STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
PROGRAM FOR CRITICAL THINKING

This program is intended to give tomorrow's adults — our children — the critical thinking skills they will need to build a better world. These thinking skills include the ability to solve problems, to distinguish which inferences are supported by evidence, to read critically and take into account the sources and internal consistency of one's information, to analyze arguments for their logic and for their unstated assumptions, and to question the beliefs and ideologies to which one is exposed.

We cannot predict the exact historical situations our children will face or the specific responses they will make. We can, however, give our children the best thinking tools we possibly can for coming up with creative solutions to tomorrow's problems.

OUTLINE
speculative thinking
discussion of philosophical issues such as:
If there were immortality, would that be a good thing?
Are thoughts real and what causes them to happen in your brain?
If you could change exactly one thing about the world, what would you change? etc., etc.
reference books: teachers' guides for Philosophy for Children program

definitions and analogies
how to come up with precise definitions ("the definition game")
how to distinguish good from poor analogies
reference books: How to Think Straight by Robert Thowless

logic, common thinking errors, and techniques of manipulation
common thinking errors: faulty analogies (see above)
sampling errors
errors of extrapolation
post hoc fallacy
inconceivability
wishful thinking
undefined language (see above)
ambiguity, shift of meaning
Circular argument
confusing "some" for "all"
"tabloid thinking" (thinking in oversimplified catchphrases)
special pleading
techniques used in advertising and politics

- appeal to numbers (the "bandwagon appeal")
- status, prestige, degrees, and titles ("nob"
- false appeal
- misleading statements
- misleading appearances
- degrees and titles sex appeal
- repetition
- technical jargon
- flattery
- bargain appeal
- appeal to sentimentality or warm feelings (for nature, children, old people, pets, etc.)

additional misleading tricks in argument

- selected reporting of facts, proof by selected instance
- ad hominem
- out of context technique of diversion
- attacking a straw man, disproving a minor point, changing the subject completely

- emotionally "loaded" language
- "loaded" question, complex question
- ridicule
- appeal to prejudice
- empty language
- appealing to support of the "middle position" vs. "the extreme"
- begging the question
- sophistical formula (attempting to refute an argument with a snappy slogan rather than with facts and logic)

references:

- How to Think Straight, Thouless
- The Propaganda Game, Allen & Goren
- The Complete Thinker, Anderson
Critical reading (and watching) of media, textbooks, encyclopedia, etc.
use of emotional and "loaded" language (e.g. in the press)
selective reporting of facts
discerning opinions of writers

"objectivity" = opinions and views of editors, owners, writers
discerning assumptions of writers