Thinking with The Hodja
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The Hodja Stories

'The Torah can be read on four levels: 1) Pashat, the literal, or 'simple', 2) Remez, the allegorical, or 'hint', 3) Drash, the metaphorical, or 'search' and 4) Sod, the 'hidden' meaning.'

Jewish teaching known by the acronym ‘PaRDeS’

The Hodja, also known as Nasreddin, is a story character thought to have originated in Turkey, although his stories can be found as far afield as China. Sometimes he is wise and sometimes a fool but his exploits often give the reader something to think about. The Hodja stories usually contain a touch of irreverence and they boldly challenge some deeply held assumptions of the time in which they were written - but also assumptions of our own time. Very often, the virtue of the stories lies in how they invite the audience to untangle the Hodja's misunderstandings and mistakes. Remember that badly asked questions are not the same as questions bad to ask! (See ‘Badly Asked Questions’ in Conversations and Controversies.) I have tried to keep them as short as possible because there is merit in brevity and very many of the Hodja stories are brief. By keeping them short they retain a Haiku or Koan-like quality providing a very small but effective catalyst to thought.
Different Levels of Analysis
(See also 40 lessons to get children thinking: Appendix 2)

You could use the Hodja stories to think about stories in different ways, and on different levels, using the Jewish teaching model mentioned at the start of this section (also described in 40 lessons… pp. 164-166) as inspiration. I have adapted the Jewish PaRDeS approach, though I have not adhered strictly to the Jewish understanding of this process but have applied my own understanding to make the process more generally applicable for most school classrooms.

Here’s an example of its application using the Hodja story Lost Keys (read the story first: page 17 below or page 165 of 40 lessons…):

**Literal meaning**: ‘It’s a funny story about a foolish man who has made an error and is looking for his keys in the wrong place’. *Questions*: What happened in the story? What do you think it’s about?

**Allegorical meaning**: (the lesson – virtue orientated) ‘in order to find something, one needs to look in the right place, not where it best suits to look’. *Questions*: What do you think we are supposed to learn through this story? What is being taught through this story? Do you agree with the moral of the story?

**Metaphorical meaning**: (deeper meaning – not necessarily virtue orientated) ‘the story may represent the following feature of the human condition: that we are only able to look where we can see, there are things we look for that may lie outside of where we are able to look or see’ (E.g. God, objectivity, truth). *Questions*: Can we see/find out all things? Are there things we cannot see/find out? Are there things we will never be able to see/find out?

**Hidden meaning**: (alternative or subjective/personal meaning) ‘I think it’s about friendship,’ or ‘I sometimes forget about why I do things, this story makes me think that I should remember why I do things in order to do them better.’ *Questions*: Can you find any other meanings or lessons in
the story? What does it mean for you, personally? Is there anything you, personally, can learn from the story?

**Thinking About**
For older students, this section may be used - slightly differently from above - to approach stories on different levels and to invite the students to think about and not just with the stories (see ‘Thinking With and Thinking About’ in *Once Upon an If* page 16). For instance, if you were to take a classic story such as *The Frog Prince* then the four levels of understanding might afford the following corresponding four (sometimes adult) kinds of analysis:

**Literal:** it’s about a princess who, in order to get something, makes a promise she later doesn’t want to keep. The princess comes to realise the importance and consequences of promise-making…

**Allegorical** (lesson): one should always keep promises, and doing so leads to reward. Another possible lesson gleaned, following this American reading: ‘You have to kiss a lot of frogs to find your prince’.

**Metaphorical** (deeper meaning): the story describes a girl’s sexual awakening, her fear - and subsequent acceptance - of the phallus.

**Hidden:** this is where one considers what values the story may be thought to reflect such as what it says, or suggests, about attitudes – at the time of writing or compiling – to women, races, classes etc.

Unlike the literal and allegorical meanings, which are usually intended in some way, the metaphorical and – especially – the hidden meanings are not. It is often a matter of debate whether – or, the extent to which - these ‘hidden’ meanings are justifiable. (A much fuller
procedure, based around PaRDeS, is described in Appendix 2 of 40 lessons to get children thinking.

What’s the Puzzle?
Sometimes, depending on the age of the class, you will find the children struggle to understand many of these stories; but remember: this is, in part, the point. There is real value in allowing the children to be, or to get confused trying to make sense of them. One good way to begin thinking using these stories came from 11-year-old Eleanor. After hearing one of the stories she said, ‘It doesn’t make sense; what’s the puzzle in the story?’ I said ‘That’s a great question. What is the puzzle?’ Then her talking partner tried to explain what she thought the puzzle was. I have since used this strategy for approaching all the Hodja stories with classes: 1) tell the story, 2) give them a minute to mull it over and then 3) ask them, ‘What’s the puzzle?’ Given this, the questions I have put at the end of each story may not be relevant if the children take a completely different route. You can approach these stories in one of two ways: either you can ‘throw them to the children’ and see what - if anything - they make of them, using the ‘What’s the puzzle?’ approach described above, or, you may use them for a specific thinking end. If so, then you may want to use the questions I have provided (or similar ones you or the children may come up with).

Many of the stories I’ve included in this section are adapted from the traditional Hodja stories, however, I’ve also included and adapted stories that are not originally Hodja stories but that I think do express something of the spirit of the Hodja. So, Tie Up Your Camel, for instance, is sometimes attributed to the Sufi writer Rumi, (although it should be pointed that the true attribution of many of these stories is difficult as they can often be sourced to different origins). The Wand and A Plan both seem to appear in many versions on the internet and are often used by public speakers. Also see The Book of Chuang Tzu, Winnie The Pooh, Calvin and Hobbes, Alice In Wonderland, to name just a few of the collections or books that contain more stories in the same
vein. There are also many collections of Hodja stories available in bookshops and as e-books (see some links at the end of this document).

**P4C Community of Enquiry**

You could also try using these stories for P4C sessions. There are many ways to do P4C including procedures such as the ‘10 step plan’. This is where the children respond to a story such as these by generating questions and then choosing a question to discuss. See The Philosophy Man’s ‘Philosophy Circles’ and Grace Lockrobin’s Thinking Space to find out more about P4C.

No matter which story you tell, always read or tell the class the following information passage before you begin:

*The Hodja is a story character thought to have originated in Turkey though he and his stories are found in many other cultures around the world. The Hodja, also known as Nasreddin, is sometimes wise and sometimes a fool, sometimes unemployed and sometimes a judge or religious leader. His stories are often humorous, puzzling and thought-provoking.*
God Willing

Themes:
Prediction
Causal connections
Certainty
Religious observances

There are two main approaches to this story. Either it could be used to engender discussions about whether one should observe certain obligations and about whether any consequences for not having done so can be attributable to not having done so; or, you may discuss to what extent one can be certain of future events - however certain they may seem. The former issue concerns what's known as the *post hoc* fallacy (from the Latin *post hoc ergo propter hoc* which means 'after the event therefore because of the event'). An example of this fallacy can be found in superstition. For instance, you may have taken a lucky charm into an exam and you may have done well, so it would appear that the charm caused your success. But a closer look shows that this line of reasoning is an example of the *post hoc fallacy* because, given that you worked hard to pass the exam it is much more likely that your hard work is the true cause of your success and that you would have succeeded whether or not you took the lucky charm in with you. (See also *The Turban 1* on page 32 and *The Wand* on page 11 for a related discussion about the *correlation/causation fallacy*).
The Story

The Hodja was making his way to the market, which he had done many times before, with a money-bag in his pocket bulging with his own hard-earned cash. On his way he bumped into a friend who was returning from the market and his friend asked him where he was going. The Hodja replied that he was going to the market to purchase some supplies, 'and maybe a few treats too!' he added. His friend said, 'But you did not say 'insha'alla'.'

Muslims add this to the end of sentences where they talk about the future: it means 'if it be the will of God'.

The Hodja replied, 'I do not need to say 'insha'alla' because I am very nearly there; I have my money and I'm not going to change my mind now. And, I've been there plenty of times before. So, of course I will go to the market and purchase my supplies, that much is certain.' And then, with a departing smile, he went on his way.

'He should have said 'insha'alla'' muttered his friend to himself as the Hodja left him.

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Task Question 1: Should he have said 'insha'alla'?

Nested Questions:

- What exactly does it mean to say 'insha'alla' or 'if it be the will of God'?
- Why do some people say it?
- Will it make a difference to what happens if he says 'insha'alla' or if he doesn’t?
- Do you have to be a Muslim for 'insha'alla' to meaningful?
- Are there any equivalent phrases in English that mean a similar kind of thing? (E.g. 'Touch wood'? How similar or different is this expression?)
Even though he was only minutes from the market place, he bumped into a group of men less friendly than the man in his last encounter: they were robbers! They took his bag of money and made off with it, leaving the Hodja feeling very sorry for himself.

'I should have said 'insha'alla'” he said.

Task Question 2: Should he have said 'insha'alla'?

Nested Questions:

• What would have happened if he had said 'insha'alla'?
• Would it have made a difference if he had said 'insha’alla'?
• Can you ever be certain about what's going to happen in the future?
• Can you be certain about what's going to happen 5 minutes in your own future?
• What about 1 minute?
• What about 10 seconds?
• What does it mean to be certain?
• Can you ever be 100% certain?
Tie Up Your Camel!

Themes:
The power of prayer
Divine intervention
Causal connections
Piety
Doing good
Reward

There are numerous different angles from which this story may be approached. One may discuss a variety of moral motivation notions - also interrelated - such as prayer, reward, piety and self-righteousness, all of which are ripe for discussion within or outside of a religious setting.

However, this story has a deeper and more controversial aspect too, as it touches on the issue of whether there exists a god at all. One needs to employ good judgement about whether the latter issue is appropriate for your class and/or their age-group. One way to approach this is not to raise the issue yourself in a discussion but to make a decision whether or not to allow it to continue if - or when - your class raise the issue for themselves. Younger ones, on the whole, are less likely to identify this aspect, but only ‘less likely’.
The Story

‘It’s been a good week,’ thought the Hodja as he made his way to the mosque to pray. Whilst praying he told Allah all about how he had been a good man that week and about how he had excelled in doing the work of Allah and, perhaps, possibly a little more than would normally be expected. When he arrived, he noticed that he was a little late and so decided not to tie up his camel as he would not be very long. Anyway, the camel generally stayed put.

When he finished praying, filled with a warm glow of self-righteousness, he returned to his camel, only to find that his camel was gone! He looked up at the sky and started to curse, shaking his fist, ‘Is this how you repay me for my pious service to you?!’

‘Always trust in Allah…’ said a passing Sufi dervish to the angry Hodja, ‘…but remember to tie up your camel.’
**Task Question 1:** Is the Hodja right to get angry with Allah?

**Nested Questions:**
- What reasons should one have for doing good?
- Is it right to do good for reward?
- If you are not rewarded should you stop doing good?
- Is it possible to do good without reward?

**Task Question 2:** If one trusts in Allah, or God, why should you tie up your camel?

**Nested Questions:**
- Does God intervene with our lives? If so, in what sort of ways?
- If God does not intervene how do we know that God is there?
- If you have to tie up your camel yourself then is there any point in trusting in God?
The Wand

(A fuller version of this is available from The Philosophy Foundation website, members' section – where you’ll find many new sessions and lesson plans, and membership is free!)

Themes:
Causal connections
Belief
Proof
Superstition

The Wand is adapted from a story that can easily be found on the internet and, again, is very difficult to source. Though there are earlier versions, one of the most popular appears in an episode of The Simpsons, 'Much Apu About Nothing', when Lisa tries to show that her father, Homer Simpson, has committed the correlation/causation fallacy. Of course, it goes right over his head. The Simpsons, one of the most successful television programmes of all time, is a great resource of stories for thinking, both for children and adults, the series consistently succeeding to operate on two (and sometimes more) levels. Homer Simpson also represents the 'wise fool' figure that you find with the Hodja. (See God Willing on page 6 and The Turban 1 on page 29 for more on the correlation/causation fallacy.)
The Story

*The Hodja was at the market and a seller was trying to sell him a wand.*

‘If you wave this wand outside your house each morning,’ said the seller, ‘it will keep lions away, which is useful because lions are man-eaters.’

‘That’s a good point,’ said the Hodja, ‘But how do I know it works?’

The seller said, ‘Well, do you see any lions around here?’

‘No,’ said the Hodja after looking around, ‘I’ll take it!’ he said, eagerly putting some money into the seller’s hand.

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**Task Question 1:** Does the wand work?

**Nested Questions:**

- Has the seller proved that the wand works?
- If there really are no lions around does that show that the wand works?
- If there were lions nearby would that show that the wand does not work?
- If the Hodja waves the wand each morning and no lions come nearby has the wand worked?
- What would happen if he failed to wave the wand around? What would it prove?
When he gets home, the Hodja decides to test his new wand. To do so, he does just as the seller had told him: he takes the wand each morning and waves it outside his house. He does this for an entire month. He has seen no lions at all in this time so he concludes that the wand must work, and that he had got a bargain.

**Task Question 2:** Was the Hodja’s test a good test?

**Nested Questions:**

- Has he proved that the wand works?
- If not, why not?
- Can you think of a test that could be performed that would prove that the wand either works or not?
- When testing something like this, should you aim to see if it works or aim to see if it doesn’t?
Eat, Coat! Eat!

Themes:
Appearances
Prejudice
Social convention
Rhetoric

This provides a great opportunity to talk about the role appearance plays in our lives. As with many of the Hodja stories, this is one of those that the children sometimes struggle to understand, but there is real value in allowing this to happen (see ‘What’s the Puzzle?’ on page 4 above). Encouraging a good thinking climate in your classroom includes an acceptance - and sometimes even a celebration – of such things as confusion, uncertainty, perplexity and inconclusiveness. These stories can be a great way to begin to cultivate these kinds of states; what the ancient Greeks grouped under the collective name *aporia*, which literally means 'without a path'.

The Story

*The Hodja turned up to a very important dinner he had been invited to and while he was there he was all but ignored. His wine glass was not refilled, he was not spoken to by the host or the other guests, and the waiters kept walking straight past him.*

*He decided to go home and put on his best clothes including a magnificent coat he had never worn before because it was so expensive. When he had changed his clothes he returned to the dinner party. This time his glass was never empty, and for most of the evening he was surrounded*
by important guests listening to his story and laughing at his jokes in all the right places (and in the wrong places too).

Eventually, when the food was served, everyone stop eating to look at the Hodja. He was, they thought, behaving very strangely. The Hodja was not eating any of his food. Instead, he was rubbing it into his coat, saying, 'Eat, coat! Eat! After all, it is you that deserve this food, not me!'

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Task Question 1: What’s the puzzle? (see page 4 above)

Nested Questions:

- Why does he feed his coat and why does he think the coat deserves the food instead of him?
- Is how we dress important?
- Can you think of a situation where how you dress really is important?
- Can you think of a situation where you think how you dress is important, but really it’s not?
- ‘Never judge a book by its cover.’ What do you think of this famous expression?
Lost Keys
(This is also available in 40 lessons to get children thinking together with a full description of the adapted PaRDeS procedure in Appendix 2)

Themes:
Knowledge and its limits
Perception and its limits
Self-deception
Absurdity
Vision and understanding
Stories and levels of understanding

Is this merely an amusing story of a silly man wilfully looking in the wrong place to suit himself or is it a profound meditation on the human condition that highlights a human propensity for self-deception whilst also commenting on the limits of human knowledge? As with many of the Hodja stories, it can be seen as both, and, it is for this reason that I see this as the archetypal Hodja story. (See ‘Different Levels of Analysis’ on page 2 above for more on exploring different levels of meaning with stories, with examples given with reference to Lost Keys.) The Concept Box strategy (Once Upon an If page 77) may also be helpful to allow the children themselves to identify deeper meanings of the story. Given a shared interest in teaching, inquiry, truth and knowledge this story seems naturally to sibling with The Sermon, The Teacher and Who’s Right?
A friend of the Hodja found the Hodja on all fours under a streetlamp.

'What are you doing, Nasreddin?' asked the Hodja’s friend.

'I am looking for my keys,' he explained.

'Shall I help?' his friend said.

'That is very kind of you.'

His friend then went on all fours and started to look for the keys too.

A little while later another of the Hodja’s friends came by.

'What are you doing, Nasreddin?' asked the other friend.

'I am looking for my keys,' the Hodja explained.

'Shall I help?'

'That is very kind of you.'

His other friend also went on all fours and started to look for the keys.

Eventually, the street under the streetlamp was completely covered in friends of the Hodja, all on their hands and knees helping him look for his lost keys. Then one of them said, 'Hodja, are you sure you lost your keys here?'

'No,' replied the Hodja, pointing, 'I lost them over there, by my front door, but I decided to look for them here, under the streetlamp, because there is much more light here.'
• Are there any other meanings or lessons that can be drawn from the story? What does it mean to you, personally?

Nested Questions:

• Is the Hodja a fool in this story? If so, exactly why?
• What is the best way (or ways) to look for something?
• Is it possible to look for something in the wrong way?
• If so, can you name some wrong ways to look for something?
• Are there things we look for that we can never find?
The Sermon

Themes:
Meaning and message
Teaching
Meaning beyond words
Absurdity

Although this could be used as a stand-alone story and session, The Sermon works well as a prelude to The Teacher and the two together make for a good, longer session.

The Story

The Hodja had recently been made a Mullah and, as Mullah, he was expected to deliver a sermon. He hadn't delivered a sermon before and wasn't sure what to say, but all the people were very keen to hear what 'Mullah Nasreddin' would say, so, on the morning of his sermon a huge crowd had gathered.

The time came for the Hodja to deliver his sermon.

'Does anyone here know what it is I am about to say?' the Hodja asked the crowd.

Nobody put up their hand.

'Oh, in which case, I'm very sorry but I can't tell you anything today,' said the Hodja and he walked off leaving the crowd somewhat disappointed.

The following day the crowd gathered again. The Hodja appeared before them and this time he said, 'Does anyone here know what it is I'm about to say?'

This time the crowd would not be caught out again, so they put their hands up.
'Oh,' said the Hodja again, 'well, if you already know what I am about to say then there is no point me telling you.' The Hodja left once again.

On the third day the crowd had gathered again and this time the Hodja asked, 'Does anyone here know what it is I am about to say?'

The crowd, being somewhat confused this time, were divided. Half of them put up their hands and the other half did not. To which the Hodja said, 'Can those of you who know what it is I am about to say tell those of you who don’t know.'

Then, the Hodja left.

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Task Question: Did the Hodja deliver his first sermon? If so, what was it?

Nested Questions:

- If a sermon is a delivered message or lesson, then did the Hodja deliver a sermon?
- Was there anything for the crowd to learn from the Hodja’s actions?
- Can you say something without saying something?
- Can you teach without saying something?
The Teacher

(There is a fuller version of this in 40 lessons to get children thinking)

Themes:
Teaching and learning
Inquiry
Paradox
Knowledge and ignorance

This is adapted from Plato's *Men*o dialogue and represents what is known as the paradox of inquiry. It raises the question: can we really ever learn anything new? I have placed it in the context of the Hodja because there does seem to be something of the spirit of the Hodja in this idea. Very often, the Hodja has just made a logical error or he has exploited an equivocation of meaning in words, or some similar trick. Is the same thing going on here, or is there a deeper problem? Many groups I have done this with discussed the nature of learning and how one goes about acquiring new knowledge.

This is a ‘dialogue story’ (see also the introduction to ‘The Cat That Barked’ in *Once Upon an If* page 112) and as well as the prose version of ‘The Teacher’ there is also a dialogue version, as an appendix to this document, so that it can be performed by two class-members, either as a first reading and/or a second reading.
The Story

It was the Hodja’s first day as a teacher.

‘Before I can tell you what I need to teach you, I need to ask: what don’t you know?’ he began.

‘There’s lots of stuff we don’t know, sir,’ said a pupil to the Hodja.

‘Good. What is it?’ he asked.

‘Well, we don’t know because we don’t know it,’ she said.

‘Let’s find it out then!’ replied the Hodja, cheerfully.

‘How will we do that?’ said the pupil.

‘We will inquire together,’ said the Hodja.

‘But what are we looking for?’ she asked.

‘I don’t know because we haven’t found it yet,’ said the Hodja, ‘so let’s get on with it and start looking!’

‘But you must tell us what we are looking for,’ insisted the pupil, ‘or else we won’t know what it is if we find it.’

‘But how can we inquire into what it is we don’t know if we already know what it is?’ He was beginning to confuse himself.

‘Errrrmm…’ said the pupil, also a little confused.

‘Come on! Let’s not waste any more time. Let’s start inquiring so we can find things out,’ said the Hodja.

He was beginning to realise that teaching wasn’t as easy as he had thought.

‘Okay!’ said the pupil, finally convinced, ‘Where do we start?’

‘Errrrrmmm...’ said the Hodja.

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**Task Question:** How should the Hodja begin?

**Nested Questions:**

- When will their inquiry end?
- How do you begin finding out what you don’t know?
- How will you know when you know it?
- If you don’t know something then how would you know if you found it?
- If you do know something then is there any point in inquiring into it?
- What is inquiry?
- What is learning?
- How do we acquire knowledge?
- How do teachers teach?
- Is there a good way to teach? Is there a bad way to teach?
- Can you make sense of the discussion?
Who's Right?

(There is a fuller version of this in 40 lessons to get children thinking)

Themes:
Truth
Belief
Disagreement
Contradiction
Argumentation

There are those who think that 'everybody can be right' given that 'everyone is entitled to their opinion' and that 'opinions are never wrong, just different'. These two stories brilliantly parody this attitude towards disagreement in a way that makes the controversy approachable for just about any age. (See Conversations and Controversies.)
The Story

The Hodja was acting as qadi - a kind of judge - and he was to listen to a case in which there was a dispute between two neighbours. The first of the neighbours stood before him and explained the situation to the Hodja. The Hodja said, with a smile, 'You are right!' Then the second of the two neighbours stood before him and explained his side of the story, to which the Hodja announced, just as cheerfully, 'You are right!' The Hodja's wife had been listening to the proceedings and stood up, saying, 'Hodja! They can't both be right!' To which the Hodja replied, smiling, 'You are right!'

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Task Question: So, who is right?

Nested Questions:

- Are there any disagreements two people can have where both people can be right?
- Are there any disagreements two people can have where only one of them can be right?
- What makes something right and what makes something wrong?
- Is being right and wrong just a matter of opinion?
- Can everyone be right?
- What is a fact?
- What is an opinion?
- Can you have an opinion about a fact?
Here is another Hodja story, this time in verse (see ‘Stories in Verse’ in *Once Upon an If* page 166) that, perhaps, provides an example of a time when both parties can be right in a disagreement.

*The Hodja had been invited to dine*

*With the King and Queen,*

*No less.*

*The food was said to be very fine,*

*The best ever been,*

*No less.*

*The King declared the soup the best -*

*The Hodja heartily agreed,*

*But the queen thought the lamb the finest dish -*

*And the Hodja heartily agreed!*

*But the Queen reminded Nasreddin*

*‘Saying ‘yes’ to both makes no sense;*

*‘Just now you agreed with the royal King.’*

*To which the Hodja made this response:*

*‘I serve my King and I serve my Queen;*

*Not the soup or lamb tagine.’*
**Task Question:** What do you think of what the Hodja says - first of all, his agreement with them both; secondly, his reason?

**Nested Questions:**

- Can the King and Queen both be right about which is the best dish?
- Is the expression ‘best dish’ the same as the expression ‘favourite dish’?
- Can the Hodja be right to agree with them both? What is he agreeing to – that he also thinks that x and y are the best dish or that they think that x and y are the best dishes?
- Is his reason for agreeing with them both a good reason?
- What kind of reason has he given? (Is his reason logical? Is it diplomatic?)
Minarets

Themes:
Thinking differently
Holes
Space
Confusion

Like *Eat, Coat! Eat!* this story can leave classes stumped at first. However, given time to reflect together on the story they are usually able to make sense of it. Another good exercise in the teacher *biting his or her tongue*! It is helpful to have images of minarets silhouetted against a desert sky ready to show them on the interactive whiteboard so that they can see what minarets are in order to more easily think about the story. It also works well with ‘Doughnut’ in *The Philosophy Shop* page 18.
The Story

The Hodja and his friend were on their way to evening prayer with the 'call to prayer' singing out across the sky as if coming from everywhere. The minarets, from where the singing was being projected, were beautifully silhouetted against the perfectly clear evening sky. The Hodja's friend was struck by their beauty and he suddenly said, 'I've never thought about it before, but how do they build minarets?'

The Hodja replied, 'That's easy! They take a well and turn it inside out.'

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It is best to use the ‘What's the puzzle?’ approach (see page 4) with this story. If you were to use a task question then you might like to use the following:

**Task Question:** Do you agree, is a minaret an inside-out well?

**Nested questions:**

- Can you explain what it is the Hodja means? *(Hermeneutic question)*
- Is there any relationship between a minaret and a well?
- Look at the art of Rachael Whiteread as a stimulus. What do you think? Perhaps use P4C approaches in response to this as a stimulus.
- See also *Experiments with a Doughnut* in *The Philosophy Shop*. 
The Turban 1

Themes:
Causal connections
Class differences
Appearances
Prejudices
Belief and inference

The first of these stories brilliantly and simply illustrates what is sometimes known as the correlation/causation fallacy. This is where a correlation between two things is mistaken for a cause. One may be forgiven for thinking, as one child once did in a philosophy session led by a female colleague of mine, that in order to be wise you need to have a beard. The child may be forgiven, if the only pictures she had seen of wise people were men with beards, for instance, ancient Greek philosophers (if they hadn’t, then it would simply be a prejudice). If one concluded that, after seeing images of ancient Greek philosophers, all they needed to do was grow a beard to be wise, then they would have committed the correlation/causation fallacy. It may seem that the Hodja has made this very error, but, once his act is understood to be ironic it becomes clear that, actually, it is his friends that have committed the fallacy. The element of irony displayed by the Hodja here – that is not displayed in The Wand – makes this trickier to use with younger children.
The Story

A long time ago in Turkey there was a widely held belief: the larger someone’s turban the more wealthy they were, the wealthier someone was the more education they could afford, and only those that were educated could speak.

One day the Hodja was with some friends and they had come to him to read a letter for them, written in the Persian language. But the Hodja was struggling to read it; his Persian wasn’t very good.

‘What’s the matter, Nasredeen, can’t you read it?’ said one of his friends.

He struggled on until, eventually, another of his friends said, ‘But Nasredeen, you have the largest Turban of us all, you should be able to read Persian!’

The Hodja, by now very annoyed, took off his Turban, placed it on the head of his friend and said, ‘There! You now have the largest Turban; you read it!’

***

Task Question: Now that his friend is wearing the large turban will his friend be able to read Persian?

Nested Questions:

Here is the ‘widely held belief’, mentioned above, laid out structurally:

1. If you have a large turban then you are wealthy.
2. If you are wealthy then you can afford an education.
3. If you are educated then you can speak Persian.

• If you are wearing a large turban then does that mean that you must be able to speak Persian?
• Who, in the story The Turban, thinks the following:

If you are wearing a large turban then you must be able to speak Persian.
The Turban 2

Themes:
Who am I? (Identity)
Error
Appearances
Subjectivity

As well as being paired with the other Turban story this one works well with Eat, Coat! Eat! as they both address the relationships between clothes, appearance and personal identity.
The Story

Later on the Hodja is travelling somewhere and he stays over night at an inn. Whilst he is sleeping some of the other travellers also staying at the inn think that it would be funny to take off his turban and swap it with another sleeping traveller’s turban; a much smaller one. When the Hodja wakes up and sees the man wearing his turban he says, ‘If that man over there is me, then who am I?’

***

Task Question: If someone else were who you are, then who would you be?

Nested Questions:

• Can someone else be you? Can you be someone else?
• What does the Hodja think here? Is he confused? If so, how?
• Is there anything wrong with the way the Hodja is thinking?
• Do your clothes at all determine who you are?
• Do your clothes at all determine how other people see you?
A Plan

(A fuller version of this can be found in 40 lessons to get children thinking)

Themes:
Business ethics
Entrepreneurialism
Calculation
Risk
Problem solving

Not originally a Hodja story but one which lends itself naturally to the Hodja, and that he receives gratefully.

The Story

One day the Hodja bought a goat from a farmer for the equivalent in dinars of £50 but when the farmer came to deliver the goat he said to the Hodja that, unfortunately, the goat had since died. The Hodja asked for his money back but the farmer confessed that he had already spent the money so was unable to give it back.

The Hodja thought for a minute and then said, 'Okay, give me the goat anyway!'
The surprised farmer said, 'Alright,' and quickly did so before the Hodja changed his mind.

***

Task Question 1: Why has the Hodja taken the goat anyway? What do you think he will do?
A little while later the farmer passed the Hodja who was now dressed in the finest clothes. 'What did you do with that dead goat I sold you?'

'I raffled it off for £2 a ticket,' the Hodja said smiling.

'Didn't the people who bought the raffle tickets get angry with you when they found out that the goat was dead?'

'No,' replied the Hodja 'because the only person who found out was the winner. I simply apologised to him and said that, unfortunately, the goat had since died. Then I gave him back his £2 and another £10 for his trouble. He was very happy with that.'

'So, how many tickets did you sell?' asked the farmer.

'200,' said the Hodja.

'Maybe if more of my goats died I'd be richer!' said the farmer.

'You need more than dead goats; you need a plan,' said the Hodja and off he went counting his money.

Task Question 2: Was the Hodja's plan a good plan?
Nested Questions:

- What do you mean by 'good'? Are there different meanings of 'good'?
- Was what the Hodja did the right thing to do?
- If you were the winner would you mind?
- If you were one of the losers would you mind?
- If you were the farmer would you mind?
- Did the Hodja do anything wrong?
The Missing Ax

Themes:
Perception
Reality/appearance distinction
Psychology
Guilt
Misappropriation

The Story

The Hodja woke up one morning to discover that his favourite ax was missing. 'Oh no!' he exclaimed, 'Someone has stolen my ax.'

When he came out of his house he saw his neighbour in the yard next door. When he saw him the Hodja thought that he looked very suspicious, that he was averting his eyes and that he was behaving very much like a thief!

Later on that day the Hodja found his missing ax. It was where he had left it among some long grass near where he had been chopping wood the day before.

The Hodja thought it odd, but when he saw his neighbour again, he wasn't acting like a thief anymore. How strange!
**Task Question:** Why did the Hodja's neighbour seem to change his behaviour?

**Nested Questions:**

- Did the Hodja's neighbour change his behaviour?
- Are things always how we see them?
- How much of what we see is affected by how we see it?
As big as it isn’t!

This is an inverted adaptation of a Bertrand Russell anecdote from his seminal paper ‘On Denoting’ in which he says,

I have heard of a touchy owner of a yacht to whom a guest, on first seeing it, remarked, ‘I thought your yacht was larger than it is’; and the owner replied, ‘No, my yacht is not larger than it is.’

In discussion you may want to use both versions of this puzzling little anecdote. The thinking aim could be to try to say exactly why this apparently harmless expression has led to what seems to be an absurd conclusion: namely, that something can be bigger than it is. Surely, something is exactly the same size as it is, neither smaller nor larger. So, what’s going on?

Story

The Hodja had invited a guest back to his house who had heard about his house but who had not been there before.

‘I didn’t think your house was as big as it is,’ said the guest.

‘What did you think then,’ replied the Hodja, ‘that it would be as big as it isn’t?’

Task Question: Has the Hodja properly understood his guest?

Nested Questions:

- Does the statement said by the guest logically lead to this absurd conclusion?
- What exactly did the guest mean by his comment?
- Does it mean anything?
- Is there a better way to say what he means?
Narrator: It was the Hodja's first day as a teacher.

Hodja: Before I can tell you what I need to teach you, I need to ask: what don't you know?

Pupil: There's lots of stuff we don't know, sir.

Hodja: Good. What is it?

Pupil: Well, we don't know because we don't know it.

Hodja: Let's find it out then!

Pupil: How will we do that?

Hodja: We will inquire together.

Pupil: But what are we looking for?

Hodja: I don't know because we haven't found it yet, so let's get on with it and start looking!

Pupil: But you must tell us what we are looking for, or else we won't know what it is if we find it.
Hodja: But how can we inquire into what it is we don’t know if we already know what it is?

Pupil: Errrmm…

Hodja: Come on! Let’s not waste any more time. Let’s start inquiring so we can find things out.

Pupil: Okay! Where do we start?

Hodja: Errrrmmm…
Appendix 2: Some more Hodja stories (without lesson plans) ready for adaptation

(see also pages 1-5 for ideas about how to treat the stories)

The Elephant Trap (Adapted from Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne)

The Hodja looked like he was going somewhere with a purpose.
‘Where are you going?’ asked a friend.
‘I’m going Elephant hunting!’ he explained.
‘How are you going to do that?’
‘I’m going to build an elephant trap,’ said the Hodja.
‘And how will you know where to build it?’ asked his friend.
‘That’s easy! About ten feet in front of wherever the elephant is.’
‘Oh yes! I hadn’t thought of that. Sounds like a good plan. Let me know when you’ve caught it - I would love to see one!’

The Centre of The Earth

Some of the Hodja’s friends were talking together about where the centre of the Earth is. The Hodja overheard them and interjected with, ‘That’s easy! I know where the centre of the Earth is.’

They all turned to find out the answer to this question; a question that had occupied them now for the whole afternoon.

The Hodja said, ‘It’s exactly one foot to the left of my donkey’s right back hoof.’

A Tight Squeeze

One day a man came to see the Hodja with a problem.
‘I only have a small house and my parents-in-law are having to move in with us. But there just isn’t the room. Hodja! what am I to do?’

‘I can solve this for you,’ said the Hodja, ‘but you will need to do exactly as I say.’
‘Anything! Just tell me how to solve my problem!’ demanded the troubled man.
‘Do you have any animals?’ asked the Hodja.
‘I do,’ said the man, slightly puzzled, ‘I’ve two hens, a pig, a horse, two cows, some sheep and a dog.’

‘Okay, when your parents-in-law move in I want to you go outside and I want you to bring in to the house your pig and your two hens. On the second night I want you to bring in the horse and the two cows, and on the third night I want you to bring into your house the sheep - all of them - and the dog.’

‘But, then there will be even less room, Hodja,’ protested the man.

‘You said that you would do anything, so just do as I say! Then come and see me on the fourth day,’ said the Hodja finally.

‘If you insist,’ said the man as he left scratching his head, very confused as to how this would solve his problem.

Four days later the man returned as instructed. ‘So, how has it been?’ asked the Hodja.

‘It’s been TERRIBLE!!!’ shouted the man, ‘What did you think would happen when I took all my animals into the house with me, my wife, my children and my parents-in-law?’ The man was very displeased.

‘Oh!’ said the Hodja, ‘I am sorry to hear that my advice has not helped you. You had better take all the animals out of the house and return them outside.’

The man, who was furious and who had clearly not slept all week, said, ‘Well, of course I will, you fool! Thank you for wasting my time!’ and off he stomped.

A week later, the Hodja bumped into the man at the market and could see that he was much happier and that he had been sleeping well. ‘Hello,’ he said, ‘you look much better.’

‘Yes,’ said the man, ‘ever since I took out all the animals the house is plenty big enough for my family even with my parents-in-law. I can’t believe I didn’t notice how spacious it was before!’ said the man.

‘How funny!’ said the Hodja as he smiled ever so slightly to himself.

Possible Task Question: Did the Hodja solve the man’s problem? If so, how?

School Daze

The young Nasreddin Hodja was at school one day.

‘Nasreddin!’ said the teacher, ‘Are you falling asleep in my lesson?’

‘No, Mullah,’ replied the Hodja, ‘I’m desperately trying to stay awake.’
The Ice Cream Vendor

One day, the Hodja is trying to get some sleep by the river. Just as he is drifting off some children start to play near where he is resting. The children are very noisy! After trying many ways to ignore them, he eventually comes up with a plan to get rid of them. He gets up and goes over to the children:

‘Hey, kids! Have you tried the ice-cream of the vendor on the other side of town? By the bridge? It’s really delicious! And I think he’s giving some away for free today.’

When the children hear about the free ice-cream, they run off in search of it. ‘That’ll give me some time for a snooze,’ thinks the Hodja.

When the children don’t return for the whole afternoon the Hodja wonders where they are. Eventually, he gets up and says, ‘That ice cream must be very delicious!’ and he abandons his rest in search of the delicious ice-cream made by the ice-cream vendor on the other side of town, by the bridge.

For more Hodja stories and ideas around the Hodja stories:

Nasreddin Hodja: 100 comic tales in verse by Raj Arumugam

Tales of Mullah Nasreddin Hodja by Raja Sharma

Learning to Philosophize with Nasreddin Hodja by Oscar Brenifier and Isabelle Millon