

The If Machine

The If Machine

Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom

Peter Worley

Illustrations by Tamar Levi



A companion website to accompany this book is available online at:
<http://education.worley.continuumbooks.com>

Please visit the link and register with us to receive your password and access these downloadable resources.

If you experience any problems accessing the resources, please contact Continuum at: info@continuumbooks.com

Continuum International Publishing Group

The Tower Building	80 Maiden Lane
11 York Road	Suite 704
London	New York
SE1 7NX	NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

© Peter Worley 2011

Illustrations © Tamar Levi 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Peter Worley has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-4411-5583-2 (paperback)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Worley, Peter.

The if machine : philosophical enquiry in the classroom / Peter Worley ; illustrations by Tamar Levi.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-4411-5583-2 (pbk.) -- ISBN 978-1-4411-1240-8 (ebook (pdf)) -- ISBN 978-1-4411-9228-8 (ebook (epub)) 1. Critical thinking--Study and teaching (Elementary) 2. Reflective learning. 3. Children and philosophy. I. Title.

LB1590.3.W67 2011

370.15'2--dc22

2010031208

Typeset by Fakenham Photosetting Ltd

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group

‘Education to independence demands that young people
should be accustomed early to consult their own sense
of propriety and their own reason.’

G.W.F Hegel (1770–1831)

Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
Preface	xi
Table of Sessions	xiii
1 How To Do Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom	1
Introduction	3
The If Machine	10
Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom	14
Teaching Strategies	29
2 The PhiE Sessions	47
The Chair	49
The Meaning of Ant Life	57
Can You Step in the Same River Twice	61
Republic Island	66
The Ring of Gyges	74
The Prince and the Pig	80
The Ship of Theseus	86
The Happy Prisoner	93
Goldfinger	98
The Frog and the Scorpion	105
The Little Old Shop of Curiosities	111
The Shadow of the Pyramid	117
Billy Bash	128
Thinking About Nothing	135
Yous on Another Planet	139
The Ceebie Stories: Friends	144
The Ceebie Stories: The Tony Test	149
The Ceebie Stories: The Robbery	155
The Ceebie Stories: The Android	162
The Ceebie Stories: The Lie	166
The Ceebie Stories: The Rebuild	172

The Ceebie Stories: Finally Human?	176
To The Edge of Forever	178
Where Are You?	182
Get Stuffed: Fun with Metaphysics	186
Glossary	191
Bibliography	195
Useful Websites	196

Section 1:

How to do Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom

Introduction

Who is this book for?

This book has been written as a resource for anyone who wants to do philosophy with children in schools, youth groups or other settings. The material has been gathered from nearly 10 years of experience doing **philosophy** (you will find words in bold briefly explained in the glossary on page 191) with children from ages 5–13, and is suitable for use with children of this age and range of abilities. If you have not studied philosophy then please note that this book and online material have been written to provide an introduction to the relevant philosophical material. This aims to give you a basic philosophical awareness so that you can feel more confident and get more out of the philosophy sessions in your class. This book also aims to serve as a general introduction to philosophy as a subject, and hopes to spark your interest to learn and read more about it.

One great thing about philosophy is that children do not need to be familiar with it to be able to do it. To be able to facilitate philosophic discussions, however, it helps to have a basic awareness of the philosophical topics and debates that surround the sessions provided in this book. This will help you to encourage – or to identify – philosophical insights from the children. These, in turn, will help you to navigate the philosophical direction of the sessions. It is important to be aware that philosophy is much more than simply talking together and sharing ideas: it is a certain *kind* of thinking about certain *kinds* of topics (see ‘philosophy’ in the glossary). The kind of thinking that philosophy practises, however, can be applied to almost any subject. At the beginning of each session I have included a quick summary introduction of the philosophy that lies behind it, and at the end a guide to further reading available on the companion website that accompanies this book.

Do remember that the information about philosophy you find in this book and the companion website is *not* information to be taught to children in the philosophy sessions; it is there to help you develop a philosophical awareness

4 The If Machine

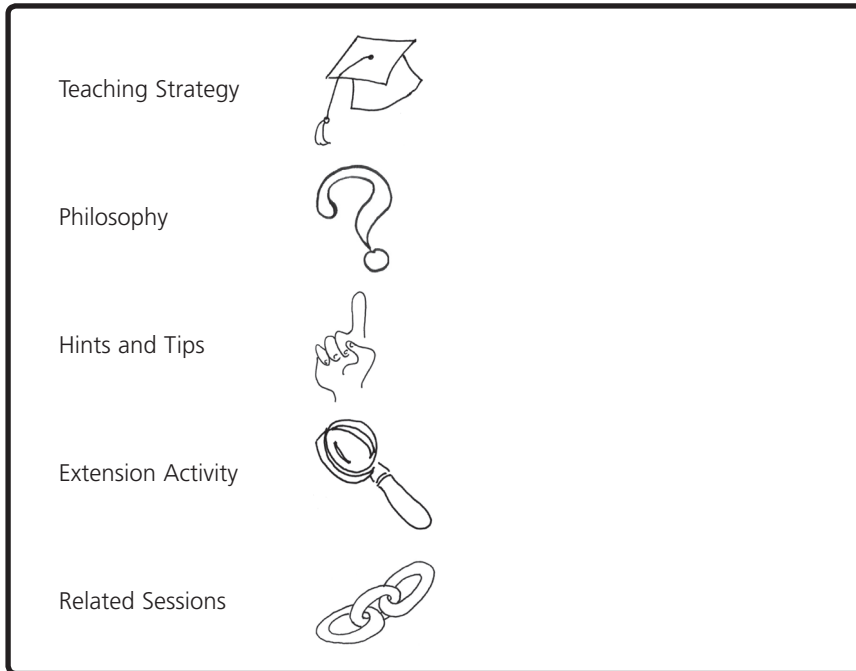
to help with the facilitation of the sessions. In other words, it assists you to be able to spot the philosophy in the sessions and guide the discussion appropriately. From this point on, while you are reading this book and doing philosophy with children, you are not a teacher, you are a ‘curious facilitator’. By this I mean that you are as interested in the ideas being discussed as the children and will do all you can to help the children explore ideas, but you will not be teaching them as you would in your normal role as ‘teacher’ and you will not be expressing your own ideas.

If you do philosophy regularly with your class and become familiar with the methods and teaching strategies (page 29) in this book you may find it can impact and inform your normal class teaching. This happens by developing transferable skills in the children such as speaking and listening, reasoning, questioning, autonomous learning, as well as critical and creative thinking. The teaching strategies should also help you to develop your teaching by giving you greater confidence with questioning and discourse skills, engendering a more collaborative relationship with your class and an atmosphere of active learning and **enquiry**. These areas of development have been shown to play a crucial role in creating independent learners in students.

The structure of this book

This book has two sections and a companion website. The first section, ‘How to do **Philosophical Enquiry** in the Classroom’, begins with an introduction to the subject of philosophy with children, and outlines my philosophical enquiry method (PhiE). There is then a full and comprehensive list of the teaching strategies that are covered in this book. These strategies can be used in any educational setting to help deepen thinking by developing questioning skills that will elicit more from the children, and engage the children critically with the material and with each other.

The second section, ‘The PhiE Sessions’, contains 25 sessions on different philosophical topics. The sessions are designed to last 1 hour, and can be extended over more than one session depending on how much discussion is generated by the questions and enquiries. Some sessions such as *The Chair*, *Republic Island*, *Billy Bash* and *Shadow of the Pyramid* are designed to span more than one session. Where this is the case, it is clearly marked at the beginning of the session. Each session includes a series of boxes that draw your attention to various features. These features include Teaching Strategy, Philosophy, Hints and Tips, Extension Activities and Related Sessions. These can be easily identified by the icons shown below.



The companion website that accompanies this book includes a comprehensive explanation of key terms used in the book, a guideline list of criteria for philosophical aptitude that children can develop through doing the philosophy sessions, and a sample PhiE session with descriptions of facilitation and Speaker Management methods to give you a context for their use. Illustrations that accompany the sessions can be downloaded as a visual supplement for the stimuli, and you will find some selected arguments, indicated in the book, also available for download. Additionally, the website provides an introduction to the philosophy that inspired the sessions. These ‘philosophy nuggets’ include the following.

- Philosopher and topic: the philosopher and the topic behind the session.
- Biography: a brief outline of the history of the philosopher.
- Big idea: a bite-size version of the relevant idea associated with the philosopher.
- Main publication(s): a reference to the most well-known publication(s) or the one most relevant to the topic. Interested readers are advised to seek these as further reading.
- Useful quote: a short quote from a primary source that captures the philosopher’s view on the relevant topic.

6 The If Machine

- About: a short discussion about the philosopher and the topic.
- Food for thought: this section is designed to get the reader thinking and engaging with the philosophical questions and issues that arise from the philosopher's idea. Dine on them with your friends to properly engage with these ideas.

How to use this book

To use this book, begin by reading Section 1 thoroughly before trying to run a session. In Section 2 (page 47) the sessions can generally be used in whatever order you like. *The Ceebie Stories* are different from the other sessions in that they have a continuous narrative that connects them. For this reason it is important that they be done successively. Do not try to run *The Ceebie Stories* in isolation from each other as there is too much background information that is not included in each individual session. There is a table for quick reference on page xiii, which includes a list of themes present in the sessions, age suitability and a star rating for difficulty that will also appear at the top of each session. On the next page you will see an example session detailing the different sections of a session.

Can You Step in the Same River Twice?

Each session has a title, and begins with the star rating, guidance as to the age-group suitability of the session and a list of broad themes that the session addresses.

Suitable for age 8 and upwards.
Star rating: *

Themes

Change
Arguments
Identity

This is followed by an introduction to the philosophical themes, issues and topics that lie behind or that may arise from the session.

Philosophy

This is one of the most famous philosophical questions and it is thought to have been first asked by Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. c. 500 BCE) ...

Next is the **Stimulus**, followed by the **Task Question(s)** (TQs) you should ask along with notes and guidance for the facilitator on how to run the session plus what they might expect from the children.

8 The If Machine

Stimulus

Timmy and Tina have gone to a river with their parents for a picnic and they are paddling in the river close to the riverbank swishing their fishing nets around trying to catch tadpoles ...

TQ: Can you say why Tina thinks it is a different river?

Give them **Talk Time** with their partners and find out what they think. If they are not having the Heraclitian insight, 'that it is not the same river because the water is constantly flowing', then you could present an argument between the two characters to bring this out ...

There will be a box or boxes containing a Teaching Strategy, Hints and Tips, Philosophy, or an Extension Activity. The teaching strategies are described more generally in the Teaching Strategies section but given a specific context in the boxes in the sessions, thereby giving clear examples of their use.



Teaching Strategy: What's needed and what's enough? (page 29)

One line of enquiry following this is to explore with the children what makes a river. Do a *what's needed and what's enough?* strategy with them on 'what is a river?' Write the word 'river' on the board, and then set them the task of listing all the features a river would need to be a river ...

The introduction to the philosophy given at the beginning of the session is supplemented on the companion website. At the end of each session you will be directed to the main online philosophy for the session, and also a series of related online philosophy topics.

Online

Main philosophy:
Heraclitus and Change

Related philosophy:
Berkeley and Idealism
Hobbes and Materialism
Leibniz and Identity

Finally, a Related Sessions box lists sessions with common philosophical themes for those interested in following Ariadne's threads through the book (see Teaching Strategies, page 29).



Related Sessions

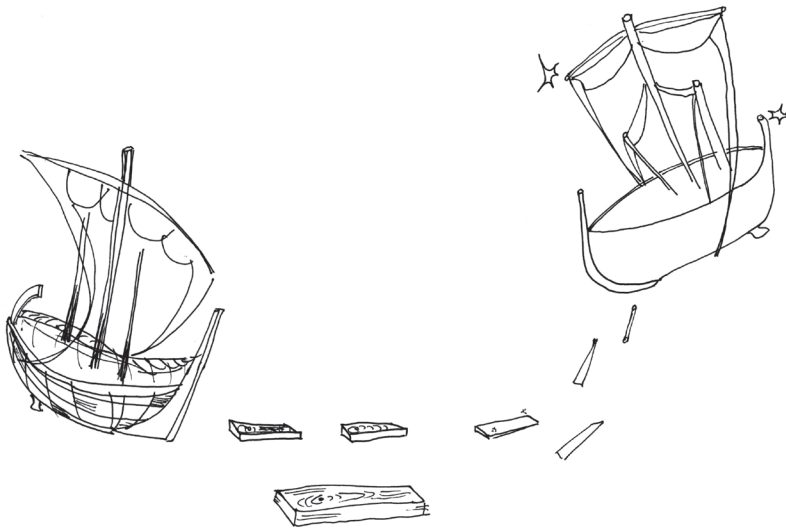
The Chair (page 49)
The Ship of Theseus (page 86)

The PhiE sessions will not necessarily unfold in the way described in the book, but I have attempted to share my experience with ideas and problems that commonly occur in the sessions. Also, I have included some directions that the sessions have taken in order to share a teaching strategy.

Section 2:

The PhiE Sessions

The Ship of Theseus



Ship of Theseus

For the 2009 Year 5 class at Horniman Primary School, Lewisham.

Suitable for age 9 and upwards.
Star rating: **

Themes

Identity
Personal identity
Change

Philosophy

The Ship of Theseus was famously supplied as a philosophical thought experiment by the British philosopher Thomas Hobbes. He drew the example from

Plutarch, a Roman writer. Theseus comes from Greek mythology and is the same Theseus who defeated the Minotaur with the help of Ariadne.

In order for this session to be philosophically fruitful it is necessary to understand the philosophical subtleties involved in an exploration of the thought experiment. Read the stimulus below before reading on. The Nested Question to bear in mind in this enquiry is: 'If it is a new ship when all the parts are replaced, then at what point does it become a new ship?'

This is where a lot of the philosophy will lie because here we are faced with the 'problem of vagueness'. If it is a new ship when the parts are all replaced and only then, would that mean that when it only had one part left to replace, it was still the old ship? If so, this seems a little odd. If not, then when does it become the new ship? This particular problem is a version of what is known as the *sorites paradox* (from the Greek word for 'heap'): 'How many grains of sand make a heap?'



Teaching Strategy: If the idea – 'Let's test it.' (page 35)

For the purpose of keeping things clear for the discussion, it is a good idea to illustrate all this with examples as you go. I would ask the children to imagine the ship has 100 parts (for the sake of argument). You can then use this at each point of the discussion to have them explore and reach the difficulties for themselves. For example, if someone says it would be the new ship when more than half the parts are replaced, *if the idea* to test it: 'Let's test it: if it has 51 new parts and only 49 old parts then is it a new ship?' Ask the class what they think about this.

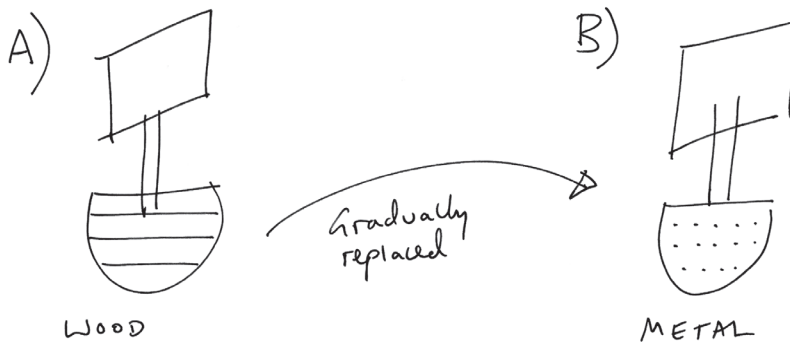
This session is subtly changed if, during your presentation of the stimulus, you say the ship is replaced simply with new parts of the same material, so: wood for wood. The emphasis is on *identity* in this case, whereas the emphasis is on *vagueness* when the replaced parts are metal. I usually stick to the 'metal' version of the story for primary school children, as it is easier for them to conceptualise the problem. It becomes difficult to refer to the two ships if they are both made of the same stuff. You could try it both ways by altering the stimulus accordingly.

Stimulus

Theseus owned a ship and the ship was entirely made of wood. He sailed around the ocean for many years in his ship. Every time a piece of the ship needed replacing it was replaced with a metal part. This went on for a few years until eventually it was entirely replaced.

TQ 1: Is the ship of Theseus the same ship of Theseus as it was when it was first built?

It may be helpful to draw a diagram similar to the one below as you explain the scenario and write the Task Question underneath.



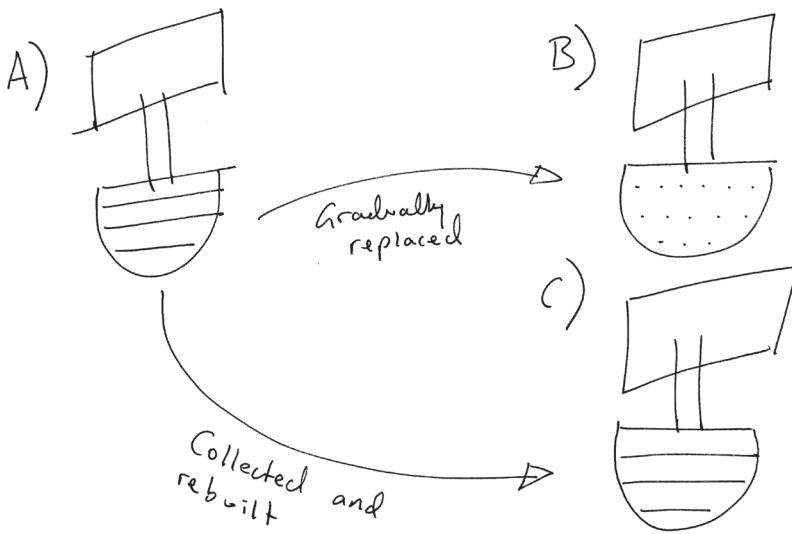
Is the ship of Theseus the same ship of Theseus as when it was first built?

There are very likely to be some *materialists* aboard your classroom – that is to say, those who will maintain that the ship is different if it is made of different stuff: ‘It was made of wood but now it’s made of metal.’ Thomas Hobbes was also a materialist in his response to the problem. He proposed a version of the following thought experiment to anyone who would entertain that the metal ship is the same as the wooden ship.

On board the ship was a sailor who really wanted his own ship but could not afford one. So, he came up with a plan: every time Theseus decided to replace one of the wooden parts of his ship with a metal part, the sailor would take the discarded piece of wood and hide it in his shed. When eventually he had collected all the wooden parts he re-assembled them into a ship again.

TQ 2: Does this mean there are two ships of Theseus or one? Which is the ship of Theseus?

Again, use diagrams to explain all this:



Which one is the ship of Theseus?

The sorts of ideas you might expect to hear in this session are as follows (often in different words).

- The ship is different the moment the first plank is replaced because any change would result in a different ship. Later, when you move to a discussion of personhood, a **Response Question** (RQ) to this point could be: 'Does that mean that any change to myself/yourself, such as a tooth falling out, makes me/you a different person?'
- The ship is different only when the last piece has been replaced because only then none of the original ship is left. RQ: 'Does that mean that when there is only one piece of the original ship left it is still the old ship?'
- If the ship *suddenly* changed into metal then it would be different, but if it changes *gradually* then it is the same ship because, at each stage of change, it is related to the old ship in that it is only minutely different.
- Even though the material it is made of changes, the shape, the name and the design stay the same, so it is the same ship.
- It is the same ship if people *think* it's the same ship.

The 'Self' of Theseus

At some point you will want to talk about how the discussion of the ship pertains to how we think of ourselves. This will either happen very naturally when the children start to make the connection or you will need to make the connection explicit yourself. Here are some suggestions of how it can be done.

- Show two photographs next to each other of someone as a young child and as an old person. Ask the children whether they think this is the same person and why.
- If you are with older children (age 10 upwards), you can explain how scientists tell us that our cells (explain what these are) are completely replaced every seven years or so and then ask the children if this means they are a different person every seven years.

The key Nested Question here is:
What is it that makes us the same person at different times?

Possible responses to this problem are as follows.

- *People and things* are different.

RQ: How are they different?

- People have thoughts and memories but ships don't.
- We might change on the outside but our personalities stay the same.

RQ: Does this mean our personalities can't change?

A suggested Task Question to deepen this enquiry follows.

TQ 3: Where is the 'me bit' inside of us?

One 11 year-old girl said in answer to this: "The "me bit" is the thoughts inside my head." (See companion website: Descartes and Dualism, 'I think therefore I am'.)

Each of these insights can lead to further related discussions in themselves.

The philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) believed that we are linked by memory to our past selves, which makes us the same person through time. So, for Locke, it is not our body that makes us the same person – as this is constantly changing – but our mental life that lasts through change. RQ: ‘If we lose our memory would that make us a different person?’



Hints and Tips: Concrete and personalised discussions

Children may begin to lose interest if philosophy discussions are too abstract or seem irrelevant to their own experience. So it is often good to begin with concrete examples, such as – in this session – a scenario with a repaired ship where the philosophical problems always have a concrete reference for the children to test them out. Also, making the discussions about the children in some way can keep them engaged with the issues. Putting the insights and ideas about the ship into the context of their own lives and experience can bring it vividly to life for them. Many of the children will have been thinking along these lines already and it can be reassuring for those children to find that there is a whole tradition of thinking about these ideas stretching back many hundreds – in some cases, thousands – of years.

It is important, however, to make sure you never personalise the discussions. If a child introduces an example around another child, it is often better to gently ask them to make the example about someone fictitious.

Online

Main philosophy:

Hobbes and Materialism

Related philosophy:

Berkley and Idealism

Descartes and Dualism

Heraclitus and Change

Leibniz and Identity

Socrates, Aristotle and the Soul

Zeno, Paradoxes and Infinity

92 The If Machine



Related sessions

- The Chair (page 49)
- Can You Step in the Same River Twice? (page 61)
- Yous on Another Planet (page 139)
- The Ceebie Stories: The Android (page 162)
- The Ceebie Stories: The Rebuild (page 172)
- Where Are You? (page 182)
- Get Stuffed: Fun with Metaphysics (page 186)