The Philosophy Foundation
THINKING CHANGES

THE TOLERANT SCHOOL

Designed by Andy West

Philosophy Addressed

Should intolerant opinions be tolerated? (If yes, then what would happen? If no, then by what criterion do we censor?)

What is the difference between disagreeing with someone and being intolerant of them?

Is tolerance an absolute good?

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.

Story

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?'

Further 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?