



A multi-campus
IB World School



Theory of Knowledge (ToK) Year 1 Course Syllabus

Course Description:

The TOK course provides students with an opportunity to explore and reflect on the nature of knowledge and the process of knowing. It is a core element of the DP, along with CAS and the Extended Essay.

In TOK, students reflect on the knowledge, beliefs and opinions that they have built up from their years of academic studies and their lives outside the classroom. The course is intended to be challenging and thought-provoking—as well as empowering—for students.

The course centers on the exploration of knowledge questions, which are a key tool for both teachers and students. These are contestable questions about knowledge itself, such as: “What counts as good evidence for a claim?”, “Are some types of knowledge less open to interpretation than others?”, or “What constraints should there be on the pursuit of knowledge?”. While these questions may initially seem slightly intimidating, they become much more accessible when considered with reference to specific examples within the TOK course.

ToK Curriculum

The TOK curriculum is made up of three deeply interconnected parts.

- **The core theme**—Knowledge and the knower
- **Optional themes:** This element provides an opportunity to take a more in-depth look at two themes of particular interest to teachers and students. The given themes all have a significant impact on the world today and play a key role in shaping people’s perspectives and identities. Teachers select two optional themes from a choice of five: knowledge and technology; knowledge and language; knowledge and politics; knowledge and religion; and knowledge and indigenous societies.
- **Areas of knowledge:** The areas of knowledge (AOK) are specific branches of knowledge, each of which can be seen to have a distinct nature and sometimes use different methods of gaining knowledge. In TOK, students explore five compulsory areas of knowledge: history; the human sciences; the natural sciences; mathematics; and the arts.

Furthermore, “knowledge questions” are organized into a **framework of four elements: scope, perspectives, methods and tools, and ethics**. This "knowledge framework" encourages a deep exploration of each theme and AOK. Having these common elements run throughout the different parts

of the curriculum also helps to unify the course and helps students to make effective connections and comparisons across the different themes and areas of knowledge.

The following **12 concepts** have particular prominence within, and thread throughout, the TOK course: *evidence, certainty, truth, interpretation, power, justification, explanation, objectivity, perspective, culture, values and responsibility*. Exploration of the relationship between knowledge and these concepts can help students to deepen their understanding, as well as facilitating the transfer of their learning to new and different contexts. The TOK course embraces the exploration of tensions, limitations and challenges relating to knowledge and knowing. However, it is also intended that TOK discussions will encourage students to appreciate and be inspired by the richness of human knowledge—and to consider the positive value of different kinds of knowledge.

Supply List:

To be successful in this class, students will need to obtain the following materials:

- Writing Utensils
- Highlighters (two colors minimum: yellow/blue, more preferred)
- Notebook (as included in the general materials via School)
- Microsoft OneNote

Texts:

- *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* by Timothy Snyder
- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Numerous Others* Assigned via OneNote and on Paper.
- *Other Texts* to be purchased either toward the end of the 2nd semester or in the 2nd year of the program. These texts are still To Be Determined.

Learning Objectives

The aims of the TOK course are:

- to encourage students to reflect on the central question, “How do we know that?”, and to recognize the value of asking that question
- to expose students to ambiguity, uncertainty and questions with multiple plausible answers
- to equip students to effectively navigate and make sense of the world, and help prepare them to encounter novel and complex situations
- to encourage students to be more aware of their own perspectives and to reflect critically on their own beliefs and assumptions
- to engage students with multiple perspectives, foster open-mindedness and develop intercultural understanding
- to encourage students to make connections between academic disciplines by exploring underlying concepts and by identifying similarities and differences in the methods of inquiry used in different areas of knowledge
- to prompt students to consider the importance of values, responsibilities and ethical concerns relating to the production, acquisition, application and communication of knowledge.

Student Evaluation & Assessment

ToK is unique within the Diploma Program. DP Courses at Willows Preparatory School are also unique. To this end, it is important to understand that there are **two modes of assessment**: *Internal Assessment* and *External Assessments*. Internal Assessments are those which are graded by the TOK teacher and are

given a score for the school's report card. External Assessments are those which will also be on transcripts but are assessed by an external IB grader. Like other DP courses, TOK does have external examinations; however, TOK has two assessments, each to be completed at the end of the corresponding year. The first year's assessment is the TOK Exhibition. The second year's assessment is the TOK Essay.

TOK Exhibition

The ToK Exhibition is an exciting opportunity for students to place a real-world context onto the ToK curriculum, ideas, and questions. The ToK Exhibition is completed in-house, much like internal examinations, but it is audited externally by an IB moderator. The exact format of the Willows Exhibition for the inaugural TOK class is to be determined; however, the purpose of the Exhibition is to publicly share a student's learning. Choosing three real world "objects" and then placing them into their real world contexts, students will use the objects to explain and describe aspects of TOK that have been gained in the first year.

TOK Essay

Similar to other courses in the DP, TOK offers a final, external examination near the end of the course. More information will be given about this essay in the second year of the program.

Internal Assessment

In addition to the external assessments in each year of the program, Willows Preparatory School will be internally assessing students. For the first year, we will be following a model similar to the IB MYP model, demonstrated below, that consists of Formative and Summative Assessments. Additionally, the ToK Exhibition will be counted toward Summative Scores for the entire year, but the ToK Essay in the second year will not, since it is entirely externally assessed.

Summative Assignments (Includes the ToK Exhibition)	- 80%
Formative Assessments	- 20%

Homework, Formative, and Summative Assignments

Tok is not designed as a homework-heavy course. However, it will be a reading-heavy course. A fair bit of this reading will take place during class time, as the goal of the class is to dive more deeply into concepts, questions, and ideas. However, there will be some outside class work, but all of this classwork is designed to enhance their learning not only in TOK by enhancing conceptual understanding but also across the curriculum. For this course, homework will take three forms, to be dispersed lightly throughout the semester:

1. Excerpt Reading: This mainly comes from the main course text, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, and the course textbook, which can be found on *Kognity*. Note: the goal of reading is to generate questions, ideas, and draw connections. It is not to absorb all the content or to analyze something. A general quip I often say: the reading should generate more questions than answers. Those questions are what we bring to class.
2. "Real-World Examples" Task: Students will often be asked to "go find real world examples." This type of homework is given to generate content to discuss in class. This will continue to grow throughout the semester.

3. **Revising Assessments:** Homework may involve revising assessments, especially those that are externally assessed. However, given the small size of the course, Summative Revisions are always possible if students communicate effectively.

Additionally, Formative grading will be based primarily on two factors: 1) class discussions and participation and 2) skills workshops. Coming to class with a curious mind and questions can be enough to fulfill this requirement.

Summative Assessments that are graded internally will occur less often than IB MYP students may be used to. However, their chief goal is to engage with course content and concepts, as well as to prepare students for the External Assessments. To this end, Summative Assessment revisions are possible if students communicate to the teacher. Scores will be given IB MYP standard, 0-8 scale, aligned with the WPS GPA converter. Ideally, students would revise their scores up to a minimum of a 6.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Integrity

ToK takes Academic Integrity seriously. As humanists and social scientists, we are compelled to be transparent and uphold academic honesty with great intention. For our class, we will follow the guidance of the Willows Preparatory School policy.

Technology Use Policy

Technology is a tremendous tool for good. It is also a challenging tool to master. This class makes two things about technology apparent: technology use for students in the 21st century is imperative *and* using technology at the middle school level is challenging. Thus, closely in line with Willows Preparatory School policy, we will be building our technology use skills through appropriate use. To help assist in this process, we will uphold the following policies:

- Students must uphold all aspects of the Willows Prep technology policy in class (See Mr. Kenta Sueyoshi's policy that students "sign" at the beginning of each year).
- Technology, above all, is a tool for learning that enhances education, not a tool for recreation and distraction. Any inappropriate use of technology will be reported to the Willows Prep administration after two reminders.
- Cell phone use in class is prohibited.

Brief Course Schedule Year 1 (Subject To Revision)

Included below is the simplified version of the course schedule for Year 1 in the ToK program. Students will receive a more detailed schedule to include readings, individual topics, and more upon starting the course.

Unit/Themes	Month/ Timeframe
<i>Knowledge and the Knower</i>	<i>Approximately 12 weeks</i>
<i>Knowledge and Language</i>	<i>Approximately 10 weeks</i>
<i>Knowledge and Politics</i>	<i>Approximately 10 weeks</i>
<i>ToK Exhibition</i>	<i>Approximately 6 weeks</i>

Please check and sign below

_____ *I have read the information and I fully understand what I'm expected to do in class.*

Student Signature: _____

Parent / Guardian Signature: _____