

# WILL POWER

Tell the story of 'Cookies' (from Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel) for young children or read 'Bite' from Thoughtings for older students.

Run an enquiry around one of these stimuli. Possible TQs:

- ✓ TQ (Cookies): Did either Frog or Toad use any will power?
- ✓ TQ (Bite): What decides what your tongue likes? Or, Can you choose what you like?
- ✓ TQ (either): Is will power important?

It is a good idea to have a definition of what will power is, if no one already knows. 'Cookies' gives one:

'Will power is stopping yourself from doing something you really want to do'. You could also provide the inverse of this: 'Or doing something you really don't want to do'.

## Activities to use during the session:

Activity 1: 'Sweets' (optional) \*

This is based on the well-known 'deferred gratification' experiments done with very young children.

1. At the very start of the session, before you do anything else, ask for hands up anyone who wants a sweet.
2. Ask for hands up anyone who wants two sweets. (1 and 2 show commitment from the children.)
3. Give everyone a sweet by placing it on the floor in front of each student.
4. Explain that they have permission to eat the sweet at any point during during the session but that they may only have the second sweet if they resist eating the first sweet until the end of the session.
5. Then conduct the session as normal.

\* You must check with the teacher if this is okay and whether there are any children with allergies etc.

Activity 2: 'Competition' \*\*

1. Place a ball in the middle of the room and say 'I don't want you to do anything, but if I were to say, "First one to the ball!" hands up if you want to go for the ball.' (Again, this shows commitment.)
2. Explain that you will set them a task.
3. Split them into smaller groups (of 5 or 6).
4. Say that, after you count to 3, they will have permission to go for the ball BUT say SEVERAL TIMES that the task is: to stop themselves from doing so or, if they don't want to, to make themselves go for the ball.
5. Tell them that when you clap your hands they must sit down again.

\*\* If you can think of another competition exercise that does not involve the possibility of an accident then use that. Otherwise, make sure that the activity is properly controlled. Again, check with the teacher that this exercise is okay to do.

Activity 3: 'Self mastery'

1. At the end of the session invite everyone to stand up.
2. The task is to stand in silence for one minute but without laughing.
3. Anyone who laughs must sit down.
4. You may not need to, but if they are finding it easy, do something, anything (appropriate), to make them laugh. E.g. walk in a funny way or speak in a funny voice etc.
5. (Optionally) You could add the extra task of 'not thinking of pink elephants'. This, by the way, can be tested. At the end, ask if anyone managed to stop thinking of pink elephants and then say, 'the way to test this is if you just thought to yourself, "Oh, I forgot about that!" then you succeeded! (See Trying to Forget and Not Bothering to Remember in The Philosophy Shop for an extension activity on this).

Each of these can be used as a stimulus. Start by simply asking them questions like, 'Who thinks they completed the task?' and go from there.

Read up on akrasia, incontinence or weakness of the will to prepare for this. There is clear overlap between philosophy and psychology here.

Extension activity: 'It Wasn't Me!'

Read the Thoughting 'It Wasn't Me!' and run a PhiE around it relating it to the discussions on will power above.

Extension activity: 'Epicurus'

Introduce the philosopher Epicurus and explain that he thought that all human beings do things (everything, in his view) in order to gain some kind of pleasure (this of course could be a discussion point later). Then explain that he thought there were two kinds of pleasure: Short Term Pleasure and Long Term Pleasure. Tell them that he LTP was always better than STP. (Write these principles up on the board).

Now, tell them that they enter a room with their favourite kind of cake in.

## Task Question 1

What would Epicurus recommend you to do?

Later on you could add that Epicurus had the following values:

- ✓ Friendship
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Food

## Task Question 2

Bearing Epicurus' values in mind, what would he recommend you do?

Extension activity: 'The Stanford Marshmallow experiment'

Show (or have the teacher show) the famous experiments from a reputable Youtube clip. See here for more information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_marshmallow\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_marshmallow_experiment) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford\\_marshmallow\\_experiment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanford_marshmallow_experiment))

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delayed\\_gratification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delayed_gratification) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delayed\\_gratification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delayed_gratification))