

Empiricism & Rationalism

Lorde and Plato

Guiding Question: How do we come to know what is real or true—and what role do reason, experience, and imagination play in that process?

Empiricism – knowledge gained through sensory experience

Rationalism – knowledge gained through reason and abstract thinking

In small groups, answer the following, using **specific quotations** from both texts.

1. What keeps people “in the cave”?

- In Plato: What traps the prisoners in illusion?
- In Lorde: What prevents people from imagining or articulating deeper truths?

Is ignorance for each caused by *false sensory experience*, *lack of reason*, or something else entirely?

Chosen quotes used for evidence:

Lorde:

Plato:

2. What counts as a path to truth?

- For Plato, how does someone move from illusion to knowledge?
- For Lorde, how does poetry function as a way of knowing?

Is Plato suspicious of the senses? Why? Is Lorde suspicious of “pure” reason without feeling or lived experience? Why?

Chosen quotes used for evidence:

Lorde:

Plato:

3. Is imagination a weakness or a necessity?

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- Plato worries about images and shadows—but still uses an allegory. Why?
- Lorde argues poetry is *not* a luxury. What work does imagination do that logic alone cannot?

Does imagination distort truth, or make truth possible?

Chosen quotes used for evidence:

Lorde:

Plato:

4. Who is responsible for sharing knowledge?

- What happens when the freed prisoner returns to the cave?
- Who is Lorde speaking to, and what does she ask them to do with their insights?

Is knowledge dangerous? Liberating? Both?

Chosen quotes used for evidence:

Lorde:

Plato:

Large Group Discussion:

Which text do you find more convincing about how humans come to know truth—and why?