

Philosophical Chairs

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue (even when we disagree about something) are learned skills. Everyone can learn them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about the opera.

You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone who has a different answer from your own. That’s okay! Take your time with each statement, embrace uncertainty, and know that changing your mind when you learn new information is a sign of strength, not weakness. Before you begin your discussion, take some time to review the rules of engagement:

Be sure you understand the statement. If something is unclear, ask!

Face each other. Body language helps show that you’re listening carefully and respectfully.

Only one speaker at a time. Everyone will get their turn to speak.

Think before you speak. Be sure that what you’re going to say is what you really mean.

Summarize the previous person’s comments before adding your own.

Address ideas, not the person. Challenging ideas or statements is good only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.

Three before me. To make sure everyone’s voice is heard, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

The Statements

- Punishment must fit the crime.
- Everyone is innocent until proven guilty.
- The death penalty is a morally justifiable response to voluntary criminal conduct.
- A death sentence provides justice.
- A death sentence provides vengeance.
- The death penalty is a cruel and unusual punishment.
- The death penalty creates a safer society.
- An execution is a violent public spectacle of official homicide.
- Society has a moral obligation to protect human life.
- Retribution is always justified.
- Anything and anyone can be redeemed.
- It is never too late to turn your life around.
- No one is ever beyond help.
- Fear is a sign of weakness.
- You can walk this life alone.
- Everyone is worthy of forgiveness.
- There is good in everyone.
- Grief will subside.
- Hope can always be found.
- Justice is always served.