



# Young Plato Resource Pack

## Doing philosophy in groups

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## 7 Big Questions - understanding & using this pack

What rules should we follow? Is ever OK to hit back? Can you control yourself? What makes you who you are? You may have asked yourself these questions when watching the journeys of Kevin McAreeve and his pupils as they grapple with school and life in the Ardoyne district of Belfast. The documentary film [Young Plato](#) is packed with big philosophical questions.

And we ask these questions all the time in our classes.

Welcome to The Philosophy Foundation's companion pack to the multi-award-winning documentary film *Young Plato*. We are giving you a way to discuss important questions and bring them to the young people you know. By asking and thinking and responding to these questions you can facilitate better thinking about challenging issues in young people's own lives and society as a whole.

### **How do I use these resources? How do I run a session?**

There are six big questions here, and each question has two enquiries that tackle separate elements of the question. There are further free downloadable sessions as well as a list of further enquiries that can be found in other publications.

Each session has a story, stimulus or exercise that leads into **Task Questions**. Ask these to the group and let them talk in pairs/small groups for a few minutes. Once they have had time to work out what they think, ask them to share their thoughts in the group. There is a wealth of strategies and support for this on The Philosophy Foundation's website (films, games and further enquiries on [members site](#), [shop for resources](#), [plus our training](#)).

To begin with, try to keep in mind that good enquiries are often:

- Reasoned: Always ask them why they think what they think. Reasons are the building blocks.
- Inclusive: Give everyone the opportunity to speak, not just those with hands up.
- Critical: Look for disagreement but don't play Devil's advocate yourself. It's their discussion, not yours.
- Spacious: Give them time to respond fully and get to the bottom of each question, only use the **Nested Questions** when discussion is drying up.
- Dialectic: The group should be: Listening, thinking and responding. Any questions you ask should facilitate this.



This will give you a good start. If you are running the sessions in a professional capacity, The Philosophy Foundation provide training for educators and individuals:

- Become a facilitator with stage 1 <https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/stage-1>
- Change your school culture with bespoke packages <https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/schools-2>
- Make better decisions at work with <https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/businesses>
- For young people at home <https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/online-courses>



## **Rules – What should we be expected to do?**

### **Sessions**

1. The Tolerant School
2. Windows

## **THE TOLERANT SCHOOL**

### **Preliminaries**

You may need to pre-teach the meaning of the word tolerance. If so, then explain it as follows:

- Intolerance = I don't like something, and I don't allow it.
- Tolerance = I don't like something, and I allow it.

For example, “teachers don't tolerate bullying” but “I tolerate my brother supporting a different football team.”

To make sure they have comprehended it, ask the learners for one thing they tolerate and one thing they don't tolerate.

You may also wish to teach the difference between the noun tolerance and the verb tolerate so that children don't use them improperly.

### **Stimulus**

On the planet Nog there is a school called the Tolerance School where the alien head teacher promises she will respect the opinions of everyone who goes there. Green, gold, purple and red aliens all go to the school knowing that they will be tolerated. ‘No matter if you have one, seven or thirty-four-and-a-half legs, you will be tolerated at The Tolerance School’, says the head teacher.

People think different things at this school. Some believe that old pencils are the best food ever. Others think that the sky is black at night because of a giant curtain that gets pulled over the planet – the stars are little holes that have been eaten in the fabric by moths. Some aliens think that the planet Nog was born 1000 years ago, and others think it was born 10,000,000 years ago. They have to respect each other's opinion in The Tolerance School.

One day a green alien called Zed stands up and says that purple aliens aren't as clever as the others. Just then the head teacher walks into the classroom and hears Zed say ‘they shouldn't be allowed to go to the same school as green, gold and red aliens.’



Everyone goes quiet.

### **Task question: Should the head teacher tell Zed to stop?**

*Iffing strategies: teasing out implications and making inferences*

If the learner answers yes, she should tell him to stop', then you can 'if' them by saying '*if the head teacher tells Zed to stop then is the school tolerant?*' If the learner answers 'no, she should tell him to stop', then you can still 'if' them by saying '*if the head teacher doesn't tell Zed to stop then is the school tolerant?*'

### **Nested questions**

- Should you tolerate intolerant opinions?
- Would you like to go to The Tolerant School?
- If you were to change the rules of the school, what would you change them to?
- What if Zed said it for a joke? Can jokes be intolerant?



## WINDOWS

Stimulus 1 and 2 could be viewed as alternatives, in which case, choose which one you'd prefer to start your session with. Or, you could use one starter one week and the other the following week, as they are closely related but deal with slightly different issues, voting and decision making.

### Stimulus 1: Voting!

Ask: 'Who would like the windows open and who would like them closed? Let's do a vote! Hands up if you'd like them open... Hands up if you'd like them closed.'

Do: Record the result on the board.

### Task question: With this result what should we do?

#### Nested questions:

- Is voting fair?
- Is voting the best way to decide? Are there any better ways?
- Is the fairest way the best way to make decisions?
- Are the majority always right?

#### Questions to take you further:

- What if it were 12 vs 13?
- What if it were 30 and 0?
- What if we found some research that said the air quality in this area is so poor that if the windows are left open then it will shorten pupils lives by up to 5 years?
- What if one child is very cold?
- What if one child has bronchitis?
- What if someone is always on the losing side of the vote (minorities, etc)?

#### Extension activity: Voice of a philosopher

Tell the group that when countries and groups decide on what to do by voting this is called democracy. A famous philosopher called Plato argued that democracy was not the best way of making decisions for a country. He said that a country is like a ship and only the captain really knows how to command the ship because he best understands the vessel, the seas and how to navigate one on the other. Likewise, only people who are very clever and good at making decisions should have the power to decide what is good for the country. Just like it would be dangerous to put the crew in charge of the ship, it would lead to problems if ordinary people could decide what happens in the country.



## Task question: What do you think about Plato's critique of democracy?

### Nested questions:

- Are clever people better at making decisions?
- Is a country like a ship?
- What dangers could follow from democracy?

### Stimulus 2: Decision!

Put some decisions on a piece of paper, such as:

- Windows open or closed?
- Which DVD to watch?
- Class trip to zoo or cinema?
- Who should be on the school council?
- Any other similar decision the class could engage in...

## Task question: What is the fairest way to make a decision?

### Extension activity for stimulus 2:

- 1) Have the children work in pairs or small groups;
- 2) Give each pair or group some paper to work/write on;
- 3) Set them each the task of coming up with alternative ways of making group decisions where there is disagreement to voting;
- 4) Allow them to work on this for some time;
- 5) Have the groups share their suggestions;
- 6) (Optional) Group them into broader categories (e.g. Random methods, Contests, Expert opinion etc. so that if someone says 'a lottery' and someone else says 'pull it out of a hat', these can both be listed the category Random methods)
- 7) Invite them all to evaluate the suggestions ('Are there any possible problems with any of these suggestions?')
- 8) Invite them all to think of any ways of dealing with the objections offered

### Further resources on Society and Rules

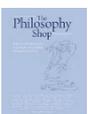
#### [The If Machine 2<sup>nd</sup> ed](#)

- Republic Island (p. 78)
- The Ring of Gyges (p. 91)



#### [The Philosophy Shop](#)

- The Magic Crown (p. 237)
- A New World (p. 242 TPS)





- *General section: Value: Politics (pp. 235-252 TPS)*



### Thoughtings

- It's the Rules (p. 174)
- Naughty-Land (p. 162)



### The If Odyssey

- Nobody's Home, story plus TQ from extension activity: Lawlessness (p. 46, TQ from pp. 56-7)



## War and Peace – When should we fight, and when not?

### Sessions

1. An Eye for an Eye
2. Who Wins, Wins

### AN EYE FOR AN EYE

#### Stimulus

There was a young man called Jerry, who lived with his mother. One day he decided it was time to move out and get a house of his own. He found a small piece of land to build his house on and ordered 500 bricks, which were delivered to that spot.

The next morning Jerry went there with the builders but all the bricks were gone. They had been moved to the garden of another house about 100m down the road. Jerry was sure they were the same bricks because he counted them - 500 - and they still had some of the plastic packaging attached. He went home and told his Mum.

His mum told him to steal the bricks back. So that's what he did. With the help of the builders he carried all the bricks back to his own land and the builders got to work putting up the walls of the new house. Just as they were finishing that job, the man who had stolen the bricks, whose name was Marcus, arrived.

'You stole my bricks,' fumed Marcus.

'You stole them from me!' replied Jerry.

'How do you know those were yours?' challenged Marcus.

'How do you know these are yours?' sneered Jerry.

Marcus couldn't think of any answer to that - except one. He bunched up his fist and punched Jerry in the face.

That evening, Jerry went back to his Mum and told her what had happened. He had a black eye. 'You need to go and find him and hit him back', was her answer. Jerry wasn't so sure. 'Listen' she warned sternly, 'We say 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. That means whatever he does has to be returned to him. He takes your bricks, you take them right back. He gives you a black eye, you need to give him one back - the same he did to you, no more, no less.'

So Jerry waited for Marcus to come out of his house the next day and surprised him with a punch in the eye. Then he ran off. Later that day he saw that Marcus had a black eye, just like his own. Then he went back to building his house. He watched the builders put the roof on and finish painting the walls, windows and doors. When it was done, he went back to get his Mum, so she could come and see. By the time he had walked over to his old



home, and she'd got ready to go, and they'd walked together back to his new home, it was starting to get dark. And when he got there, he couldn't believe his eyes.

His brand-new house was in ruins. The roof and walls had all been smashed in. The ground was covered with broken bricks and tiles. Jerry howled with rage. Just then, he saw Marcus in the distance, carrying a sledgehammer. Jerry ran after Marcus. When Marcus saw Jerry chasing, he dropped the sledgehammer and ran. Jerry stopped to pick it up. It had brick dust on it from where Marcus had been smashing up his newly built house. 'You know what you have to do,' his mother said. 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a house for a house.'

Jerry carried the sledgehammer over to Marcus's house and rang the bell. There was no answer. 'Good,' thought Marcus, 'He's too scared to come home. So I won't be disturbed.' With a couple of big swings of the sledgehammer, the whole of Marcus's roof came crashing down. Then Jerry smashed in the walls until there was just a huge heap of rubble. He stood and looked at what he had done. It made him a bit sad to see all that destruction. But now all his anger was gone. And it was only fair that Marcus got what he deserved.

### Task questions:

- Is it fair that Marcus's house was knocked down?
- Was it right of Jerry to knock Marcus's house down?
- Where should Jerry have stopped - before the bricks? After the bricks? The black eye? The house? Never?
- If you were a judge, what punishment would you give Marcus and Jerry? What about Jerry's Mum?

### Extension activity

... It turns out that Marcus wasn't out. He was hiding in the house and didn't answer the door. He was crushed by the falling roof and died.

This changes the discussion completely because it brings in the idea of unintended consequences (this is recognised in law: Jerry would be convicted of manslaughter, not murder, if it was clear that he didn't know Marcus was there). It doesn't prove that Jerry was wrong or right in his intentions. So someone could argue that it was still right for Jerry to knock Marcus's house down but that he should have made sure Marcus wasn't in it.



## WHO WINS, WINS – THINKING ABOUT INVASION

### Stimulus

There are two countries: a country called ‘Mars’ and another called ‘Venus’ [feel free to rename these]. Martians are a warrior people, who also like to move to new countries to set up new towns and cities. It is the Martian way to invade other countries if they are already settled. Their belief is that whoever wins a battle deserves to take the spoils. Their motto is ‘Who wins, wins’. They believe that if you’re not Martian then it’s okay to invade and kill you. That’s what Martians believe.

The Venusians are a peace-loving people who believe in tolerance, acceptance, dialogue and respect. They are also pacifists, which means that they do not believe in war or violence. Their motto is ‘live and let live’.

### *Invasion*

The Martians have decided to invade the Southern part of Venus so that they can build a new city there because the land is fertile land and because it is a good strategic post.

Draw a simple diagram showing two countries and label them ‘Mars’ and ‘Venus’. Draw an arrow pointing from *Mars* to *Venus*, indicating an invasion. Run two enquiries where you ask the class to imagine that they are:

- a) Martians
- b) Venusians

### **Task question: (If you are an Xian), is it okay for the Martians to invade Venus?**

### **Nested questions:**

- Is invasion ever acceptable?
- Do the beliefs of the Martians make it acceptable in this case?
- Does the fact that the Venusians will not fight back make a difference?
- Does ‘Live and let live’ result in any logical problems? Does it give license to those who wish to oppress, especially if it is part of their culture?

### **Extension activity**

In the Venusian senate an argument breaks out because one of the Venusians has suggested that they suspend their pacifist laws in order to defend themselves.



Split the class into two and ask each side to take on the role of one side of the debate:

- 1) That they *should not* suspend their pacifist law.
- 2) That they *should* suspend their pacifist law.

Conduct a debate. After the debate ask them to return to their own authentic positions and run an enquiry around the following question:

### **Task question 2: Should the Venusians suspend their pacifist law?**

#### **Nested questions:**

- Is it okay for them to fight to defend themselves?
- Is pacifism a good policy?

#### **Further resources on War and Peace**

[Here and Elsewhere – thinking about migration and identity](#)



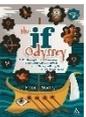
#### [The If Machine 2<sup>nd</sup> ed](#)

- Republic Island (p. 78)



#### [The Philosophy Shop](#)

- Gun (p. 223)



#### [The If Odyssey](#)

- The War (p. 25)
- The Battle (p. 33)



#### [40 Lessons to get children thinking](#)

- The Hiding Box (p. 156): A World Without... exercise on 'War', 'Fighting', 'evil' and 'good'.



## **Belonging – What is ‘us’?**

### **Sessions**

1. In Another Class
2. Star Trekking

## **IN ANOTHER CLASS - THINKING ABOUT IDENTITY, VAGUENESS AND SETS**

### **Stimulus**

- 1) Have the class stand up.
- 2) Split the class into two (equal or as close as).
- 3) Have them stand in two circles or two lines opposite one another.
- 4) Name one group ‘class A’ and the other ‘class B’.
- 5) Ask everyone to begin by putting their thumbs up.
- 6) Ask them to put their thumbs down when they think the class is no longer the same class.
- 7) Tap two children (one from each ‘class’) on the shoulder and have the two children swap places, joining the other class.
- 8) Tap another two children and have them do the same.
- 9) Carry on in this way until all the children have swapped classes.

### **Task question: Which is class A and which is class B?**

- If you changed your thumb direction, at what point did you change your thumb direction?
- Why did you change your thumb direction when you did?
- Why didn’t you change your thumb direction?

### **Nested questions:**

- Is there a point at which something becomes something else?
- Are there reasons why something remains the same thing no matter what changes occur? If so, what would they be?
- Can change occur without loss of identity?



### Extension activity

- 1) Find out the name of the class (e.g. 'Oak class' or '4RD' etc.)
- 2) Ask the children where they went on their holidays.
- 3) Ask them to imagine drawing a line from X (e.g. Scotland) to Y (e.g. Mexico) etc. forming a big imaginary circle on a map.

### Task question: While you were all on your holidays how big was 'X' class?

#### Nested questions:

- Did 'X' class still exist?
- When you are in the classroom does 'class x' still exist?
- When you leave the classroom does 'class x' still exist?
- What is a class?
- Where is a class?

### Extension activity

Have the class huddle up as close as possible to each other in the middle of the room.

### Task question 1: Is the class smaller?

Have the class spread out to the walls of the classroom as far as they can?

### Task question 2: Is the class bigger?

#### Nested questions:

- Did 'X' class still exist?
- When you are in the classroom does 'class x' still exist?
- When you leave the classroom does 'class x' still exist?
- What is a class?
- Where is a class?

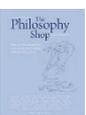
### Further resources on Belonging

#### [The If Machine 2<sup>nd</sup> ed](#)



- The Ship of Theseus (p.102)
- The Rebuild (p.205)

#### [The Philosophy Shop](#)



- A Heap of Exercises? (p.26)
- Across the River and Into the Trees (p.29)



- Tralse (p.265)
- Said and Unsaid (p.262)



### [The If Odyssey](#)

- The Storyteller (p.134)
- The Stranger (p.146)



### [Once Upon an If](#)

- As Clear As The Edge of a Cloud (p. 61)
- This book is out of print, but enquiry available on TPF website [As Clear As The Edge of a Cloud](#).



## STAR TREKKING

### Stimulus

You are the captain of a star-ship, the TriStar, and have been now for the past 10 years during which time you have trekked across the universe exploring new planets and encountering all kinds of new life forms. The ship has a teletransporter on board and this is the routine method of transportation on and off the ship. You must have been through the transporter hundreds – if not thousands – of times. However, you hear about a strange case on the news reporter. A scientific report has been published back on Earth claiming that anybody who travels through the teletransporter suffers a terrible - but hitherto unknown – fate: they die!

The report explains it like this: each time a person transports through the machine the actual material that they are made of is destroyed, or, more accurately, disassembled, and the information about the person is then beamed across space and the person is copied using the atoms available at the designated place where they are simply copied in every detail including memories and feelings. The person who materialises at the other end will feel like a continuation of the person who stepped into the machine on board the ship, but – according to the report – they will, in fact, be a completely new person having replaced the old one.

You read the extract with astonishment: that would mean that you have died many hundreds of times. But you feel like the same person - you don't feel like you've died and been replaced. You are requested to beam down onto Earth's surface for a routine meeting. You step towards the teletransporter and then hesitate...

### Task question: Should you step into the machine?

#### Questions and tasks to take you further:

- Will this be the last journey you ever make?
- Draw a diagram as you explain to help ease understanding.

#### Nested questions:

- If you are copied by the machine then is the copy the same person as you?
- There is only one of you at any one time, does this mean that it is you when you appear at the other end?

#### Extension activity 1

One way to think of this is to imagine two scenarios:



Scenario one: a car is taken apart and then the parts are taken somewhere else where the car is rebuilt, using the same parts.

Scenario two: a car is taken apart and the information about how the car was built is sent somewhere else where the instructions are followed accurately and the car is rebuilt, using other parts that they make at the new location, indistinguishable from the first car.

**Task question: Is the story of the captain of the star-ship more similar to scenario one or scenario two?**

### Extension activity 2

If we imagine that the teletransporter was able to actually transport the atoms that comprise you, if those atoms are first of all completely dismantled, flown through space, and then reassembled at the other end, would the end result be the same person or a different person do you think?

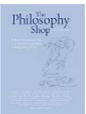
**Task question: Would it be you on the other planet?**

### Further resources on Belonging

#### [The If Machine 2<sup>nd</sup> ed](#)



- Here and Elsewhere (p. 108)
- The Ceebie Stories, especially Friends, The Android, Finally Human? (pp. 178-210)
- Republic Island (p. 78): Alone or Together? (p.85)



#### [The Philosophy Shop](#)

- The Magician's Misery (p. 240)
- Bobby the Punching Bag (p. 189)



## **Belief – What do we think is the case?**

### **Sessions**

1. Flat Earth
2. Is It a Lie?

## **FLAT EARTH**

### **Philosophy**

This session is based around the curriculum themes earth, sun and moon and direct and indirect evidence. In this session the teacher role-plays the ancient Egyptian thereby giving a dynamic and responsive voice to this figure of antiquity. The children role-play the time traveller, so you will need to think on your feet to be able to respond appropriately to the children's arguments and challenges. Their job is to demonstrate to the ancient Egyptian that the Earth is round and not flat. However, given that most of the evidence we have for this is only indirect, it is harder than they will at first think. For instance, if the children say 'that you just have to look in any book!' then you – as the ancient Egyptian – can say something like, 'Ah! But how do you know that the books speak the truth?' or, 'But all of the books in the Pharaoh's library state quite clearly that the Earth is flat'. It may take them a minute or two to work out what is meant by this.

Most direct evidence supports the view that the Earth is flat and this is precisely why this view was historically held by so many for so long: for instance, any landscape or horizon will not appear curved when observed from a ship. This often surprises the children but it is good if they start to realise for themselves that there are these difficulties, through a session like this rather than simply being told.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) used the apparent movement of the constellations to speculate that the earth was in fact spherical and, later, Eratosthenes (276–195 BCE) surmised its shape by the angles cast by sunbeams.

He also calculated the circumference of the Earth on this basis with remarkable accuracy. I have heard children also make some compelling arguments such as, 'If the Earth was flat then when we look out across the sea we would be able to see America, on a clear day,' or that 'because ships disappear behind a horizon it shows that the Earth must be curved'. Of course, they would need to actually see these things before the arguments could be demonstrated, but the key thing is that these primary-aged children have thought of something that both they and the Egyptian could, in principle, perform and observe. It is therefore the sort of idea that shows a move away from the unreflective and unsupported assertion that 'the Earth must be round because thinking that it's flat is just stupid!' This comment is closer to how they can sometimes begin the debate.



## Stimulus

You are a time traveller. And also a scientist and historian, specialising in ancient Egyptian languages and the history of science. You have decided to take a trip back in time using a time machine. Given your special interest in ancient Egypt you set the controls of your time machine for ancient Egypt: the year 2500 BCE, to be precise. [You could ask the class how long ago they think this would be.]

When the whirring and humming of your time machine finally stops you open the door and step outside. All your knowledge, and the reading you have done of this time, cannot prepare you for what you see when you actually arrive in ancient Egypt. What particularly strikes you is how new everything looks. And the colours! The statues and pyramids are not mere bare stone, they are coloured and some are even decorated. Quite amazing!

Being a scientist you seek out another who will share your interests. There aren't really any scientists in the sense that there are in your time, but you are able to find a person who is interested in similar things: in how things are and how things work. His name is Amun and once you get the hang of speaking a language you have only had to read before now, the two of you speak at length about a great many things such as cosmology (that is 'the origins of the universe') and the engineering skills and plans that were used to build the pyramids. You are amazed to discover that all the theories modern people have come up with about how the ancient Egyptians built the pyramids are all wrong – you can't wait to get home to write the definitive paper all about it!

## Extension activity

Have the class research the various theories put forward about how the Egyptians actually engineered the building of the great pyramids such as the 'inside-out theory'.

Among the many things you talk about together you eventually come to the topic of the shape of the Earth. As you already know, the ancient Egyptians believed that the Earth was flat, not round as we think today. They also believed that it rests on a sea that stretches on forever in all directions.

## Start questions:

- How will you persuade Amun that the Earth is in fact round and not flat?
- Can you?

(At this point the teacher should assume the role of Amun the Egyptian and enter into a role-played dialogue with the children – see above.)



### **Nested questions:**

- How do you know the Earth is round?
- Does the Earth look round?
- Could the Earth be flat and not round? Could you be wrong in thinking that it is round?

### **Task question: How do we know things?**

#### **Nested question:**

- What is knowledge?

#### **Extension discussion:**

- Does the ancient Egyptian hypothesis (alternative word: idea) that the earth rests on an infinite sea make sense?

Note: Amun, when he understands what we think, may object that our understanding is no different from his: we also posit (or are left with the problem of) an 'infinite sea' of space instead of water; but, in principle, he may say, it's the same idea.



## IS IT A LIE?

### Stimulus

Jeff is playing ball outside and kicks it through a window. The owner comes out and says: "Did you break my window?"

Jeff responds with, "no."

### Task questions:

- Did Jeff lie?

### Nested questions:

- What makes it a lie/not a lie?
- What is a lie?
- What is a 'truth'?

The discussion may centre around whether Jeff intended to or not: some say if it was by accident then he didn't (actively) break it, it just happened - so it's not a lie. Others claim it was a lie because he knows that it was him but didn't say. Equally, they may all think that Jeff is clearly lying, so move to the extension activity.

### Extension activity 1

Jeff is playing ball outside and kicks it through a window. Jeff leaves and forgets about it, he goes to school, grows up and gets a job delivering parcels for Amazon. He returns to the house to deliver a package. The occupant opens the door and says, "Aren't you the boy who broke my window 15 years ago?"

Jeff has no memory of this so says, "No."

### Task question: Is that a lie?

### Nested questions:

- Can you lie by accident?
- Is it a lie if he's pretty sure he didn't do it?
- If he thinks he might have done it and says 'Yes', is that a lie?

### Extension activity 2

Jeff is playing ball outside and kicks it through a window. He leaves and meets his friend Ella. He tells Ella all about it. Later Ella

walks past the house to see the window that Jeff broke. The owner spots her and says, "Do you know who broke my window?" Ella replies: "I wasn't there when it happened"



## Task question: Did Ella lie?

### Nested questions:

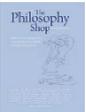
- Is not answering the question the same as lying?
- If you let someone think something that is not true are you lying?
- Are adverts (Center parcs - the best day of your life!) lying?
- Are stories lies?
- Is the truth important?
- Are lies important?

### Further resources on Belief



#### [40 Lessons to get children thinking](#)

- The Talking Skull (p.80)



#### [The Philosophy Shop](#)

- Tina's Ghost (p.143)
- The Confession (p.145)
- The Adventures of Poppy The Bear (p.148)
- *General section: Part 2 (pp. 141-182)*



#### [The If Machine 2<sup>nd</sup> ed](#)

- Billy Bash (p.156)
- The Wand (p.153)



## Stories - What and how do we tell each other things?

### Sessions

1. Once Upon an If, parts 1... and 2
2. The Matches

### ONCE UPON AN IF (PART 1)

#### Stimulus

You can tell this with props. You will need two books, a larger book for The Big Story Book (preferably decorative to meet with its description in the story) and a smaller one for The Little Story Book. Wrap the larger book before the class arrives so that it can be opened at the appropriate time in the story; place the smaller book under a table or chair on the other side of the room, in advance, so that it can be retrieved, almost magically when it appears in the story.

Zadie was a little girl who loved stories. Her Mum travelled far and wide around the world for her work. While travelling in the Middle East she was sold a very special object by a street seller at a bazaar in Turkey. She took it home as a gift for Zadie.

On her birthday Zadie opened up the present that she was sure was a book from its shape and weight. She wasn't very excited at the prospect of a book for her birthday, but when she took off the wrapping she found something she really wasn't expecting. It was a book beautifully bound with leather and a cover decoration made from real silver, curling and winding all around the book's cover and spine. The silver also formed the words 'The Story Book'. Now she really was excited. 'Thank you Mum!' she said.

Her mother, however, had a puzzled look on her face. 'What is it?' Zadie asked her.

'Oh, it's just that, when I bought it from the bookseller in Turkey -'

'Turkey! You bought this in Turkey?' Zadie interjected.

'Yes, from Turkey,' said her mother. 'As I was saying: when I bought it from Turkey I was sure the title was in Turkish. Funny how your memory plays tricks on you,' she said, more to herself than to anyone else.

'It's beautiful!' said Zadie, and then she kissed her mother. To Zadie, Turkey was a far-off, exotic place that brought to her mind magic carpets and minarets. Zadie became distracted by all the other presents that she had to open and with all the fun things she did



on her birthday and so didn't get to open the book all day. She went to the zoo and then came home and had a party with all her friends.

That night, when she lay in bed, she remembered that she hadn't opened The Story Book yet. She reached down to the pile of presents she had collected throughout the day and pulled the book out from the bottom.

She became enchanted again by the beautiful cover and her eyes tried to follow the twisting and curling lines that decorated it. But she could never follow one line to the end. Eventually she opened it...

Flicking through the pages she was disappointed to see that it was empty. Or, almost empty, for there was something on the first page only. There was some writing with a picture above it of a stick person standing in front of a crudely drawn book that lay on the ground in front of it. The writing underneath said, 'Hello, I am the character from this book. You will need to tell me who and what I am. To do this you will need to use the book that is in your room – not this one; the other one. Take a look!' There, the writing ended. Zadie thought that this was a very strange book indeed because if this was all that was written then it wasn't a story at all. But then something caught her eye just over the top of the book. In her room, across from her, lay another book that hadn't been there before. 'Wow!' she said as she decided that The Story Book must be magic.

She put down the book and jumped off her bed to retrieve the other, smaller one. She opened it to the first page and found only the words 'Who am I?' written at the top, the rest of the page was empty. She turned the page to find 'What am I?' at the top of the second page and 'Where am I?' at the top of the third page; 'When am I?' at the top of the fourth page and 'What if...?' and [Slide 8] 'Who else?' at the top of the fifth and sixth pages. She had no idea what they could mean. 'Oh no!' she said, 'Now I'll never find out who's in The Story Book!'

That night it took her ages to fall asleep, she just didn't know what to do with the books. And she was so disappointed to discover that they had nothing but mysteries in them.

**Task question: What do you think the questions in the little book mean?**

**Nested questions:**

- What should Zadie do with the books? • Can the mystery be solved?
- What would you do?



### Stimulus continues

But the new day brought with it an idea.

The first thing she did was to see if both books were still there. They were. Then she took her favourite pen and opened the smaller book that had appeared, she could only imagine magically, the night before. She opened the book to the first page where it said 'Who am I?' and she removed the top of the pen and wrote, 'You are...' then she stopped and wondered what name she could give the character. She realised that she could give the character any name she wanted. 'You are... Matilda,' she wrote. Her mum had told her that she and her dad had nearly named Zadie 'Matilda'. Then she wondered about what sort of a person Matilda might be.

### Task question: What sort of person would someone called Matilda be?

#### Nested questions:

- Would a Matilda have any particular characteristics at all?
- Does a name have anything to do with what sort of a person you are?
- Does someone called Matilda have to be a girl?
- Do you think Zadie would have been a different person had she been named Matilda?
- TX (see page 7) name-change: imagine that you have had your name changed. Perhaps you have travelled to live in a new country where your old name was too difficult to pronounce. Are there any names you could have that may affect your personality or what sort of person people think you are? What about: Hilary? (Both a boy's and a girl's name) Biff? Farquhar?
- Are there any other names you can think of that might significantly affect you or the way other people see you?

Zadie closed the little book then ran back to her bed, climbed up and opened The Big Story Book.

### Task question: What do you think she will find?

This time, instead of the stick person there was a picture, simply drawn, of a young girl about the same age as Zadie and underneath the picture it said,

*Once upon a time there was a girl and her name was Matilda.*



It was written in beautiful, middle eastern-style calligraphy. The picture also showed Matilda holding and reading the book that had been on the floor before.

But then it occurred to Zadie that Matilda didn't have to be a girl, and a sudden rush of freedom surged through her. She crossed out 'girl' and instead wrote the word 'dragon' into *The Little Story Book* so that the story in *The Big Story Book* now read

Once upon a time there was a dragon and its name was Matilda...

There was now a picture of a dragon reading the book instead of the girl that had been there before.

A shiver ran through Zadie's body as she realised what was happening. She thought about what she could do. She took in a deep breath and lifted her pen to begin her story...

### **Task question: So, what has happened?**

...As she breathed out, her breathing out gave her an idea, so Zadie wrote these words down in her Little Story Book under the question 'What if...?' What if there was a dragon that couldn't breathe fire?

She opened *The Big Story Book* and, starting with a title

#### Matilda, The Fireless Dragon

it read:

Once upon a time there was a dragon called Matilda. Matilda was a dragon that couldn't breathe fire and she lived in a...

Zadie realised that she was going to have to think of somewhere a dragon would live. So she lifted her pen and, using *The Little Story Book*, told Matilda where she lived under the question 'Where am I?'. Very carefully, she wrote, Matilda lives in a cave all by herself and she likes being alone.

When she opened *The Big Story Book* again it now read:

Once upon a time there was a dragon called Matilda. Matilda was a dragon that couldn't breathe fire and she lived in a cave by herself. All she wanted was to be left alone.



‘Oh!’ said Zadie, ‘It’s sad.’ Then she realised that she needed to tell the book what other characters there would be so that the story could be finished. Under the question ‘Who else?’, she wrote: There will be a grumpy princess, the princess’s parents, the king and queen; an annoying knight and a monster made of water...

Under the remaining question, ‘When am I?’ she wrote: A long time ago in Fairy Tale Land.

Once Zadie had finished answering all the questions in *The Little Story Book* she ran over to The Big Story Book and sat down to read the story that now lay within, waiting to be discovered.

This is the story she found...



## ONCE UPON AN IF: (PART 2): MATILDA, THE FIRELESS DRAGON

### Stimulus

Once upon a time there was a dragon called Matilda. Matilda was a dragon that couldn't breathe fire and she lived in a cave by herself. All she wanted was to be left alone. But the local townspeople just wouldn't do that. They were always bothering her with one thing or another. This week it was the Princess. She had recently been bitten by a werewolf, but it was a werewolf that had no teeth so she had not been affected by the 'curse of the werewolf' – which says that if you are bitten by a werewolf, you turn into one! However, she had transformed into something – not because of the werewolf but because she had just turned 13. She had transformed into... a teenager! This meant that, all this week, she had lain in bed until noon and when she did finally get up she would be in a foul mood. 'I would rather DIE than live with YOU, mum and dad!' she screamed as she arrived at Matilda's cave. 'I'm going to chain myself up outside the dragon's cave until it EATS ME! And I DON'T CARE!!'

Oh no! thought Matilda as the Princess chained herself up, I was just drifting off to sleep. When a handsome knight rode into the town the following day, the King and Queen told him that their beautiful daughter had been kidnapped by the evil dragon that lived in the hills. So the next thing to disturb Matilda was a knight with an over-long lance and a little too much enthusiasm for slaying dragons.

Oh no! thought Matilda again, with a silent sigh.

For the next three days poor Matilda was vexed by the over-zealous knight. But he was unable to slay her. And it was a good job too. Because on the fourth day the townspeople were themselves terrorised by a water monster. It had been created by a wizard who had lost control of it and now the huge giant, made entirely of water, was on the rampage, drowning cattle, flattening crops and destroying buildings.

'Our only hope,' said the king, 'is to ask the dragon to help us.'

Matilda was busy fighting the knight who was also busy trying to slay her. Not very effectively, it has to be said. Then the King arrived and told the knight to stop slaying the dragon.

'I have come here today to offer a royal apology,' said the King to Matilda, 'And would you be kind enough to help us repel a water monster that is terrorising our town?'

'Why should I help you?' said Matilda. 'All you've done is cause me misery.'



'I know,' said the King, 'and I'm very sorry. But, in return for your help, we will give you anything you want,' he promised.

'There is one thing I want that you could give me,' said Matilda. 'Name it!' said the King. 'Solitude. I just want to be left alone!'

'It will be done,' assured the King, 'if you can help us.'

'The dragon can't even breathe fire!' exclaimed the knight, who was offended that his knightly services were no longer required.

Matilda flew into the town. And the water monster was there, busy creating geezers to knock down trees.

### **Task question: What can Matilda do to repel the water monster?**

When the monster saw the dragon swoop down it was somewhat alarmed as dragons are known to breathe large amounts of fire. And if there's one thing a water monster – being made entirely of water – doesn't like very much, it is large amounts of fire!

'Hello!' said Matilda. 'Now, let's get rid of you,' she said as she started to intake a huge breath.

'No! Stop!' shouted the frightened water monster. 'Okay, I'll go.' But just as the monster was edging its way to leave the town and its people the knight shouted out, still irritated with Matilda, 'The dragon can't breathe fire, you know!'

### **Task question: Now that the knight has revealed that Matilda cannot breathe fire, what can she do?**

The water monster stopped in its tracks. Then turned around and looked at Matilda, who was still holding her breath as if she was about to breathe out.

'Is this true?' asked the monster in a gurgly voice.

'Well,' said Matilda, breathing out in a slow, controlled way, 'everyone knows that dragons breathe fire.'

'But he just said that you don't,' said the monster, pointing to the knight.

'Ah, yes, the knight,' said Matilda. 'You see, he doesn't like me very much, so he's just saying that to annoy me.'



The water monster walked threateningly towards Matilda. It was growing less and less afraid of her by the second.

‘Do you really want to take the risk,’ said Matilda after a pause, ‘given what you know about dragons? Maybe I can breathe fire and maybe I can’t. Do you want to find out?’

### **Task question: What should the water monster think?**

#### **Nested questions:**

- If all the dragons the water monster had previously met breathed fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- If the water monster had only read that *all* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- If the water monster had read that *most* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- If the water monster had read that *some* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- If the water monster had read that *few* dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- If the water monster had read that it is a myth that dragons breathe fire, should the water monster believe that Matilda breathes fire?
- Is there something that the water monster can say, or do, to Matilda? If so, what should Matilda say, or do, in return?
- What would be the reasonable thing for the water monster to do?

And with that she took in a huge breath and looked with wide eyes at the monster.

The monster looked back at her, waited, and then... eventually he slowly turned to go. The water monster had decided it was a risk too great to take.

Once the monster had gone Matilda was able to breathe out, which was good because she was just about to faint.

‘Hip-Hip Hooray!!’ the townspeople cheered.

Matilda went over to the knight, who had nearly spoilt everything, and said, ‘I may not be able to breathe fire but I am big enough to EAT YOU!’ She opened her huge jaws and gobbled up the knight in one go.

The princess was quite pleased because she found him annoying. Then she decided that she would move in with Matilda: her ‘NBF’, as the Princess said, which means ‘new best friend’.



Oh no! thought Matilda.

The End.

Zadie closed the book then both sighed and smiled. Matilda didn't get to be left alone, she thought, but at least she was the hero; dragons aren't usually heroes, and Matilda may have been fireless but she certainly wasn't fearless. Then Zadie put her hand on her chin and looked up towards the ceiling; she was already thinking about what she was going to write in *The Little Story Book* tomorrow...

What if there was a boy who had lost his name? she wondered. And what if there was a cat that couldn't say meow, and what if there was a tree that wished to fly like a bird and...

### **Nested questions:**

- What is a stereotype? (this could be a research task for the class.)
- Are there any stereotypes in this story?
- Does this story challenge any stereotypes?
- Is it okay to use stereotypes in stories? If so, when?



## THE MATCHES

### Stimulus

(The beginning, the middle and the end sections have been marked with a /. You may want to use these for a later discussion. The children may not agree with this division.)

A long time ago there was a man who lived by himself in a big house. / One night, he awoke sweating and terrified, convinced there was someone else in the room with him. / He searched in the darkness for some matches with which to light a candle... and in the darkness, the matches were handed to him!

### Task: Can anyone say back to the class what happened in the story?

(This is not a storytelling task, just a plot-recall task to help embed the story in the minds of the children. You could extend this by asking them to turn to a partner and take it in turns to tell each other what happened in the story. They should correct each other and fill in any gaps. Even at this stage, some of them will naturally storytell. The next task is a storytelling activity.)

### Task: When you tell this story to someone, how can you tell it so that it will work really well?

In pairs or groups, the children should be given a minute or two to think of different ways that they could tell the story effectively. Some suggestions could be:

- Lower your tone.
- Use more description.
- Get a friend to make some sound effects while you tell it.
- Turn it into a play.
- Turn the lights down.
- Use hand gestures.
- Put pauses in.
- Speed up at the exciting bit ('He scrambled around for some matches to light a candle...').
- Turn it into a comedy ('...and then his mother's voice said, "Are you still up, you should be asleep!").
- Give the story an ending. (This makes an excellent discussion point: does it have an ending?)



One very interesting suggestion was that you should say when it happened so that people would know that there were no electric lights, providing a reason to the listener for why he didn't just switch the light on.

Whenever the children make a suggestion ask them to demonstrate it to the class. As the story is so short this should not be too difficult for them to do. If you want to make it solely a storytelling exercise then stipulate that they are not to change the story in any way. Whether it is a story and whether it can be improved can be a separate discussion.

Some of the above suggestions offered by the children are more controversial than others. It is often a good idea to engage the children in a discussion about the more controversial ones. If someone says 'use more description' or 'give the story an ending' ask the class what they think about this and allow different points of view to be voiced, for example: (Year 3) 'It should have an ending because it's boring if you don't know what happens at the end.' / 'It shouldn't have an ending because it keeps people wondering about who or what is in the room and that's more exciting.' You could use an opportunity like this to explain a distinction between 'an ending' and 'a conclusion' (or 'a finish'): *The Matches* clearly has an ending but it is inconclusive for dramatic reasons.

I offer some of my own basic hints for storytelling to the children (to add to their own, if they haven't already said them):

- 1) Split the story into three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end (not the same as 'a finish'). Ask the children to say what these are in the story.
- 2) Suggest that they try not to say 'and then...' between every sentence or event. Demonstrate this by telling the story with 'and thens' and then (!) telling it without them.
- 3) Insert dramatic pauses between the three sections instead of saying 'and then'.
- 4) Try telling the story in lots of different ways to find out which way works best (list the suggestions the class has already made).

Leave them with the task of telling the story to others at home and then to report back to you the following week about how their storytelling went and about which storytelling method worked best with their audience. If they told a different story ask them to tell it to the class; avoid saying 'perform it' as this may put some off.

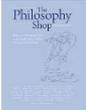


## Further resources on Stories



### [40 Lessons to get children thinking](#)

- The Pedlar of Swaffham (p. 94 and Appendix 2 p. 164)
- The Never-ending Letter (p. 98)



### [The Philosophy Shop](#)

- *General section: Metaphysics: Fiction* (pp. 131-140 TPS)



## **Freedom and control (Are we free?)**

### **Sessions**

1. The Happy Prisoner
2. Choice vs. Not a Choice

## **THE HAPPY PRISONER**

### **Stimulus**

Sit one child in the centre of the room and say:

*This person is in a room. A locked room and the key has been thrown away. Whatever happens in this story it is important to remember that this person cannot leave the room. However, they can have whatever they want inside the room. Any suggestions?*

As pupils suggest things the child in the middle can decide whether she wants them in the room or not. At a certain point you will want to say *'by the way if you want to put something quite large we can make the room bigger, as long as she doesn't leave the room'*.

Inclusion strategy: For the above stage ask everyone to stand up first. Then ask for things they can put in the room. Once a person has contributed an idea they can sit down. Continue at a quick pace until everyone is sat down. This gives everyone a chance to participate easily. It also means that everyone has added to the story, so they are likely to feel a little more invested.

*So, imagine we put all these things (list a few of their ideas) into the room and whatever else she wanted. I have one question...*

### **Task Question: Are they free? (pointing at the person in room)**

### **Nested Questions:**

- What is freedom?
- Is freedom getting what you want?
- Can you be free if you don't get what you want?
- Are we free?
- Is there anyone who we would place at the other end?

### **Extension activity**

Place two pieces of paper or whiteboards at opposite sides of the circle. One has FREE written on it, the other has NOT FREE on it. Ask children where the person in the room



should go. Leave it open as to whether freedom is linear or binary (So don't ask, "Free or not free?" instead ask, "Free, not free or something else?")

Is there anyone who we would place at the other end?

Continue to add people to FREE or NOT FREE (or anywhere in between), allowing children to move people around as the arguments develop.

Suggested characters from children's suggestions:

- Dogs (Are you free if you are owned?)
- Kings/Queens (Does freedom come with power?)
- Children (often in the middle)
- Explorer who can go wherever they want, even in to space (free through movement?)
- A person who is dreaming/believes they are free (free as a perception?)
- God (free to do anything)
- Prisoner (not freed – trapped in one place)
- Wheelchair user (Best to check with class teacher first)



## CHOICE VS NOT A CHOICE

### Stimulus

Make a table with 2 columns on the board. Label the 2 columns 'Choice' and 'not a choice'  
Give each pair a statement:

- Blinking
- Sneezing
- Forgiving someone
- Dreaming about cake
- Getting angry
- Being free
- Feeling happy
- Being British
- Hitting someone
- Winning
- Cheating
- Going to school
- Liking maths
- Speaking Italian
- Sleeping

### Task Question: Which column should your statement go in?

Take some feedback from three or four groups that you pick to be most fertile. Keep the discussion moving by giving lots of groups the opportunity to explain their ideas. The facilitation method I use the most here is **anchoring** and **iffing**, e.g. 'If your parents make you go to school, then which column should it go in?' (iffing and anchoring strategies found in The Philosophy Foundation's [publications](#) and [training](#))

### Extension exercise

- Ask the children: can you finish this sentence "Having a choice is when..." (You are not allowed to use the words "choice" or "choose").
- Can you finish this sentence "Not having a choice is when..." (The same rules apply as above).

Now that they have defined what is meant by having a choice and not having a choice, ask the original **Task Question** again: *So, which column does your statement go in now?*



## Further resources on Freedom and Control

### [40 Lessons to get children thinking](#)



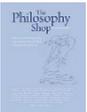
- The Diary (p. 84)
- The Instant Success Switch (p. 106)

### [The If Machine 2<sup>nd</sup> ed](#)



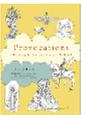
- The Happy Prisoner (p. 114)
- The Frog and the Scorpion (p. 131)
- The Book of Life (p. 137)
- Billy Bash (p. 156)

### [The Philosophy Shop](#)



- The Magic Crown (p. 237)
- Of Fences (p. 249)
- Acorn (p. 251)
- Gun (p. 223)
- General section: Metaphysics: Freedom (pp. 75-90)

### [Provocations](#)



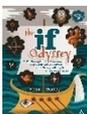
- Freedom (p. 107)

### [Thoughtings](#)



- Are you free? (pp. 177-187)

### [The if Odyssey](#)



- The Singing Women (p. 95)