

## PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue are learned skills: Everyone can acquire them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about opera.

You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone whose views differ from your own. That’s the point! Take your time with each statement, embrace uncertainty, and know that changing your mind as you learn new information is a sign of strength. Before you begin your discussion, take some time to review the rules of engagement:

**Be sure you understand the statement.** If something is unclear, ask!

**Face each other.** Body language helps show that you’re listening.

**Only one speaker at a time.** Everyone will get their turn to speak.

**Think before you speak.** Be sure that what you’re going to say is what you really mean, and remember that we can disagree while still being kind.

**Summarize the previous person’s comments before adding your own.** This will show that you have heard their thoughts and are responding thoughtfully to what they said. It will also help avoid misunderstandings and faulty assumptions.

**Address ideas, not the person.** Challenging ideas or statements is great—but only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.

**Three before me.** After you’ve spoken, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

### THE STATEMENTS

- Everyone has secrets.
- You can’t run away from your past.
- Society should clearly delineate gender norms.
- All men experience anger, rage, and a desire to fight.
- The world needs more masculinity.
- Your identity is personal.
- You are who the world says you are.
- Teasing and taunting others is harmless.
- “Man up” is a harmless phrase.
- Who you love defines who you are.
- My words and actions affect others’ self-worth.
- My words and actions affect my own self-worth.
- You should be quick to judge yourself.
- You will only feel guilty if you’ve done something wrong.
- It is easier to forgive others than yourself.
- Everyone deserves a second chance.
- I am enough.