

A GUIDE FOR HOME EDUCATORS

# Conversational Curriculum

Tutor-style home education using the Socratic method and AI.  
How to have conversations that are lessons — without feeling like them.

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# What is the Conversational Curriculum?

Most home-ed resources are about planning — what to teach, when to teach it, how to cover the syllabus. This one is about a way of teaching: a framework for teaching your child without having to be a teacher. It teaches you how to have conversations that are lessons — without feeling like them.

The Conversational Curriculum is a method, not a schedule. It replaces one lesson a week (or more, if you want) with a guided discussion — led by you, shaped by AI, and driven by your child's questions as much as yours.

It works especially well for subjects that don't have neat right answers: history, ethics, politics, religion, science's big questions, current affairs. But it also works for factual subjects when you want your child to understand something, not just remember it.

## WHY CONVERSATION WORKS

- Builds genuine understanding — not just recall
- Children learn to think, not just to answer
- Works across all ages with the same method
- Develops argument, reasoning and confidence
- No marking, no stress, no wrong answers
- Naturally interest-led — follows the child
- Counts as learning even when it feels like talking
- AI means you don't need to be the expert

*"The best learning conversations I've had with my teens didn't start with a textbook. They started with a question I didn't know the answer to either. That's the point. Our job is to teach them how to learn: when I don't know the answer, I'm modelling how exactly to do that."*

# The Socratic method — a plain-English guide

Socrates was a Greek philosopher who taught by asking questions rather than giving answers. He'd take a big idea — justice, courage, knowledge — sit down with someone, and ask them what they thought. Then he'd ask a follow-up. And another. Not to trip them up, but to help them think more carefully.

That's it. That's the whole method. The teacher's job isn't to explain — it's to ask good questions and listen carefully to the answers.

## THE FIVE MOVES OF A SOCRATIC CONVERSATION

01

### Open with a question, not a statement

Don't explain the topic first. Ask about it. "What do you already know about climate change?" gets more genuine thinking than "Today we're going to learn about climate change." The first move is always a question.

02

### Follow the answer

Whatever they say, your next question comes from that — not from your prepared list. If they say something unexpected, that's the interesting bit. Follow it. "That's interesting — why do you think that?"

03

### Ask for evidence or reasoning

"What makes you say that?" is one of the most powerful questions in education. It's not a challenge — it's an invitation to go deeper. Use it often.

04

### Introduce the complication

Once they've said what they think, offer a piece of information or a counterpoint that adds complexity. "That's one way to look at it. What about people who think...?" This is where the real thinking begins.

05

### End with their conclusion, not yours

A Socratic conversation doesn't end with you summarising the right answer. It ends with them: "So what do you think now — has your view changed at all?" Their conclusion, in their words.

You don't have to be an expert in climate science or political theory to lead a Socratic conversation about it. Your job is to ask good questions, not to have all the answers. That's what the AI is for — it holds the factual content so you can hold the conversation.

# The master prompt

Copy this prompt into any AI tool — ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, all work. Fill in the brackets. The AI will build you a guided conversation plan ready to use immediately or adapt for your child.

## THE PROMPT – COPY AND FILL IN THE BRACKETS

Act as an experienced Socratic tutor working with a home-educated child aged **[AGE]**. We are going to have a guided conversation about **[TOPIC]**.

This is a **[CONVERSATION TYPE: factual exploration / open question / ethical dilemma]** conversation. The child's current knowledge level is **[BRIEF DESCRIPTION — e.g. "has some awareness but no formal study" / "studied this last term" / "knows the basics, ready to go deeper"]**.

Please provide: (1) A strong opening question to begin the conversation. (2) 6–8 follow-up questions that develop the topic, in a logical sequence — moving from what they know, to what they think, to where it gets complicated. (3) For each question, one or two likely answers a child this age might give, and a suggested follow-up for each. (4) Two or three key facts or ideas to introduce if the conversation stalls or needs direction. (5) A closing question that asks the child to state their own conclusion.

Keep the language accessible for a **[AGE]**-year-old. Flag any questions where the topic becomes genuinely contested so I can handle those with care.

## OPTIONAL ADD-ONS – ADD ANY OF THESE TO THE END OF THE PROMPT

- "After the conversation, give me three short-answer questions to check understanding."
- "Suggest one book, documentary or article a **[AGE]**-year-old could explore independently to go deeper on this."
- "Cross-reference this topic with **[SUBJECT/EXAM BOARD/CURRICULUM STAGE]** and flag any syllabus objectives this conversation covers."

## WHAT TO PUT IN THE BRACKETS

<b>[AGE]</b>	The AI calibrates vocabulary, complexity and assumed knowledge from this. If your child works at a different level, use that instead.
<b>[TOPIC]</b>	Be specific enough to be useful. "Climate change" is fine; "the difference between mitigation and adaptation in climate policy" is better. Start broad and narrow it.
<b>[CONVERSATION TYPE]</b>	Factual exploration = there are right answers and we're building knowledge. Open question = reasonable people disagree. Ethical dilemma = no clean answer, the point is to think carefully.
<b>[CURRENT KNOWLEDGE]</b>	A rough honest description. "Knows nothing yet" is perfectly valid.

# Prompt variations by conversation type

Not all topics work the same way. The master prompt has a [CONVERSATION TYPE] variable for a reason. Here's what changes — and why it matters.

## FACTUAL EXPLORATION

*Use when: science, history, geography, health, "how does X work" questions.*

The conversation has direction — you're building toward an accurate understanding. Questions move from recall ("What do you already know?") to comprehension ("Why does that happen?") to application ("What would change if...?").

### ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION TO ADD

"At each stage, gently correct any misconceptions without making them feel wrong — reframe rather than contradict."

## OPEN QUESTION

*Use when: politics, philosophy, religion, ethics, big "should we" questions.*

There's no single right answer. The goal is careful reasoning, not the correct conclusion. Questions help them see multiple perspectives, identify their assumptions, and understand why reasonable people disagree.

### ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION TO ADD

"Present at least two well-reasoned positions on this topic. Don't indicate which is correct — present them as genuinely held views."

## ETHICAL DILEMMA

*Use when: human rights, justice, historical decisions, medical ethics, current affairs.*

The hardest type — and the most valuable. The child is asked to hold competing values and find a position they can defend. There's discomfort here and that's the point. This type builds moral reasoning more than any other.

### ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION TO ADD

"Flag where this topic might be emotionally sensitive for a child. Suggest where to pause and check in."

# Worked examples

Four examples showing the prompt filled in, then the kind of conversation that follows. The child's responses are placeholders for your child's actual voice.

## Example 01

### Climate Change — age 11, factual exploration

#### PROMPT USED

*Act as an experienced Socratic tutor working with a home-educated child aged 11. We are going to have a guided conversation about climate change — specifically, the difference between the greenhouse effect as a natural process and how human activity has intensified it. This is a factual exploration conversation. The child has general awareness but no formal study.*

- YOU            What do you already know about climate change?
- CHILD        *"It's getting hotter because of pollution and cars and factories. The ice is melting."*
- YOU            That's a good start. Where does the heat actually come from — do you know how the warming process works?
- CHILD        *"The sun heats things up and then... it can't escape? Something traps it?"*
- YOU            Yes — exactly. That's called the greenhouse effect. Here's something interesting though: it's not a new thing. The greenhouse effect has always existed. Without it, Earth would be too cold for life. So what do you think has changed?
- CHILD        *"We've added more... gases?"*
- YOU            Right. So if the greenhouse effect itself isn't the problem, what's your thinking now about what actually is?

*The child moves from "pollution is bad" to understanding a specific mechanism — without being lectured at.*

## Example 02

### Should animals be kept in zoos? — age 9, ethical dilemma

- YOU            Do you think animals should be kept in zoos?
- CHILD        *"Yes — they're looked after and safe and people can see them."*
- YOU            That makes sense. What about the animals themselves — do you think they'd choose to be in a zoo if they could?
- CHILD        *"...probably not. They'd want to be free."*
- YOU            So we have two things that might be in tension: the animals are safer and cared for, but they might not want to be there. What do you do when two good things pull against each other?
- CHILD        *"I don't know... maybe it depends on the animal?"*
- YOU            That's really interesting — say more about that. What might the difference be?

*A 9-year-old has just independently introduced the concept of context-dependency in ethics. No worksheet required.*

## Example 03

## What is democracy? — age 13, open question

## PROMPT USED

*Act as an experienced Socratic tutor working with a home-educated child aged 13. We are going to have a guided conversation about democracy — what it is, whether it's the best system, and what its weaknesses are. This is an open question conversation. The child has a general understanding of voting and elections but hasn't studied political systems formally.*

- YOU How would you explain democracy to someone who'd never heard of it?
- CHILD *"It's when people vote for who runs the country."*
- YOU Good. Is that enough — do you think voting is all democracy is?
- CHILD *"Maybe not? There's also... rights? And laws?"*
- YOU What do you think about this: a country has elections every four years, but between elections the government can do anything it wants with no checks. Is that a democracy?
- CHILD *"It doesn't feel like one..."*
- YOU So what's missing? What makes voting not quite enough on its own?

*The child is being walked toward the concept of "liberal democracy" vs. "electoral authoritarianism" — entirely through questions.*

## Example 04

## Nutrition — age 10, factual exploration with opinion

- YOU If you had to guess — why do you think we need to eat at all? What is food actually doing for your body?
- CHILD *"Energy? And... growing?"*
- YOU Yes — both of those. Can you think of any other jobs food might do besides give you energy and help you grow?
- CHILD *"Maybe... fixing things? When you're ill?"*
- YOU That's exactly right — your body is constantly repairing itself. So if food does all those different jobs, what does that tell us about whether one type of food can do everything?
- CHILD *"It probably can't. You need different ones for different things."*
- YOU So "balanced diet" — what do you think that actually means now, in your own words?

*The child has just constructed the concept of nutritional variety from first principles. They'll remember this far longer than a list of food groups on a worksheet.*

# Building a weekly conversation habit

One conversation a week is enough to make this a meaningful part of your home-ed. Here's a simple structure that works without becoming another thing to plan.

## Pick a slot — not a topic

Decide when your conversation happens (Wednesday morning, Friday after lunch) before you decide what it's about. The regularity matters more than the subject.

## Let the topic come from that week

Something in the news. Something they asked about. Something that connects to what you've been studying. The best conversations come from genuine curiosity, not a pre-planned list.

## Prep takes five minutes

Run the master prompt with that week's topic the evening before. Read the output. You don't need to memorise it — just get the shape of the conversation in your head.

## Have the conversation — then let it settle

Don't debrief it too much afterwards. You can set a follow-up written piece the week after — what they actually took from it will sometimes surprise you.

## Note what surprised you

Keep a one-line record: date, topic, one thing they said that you didn't expect. Over a year, these become something worth keeping.

## A NOTE ON CURRENT AFFAIRS — GOOD NEWS

One conversation a month specifically about good news — genuine positive developments in science, environment, human rights, medicine, community — is worth building in deliberately. Children who only encounter current affairs as a list of problems grow up with a skewed picture of what's possible. Add this prompt variation:

*"Find me a piece of genuinely good news from the last month that a [AGE]-year-old would find interesting or surprising. Give me three Socratic questions to explore it — focusing on how it happened, who made it happen, and what it tells us about what's possible."*

# Topic starter list

A starting point, not a syllabus. Use these when you're not sure what to talk about this week. Each topic works at any age — the master prompt does the age-calibration work.

## SCIENCE & THE NATURAL WORLD

- What is the difference between weather and climate?
- Why do we sleep and what happens if we don't?
- How does vaccination work?
- What is the universe made of?
- What characteristics make us human?
- How do we know dinosaurs existed?

## PHILOSOPHY & BIG QUESTIONS

- Is it ever right to break the law?
- What do we owe to people we'll never meet?
- Does it matter why someone does the right thing?
- What is fairness — and is it the same as equality?
- Can something be true for one person and not another?

## HEALTH & THE BODY

- What does "healthy" actually mean?
- Why does exercise affect how we feel mentally?
- How does stress affect the body?
- What is the gut microbiome and why does it matter?
- Sleep, screens and the teenage brain.

## HISTORY & POLITICS

- Why do countries go to war?
- What is democracy — and does it always work?
- How did colonialism shape the world we live in now?
- What makes a good leader?
- Why do some revolutions succeed and others fail?
- Human rights: where do they come from and who decides?

## CURRENT AFFAIRS & THE WORLD NOW

- What is happening with [current news event] — and why does it matter?
- What is AI — and should we be worried about it?
- What is inequality and why does it persist?
- What would it take to end poverty?
- Something good that happened this month.

# Where the conversation goes next

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The conversation is the lesson. But it doesn't have to end when you close the laptop.

## Set a follow-up piece of writing

A summary, an essay, a journal entry from the perspective of someone who was there — this shows you what they actually took in. The answers are sometimes different to what you'd expect, and usually more interesting.

## Ask them to present what they learned

To you, to the family, to a home-ed group. Explaining something out loud to another person is a different cognitive task to understanding it privately — it asks them to know it well enough to hand it to someone else. For learners who come alive when they're talking, this is the natural follow-up. You can also ask them to record a podcast-style episode, or argue a position in a short debate.

## Fact-check and go further

Ask them to check anything that came directly from the AI. Then suggest one book, article or documentary on the same topic. Our starting order is books first, everything else second.

## Follow it creatively

A piece of art, a piece of music, a photograph. There's no rule that says follow-up has to be written.

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Once this becomes familiar — once the shape of a Socratic conversation is something you both know — you won't need the prompts. A podcast, a news article, a chapter from whatever they're reading: anything can start it. And when you're really ready, hand the lead over to them. See where they take it.

A good conversation can teach more than a run of textbook lessons. And much as this is definitely school, it feels a little more like home.

YES, YOU CAN TEACH YOUR KIDS.

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