

A World Without

Key Stage: KS2, KS3, KS4 & KS5

Assembly: Concepts that shape our world, working together to make a better world (thinking about the world with and without things), developing critical thinking skills, developing resilience.

Core aim/outcome of this lesson: Thinking about the absence or presence of concepts

Pupil outcome:

Curriculum links:

Links to additional resources: 'The Hiding Box' in 40 lessons to get children thinking, 'Erasure' in Provocations by David Birch

Further preparation: Stephen Lawrence Day Philosophy Foundation Lessons: Teacher Information

Introduction

One of the principle conceptual tools of philosophy is the *thought-experiment*: constructing stories or scenarios and situations in which the thinker is invited to consider the philosophical and conceptual variables involved. Very often, the conceptual variables are tweaked to see how this affects thinking and values about the situation. The following general hypothetical thinking tool is probably the easiest way to think about concepts in this way. It simply asks thinkers to consider the following questions: 'What would the world be with/without X?' It can be used again and again in lots of different learning contexts. So, be sure to take this one with you! This lesson plan doesn't make use of the Hokey Kokey or Kokey Hokey models. You could start this one simply by asking the question, 'What would the world be with/without X?' However, below is a slightly more imaginative way of asking these questions.

Session

Activity: Delete!

Imagine you have a magic delete box. If you put a word (e.g. *hatred*) into the magic box, then press the 'delete' button on top of it, that thing will no longer exist (e.g. the world will no longer contain *hatred*).

Here are some more suggestions for concept words (and their contraries) to go into the delete box:

- Hatred/love
- Difference/sameness (more specifically: 'racial difference', 'cultural...', 'gender...?')

- Evil/good
- Death/life
- Feel free to insert your own concept-words (as a rule of thumb, use abstract nouns for philosophical discussions, but some concrete nouns can be fruitful, too, such as 'mushrooms' or 'T.V.s')

Starter question: Would you press 'delete' with X in the box?

What would it mean to have no X in the world? (And, by contrast: what does it mean to have X in the world?)

Extension activity: A World With

For this variation, simply ask the inverse of the question: 'What would the world be like with X?' To introduce another magic box: the 'add' button.

This resource is a sample from the book [40 Lessons to Get Children Thinking](#) by Peter Worley, Published by Bloomsbury Education.

Peter Worley is the Co-Founder of Educational charity [The Philosophy Foundation](#). Check out their website for more resources, training and much more!

Bike problem – on certainty

Key ideas:

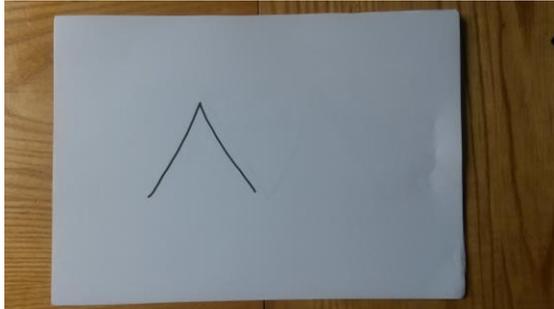
Knowledge and certainty, proof

Resources

A4 white board or similar surface to draw on

Starter

On a white board draw this (hidden from the children's eyes to add suspense) then reveal it



Ask

- *What is it?*
- **Why** is it [a mountain]?
- *Who* thinks it is **something else**?

Ask children for a number of ideas and write them down or keep them in your head.

Main activity

Pick up the white board and (hiding it from their prying eyes) draw this:



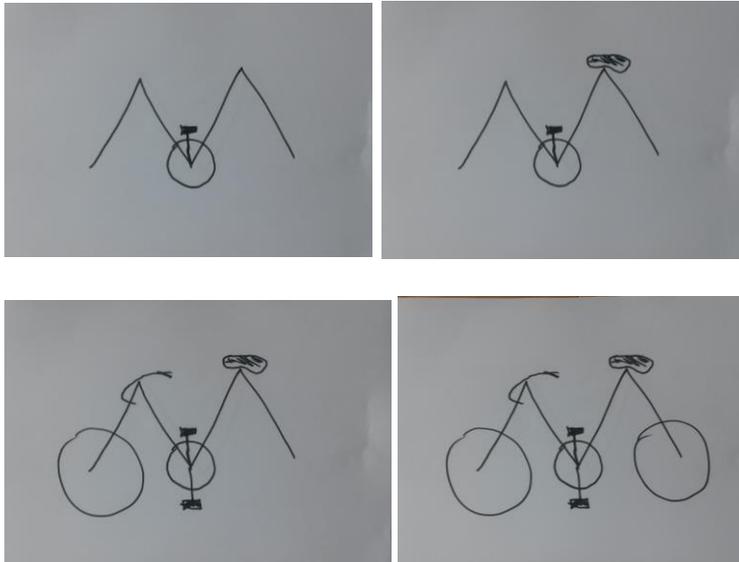
Ask:

- What is it?
- Is it a (insert one of their ideas from the previous picture like 'mountain')?
- Are you sure?
- Show me if it's **definitely** a mountain – thumbs up.
- **Definitely not** a mountain – thumbs down.
- Or
- **Might be** a mountain – half-way, uncertain thumb.

Children often say that it is a mountain because "it's got a pointy bit". Make sure you follow up with, questions like 'So is it definitely a mountain?'

Continue to add bits to the picture (see pics below) and reveal to the class, asking the questions above.

Can it be a bike if it doesn't have wheels?
If it looks like a bike does that mean it is?
Can it be 2 different things?



Extension activity/game:

Teacher or children to draw a simple line or shape on the whiteboard. Then ask who can make it into something by adding a line or continuing the drawing in some way e.g. *I draw a line on the board and ask 'who can finish the picture?' A child comes up at draws another line across it 'It's the letter "t"'*.

This resource is a sample from the resource [Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum](#) by Educational charity [The Philosophy Foundation](#). Check out their website for more resources, training and much more!



Billy Bash

from Peter Worley's *The If Machine*

Listen to the story of Billy Bash on
Soundcloud: <https://bit.ly/3crUznA>

What do you think Billy will do and why?

If you can't help bashing people should you feel bad?

Did the old woman help Billy or not?

If the potions were just water, did they work? Why did he stop bashing people?

If you liked thinking about this, why not contact kim@philosophy-foundation.org for further information on joining online philosophy sessions or Q&As with a philosopher.

Can you think of examples of when you can control yourself and when you can't?

Can we control our feelings?

How can you stop yourself from doing something bad when you are really angry?

Can we decide what kind of person we are, or will be?

If you liked thinking about this, why not contact kim@philosophy-foundation.org for further information on joining online philosophy sessions or Q&As with a philosopher.



The Philosophy
Foundation
THINKING CHANGES

Let's Get Lost!

For the 2018-19 Year 3 class at Horniman school, Forest Hill, London.

Suitable for ages 5 and upwards (see below)

Star rating: *

Themes

Loss

Finding

Knowledge

Bereavement

Grief

Philosophy

Loss may be something young children have no experience of, but some may have lost a loved one, a pet or even a favourite toy! All these experiences give the children something that they may be able to draw upon to explore the concept of loss, losing and finding things. Their sharing of different experiences may help to deepen their understanding of loss. Be aware of and sensitive to anyone who may have experienced a loss recently. If treated sensitively, you may find that this discussion is a necessary one for them. This session, together with Goldfinger (from [The If Machine](#)) is a good example of what you can do with philosophy for younger children (5-7-year-olds). This session also demonstrates the Kokey Hokey method ([see Philosophy Foundation blog](#)) by starting with an abstract question before moving to the concrete questions.

Stimulus

Task question 1: What is it to lose something?

Nested questions:

- Is something lost if you can find it again?
- Is something lost if you cannot find it again?
- What is loss?
- Is *loss* a feeling?
- Is *lost* a feeling?
- Can you lose yourself?

- Can you find yourself?
- Is loss good or bad?
- Is forgetting loss?
- If you forget that you have something, have you lost it?
- Is 'being lost' the same or different to 'losing something or 'loss'?

Once you've spent a few minutes gathering the pupil's responses to the starter question, move to the following stimuli. Remember that you can 'if' (see page x) what they say at this stage later (e.g. 'So, if losing something is not knowing where it is, has [insert pupil name] lost her pencil when she knows where it is but can't get it?') See 'Two classroom scenarios' below) After each stimulus, give the class enough time to explore the questions before moving onto the next one.

Activity 1

Enlist two volunteers. Make sure that the children have an object each for them to try to lose. Have a timer ready, then say the following to them:

Try to lose the thing you've got. You have 1 minute to try to lose it. Go! [Start timer.]

Task Question 2: Did [pupil names] lose the [insert object]?

Activity 2

Enlist two more volunteers. This time have one child try to lose the object for the other child. Say the following:

[Pupil name] *wants to lose her* [insert object], *but try as she might, she always remembers where it is. So, she asks a friend to lose it for her.* [To 'friend':] *You have 1 minute to lose this object for [insert pupil name]. Go!* [Start timer]

(See also 'Doing Philosophy' in *40 lessons to get children thinking* p. 68 for more on 'Doing for thinking')

Extension activities

Two classroom scenarios

Imagine that someone, when trying to lose her object, accidentally drops it behind the radiator. She knows where it is but cannot get it. TQ: Has she lost it?

After activity 2, while the students are discussing whether X lost the object for the other pupil, see if you can surreptitiously move the object and hide it somewhere else (or have someone else do it, such as support staff). Then, at some point during the discussion, ask the pupil who 'lost' it for the other pupil to retrieve the object. If they report that they can't find it, before revealing what you have done, ask them to tell the group how it feels to have

lost something. When you reveal what really happened anchor the class: ‘So, did X lose the [insert object]?’

Hints and tips: Phenomenology: How does it feel?

On occasion, it can be informative to a philosophical discussion to bring in the phenomenological aspect of a concept or object of consideration. That is, in normal English, what are the qualities of the feeling or experience of X (in this case, of losing something). The second of the classroom scenarios above, provides an opportunity to draw upon a genuine experience of losing something for the class to then draw upon when talking about what it is to lose something. If the pupil is happy to, come back to them periodically during the discussion to speak from the authority of experience about whether another pupil’s idea about the relevant concept. Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy founded by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century, though it has its roots in Descartes and Kant. The emphasis and starting point of phenomenology is experience and perception.

[Close box]

The Lost Teddy Bear (A true story!)

Katy had a teddy bear that she loved very much. One day, while travelling in a country far, far away, she lost him. She and her parents looked and looked in the park where she had lost him, but they couldn’t find him anywhere. She was very sad. When she got back home, she saw a teddy bear in a shop window *exactly the same* as the one she had lost. ‘There’s Ted!’ She exclaimed. Katy’s parents bought the new Ted for her. She said that she was very happy to have Ted back.

Task Question 3: Had Katy found her teddy bear?

Rumi-nating on loss! (For Key Stage 2 and upwards)

“Don’t be sad: anything you’ve lost comes around in another form.” Rumi (13th century Persian philosopher)

Task Question 4: What do you think Rumi means by this?

Make a list of 3 things you’ve lost that made you sad when you lost them. Read the quote above.

Task Question 5: Do you agree with Rumi? (Or: Is this good advice?)

Rumi was a 13th century Persian poet and philosopher (among other things!) whose poems and stories invite the reader to think, often with puzzling and sometimes humorous situations and musings. There are some collections of Rumi’s poems and stories for children available.

See also: *A Bit Lost* by Chris Haughton and *Beegu* by Alexis Deacon, *Sad* by Michael Rosen; ‘The Rebuild’ in *The Ceebie Stories* in [The If Machine](#).

THE VOLCANO

BACKGROUND

In Gulliver's Travels the author Jonathan Swift makes fun of religious and sectarian differences. On the island of Lilliput, there is a deadly dispute between those that crack their boiled eggs on the more pointy end, and those that crack their eggs on the roundy end. The idea is to highlight how random and unimportant the difference between the different groups is. From the outside, a lot of disputes (Protestant/Catholic, Sunni/Shi-ite) seem to be based on trivial differences. But if those two sides have done real harm to each other, the people involved can be locked in a cycle of violence for centuries.

The painting of Boyarynya Morozova by Vasily Surikov (easily found online, for example at: http://https://en.wiki2.org/wiki/Sign_of_the_cross) depicts a martyr in the Russian Orthodox Church who was arrested, tortured and starved to death for being an 'Old Believer' in the 17th Century. In the picture she is defiantly holding up two fingers to the crowd. Making the sign of the cross with two fingers rather than three was the old tradition. To us now, it sounds a tiny unimportant detail, but Morozova was prepared to lose her enormous fortune and then her life to defend it.

STIMULUS

Once upon a time, there was a town on the side of a mountain. In that town there were two religions. Half of the people followed a god called Ruby. They were called Ruby-followers. And the other half, the Sapphire-followers, believed in a god called Sapphire.

No-one knew where the Ruby and Sapphire names came from. There was a story that back in the old days all the people followed the same religion but then there was an argument, and the religion separated into two. Both sides were certain that their religion was the original, real, religion and the other side had broken away.

One thing they did know was that the mountain they lived on was actually a volcano. Every now and again it rumbled, and steam curled out of the top of its crater. It had not erupted for a hundred years, but there was always a fear that this towering tyrant would completely destroy the town if it did.

Every week, in their different temples, with different books and different songs, the two groups of people prayed for the same thing. They asked God to protect their village from the volcano.

But then one day, the one thing they feared most happened. The rumblings grew louder and louder. Rocks were flung into the air. A vast jet of ash rose above the crater, the sides of the mountain cracked open and glowing lava slid down the slopes. The townspeople ran for their lives. Some refused to leave and stayed in their houses praying desperately that they would not be flattened by the creeping carpet of molten rock.

Those that had escaped to a safe distance began to argue. Those in the Ruby religion blamed the Sapphire-followers: they said that Ruby was punishing them for ignoring the one true faith. The Sapphire-followers argued that Sapphire was angry because the Ruby followers had not listened to his word. Meanwhile the lava edged closer and closer to their town. But then they saw something that amazed them all: just before it reached the town, the lava stream split, making two streams, one on each side, leaving the buildings untouched in the middle.

The volcano calmed. The smoke blew away. The lava cooled into hard, grey rock. The people could still hardly believe their eyes. The whole valley had been buried beneath the lava - except for their small town. They had been saved by a miracle. Half of them started praying in thanks to Ruby and half started thanking Sapphire.

Task Questions

- ✓ Was it a miracle?
- ✓ Was the town saved?
- ✓ Were the Ruby-followers right or the Sapphire-followers?
- ✓ If you lived in the town, which religion would you follow and why/?

LESSON COMMENTS

Here are some of the different positions that might be taken on this story:

1. The prayers have no effect, there is no miracle, and the town was just lucky. Neither of the groups is right.
2. There is no real difference between the two groups, and they should all realise that God saved them both.
3. Both groups are mistaken because there is a true religion - but not the one they follow.

No-one listening to the story is likely to conclude that either of the two sects is more right than the other. The story is set up to make that point - just like Swift's Lilliputians and their boiled eggs. And apart from the two different names - Ruby and Sapphire - the story gives no clue as to what the differences in belief between the two groups might have been.

It is worth noting whether any children ask for information about what the difference in beliefs was. It is similar to the question lying beneath the Bhagavad Gita story, where children ought really to be asking why the war started and what the opposing sides are fighting over. In real life wars and disputes, the opposing sides rarely agree and what they are fighting about. Each one will tell a story in which they themselves were originally the injured party and any seeming aggression on their part is a retaliation or an attempt to regain what was rightfully theirs.

As a follow-up, you could divide your class into the two groups: Ruby and Sapphire and see if they can persuade anyone on the other side to cross over. This is something of an experiment because, of course, as things stand there is no good reason to switch sides or even feel allegiance to one side to begin with.

However, we should be careful with how far we take that kind of activity. Experimental psychologists have gathered evidence that when we divide people into separate groups, tension and rivalry are inevitable - even without any cause for antagonism. That being the case, it only takes a spark of aggression for one side to feel aggrieved and attack the other.

The 1968 'Blue eyes-Brown eyes' experiment of Jane Elliott, (where she told the blue-eyed children in her class they were superior to the brown-eyed children, and saw huge effects on the children's behaviour) is a cautionary tale here: it illustrated the evils of prejudice brilliantly but was probably too stressful for the participants to be considered ethical.