

# Lesson Plan: The Great Philosophical Shift - A Sophie's World Board Game

**Subject:** Philosophy, History, Literature, Game Design

**Student Age:** 15

**Core Text:** *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder (Chapters 14, 15, and 16)

**Lesson Focus:** This lesson moves beyond simple comprehension to creative application. You will analyze the monumental shift in thinking from the God-focused Middle Ages to the human-focused Renaissance and the tension-filled Baroque period. Your main project will be to design and prototype a board game that captures this intellectual journey.

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## Materials Needed

- A copy of *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder
  - Notebook or digital document for notes
  - Large sheet of paper, poster board, or a blank cardboard game board
  - Index cards or small pieces of cardstock (at least 20-30)
  - Markers, colored pencils, or pens
  - Dice (one or two)
  - Small objects to use as player tokens (e.g., coins, buttons, small figurines)
  - Optional: Ruler, scissors, glue
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## Lesson Activities

### Part 1: The Philosopher's Compass (30 minutes)

**Goal:** To understand the core differences between the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque periods as presented in the book.

Hello! Today, we're going to explore one of the most dramatic periods of change in Western thought. It's like watching the world switch from seeing everything in black and white to suddenly discovering a full spectrum of color, and then learning how to use shadows and light. We're not just going to read about it; we're going to build a game that shows how it happened.

1. **Warm-Up Question:** If you had to describe the "vibe" of the Middle Ages (Chapter 14) in one word, what would it be? Now, do the same for the Renaissance (Chapter 15). What does the difference between your two words tell you?
  2. **Comparative Chart:** Open your notebook and create a three-column chart. Label the columns: **The Middle Ages (Ch. 14)**, **The Renaissance (Ch. 15)**, and **The Baroque (Ch. 16)**. As you quickly review the chapters, fill in the chart with bullet points for the following rows:
    - **Central Focus:** Was it God, humanity, or something else?
    - **Source of Truth:** Where did people look for answers? (e.g., faith, scripture, human reason,
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scientific observation)

- **Key Philosophers:** List one or two major thinkers for each era (e.g., Thomas Aquinas, Descartes).
- **Big Idea:** Write one sentence that you think summarizes the main philosophy of the time. For example, for the Middle Ages, it might be: "All life is a preparation for salvation in the next world."

### 3. Discussion:

- Looking at your chart, what was the biggest "casualty" of the shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance? What idea or belief was most challenged?
- The Baroque era is described as a time of tension and drama. Where did that tension come from? (Hint: Think about the clash between the ideas in your first two columns).

## Part 2: The Game Designer's Blueprint (45 minutes)

**Goal:** To brainstorm and outline the rules and structure of your board game, "The Great Shift."

Now, let's become game designers. The best games aren't just fun; they tell a story through their rules. Our game will tell the story of moving from a world dominated by faith to one celebrating human reason and wrestling with doubt.

### 1. The Core Concept:

- **Game Title:** Let's call it "The Great Shift," but feel free to invent your own!
- **Winning the Game:** What is the ultimate goal for a player? Is it to be the first to reach the "Age of Enlightenment" space at the end of the board? Or is it to collect a certain number of "Insight" tokens by correctly answering philosophical questions? Decide on your win condition.

### 2. The Game Board:

- Sketch a rough draft of your game board. It doesn't need to be perfect. Think about the path. Is it a straight line representing a timeline? Is it a winding path moving from a dark castle (Middle Ages) to a vibrant city (Renaissance) and then through a stormy landscape (Baroque)?
- Divide the path into three distinct sections, one for each era. The spaces and challenges should be different in each section. For example, the Middle Ages section might have more spaces related to faith and the Church, while the Renaissance section has spaces related to art, science, and exploration.

### 3. Game Mechanics & Cards:

This is where the philosophy comes alive! Let's design the cards players will draw. Get your index cards ready.

- **"Providence/Fate" Cards (for the Middle Ages section):** These cards represent the idea that life is divinely ordained.
  - *Example:* "You have devoted your life to prayer. Your faith is rewarded. Move ahead 2 spaces."
  - *Example:* "A plague sweeps the land. You see it as God's will. Lose one turn contemplating eternity."
- **"Humanist" Cards (for the Renaissance section):** These cards celebrate human potential, discovery, and creativity.
  - *Example:* "You rediscover the lost works of Aristotle! Gain an extra 'Insight' token."
  - *Example:* "Your new anatomical drawings are a masterpiece of science and art. Take an extra turn."
- **"Dilemma" Cards (for the Baroque section):** These cards reflect the conflict between

faith and reason, idealism and materialism.

- *Example:* "Descartes' Dualism: You ponder if you are a mind or a body. Miss one turn to think 'I think, therefore I am.'"
- *Example:* "The Church questions your new astronomical model. You can either recant and move back 4 spaces, or hold your ground and lose your next two turns."

**Your Task:** Write at least 3-4 example cards for each of the three categories.

### Part 3: The Creator's Workshop (60 minutes or ongoing project)

**Goal:** To create a working prototype of your board game.

Time to bring your blueprint to life! Don't worry about making it a polished, finished product today. The goal is to create a playable prototype that you can test and improve later.

1. **Build the Board:** Using your poster board and markers, draw the final path for your game. Add illustrations or symbols to spaces. Label the three main sections (Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque). Don't forget a "Start" and "Finish."
2. **Finalize the Cards:** Write out your game cards clearly on the index cards. Try to create at least 5-7 cards for each category to start. You can always add more later! Create a space on your board to place the three different decks.
3. **Write the Rules:** On a separate piece of paper (or the back of the board), write a simple "How to Play" guide. It should include:
  - The goal of the game (the win condition).
  - What to do on your turn (e.g., "Roll the dice, move your token, and follow the instructions on the space you land on.").
  - How the different card decks work.
4. **Assemble:** Grab your tokens and dice. Set up your game as if you were about to play it for the first time.

### Wrap-Up & Reflection (15 minutes)

**Goal:** To articulate the connection between your creative choices and the philosophical ideas from the book.

Fantastic work! Now, step back and look at what you've created. Let's reflect on how your game is more than just a game.

1. **The Designer's Pitch:** Explain your game to me as if you were pitching it to a publisher.
  - How does the journey on your game board reflect the historical and philosophical journey Sophie takes in these chapters?
  - Pick one card you created. Explain how its effect in the game represents a key idea from that philosophical era.
  - What was the most challenging part of turning these complex philosophical ideas into a simple game mechanic?
2. **Next Steps:** What is one thing you would add or change after playing your game once? Maybe you need more "Dilemma" cards, or a special rule for when two players land on the same space? The best games evolve through play!