Knowledge and the knower

IB DP Theory of Knowledge Knowledge and the knower full package

Knowledge and the knower

- tell a **knowledge question** apart from a first-order question, and write your own;
- explain how **perspective**, **confirmation bias** and communities of knowers shape knowledge;
- compare the methods of the five areas of knowledge with real examples;

Knowledge and the knower (2)

- plan an essay on a **prescribed title** in five moves;
- choose three real objects for an **exhibition** prompt.

The knowledge question

- A **knowledge question** is a question about knowledge itself, not about the subject matter.
- A good **knowledge question** is **open** (more than one reasonable answer), **general** (about knowledge, not one fact) and uses TOK words: *know, evidence, certainty, interpretation, bias, expert, method*.

Knowledge and the knower ·

- Everyone knows from somewhere.
- Your language, culture, education and interests are your **perspective** .
- They help you see some things and hide others.
- A common trap is **confirmation bias** : noticing the evidence that supports what we already believe and ignoring the rest.

The five areas of knowledge

- The best TOK thinking compares areas: does "evidence", "proof" or "explain" mean the same in history as in the natural sciences?
- Check the conditions before using the result.

The essay on a prescribed title

- Unpack: an expert is a person with training who is trusted by a community; "important" can mean useful, or necessary.
- Natural sciences: peer review by experts catches mistakes before results are accepted.
- **Counterclaim**: experts rejected Marshall's evidence for years; in the end the evidence, not the experts' opinion, decided.

The essay on a prescribed title (2)

- The arts: here experts (critics, museums) partly *make* the knowledge: *Fountain* is famous art because the art world accepted it.
- Implication: in the sciences, expert opinion is a strong but correctable guide; in the arts, it helps decide what counts as knowledge at all.

The exhibition

- Each **object** must be real and specific: *this* weather app on your phone, not "weather apps" in general.
- Each commentary explains the object's real-world context, links it clearly to the prompt, and gives reasons with evidence.
- The three objects should show three different links to the prompt.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *__Theory of Knowledge__ guide* (first assessment 2022), including the specimen prescribed titles and the 35 **exhibition** prompts.
- International Astronomical Union, Resolution B5, "Definition of a Planet in the Solar System" (24 August 2006).
- B. Marshall and J. R. Warren, "Unidentified curved bacilli in the stomach of patients with gastritis and peptic ulceration", *The Lancet* (16 June 1984), and the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2005.

Sources for this lesson (2)

- E. Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (1933), on the Hawthorne studies.
- C. Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (1996), on *Fountain* (1917).
- F. C. Müller-Lyer, "Optische Urteilstäuschungen" (1889).

Common errors

- Asking a first-order question ("Is Pluto a planet?") instead of a **knowledge question** about how we know.
- Using a vague, invented example ("a scientist might ...") instead of a real, specific one.
- Giving a **counterclaim** and then ignoring it; the essay must weigh it.

Common errors (2)

- Writing about the two areas of knowledge separately, without comparing them.
- Choosing **exhibition** objects that are general ("social media") rather than specific ("this post on this day").
- Ending without implications: why the conclusion matters.

Key terms

- **Knowledge question**: an open, general question about knowledge itself, not about the subject matter.
- **Perspective**: the point of view, shaped by language, culture, education and interests, from which a knower sees.
- **Confirmation bias**: noticing evidence that supports what we already believe and ignoring the rest.

Key terms (2)

- **Community of knowers**: a group, such as scientists or historians, that decides together what counts as good evidence.
- **Area of knowledge**: one of the five fields TOK compares: history, the human sciences, the natural sciences, the arts and mathematics.
- **Counterclaim**: the strongest point against your claim.

Check yourself

- 1.
- Turn "Who came first in the class ranking?" into a **knowledge question**. 2.
- What are the three marks of a good knowledge question? 3.
- What changed in August 2006: Pluto, or something else? 4.