

theoryofknowledge.net



**SAMPLE PACK**

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# INTRODUCTION

## About theoryofknowledge.net

theoryofknowledge.net was set up in 2009 by Michael Dunn, a Cambridge and Edinburgh-educated History and TOK teacher.

Initially just a small homemade website, it quickly grew to become the most popular online resource for TOK in the world. It now comprises a free 200 page website accessed by up to 5500 users every day, an Android and iOS mobile app, a newsletter that is sent out in 2 versions to nearly 10,000 subscribers worldwide, a range of social media resources, and a range of teaching resources that have been purchased by individuals and schools in over 750 towns and cities in more than 100 countries around the world. This means that theoryofknowledge.net's ideas and strategies are an integral part of the learning process for thousands of IB Diploma students globally.



Amongst the resources that are produced by Michael are the TOK Sessions Packs, the Premium TOK Newsletter, and the TOK Essay Guide (co-written with Sue Bastian). Michael also offers a range of in-school workshops and seminars, designed for teachers and students of TOK. You will find detailed information about all of these from the website, or you can email Michael at [michael.dunn@theoryofknowledge.net](mailto:michael.dunn@theoryofknowledge.net).

## About the TED Companion

The TED talks provide us with the opportunity to listen to some of the world's best thinkers and talkers, on a huge array of subjects and ideas. Scientists rub shoulders with artists, atheists with those of religious faith, mathematicians with storytellers, psychologists with leaders of indigenous tribes.

theoryofknowledge.net's **TED Companion** is designed to enable teachers to tap into this wonderful collection of knowledge effortlessly, and use it to deepen students' understanding of the different components of TOK, as well as hook them up with the people who are responsible for shaping the way we currently view the world. Although it is aimed primarily at TOK teachers, it is also intended for use by other subject teachers, who wish to explore the nature of knowledge of their own subject, and ensure that the delivery of the Diploma is as integrated as possible.

The resource is very versatile, and can be used in a variety of ways, either in the classroom, or outside of it. Possible applications include:

1. As a way to introduce a way of knowing or area of knowledge (eg, Wade Davis on IKS)
2. As a way to introduce an issue within a WOK or AOK (eg, Naomi Oreskes on why we should put our trust in natural scientists)
3. As a prompt for discussion and debate, perhaps with students watching the relevant talk as preparation for a lesson (eg, Sam Harris on whether we can use the scientific method to arrive at ethical knowledge)
4. As way of challenging assumptions that students might have about knowledge acquisition and usage (eg Julian Baggini on whether 'you' exist)
5. As an entertaining opening, or end, to a class (eg, JR on the power of art)

The talks are arranged into different ways of knowing and areas of knowledge, and within each section ordered according to the length of talk. An outline of the talks is provided for teachers to view, with a short description of why each talk is worth talking. This also provides an indication of how the TED talks interlink and draw together different thoughts and ideas, and how each talk touches on more than one way of knowing and area of knowledge - something that should be borne in mind when looking for talks to support TOK teaching.

All of the talks here are informative and thought provoking, and as a whole they represent a huge range of philosophical, cultural, and academic perspectives. However, a select few are of special interest, perhaps because they perfectly encapsulate the way of knowing or area of knowledge they represent, perhaps because they offer a paradigm-altering experience for students (and teachers), or perhaps because they are particularly engaging, original, and interesting. These talks are indicated as an ★ESSENTIAL TALK★

## I. SAMPLE TALK ON THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

### 4. Is there a real you?

Julian Baggini, November 2011, 11.59, [NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE](#)

#### Link

[http://www.ted.com/talks/julian\\_baggini\\_is\\_there\\_a\\_real\\_you](http://www.ted.com/talks/julian_baggini_is_there_a_real_you)

#### About Julian Baggini

Julian Baggini is a philosopher and writer whose ideas have been published widely in the media, and a range of engaging books. He is editor-in-chief of the *Philosophers' Magazine*, and has worked as *Philosopher-in-residence* at Wellington College.

#### Why is this talk worth watching?

Even if we have moved on from a worldview based on Cartesian duality, we still think of ourselves as being an actual, real entity. But Baggini questions this most fundamental of assumptions, and helps us to reevaluate who we actually are.

#### WOKs/AOKs

[NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE](#), human sciences, memory, intuition, language

#### Questions on the talk

1	Why does JB's question seem like an obvious one?	We are conditioned to think that we have an essence or core that can be identified and labelled according to star sign, Facebook profile, or psychological profiling.	0.20
2	What is JB's contention?	He argues that there isn't a 'you' at the heart of all your experiences. Instead, what we 'are' is an amalgamation of memories, desires, sensations, and intentions – there is no separate entity experiencing all these things.	3.00
3	What analogy does he use to try to demonstrate that this idea is common sense, rather than 'weird'?	He argues that if you look at anything else in the universe, it is made up of its constituent parts, such as water (2 Hydrogen and 1 Oxygen atoms) or a watch (made up of mechanical parts). These bits are not attached to a separate entity called water or a watch.	5.00
4	How much support can you find for this way of thinking?	JB points out that it is a view that is found in Buddhism, that Locke and Hume both advocated it, and that it is found in modern neuroscience, which maintains that there is no central 'control spot' within the brain.	6.20

5	Does this mean that what we think of as our 'self' is an illusion?	Although there are psychologists who hold this view, JB does not think this is a helpful way of understanding this idea. Instead, he argues that we should think of ourselves as a constantly changing process, rather than a permanent 'thing'. He also believes this is liberating, as it allows us to improve and develop, and become something we want to be (within limits!).	7.50
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**Related knowledge questions and discussion points**

- To what extent are our ideas about our identity and self shaped by language?
- What are the implications of the realization that 'we' do not exist?
- Do religious knowledge systems help us to discover our identities?

## 2. SAMPLE TALK ON THE WAYS OF KNOWING

### 21. The politics of fiction

Elif Shafak, 2010, 19.46, *IMAGINATION* ★ESSENTIAL TALK★

#### Link

[http://www.ted.com/talks/elif\\_shafak\\_the\\_politics\\_of\\_fiction.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_politics_of_fiction.html)

#### About Elif Shafak

Elif Shafak is a writer whose books draw on a whole range of different themes and cultures, but for which one thing is vital: the imaginative story. She argues against pigeonholing artists and people due to race, culture, and identity, and asserts that fiction allows us to connect with others.

#### Why is this talk worth watching?

This is a fascinating approach to imagination, and what an important role it plays in helping us to empathize and understand other people. Some of her quotes – particularly the one in question 2 – are brilliantly effective and evocative.

#### WOKs/AOKs

*IMAGINATION*, the arts, human sciences, ethics, languages

#### Questions on the talk

1	What warning does ES give us about society?	She argues that we live in self-enclosed cultural cocoons, surrounded only by people who resemble ourselves. This leads to stereotyping of other people because we do not know them.	3.00
2	In what way does ES say imagination can overcome this?	By telling and listening to stories we can “punch holes through our mental walls”.	4.05
3	What did writing allow ES to begin doing when she was young?	Rather than write a journal describing herself, her writing let her enter other lives and possibilities, and different perspectives.	5.00
4	Why does ES write in different languages?	She feels Turkish and English both have their own inherent traits: the former, poetic and emotional; the latter, mathematical and cerebral.	8.45
5	How important is the element of the story within a book for ES?	She believes that stories lose their ‘magic’ the moment they are seen as more than stories (ie when they are deconstructed and more meaning is ascribed to it).	10.30

6	What problem does ES identify within the world of literature today?	Writers are increasingly being seen not as individuals, but as representatives of their cultures – something she experienced as an international student. This is particularly true of non-Western writers.	12.10
7	For ES, how do identity politics and fiction differ?	The former divides us; the latter connects us. She passionately believes stories transcend borders.	14.55
8	What role does imagination seem to play in ES's work?	Her way of writing embraces uncertainty and surprise, and she seems not to know where her stories are going. She suggests that perhaps we should not write what we know, but what we feel and imagine.	17.55

### Related knowledge questions and discussion points

- Do the arts make us 'better' people?
- How important is imagination in empathizing with other people?
- What defines us as human beings – and does that question disconnect us from others?

### 3. SAMPLE TALK ON THE AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE

#### 66. We need a moral “operating system”

Damon Horowitz, May 2011, 16.18, *ETHICS*

##### Link

[http://www.ted.com/talks/damon\\_horowitz](http://www.ted.com/talks/damon_horowitz)

##### About Damon Horowitz

Damon Horowitz is a philosopher and a digital entrepreneur. He now works as Google’s ‘in-house philosopher’, focusing on how Google’s technology can be harnessed to help advance social development.

##### Why should you watch this talk?

Horowitz is very good at pointing out the importance of ethics, and why it should play a larger role in our lives. He also runs through some of the most influential moral theories that have ever been propounded, which is helpful for us as we seek to understand ethics.

##### WOKs/AOKs

*ETHICS*, human sciences, reason

##### Questions on the talk

1	Why does DH think that the result of the straw poll he conducts is ‘horrifying’?	The audience all have an answer to which mobile phone they prefer to use, but they can’t say which moral framework is preferable in terms of providing us with guidance on how to live our lives correctly.	3.00
2	What does DH want in terms of ethical knowledge?	He wants “objective truth” about ethics - not mere opinion; knowledge with the same level of certainty as is found in mathematics.	6.10
3	What are the two moral positions typified by Plato and Aristotle?	Plato argued that it was possible to find objective truths in ethics. Aristotle believes that “we should seek only so much precision in each subject as the subject allows.” – and that ethics should be approached on a case-by-case basis.	7.10
4	Who else does DH draw on to debate what form our ‘moral operating system’ should take?	He looks at the difference between Mill and Kant. Mill argued that we could calculate the morality of an action by measuring end versus means. Kant argued that things were intrinsically right or wrong, and we can assess that by using reason.	9.20

5	Why is ethics 'uncomfortable', according to DH?	Because it is very difficult, and it cannot be done by building a machine to do the thinking for us. He argues that we must all be involved in ethics, or evil will prevail in the world (see Arendt).	11.20
6	What is "crucial to making ethical decisions", according to DH?	DH says that you should try to discuss ethics with people from a different background to you, in order to gain insight into how others approach morality.	13.40

### Related knowledge questions and discussion points

- How certain is ethical knowledge?
- Should we base our ethical decision-making on principles?
- Which way of knowing is the most important one to provide us with ethical knowledge?

# STUDENT HANDOUTS FOR THESE TALKS

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