

Children must be taught
how to think, not what to
think

The Outline

I Introduction:

A) The importance of teaching children how to think and not what to think.

B) Thesis Statement:

Historical evidence such as the events that led to the death of Socrates, the Nazi German genocide and the story of Musa and the gold cattle provide us with an understanding of the importance of critical thinking. This can be developed in a child by encouraging their curiosity, building a habit of reading etc. The nurturing of this ability will help the world society to progress as a whole.

II Lessons from the past underscoring the importance of developing critical thinking in children.

A) Socrates 'corrupting the youth' and his eventual execution

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- b) The acceptance of Nazi German Society of genocide.
 - c) Hazrat Musa (AS) and the gold cow.

III How can critical thinking be fostered in a child?

- a) By encouraging their curiosity and imagination.
- b) Reading books and asking open ended questions.
- c) Problems solving activities, discussions and solving puzzles.

IV Fostering a child's critical thinking and the progress of Society.

- ~~a) Innovation and problem solving~~
- ~~b) Informed decision making~~
- ~~c) Ethical decision making~~

v) Conclusion.

- a) The importance of critical thinking
- b) Developing critical thinking in children

g)

Earlier this year, the 13 year old Bisma from Karachi was invited by NASA, the renowned space agency, to showcase her abilities at their camp. It makes one wonder what was different about this child, to invent anti-sleep glasses for drivers, where Pakistan has so far failed to produce its next Arfa Kareem. It most definitely had involved her critical thinking abilities; she was taught how to think, not what to think. History provides us with ample evidence of nations where children and resultant adults lacked critical thinking. Examples of Socrates execution, the Nazi German support for genocide, USA's own genocidal history are a few examples of people lacking critical thinking and being nothing more than sheep. It is of utmost importance to not follow on this path and learn from our ancestors mistakes by developing critical thinking skills. This can be achieved by inciting a child's curiosity and imagination, evoking empathy.

telling them ask questions and asking them questions, guiding them instead of leading and by telling them explore the world. By fostering the development of these critical minds, the world will surely harvest the fruit through their innovation, problem-solving attitudes, their sense of justice and humanity which would ultimately allow society of humanity to prosper.

We are fortunate to not be one of the first ones to arrive on this earth. The water, older than earth itself, and the sky have witnessed millions of lives. These lives are our best informants, history is our best teacher. To understand the importance of developing critical thinking in children can truly be understood in concrete terms by what it can do to society when not fostered and nurtured. The most prominent examples might be of the genocidal culture of the Germans, USA wiping out natives, the Israelites being allowed by millions to enforce 'The Nakba' and many more. These events have had tremendous impact on our history so it is important, no crucial, to understand

how and why this occurred, the lack of critical thinking might be the culprit.

Picture Socrates, a man of critical thinking facing certain death, accused of the most heinous crime known to Athens; corrupting the youth. It is indeed a curious crime to be convicted of. How did he do it? Was he inciting the young minds to rebellion? or immorality or ~~indeed~~ murder? The answer is a resounding no. Socrates was trying to enlighten the young minds. His famous Socratic method, asking questions from students till they arrive at a definition of a phenomenon or object that was irrefutable and flawless, is used as a teaching technique by teachers all over the world. This method allows the individual to develop critical thinking and thus question reality and society as it has been taught. When Socrates successfully inculcated these ability in his students, they started to question the substance and existence of the pantheon of Greek gods. The mobs involved gods against Socrates as he was dragged

to his execution. Not one stood up and questioned whether he was right. The lack of critical thinking and instead being told by the elites about what to think led to the extinguishes of the mind ~~that~~ ^{whose philosophy} will light the minds of millions centuries later.

A question that repeatedly pops up in ones mind while going through the second world war; why did no one stop the Jewish genocide? How did society fail the 6 million Jews so greatly? The answer is simple. Children were taught that the Jews were the reason for all their despair. They were told not to question this reality, why did no one stop and question why the Nazi pamphlets depicted Jews as vermins being exterminated by the Germans? Because they saw and accepted this as a reality, the Jews were xels to be exterminated by the carageous and Just Nazis. Imagine if the children and youth had se taught how to think critically instead of what to think? what would have the situation looked like then? Probably close to what it looks

like now as people realize the lies and manipulation that the Israelis are participating in against the Palestinians. Hence it would be reasonable to conclude that teaching children how to think could have possibly prevented genocide.

The case for developing critical thinking in children can probably be drawn from the Quran. In Surah Al-An'Am Allah says, "If you were to follow the majority, they would surely lead you away from Allah..." A lesson can be drawn that how can one avoid the trap of falling into this 'mob mentality' and thus remain towards the single truth of this world, i.e. Allah? Teaching children ~~what~~ how to think and not what to think would greatly solve this dilemma. 'An'Am' means 'The cattle' and one can surely learn the value of developing critical thinking skills from the story of Prophet Musa (AS) and the Gold Cattle (cow). Musa (AS) had withdrawn for a period of 40 days to converse with God after delivering the Truth to his people. In his absence,

The people were led astray by a man who built a gold cow that was hollow and so made a sound whenever wind moved through it. The people of Mosa did not question whether this unbreathing, unmoving, inanimate object was the god who parted the sea for them. They lacked ^{the} skill of how to think and hence independent thought. This led them to err greatly which they would have ~~not~~ if they had be taught how to think critically.

After comprehending the importance of why critical thinking is ^{crucial} ~~important~~, the next step is to develop ways to nurture this ability in the fresh and blank minds of children. or 'Tabula Rasa', Blank slates, as Locke called them. Like blank slates one can easily imprint ideas on their young minds. They can be taught what to think, what to hate, to love, to deny, to accept and so on. As children, people in USA are taught that they are the saviors of humanity, their morals and values are supreme and need to be embedded in others as well. This thinking has led

to the development of many a minds like Ben Shapiro, a political commentator, who believe in their American superiority and have openly supported that democracy should be bombed into the people of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Afghanistan.

The world has slowly moved towards an education system that has done more to indoctrinate young minds than it has to let them think openly and freely so that they might one day impact our human society positively.

One way to nurture critical thinking in children is by inciting their curiosity. Children are naturally curious beings. All humans, at one point in their lives, must have encountered a toddler, rattling off questions of this and that. Most parents, their first teachers, might find this annoying and hand them a phone or any screen just to experience some peace and quiet. However, this simple act has the tremendous consequence of shutting down any child's curious nature.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, a prominent philosopher of the Enlightenment period, wrote the book 'Emile' which means 'On Education'. In this

book, Rousseau highlights the importance of encouraging a child's curiosity and allowing him to grow naturally without interference. Not many parents might be aware, that the rapid imagery and colourfulness of books like 'Cocomelon' actually deaden a child's imagination and curiosity. And this is an interference in the child's development as Rousseau has pointed out. Curiosity will allow the child to ask questions which will nurture his ability to think critically, much like Socrates did with his student, Plato.

Reading books polishes a person's ability to think critically. It introduces him to a new world of ideas and broadens his mind. While children might not be capable of reading Rousseau, Aristotle or Socrates, they can understand simple concepts of moralistic stories. After reading them the story of 'Goldilocks and the three bears' for instance, the parent might ask the child to provide her views on the story. Asking her questions about what she thought was good about the story or what.

lesson she can draw from it will develop in her an ability to not accept any story as narrated to her but to question it till all doubts of her mind have been cleared. This will inevitably allow her to develop a critical thinking style. She will learn how to draw her own conclusions and will think independently.

Involving a child in problem solving discussions and puzzles will also allow her to fit the metaphorical puzzle pieces together of any problem she encounters. Involve your child in problem-solving whenever she encounters a problem. Ask her opinion on matters of import. For instance, a parent might go couch shopping and be confused between two options. It would benefit the child to ask her of her opinion of which one they should get. Provide her with the facts such as the price and comfortability of each couch. She might choose the wrong one, but guide her, ask her open-ended questions of why she thinks that either is a good or bad choice. Instead of just ignoring her or buying one despite her

opinion, this method will foster confidence in herself and she will learn not only to question others but also herself. As Aristotle, the philosopher said, "It is the characteristic of a great mind to entertain a thought without accepting it." So developing his critical thinking ability in her will produce the greatness of thought in her.

Teaching and allowing a child to develop skills to think critically instead of dictating them will lead to the progress of society as a whole. This world has yet to produce the great minds of the scientific revolution, or painters like Van Gogh, or revolutionary writers like the Brontë sisters or great philosophical minds like René Descartes, Aristotle, Plato, Karl Popper and the list goes on. This is not to say the world has not produced greatness since, but the progress achieved during these eras have remained unmatched. These men and women have revolutionized the world stage and the world can only continue to produce these great minds by etching into the minds of the youth the skills of critical thinking.

In a nutshell, the importance of teaching children how to think and not what to think can be highlighted through events such as the execution of Socrates, the culture that allowed the unquestioned genocide of Jews and the story of Moses and the gold cow. These stories present a commonality of the audience who did not question of what their leaders did but blindly followed them much like sheep. Thus it is of utmost importance to nourish the young minds of children by encouraging their curiosity, involving them in problem solving activities and by reading books and asking open ended questions. This will bear the fruits for society as it progresses just as it did in the 18th century and before. The essence of indulging a child's critically thinking is captured aptly by Maria Montessori

"The goal of early childhood education is to activate the child's own natural desire to learn."