



SPINOZA, THE PHILOSOPHER

Learning Objectives	This lesson plan aims to introduce students to the life and contributions of Baruch Spinoza, a prominent philosopher of the Enlightenment era. Students will familiarise themselves with Spinoza's key ideas and concepts and they will be encouraged to develop their critical thinking while reflecting on Spinoza's philosophy.
Subjects	Art, Psychology, Social Sciences
Recommended Age (10-12 or 12-14)	12-14
Number of students involved	20 students
Duration	90 minutes
Skills Developed	Critical thinking, creativity, cooperation and group work skills
Material Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whiteboard or blackboard • Markers or chalk • Paper and pencils for students • Laptop/internet
Inclusion Best Practices	<p>This lesson plans discussed the concept of God, which might be sensitive for some students. You should make sure that all students feel safe and comfortable to participate throughout the lesson plan.</p> <p>Depending on the class dynamics and time available, you may need to adjust the lesson plan to suit the needs and engagement level of the students. For older students, more particularly, you could include activities like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a writing task for students to analyse and critique Spinoza's views on freedom and determinism. • Create a classroom activity where students reflect on their personal quest for happiness and discuss



	how they can align their actions with Spinoza's principles.
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Introduction (15 minutes)

Greet your students and share some information about the aim of this lesson which is to learn about the philosopher Baruch Spinoza and his main philosophical ideas.

As a starting point, you can discuss with your students the importance of philosophy and how it encourages critical thinking.

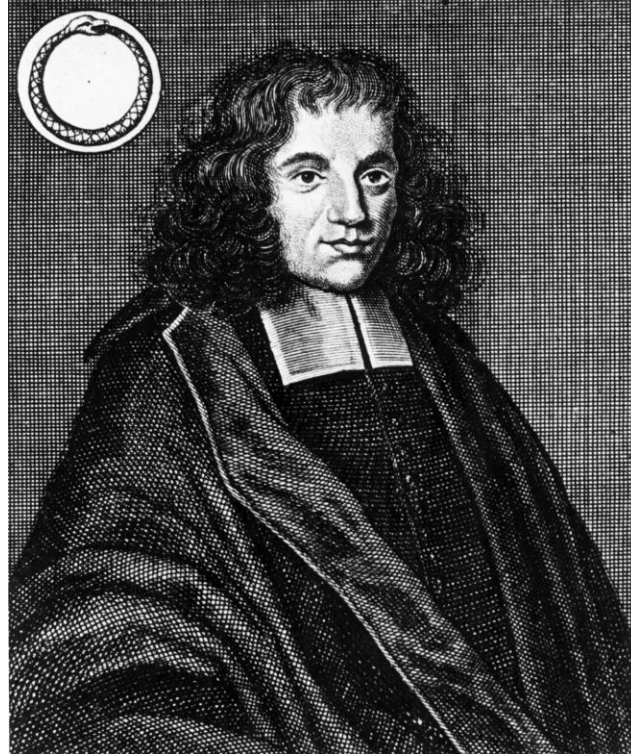
A few questions to ask your students include:

- Have you ever wondered why things are the way they are? Why do we have rules, or why do people have different opinions about things?
- Think about a time when you had to make a choice. How did you decide what to do? What do you think makes some choices right and others not so right?
- Imagine you're exploring a new planet where no one knows anything. How could you use your thinking to help create a fair and happy society there?

Step 1: Who Was Baruch Spinoza? (15 minutes)

Once you have introduced the topic of philosophy, you could provide a brief overview of Spinoza's life, including his birth in Amsterdam, his Jewish background, and his interest in philosophy. You should also highlight Spinoza's role as a rationalist philosopher during the Enlightenment period.

It might be helpful to show a picture of Spinoza to your students, if available. One example could be:



Source: 'Benedict de Spinoza', Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Benedict-de-Spinoza>.

To help your students familiarise with the philosophy of Spinoza you could show them a short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXxra7Coh3g>. [This is a video in English. There are no subtitles available.](#)

Step 2: Spinoza's Concept of God and Nature (30 minutes)

At this stage you should introduce Spinoza's concept of God and Nature as interconnected entities. To help your students understand these concepts you could offer them a short definition of key terminology in these fields ([Cline, 2019](#)):

Atheism: not believing in the existence of a god.

Agnosticism: the term literally means 'without knowledge' (of the existence of god) and it has Greek roots.

Monism: the existence of one single god.

Pantheism: it is the belief that God is the universe.

Deism: a form of monotheism, arguing that a single existing god is personal in nature and transcendent from the created nature.

Theism: Believing in the existence of a god.



You should explain to your students that Spinoza believed that God and Nature are two terms for the same reality, and everything that exists is a manifestation of this divine nature.

It is important to explain to your students that the notion of God, as understood by Spinoza, does not relate to a particular religion. It is advisable to avoid referring to specific religions while implementing this lesson plan, as this might be a sensitive topic for students.

Instead, ask your students to imagine that they have to solve a big puzzle, and this puzzle is the whole universe! Spinoza was a philosopher that liked to imagine of the universe as a big puzzle. Spinoza described everything that is part of the universe as the Nature.

Nature, according to Spinoza, includes us (people), animals, the trees, the stars in the sky, the air, everything. What Spinoza needed then, was a name for the big puzzle that holds the Nature together. This is what Spinoza called God.

Remember, however, that Spinoza's idea is to think about the universe and everything in it without focusing on a particular religion.

At this stage to help your students familiarise with these philosophical topics, ask them to create a puzzle about their classroom and include their friends, their teacher, things that exist in their classroom etc. Students should work in groups of four to five students each group.

Step 3: Ethics and the Quest for Happiness (30 minutes)

After you have explained Spinoza's ideas of God and Nature, you can introduce Spinoza's work "Ethics" and his ideas on human happiness.

One of the main questions that Spinoza aimed to answer is: How can people be happy? He wanted to figure out what makes people feel good and happy.

To help your students understand this concept ask them to imagine that happiness is a treasure hunt. Now, instead of gold, their aim should be to look for things that make them happy and give them joy in their daily life.

Divide your students into groups of four to five students and ask them to think and write down a few things that make them happy. Then collect all of their notes into one big box. To make this more interactive you can name this box, the treasure hunt of happiness, and leave the box in the classroom for students to explore and read what other students wrote during the break.

Step 4: Reflecting on Spinoza's Ideas (10 minutes)



Towards the end of the lesson plan, ask your students to take a few minutes to write down their reflections on Spinoza's ideas, specifically focusing on his concept of God and Nature and the quest for happiness.

Invite some volunteers to share their thoughts or insights with the rest of the class and answer any remaining questions that your student might have.

References:

'Benedict de Spinoza', Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Benedict-de-Spinoza>.

Little Philosophers, EU project, <https://littlephilosophers.eu/?lang=en>.

Austin Cline, "One or Many Gods: The Varieties of Theism", <https://www.learnreligions.com/theisms-monotheism-polytheism-deism-and-more-250956>.