFTER READING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  page each

retype the question in bold

1. **The first chapter's title, "The Garden of Eden," underscores the concept of beginnings and origins. How did you first respond to the initial two questions, "Who are you?" and "Where does the world come from?" Did your answers change by the time you reached the end of the novel? How and why?**
2. **"Bjerkely" marks the transition from Sophie's to Hilde's point of view. Both of the heroines in *Sophie's World* are going through the phases of rapid physical, intellectual, and emotional development. How do their lives, personalities, and philosophies compare? What makes Berkeley/Bjerkely an appropriate backdrop for putting such dualities in the spotlight?**
3. **In the "Romanticism" chapter, Alberto quotes a character from Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* as saying, "One cannot die in the middle of Act Five." What is your interpretation of this line? What do the poets and the other philosophers discussed in this chapter say about the nature of life and identity?**
4. **More than once in these pages, the child's perspective is mentioned as a paradigm for how philosophers should think or perceive. Though they are at an age when they are beginning to leave childhood behind, do Sophie and Hilde possess greater wisdom than their elders?**
5. ***Sophie's World* encompasses numerous time periods, cultures, discoveries, and belief systems. How many of the novel's terms and references were you already familiar with? Which aspects did you most want to research further?**
6. **Which philosophy did you like the most? Why? Which philosophy did you like the least? Why?**

#### READING GUIDE QUESTIONS\*

1. Explain the importance of the title of this book's first chapter.
2. Why does Sophie's philosophy teacher tell her that "you are a Martian yourself" (p. 18)?

3. What is a “philosophical project” (p. 63)? Why does the philosophy teacher assert that “no one philosopher concerns himself with the whole of philosophy” (p.32)?
4. Name the four basic elements (see p. 38) that were identified by Empedocles and other natural philosophers of early Greece, and explain why these particular elements were so labeled. What properties were assigned to each element?
5. Why does Sophie’s correspondent call the Lego block “the most ingenious toy in the world” (p. 44)? What is he saying about Legos? Explain the metaphor he’s making here. Further, when thinking about Legos in this regard, Sophie wonders, “Why did people quit playing when they grew up”? How would you answer her?
6. When Sophie first starts receiving letters from the philosophy teacher, she finds that each one is slightly damp, having “two little holes in it” (p. 49). Why is this the case? Thinking of *Sophie’s World* as a mystery novel, what other “clues” did you encounter over the course of the book? Were you able to use them to solve any riddles? And were there any “red herrings” as well?
7. What does it mean to be “skeptical” of something? Or “cynical”? Or “stoic”? How do these terms echo the thinking of various ancient Greek philosophers (see p. 129)?
8. Socrates, we read, was widely seen as the wisest man in Athens, even though he freely admitted that he “knew nothing about life (or) the world” (p. 6). Is this a paradox? Why or why not? Explain.
9. Regarding the video cassette that Sophie watches in secret, how is Alberto Knox able to bring ancient Athens back to life (see p. 73)?
10. Paraphrase the “Myth of the Cave” (p. 89) that Plato wrote about. What was Plato saying in this allegory? What lessons might we draw from it?
11. Explain how and why Plato goes from describing the human body to describing the ideal government (see p. 91).
12. Why doesn’t, or why wouldn’t, Aristotle accept the validity of the “gingerbread mold” (p. 107) that Alberto tells Sophie about? Further, how does Aristotle’s take on the link between nature and reality differ from Plato’s take on this link?
13. What is the “Golden Mean” (p. 114)? How does this concept fit alongside Aristotle’s views on the human diet, disposition, and so on?
14. In the “Middle Ages” chapter, Alberto says, “We can say that Aquinas christianized Aristotle in the same way that St. Augustine Christianized Plato” (p, 177). Why did these great medieval thinkers aim to apply the teachings of Christ to philosophers who had lived hundreds of years “BC”?
15. Who were Hildegard of Bingen, Albert the Great, and Sophia (pp. 182-83)? How are they reflected in these pages by more contemporary figures?
16. “You could say,” Alberto tells Sophie, “that a process started in the Renaissance finally brought people to the moon. Or for that matter to Hiroshima and Chernobyl” (p. 195). What is this “process”? What is Alberto saying?
17. Later in the “Renaissance chapter, Alberto says, “Of all the scientific discoveries in the history of mankind, this is positively the most important” (p. 205). What’s he referring to, and why is it so paramount? Furthermore, why did the Renaissance lead to, as Alberto puts it, “a new religiosity” (p. 208)?

18. Why did “the Baroque period [give] birth to modern theater,” as Alberto asserts (p. 225)? What was it about this particular moment in history that led to the likes of Shakespeare?
19. Alberto calls Descartes “the father of modern philosophy” (p. 231) --- but why does he make this claim? What did Descartes bring to philosophical inquiry that changed things so considerably, or that moved things forward?
20. What are the advantages of viewing all things, as Spinoza said, “sub specie aeternitatis” (p. 251)? What insights does this provide? What does it tell us?
21. In the “Locke” chapter, Alberto tells Sophie about “the only thing a real philosopher must never do.” What is it? Does Sophie ever do it? Or Alberto, or Hilde? Or did you, as a reader? Explain.
22. “More than any other philosopher,” Alberto says, David Hume “took the everyday world as his starting point” (p. 264). How did Hume do this? And what was the result of such earthbound thought? How did he come to understand the world --- and what sort of philosophical thought has followed in Hume’s wake?
23. Things have changed dramatically, from a narrative standpoint and otherwise, when the “Bjerkely” chapter begins. But how? What connections exist between Berkeley and Bjerkely? Between Sophie and Hilde? Between Alberto Knox and Albert Knag? Or even between Albert Knag and Jostein Gaarder?
24. What comparative comments does Hilde’s father make to Alberto and Sophie about the French Enlightenment and the United Nations --- and how does he get these comments across (see pp. 309, 337)? More generally, what points about the UN--- its mission, its purpose, its politics--- are made throughout *Sophie’s World* (pp. 143, 218)?
25. Explain the “red-tinted glasses” metaphor employed in the “Kant” chapter.
26. In the “Romanticism” chapter, Alberto quotes a character from Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*: “One cannot die in the middle of Act Five” (p. 350). What’s the meaning of this line? What’s Alberto trying to say by quoting it?
27. “In a sense,” Alberto tells Sophie, “Freud demonstrated that there is an artist in everyone” (p. 435). How did Freud’s writing and thinking make this point? And to what extent, in your view, is this point valid?
28. What is the “theater of the absurd” (p. 454) --- and how did it come about? What were the playwrights involved in this movement trying to say, philosophically, dramatically, and otherwise, with their work?
29. In the “Big Bang” chapter, we find that stargazing is actually a form of time-travel. How could this be? Explain.
30. Looking back at the beginning of this novel, reread the quotation from Goethe that precedes the first chapter. Explain this quote, and explain whether and how you think it applies to Gaarder’s work.

\*Page numbers refer to the following edition:

Gaarder, Jostein. *Sophie’s World*. trans. Palette Møller. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, Inc., 1996