

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

- Jealousy knows no bounds
- Envy is easily managed.
- Power is status.
- Power is always balanced.
- Power is often abused.
- Having power comes with consequences.
- All politicians are corrupt.
- All relationships require trust.
- Love and desire are the same feelings.
- Desire fuels relationships.
- Infidelity (cheating) is an act of betrayal.
- The use of torture is morally permissible.
- Vengeance and retribution are always justifiable.
- Two wrongs make a right.
- Revenge is always motivated by justice.
- The ends always justify the means.
- Bribery is a form of corruption.
- Deceit and betrayal have been normalized in society.
- In the end, everyone gets what they deserve.