



IS IT ALIVE?

By Steve Hoggins

The idea for the characters of Critu and Aris is taken from David Birch's entries in 'The Philosophy Shop', edited by Peter Worley.

Ed Weijers and his colleague Eef Cornelisson, who I met through the SOPHIA network, inspired the 'alive or not alive?' question.

Set up

Gather some objects and/or pictures. Choose ones that are certainly alive and certainly not alive then some in between that children will have to think about. Put them in a bag ready to draw out later. Place two hoops or two boards on the floor with 'alive' and 'not alive' written on them

Story

I have based it around the example of a shoe as I usually use one to tell the story – embellish as you see fit.

Last Tuesday two aliens dropped by. Their names were Critu and Aris. Critu and Aris were two of the cleverest aliens you could ever meet. They could read whole books in seconds, just by flicking the pages. They never needed help to work out what the time was or how much money they needed, their brains calculated it all easily.

Anyway, last Tuesday Critu and Aris popped over to earth to find some things that were 'alive'. Pjnka started with a shoe,

'Here look at this! I think it might be alive', Critu paused and looked a little closer. 'In fact, if I look carefully, I can see definitely alive', continued Critu, pulling at the laces.

'Hold on!' said Aris, 'that's not alive. It's not a living thing; it's just a thing. Put it in the 'not alive.'

'No, no, no!' cried Critu. 'It's actually alive!'

'Nope. Not alive.'

'Alive!'

'Not alive!'

The discussion continues long into the night....

Teaching point - Teacher impartiality

Avoid suggesting what the answer is to children. In this story, for example, it is very important that you do not accidentally give away any reasons why something may be alive. I once made the mistake of saying 'Critu says 'Look! It's moving, it's alive.' The children then thought that moving means it is alive and we're wed to that idea instead of generating their own ideas

Why does Critu think it's alive?

Why does Aris think it's not alive?

Teaching point - Generating ideas

When I first started working with young children I found they often agreed with the first thing said. So if I asked 'Is an egg alive?' and Calum said 'yes' then Caleb, Mariam, Charlie, Sophie etc. would all go on to say 'yes'. Not because they had considered the reasons but some other social reason (I still haven't worked out what that is). To encourage them to consider other viewpoints I could ask something like 'Can you think why it might actually NOT be alive?' but it doesn't work. The language is too complicated and maybe it's a bit odd for the child to consider something so hypothetical. Asking them to consider What Critu's thoughts are

Task questions

- ✓ Is Critu right? Why?
- ✓ Is Aris right, Why?
- ✓ Where would you put it? Why?
- ✓ Is x Alive? Can you show me?

Once you have placed the shoe you can ask them if the following go into 'alive' or 'not alive':

- ✓ A person (you can use a child for this)
- ✓ A worm

- ✓ A fish
- ✓ Tree
- ✓ Twig with leaves
- ✓ Twig without leaves
- ✓ Tree without leaves
- ✓ Chicken
- ✓ Chicken leg
- ✓ Feather
- ✓ Egg
- ✓ Apple
- ✓ Rain (raindrop)
- ✓ Toy
- ✓ Hair
- ✓ Sun
- ✓ Thoughts
- ✓ Robot
- ✓ Turtle shell
- ✓ Snowman

Hidden questions

What is 'alive'?

- ✓ Can something be alive and not alive?
- ✓ Does a raindrop die when it hits the ground?
- ✓ Can something be alive if it's not real? (Citu, for example)