

THE OLD WOMAN IN THE CAVE

There was once a man who desired to know. He was very bookish and spent most of his time buried in a book. One day, he turned to his wife and said, 'I have studied much and I know a great deal, but there is one thing that eludes me: truth. I have decided to leave and search for truth.

'Good luck!' said his wife.

Task Question:

- ✓ Where should he look in order to find truth?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ Where is truth?
- ✓ What is truth?
- ✓ Is truth important? If so, why?

The man searched high and low, far and wide, inside and out. He crossed oceans, scaled mountains and traversed forests for many years until he came to a barely visible path at the foot of a huge, cold mountain. He followed the path up to the highest part, furthest from any other human, town or village. At the top of the mountain he found a cave full of darkness. Inside, he met an old woman. She was the oldest and ugliest woman he had ever seen, older than the mountains and uglier than a lie. When she spoke, the man realized that he could learn and understand much from this old woman, so he decided to stay for a while to study with her. She said that he could.

After many months of study the man decided that it was time to leave the old woman and return to his wife. He bid the old woman farewell and thanked her for all she'd taught him, then he said, 'You never told me your name.'

To which the old lady said, 'I am truth.'

The man was overjoyed to have found truth, without even knowing that he had done so, and to have learned and understood from her. As he turned to leave, she placed her wrinkled hand on his arm and said, 'I have just one request: when you return to your people and tell them about me, tell them I'm young and beautiful.'

Hermeneutical Question:

- ✓ What is meant by the last line of the story, said by the old woman?

Nested Questions:

- ✓ What did the old lady mean by saying it?
- ✓ What did the author mean by it?
- ✓ Are the two meanings to the previous two questions the same?

The main PhiE happens at the TQ above. Otherwise – or in addition – you could also do the following with this story if you would like the class to tackle the interpretation of this story:

'The concept box' procedure (see Once Upon an If p. 77)

PaRDeS (40 lessons to get children thinking pp. 164-166 and then p. 94)

Extension activities

Poem stimulus

What is truth?

The truth is what's what,

A lie is what's not.

Steve Turner (from I Was Only Asking)

Task Question:

- ✓ Do you agree with the poem?

Links

40 lessons to get children thinking: Truing and Lying, Reality Glasses, Perspectacles, They Hypothesis Box, The Talking Skull, Rulers, Who's Right?, The Maybe Cat, If a Rockslide Tumbles..., The Glass of Water, Know Cards

Once Upon an If: The Six Wise Men, Flat Earth, 'As if: truth and lies in fiction' (page 8), 'The Rashomon Effect' (page 27)

Thoughtings: Are Things Always What They Seem To Us To Be?, Tralse, Socrates' Puzzle, Are Opinions Never Wrong?

The If Odyssey: Clouded (and online supplement)

Provocations: Facts and Opinions, Art and Reality, Human Omniscience, Lying

The Philosophy Shop: Metaphysics: Fiction, Epistemology: Knowledge, Epistemology: Perception, Language and Meaning, or What Can Be Said About What There Is

Plato Was Wrong!: Chapter 3: What Do I Know?