
Stoic Week for Students

Instructor's Guide



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The contents of this handbook are not intended as a substitute for medical advice or treatment. Any person with a condition requiring medical attention should consult a qualified medical practitioner or suitable therapist. These materials are not intended for anyone who has untreated psychosis, personality disorder, clinical depression, PTSD, or other severe mental health problems. By using these materials the participant acknowledges that they are aware of and accept responsibility in relation to the foregoing.

Part 1

Getting Started

with Stoicism

Background for Instructors

Welcome to Stoic Week! Whether you are a teacher, parent, or mentor, we are so glad you've decided to share Stoicism with the young people in your life. We at Modern Stoicism have created this course to be as accessible and relevant as possible to students ages 13-15. But we know that the most important ingredient of all is YOU! You are the role model and inspiration that teens will look up to as we discuss Stoic philosophy. We put together this guide to help you guide your student(s) through this fun and informative dive into Stoicism.

Stoicism is a Hellenistic philosophy that developed within the philosophical traditions of ancient Greece. Along with other Greek philosophies like Epicureanism and Skepticism, Stoicism was very influential in both Greek and Roman culture for about 500 years. Even after it faded from public view, Stoic philosophy continued to influence early and medieval Christianity. Stoicism also helped shape Western philosophy through figures such as Augustine, Kant, Adam Smith, and Thoreau.

More recently, the wider public has once again become interested in Stoicism due to its proven success as a philosophy of life. In the second half of the 20th century, scholars such as Christopher Gill, Julia Annas, A.A. Long, and many others made great strides reconstructing the ancient philosophy. (This was no easy task since almost all of the early texts have now been lost.) This scholarly endeavor led to a new appreciation for the coherence and usefulness of Stoicism in the modern era.

In the early 21st century, members of the Modern Stoicism team, such as John Sellars, Donald Robertson, and Tim LeBon came together to discuss the applications of Stoicism to modern life. In particular, they were interested in Stoicism's relationship to psychotherapy. Both cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) use cognitive techniques first developed by the ancient Stoics. Many of these ideas are now regularly used to help patients overcome harmful patterns of thinking and to promote mental health.

During Stoic Week, we would like to share some of these time-tested techniques with your students. Our goal is to get students thinking. We want them to start asking questions about what it means to live a good life, or how they can become more resilient. Even if students don't agree with some parts of Stoicism, our main purpose is to help them think through these issues for themselves. We believe these are topics that can impact their lifelong mental health and well-being.

Thank you again for your participation. If any issues arise during the course, feel free to reach out to the Modern Stoicism team through our webpage.

Additional Resources

Below you will find some general resources for adults. This is primarily background information for you as you present the lessons, but you may be able to adapt some of these materials for use with older or more advanced students.

Online Material

- *Stoicism Today* is a weekly publication produced by Modern Stoicism. You can browse the complete archives and search for particular topics.
- You can find the meditations used in this Handbook in the Stoic Week for Students resource file on the Modern Stoicism webpage.
- The Gregory B. Sadler YouTube channel contains hundreds of videos on Stoicism, ancient philosophy, and philosophy from all eras.
- An early video on practical philosophy by Jules Evans, *How Philosophy Can Save Your Life*, explains how he became interested in Stoic philosophical ideas as a teenager:
<https://youtu.be/XuwYvFINGns>

Books for a General Audience

- *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*, by William B. Irvine. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- *A Handbook for New Stoics: How to Thrive in a World Out of Your Control*, by Massimo Pigliucci and Gregory Lopez. The Experiment, 2019.
- *Being Better: Stoicism for a World Worth Living In*, by Kai Whiting and Leonidas Konstantakos. New World Library, 2021.
- *How to Be a Stoic: Using Ancient Philosophy to Live a Modern Life*, by Massimo Pigliucci. Basic Books, 2017.
- *How to Think Like a Roman Emperor: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius*, by Donald Robertson. St. Martin's Press, 2019.
- *Lessons in Stoicism: What Ancient Philosophers Teach Us About How to Live*, by John Sellars. Penguin, 2020.
- *Stoic Serenity: A Practical Course on Finding Inner Peace*, by Keith Seddon. Lulu, 2006.
- *Stoic Spiritual Exercises*, by Elen Buzaré. Lulu, 2011.
- *Stoicism and the Art of Happiness: Practical Wisdom for Everyday Life*, by Donald Robertson. Teach Yourself, 2018.
- *The Art of Living: The Classic Manual on Virtue, Happiness, and Effectiveness*, by Sharon Lebell. HarperOne, 1995.
- *The Practicing Stoic: A Philosophical User's Manual*, by Ward Farnsworth. David R. Godine, 2018.

Scholarly Books on Stoicism

- *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life*, by A. A. Long. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- *Manual of Reformed Stoicism*, by Piotr Stankiewicz. Vernon Press, 2020.
- *Stoicism and Emotion*, by Margaret R. Graver. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

- *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, by Pierre Hadot, translated by Michael Chase. Harvard University Press, 2001.
- *Stoicism*, by John Sellars. University of California Press, 2006.
- *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy*, by John Sellars. Bristol Classical Press, 2009.
- *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, edited by Brad Inwood. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection*, by Gretchen Reydam-Schils. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- *The Routledge Handbook of the Stoic Tradition*, edited by John Sellars. Routledge, 2016.
- *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, edited by Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson. Hackett Publishing, 2008.

Scholarly Books on Ancient Philosophy

- *Cicero: The Philosophy of a Roman Sceptic*, by Raphael Woolf. Routledge, 2015.
- *Hellenistic Philosophy*, by John Sellars. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- *The Morality of Happiness*, by Julia Annas. Oxford University Press, 1993.



Part 2

Stoic Week

Monday: Emotions

Optional Activity

- Play the “Mind the Gap” meditation for your students. This is located in the Stoic Week for Students resource file on the Modern Stoicism webpage.
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Tuesday: Resilience

Optional Activity: Imagining Situations

Think about some events or situations that would be difficult for you, trying to come up with around three things. Start with something that is just a tiny bit stressful but not too majorly awful, then work up to things that are a little bit more stressful. For example, like we were saying, your phone going flat, forgetting a password for something, you can't find the top you want to wear. Then, when you are more confident, you can move onto more stressful things, like you lost some money or can't find your phone.

Starting with the least scary event on your list. Try to imagine it actually happening *as much as you can as if you are experiencing it right now*. How do you feel? What are you doing or saying? When you feel *totally into* the situation you have imagined then use relaxation techniques to get back to a nice calm state. For example, you can try breathing in for five and then out for five, nice and slowly, or you can imagine your favorite place, like being in the park in the sun. Say the useful words over to yourself, like “*everything is figureoutable*” (this isn't a real word, but it's super helpful!). See if you can manage to really imagine the situation whilst also staying super calm. Think about how many people you have who might be able to help you and the strength and ideas you could bring to the situation if you did have to face it. What could you do or say that would be helpful? What could you remind yourself of?

Are there any things you could do that are under your control that would be helpful if this situation was to occur?

When you get to a point *when you are calm and feel strong whilst imagining the situation*, you have worked on that situation. You are then ready to move onto the next one if you want to try to do all three things you thought of. Remember, this is about being able to face the challenges of life with all the resources you have. It is not about learning to “not care.” You are reminding yourself that if these things did happen, you could still act with good character.

Let’s look at the example on the next page. After reading the example, try it yourself in the next column.

Horrible event	Losing my phone	
How stressful does this event feel when you imagine it happening? (0-10)	This is quite stressful for me when I imagine it as I rely on my phone a lot, so I would say 5. I feel anxiety that someone could somehow use it to get access to my bank accounts, etc., or that they would read my texts or access my social media and post something stupid in my name.	
What could you say to yourself that would help you if it did happen?	That I have dealt with much worse things than this and been completely fine. That my initial stressed out response in my body will go away pretty quickly, it’s just my “animal brain” trying to keep me safe.	
What is under your control and would help if this situation was to occur?	I can make sure I know all the steps to take if you lose your phone. I could print these out and keep it in my diary as a “step by step” guide of what to do if this happens.	
How stressful is the event once you have “worked on it”? (0-10)	After spending some time on this, where I imagined my phone has been stolen and then used breathing exercises and useful phrases, it has gone down to a 2. I think it helped that I have also worked more on what I can do if this does happen.	

Wednesday: The Value of Friendships

Virtues and Preferred Indifferents

Aristotle is widely known for his list of virtues, vices and a “golden mean” between them that would be the path to eudaimonia (well-being or flourishing). In Aristotle’s view, some things that were on the vice end of the spectrum at large quantities might also be virtues in smaller quantities (meaning that moderation in all things led to a happy and balanced life).

The Stoics had a different approach to following this path.

“*Summum Bonum* was the expression from Cicero, Rome’s greatest orator. In Latin, it means “the highest good.” And what is the highest good? What is it that we are supposed to be aiming for in this life? To the Stoics, the answer is virtue. They said that everything we face in life was an opportunity to respond with virtue. Even bad situations. Even painful or scary ones. If we act virtuously, they believed, everything else important could follow: Happiness, success, meaning, reputation, honor, love.” (from Ryan Holiday: *The Highest Good*, <https://dailystoic.com/4-stoic-virtues/>)

The four Stoic virtues, more valuable than all other valued things in life, are: courage, wisdom, moderation and justice. These are the four virtues we have control over in our lives, and putting them at the top of our preferences, above the other things we feel we want or need to make us happy, leads to living a virtuous life.

This class is designed to help a teacher walk through a discussion about the true value of friendships. The concept of “lexicographic preferences” in economics shows that people value some things inherently above other things and the ranking of these things into A, B and C lists can help us to see how Stoic virtues will always rank to the top and the others will be “preferred” but not necessary to happiness.

The ranking into these groups stimulates a conversation about the requirements for having a “good life” or being a “good person.” For instance, are some things from the A list really necessary, or merely preferable? The class can go further into discussing the four Stoic virtues and whether they are necessary or preferred to other virtues (for instance in Aristotle’s list).

A group (necessary)	B group (preferred but not necessary)	C group (neutral)
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Thursday: Nature & Community

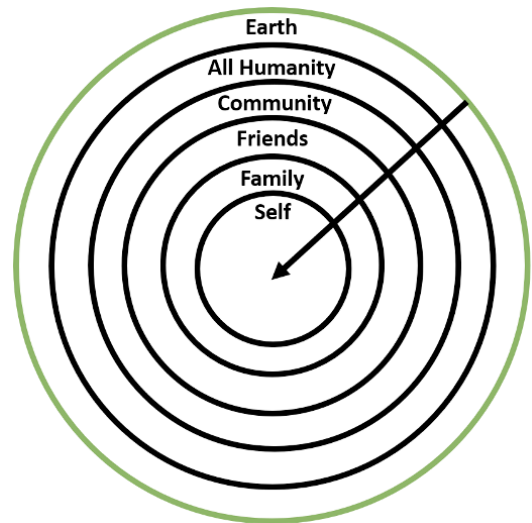
A Stoic View on the Environment and Cosmopolitanism

The Stoics have developed a way to visualize the Self, Other, and Environment in a unique way. This lesson will help to initiate conversations about relationships in widening circles, and the responsibilities that we each have to the greater whole of this planet. It is important to encourage young people, who are drawn to consider the earth's future in connection to their own future, to see themselves as central in this process of building community. This lesson should provide a starting point for discussing the ethics of being motivated to care about oneself, one's kin group and species, and ultimately all life on the planet.

The Stoic framework can be helpful in leading us to make the kind of response in action that is called for by the environmental crisis, and to conceive this response in a positive way. The Stoics think human beings (like other animals) have an in-built instinct to take care of themselves and others of our kind. Because of our distinctive capacity for rationality this takes a complex form, that of developing the virtues, in a way that benefits ourselves as well as those affected by our actions. A useful activity here is the Stoic exercise of the 'widening circles', imagining all the different wider communities that we're a part of.

The circles visually portray the Stoic belief that a reasonable person's relationship with others starts with the circle of the "self" and expands into "family," "community," "nation," and "all humanity", and finally, the "Earth". These circles allow us to recognize ourselves in all of humanity and all of humanity in ourselves. It leads to an understanding that Stoicism is more about collective obligations, responsibilities and civic duty than an individual's rights, a sentiment which is nicely captured by Marcus Aurelius when he says:

What brings no benefit to the hive brings no benefit to the bee
Meditations 6.54



Meditation

- Play the Circles of Care meditation for students, then discuss their responses. This is located in the Stoic Week for Students resource file on the Modern Stoicism webpage.

Friday: Identity & Character

Here's another Stoic perspective on identity, this time from Epictetus. Someone probably asked Epictetus (Discourse 2.10), "How may the actions that are appropriate to a person be discovered?" In other words, how do we know what we're supposed to do in life? Epictetus's answer is interesting. He says we should consider the roles we play in life, and based on those roles, we will know what we're supposed to do and how we're supposed to act. Let's take a look at some of those roles.

Consider who you are. First of all, a human being.

What is more, you're a citizen of the world and a part of it.

Remember next that you're a son [or daughter].

Know next that you are also a brother [or sister].

If you're sitting on the council of some city, remember that you're a councilor; if you're young, remember that you're young; if you're old, remember that you're old; if a father [or mother], remember that you're a father [or mother]. For each of these names, if carefully considered, indicates the actions that are appropriate to it.

Now fill in the table below.

Role	Give an example from your life.	How does this guide your actions?
Human Being		
Citizen of the World		
Family Relationships		
Social/Community Roles		

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be a citizen of the world? Do you think this is an important role?
2. Are your current roles different from your future roles? How are they alike or different?
3. Do you know of any role models whose behavior could guide your own actions?
4. How is Epictetus's discussion of identity similar to Cicero's four characters?

Supplemental Reading

John Sellars, *Cicero on Living a Stoic Life*

<https://modernstoicism.com/cicero-on-living-a-stoic-life-by-john-sellars/>

About the Authors



Brittany Polat is a writer and researcher on Stoicism as a way of life. She is the creator of *Living in Agreement*, a website on Stoic moral psychology, and co-creator of *Stoicare*, an online hub for teachers, parents, medical professionals, and all Stoics who care. Brittany holds a Ph.D. in applied linguistics with a focus on individual differences in second language development. Her latest book is *Tranquility Parenting: A Guide to Staying Calm, Mindful, and Engaged*.



Eve Riches is a Stoicism based mentor and coach. She is an advisor to the Aurelius Foundation, and also runs the online group, London Stoics. Eve is the co-creator of Stoicare with Brittany Polat. Eve also works as an employment consultant, supporting autistic adults and teens. Eve is registered blind / severely sight impaired and credits Stoic teaching with being able to live well with disability.



Amy Valladares, Ph.D., discovered ancient Stoic philosophy as a freshman in college, and then rediscovered it during a midlife crisis. She credits her “natural Stoicism” to the “school of hard knocks,” getting her through some tough times. Amy’s anthropology training has led her to self-study the ancient sources, take part in modern community-building and create a personal Stoic practice. She co-organized the Stoicons in New York (2016), Toronto (2017), London (2018) and Athens (2019). As a teacher of middle and high school students, she has stealthily incorporated ideas of Stoic philosophy into classes about everyday life.