Big Ideas for Little Kids

SECOND EDITION

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Thomas E. Wartenberg

Big Ideas for Little Kids

ALSO BY THOMAS E. WARTENBERG

The Philosophical I:
Personal Reflections on Life in Philosophy

Big Ideas for Little Kids:
Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature

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Thomas E. Wartenberg

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Contents

PART III: THE STORIES

PART IV: IMPLICATIONS

List of Tables

List of Figures

Preface

I have been extremely gratified by the success of *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*. One measure of its success is the adoption of its method for discussing philosophy with elementary schoolchildren by more than eleven other programs in the United States and abroad. There can be no better evidence of the book's value than the impact it has had on educational practice.

However, looking back at the book after a number of years, I came to see features that I wanted to change. Most centrally, I felt it important to provide a better theoretical account of facilitation as well as more accurate practical advice on how to prepare for and lead an elementary school philosophy discussion. The changes in this second edition reflect these concerns.

But it was the convergence of a number of different factors that led me to decide it was time to revise the book. When I began working with elementary schoolchildren and teachers, I felt quite alone in the work I was doing, aside from the crucial support I received from the late Gareth B. Matthews. Now, some fifteen years later, I feel part of a worldwide community of philosophers and educators who are committed to bringing philosophy to young children.

As part of that community, I have been exposed to different practices used for getting children to discuss philosophy. Awareness of the ideas of others, as well as the experience I have gained myself, has resulted in my desire for a second edition that would bring the book's advice in line with my own contemporary practice.

For example, while I was in Wellington, New Zealand, on a Fulbright Fellowship in the first half of 2012, I facilitated weekly philosophy sessions for children aged six to seven and ten to eleven. Working with these children over an extended period of time was a complete joy, for their enthusiasm and engagement were contagious. I also worked with the teachers at the Island Bay School

as they attempted to integrate philosophy into their classrooms. As a result of my work with both of these groups—assisted by my host, Sondra Bacharach, as well as Mark Bigelow and Ramon Das—I found myself modifying some of my practices to better assist the children in their philosophy discussions.

In addition, during my time "down under" I spoke at a number of conferences on philosophy for children, and I had the opportunity to hear the ideas of some amazing people involved in the philosophy for children movement in Australia and New Zealand. Lynne Hinton, Phil Cam, Clinton Golding, and Vanya Kovacs, among others, enriched the stock of ideas I had about doing philosophy with children.

The students in my Philosophy for Children course at Mount Holyoke College have continued to influence my understanding of how to best get young children to take part in philosophical discussions. I remain grateful for their enthusiasm and insight. They have contributed a great deal to my understanding of doing philosophy with children.

* * *

This book is still intended for three distinct audiences. I think that it has served both teachers and students quite well. But parents—the third target audience for the book—face different challenges, and I wanted to explicitly acknowledge this here. Much of what I say in this book assumes that philosophy is being taught to a group of children—in school, at an after-school program, or in some such venue—and that is a very different setting than the ones that parents and their children occupy. Despite this difference, and the fact that they will notice that the book, of necessity, addresses educational issues that they might not feel are relevant to their situation, parents will find a great deal that is useful in their interactions with their own children, a fact I have witnessed in the grateful email responses I have received from many parents since the book's first publication.

So let me note one very important difference at the outset: Parents should not feel compelled to maintain the stance of "Socratic ignorance" that I encourage students and teachers to adopt. With a group of children, the benefit of remaining "outside" of the actual discussion is that the children are able to engage in a fruitful discussion with each other without turning to the adult as an authority on the issue they are discussing. But if there is only one child and an adult, the only discussion partner the child has is the adult, so the adult has to engage more fully in the discussion in order to get the child to think more deeply about her beliefs. At the same time—and this is a genuine challenge—the parent or other adult needs to maintain a commitment to genuinely *listening* to what the child has to say, to responding to the claims

the child makes, and not to telling the child what to think, so that the child can focus on refining and defending *her* beliefs.

This openness to what children have to say, together with a recognition that children often can be more insightful than adults when discussing a philosophical issue, is what makes doing philosophy with them so exciting and enriching, for parents as well as other adults.

CHANGES IN THIS EDITION

Here are the major changes you will find in the second edition of *Big Ideas for Little Kids*:

- I have added a chapter on logic, an important philosophical field, to the elementary school introduction to philosophy course in part 3. I have also revised my discussions of each of the books in this section.
- I have rewritten the second section of this book with an aim to giving prospective facilitators better guidance in how to lead a discussion.
- I have moved the "follow-up activities" to the end of the chapters about the picture books. I have also included a short list of suggestions for other picture books in the same area of philosophy that you might want to use to continue an investigation of this area of philosophy.
- I have included a record of an actual discussion that I facilitated based on Shel Silverstein's controversial book, *The Giving Tree*. Readers have told me that they would benefit from seeing how a philosophy discussion among children proceeds, and this chapter provides that glimpse.

Although none of these changes by itself is monumental, their cumulative effect is significant. My hope is that they will enable readers to have an easier time beginning to discuss philosophy with children.

* * *

Many people who have assisted me in my work with children are mentioned in the preface to the first edition. So it only remains to thank those whose contributions have come more recently. First, I want to thank the staff of the Island Bay School in Wellington and especially the principal, Perry Rush, the deputy principal, Jane Hossack, and the associate principal, Noeline Poulopoulos, for their support during my time in Wellington. Sondra Bacharach deserves special thanks for assisting me, as well as for bringing me to Wellington in the first place.

In addition to all of the students in my Philosophy for Children class, I want to thank my three recent "mentors" for their contributions to the class: Hina Jawaid, Mila Devenport, and Madeleine Lifsey. Thanks also to Matt Atwood for his excellent coordination of our sessions at the Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence in Springfield, Massachusetts.

A number of people made suggestions about improving the book. Both Leo Haska and Paul Bodin, who have developed their own philosophy for children programs, gave me very useful advice. Jana Mohr Lone and Berys and Morag Gaut, themselves authors of great books about doing philosophy with children, also gave me useful feedback.

Sara Goering, my dear comrade in the philosophy for children movement, gave me excellent feedback on an earlier version of this book. I thank her for all of her suggestions. I have done my best to take account of them. Madeleine Lifsey also read the manuscript and gave me very helpful feedback.

Despite the help of all these folks, I am sure that there are still shortcomings in the text, and I take full responsibility for them. But whatever its shortcomings, I hope this second edition will prove even more useful than the first for people interested in getting children to express their philosophical ideas and subject them to critical scrutiny with the help of their peers.

Preface to the First Edition

This book contains everything necessary to begin teaching an introduction to philosophy class in elementary schools. It is the result of my own experience discussing philosophical issues with young children, from first- to fifth-graders, over the past twenty years. Since the very idea that kids are capable of taking part in a philosophical dialogue will surprise many of you, the book also explains quite carefully the rationale for discussing philosophy with them and, indeed, the importance of doing so.

My goal in introducing philosophy to young children has always been to encourage and support elementary school classroom teachers in their efforts to bring philosophy into their classrooms. Because my hope is that this book will spur the efforts of teachers to do so, I emphasize the fact that you do not have to have a background in philosophy to start becoming an elementary school philosophy teacher. All you need is a genuine interest in fostering the independence, creativity, and inquisitiveness of your students—as well as patience and a sense of humor! If you possess these and are interested in introducing philosophy into your elementary school classroom, you'll find that this book has all you need to take your first steps.

Although I began by working with teachers to help them introduce philosophy into their classrooms, for the past decade my primary involvement has been through a course that I teach at Mount Holyoke College in which my students teach philosophy to elementary schoolchildren. The success that this course has achieved has surprised no one more than me. Another element of my motivation for writing this book is to encourage other philosophy professors to teach such courses, for it provides all the materials they will need to do so. Since my course is so unusual—I seriously doubt that anyone leaving a PhD program in philosophy in the United States has had any instruction in

teaching such a class—I wanted to help others interested in teaching a similar course like it to do so.

My hope is this book will have an even wider readership than elementary school teachers and college students, for parents and other adults may not only find the idea that their young children are natural-born philosophers intriguing but may also discover that the mode of interacting with children discussed in this book offers them a way of deepening their relationships with their own children or those of others. So even though it is written very much as a handbook to be used in teaching philosophy to young children in a school setting, it can provide guidance for anyone interested in discussing philosophy with children.

Suggesting that philosophy should be taught in elementary schools raises many deep and controversial issues. For the most part, I have not addressed them here, lest such a discussion get in the way of the book's primary purpose of providing guidance in the teaching of philosophy in elementary schools. Rather than engaging in such theoretical dispute in order to convince readers of the viability of an elementary school philosophy class, my hope is that anyone who reads this book will come to see the benefits of doing philosophy with young children by means of the practical example embodied in it.

This book, then, is intended as a guide for teaching an introduction to philosophy course in an elementary school classroom. In the first four chapters, I explain exactly what I mean when I speak of elementary schoolchildren *doing philosophy*. I also explain why those without any formal training in philosophy are able to facilitate philosophical discussions among young children.

In the balance of the book, I present the materials necessary for teaching an introduction to philosophy course for elementary schoolchildren. My students and I developed most of these materials while teaching at the Jackson Street School in Northampton, Massachusetts; the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School in Hadley, Massachusetts; and the Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence in Springfield, Massachusetts. The guiding idea of our engagement in these schools was to introduce elementary schoolchildren to philosophy in the same systematic way that it is generally taught to college students. The course that you will find presented in this book was thus conceived as an elementary school version of a typical college- or university-level introduction to philosophy class. The aim was to have the young students we taught develop not only the skills necessary for doing philosophy but an awareness of what philosophy as a field of inquiry encompasses.

Our method for accomplishing this uses picture books as prompts for philosophical discussions. Our introduction to philosophy class uses nine different picture books to discuss issues in all the major fields of philosophy, from ethics to aesthetics and metaphysics to the theory of knowledge.

This book, then, is intended to serve as a jumping-off place for anyone interested in acquainting young children with philosophy or—to put the point in a way more congruent with the views advanced here—in supporting the philosophical questions that young children find themselves puzzled by. Once you have been bitten by the bug of doing philosophy with children, you can find more materials for doing so at my website: teachingchildrenphilosophy.org. There you can also find more details about the course I teach to undergraduates.

* * *

There are many people whom I want to thank, for they have played a huge role in making my work with children possible. Gwen Agna, the principal of the Jackson Street School in Northampton, Massachusetts, had the foresight to see the potential of elementary school philosophy. Mary Cowhey worked closely with me and opened up her second-grade class to me. Kimberly Gerould and the late Susan Fink also supported my work at the school. At the Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence in Springfield, Massachusetts, Lan Katz gave me the opportunity to develop a more systematic approach to elementary school philosophy, and my ex-student, Sulaiha Schwartz, who became a teacher at that school, made a huge effort to ensure the success of the program.

At Mount Holyoke College, a number of people have helped me develop my idea of having college students teach elementary school philosophy. Don O'Shea, the dean of the faculty, has been very supportive of my efforts. Alan Bloomgarden, the new coordinator of Community Based Learning, has also been both enthusiastic about my work and generous in his support of it. But I especially want to thank all the students who have taken my course—Philosophy 280, Philosophy for Children—for their enthusiasm and support. Without their help, and especially that of the mentors in my course over the years—Heidi Winterburn, Paula Carpentier, Chloe Martin, Kelly Albrecht, Reisa Alexander, and Ariel Sykes—not only would this book never have been written, but the whole program I have developed would not have existed. I have learned as much from them as I have taught them. Although I have revised all of the question sets included in this book, some of the original ones were developed for my website by the following students, all of whose contributions I gratefully acknowledge: Christina M. Blair, Nicole Giambalvo, Lindsay Kurahara, Melissa Saltman, Jelena Spasojevic, Ariel Sykes, and Kate Vigour.

A number of friends and colleagues have read the manuscript and given me helpful suggestions. I thank them all: Wendy Berg, Jayme Johnston, the late Gary Matthews, and Joe Moore. Richard Brunswick deserves thanks for helping me come up with the book's title.

The Squire Family Foundation and its director, Roberta Israeloff, provided the support I needed to have the time to develop the materials upon which this book is based. I am very grateful that Roberta and the foundation recognized the value of introducing philosophy in elementary schools and chose to support my efforts in that direction. Their recognition gave me the impetus to push ahead with this project.

The two people to whom this book is dedicated each deserve special thanks. As readers of this book will discover, my own son, Jake, played a crucial role in my discovery of the potential that young children have for philosophical thinking. Although he is now a teenager, Jake remains amazingly supportive of the project of teaching philosophy to young children. Indeed, he has spent many hours improving my website out of his conviction in the importance of introducing philosophy to children. I owe him an incredible debt of gratitude not only for his support but also for all the ways in which his philosophical inquisitiveness has enriched my life.

The late Gary Matthews has been extremely generous with both his time and expertise in support of my efforts. His inspiration and, indeed, ideas permeate this book. Without his model—as both a philosopher and an educator of young children—I never would have ventured into the field of philosophy for children. He, too, has enriched my life, and for this I think him deeply.

Finally and as always, I want to thank my wife, Wendy Berg, for her support and understanding. Without her push to get involved with Jackson Street, I would not have begun the long path that led to the writing of this book. I thank her for getting me to go where I would never have dared to go without her encouragement.

Part I

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Chapter One

Natural-Born Philosophers

As I was putting my then five-year-old son to bed one evening, he turned to me and asked, "Daddy, how did the first human get here?" Surprised by his question, I asked Jake to explain what was puzzling him. "Well," he said, "You and Mom are my parents, and Oma and Opa [his names for his paternal grandparents] are your parents. And they had parents, too. But what about the first humans? How did they get here?" Surprised at his interest in this philosophical issue, I began to discuss with him different theories that had been proposed as answers to it. By the time we were finished, if not satisfied, he was at least willing to leave the question for the time being and go to sleep.

To anyone familiar with the history of Western philosophy, it is apparent that my son had become puzzled by an issue that has bedeviled philosophers for at least 2,500 years: How could human life have begun? Jake could understand that he had come into being from my wife and me, and that each of us similarly had parents. In turn, our parents had parents, and so on. But at some point, you are confronted by an apparently insoluble dilemma: Either the series goes on forever—but how could that be, for that would mean there was an infinite number of humans prior to the present? Or there is a point at which there were two humans who did not have parents and who started the whole human race—but then, where did they come from? By what means did they spring into existence?

Of course, this is a point at which many have chosen to make reference to God, for one reason to invoke a supreme being is precisely because he has the ability to create things, including humans, from nothing. But my son has a scientific attitude toward the world, and I knew that he would resist bringing God into the picture to explain the origins of human life. Discussing evolutionary theory with him—that humans had resulted from apes through a mutation—kept him at bay for a while, although he eventually reformulated

his worry about how living things could have come into existence from a nonliving universe.

Jake's questions showed me that, already at age five, he had been bitten by the bug called "philosophy," and this surprised me. There were a number of different reasons for my astonishment. First, I was genuinely amazed that Jake had been puzzled by this issue without any prompting from me. As a college teacher, I am used to having to struggle to get students to comprehend the point of a metaphysical question. Could a five-year-old child, I wondered—even one as precocious as Jake—actually have a more intuitive grasp of philosophical issues than my own college students?

I was also surprised by the tenacity with which Jake puzzled over this problem. After our nighttime conversation, he did not let the matter drop. Not only did he continue to ask more about the generation of human beings, but he also started to ask questions about related issues such as the infinitude of time and space. Once again, I was startled to realize that a five-year-old could see for himself that there was a range of related metaphysical issues all having to do with infinite sequences. Could it be, I asked myself, that young children like Jake were actually proto-philosophers?

To answer this question, we need to reflect on what philosophy itself is. At its most basic level, philosophy attempts to solve fundamental puzzles about our lives and the world in which we find ourselves, puzzles that involve what I call "big ideas." The question that bothered Jake about how human life could have sprung into existence is a philosophical one. Even though scientific discoveries are relevant to our thinking about this question, it is ultimately philosophers who help us think about this abstract issue, even if they haven't yet provided a definitive solution to it. In pursuing such issues and thinking about big ideas, philosophers remain puzzled by the same types of questions that vexed my young son as he tried to make sense of the world in which he found himself.

This suggests that philosophers are people who have never outgrown their sense that the world is a very puzzling place in which there are many questions demanding answers. For the most part, people seem generally content to follow the advice implicit in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

> "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child: But when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11; cited in Barclay 2002).

Philosophers, however, retain their youthful attitude of posing questions about the world. They want things to make sense to them and refuse to drop that demand in order to simply "get on" with the business of being adults.

This image of the philosopher as an overgrown child is at odds with the venerable images of them as great bearded old men, as in, for example, Ra-

phael's great painting *School of Athens*. From Plato onward, there has been a feeling among philosophers and, indeed, the public at large, that philosophy is appropriately pursued toward the end of one's life. The idea has been that only a long life can supply the materials necessary for philosophical reflection. The hope is that with old age comes the wisdom that is taken to be characteristic of the philosopher.

This book is written with the conviction that trying to maintain philosophy as the exclusive domain of the old—or those of at least college age—is a serious mistake, one that has deep implications for our lives as human beings and for the society in which we live. As Jake's example shows, philosophy comes naturally to the young and needs to be viewed as something they can legitimately pursue, so we should foster their interest rather than snuff it out.

This belief underlies my attempt to encourage the teaching of philosophy in elementary schools. Although grade school is often thought of as a place in which young children learn basic social skills and the fundamentals of the three Rs—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic—focusing only on these aspects of a child's education can have disastrous consequences. School needs to include discussions of big ideas as well as of the basic literacy skills mentioned above. The early years of schooling are the time when children first encounter organized learning, and their lifelong attitudes toward knowledge and education are indelibly formed during this period. To fail to acquaint young pupils with the joys of thinking and learning is a grave injustice that will harm them for the rest of their lives.

Because children are born with natural inquisitiveness, it is important to foster this aspect of their creativity. Schools need not so much to develop the spirit of inquiry in their young charges as to demonstrate to them that this spirit will be cultivated during their formal educations by giving their spontaneous questioning direction and guidance. In order not to turn young children off to school, we need to show them that school will help them find a way to think about the questions that they naturally raise as they grow and develop.

Parents will also benefit from having philosophical discussions with their young children. Too often, parents treat picture books as simply fodder to be used to get their kids to sleep. But many picture books, as I will show you later, are themselves chock full of the philosophical big ideas that kids are puzzled about, and parents can help their children think more clearly about them while also opening important lines of communications with their children.

But it is not just children themselves who will benefit from the introduction of philosophy into elementary schools and parental discussions. Society as a whole will reap the benefit of having more critical, skeptical citizens who have learned not to trust authorities simply because of their social positions,

but to look for evidence and reasons that they themselves find convincing. A democratic society can ill afford allowing its future citizens to grow up with a sense that they can find all the answers they need on a blog.

In his famous dialogue *The Republic* (1961), Plato (429–347 BCE) boldly asserted that there would be no justice in the world until philosophers became kings. Here, I will make a similarly brash claim: Education will not live up to its ideals until we make every student a philosopher. Just as Plato's social vision depended upon having rulers who possessed the truth, so our own democratic society requires a citizenry of independent, critical thinkers that only a philosophical education can produce.

I am aware how idealistic this might sound. Especially in an age in which standardized tests are the norm, so that teachers are forced more and more to teach to what the tests will test rather than to imbue their classrooms with a genuine love of learning, is it really possible to introduce philosophy into elementary school curricula? What sense does it make to ask our already overburdened teachers to add philosophy into an already crammed curriculum in which such traditional subjects as math and language skills have already been supplemented with multiculturalism and other important concerns?

The reason these fears are unfounded is that philosophy, as I practice it in elementary schools, is not another subject added onto the existing curriculum of language arts, mathematics, science, and so on. Instead, elementary school philosophy is a methodology for teaching material that is already part of the standard elementary school curriculum, especially in the language arts. Because I use children's books such as Arnold Lobel's *Frog and Toad Together* (1999) and Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964)—books that are already widely used in elementary school classrooms—to stimulate philosophical discussion among the children themselves, teachers do not have to figure out where philosophy fits into their crowded days. All they need to do is restructure the language arts lessons they already give.

Not only does using children's books to stimulate philosophical discussion allow children to articulate and substantiate their own views on such philosophical big ideas as bravery (discussed in one of the stories in *Frog and Toad Together* that we will discuss soon and I examine in detail in chapter 9) and morality (raised by *The Giving Tree*, the book featured in the discussion recorded in chapter 13) but it also enhances all the other areas of the grade school curriculum. For example, in learning to discuss philosophical questions students will develop the sorts of language skills that most grade school curricula emphasize. They will learn to articulate their ideas clearly, to back them up with valid reasons, and to discuss their views with others in a reasonable manner. In addition, they will learn how to assess the evidence for claims that are presented to them, rather than to simply accept what authorities—be they

books or people—tell them is so. A philosophically educated nine-year-old is a more sophisticated and critical thinker than most people believe possible. (More on this topic in the next chapter.)

This book is intended as a guide that will enable you to teach philosophy to elementary schoolchildren. After discussing the specific methods that I use to do so, I will go over a set of eight picture books and one chapter book that you can use to teach *an elementary school introduction to philosophy course* or that you can simply discuss with your or others' children.

I can already hear you thinking, "How can *I* teach philosophy to schoolchildren? After all, I never took any philosophy in college. I wouldn't know where to begin. Although I was interested in philosophy as a high school student, I've never been able to understand what philosophers are talking about. I know I'll never be able to teach it, intriguing as the idea might be!"

Let me reassure you: You don't have to have had a great deal of exposure to philosophy to start to teach it! I realize that's an extraordinary statement to make, but it's absolutely true. Although being a good facilitator of elementary school philosophy discussions does require a range of different skills, you don't have to have an advanced degree in philosophy to be successful at it. By reading this book and thinking carefully about the material it presents, you will be able to take your first steps as a philosophical facilitator. And as you practice guiding philosophical discussions, you will come to have a sense of what philosophy is all about.

And that's really all you require: an awareness of what makes a question or comment a philosophical one. So don't let your own worries about not knowing much, or even any, philosophy stand in your way. You will be able to learn what philosophy is by helping your students engage in philosophical discussions.

Chapter Two

How I Became a Children's Philosophy Teacher

Perplexity is probably one of the first reactions many people have when they hear that I teach college students how to get elementary schoolchildren to have philosophy discussions. Since philosophy is an academic subject that generally is not taught in the United States until college or university, it's not hard to understand this response. And given most people's notion of what philosophy is, one can easily empathize with their puzzlement at the contention that philosophy is an activity that young people can actually take part in both at school and at home because they already have a natural inclination toward pursuing it.

When I first got involved in teaching philosophy to young children, I actually shared that skepticism and, in fact, I didn't then think that I was really teaching children how to philosophize. In my first efforts to introduce philosophy into elementary schools, I worked with teachers and thought of myself as helping them teach critical thinking, a skill or set of skills that I knew young kids really needed help acquiring. But I nonetheless used the label of teaching *philosophy* because that was my academic specialty, and it had a sort of cachet that made teachers intrigued and interested in working with me.

So let me tell you how I got involved in this rather unusual undertaking: I had just read a book by Tracy Kidder, a well-known nonfiction writer who lives near Northampton, Massachusetts, where I also reside. The book, *Among Schoolchildren* (Kidder 1989), tells the story of Chris Zajac, a fifth-grade teacher at the Kelly School, located in nearby Holyoke, Massachusetts. Kidder has a penchant for stories about heroic individuals fighting against the odds to achieve a goal that others think of as quixotic. *Among Schoolchildren* follows that trajectory, portraying Zajac as a teacher struggling to get her pupils to succeed at school when all the factors in their environment conspired to keep them from taking education seriously, for most of Zajac's students

came from backgrounds in which education was not viewed as leading anywhere and were surrounded by a peer culture that was hostile to it.

Despite my admiration for Zajac's heroic efforts, one particular feature of her teaching troubled me: In order to get her pupils to focus on the lessons she wanted—whether it was spelling rules or the heinous math tables—Zajac would cajole them by threatening to withhold the treat with which she ended each day: the "read-aloud." This threat appeared to have miraculous power, for the students would quiet down and persevere with their appointed tasks, lest they jeopardize the event they seemed to relish above all else in their otherwise quite traditional school days: having their teacher read them a book.

Kidder regarded this stratagem as an example of Zajac's skill and imagination as a teacher who had to learn how to teach without support from her fellow teachers, let alone any more structured mentoring options. But to me, this tactic was almost tragic because of its failure to use children's enthusiasm for the read-aloud as a means of motivating their interest in other academic tasks and not just as icing on the cake, so to speak.

So when I began teaching philosophy to elementary schoolchildren, I followed almost the reverse procedure to Zajac's. I began where she ended: by reading the children a story. It's true that the stories that I read were selected because of their philosophical content, but many children's books raise philosophical issues, so this was not much of a departure.

I might, for example, read them one of Arnold Lobel's wonderful Frog and Toad stories, such as "Dragons and Giants" or "Cookies" (both in Lobel 1999). When I was done reading the story, I would ask the kids a question about what I took to be the central philosophical concept in the story. If I'd read them "Cookies"—a story in which Frog and Toad try different tactics to keep themselves from gorging on the delicious cookies Toad has baked, thereby nearly making themselves sick—I would focus on "willpower," one of those big ideas discussed in philosophy. At the end of the story, Frog tries to console the despondent Toad by reassuring him that, even though they have no cookies, they have plenty of willpower. But with no cookies left to tempt them, can Frog and Toad really possess willpower? Doesn't willpower require the presence of the very temptation that you have to use your willpower to resist? These questions—some of which I posed to the children and which the story itself pushes us to think about—are exactly the ones that lead one into a philosophical investigation of the notion of willpower.

A quick digression. This type of question—Does willpower require the presence of a temptation? for example—is precisely the sort of issue focused on in philosophy. It inspects a big idea with the goal of understanding it better. A psychologist, on the other hand, might be interested at what age children become capable of exercising willpower and in what contexts, a more

empirical investigation that takes the concept of willpower itself to already be clear.

Later, I will show you examples that convey the enthusiasm with which the children take up philosophical questions and begin to discuss them among themselves. For now, what matters is that I used the read-aloud not as a reward for compliant behavior, but as a means for teaching the children a variety of language arts skills.

In the past, *language arts*, the term that curriculum guides often use to capture a range of linguistic and intellectual skills that teachers are supposed to teach children, were often reduced to spelling, writing, and reading. But the new Common Core Standards explicitly include *speaking and listening* as skills that children need to learn in elementary school. More specifically, as early as kindergarten, children are to learn to "follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion)" (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/1). By fifth grade, the standards are expanded to include such items as "pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others" and "review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions" (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/5).

To one versed in doing philosophy with young children, it's as if the Common Core Standards were written with philosophy for children specifically in mind. Every single requirement in the language arts section of the standards is a skill that is explicitly targeted in our elementary school philosophy program! I only hope that more educators will come to realize that philosophy provides them with one of the best means to satisfy these requirements.

There are many different ways to initiate a philosophical discussion among children. What's amazing about using children's literature as the focus for a philosophic discussion is that the children learn the requisite language arts skills without you having to drill these skills into them: They are so eager to talk about the story and share their views that, with your guidance in following some simple rules, they will pick up along the way all the skills required for taking part in their discussions of the books.

This explains both why I got interested in teaching philosophy to elementary schoolchildren and also how I actually do it. I thought that teaching philosophy through children's literature was an extremely underappreciated way of getting kids to be very interested in what happens in school, to see their lessons as really fun and not something in which they had interest unless you threatened to withhold something they really liked: the read-aloud. Instead, by inverting Mrs. Zajac's procedure, the philosophy read-aloud fuels the

kids' curiosity and gets them to learn many skills naturally, without having to give them specific instructions like, "OK, kids, now we're going to learn how to defend a position that you have against others who disagree with it," which would likely sap all of their energy and interest.

I began teaching elementary schoolchildren philosophy, then, as a way of getting young children to do what the schools wanted them to do anyway—learn language skills—but in a much more fun and exciting manner than what was previously done. Soon, however, the children taught me that there was much more at stake. For as I gained more experience working in the classroom—and as my own son got older and I had more firsthand experience having parental philosophy discussions with a child who was genuinely intrigued by philosophical ideas—I came to see a further and even deeper potential that was unleashed by teaching philosophy in an elementary school as well as by discussing philosophy with my child.

Gradually, I came to realize how puzzled children are by philosophical questions. We all know that children thrive on asking questions. "Daddy, why is the sky blue?" is the apocryphal example of the curiosity that moves young children. All too often, however, we grown-ups don't take our kids' questions seriously. In part, this is because their questions are distractions from our need to get things done. Kids are always pausing to smell the flowers—only they don't just enjoy their smell, they wonder what makes them smell sweet rather than sour or why we should find *that* particular smell "yummy" instead of experiencing it as "gross" or "yucky." And that's why they are like philosophers.

The ancient Athenians put to death Socrates (469–399 BCE)—often regarded as the real founder of Western philosophy—for teaching philosophy to their young men. (Young women, I'm afraid, never had a chance to interact with him, as they were bound to their homes. And noncitizens didn't have much chance to do anything in that ancient city other than what their masters commanded.) Although philosophy professors tell the story of Socrates' trial, conviction, and punishment to show their students that philosophy is important despite social attitudes that disparage it, his story contains a very important truth that is not always emphasized: Philosophers are "pains in the butt."

When you want to proceed with a law case, the last thing you want to do is to engage in a protracted discussion about the nature of law—another one of those philosophical big ideas—and whether there is even such a thing as justice in the first place, as Socrates is recorded as having done in Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro* (Plato 1961). You just want to get on with the business at hand. The Athenians didn't like Socrates' practice of interrupting them when they were taking care of business, much less encouraging their kids to do the same. So it's not really surprising that they wanted to get rid of him.

(Philosophy professors also tend to ignore Socrates' refusal to be exiled as the reason that death became the only option for his punishment, but that's another story.)

One thing that philosophers have in common with children, then, is a reluctance to get on with anything until they understand the things that puzzle them. My son, Jake, was an expert at this. If there was a moment of silence, only on a rare occasion was that silence not broken by him asking some type of hypothetical question—"Dad, if you suddenly had a lot of money, would you prefer . . ."—and the discussion was on. Or when we were off to buy something, he'd start asking the most interesting questions about how it worked . . . only all I wanted to do was to get back in the car and head home. He was a pain . . . the very sort of pain that philosophers are because they are professional kids who don't take things for granted. We philosophers don't just want to get on with the task at hand; we want to ponder it for a moment and question whether it's really what we should be doing with our time. What a drag!

At least to many adults, especially parents. But to children, this is one of the truly wonderful things about doing philosophy: We philosophers take kids' concerns seriously, and we let them spend time thinking through their ideas about them. And kids don't merely say "the darndest things"—as Art Linkletter (1957) once quipped—they often say the most insightful things . . . if we only would take the time to *really* listen to what they say. And that's exactly what philosophy for children encourages children themselves to do: to listen carefully to one another as they express their own opinions about philosophical issues and to discuss them respectfully with each other. When this happens, the results are genuinely spectacular.

Recently, I was introducing the idea of doing philosophy to a fifth-grade class at the Jackson Street Elementary School in Northampton, Massachusetts. After some general remarks about philosophy, I told them we were going to think about a philosophical question: Why is stealing wrong? After a few comments, Matthew responded that stealing was wrong because your parents told you that it was. Jennifer's hand shot up in the air, demanding to be recognized. When I called on her, she responded, "Stealing is not wrong because your parents tell you that it is. The reason they tell you that it's wrong is because it *is* wrong."

Now this may not strike you as particularly insightful, but it is precisely the argument that Socrates presents to Euthyphro, the central character in Plato's dialogue of the same name. Socrates' claim is that the rightness or wrongness of an action is an objective property of that action, so that what makes it wrong cannot be anyone's attitude toward it, even that of the gods, as the traditional Greek religion had taught. I remember spending hours trying to figure out

what exactly Socrates was arguing when I took my first history of philosophy class as a junior in college—and here was a fifth-grader articulating that very argument on her own! It's no surprise that, as one of my students later told me, my mouth just hung open for a moment as I realized the significance of what I had just heard.

It's uncanny how often such an experience happens when I am discussing philosophy with elementary schoolchildren. They often have a sophisticated understanding of philosophical issues and are able to articulate their ideas clearly in discussion with their peers. How could one not want to foster this amazing ability?

Acknowledging kids' philosophical abilities contradicts some of our most cherished views about children and childhood. In our post-Freudian era, the notion that children are innocent and incapable of deliberate cruelty no longer has much currency. Still, childhood is seen as a time in which children are supposed to learn those things necessary for them to be functioning and functional adults.

But viewing childhood this way does not accord childhood its due as a distinct life stage, with needs, desires, and capabilities of its own. As I have been arguing, childhood is a time during which many specifically philosophical issues arise that children think about a great deal. So it makes sense, even though it goes against the grain of much traditional educational theory, to allow children access to philosophy as a way of honoring what's special about their own unique stage of life.

So now, as a result of my experiences in elementary schools, I no longer think of myself as someone who only helps children acquire critical-thinking skills. I view myself as a crusader of sorts, who wants to enable children to do something that comes naturally to them and at which they are astoundingly good: engage in philosophical discussions of important issues, the "big ideas" of this book's title.

The goal of my crusade is to develop an education system that supports young children's natural inquisitiveness, making them see that their opinions count and are worth sharing with their peers. The result of such a philosophical education would be the development of confident, respectful, and thoughtful individuals who value hearing what others have to say and who are engaged in reflecting on the major issues of human life.

As a crusader, I aim to convince you that you can do exactly what I have done. So let's turn to seeing exactly what it takes to make this happen.

Chapter Three

Learner-Centered Teaching

One of the reasons that philosophy is not widely taught at the elementary school level is that those responsible for teaching young children generally don't think that they have the specialized knowledge or skills necessary for doing so. Certainly, if what teaching philosophy in grade school involved was explaining philosophical claims such as why Descartes (1596–1650) thought that all our ordinary beliefs about the world might actually be false, this view would be justified (Descartes 1993). Ironically, one of my best students was excited by this very possibility when she heard that I would be offering a course in teaching philosophy in elementary schools. To her, the thought of explaining Descartes and Kant to young kids was really exciting, and she was very disappointed to discover that that was not what we would be doing.

Almost everyone else will be relieved to discover that teaching philosophy to elementary schoolchildren does not involve giving lectures on the great philosophers of the past or the central problems of Western philosophy. But, then, what exactly does doing philosophy with elementary schoolchildren involve?

Our focus when teaching philosophy in elementary school classrooms is giving children the opportunity to discuss philosophical questions among themselves. As I have already explained, young children are natural-born philosophers. What we do is give them the chance to pursue their natural inclination for philosophy in the formal setting of the classroom by initiating discussions of basic questions about human life and a world whose mysteries children are just discovering and trying to make sense of.

In doing so, we don't tell them what to think about anything; our only purpose is to assist the children so that they can have a productive discussion with one another. For even though young children may be natural-born philosophers, they are not born ready to discuss philosophical issues with their peers. *That's* what we have to teach them how to do.

Because "all" that the teacher has to do is to assist the children in *their* philosophical discussion, it doesn't require a great deal of specialized philosophical knowledge to teach elementary school philosophy. All you need to know initially is how to facilitate a philosophical discussion among your students. As your familiarity with leading such discussions increases, you'll also find yourself picking up more philosophical knowledge, and that will, in turn, make you a more effective facilitator.

It's important to realize that there is a model of what teaching involves that makes it difficult to see how an elementary school teacher could possibly teach her students philosophy, what I call the *teacher-centered model of learning*. The goal of teaching, in this view, is the students' *acquisition of knowledge*. This seems so self-evident a goal for learning that it can be hard to think about it critically. After all, children do lack a great deal of the knowledge that most adults have—such as how to spell, read, and add. Isn't the point of education to provide them with the knowledge they lack, to transform them, at least eventually, from ignorant youngsters into knowledgeable adults?

Once teaching is conceived of in this way, many features of the teacher-centered model follow. The *teacher*, as the *possessor* of the desired knowledge, must *transmit* her knowledge to her *ignorant pupils*. Since the students are ignorant, the teacher must *control* the process of knowledge acquisition at every step. Who else is there to ensure that the children are progressing from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge?

Even the emphasis on testing follows from this view. The way to tell whether a student has acquired the knowledge he needs is to require him to (re)produce it. And what, after all, is a test but a situation designed to compel students to spill out for the teacher those things she has decided they must know?

Perhaps the most striking feature of the teacher-centered model is the centrality it accords to the teacher in the educational process. Not only does she have the knowledge that the students lack, but she sets the agenda for learning and she transmits her knowledge to each student in a manner that she thinks appropriate. But almost as striking is the assumption that children will simply fit into the role of pliant learner that this model creates for them. Rather than seeing children as independent beings with needs, desires, and questions of their own, this model conceives children as empty receptacles, ready to accept whatever the teacher has determined is good for them.

Clearly, if we apply this model to teaching philosophy to children, it becomes clear why an elementary school teacher would think she was incapable of teaching philosophy to her students. Because elementary school teachers generally lack any specialized knowledge about the discipline of philosophy, they would be unable to teach it, for the teacher-centered model requires

that the teacher possess a supply of knowledge that she can distribute to her charges. Given the prevalence of this model of learning and teaching, it's not surprising that there is so much skepticism about the possibility of teaching philosophy in elementary schools.

But philosophy *can* be taught to elementary schoolchildren, as I can amply testify to from my own experience and from watching the classroom practices of my own college students as well as the teachers I have worked with. And one of the reasons for this is that, as we have seen, children are *natural-born philosophers*. That is, as they attempt to make sense of the often perplexing and sometimes confusing world in which they find themselves, children just naturally ask questions that are decidedly philosophical, as my son Jake did when he wondered how the first human came into existence.

So when we teach children philosophy—and this method is suitable to other subjects as well—we seek to mobilize their natural curiosity and help them *discover through reflection, express in words, and support with reasons* their own answers to questions that concern them. For this reason, I call this method of education *learner-centered teaching* to emphasize the centrality it accords to the children as natural investigators and learners. (For a comparison of the teacher-centered and learner-centered models, see table 3.1.)[1]

The fundamental assumption of learner-centered teaching is that the student, no less than the human mind itself, is not simply a tabula rasa (blank tablet) upon which anything a teacher wants can be inscribed. Instead, it recognizes that the student-learner has many dispositions, capacities, and ideas that education must acknowledge and take into account. This means that, among other things, for education to be successful, the student must have a

Table 3.1. Comparison of Two Models of Learning

	Teacher-Centered Learning	*Learner-Centered Teaching*
Goal	Acquisition of knowledge	Students' development, articulation, and support of their own views
Assumption about the students	Ignorant	Naturally inquisitive
Teacher's role	Possessor and distributor of knowledge	Facilitator of the investigation
The learning relationship	Dyadic student-teacher relation through which knowledge is transmitted	Learning happens through group investigation and discussion
Agenda setting	Teacher sets the agenda	Students determine the course of the investigation
Assessment	Use of testing	Dialogue itself as evidence of its success

desire to participate in the process of learning itself. All too often, this doesn't happen, since the process of education is completely controlled by someone else. Part of what makes learner-centered teaching different is that the learner is able to exert control over his own learning. Although the teacher still has an important role to play, she no longer is the sole author of the learning process.

In transferring children's natural curiosity to the classroom, the main innovation we make is that of transforming the child's investigation of the world from an individual process into a social or group one. If we step away from the classroom and recognize that learning is something that takes place throughout our lives in very different contexts and settings, it becomes apparent that very little *real learning* takes place individually; for the most part, it is the combined efforts of people working together that have solved all the problems that the human race has actually faced. Only a Robinson Crusoe—marooned alone on his island—confronts the world on his own, and even he had an unacknowledged helpmate, Friday. When we human beings work together to solve our problems, we find that we are a remarkably capable species. Despite the wealth of problems that we have to face, we take the optimistic view that we can solve them all so long as we work together.

The learner-centered model of teaching attempts to create a classroom that takes account of the innate curiosity of children and the social situation of the classroom in which they find themselves. It seeks to engage students communally in a natural way, so that they will be motivated to work together to solve problems that they themselves actually encounter and, hence, want to find solutions to. Those solutions get worked out through trial-and-error processes that the group undertakes together, and learning results when the children take part in those interchanges.

Since children are not generally used to treating learning as a *communal* project, they need the teacher to facilitate their interactions with each other in such a way that they engage cooperatively and supportively in an attempt to answer a question that puzzles them. The teacher is a guide who oversees the students' own process of investigation to ensure that it proceeds in accordance with norms that make it possible for the children to work together cooperatively.

Because the dialogue that emerges from this process of joint investigation is itself evidence that learning is taking place—or failing to—there is no need to impose a punitive style of assessment on the learning process. The success of an investigation can simply be registered through a careful examination of the discussion itself as well as by the students' own reflection on it.

This, then, is the learner-centered model of teaching. Many classroom teachers already aspire to the creation of learner-centered classrooms. I have

only been trying to show you that such classrooms are hospitable environments for philosophical discussions.

There are two problems that immediately confront anyone in introducing learner-centered teaching into her classroom. The first is how to get the children interested in having a philosophical discussion. I call this the *initiation problem*. It is a significant issue, for the learner-centered approach to teaching requires that the questions students face arise out of their own experience.

The second—the *regulation problem*—concerns how the teacher should oversee the group's discussion so that it is likely to produce a positive outcome for all of the children. The fact is, children have to be taught how to work together cooperatively. As a result, we are faced with the question of whether it is possible for someone without a background in philosophy to help children productively engage in a philosophical discussion.

I've already said that I use children's literature, especially picture books but also chapter books, as the basis for developing philosophical discussions among elementary schoolchildren. You may not have realized that using stories solves both of the problems facing the learner-centered teacher. I will discuss the initiation problem now, reserving a discussion of the regulation problem until the next chapter.

To show you how children's books can solve the initiation problem, I will first tell you another story about my son. One day Jake, then in first grade, came home upset. Apparently, the fifth-graders had baked some cookies, and only the fourth-graders had been invited to a party to eat them. "That's really unfair," Jake told me. "The older kids always get all the good things," he complained. "What do you mean?" I asked. He responded by telling me that all the special treats were given to the fourth- and fifth-graders, such as field trips and special assemblies. "It's not fair that the younger kids don't get any of those things," he concluded.

In our psychological age, I imagine that many parents and caretakers would use this as an opportunity to commiserate with their child, to reassure him in some way. "I'm sorry," a parent might respond. "Why don't we go bake some cookies for ourselves?"

But, being a philosopher, I saw Jake's distress as an opportunity to initiate a philosophical conversation with him. So I asked him a question. "Jake," I queried, "what makes this unfair? After all, someday you'll be an older kid and have the same privileges as the fourth- and fifth-graders do now. Why isn't it all right to give different-aged children different privileges so long as the younger children eventually get the privileges now accorded to the older ones?"

Jake pondered this for a while and responded, "But what if I'm not in school here then? It's not fair to make us little kids wait until later to be

treated fairly. It needs to happen now." Our conversation continued for some time, as we discussed whether it was all right to allow one group special privileges or whether justice demanded that everyone be treated exactly in the same way all of the time. The discussion ended with Jake determined to write a note to the principal demanding justice for first-graders!

I tell this story to illustrate two things. First, when a child has a genuine concern, he wants to engage in a discussion aimed at resolving his difficulty. Coming to terms, as they are, with a wealth of different phenomena, children frequently encounter things that bother them. Often they raise their concerns with the adults to whom they are closest, for example, their parents. Although we adults rarely follow up on the opportunities these conversations provide, we ought to recognize that children's desire to figure out their world gives us many chances to have philosophical discussions with them. When we do so, the children are motivated to take part in the discussion precisely because they are the ones who have initiated it. In fact, they usually are very grateful that the adults to whom they are closest are taking their concerns seriously by engaging them in a discussion about *their* issues. And often, as I've said, these issues concern the very same big ideas that worry philosophers.

Second, my encounter with Jake illustrates how a carefully posed question can transform a child's feeling of distress into the motivation to engage in a philosophical discussion. This is because a child in distress is often not simply looking to an adult for comfort. What he desires is a way to think about *why* he is upset and *what* he should do to alleviate it. Because Jake was confident that the philosophical discussion I had with him might help him figure out how to resolve his worry about the *fairness* of his school's practices, he was very willing to focus for quite a while on a philosophical discussion of that big idea with me.

Having a discussion with children after reading them a story from a picture book shares both of these two crucial features of the discussion I had with my son. Because aspects of the stories that we read to the children have puzzling or bothersome features in them, the children are not just satisfied when the stories are read to them. They find themselves perplexed about some issues raised by the stories, issues that focus on some of the "big ideas" characteristic of philosophy. Stories about animals who call themselves brave yet run terrified from every danger they encounter ("Dragons and Giants" [Lobel 1999]) or a judge of an art contest who declares a painting of a dog bad just because she dislikes dogs (*Emily's Art* [Catalanotto 2001]) are examples of stories that engage children because they have puzzling, bothersome, or even paradoxical aspects to them—aspects that we can recognize as raising genuinely philosophical issues. As a result, children jump at the chance to resolve the puzzles presented by the stories. The questions that we ask the children

focus on these problematic aspects of the stories and give the children an opportunity to express their opinions and resolve their confusion.

Using a read-aloud to begin a philosophical discussion, then, solves the initiation problem in a neat way. For what we do, once the read-aloud is over, is ask the children a question that contains a philosophical puzzle about a big idea central to the story itself. Because the children have been engaged by the story, they have a natural desire to resolve the issue we raise. Our belief is that this process will stimulate a genuine investigation by the children into the problem or puzzle that we present because it is an issue that arises directly out of the story that they have been read.

Sometimes, although really quite rarely, a question just falls flat, and the children seem to be unable or unwilling to discuss it. If that happens, there are a couple of things you can do. My basic suggestion is to ask the children why they are having trouble answering the question you have asked. (In general, when you feel yourself at a loss, turning to the children for guidance is a good strategy to bear in mind.) This will lead into a discussion that often gets to the issue you wanted but will give you more information, in any case. And you will have some other questions in reserve from your discussion framework (see chapter 6) that you can always raise to try to kindle the children's interest.

Because many of the stories we use pose but do not resolve philosophical questions (such as whether a person who appears to be brave because he does something very dangerous can really be doing something quite stupid), a well-formulated question makes explicit a puzzle about the story's big idea that many children will be wondering about at least implicitly after hearing the story. As a result, the children's pleasure at being read to can be redirected into a lively and engaging discussion of a significant philosophical issue.

In addition, using questions designed to raise philosophical issues solves an important aspect of the problem of how someone without philosophical training can facilitate a philosophical discussion among children. Our questions initiate a philosophical discussion that then only requires careful facilitation in order to remain philosophically relevant.

It is important for you to realize that one of the basic principles of all philosophical discussion is that disagreement is not only not a problem but something to be valued, so long as it is expressed in a respectful manner. This is crucial, because philosophical issues generally do not have agreed-upon solutions. For example, philosophers disagree about the answer to the question, "What is the meaning of life?" and even whether it is possible to definitively answer it. So the point of discussing philosophical questions is *not* to learn what the correct answer is, for many do not have universally accepted answers. Rather, what we expect the children to acquire is a set of

cognitive skills that allow them to decide what their own answers to such questions are and to be able to explain, to themselves and others, why their answers make sense.

This involves getting children to realize that they have opinions that are genuinely *theirs* and worth identifying as such. Since a great deal of the learning in elementary schools involves children being told what they should think—"Joey, 27 + 35 = 62, not 61"—they have to learn to value their own opinions. One of the really significant results of our philosophy discussions is that young children come to think of themselves as philosophers—that is, people whose opinions really do matter and are taken seriously by their peers.

Traditional classrooms come closest to having philosophical discussions when they use debates about controversial issues, for children are then asked to support their views with good reasons. But in philosophy discussions, unlike a debate, the emphasis is not on facts but defending what you think by providing good reasons for thinking what you do. Nor is it a competitive process designed to produce a winner, aiming instead at a productive, cooperative investigation oriented toward resolving a question.

The reason, then, that children's books provide such a good means for initiating philosophical discussions is that they present philosophical issues in a way that engages the children that naturally leads to animated conversations. When you look at the actual books that we use in our elementary school philosophy course, you will see how well they can serve to begin philosophical discussions.

Using children's books to initiate philosophical discussions has another important advantage. Because elementary school teachers are already using these books, they are familiar with them prior to using them in philosophy lessons and do not have to study new materials in order to start teaching philosophy. When we say that we are teaching children *philosophy*, we don't mean that we are *adding* a new subject into the curriculum. What we are doing is using books that teachers already are supposed to teach but in a new and innovative manner, one that will engage the children and allow them to develop important cognitive skills.

As I've said, I will explain how our method of teaching solves the regulation problem in the next chapter. So let me conclude the present discussion by emphasizing that the read-aloud serves to initiate a philosophical discussion in which the teacher is not the center of attention but the facilitator of a child-centered discussion among peers. Although this has generally been referred to as the creation of a community of inquiry by philosophers interested in discussing philosophical issues with children (see, for example, Kennedy 1996), I prefer to talk of learner-centered teaching because this emphasizes how the teacher should conceive of her role: as the facilitator of a learning process

that takes place through the interaction of the students with one another and is thus centered upon them and their ideas.

Initiating the philosophical discussion with a picture book ensures that the discussion begins with a focus on one of the big ideas central to philosophy. Although the facilitator will have to make some well-timed interventions to keep the discussion on track, she will have the advantage of beginning in an appropriate place with a question that will interest the children because it raises a philosophical issue implicit in the story.

NOTE

1. The contrast between teacher-centered learning and learner-centered teaching is my way of describing a distinction that many others have made. See, for example, Paulo Freire's discussion of the banking conception of education (1970) for one attempt to characterize two different approaches to learning.

Part II

PREPARING TO TEACH

Chapter Four

The "Game" of Philosophy

In the last chapter, I said I would discuss what I called the "regulation problem"—that is, how someone could facilitate a philosophical discussion among children that was likely to produce a good outcome. This problem is especially acute since most teachers are not experts in philosophy. We have already seen that it is possible for a teacher to lead such a discussion because he is not expected to transmit his specialized knowledge of significant philosophical ideas or theories, a task that he is probably not prepared to undertake. Instead, his role is to facilitate a philosophical discussion among his students in which the students work out among themselves their own answer(s) to philosophical questions stemming from a story that has just been read to them. But how, exactly, is an adult supposed to oversee such a discussion?

Some readers have been puzzled by my contention that virtually anyone can lead a philosophy discussion, even if they don't have much knowledge of philosophy. So let me explain: Even though the *content* of philosophy can be hard to understand, the *form* that a philosophy discussion follows is really quite simple and can be articulated in a few simple rules, as I do later in this chapter.

So long as a facilitator has a good working knowledge of the rules for doing philosophy, she can be an effective discussion leader. Of course, for reasons I shall explore, some knowledge of the content under discussion is helpful. But you really shouldn't let the fact that you have no previous knowledge of philosophy keep you from helping children engage in philosophical discussions of issues that concern them.

The first issue that a potential facilitator has to face is not having a clear idea of what makes a question or issue philosophical. This is actually one of the most difficult philosophical questions that there is, and one that philosophers disagree about vehemently. My view is that a question is philosophical

when it is one that cannot be answered empirically and for which no specific discipline has been developed that is capable of providing an answer to it.

Consider, for example, the paradigmatic child's question I mentioned earlier, "Daddy, why is the sky blue?" This is not a philosophical question because there is a well-established way to go about answering it. Physicists, beginning with John Tyndall in 1859, determined that air molecules scatter blue light from the sun in such a way as to produce the blue color of "the sky." Because this is an issue within the purview of physicists, it is not a philosophical question. But if a child were to ask whether the sky really is an object located over our heads, that would be a philosophical question, for it goes beyond the bounds of physics by asking about the relationship between our ordinary concepts—of which "the sky" is one—and our best scientific understanding of the ultimate constituents of the world.

Or, consider the question, "Could all of my perceptual beliefs be wrong?" If anything is a philosophical question, this is, for no other discipline sees it as a *real* issue for it to address. But philosophers do. And it's also a question that comes up in most people's lives at some time or other, say when they've just woken from a particularly convincing dream and are puzzled by whether what they thought just happened actually took place. The crucial feature that makes this a *philosophical* question is that there is no established discipline—other than philosophy itself—to turn to in deciding how to find an answer to it. You can't ask a friend or conduct an experiment; your friend's opinion can't settle the matter for *you*, and what sort of experiment could possibly tell *me* whether or not the words that you are now reading are real?

This conception of philosophy also explains why many questions that appeared to be philosophical at some point are now recognized as not being genuinely philosophical. A good example of such a question is, "What are the ultimate constituents of the universe?" The ancient Greek philosophers proposed many different answers to this question—starting with water and proceeding through many different alternatives, including atoms!—but we now recognize this as a scientific question that should be settled by scientific theorizing and experimentation. Only those questions for which there is no such agreed-upon discipline that provides the method for their solution count as genuinely philosophical.

I use the notion of a "big idea" as a shorthand way of capturing this conception of philosophy. The big ideas that are central to the philosophical enterprise are ideas that are nonempirical and that philosophers continue to discuss in their own characteristic way. Some examples of the big ideas that you may find yourself discussing with children are: justice, right and wrong, truth, reality, beauty, knowledge, and meaning. It's not that other disciplines can't address the issues involving these ideas, but their interest in them lacks the purely theoretical engagement of the philosopher.

In chapter 2, I mentioned that a philosopher's concern with the idea of willpower is different than a psychologist's. This is a good example of how the same "big idea" can be investigated in both an empirical, psychological manner and a theoretical, philosophical one. Although philosophers don't have a monopoly on the big ideas discussed in their discipline, their concerns with these ideas are different than those of other, more empirical investigators.

Even though philosophy is a communal enterprise dedicated to exploring our justification for using the criteria we use to distinguish between, for example, moral and immoral actions, truth and falsity, reality and appearance, and more, philosophical discourse proceeds by argumentation. So a philosopher might put forward "correspondence to reality" as a criterion for distinguishing a true belief from a false one. In order to determine whether that is an adequate criterion, other philosophers would critically discuss that proposal, and one might criticize it by pointing out that we have no means of telling whether or not an idea corresponds to reality because our access to reality is always mediated by our ideas. And that's exactly how a philosophical discussion develops, with all the parties to it arguing for their own point of view (although they can jump ship and switch to the other side!) at the same time that they are committed to jointly figuring out the correct answer to the question.

Even if you find this sketch of a philosophical discussion a little hard to understand, I think you can pretty easily see *the form* it takes: One philosopher *presents a view* and another counters with *a reason* why that view is incorrect. Because philosophical argumentation follows a small set of such rules, you'll be able to facilitate an elementary school philosophy discussion even without a great deal of knowledge about the *content* of the material under discussion.

To help you see how, I want to introduce an analogy between a philosophical discussion and a game. There are, of course, all sorts of games, from chess to soccer and even so-called war games. One thing that all of these games have in common is a set of *rules* that explain which *moves* are allowed in the game and which are prohibited.

One of the most important rules of soccer (or "football" for everyone but North Americans) states that no player except the goalie (when he is in his "box") is allowed to intentionally touch the ball with his hands. When a player does intentionally use his hands to touch the ball, a "hand ball" is called and the opposing team gets possession of the ball.[1]

This rule takes a specific situation—a player other than the goalie intentionally touching the ball—and specifies what must happen next in the game—the other team gets possession of the ball. When the game is in this situation, the rule tells us what must next happen for the game to legitimately progress, what "move" is allowed.

There are, of course, many other rules that jointly characterize the game of soccer. I am asking you to think of these rules as specifying the permissible moves within the game.

The rules of soccer don't tell you everything you need to know to be a good soccer player. To actually play soccer, for example, you need to know how to head the ball, how to pass it, how to defend against an opponent shooting the ball, and more. None of these things are part of the rules of soccer, though all have to be done in a way that doesn't violate the rules. Just as in philosophy, the game of soccer has rules that determine the *form* of the game, but there is a lot more *content* that a (good) player has to master in order to play the game well.

Once you adopt this perspective, it will not be hard to see that it is the *referee's* job to *apply* the rules—to determine when a particular rule applies—so that it is clear what the next move of the game will be.

This means that the referee has to decide when a player has committed an infraction of the rules of the game. In terms of the "hand ball" rule, the referee has to signal when a hand ball has occurred. When he thinks one has, he will whistle and have the opposing team kick in order to resume play. As he performs these tasks, the referee is determining when the rules of the game have been violated and specifying specific moves that must take place in order for the game to be continued.

Although you might think that all of this would be a lot clearer if I used chess as my example of a game, I want you to see that the idea of a game with prescribed moves is so general that it applies to all sorts of activities that might not at first seem to be aptly described in this way. Once you accept this idea, I hope you will be able to think of a *philosophy discussion* as a gamelike activity whose form is regulated by *rules*. This will allow you to recognize that the teacher or facilitator overseeing such a discussion has a natural role: the refereelike role of making sure the rules are being correctly followed during a philosophical discussion and intervening when she sees the rules being violated.

In this analogy, one of the facilitator's central roles is to decide whether a given *move in the game of philosophy* is legitimate or not. Like the referee in a game of soccer, he mostly allows the players to get on with playing the game, generally stepping in only when necessary to make it clear that a particular move is a violation of a rule. Of course, like an referee whose whistle gets a soccer match started and then stops and starts play, the facilitator will have to initiate a philosophical discussion and then make sure that it keeps moving along in a way that conforms to the rules.

One of the interesting features of soccer is that the referees don't call all the fouls that they see and, of course, they miss some of the fouls that actually

occur. They will let a foul go if it doesn't provide an advantage to the team that commits the foul and, analogously, you can let a comment pass that's not philosophically germane so long as the conversation is not disrupted by it. Similarly, like any referee, you will miss some calls, but the "game" will still progress fine nonetheless.

I imagine that something may still be bothering you. After all, referees in soccer do have to have quite substantial knowledge of soccer. For example, how do they determine whether an infraction of the rules gives one team an advantage? Only by knowing a lot about how soccer is played. So what about the person who is facilitating a philosophical discussion among elementary schoolchildren? Doesn't she have to have a lot of specialized knowledge about philosophy in order to serve as the refereelike facilitator of the discussion?

It can't be denied that having some general acquaintance with the philosophical issue being discussed is helpful to a facilitator. But two things need to be borne in mind. First, this awareness of specific content supplements the general knowledge of the rules of philosophy that a facilitator can easily acquire. These rules are simple—as you shall see in a moment—and easy for anyone to master. Second, the third section of this book includes brief discussions of the basic content raised by each picture book discussed. Armed with a general knowledge of how the game of philosophy is played and some more specific knowledge of the topics under discussion, anyone can facilitate an elementary school philosophy discussion.

* * *

I am now going to present the *six basic rules* for conducting a philosophical discussion. Although it may be quite difficult to decide how the rules apply in a particular context, it will be easy for you to get a handle on these basic rules, especially if you keep in mind the analogy between philosophical discussions and games. The essential point the "referee" of a philosophical discussion has to consider is whether what a child says contributes to the ongoing discussion or hinders it, is an allowable move in the game or is against the rules and blocks the game's progress. Your primary role as facilitator is exactly analogous to that of the referee: determining when a rule has been broken and stepping in to call a "penalty" that gets the game back on track.

What, then, are the essential rules for, or elements of, a philosophical discussion? As I've said, I think there are six basic ones, and they all stipulate appropriate responses that can be made at a given stage in the discussion. Don't forget that in addition to his role as facilitator, the teacher actually has another role: He also *initiates* the discussion by reading the story and asking a

question. However, once the discussion proper begins, nearly all of the teacher's actions function to *regulate* the "playing" of the game of philosophy.

Here, then, are the six rules for having a philosophical discussion. What they specify are the "moves" that one is allowed to make in the game of philosophy.

1. *Present a real example of the abstract issue being discussed.*
   Philosophical claims are abstract and general. It can be very difficult for students new to the game of philosophy to know how to make a contribution to the discussion. For this reason, it can be helpful to have children provide an example from their own experience of the issue being discussed.

   For example, if you are discussing the issue of whether a brave person can be scared—a topic that we have seen figures prominently in one of the stories in our elementary school introduction to philosophy, "Dragons and Giants" (Lobel 1999)—it can be very helpful to begin the discussion by asking the children to tell everyone if they were ever scared when they did something brave. This brings the story and its ideas directly into their own lives and therefore helps them see the relevance of philosophy.

   The pitfall to this "move" is that children love to tell stories, so giving them an opportunity to do so can hijack your entire discussion as one child after another tells stories about the time her little sister was brave when she had to go to the doctor but didn't cry when given a shot. In fact, I've become a lot more cautious about asking children to give examples from their own experience, although it is a useful technique, especially as you begin to discuss philosophy with children.

   It's very important that you, as the facilitator, keep this part of the discussion as brief and focused as possible. Make sure to establish the allowable parameters for their answers before asking them to share their examples.
2. *State your position on an issue—that is, answer a question that has been asked—in a clear manner after taking time to think.*
   This is the first substantive rule for doing philosophy and it actually requires important cognitive skills. To know what you think about an issue—especially an abstract philosophical one—requires introspective awareness and the ability to express what that yields. Without these skills, no child can do philosophy.

   This means that a facilitator has to exhibit patience as children struggle to express themselves—and she has to help other children also wait respectfully. Part of what makes philosophy so unique as a classroom experience for elementary schoolchildren is that we are asking them to figure out what they think about issues that even adults are uncertain about.

On the other hand, there is the opposite danger: that children's desire to talk will prompt them to speak without the requisite reflection. It may behoove you to suggest that they not immediately raise their hands but take some time to think about what they want to say.

Children also have to be taught how to express their ideas in a manner that lets other people, especially their peers, know exactly what they have in mind. So if you don't have a clear understanding of exactly what a child has said, you need to make sure that she rephrases her ideas in a way that you can understand. Here, it's often helpful to turn to the other children and ask them if they understand what was said and, if they don't, to ask the child to explain it to those who don't understand. After all, it is *their* discussion, so they need to understand what's been said if they are to take part in it. Any time the children make it clear that they don't understand something, you have a good reason as facilitator to ask for clarification. Hopefully, as you work with the children, they will themselves internalize the need to understand what has been said and take over this task themselves.

3. *Support your position with reasons.*

In the game of philosophy, it's not enough to say what you think. You have to explain *why* you think it. In fact, this is probably the most important rule for doing philosophy, for philosophers care at least as much *why* you think what you think as *what* you think. So you can't stress the importance of giving reasons enough.

Children can learn to give reasons for their beliefs quite easily. After all, they ask you "Why?" so often that they don't mind being asked "Why?" themselves. The problem is making it clear what types of answers count as good philosophical reasons for why you think what you do.

A philosophical explanation has to be *logical* and provide a *good explanation* of why anyone should accept it. If a child is asked to explain why she thinks that, for example, bravery means acting despite one's fears, and the child responds that she read it in a book or saw it on the Web or her big sister told her so, that's not an appropriate move in the philosophy game; these are not *good* reasons unless they can be backed up by something else. A good reason might involve explaining what is involved in being brave, how it's an appropriate response in dangerous situations, and what role fear plays.

Students may not be able to give complete explanations for their ideas right off the bat, for this is a move that takes some practice. When a student who has staked out a position doesn't know how to give a reason for it, it's generally helpful to turn to her peers and ask any of them who agree if they can help out by providing a good reason for the claim in question. In fact, as a facilitator, you can see your role as one in which you repeatedly deflect the children's attention from yourself by asking them, "What

do you all think about that?" rather than attempting to say what you think. In fact, a good rule of thumb is to *never* tell the children what you think about an issue *they* are discussing. If they do ask, try to finesse giving an answer by telling them this is *their time*, so they should be thinking about what *they* think.

4. *Figure out if you* agree or disagree *with what has been said.*
Although we often know exactly what we think about an ordinary, everyday issue, the abstractness of some philosophical issues makes it hard to know what we think about *them*. It's therefore important to help the children figure out their positions on the philosophical issue being discussed.

   This may require that children ask questions about what has been said, for this additional information may help them decide what they think. But an important move in the game of philosophy is determining what you think about something that someone else has said. It's therefore useful for you to ask, in response to a child's answer to a question, "Who agrees and who disagrees with what Shaquille has said?" (Again, it's important to first be sure that everyone knows what it is that Shaquille has said.) In fact, it can be very helpful to explicitly get the children to say, before they make any comment, "I agree [or disagree] with what Shaquille has said."

   It's important to realize that, in a philosophy discussion, disagreement can be a good thing. Children are sometimes afraid to disagree with others. Make sure they realize that in philosophy, disagreements are productive.

   We emphasize agreeing and disagreeing in our work with children in elementary schools. They pick up on this aspect of the process very quickly and often tell us that it's what makes doing philosophy so much fun.

5. *Present a counterexample to a claim that has been proposed.*
One goal of philosophical discussions is to establish general principles. For example, if you ask what makes a person brave, a child might say, "Facing something dangerous without being scared." This is, at least implicitly, a general principle that states that only when a person faces dangers without fear do her actions count as brave.

   An important aspect of doing philosophy is thinking about whether such general principles apply across the board to all instances of the phenomenon being discussed. And one way to show that they do not is to provide a counterexample, that is, an instance of something (bravery, in this case) that does not satisfy the criterion being advanced (facing something dangerous without fear). It's important to teach the children this skill, for it is central to how they need to assess the validity of general principles.

   A good way to do so is to ask the group, after a child has presented a general principle, if they can think of circumstances when that claim does

not apply or examples that do not fit it. Here, you might begin by noting that a child has said something very interesting that everyone needs to think about (I call this "giving a marker" and will discuss it soon) and then asking, "Can anyone think of someone who is being brave but who is not facing something dangerous without being scared?" A child might respond by telling you about something she did that she thought was brave but admit that she was really scared when she did it, or else give you an example of someone who she thinks is brave but was really scared, too. If the children do either of these things, then they have provided a *counterexample* to the general principle. This would show that the proposed definition of bravery is not valid as an account of what bravery is.

A counterexample is sort of like the "Go to jail!" card in the game of Monopoly. It sends you away from the position you have reached and requires that you do something special to proceed. To "get out of jail," the children who supported the original claim need to think about how to respond to the counterexample. They can reject the counterexample by arguing that it doesn't really apply, put forward a completely different claim that takes the discussion along a different path, or they can revise the previous claim in the way I will now describe.

6. *Put forward a revised version of a claim in light of criticism.*
Philosophers are stubborn folks. They don't easily abandon their positions. As a result, when faced with a counterexample to a claim, they often put forward a revised version of it, one that "takes care of" the counterexample. So it's important that the children learn this skill as well.

   Faced with a counterexample to a child's definition of bravery, you might turn to her and ask her—as well as her discussion partners—whether she, or any of them, has a way of responding to the counterexample. In our example, a student might respond by saying that you're being brave if you don't let your fears keep you from doing what you want in a dangerous situation. This would be a reformulation of the initial account of bravery that disarms the counterexample.

In a nutshell, these are the six "moves" that are permitted in the game of philosophy (summarized in table 4.1). Your task as a philosophical facilitator, like that of any referee, is to make sure that the participants are playing by the rules, making only permitted moves. In addition, you need to keep the game progressing so that the children remain engaged by it. This is a very different role than that which the teacher has under the teaching-centered conception of learning, for you will never be telling the children what to think about anything. Instead, you will function as a "philosophical midwife"—the term is Socrates'—helping the children give birth to their own ideas.

Table 4.1. "Moves" in the Game of Philosophy

"Moves" in the Game of Philosophy
1. Present a real *example* of the abstract issue being discussed.
2. State your *position* on an issue—that is, answer a question that has been asked—in a clear manner after taking time to think.
3. Support your position with *reasons*.
4. Figure out if you *agree or disagree* with what has been said.
5. Present a *counterexample* to a claim that has been proposed.
6. Put forward a *revised version* of a claim in light of criticism.

When I said that when we "teach" children philosophy, we don't actually *teach* them anything but only get them to discuss their own ideas in a carefully regulated manner, I was not being completely honest with you. While we don't prescribe what the children should think about anything, we do actually require that what they say accords with the rules for having a philosophical discussion that I have just explained. But this means that we are actually teaching them something: *How to take part in a philosophical discussion*. But that's very different than telling them, for example, that to be brave a person actually has to experience fear.

The fact is, acquiring the crucial skills necessary for taking part in a philosophical discussion will benefit children in all sorts of ways in their educations and, indeed, in their lives. That's because the rules for having a *philosophical* discussion are actually the basic rules for thinking about anything at all and therefore form the basis for all the thinking that we do, no matter what the content of our thought is. That's why philosophy can be characterized as the discipline that *thinks about thinking*, though there is more to philosophy than that.

There are two important skills that a facilitator has to possess that I have not yet emphasized. In order to maintain the *philosophical* nature of a discussion that children are having, the facilitator, first of all, has to be able to recognize when a comment made by a child is philosophically relevant and when not. Developing this skill can be difficult, but it is something that you will learn over time and through reading the later chapters in this book. Even experienced facilitators may assume that a contribution made by a child is not philosophical when she simply does not understand what point the child wished to make.

One reason why I suggest that inexperienced facilitators begin their discussion of picture books with the questions supplied in this book is that these questions are designed to elicit philosophical responses from children. This helps at least begin the discussion on a philosophical topic, and the subse-

quent questions in each question set provide ways of moving a discussion to a more abstract and philosophical level.

Because we begin our discussions with children's books, the initial stages of the discussions often focus on questions about what the characters did and the children's attitudes toward those actions. In order for the discussion to be genuinely philosophical, the facilitator will have to ask a well-timed question that refocuses the discussion on the more abstract question raised by the story. If the children have been discussing, for example, whether Frog and Toad were really brave even though they were scared, at some point the facilitator will have to pose a question like this: "We've been discussing whether Frog and Toad were brave even though they were scared, and you all felt that they were. Do you all agree that a person can be brave even though they are scared?"

This latter question is philosophical because it proposes a general criterion for bravery: feeling fear. When the children turn their focus onto that question, they are beginning to have a genuinely philosophical discussion, one that leaves the specifics of the story behind. Again, the question sets in the third part of this book provide guidance on how to move the discussion onto a higher plane.

Understanding philosophy as requiring children to master some general rules for having a discussion explain why teaching children philosophy is so important. Getting children to master these rules provides them with some of the most basic skills they will need no matter what else they go on to study. So as well as allowing them to discuss issues and questions that really matter to them, philosophy also provides them with an important set of cognitive and behavioral skills that will be applicable throughout their educations.

When I was working with Mary Cowhey, a teacher at the Jackson Street School, we developed a set of questions to use in discussing William Steig's *The Real Thief* (1973). This is the story of a goose that is wrongly convicted of a crime on the basis of circumstantial evidence. When the students discussed the story, they wanted to understand how a person could be convicted of a crime that he didn't do.

To help her explain this, Mary brought in my wife, Wendy Berg, a lawyer, to explain different standards of evidence to the children. Wendy explained the difference between direct and circumstantial evidence, along with the different degrees of credibility each has. This enabled the children to understand how a miscarriage of justice was possible when circumstantial evidence is the sole basis for a conviction.

As a result of these discussions, the idea of evidence became so powerful that, no matter what the students were studying—from history to science—they kept demanding to know what the evidence for any proposed

claim was. Other visitors to this classroom left amazed that second-graders were demanding that they support what they were saying with *evidence*, for the children were no longer willing to accept their stories at face value (see Cowhey 2006, 157). This is a real example of how useful a philosophical education can be in creating young children as independent thinkers and how skills learned during a philosophy discussion are transferrable to other areas of inquiry.

More generally, teaching children how to have a philosophical discussion will change the culture of a classroom in a positive way. As they learn to see one another as partners in a quest for understanding, they will come to value their classmates not only as fellow knowledge seekers in the game of philosophy but also as suitable conversation partners on virtually any topic. Children who have become skillful players of the game of philosophy will bring their newfound abilities to bear on every aspect of their schooling—and much of their lives in general.

NOTE

1. I discuss soccer because it is the sport most familiar to people around the globe. North Americans may find its rules hard to understand. They may wish to substitute the "three strikes and you're out" rule from baseball.

Chapter Five

The Elementary School Introduction to Philosophy Course

As I've mentioned a number of times, this book contains the materials you will need to teach an introduction to philosophy course to elementary schoolchildren. So, it's high time that I give you a better sense of what such a course involves.

The course that I am about to describe is one that my undergraduate students have taught at the Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School of Excellence in Springfield, Massachusetts. It evolved from my work there as well as with children and teachers at the Jackson Street School in Northampton, Massachusetts, and the Island Bay School in Wellington, New Zealand. The course I am presenting to you is thus based on my actual experience and that of my college students in teaching philosophy to elementary schoolchildren. All of the books included in the course can be taught in any grade, so long as you explain to upper-level elementary school students and those who have already read the books that what you are doing with the books is different from what they might be used to. I have recently used these books very successfully, for example, with fifth-graders in Wellington.

To begin, I'd like to say something more specific about philosophy in order to explain the actual content of this elementary school introduction to philosophy course. Philosophy is the intellectual discipline that considers the most basic questions of human existence. The tradition of philosophizing that we will be invoking—"Western" philosophy—began in Greece in the fifth century BCE. Although philosophy is therefore two-and-a-half millennia old, its basic questions remain the same: What can we know? What should we do? What does it all mean? Even though these questions remain without definitive answers, philosophy allows us to reflect upon these questions in our ever-changing world.

Philosophical inquiry is generally divided into a number of specific fields, each of which investigates a different subject matter that is reflected in the Big Ideas upon which it focuses (see table 5.1). Although I will provide somewhat more detailed explanations of these fields later in the book, I will give a provisional account now in order to explain the structure of our course. First, there is *metaphysics*, the philosophical discipline that considers the nature of existence. This is the headiest field of philosophy, and the hardest one to get a handle on. Basically, metaphysicians wonder about what the structure of reality is really like. They ask questions such as whether the world as it appears to us is the real world and whether many of its features—like colors, smells, time, numbers—might just be projections of our human ways of thinking and perceiving.

Epistemology (from the Greek word for knowledge, *episteme*) focuses on the nature of human knowledge. The central figure for the epistemologist is the skeptic, who denies that certain accepted modes of knowing really give us knowledge. The most venerable forms of skepticism are skepticism about the reality of the external world, which asks, "Do we have knowledge that there is a world external to ourselves that resembles our impressions of it?" and skepticism about the existence of other minds, which poses the question, "Can we be sure that, attached to the bodies that we see surrounding us that behave much as we do, there are minds like our own?"

Logic is the philosophical discipline that studies rules of reasoning. Its results are presupposed by all the other fields of philosophy, for one has to

Table 5.1. The Basic Fields of Philosophy

Philosophical Field	*Basic Question*	*Big Ideas*
Metaphysics	What really exists?	Truth, Reality
Epistemology	What can we know?	Knowledge, Perception
Logic	What is a valid form of reasoning?	Validity, Soundness
Philosophy of language	How does language refer to reality?	Representation, Meaning
Philosophy of mind	Is the mind distinct from the body?	Mind, Thinking
Ethics	How should we act?	Right/Wrong, Good/Bad
Social and political philosophy	How should society be organized?	Justice, Rights, Equality
Aesthetics	What is art?	Art, Beauty
Environmental philosophy	What is the appropriate relationship for humans to have with the natural world?	Nature, Environment, Care

reason correctly no matter what the subject matter you are reasoning about. Although it was developed in ancient Greece, it was completely transformed into the modern field that it is at the beginning of the twentieth century through the introduction of formal symbolization. Research remains very active in logic, as logicians attempt to provide formal models for all types of human reasoning.

A field of philosophy that came into existence only in the twentieth century is the *philosophy of language*. Prior to that time, philosophers had not given language much attention, thinking of it as simply the medium in which we express our thoughts, the mental items whose nature they investigated. But beginning in the early twentieth century, philosophers began to suspect that language had a much greater impact on our thinking than had previously been recognized. Philosophers of language investigate the nature of language and how it enables us to effectively communicate with one another. They wonder, for example, whether language is inherently social and whether its structure determines our sense of what there is in the world, so that different languages present their users with different world pictures.

The human mind is one of the most amazing features of the world, but also one of its most puzzling. The *philosophy of mind* poses questions about the nature of the mind, such as what relation it bears to the human body. In general, it seeks to explain the nature of all mental phenomena, including thoughts, emotions, and volitions. In so doing, the philosophy of mind brings to bear the amazing results of recent research in cognitive science that may have the potential to solve the "riddle of consciousness" and to transform our self-understanding.

Ethics is the field of philosophy that addresses questions of human conduct. People generally understand that there is a difference between doing what they feel like at a given moment and what they think they *ought* to do. Ethics attempts to explain the nature of the obligation we feel to do the moral or the "right" thing. Ethicists worry about such questions as whether we have an obligation to treat other people respectfully simply by virtue of their humanity and, if so, exactly how such an obligation can be justified.

While ethics is concerned with individual human beings, the related field of *social and political philosophy* focuses on the nature of society. Foremost among its issues is the justification for government. All of the political disagreements between liberals and conservatives are reflected at a more abstract level in disputes in social and political philosophy. Some would argue, for example, that justice demands that everyone have a socially agreed-upon minimum level of welfare, while others reject that contention for requiring untoward intervention into people's individual rights.

Aesthetics focuses on questions that arise concerning art. The issues that bedevil each of the other fields of philosophy find their own specific register in aesthetics. For example, one of the most vexed issues facing the philosophy of art is the metaphysical one of exactly what distinguishes works of art from other things in the world. Since artists now include virtually everything *including* the kitchen sink in their works, the question of what differentiates a work of art from other, "ordinary" objects becomes pressing. But there are also epistemological and ethical questions that get raised about art, such as whether good art can be objectionable from a moral point of view.

Another recent addition to the domain of philosophy is *environmental philosophy*. Given the widespread recognition that human beings have wrought serious damage to the natural world, philosophers have begun to question whether there is a better way for humans to relate to their environment. Reacting against an earlier age's assumption that natural things were simply there for human beings to use, some philosophers argue that humans need to regard natural things as having rights of their own that must be respected.

Since a college-level introduction to philosophy course would introduce students to at least some of the above-mentioned fields of philosophy, I decided to make the elementary school introduction to philosophy course I describe in the third section of this book have a similar range. I chose nine books out of a virtually unlimited supply of picture books that can be used to initiate philosophical discussions with young children. With one exception, I have limited myself to picture books. This is because we generally have only been able to meet with the children once a week, so we need to read the book and have a discussion in one forty-five-minute class period. But chapter books are also suitable for philosophical discussions with children if one has the ability to meet with them more often or if one focuses on a single chapter, as you'll see in my discussion of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum 1900).

Each of the books that I use in this course was chosen because it raises important issues in one of the above-mentioned fields of philosophy. For example, what constitutes bravery is a significant issue in the field of ethics, for it asks us to think about why we believe that being brave is a good thing, assuming we do, and how we can tell that someone is brave. "Dragons and Giants," a story from *Frog and Toad Together* (Lobel 1999) that I have already used as an example and will continue to use in this way, raises these questions in a humorous and engaging manner by raising puzzles about how a person could say that he was being brave at the same time as he ran as fast as he could to evade something dangerous. As a result, I decided to use this story to introduce ethics to the schoolchildren.

Analogous things can be said about each of the other books or stories that together make up the elementary school introduction to philosophy course.

By combining them, you can acquaint the children with most of the central areas of philosophy, though you will only look at one small topic or set of topics within each field in a manner similar to most college-level introductory courses. More intensive explorations of any of these areas will have to be left for future sessions, perhaps using some of the books mentioned at the end of each chapter.

Now that you have a general idea of how the introduction to philosophy course is structured, I'll describe how a typical session of elementary school philosophy instruction proceeds. Philosophy discussions work best with groups of roughly six to twelve students—enough to have a discussion and differing opinions, but not so many that the children become frustrated because they have to wait so long to express their views.

This may be a problem if you teach a large class, in which you have two to three times this number of children. One solution that an ingenious teacher in Wellington came up with was to divide the children into reading groups and to conduct philosophy discussions in each group on a different day of the week as the rest of the class pursued their reading assignments. It is also possible to work with an entire class so long as you can keep the children from getting frustrated, say, by having them talk to their neighbor about an issue before making contributions to the large group.

We generally sit on the floor in a large circle. In this way, the students are able to make eye contact with all of their peers. This is an important prerequisite in learner-centered teaching, where the teacher is not going to be the center of attention.

The first time we go into a class, we have a general conversation with the children about what's involved in having a philosophical discussion. We explain to them that philosophy requires them to act differently than they are used to, because they have to think very hard, listen to their classmates even harder, and figure out if they agree or disagree with what has been said as well as to provide reasons for what they think. In addition, we emphasize that philosophy is not so much about saying *what* you think but *why* you think it.

To help the children remember what is required of them, we use a list titled "How We Do Philosophy!" This list, which we post in the classroom as a reminder to them, gives them a sense of philosophy as having special rules, just as I explained in the last chapter, but spelled out in a "friendlier" manner for the children. You can see the list in table 5.2.

Sitting in a circle with the students, the facilitator might begin her philosophy session by going over these rules. If it is the first session, she would spend more time, asking the students what they think of each rule, whether it might be important, and even changing a rule if the students think that's important.

Table 5.2. How We Do Philosophy!

1. We *think* about what we heard.
2. We *answer* the questions as clearly as we can.
3. We *listen* carefully and quietly, with our hands down, to what someone is saying.
4. We *decide* if we *agree or disagree*.
5. We think about *why* we agree or disagree.
6. When it's our turn, we *say* whether we agree or not and why.
7. We *respect* what everyone says.
8. We *all* have valuable comments to make.
8. We *have fun* thinking together!

If you have enough time, though, you can have your students develop their own version of "How We Do Philosophy!" I do this whenever I can since it gives the children a real sense that they are setting things up in the way that they want. You can even have them sign the large poster that contains these rules and keep it displayed throughout your philosophy discussions, an innovation that I found works very well when I tried it in Wellington.

For reasons that should be clear by now, every session includes a read-aloud. The reading of the story is always a lot of fun. I advise my students to ham it up *more* than they want to. The stories we read are very entertaining, so we want the children to be really engaged by them. As the facilitator reads, she might pause from time to time at a well-chosen place to make sure that everyone has understood what's happened in the story. Everyone should be an active participant in our discussions, so we don't want attention problems or comprehension difficulties to stymie anyone.

Not all elementary schoolchildren are as comfortable moving immediately from the read-aloud to an abstract discussion of a philosophical issue. In order to make sure that everyone is able to take part in the discussion, we have learned to begin our discussion of the book with what I call the *story matrix*. We use those large pads that populate elementary school classrooms, so that all of the children can help us fill it in. The story matrix generally begins by displaying the central elements of the story that we will be discussing, but it moves on from there, as we ask the children to fill in information as a first, gentle step in our philosophical discussion. (You'll find a more extensive discussion of the story matrix in the next chapter.)

When we teach *The Important Book* (Brown 1990), for example, we choose three of the objects upon which the book focuses—a spoon, an apple, and you—and list everything that the book says about them. Doing this helps get all the children in a position to discuss whether they agree with the book's assertions about what the important thing is about each of these things. (For more on *The Important Book*, see chapter 11.)

Central to our method for discussing philosophy with children are the questions that the facilitator poses to them. I have prepared sets of questions for each of the books that will help you get at the philosophical issues that each story raises. I have spent a lot of time figuring out what philosophical questions are raised by each book and how best to get children to discuss them.

This is not an easy undertaking. Recently, I was discussing "The Garden," another story from *Frog and Toad Together* (Lobel 1999) with a group of fourth- and fifth-graders at the Island Bay School in Wellington. I had developed my own set of questions, operating on the assumption that we would be talking about how the differences between different types of things—especially nonsentient things like seeds and being with minds like us—requires you to treat them differently. This was because, to encourage his seeds to grow, Toad did all sorts of inappropriate things like yelling at the seeds, reading to them, and singing them songs.

To my surprise, the students responded by saying that Toad was impatient and that was bad. What ensued was an amazing discussion of whether patience was a good thing, morally speaking, that was so vigorous we had to extend it into a second session. These children had seen a potential in the story that I had passed over in my interest in having a discussion of the difference that having a mind makes. But I let the discussion develop in the direction suggested by the children, and the results were great.

Although the moral of this story is that letting the discussion go off in unanticipated directions can be extremely fruitful, generally the discussion will take place along less unexpected lines of inquiry. That's why the question sets can provide so much assistance to you. For each story in part 3, I provide a series of questions that you can use to raise the story's most important philosophical questions in a way that will stimulate discussion. This is important because determining what philosophical issues a story raises is difficult and requires some knowledge of philosophy. By preselecting questions for you, I have attempted to ensure that you can direct your students toward philosophically significant issues raised by the story that you want them to discuss and to approach them gradually. This lets your students engage in philosophical discussions without you having to decide on your own what philosophical issues a story actually raises.

Generally, then, the question sets will be very useful for you in facilitating your philosophy discussions. When I first started using these question sets, my students tended to use them as recipes:

Step 1: Ask question 1.
Wait for an answer.
Step 2: Ask question 2.
Wait for an answer. And so on.

I know that this was the result of insecurity and nervousness, but the result was that discussions were often stifled prematurely because my students were trying to keep to the plan instead of *listening* to what the children had to say. My students didn't realize that, in general, the best way to move the discussion forward is *not* by asking a new question, but by, for example, focusing on the answer a child has already given and asking the other children what they think of it.

One thing that I have learned through my engagement with children and philosophy is how little we listen to each other. In the classroom, children generally vie with one another for their teacher's attention and pay little attention to what their classmates say. Adults hear what children say but often fail to really listen to them, to consider what they really are saying or asking.

One of the great virtues of doing philosophy with children is that it forces everyone to listen to each other much more carefully than we ordinarily do. When you see children in a classroom squirming in their seats with their hands raised for the teacher to call on them, you can't help but notice the excitement that the group of kids has.

The downside of all that enthusiasm is that the children whose hands are raised usually are not listening to the one who currently has the floor—but are focusing their energy on getting the teacher to recognize *them*. That's not conducive to a learner-centered classroom. That's why I added to the rules for doing philosophy that the children have to put their hands down when someone else is speaking.

Equally important is the fact that, in a philosophy discussion, *you* have to *listen* to your students. It's a skill my college students have to learn, in part because their own anxieties about being in a classroom make it difficult for them to really listen to what the children are saying. But that is something they need to learn to do even as they remain nervous about facilitating well. In fact, it's one of the basic rules for good facilitation:

Listen to what the children say and let that move the discussion along.

You'll have a much more fruitful philosophy lesson if you are able to listen, rather than simply nodding and going on to ask them the next question from your discussion framework, for doing so will allow you to involve all the students in a discussion of what has been said.

It's very important not to think of the questions in the question sets as requiring that the children participating in the discussion answer them serially, one after the other. They really are nothing other than *prompts* for discussion. This means that, when a child answers a question you've asked, your role is to get the other children to focus upon what he has said and to respond to it

using one of the appropriate "moves" I detailed in the last chapter. Among other things, you are trying to get the children to see that they can really learn through their interactions with one another, something that may be a very different classroom experience for them.

This is why I suggest that you use the question set I provide for each book as the basis for a "discussion framework" of your own devising. I describe how to make one in the next chapter. For now, let me say that a discussion framework is your attempt to outline the philosophical issues that the story raises and that you intend to be the focus of discussion. Just remember not to force the discussion to proceed as *you* want it to. It's the children's discussion, and they should be able to determine how it develops.

It's also worth noting that a good philosophy discussion creates a space in which children can ask their own questions. Although I prefer not to start the discussion with their questions and suggest that you do not either, this is a contentious issue among those interested in introducing philosophy into elementary schools. In part, my suggestion has a pragmatic reason. In our sessions, we only have forty-five minutes. It would use up all of our time if we tried to canvas the children for their questions and then proceed to select one for a discussion. In addition, our questions are philosophical, so even novice facilitators will have a way of making sure the discussion starts off on a relevant philosophical issue.

But even if you don't *start* with children's questions, you need to recognize that giving the children the space in which to express their own questions is one of the ways in which taking part in a philosophy discussion enhances their sense of self. So if a child does ask a relevant question, you should try to find a way to incorporate that into the discussion.

To make you more comfortable with facilitating discussions of philosophical topics you may not know a great deal about, I have provided philosophical introductions to the issues raised by each of the picture books I discuss in part 3. Having a sense of the philosophical terrain that a book traverses will make you a better, more perceptive listener to a philosophical discussion and also give you more self-confidence. My philosophical introductions should give you enough knowledge to feel comfortable without boring you with too much detail. (There are also suggestions for further investigation in chapter 18, if you are interested in learning more about any topic, and my book, *A Sneetch Is a Sneetch and Other Philosophical Discoveries: Finding Wisdom in Children's Literature* is a user-friendly introduction to philosophy based on picture books that you may find helpful in acquiring a background in philosophy.) Getting used to facilitating discussions about topics for which you don't have the answer—indeed, for which there may be no agreed-upon answer—is hard. But it is also what

makes it so much fun to work with children in this way: You may learn as much from them as they will from you.

To provide the children with a sense of closure, I always end my classroom session with a "go-round." This is a time when each child in the circle gets to say something that they want to about the session and everyone listens without responding. Since each child has the option of passing, it's a nonpressured situation that encourages participation, and it plays an important role in bringing the discussion to a satisfying conclusion. The children can discuss the content, say, by adding a final comment they have wanted to make but didn't get a chance to. Or they can evaluate either the book or the discussion, giving you useful feedback. Many times, a child who has not spoken reveals how carefully they have followed the discussion during the go-round.

Before I give you more detailed advice about how to prepare for and lead a philosophy discussion—the subject of the next two chapters—I want to return briefly to my description of the classroom sessions that my students and I engage in. We generally do not spend more than forty-five minutes with the children discussing a story. Having a philosophical discussion requires a lot of attention from everyone, so we don't want to exhaust the children, allowing their attention to flag, a sure prelude to "classroom management" issues. But it's also important to allow enough time for the discussion to get going. In consultation with classroom teachers, we've settled on forty-five minutes as a good general limit, although younger children may find thirty minutes to be as much as they can handle, and some of the older children I have worked with are still very much engaged after an hour of discussion.

This chapter has provided you with an overview of my elementary school introduction of philosophy course for elementary schoolchildren. In the balance of the book, I will, first, explain how to prepare for and lead a philosophical discussion, two necessary components for a good session with the children. I will then present each of the nine stories that make up my elementary school philosophy course. For each story, I will outline the philosophical issues it raises and then describe how you might lead a discussion that focuses on those issues, followed by the actual question set I have devised for the story. The idea is that you can use both my discussion and the question sets to prepare your own discussion framework for each story.

Chapter Six

Preparing for a Philosophy Discussion: The Discussion Framework

The key element as you prepare to facilitate an elementary school philosophy discussion is the discussion framework. Looser than a lesson plan, the discussion framework outlines the issues and questions that you see a story as raising, as well as the possible directions you believe that a discussion of those issues *might* take. It is a guide to assist you in leading a children's philosophical discussion of a story. This chapter will explain how to make one.

The discussion framework has three essential components: the story matrix, the concept map of big ideas, and the philosophical question sets. I will explain each of them in turn. Although my discussion of these three elements is necessarily sequential, you may find it easier to fill out all three elements of the discussion framework in tandem with one another.

1. The Story Matrix.

The *story matrix*, the first element in your discussion framework, takes the book's narrative—a series of events that unfolds sequentially in time, generally speaking—and puts them into a logical structure involving the fundamental categories that the children will have to use in order to have a philosophy discussion. Many children find it difficult to move from the pure temporal sequence of events—this, and then this, and then that—to the more abstract issues involved in a philosophy discussion. Moving directly from a story about, say, Frog and Toad climbing a mountain to questions about whether they were brave skips a number of important cognitive steps. In order to keep all—or most—of the children involved in the discussion, it may be necessary to explicitly include these steps.

The discussion matrix accomplishes that. It also creates a visual record of the interpreted story that you and the children can continue to refer to during the discussion. If you make the discussion matrix with the children, you

will find them standing up and pointing to one of the items on the discussion matrix as a way of explaining the point they want to make.

The discussion matrix is not only useful to students. Working with teachers to plan how to structure a book discussion, I realized how useful creating a story matrix was for *us*. As we labored together to create one, we came to understand the story more deeply and to see what philosophical concerns were in play.

It will be easier to understand what a story matrix is by looking at a specific example. Table 6.1 presents the story matrix for Arnold Lobel's story "Dragons and Giants" from *Frog and Toad Together*, the story that I will use to illustrate all of the elements of a discussion framework. So let me briefly summarize its narrative.

Having just read a book of fairy tales, Toad declares that the people in the book were brave because they fought dragons and giants and were never afraid. This sets up the claim whose validity the story will investigate: that being brave requires facing dangers without fear. (Note that this claim is a simple generalization of Toad's claims about the book's characters, and making such generalizations is one aspect of what doing philosophy involves.)

Since looking in a mirror only tells them that they *look* brave, Frog and Toad set off to climb a mountain, and they encounter three dangerous things on their trip: a snake, an avalanche, and a hawk. Each time, although they evade the danger, they tremble with fear, eventually winding up hiding in Toad's house shaking with fear.

Table 6.1. Story Matrix for "Dragons and Giants": How Frog and Toad Try to Figure Out Whether They Are Brave

What Do Frog and Toad Do?	*Is There Danger?*	*Are They Scared?*	*Are They Being Brave?*
Look in a mirror	No	No	Can't tell. They look brave, but that doesn't mean they are.
Decide to climb a mountain	Yes	No	Yes
Jump away from the snake	Yes	Yes	??
Jump away from the avalanche	Yes	Yes	??
Hide under some rocks	Yes	Yes	??
Hide in the closet and under the covers	No	Yes	??

Note: The answers placed in the boxes are just a suggestion of what the kids might say.
?? indicates that children will likely have different views. None of this is prescriptive.

Just considering the events in the story, I'll think you'll see that it sets up the question of whether you accept Toad's claim about the relationship between bravery, danger, and fear as legitimate. Even if that's exactly what the focus of the children's discussion will be, we first need to construct a story matrix that they can refer to in thinking about this issue.

As you can see, the story matrix for "Dragons and Giants" is a 4 x 7 table. The first column represents the basic events in the story's plot or, to put it in more child-friendly terms, "What Do Frog and Toad Do?" Most story matrices have a similar reconstruction of the plot as their first column. In this case, six events comprise the story's plot, and they are listed in the first column.

Since Toad's definition calls into question the relationship between danger, fear, and bravery, the story matrix needs to contain the information about whether each of these were present during the incidents in the plot. So we pose questions about each of these in the first row of the matrix: Was there danger? Were they scared? Were they brave?

You can then fill in the cells of the chart based on your understanding of the story. Once you have done so, I think you will realize that the question of whether Frog and Toad were brave as they hiked up the mountain and experienced three quite dangerous situations is the crux of this story, and of the discussion about it you will have with the children.

The story matrix not only helps you understand the issues in the book, it also forms the first step in your discussion of the book with the children. For them, you should leave all but the first row and top column blank, so that they can tell you how to fill it out. I'll discuss how to do this in greater detail in the next chapter.

In part 3 of this book, I have supplied story matrices for each of the stories I discuss. Each was constructed with the aim of helping the children discuss the story from a philosophical point of view. Once you have a sense of the basic philosophical issue raised by a story, it's not hard to construct a story matrix on your own.

2. The Concept Map of Big Ideas.

The concept map contains the "big ideas" or philosophical concepts that a story focuses upon. It is useful, both in your planning and as the discussion actually takes place, to keep a record of these big ideas. So I suggest that you make a concept map as part of your planning for the discussion, but also record the big ideas that come up during the children's discussion.

The concept map should be pretty easy to create once you have developed your story matrix. This is because the story matrix highlights the basic philosophical issue raised by a story and thus more or less contains the story's big ideas.

In fact, if you look back at what I said about "Dragons and Giants," you'll notice that I already mentioned the three big ideas that are central to the story: bravery, danger, and fear. To construct a concept map, all you need to do is write these three ideas down on your discussion framework—I favor putting circles around them—and then think about how they might be related to each other.

After a little thought, you might find yourself with a discussion map like this:

Figure 6.1. The Big Ideas in "Dragons and Giants"

You'll note that the concept map presents the three big ideas in a specific order: First, we have the situation—danger. This is because bravery is a specific response to a dangerous situation. It is not the only one—timidity and recklessness are two others—but you needn't have anticipated this point and that's why they are not part of the concept map. All that it shows is that *fear*—the second big idea—is produced by danger. I've put a question mark over the relationship between them because that's one issue that can be discussed: Is fear a necessary emotional response to a dangerous situation? Finally, there is *bravery*—the big idea that is the philosophical crux of this story, for it is an ethical concept. Once again, I have a question mark to indicate that the relationship between fear and bravery is one upon which the discussion might (and, hopefully, will) focus.

You might have been surprised when I claimed just now that bravery is an ethical concept. I did so because bravery is a character trait we generally think of in a positive light, making it one of the *virtues* discussed by moral philosophers. When I discuss the story in chapter 9, I'll explain this in more detail. For now, it's only important to realize that the three big ideas I have mentioned constituted the basic concept map for "Dragons and Giants."

Why is a concept map important? There are two basic reasons. The first is that having it in mind makes you a more perceptive facilitator of the discussion. As you listen carefully to what the children say, you will be aware when their comments use one of the big ideas central to the story and, when you hear one, you can write it on the pad or board you are using.

The second is that it can be used to help the children move their discussion to a more abstract and philosophical plane. If you reconstruct the concept map as you listen to the children talk by putting down the big ideas as they mention them, you will have an important additional resource in facilitating. At a suitable point in the discussion, you can then easily lead the children to turn away from the story and questions about, in this case, Frog and Toad, and refocus on the big ideas and their relationship to one another. In so doing, you ensure that their discussion takes a philosophical turn.

3. The Questions Sets.

You are now ready to "plan" the final part of your discussion framework. This involves figuring out a series of questions on different philosophical issues that a story presents. The goal here is not to create a sort of recipe whose steps have to be followed to create a successful philosophy discussion. Rather, the questions sets map out possible routes the discussion might take so that you will be prepared, when you hear a relevant comment, to ask a question that moves the discussion in a philosophical direction.

To help you out, I have provided questions sets at the end of each chapter for the nine stories discussed in part 3 of this book. Each of these sets of questions both selects an issue to discuss that is clearly philosophical—thus helping those of you who don't already know much philosophy see what the philosophical issues raised by the books are—and shows you how to get the children to address that issue through a series of increasingly abstract questions. In reading over these questions sets, familiarize yourself with the philosophical issues raised by the story and, with my questions as guides, think about how you would feel most comfortable raising them with your students.

This element of your discussion framework should be your adaptation of the questions set given in this book that you have modified so as to best stimulate discussion. You need to think about raising questions so that they follow one another in a logical sequence. So, please, modify the questions as you see fit, and even add ones of your own if you think they make sense and will assist you in discussing the story. There is absolutely no need to follow my questions slavishly. You'll do a better job if you adapt them in light of your own ideas about what will work best with your students.

In developing the questions sets, I have attempted to present the individual questions in a logical sequence. Generally, the idea is to begin with more specific and concrete questions, and then to move to more abstract and general ones. There are a variety of reasons for this. As I have already mentioned, it is important to try to get every student involved in the discussion. Beginning with questions that relate directly to the story, for example, can give students

a way to participate, even if they are not yet ready to make contributions to the more abstract discussions.

This is also why you should not begin with questions that are so abstract that the students will not know how to respond to them. So, for example, it's not a good idea to begin your discussion of "Dragons and Giants" with the question, "What is bravery?" because that question is so abstract that it's not clear to the students—or, indeed, most of us—how to answer it. It's much better to ask, as I suggest you do while constructing the story matrix, if they thought Frog and Toad were brave when they ran from the avalanche.

Except at the very start as you fill out the story matrix it's very important not to include any leading questions in your question sets. Leading questions are questions whose answer you already know and expect the children to supply. I liken the result of asking such questions to "fishing expeditions," as each child tries to guess what you want them to say. Such attempts to satisfy the discussion leader are antithetical to our attempt to create a learner-centered teaching environment in the classroom and generally need to be studiously avoided!

Usually, the questions sets for any story include questions on more than one philosophical topic. This is because the stories themselves generally raise a number of different philosophical issues. Don't feel that a successful discussion of a book has to touch on all of the issues a book raises. We often purposely focus only on one issue, leaving the others aside, and sometimes even read only part of the book to keep the discussion focused. Still, it's a good idea to be prepared for students raising any of the issues presented by a book.

You can also use your discussion framework to remind yourself of things that are important to do during the discussion, such as giving the children lots of positive feedback or listening carefully to what they say. Having that advice before you in black and white can be an important means of reminding yourself of what you want to do while leading the discussion.

But above all, remember not to treat the discussion framework as setting up a fixed direction that the discussion has to take. It's there to help you begin the discussion and keep track of the central philosophical issues raised by the story. When you actually hear the kids responding to you, you should be prepared to follow the discussion wherever it leads, so long as it remains philosophically pertinent, and your discussion framework is intended to help you do that.

The next couple of pages have two documents that you may find useful as you begin planning to facilitate a discussion. The first is a sample of a discussion framework that I developed for "Dragons and Giants" that will give you a better sense of what one looks like. You can compare it to the question set at the end of chapter 8 in order to see how far one can depart from a question

set in developing a good discussion framework. The second is a form that you can use for your discussion framework. You can even use it as a template to be filled out as you prepare for leading your discussion. I hope both of these are helpful and make it easier for you to begin—and enjoy!—teaching philosophy.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK

Discussion Framework for Philosophical Discussion of "Dragons and Giants" from *Frog and Toad Together*

Author: Arnold Lobel

Concept Map of Big Ideas:

Vocabulary: avalanche

Before Reading:

1. Ask if they've read Frog and Toad stories before.
2. If so, ask, "What is the relationship between Frog and Toad and, looking at the cover, which is which?"
3. Ask what the title suggests to them, where they might have read or heard any stories about dragons and giants, and whether they find them scary.

During Reading:

1. Ask, "Can you see what book Frog and Toad are reading? Do you know any fairy tales? Who is brave in them?"
2. Focus on the snake incident by asking them if they are afraid of snakes. What would they have done in Frog and Toad's place?
3. Remind them of what an avalanche is. Ask them why it is scary.
4. Ask them why Frog and Toad are scared of the hawk. Would they be?

After Reading:
Begin by filling out the story matrix. (See table 6.1.)

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think Frog and Toad were brave as they hiked up the mountain? How about at the end of the story?
2. Were they afraid?
3. How could they be brave if they were afraid?
4. Do you think Frog and Toad *should* have been afraid?
5. What about all the things they came across as they climbed? Were they dangerous?
6. Is it okay to be scared when you find yourself facing danger?
7. Do you think Frog and Toad would have been dumb to try to fight the snake?
8. Can people who do brave things actually be a little dumb?
9. Ask the children to make a brave face and explain why that face is brave.
10. Can you tell that your classmates are brave by looking at them?
11. How *can* you tell if someone is brave?
12. What do you think bravery is?

DISCUSSION FRAMEWORK FORM

(Feel free to copy)

Discussion Framework for Philosophical Discussion of _____

Author:

Concept Map of Big Ideas:

Vocabulary: (3–5 words)

Before Reading:

1.
2.
3.
4.

During Reading:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

After Reading:

Story Matrix:

Questions for Discussion:

Topic 1:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Topic 2:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Chapter Seven

Facilitating a Philosophical Discussion

At this point, I hope that you can see how it is possible for someone without a great deal of specialized philosophical knowledge to lead a philosophy discussion among elementary schoolchildren. The crucial thing to remember is that the teacher serves as both the initiator and regulator of a philosophical discussion but not as a dispenser of philosophical knowledge to the children. As a result, although it is helpful for the teacher to know what constitutes a good philosophical discussion and how to recognize a comment or question as distinctly philosophical, she does not need to come to the discussion with a great deal of prior specialized knowledge about the topics that will be discussed. Indeed, even though teachers don't usually possess this "expert" knowledge, they can still be very effective in leading philosophical discussions in their classrooms, so long as they engage in some reflection on the topics that are likely to be covered.

Even so, leading a philosophical discussion with children can be intimidating, especially the first time. Partly, this is because we are not used to thinking of education as what I have called a "learner-centered" process. As a result, we sometimes revert to older ways of thinking according to which teachers are knowledgeable and students are ignorant. It's certainly very comfortable to be in the position of "the knowledgeable one." You then know what you've got to do: Transmit the knowledge that you have to your charges who lack it. But it's a very different story when you are leading a discussion of a subject about which you don't have much more knowledge than your students and where you are asking open-ended questions for which you don't know the answers! How can you feel comfortable with this unusual role?

I've already presented an important piece of advice that will help those of you not accustomed to your role as facilitator: Create a discussion framework. The discussion framework can provide you with a certain degree of security,

for it maps out the philosophical terrain you anticipate the discussion possibly traversing. I know that it's scary to try to lead an open-ended discussion because you just can't be sure of where it might go. When I first started teaching, I was petrified of class discussions because I didn't think I would be able to direct them effectively. It took me a long time to develop the self-confidence necessary to allow my college students more freedom in the classroom. But once I did—in part as a result of my work with young children!—I realized that leading a discussion wasn't so hard, for the students were eager to have a meaningful discussion of the issues on the table. So don't let your fear keep you from taking the "leap of faith" and trying. You can only learn to swim by actually jumping in the water, as the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) quipped in a different context!

Elementary schoolchildren will be eager participants in your attempt. With your assistance, they will take to the game of philosophy readily. If you are prepared with your discussion framework, you can help them explore a range of fascinating issues. And who knows? You might even learn from their comments!

To assist you in your efforts, in the chapters in the next section of this book, I've provided introductions to the philosophical issues raised by each story you will discuss. These are intended to give you overviews of what philosophical questions are raised by the stories and outlines of what philosophers think about them. One of the important features of philosophy is that virtually none of the issues lying at its core has received a definitive resolution in the two-and-a-half millennia that they have been discussed. This means that, rather than having widely accepted answers, these questions generally have two or more competing proposed "solutions" whose viability philosophers continue to discuss and debate. For each issue raised by a story, my philosophical introductions acquaint you with some of these competing positions. My hope is that, by having a general sense of what views philosophers have put forward in an attempt to answer these questions, you will be better able to recognize and encourage the philosophically astute responses that your students will make.

I have already discussed the question sets I provide for each story. So let me just remind you that I have thought long and hard about how best to begin a philosophical discussion for each book. The result is the question set, a series of questions about each book that can guide you in initiating and regulating a philosophical discussion among your students. In this way, you don't need to decide by yourself what the central issues raised by a picture book are but can rely on my suggestions. Still, you should feel free to supplement these with your own ideas, so that your own discussion framework adapts my suggestions to your students' skills, abilities, and interests.

I now want to present the advice that I give my own students for leading a philosophical discussion. Much of this will be old hat to experienced teachers. But I include it here for the benefit of anyone interested in having

philosophical discussions with children who might find it useful, including parents and philosophy students at colleges and universities.

I give my own college students six pieces of advice for leading a successful philosophical discussion among elementary schoolchildren (summarized in table 7.1):

1. *Be prepared!* Although this is the most obvious piece of advice I can give you, it is still incredibly important. You need to acquaint yourself thoroughly with the book you will be teaching the students. Of course, this requires that you have read it carefully at least a couple of times. It probably would be good to make at least one of those readings a read-aloud, so you can see how the story sounds and if there are any tricky passages that need a bit of work. You can also practice "hamming it up," say, by developing different voices for each of the characters, if you are up to the challenge. In my college course, I actually have a professional storyteller, Gail Herman, assist my students in developing distinctive voices for each character in a story they read to the children.

In thinking about each book or story, it is important to realize that, even though they are all "simple" books to read, deciphering the precise nature of the philosophical issues they raise can take some time. Allow yourself that time to really explore the ideas animating the books and stories.

It's also important, as I emphasized in the previous chapters, to go over each question set and create a discussion framework in which you include the topics you think are most important, the ones you really want to ask your students to discuss. Finally, you will undoubtedly find it helpful to have a basic understanding of the philosophical issues raised by the story, so that you can recognize a good response and call the kids' attention to it. My introductions are intended to help you with this.

2. *Show your excitement!* Your success will depend a lot on how the kids perceive you. Show them that you are very interested in them and are excited to be teaching them. This shouldn't be hard, but remember not to let any anxiety you might have about teaching philosophy get in the way of showing them that you really are having a great time talking to them. Of course, I hope that you really do!

Table 7.1. The Six Pieces of Advice for Facilitators

1. Be prepared!
2. Show your excitement!
3. Listen carefully!
4. Give markers and praise!
5. Facilitate, don't participate!
6. Enjoy yourself!

3. *Listen carefully!* In my experience, this seemingly easy task turns out to be pretty hard, especially at first. You probably will be nervous, and you have a plan full of questions in your head. The temptation is to ask a question and then, after a kid responds, to just ask the next one, your hands shaking, just like Frog and Toad at the end of "Dragons and Giants."

Don't do it!

You need to listen to what the students are saying and try to get them to respond to what their classmates have said. If no one else has a hand raised to respond, ask an improvised follow-up question to keep the discussion moving and focused on the issue that they have raised.

Our aim is to have the children fully discuss each issue that you bring up. There is absolutely no pressure on you to "get through" all the topics covered in a given question set or your discussion framework. In fact, the danger of having prepared the discussion framework is that it can seem that you should "cover" everything you have put in it. Remember that the discussion framework is just a general guide to give you the lay of the philosophical land. Don't let it get in the way of paying attention to the children's own claims.

So if you ask a question and a good philosophical discussion develops, that's great! Stick with it. Remember, your only goal is to provide an opportunity for the children to have a philosophical conversation with one another on a particular topic. Don't worry at all about "coverage." There's no harm in leaving some issues raised by a book remain unexplored. You can always decide to return to them during a future philosophy session.

Generally, I think a good elementary school philosophy discussion evolves naturally from a single question posed to students. Rarely if ever will I now revert to a new question because the discussion has stalled. Listening carefully to what the children have said, I find that there are generally ways to keep the conversation going—and progressing—without having to change the topic under discussion. But it's good to keep that option in reserve, for having that makes it less terrifying to facilitate philosophy discussions.

4. *Give markers and praise.* Markers are comments that indicate when something significant has been accomplished during a discussion. If you've had a discussion of a philosophical topic that is winding down, don't just move on to a new topic. You need to *mark* how the discussion has progressed so that the students can recognize that they have genuinely accomplished something in their discussion. One of the real dangers of engaging elementary school students in philosophical discussions is that, because there are no definitive answers to be had, they will feel that the discussion went nowhere and become frustrated. It's very important for the children to have a sense that they have accomplished something during their philosophical discussion. Because you are giving them a great deal of control of the discussion and there is no necessity for it to resolve in complete agree-

ment, the perception can develop that philosophy never settles anything, and so is not worth doing.

This charge has been brought against philosophy itself as well. Since most of the central problems of philosophy were clearly articulated by Plato well over two thousand years ago and still haven't been *solved*, people may wonder what the point of doing philosophy is.

But even if the central problems of philosophy haven't been solved, there has been progress in figuring them out. Here's an example drawn from political philosophy. Both Plato and Aristotle, the two greatest Greek philosophers, discussed ethical as well as political issues. But neither of them used a notion of individual rights, one of the basic ideas central to modern democratic societies. This notion was developed by philosophers such as John Locke (1632–1704) and represents an important innovation in political thought.

So it's important that, in your discussion with children, you convey the idea that they have accomplished something, just as I have tried to give you a sense that the discipline of philosophy is not simply a recycling of old questions that never gets anywhere. You should keep in mind a variety of different strategies for indicating that the discussion has made genuine progress, even if that progress is not reflected in the achievement of unanimity.

For example, even though no consensus may have been reached, progress is made when a question is clarified or new alternatives are proposed. It's crucial, therefore, that you, as a facilitator, get the students to recognize what they have accomplished during their discussion. This is the point of giving them clear markers—as well as frequent praise for their efforts.

It is important to realize that progress in a philosophical discussion can take place in many ways. Even having a disagreement can count as progress when the alternatives are posed more clearly than they were prior to the discussion. In such cases, you might say something like, "We've had a really interesting discussion of what makes an action fair. I think we have a real disagreement here. Some of you think that only things that help everyone are fair, while others disagree. Being clear on this disagreement is a real accomplishment that we have made in our discussion. Great work!"

If there's time, you might go on to ask the children, "How do you think we should proceed to try to resolve this disagreement?" And that's when you move to a discussion focused on the big ideas themselves, a topic I will discuss more fully in the next chapter.

In sum, remember to be lavish in your praise of the children when they have had a good discussion of an issue. Telling a student that she has made an interesting comment and asking others whether they agree with it is a great way to stimulate further discussion as well as to provide the class with a marker of their progress.

5. *Facilitate, don't participate!* Your goal is to get the kids to talk with one another about the issues, not tell them what you think or what they should think about them. I've already discussed a variety of techniques you can use to keep them talking to each other, such as asking, "What do the rest of you think about what Latifa just said about bravery?" Or, "Does anyone disagree with Colin, that bravery is really stupid?" Or, "Let's go around the circle and each of you share an example of something brave that you have done."

It's important to not let yourself tell the children what you think, even when you are not happy with the conclusions they have reached. Keep telling yourself that this is their discussion, and that you need to refrain from telling them your views. If you really want to push them to question a conclusion, you need to think of a question that will get *them* to do that.

6. *Enjoy yourself!* If you are not too nervous and are able to focus on what the kids say, leading a philosophical discussion can be a really fun and rewarding experience. I always learn something from doing philosophy with children. Remember, they are natural-born philosophers, so we can all learn from them. And they are funny as well as intelligent. So give yourself over to the experience and enjoy it!

* * *

Having given you these general pieces of advice, I'd now like to suggest some techniques that you might find useful as you begin facilitating philosophy discussions. Again, many teachers will know full well how these work, but I think it's good to have them assembled here for you to consider.

One question that looms large is how to begin the philosophy discussion. In the chapters in part 3, I include suggested questions to initiate a philosophy discussion, but here are some more general strategies that you can use. For example, I suggest that you begin by asking the children a question that is raised by the story, either one I have suggested or one you develop on your own. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, it ensures that the initial focus of the children will be on a philosophical issue raised in the story. This means that the discussion will at least begin in a philosophically rich place.

One good technique that you might try to use early in the discussion is the "go-round." The go-round can be initiated by asking an easy question that each student will be able to answer. Sometimes this will involve asking them to give an example from their own experience of the concept in question, but it can also be more abstract. For example, if there is an illustration in the book that is relevant to the discussion, you might ask each student to say what he or she likes or dislikes about the picture (see, for example, the discussion of *Emily's Art* in chapter 17). Planning to have some go-rounds in your lesson is a good way to ensure that all the children will participate in the discussion.

Here are some other general things that you might want to keep in mind as you facilitate this stage of your philosophy discussion:

1. One strategy to use if you are unsure whether a comment is philosophical is to ask a child who has made a comment to explain how that comment bears on the issue you have raised. This forces them to make connections that everyone else can understand. If a student realizes that their question was not really germane to the discussion, try to find a way to reassure them; for example, by saying that you really appreciate their comment.
2. When a student makes a comment that you think is one that is right on topic, you can intervene by asking the other children whether they agree or disagree with what was said and why. This reinforces some of the central features of a philosophical discussion while also focusing the discussion on a philosophically rich claim.
3. I've already stressed the importance of *your* listening to what your students say. It's equally important that the children learn to listen to one another. Make sure to stress to the children that they need to *listen* to what their classmates say since they are taking part in a philosophical *discussion*. Because of the dominance of teacher-centered learning, young students routinely want to talk to the teacher. When they are responding to another child, have them look at that child and not at you. You may have to repeatedly ask them to do this, but it's important to get them to behave in a manner appropriate to a genuine conversation. And telling them to put their hands down when others are speaking can really help them be effective listeners.

   This is the aspect of facilitating a philosophy discussion whose difficulty I initially underestimated most. Listening is a skill that everyone involved in doing philosophy has to develop—the children and the facilitators. It's also one of the features of our method that children value most, often telling us that very rarely are *they* asked what they think.
4. One technique that helps make the facilitator less the focus of the students' attention is to use a *speaking object*. The idea is that only the student who has the object can speak. When the student is done speaking, she is allowed to choose the next speaker by handing or rolling the object to them. My college students have elected to use soft stuffed animals, what they call *conversation critters*, as the objects that the children have to hold in order to speak. Whatever you use, it can be very helpful.

Again, there is nothing magical about these suggestions. They are just some things I've learned during my years of working with young children. I present them in case you find something you can use for your own philosophy discussions.

Chapter Eight

Deepening and Extending the Discussion

My focus in this book has been on philosophy discussions that take place in a single session with children. In part, this is because this is what both my students and I have experience doing. We generally visit classes to lead philosophy discussions that need to be completed in just one forty-five-minute visit. But it's also because leading a learner-centered discussion is likely something that is different for you. As a result, I thought it important to give you a clear sense of what is required for this style of teaching. Additionally, because philosophy may be a field that you are new to, I wanted to spend some time explaining the nature of philosophy and how specific children's stories raise philosophical issues.

Classroom teachers and parents do not have the limitations that my students and I generally have. So they are able to take philosophy discussions into regions that my students rarely can. Particularly if you are working with older students, you might consider how you might enrich a philosophy discussion by delving deeper into an issue than you can in a single session or by linking the discussion to other learning opportunities for the children.

So that's what I'm going to focus on in this chapter—digging deeper and extending a discussion beyond its philosophical roots. I will discuss each of these separately.

Digging Deeper: How can you move the discussion of an issue raised by the book to a more general and abstract discussion of a philosophical issue, the big ideas I make so much fuss over?

It's important to recognize that any philosophy discussion already involves a focus on some big idea. What's different in getting the discussion to go "deeper" is that you want to move the discussion from one that is oriented on the book—*Were Frog and Toad really brave?*—to one that is focused on

the more general philosophical issue(s) raised by the story—*Can someone be afraid and still be brave?* for example.

In order to make this move easier for the children, I reserve a portion of the board—using a pad of paper is fine, too—to record some of the big ideas as they come up during the initial phase of their discussion. When I get a sense that the time is right—I'm not sure how to characterize this, but it often has to do with a sense that the children are beginning to repeat themselves or get restless—I ask them to look at what I've written on the board. "What have you been saying," I might ask them, "about the relationship between these big ideas? Can a brave person really be scared?"

What then happens is that the children try to take the ideas that they have been expressing in relation to the story and develop a more general and abstract conception of their relationship. When they succeed at this, the conversation will have gone beyond the books itself and progressed in a significant philosophical direction.

Not every discussion will naturally connect to the big ideas you have included in your "concept map." But making them the focus of the discussion is one good way to begin a discussion of the abstract ideas that are the philosopher's bread and butter! (You can find my record of a discussion that made such a move in chapter 18.)

Recently, I discovered another technique for getting to the big ideas. I was discussing whether it was ever all right for someone to steal something, and the kids all agreed that stealing was always wrong. Rather than experiencing their agreement as an obstacle to a philosophical discussion, I used it to ask them *why* they thought that stealing was wrong, what justification they had in mind for the claim they all agreed with.

In response, the children came up with a variety of different justifications for this moral prohibition: some suggested that their parents say so was sufficient to warrant the prohibition, while others thought that their parents only said it was wrong because stealing hurt the people you stole from. Then some tried to present arguments to justify their view. We got into a very good philosophical discussion of the morality of actions precisely because their agreement let me move the discussion to the more abstract question of why they believed what they did.

What I hope you now see is that there are really two stages that a philosophy discussion involves. The first is more closely related to the story that the children have heard, while the second moves away from the book and confronts philosophy's big ideas head on.

During the initial stage of a discussion, it's quite natural for the conversation to move back and forth between comments that are directly related to the story you've read and ones that are more abstract and directly address

philosophical issues. So, for example, one comment might be, "I don't think that Frog and Toad were brave because they were shaking and that means that they were scared" (phase 1: book related). And this might be followed by, "You can be scared and still be brave. It's a question of facing your fears" (phase 2: focus on the big ideas). This seems encouraging, for the discussion appears to be moving onto a more theoretical level—one that will focus on the big ideas and in which the details of the story are left behind and the philosophical issues get discussed on their own.

But then, a child might say this: "But Toad said that the people he read about were brave because they weren't afraid, so he and Frog aren't brave." Although this comment is helpful in that it reminds everyone of the initial claim made about bravery in the story, it potentially moves the discussion from the abstract level it was just entering back onto the phase 1 discussion of whether Frog and Toad were actually brave.

So a challenge you face as a facilitator that I have not yet discussed involves devising strategies for keeping the discussion at the higher level when it gets there. I've pointed out two of them: using a concept map to address the abstract relationship between the big ideas raised in the discussion and asking the children to justify their reasons for a general claim that they have made. You can use these and develop others of your own. But just recognizing these two distinct phases of a philosophy discussion is itself important.

My suggestion that you need to move the discussion onto an abstract, philosophical level may make you anxious. After all, you might be wondering to yourself, "I'm not a philosopher, so how can I really conduct a discussion of abstract philosophical issues?"

Let me reassure you: Most of the time, it will be enough to get the children to develop their own views in response to a question that you ask them—that is, have a discussion limited to its first phase. Even when you start with a good question—"Do you think that Frog and Toad are brave?"—it will take a while for the students to develop their views. After a reasonable amount of discussion, some of them might think that the two amphibians were not brave because they were clearly very scared and hid in Toad's house, while others might maintain that they were quite brave because they persevered in their "test hike" despite the dangers that they encountered on it.

Even if the conversation does not progress beyond this initial phase, you still should call the children's attention to how much they have already accomplished in the discussion by what I called "giving markers" in the last chapter. Remember that the point of giving them is to ensure that the children recognize that their discussion has not simply gone around in an endless circle. For example, saying, "Chris just presented a novel argument to support his claim that Frog and Toad were brave. Who thinks they understand

what he said?" notes that Chris developed the discussion in a philosophically significant manner and gets the other children to focus on what he said.

Moving Beyond: It would be a shame if you always let your students' engagement with a philosophical issue drop after just a single discussion. After all, philosophy discussions generate a lot of excitement for the children. Why not use that excitement to fuel their learning in other ways? Indeed, part of the value of introducing philosophy into elementary school classrooms is its potential to enliven many different aspects of the curriculum.

There are many ways in which this can be done, and I'm sure you can supplement my suggestions with many ideas of your own. But let me just mention a couple that I think are important. Since the children have been deciding what they think about a philosophical issue and what their reasons are, you could ask them to write a short explanation of their ideas. The goal of such an exercise would be to have the students present their ideas clearly and support them in a logical fashion. These are, after all, the central aims of expository writing, so philosophy discussions can be a good means for developing the students' skills in this area. Because they have already discussed the issue they are writing about, they have prepared for the writing exercise. And they may really relish the chance to develop their ideas more fully in this way.

You can also give your students, especially younger ones, a very easy written assignment that will be helpful as they go on to write longer pieces. For example, following a discussion of *The Important Book* (chapter 11), you could ask them to choose an object they see in the classroom and fill out a chart similar to the one you have used in the discussion that lists all the things that an object *is* and the one *important* thing about the object, as well as to make a drawing of the object they have chosen.

Of course, some students may not be ready to write a philosophical essay, even a very short one. Such students can still take part in various other types of follow-ups. You might ask them to draw something that represents ideas they got out of the discussion. With *Emily's Art* (Catalanotto 2001), for example, you might ask the students to make a drawing in Emily's expressive style. But even books about more abstract topics can have drawing follow-ups, as you can see from the specific suggestions given after my discussion of the individual stories in the next section of this book.

A very different activity involves games for the students to play that elaborate on the ideas raised during their philosophy discussions. So, for example, asking them to communicate with one another without using words, as we do in our follow-up to *Knuffle Bunny* (chapter 16), can develop their understanding of language.

Writing a poem about a question they have discussed is another option that would allow students with different proclivities to develop their philosophy

lesson in an interesting direction. You might ask them to adopt the point of view of the tree in *The Giving Tree* (chapter 13) and write a poem expressing its feelings at one stage in its relationship to the boy.

The different activities that can be used to extend a philosophy discussion are limited only by your own imagination. And you need not limit yourself to follow-ups that involve language arts. A philosophy discussion can also be extended in a creative and interesting manner by moving into an empirical field, like science. A discussion of *Many Moons* (chapter 15) can easily lead into a science lesson in which children have to investigate how large celestial objects are, how far away from us, and what they are made of. But instead of these being just abstract topics they are being asked to consider, their interest in these questions will have been piqued by their philosophical discussion.

So I've included a few suggested follow-up activities at the end of each of the nine chapters in part 3 of this book. I'm sure you will be able to supplement them with very creative and interesting ideas of your own.

Part III

THE STORIES

Chapter Nine

"Dragons and Giants": Teaching Ethics

Ethics forms a very important part of the discipline of philosophy. Ethics focuses on how we humans ought to live our lives. In exploring the different options that we have, ethics attempts to distinguish the more worthwhile paths we can follow from less valuable ones. There are people each of us admires for how they conduct themselves, and we generally would use some term of praise to register this admiration, say, by calling them *good*, *virtuous*, or *admirable*. Similarly, there are people whose lives we can all point to as prime examples of how not to live; indeed, the truly evil people in the world may stand out in a way that the good ones often do not. Ethics investigates the rationality of the practice of making such value judgments about how human beings conduct their lives.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), one of the first philosophers to clearly see the importance of arriving at a systematic account of why certain life paths are better than others, suggested that we should think of *virtues* as character states that human beings ought to develop. He recognized that there were certain very basic types of situations that human beings were likely to encounter in the course of their lives. For example, every human being will probably experience dangerous situations—that is, situations in which they find themselves confronted by something they believe can harm them and that therefore makes them scared. Similarly, there are many times when we find ourselves wanting something that may or may not be good for us. Aristotle's idea was that there is a specific virtue—such as *bravery* or *moderation* (or being temperate)—that can allow individuals in the relevant circumstances to make appropriate decisions and perform suitable actions (Aristotle 1999).

To see how this works, imagine that I live in a mountainous area where the trails I walk on have frequent, rather large ravines over which I have to jump to get to where I want to go. (Let's assume that the ravines are big and very

dangerous because they go way, way down.) What's the best way to handle having to jump over those threatening gullies?

One answer would be to engage in tough physical training, so that I would never blanch in the face of any danger so paltry as a simple ravine. But many of us would not regard this as the best thing to do, for there could be ravines so vast that it would be a mistake for me to blithely assume that I could jump even one of them. Far better, I think, for me to develop more than one capacity: In addition to physical prowess, I would need to have the self-confidence necessary for jumping ravines that are reasonable to jump and also the ability to judge which ravines I can jump and which ones I can't, so that I would know when to jump and when not to.

How should we describe this situation philosophically? One possibility is to say that bravery, which is the capacity to deal appropriately with dangerous situations, has more than one component. First, there is the fear that is produced by a perception of the actual danger one faces. Being scared is a natural reaction to a dangerous situation, but it needs to occur in the correct amount. If one's fear is too great, one will be overwhelmed by it and thus be unable to act; but if one's fear is not strong enough, one might ignore the threat that the danger poses to one's well-being and suffer injury.

Although we tend to think of our emotions as simply states of feeling, what I've just said is meant to convince you that they are more complex and involve an element of *judgment*. Our fear includes an assessment of the significance of the danger we are facing, and it will be larger or smaller depending on that judgment.

In addition, one has to make a correct assessment of her own capacity to handle the danger she faces. This is not just a sense that she has the ability to do certain things, but the experience-based knowledge on which to base it. We can call this an appropriate degree of *self-confidence*, and see it as a crucial component of bravery.

On this analysis, in addition to the appropriate amount of fear one feels in a dangerous situation, bravery is composed of two basic capacities, judgment and self-confidence. For someone to be brave, she must have each of these in just the right proportion. A person who lacks judgment and whose self-confidence appears infinite is *rash*, for she will face dangers she would do well to avoid. On the other hand, a person with sound judgment but no self-confidence will be overwhelmed by every danger she faces. Realizing that dangers always pose *some* sort of threat to herself, such a person will be incapacitated and unable therefore to face the dangers. She will be *timid* or *cowardly*, the contrary moral failing to rashness.

I have just presented an analysis of bravery as an Aristotelean "virtue"—that is, a state of a person's character that is well suited to dealing with a spe-

cific type of situation that human beings can be expected to face during their lives. The situation for which bravery is appropriate is one in which a person is faced with a danger that must be met with the right balance of fear, self-confidence, and judgment. This virtue has two "vices," or defects, that are caused by a preponderance of one of the components (fear, self-confidence, or judgment) over the others—rashness and cowardice.

The basic idea of this *virtue theory* of ethics, then, is that an ethical or good person is one who cultivates the virtues, for this will allow her to deal appropriately with the typical situations that human beings are likely to face in the course of their lives. Such a person will be able to surmount dangers, avoid temptation, not overindulge their appetites, and so forth.

Aristotle's theory of the virtues has been so influential that much of our commonsense understanding of ethical behavior reflects it, though we are generally not aware of this. In discussing bravery with the children, we give them the opportunity to think about their own understanding of what makes a person brave.

Arnold Lobel's story that I have already used as an example, "Dragons and Giants," is particularly well suited to this purpose. Lobel wrote a series of stories about two charming but often clueless amphibians, Frog and Toad, who are good friends and who often succumb to puzzlement, a state of being that is characteristic of philosophers—and children. Their foibles and idiosyncrasies provide ample fuel for an elementary school philosophy discussion.

In this particular story, Frog and Toad puzzle over what makes someone brave. After looking in a mirror to see if they are as brave as the characters they have been reading about in a book of fairy tales and discovering that will only tell them if they *look* brave, they go on a walk to discover if they really *are* brave. During their walk, they encounter three dangerous situations that give them the opportunity to test their bravery. Frog and Toad's responses to these dangers provide an excellent focus for an elementary school discussion of bravery, for the children will be genuinely puzzled about whether Frog and Toad have responded to the different threats to their well-being as bravely as they explicitly say they have.

I suggest you start your discussion of bravery by making a story matrix with the children (see table 9.1). Begin by asking them to tell you all of the things that Frog and Toad do to see if they are brave. You should list their responses on the chart's first column. Then, for each of those actions, ask the children (1) was the situation a dangerous one, (2) were Frog and Toad scared, and (3) do they think they were brave.

One of the many places from which the discussion can take off is the first entry in the chart: Frog and Toad looking at themselves in a mirror to see if

Table 9.1. Story Matrix for "Dragons and Giants": How Frog and Toad Try to Figure Out Whether They Are Brave

What Do Frog and Toad Do?	*Is There Danger?*	*Are They Scared?*	*Are They Being Brave?*
Look in a mirror	No	No	Can't tell. They look brave, but that doesn't mean they are.
Decide to climb a mountain	Yes	No	Yes
Jump away from the snake	Yes	Yes	??
Jump away from the avalanche	Yes	Yes	??
Hide under some rocks	Yes	Yes	??
Hide in the closet and under the covers	No	Yes	??

?? indicates that children may have different views.

they are brave. (Make sure the children notice the book titled *Fairy Tales* that Toad holds in his hands.) This raises the question of whether you can look at someone and tell whether she is brave. You can ask the children whether they have a "brave" look. Some of them might and others might not. You could then follow up by asking what it is about those brave looks that show that they are brave. This allows you to get a sense of what their initial, unreflective notion of bravery is. If one of them says that bravery can't be seen, that it's *something inside*, you have an opening for further discussion.

As you continue this discussion, you might ask if there are certain types of people who are brave. Here, one can imagine firefighters, cowboys, soldiers, and the like being cited. Again, once the children have put forward some examples of brave people, it's important to ask them why they think those people are brave, for they will presumably say something about the *dangers* they face.

* * *

By looking at the initial moves suggested for a discussion of "Dragons and Giants," you can see an important feature of a philosophical discussion that distinguishes it from other types of discussions that we frequently have with children. First, we begin with an idea that comes from the story—Is there a way to look brave?—and we immediately move to a more abstract level by asking what about such a look shows that the person is brave. This is significant, for one of the characteristics of philosophy is its *generality*, and we can see here how this comes about: We start with a question about the book and then *refocus* the discussion with a well-posed question that gets the children to reflect about the same subject (here, bravery) in a more abstract and general manner.

As the discussion proceeds, you need to pay very careful attention to what the children have said. Although there is a logic to the development of the story that you might ideally wish the children to follow, as a facilitator, you need to listen with open and highly attuned ears to what the children are saying so that you can help them make the move toward abstraction that is characteristic of philosophy, albeit in a way that is appropriate to their own discussion rather than to your intentions. The discussion belongs to them; you are only its facilitator.

This means that, as you listen carefully to what the children are saying, you may have to follow their lead rather than take the discussion in the direction that you anticipated. Although we are aiming to encourage a philosophical discussion among the children, we want them to have control over the direction the discussion takes.

* * *

At this point, there are many ways that the discussion could proceed. You could ask the children whether a person who faces each and every danger that comes her way really is a brave person. If they seem to think she is, you can ask them to engage in what philosophers call a "thought experiment."

Thought experiments are imaginary scenarios that philosophers devise to get others to think about a significant philosophical issue. In fact, we treat children's picture books as thought experiments when we ask children abstract questions based upon them. You can focus a discussion by introducing your own thought experiments. For example, you can ask the children to imagine that a huge monster has come to town. Would the person who walks up to the monster and says, "Go away! You are frightening everyone!" really be brave?

The idea is to get them to discuss the philosophical claim that a brave person has the self-confidence to face danger but also the judgment to know when doing so would be rash. So taking on a vicious monster that is bigger and stronger than you might be rash rather than brave.

Reflection on the roles of fear, self-confidence, and judgment in bravery can help the children develop a more sophisticated understanding of the components of bravery, one that recognizes that there are different elements that make up bravery itself. This development points to an important characteristic of a philosophical discussion: By thinking carefully about an idea we believe we understand, we come to realize that it is actually a lot more complicated than we had thought.

Their discussion of "Dragons and Giants" encourages the children to think more carefully about bravery in the expectation that they will notice that it is a complex notion with a number of different components. Of course, they will not express themselves using the sophisticated vocabulary I have. They are more likely to say, "That wasn't brave. It was stupid!" But when they do

so, they are making the same distinction I did by saying that judgment is one of the components of bravery.

Let me add two pieces of advice. First, have faith that the discussion will develop along philosophically interesting lines. You can help make this happen by recognizing when a child has made a philosophically relevant suggestion and refocusing the discussion with a comment like, "That was a really interesting point you just made, Mathilda! Who agrees with what Mathilda said and tell me why?"

In addition, be prepared for the surprising ways in which the children might respond to a question like "What's something that you have done that you consider to be brave?" Many of the children you are encouraging to discuss philosophy may come from social backgrounds very different than yours, and this might affect how they respond to your questions. You need to be ready for almost anything.

What would you have done if one of the young and very cute second-graders you were teaching responded to your question about doing something brave by saying, "A grown-up hit me in the face with a glass bottle and I was brave when I didn't cry and took all the pieces of glass out of my face by myself"? The college student who told me that one of the children she was teaching responded this way said that she was overwhelmed and thought, "Who am I to teach this child anything about bravery? He knows more about it than I do."

Try to avoid reacting like this despite the very real temptation to do so. (Reporting this incident to an appropriate staff member is a different matter and should be considered.) This unfortunate young boy had actually provided some very good material to deepen the discussion of bravery that had been taking place. He had mentioned two acts that would have made him feel that he wasn't brave: crying and asking an adult for help. Does doing either of these things indicate that a person was not brave, a coward? I don't think so, and it would have been great for my student to have simply turned to the rest of the group and said, "Amachai just raised a very interesting question. Do you think that a person who cries is not brave? What about a person who turns to an adult for help in a dangerous situation?" Notice how these questions turn the discussion away from Amachai's specific and very bad situation and address some fundamental questions about bravery in general.

By the way, I have been astounded by what people are willing to reveal about themselves during a discussion of "Dragons and Giants." In one of the first workshops I ever led for teachers, I began by reading aloud "Dragons and Giants." My first question to the teachers was whether there was something that they had done that they thought was particularly brave.

In response, one teacher talked about dealing with her breast cancer. She felt that the way she had dealt with her disease was the bravest thing she had

ever done. Another talked about raising a son with a mental disability. She said that it took great bravery to keep on doing all she needed to despite how exhausting it was. Each teacher revealed a facet of their lives that was not visible to me but showed that they were acting with great courage in facing very real difficulties. And the session may have helped them by getting them to see themselves as living, real profiles in courage.

* * *

The question set that follows provides you with various questions that you can use to discuss bravery with children. It includes a variety of questions about the nature of bravery, such as whether a brave person can actually be scared. My experience is that children have a lot to say about the issues concerning bravery raised by "Dragons and Giants."

I have pointed to many benefits that result from introducing philosophy into elementary school classrooms. One that I have not yet mentioned is that it can help children view the stresses in their own lives from a different perspective. "Dragons and Giants" is a good example of a story that can have this effect. One problem that elementary schoolchildren often have to face is bullying. Bullies generally try to get kids to do dangerous things the children know they shouldn't by daring them to do something on pain of being "chicken." Reflecting on "Dragons and Giants" and the idea that it can be stupid to do something really dangerous can help children perceive such "dares" very differently than they had, to see that refusing to do what a bully demands might actually be braver than giving in to the pressure he exerts. But if they can come to see things this way as a result of discussing "Dragons and Giants," it's because they have learned something through their communal investigation of bravery rather than from us telling them what to do, and that's likely to have a more lasting impact.

"DRAGONS AND GIANTS" FROM *FROG AND TOAD TOGETHER,* BY ARNOLD LOBEL

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: Looking Brave

Frog and Toad look in a mirror to see if they are brave. Frog says they look brave. Toad asks if they really are brave.

1. How could Frog and Toad tell that they looked brave?
2. How do you look when you are being brave?

3. Can you tell by looking at someone whether they are brave or not?
4. Was there ever a time when you felt brave but didn't look brave?
5. Can you look frightened and still be brave?

Topic: Bravery and Danger

Frog says that climbing a mountain will tell them whether they are brave.

1. Does doing something dangerous prove that you are brave?
2. Are there other ways to show that you are brave?
3. Is it brave to do something dangerous if someone else gets you to do it?
4. What if you do something dangerous but don't know it's dangerous? Is that still brave?

Topic: Perceiving Bravery

Frog and Toad wonder whether they are brave.

1. How do you know when you're being brave?
2. If someone says that you are brave, does this mean that you are?
3. How can other people tell when you are being brave?
4. Is it possible that you might think you are brave and be wrong?
5. Can other people be wrong if they think that you are not brave?

Topic: Bravery and Fear

When the snake tries to eat Frog and Toad, they jump away and Toad starts shaking.

1. Were Frog and Toad being brave even though they jumped away?
2. What else could they have done?
3. Is it ever brave to run away from something dangerous?
4. Was Toad brave even though he was shaking with fear?
5. Does being scared in a dangerous situation show that you aren't really brave?
6. Is it possible to be brave and afraid at the same time?

Topic: Bravery and Action

When Frog and Toad get back to Toad's house, Toad jumps into bed and pulls the cover up over his head. Frog jumps into the closet and shuts the door.

1. Does hiding under the covers or in the closet show that you are not brave?

2. Does a brave person have to be brave all of the time?
3. Can you run away from something scary and still be brave?
4. Why do Frog and Toad each say the other is brave?

Suggested Follow-Up Activities

There are many different ways to extend the children's discussion of bravery. Here are a few. I'm sure you can think of others.

- Ask the students to draw someone they think is brave and/or describe why the person is brave.
- Ask them to make a brave face and then discuss whether they can tell that their friend is brave from looking at him or her.
- Have them write a brief story about something they did that was brave that includes an explanation of why it was brave.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT ETHICS

- *The Big Box* by Toni Morrison
- *Zen Shorts* by Jon J. Muth
- *Mirette on the High Wire* by Emily Arnold McCully

Chapter Ten

Frederick: Teaching Social and Political Philosophy

The fundamental issue that social and political philosophy addresses is what types of social and political arrangements are legitimate. For example, most societies accept the existence of both social and economic differences among the individuals who make them up. In such societies, some people are wealthier than others, and prestige is also distributed unequally. At the same time, a democratic society is founded, at least in theory, on the notion of "one person, one vote," so that in this respect democracies do not permit unequal distribution of power in the political realm. One question that a social and political philosopher has to face, then, is, "Why do we think that certain kinds of inequality are morally acceptable while we object to the morality of others?"

One reason that has been offered to explain why economic inequality might be justifiable is that it is the most *expedient* way to structure society. That is, social and political philosophers argue that allowing economic inequality will promote a higher level of economic productivity (or "general welfare" in philosophers' jargon) than a system of complete economic equality. This is the idea behind so-called trickle-down economics: If you let the wealthy have benefits, the increase in productivity that results will eventually improve the lives of everyone. Even if you find this application of the idea implausible, the general idea of allowing inequality in order to provide for a higher level of overall well-being is one that many people accept.

Alternatively, some philosophers believe that equality is such an important norm or value that there is no justification for departing from it. From such a point of view, everyone should share equally in the economic benefits that society has to offer, so there is no justification for letting anyone have more than anyone else. This is the basic idea behind socialism, although it also has roots in religious traditions such as Christianity.

Many philosophers think that there needs to be some middle ground between pure expediency and absolute equality. These philosophers would allow for differences in wealth but put limits on how large such differences can be. In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls put forward an influential principle intended to limit the extent of inequalities: *Only those differences in wealth that benefit the least well-off members of society are justified*. The idea is that only those departures from equality that benefit the worst off are morally permissible. This view accepts the socialist claim that equality is a crucial value but tempers it with the recognition that it can be legitimate to depart from it so long as everyone benefits from such departures. It seems difficult to advocate that equality should be maintained even if everyone would be better off if certain limited inequalities were permitted.

But if it is widely acknowledged that inequality in the economic sphere makes sense, why is the political sphere different? After all, we don't think anyone should get an extra vote, no matter what. Why is the assumption of equality held to be politically inviolable when it is not economically?

This differential application of the norm of equality in regard to the political and economic spheres is a very important topic to reflect upon for citizens in a democracy. Here, I can only point to one line of argument in favor of political equality—namely, that it best ensures the legitimacy of government. Roughly, the idea is that people will be more committed to the existence of a government when they believe their share of control is equal to that which everyone else has. Allowing certain people a greater degree of control over the government would alienate people and could lead to a crisis of legitimacy.

It is important to realize that social and political philosophy makes evident that philosophy deals with idealized situations. In American society, there is no question that, despite the "one person, one vote" principle, some people have a much greater degree of influence over government than others. This is particularly true of large corporations and very wealthy people. Their economic resources allow them to buy political influence, something most of us cannot do. But such departures from the ideal are not usually taken to be the appropriate subject for philosophical discussions of what makes certain social arrangements legitimate.

* * *

So far, I have discussed economic and political questions. What exactly makes an issue reside in the realm of *social* philosophy? Well, one pertinent example is that of gay marriage. Leaving aside a religious perspective, marriage is a legal arrangement that creates both obligations and benefits for each of the partners. The question of gay marriage, from a social point of view, is whether there are good reasons to allow heterosexual couples to have access to social benefits and obligations that nonheterosexual couples do not. Although this is a legal question, it also has broader implications, for even

if one thought there were reasons why gay couples should not be allowed to marry, there is the broader social question of whether there should be such a great inequality in social benefits—visitation rights to sick partners and inheritance being just two examples—based upon one's sexual orientation and partner choice.

As you can see, our society has a general presumption in favor of equality, although it is one that can be overridden by other factors. A central task of social and political philosophy is to explain exactly when and to what extent such deviations should be allowed, as well as to provide some justification for the original assumption of the value of equality.

* * *

Leo Lionni's book *Frederick* (1967) raises some of these questions in a charming and unusual manner. *Frederick* is the story of its eponymous mouse-poet. While all the other mice in Frederick's family are busy gathering various necessities for winter, Frederick seems to be just lying around enjoying himself. When questioned by the other mice, he tells them that he is gathering colors and words for winter, responses that don't seem to satisfy them. However, during the winter, when all their supplies have run out, the mice turn to Frederick and he is able to share with them the results of all he gathered during the fall. He recites one poem that allows them to experience the colors of summer and another that explains the seasons in a mousy sort of way. By the end, the other mice realize that Frederick is a poet who provides something unique for them during the long, austere months of winter.

The central issue that *Frederick* raises is whether there is reason to think that everyone has to contribute equally to their community. Generally, people think that it is not necessary to contribute equally—that is, to make the exact same contribution—but rather to make a contribution that is equally valuable. While the children will generally agree that everyone ought to make a contribution of equal value to their community—and here they may be thinking of the school, their family, or even their classroom—there will generally be some disagreement about whether Frederick is making an equally valuable contribution to his family by reciting poetry.

Of course, the issue of how the value of different activities can be compared is a difficult one. Although it has been claimed that an activity that requires more years of study is more valuable than one that doesn't—thereby justifying a greater reward for performing that activity—this claim has been hotly debated.

Early on in your discussion, it is important to be sure that the children understand what Frederick's activities of "gathering words" and "gathering sun rays" really amount to. In the book, it is clear that both are aspects of the activity of writing poems, but it is important to be sure the children understand this. It also might be useful to concentrate a little on Frederick's poems and ask the children if they like them and why.

One way to accomplish this is to make a story matrix that compares what Frederick does in the fall with what all the other mice do (see table 10.1). This will help the children begin to focus on the philosophical issues that are central to the story.

Once you have made the matrix with the children, you might want to see whether they all agree on the importance of writing poetry. You can ask the children whether they think writing poems is as valuable a contribution to a group as gathering nuts and berries. Generally, at least one of them will respond that writing poems is not really as valuable as the work the other mice do. This can then lead into a discussion of how we decide on the value of any activity so that we can compare the contributions they make to society.

Another interesting issue raised by *Frederick* is whether something can only make a valuable contribution to society if it is work. Here, you might want to ask the children to think about their own lives and the activities they like. Are they making a contribution to their school or their family? What do they contribute? Is it work? Hopefully, asking them about whether their contributions are *work* will focus the discussion on the nature of work.

The question of when and why an activity should count as *work* is an extremely complex one. At first, many students are inclined to say that an activity only counts as work if it is not something you enjoy or that's fun. So they might contrast playing a game (not work) with doing manual labor (work). This would lead to viewing Frederick as not really working, for he is not doing the manual labor of gathering food that all the other mice have to engage in to prepare for the winter.

It's easy to see that this distinction won't do as it stands. Consider your favorite athlete or musician. He's doing something that's fun—playing a game or an instrument—but he gets paid millions of dollars for doing it. He's working when he plays football or music, but he's taking part in an activity that's fun. (Incidentally, this example can cut either way, for you could reply that baseball players should not be paid for doing what they do. That's actu-

Table 10.1. Story Matrix for *Frederick*: Comparing What Frederick Does with What the Other Mice Do

	What Do They Gather?	*Why Do They Do It?*	*Is the Contribution Valuable?*
The Other Mice	grain, nuts, wheat, corn	to survive the winter	Yes
Frederick	colors, words	don't know at first, but it's also to survive	??

?? indicates that children may have different views.

ally an interesting line of thought you could follow up on if it occurs during a discussion.)

A more sophisticated way to justify the intuition that Frederick is not making a valuable contribution to his family/community relies on the idea that an activity counts as work only if it is something that is necessary for the continuation of the group. On this view, gathering nuts is work because it is the type of activity that needs to be done in order to keep everyone alive through the winter. The question that then arises is whether a community needs to have a poet.

In order to have a fruitful discussion of this issue, it would be helpful to generalize from poetry to cultural activity in general. That is, children will probably be inclined to say that poetry is not necessary for the existence of a community, but they will be less likely to say that movies, music, and television are equally superfluous.

This is where it might be helpful to try the "suitcase activity" that was developed by one of my students, Ariel Sykes. The point of this activity is to get the children to think about what they think the necessities of life are, so that people should be credited with making a valuable contribution to society only when they perform activities that supply those necessities.

To get the children to engage in the suitcase activity, ask them to make a drawing of two different types of things that they would take with them for the trip described in the passage below. You might want to give each of them a "suitcase"—printed on a piece of paper— on which to draw their choices.

> Now it is your turn to create your own suitcase for the winter. Say that you are going to an island to spend the winter. Think of four things that you would bring to survive the winter that resemble the field mice's supplies, and one or two things like Frederick's. Draw pictures that represent what you think are the most important things you will need to survive a long winter. Make sure you are being thoughtful and careful in your selection, because you may have to explain to everyone why you picked each item.

The idea behind this exercise is to provide a specific challenge to the students to think about what they really need in order to survive over and above the basic physical necessities of life. It is intended to stimulate their own thinking about why it might make sense to see poetry as one of a range of activities that they themselves view as part of the necessities of life. This is not to say that this is the position they have to endorse, for one could coherently maintain that such activities are still different in kind from the activities absolutely necessary for the continuation of the community. Having the children perform this activity not only engages them in thinking through the story, it asks them to apply the ideas to their own lives.

FREDERICK, BY LEO LIONNI

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: The Nature of Community

Frederick explains that he is gathering words to use for the winter when they will run out of words.

1. What is one community that you belong to?
2. What makes that community a community?
3. Do you think that members of a community need to contribute to it?
4. How do the mice contribute to their community? How do you contribute to yours?
5. What about Frederick? Does he contribute to the mouse community?

Topic: Contributing Equally to the Community

Frederick makes a very different contribution to his family than the other mice do.

1. Do you think that everyone should make an equal contribution to their community?
2. What sorts of activities are necessary for the community you belong to?
3. Do you think everyone has to take a turn performing them?
4. Do people make different but equally valuable contributions to your community?

Topic: The Nature of Work

Frederick claims that what he does—gathering sun rays—is work.

1. Do you think Frederick is working when he gathers the sun rays?
2. What does working feel like?
3. If you like doing something, can it still be work?
4. Does work have to be hard? Why or why not?
5. Give an example of something you do that you think is work and something you think is play. What makes one work and the other play?
6. Who is your favorite athlete? Your favorite musician? If they get paid to play their sport or instrument, are they working?
7. What is your favorite subject at school? What is your least favorite subject? Is doing homework for either of them work? Why?

8. Do only adults work?
9. Is thinking work?

Topic: The Value of Poetry

At the end, all the mice realize that Frederick is a poet.

1. Do you like Frederick's poem? Why or why not?
2. Why do people write poetry?
3. Is being a poet a job? Why or why not?
4. Do people need poetry? Is it important?
5. What about TV? Music? Video games?
6. If you think it is important for people to have art such as paintings, poetry, and music, can you say why?

Suggested Follow-Up Activities

If you haven't used the suitcase activity during your discussion, it makes an excellent follow-up activity, one that combines thinking, drawing, and speaking. It's described above.

Another interesting follow-up would be to have the children list all of the things they do during a day and decide whether it is work, play, hard, enjoyable, and more. You might even ask them to keep a diary of this. The idea would be to try to categorize activities in such a way as to explain what makes them work or not, and whether the only valuable activities are those that count as work.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- *Tusk Tusk* by David McKee
- *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell
- *Bartholomew and the Oobleck* by Dr. Seuss

Chapter Eleven

The Important Book: Teaching Metaphysics

Unlike some of the other fields of philosophy, metaphysics is one whose subject can initially be hard to grasp, for the central concern of metaphysics is to explicate the structure of something that goes by different names: reality, existence, or being. Because of the very abstractness of this enterprise, it may be difficult to get a handle on what exactly metaphysical investigations are about. The traditional understanding of metaphysics as an investigation into the nature of *being as being* only muddies the already murky waters.

To get a handle on the nature of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline, let's begin by thinking about all the different individual things that exist. Once you focus on some of them (think, for example, of tables and chairs), it becomes apparent that these things fall into different types or classes (furniture in this case). Virtually everything that exists is a member of some class or other. So you and I are not just individuals but instances of the general type, *human being*. Similarly, the maple tree outside of my window and the birch across the street are both trees and not merely individual things, though they are that as well. In general, things fall into various basic classes that metaphysicians label as *species*.

But that's not all the structure that reality has, for these species also fall under more general classes. Trees and flowers are both instances of the more general class *plant*, just as human beings and dogs are both instances of the general class *animal*. And such general classes can themselves be grouped into the overarching classes of animate objects and inanimate ones, with the latter including things such as rocks and dirt. Finally, we can ascend to the most basic class of all, that of being an entity. After all, both inanimate and animate objects share something, for everything is also *a being* or *an entity*.

But now we are at the point where genuine metaphysical inquiry begins, for we can ask, "What it is that makes something an entity?" This is a very

difficult question to wrap one's mind around. A useful piece of philosophical advice is to begin thinking about such abstract questions by comparing the concept at issue (here, entity) with its opposite (existing things that are not entities). But this may seem to be of little help, for it's not at all clear what sort of a thing a nonentity could be.

One of the most fundamental metaphysical distinctions is that between a *substance* (what I've been calling "an entity") and its *properties* or *qualities* ("things" that are not entities). Grass is an example of a substance, and its color—normally green—is one of its properties. That's why the statement, "Grass is green," is true. Similarly, a dog is a substance, and having four legs one of its properties. If you consider any individual thing, you will see that it is a substance that has a variety of different properties. In fact, this philosophical distinction is so lodged in our commonsense approach to the world that, once it has been made, it seems so obvious that we can't remember why it was ever difficult to understand.

But now think about why we call some things substances but others properties of those substances. That is, why is *grass* a substance but its *green color* or *greenness* a property of the grass? One answer that metaphysicians have proposed is that substances can *exist independently* of other things but properties cannot. The idea is that grass is the sort of entity or being that can exist independently of other things but that its greenness must exist or reside in the grass. So the distinction between a substance and its properties is one between independent and dependent existents.

You might immediately question the validity of this distinction. After all, grass, in order to exist, needs water and minerals, at a minimum. It's not really an independent existence in any obvious sense, you might say. With this, the philosophical discussion of the validity of the distinction between substances and their properties begins.

One of the great philosophers of the early modern period, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), would have applauded your acumen. No finite things are completely independent, Spinoza believed, so they cannot be substances. In fact, the only thing that was a substance was everything, a substance that Spinoza thought went by two names—God or Nature—depending on whether you thought about it via the property of mind or matter.

Faced with such problems, other philosophers have proposed alternative grounds for making the substance-property distinction. Consider grass again. Philosophers have argued that the substance grass can exist without it having the property of being green, as it does during a drought, when it turns brown. But the grass's greenness, it is contended, is not something that can exist without being embodied in the grass. This is a second way that the distinction between independent and dependent existence has been explicated.

Let's think a bit more carefully about the relationship between one type of substance and at least some of its properties. We'll focus on the case of artifacts, things that human beings create for some purpose. A chair is an example of an artifact, for it was created for us to sit on.

But can something still be a chair even if we can't sit on it? Although the answer I'm about to give can be debated, I think it reasonable to say that, if we cannot sit on something, it is not a real, functioning, chair. It could be, say, something that was created to be a chair but is now broken. But nothing that we cannot sit on can be a real chair. (Of course, you could counter by asking me about the chair in Van Gogh's famous painting, *Chair* [1888], saying I'd have a hard time sitting in *that* chair. A philosopher's job is never done!)

If my claim can be made to hold in general, then, at least for one class of substances—artifacts—there is at least one property that cannot be detached from a substance without changing its nature. Philosophers have called this type of property an *essential property*, meaning that it makes up the *essence* of the thing in question, "what-it-is-to-be" that very thing and not something else. On my account, being a chair is just being a "thing-for-sitting," so that, when an object is not one that we can sit on, it cannot be, or no longer is, a chair.

There are many other metaphysical questions besides whether the substance-property distinction has validity. For example, philosophers worry about what types of things really exist. Numbers are one example of a type of entity that some philosophers—those called "nominalists"—think do not really exist. One reason in support of nominalism is that we never encounter actual numbers in our experience but only objects that we can characterize numerically or numerals.

* * *

Without going any farther afield, we are now ready to approach our elementary school metaphysics text, *The Important Book* (Brown 1990). This book is quite simple in structure and is the only one I am going to discuss that does not tell a story. On each of its ten double pages, it describes one type of thing. These are: a spoon, a daisy, rain, grass, snow, an apple, wind, the sky, a shoe, and, finally, you. For each of these things, some property is claimed to be "the important thing" about that item. So, for example, the book states that "you eat with it" is the important thing about a spoon. A number of other properties of each object are also listed. So the book says that a spoon is not flat but hollow. Finally, the initial claim about the object's important property is reiterated: "But the important thing about a spoon is that you eat with it" (Brown 1990, 5).

With just a little thought, you can see that it makes sense to interpret the book as making claims about what the essential property of each of the substances it considers is. For a spoon, its essential property is claimed to be the

fact that one eats with it. And similar claims are made for each of the things it discusses, up to and including "you." As a result, the book provides a good opportunity for children to think about the nature of things and whether they have essential properties or not.

* * *

One of the features of *The Important Book* that we exploit is that almost all the claims it makes about the important thing about an entity are quite obviously *false*. For example, it says that the important thing about an apple is that it is round. There are two problems with this claim: First, apples are not really round, if what "round" means is spherical, although it is true that apples do not have sharp edges, another possible way to understand the roundness of an apple. Second, it seems perfectly possible for there to be ovoid or even square apples. There is nothing about what an apple is that requires it to be round in the sense of spherical.

Normally, one would not want to teach from a book that contains errors as obvious as the one that *The Important Book* makes about apples. When you are doing philosophy, however, such errors provide great opportunities: We use the errors in the book to teach the children the need to think for themselves and not to accept something just because they find it written in a book. This is one of the central lessons that studying philosophy teaches children, and *The Important Book* provides a great way of communicating it.

* * *

I suggest that you begin the discussion by concentrating on a few of the different "things" that the book discusses and putting them onto a story matrix. It would be best if you choose objects from different categories, such as a spoon (an artifact), an apple (a fruit), rain (a meteorological phenomenon), and you (a human being). For each item, ask the kids what the book says the important thing about it is and what it says the other things that are also true about it are (see table 11.1).

Table 11.1. Initial Story Matrix for *The Important Book*: The Important Thing About . . .

What the Book Says:			
	The Important Thing About . . .	*Other Things About . . .*	*Do You Agree?*
A Spoon	You eat with it.	It is hollow, etc.	
An Apple	It is round.	It is red, etc.	
Rain	It falls from the sky.	It is wet, etc.	
You	You are you.	You were a baby, etc.	

Once you have made the matrix, go back to the first object—a spoon in my list—and try asking the children if they agree that the important thing about a spoon is that you can eat with it. You can also ask them whether, if you couldn't eat with it, it would no longer be a spoon. Follow up by asking them about all the other things that the book says that a spoon also is. Since none of these is presented as the important thing about a spoon, something could still be a spoon and not be one of them, according to the book. This provides an opportunity to ask, for example, whether something could be a spoon even if it were flat.

At no point in the discussion do the children have to agree that the book is wrong about the essential or other properties of any object, but they will generally come to see that they don't agree with the book in regard to everything it says about the essential properties of objects. One obvious case is that of the apple cited earlier. After all, an apple is the seedpod of an apple tree, so if it has any essential or important property it is that it contains seeds. But even here, it is possible to produce fruit that do not have seeds in them, as in the case of seedless watermelons. Nonetheless, having seeds remains the best candidate for an essential property of a fruit like an apple.

If you find that the children are engaged by the discussion of the book's errors, you can suggest that it would be fun to construct their own version of the matrix for the objects from *The Important Book*. I've included a schematic version of such a matrix (table 11.2). You can even ask them to compare the two matrices and explain why they prefer theirs if they do.

When one of my students tried to do something similar, she got amazing results. She had the children focus on rain and make their own page about rain, which I present in table 11.3. Not only did the children's claims about rain present a much more plausible metaphysical account of it than the book did, they had insightful things to say about why their list was better than the book's. They said that their account showed what rain *did*, not just how it looked.

Table 11.2. What We Think

Once the children have discussed what the book says, you can ask them if they agree with it or not and even, if you like, construct a second matrix:

What We Think:

	The Important Thing About . . .	*Other Things About . . .*
A Spoon		
An Apple		
Rain		
You		

Table 11.3. What We Think About Rain

Rain
Makes puddles
Makes ponds
Splashes
Makes things grow (every living thing depends on it)
It can evaporate (take different forms: solid, liquid, gas)
Makes mud
The Important Thing about Rain: It makes things grow.

Philosophers in both the pragmatic and phenomenological traditions have criticized traditional metaphysical accounts of the being of substances on very similar grounds. They have claimed that we identify things primarily in terms of the functions they serve—what they *do*, in the kids' terms—while traditional accounts prioritize their structure—what the kids term the things' *look*. Pretty insightful, weren't they?

* * *

In discussing *The Important Book*, it's important to think about how to handle the children's recognition that they don't agree with what the book says. One obvious point to make is that they all know the saying, "You can't trust everything you read." Well, they've just had a good example of its truth. You thus have an opportunity to impress upon the children how important it is for them to be active and critical consumers of information. You might also stress that their training as philosophers will help them be able to make up their own minds about important questions rather than simply relying on what others tell them.

* * *

Depending on how long the discussion takes, you may or may not have time to raise the question of what the important thing about *you* is. *The Important Book*'s answer—that "you are you"—seems pretty difficult to endorse. If it means that everything about you is essential to your being you, then it's pretty clearly false. After all, I am still me even after I shave my beard, making me go from being a bearded man to a clean-shaven one, and similarly for many other properties. Nonetheless, the question of what makes you the very specific individual that you are is an interesting metaphysical question that is fun to discuss with the children.

One version of this question is the problem of personal identity: What about you can be changed without making you into a different person? As

I've said, it's pretty obvious that shaving a beard doesn't make me a different person. But you can ask the children to think about all sorts of different circumstances and whether the changes they envision would result in you no longer being the same person that you were. For example, what about losing a limb? Most of them would say that's not enough to change who you are. But what about not enjoying your favorite activity, such as playing the piano or playing ball? Would you still be you if you didn't like that activity?

Once again, it's important to realize that there are no certain answers to this, or indeed any, philosophical question. Philosophers continue to argue about what makes a person the person that she is. As I mentioned earlier, in order to try to support their views, philosophers often make use of weird science fiction scenarios that are called *thought experiments*. For example, if you and Albert Einstein (you can substitute the famous person of your choice here) switched brains using some advanced medical technique, which of the resulting beings would be you—the one consisting of Einstein's brain in your body or the one consisting of your brain in his body? Getting the children to think about such hypothetical cases is a good way to hone their philosophical skills. We'll delve into some of them in the next chapter.

THE IMPORTANT BOOK, BY MARGARET WISE BROWN

Questions for a Philosophical Discussion

Topic: Artifacts and Essential Properties

The book says that the important thing about a spoon is that you eat with it.

1. Have you ever seen a spoon that you don't eat with?
2. Are there any other things about spoons that are important?
3. Is there one "important" thing about a spoon? If so, what is it and why? If not, why not?

Topic: Natural Things and Essential Properties

The book says that the important thing about an apple is that it is round.

1. What are some other important things about apples?
2. Is being round the important thing about an apple?
3. Could something be an apple and have some other shape?
4. Is there one important thing about being an apple?

Topic: Personal Identity

The book says that the important thing about you is that you are you.

1. Tell us one very important thing about you.
2. Could you still be you and not possess that very important thing?
3. What makes you *you*?

Suggested Follow-Up Activities

Ask the students to choose any item in the classroom, list some of its properties, and explain whether or not it has one "most important property."

Another option is to pair up your students. Ask them to interview each other and then to create a page like the ones in the book that list all the properties of their partner, including the most important one. They can even draw a picture of their partner.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT METAPHYSICS

- *The Mixed Up Chameleon* by Eric Carle
- *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak
- *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon

Chapter Twelve

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: Teaching the Philosophy of Mind

A central question in the philosophy of mind is what makes us human beings the sort of creatures that we are. We all have a body and also possess a mind or consciousness. Are both of these essential to human beings? If not, can either one be thought of as some sort of complex aspect of the other? If so, what relationship holds between them? These types of questions populate this area of philosophical investigation.

The philosophy of mind is the area of philosophy that has been most affected by recent scientific discoveries. This is because scientists are figuring out more and more about the human brain and its relationship to conscious thought and feeling. Scientists are now able, for example, to localize certain emotions to specific areas of the human brain. This gives support to the philosophical position of *materialism*, the claim that consciousness is a complex feature of the brain and not a completely different type of thing, as *dualists* hold.

Another important issue in the philosophy of mind is that of personal identity. The question is what makes us the same person from one moment in time to the next, an issue that I already touched on in the last chapter. Different types of things have different "identity conditions." For example, a pile of leaves is usually thought to be the same pile only if all (or, perhaps, most) of the leaves in the pile are the same. If we replace the current pile with a whole new set of leaves, most people would agree that we now have a different pile, even though it is in the same place as the first. This is because we think that the identity of the pile depends on its being made up of the same leaves or, to speak more abstractly, has the same material constituents.

Identity conditions are more complex for things that have a more complex structure, such as a ship. The question of whether a ship can remain the same even though its constituent parts have changed was raised in ancient times through the story of the ship of Theseus. According to legend, the ship that

Theseus used was preserved for many years by the Athenians who replaced all of the ship's old planks as they rotted with new ones. The question that ancient philosophers debated was whether it could still be considered the same ship as before, once all of its physical constituents were replaced with other lumber.

A thought experiment can illustrate why this is a perplexing issue. In the story, the planks of the ship are replaced one at a time, so it is at least plausible to maintain that it is the same ship. But what if the ship suddenly burned completely and was later reconstructed all at once out of different pieces of wood? Would it still be plausible to say it was the same ship? Those who think that it is would argue that it is the sameness of the *structure* as opposed to the identity of the *material* that constitutes the identity of the ship. Others claim that all we would have is an exact *replica* of Theseus's ship and not the ship itself. For them, identity requires that the entity in question continually exist through time, as our hypothetical ship did not.

How does the problem of identity differ when it comes to human beings or persons? Well, for one thing, it is completely implausible to maintain that a person's identity depends on her always being composed of the identical physical constituents. Scientists tell us that all of the atoms and molecules that make up a human being get completely replaced every six years. (Although there is debate on the exact number of years, the general principle is certainly true.) So personal identity cannot be based on the identity of our physical constituents. But what about structural identity? Can this be the basis of personal identity?

It's not clear what the correct answers to these questions are. The existence of transplants and artificial body parts seems to suggest that identity of structure is a component of personal identity. What's important to realize, however, is that identity of structure cannot be the whole answer to the problem of personal identity. Philosophers have developed many peculiar and intriguing thought experiments to try to make this point. Consider, for example, the following story: Suppose that there is a new machine invented that can transplant one person's consciousness into that of another, memories and everything else included. Say that we now take you and Barack Obama and switch your consciousnesses. Which, if either, of you *is* Obama?

There is a good case to be made that the person consisting of your former body and Obama's consciousness is Obama. Support for this view comes from the fact that the person consisting of your former body and Obama's consciousness has all of Obama's memories, dispositions, thoughts, and emotions, while the person consisting of Obama's former body and your consciousness has yours. If that makes sense to you, then you would be endorsing the notion that identity of *consciousness* is what constitutes personal identity.

But there are philosophers who deny that this is the correct answer. To justify their view, they also put forward a thought experiment: Suppose that there is a consciousness duplicator, so that it is possible to replace one person's consciousness with that of another. Say that we use it to replace Obama's consciousness with yours, while you remain the same as you now are. Surely, these philosophers would say, we wouldn't be prepared to say that the entity composed of Obama's body and your duplicated mind is *you*, for you continue to exist. They take this to show that a person's identity does not simply consist of the identity of his consciousness.

* * *

"The Rescue of the Tin Woodman" chapter from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (1900) is an excellent way to get children to think about issues of personal identity. Although this story comes from a chapter book, I have chosen to use it because I don't know of a picture book that raises issues in the philosophy of mind in such a clear and compelling manner. In addition, the popularity of the film version of the book means that many children will be familiar with the Tin Man, as the film calls him. Still, the book has only a few illustrations, and that may make it harder to keep younger children entertained as you read them the story. One option would be to print some images from the film and use them as you read the story to keep the children's interest. Another would be to show them a short segment of the film.

In this chapter, Dorothy and her companions—her dog, Toto, and the Scarecrow—come upon a man entirely made of tin who is frozen in the act of chopping a tree. His groans alert Dorothy to the fact that he is alive, and she uses his oil can to oil his joints. When he finds out that the travelers are headed to Oz, he decides to join them and to ask the Wizard to give him a heart.

As they walk, the Scarecrow falls into a hole. After he has been rescued by the Woodman, the two of them debate whether a brain—what the Scarecrow seeks from Oz to keep him from doing dumb things like falling into a hole—or a heart—which will allow the Woodman to love—is more important. To justify his claim that the heart is more important than the brain, the Woodman tells his life story:

> The Woodman was originally a normal human being. But when he fell in love with one of the Munchkin girls, the old woman she lived with was opposed to their marrying and gave the Wicked Witch of the East two sheep and a cow so that she would prevent the marriage from taking place. The Witch cast a spell and one day the Woodman chopped off his left leg. Fortunately, a tinsmith was able to fashion a new leg for him, and the Tin Woodman was able to resume his wood chopping.
>
> But the Wicked Witch was not satisfied, since she wouldn't get the sheep and cow if the Woodman married the Munchkin girl. In short order, the Woodman

chopped off his other leg, each of his arms, his head, and finally split his body in two. After each "accident," the tinsmith fashioned a tin version of the body part that the Woodman had chopped off.

The only problem was that the tinsmith did not fashion a heart for the Woodman, so he stopped loving the Munchkin girl. The only danger that remains is the one that put him into the predicament in which Dorothy found him: Rain can rust his joints.

That's what happened one day and the Woodman had remained rusted in place for a year, during which time he was able to think that his greatest loss was the loss of his heart, for he was the happiest man on earth when he was in love. And that's why he wants the Wizard to give him a heart.

The chapter ends with the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman resuming their debate over the relative value of a brain and a heart. The Scarecrow says that the brain is more important, since without it a person wouldn't know what to do with his heart. The Woodman demurs, saying that happiness is the most important thing in the world and a brain does not make you happy.

This chapter raises a number of interesting issues in the philosophy of mind, any one of which would be a good one to use for a philosophy of mind discussion. One option is to begin with the debate between the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow about the relative value of a heart and a brain.

To start this discussion, you might begin filling in a story matrix that presents their two arguments. (See table 12.1.) When you begin filling in the column that presents their arguments, you will have begun the philosophical discussion, for the kids will, no doubt, question the arguments the characters give.

One problem that this discussion may present is that it uses the terms *brain* and *heart* in a metaphorical way to stand for *thinking* and *loving*. So the real

Table 12.1. The Scarecrow and Tin Woodman's Debate

Which is better, a brain or a heart?

The Characters	*What is Their Answer?*	*How Do They Support Their Answer?*	*Do You Agree?*
The Scarecrow	A Brain	Without a brain, you wouldn't know what to do with a heart, so a brain is more important than a heart.	??
The Tin Woodman	A Heart	Happiness is the most important thing. I was the happiest man alive when I was in love. Therefore, a heart is more important than a brain.	??

?? The children may disagree.

question presented by the story is whether being capable of thought or having the capacity to love is a more distinctive human capacity. You may want to point this out to make sure the discussion is properly focused.

The relative priority of different human capacities has been debated by philosophers going all the way back to Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle thought that the ability to think was the "divine in man"; that is, our highest capacity, the one that brought us closest to the gods, an idea that has remained very powerful in Western thinking. Plato, at least in his dialogue *The Symposium*, viewed love as the basic drive that was the basis of all growth and development, so that thinking was subordinate to it.

Nonetheless, the children may wind up suggesting that both are important, that it's a sort of "chicken and egg" problem. If you have already discussed *The Important Book* with the children, you can remind them of the idea that there is an important thing about every object. Do they think that there are two important things about human beings? Are there others?

An alternative place to begin the discussion—or a way to continue it if you find the kids getting stuck—is with you asking the children to explain all of the ways in which the Tin Woodman differs from a normal human being, and you can make the story's matrix from their answers (see table 12.2).

Having finished the matrix, why not ask the children whether the Tin Woodman is the same person that he was when he was in love with one of the Munchkin girls, even though he's now made of tin? There are a number of factors that you can ask them to consider. One is that his body is completely different now, for all of his "fleshy" parts have been replaced with tin ones. Another is that he is incapable of feeling, according to the book, because he does not have a heart, which means that he no longer can feel the love that he had for the Munchkin girl. So he's clearly different. But he still thinks that he's the same person. Does that make sense?

Philosophers have been fascinated by the question of whether machines can think. Although this question is not directly raised by this story, the fact that all of the Tin Woodman's body parts are tin could give you an entry into

Table 12.2. Story Matrix for *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*: How Does the Tin Woodman Differ from Normal Human Beings?

Features	*The Tin Woodman*	*Normal Human Beings*
Arms, legs, etc.	Yes	Yes
Brain	No	Yes
Hear	No	Yes
Can speak	Yes	Yes
Can walk	Yes	Yes
Made of . . .	Metal	Flesh

this issue. The question would be whether only fleshy sorts of creatures are capable of having thoughts and feelings.

A further discussion issue stems from the fact that the Tin Woodman lacks a brain and a heart. Since he can talk and act but not feel, this seems puzzling. You can ask the children what they think about this—that you need a heart to feel but not a brain to think.

"THE RESCUE OF THE TIN WOODMAN" FROM *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*, BY L. FRANK BAUM

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: Brains versus Heart

Unlike the Tin Woodman, the Scarecrow wants to have a brain.

1. Why does the Scarecrow want to have a brain?
2. Why does the Tin Woodman want to have a heart?
3. Which do you think is more important, a brain or a heart? Why?

Topic: Happiness

"I shall take the heart," replied the Tin Woodman, "for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world."

1. What makes you happy?
2. What other things, besides happiness, do you think are good or valuable?
3. Do you agree with the Tin Woodman that happiness is the best thing in the world? How can we decide?

Topic: Personal Identity

"My body shone so brightly in the sun that I felt very proud of it"

1. The Tin Woodman no longer has any of the body parts he did when he was a man. Do you think he is the same person he was before?
2. Would you be the same person even if your mind were put in your best friend's body? What if you could no longer play your favorite sport or computer game the way you could before?
3. The Tin Woodman cannot love the Munchkin girl because he has no heart. Does this mean he is not really the same person he once was?
4. What makes a person the same person at different times?

Suggested Follow-Up Activity

Ask the children to draw up two lists, one of things that the brain (mind) does and one of the things that the heart (emotional core) does. Is one of the lists longer than the other? Does that make the thing more important than the other? Why or why not?

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson
- *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst
- *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* by Michael Rosen

Chapter Thirteen

The Giving Tree: Teaching Environmental Philosophy

As you now know, philosophy is an ancient discipline, with roots extending back nearly three thousand years to ancient Greece. However, some areas of human life have only recently been recognized as suitable subjects for the serious thinking characteristic of philosophy. This is the case with environmental philosophy. Although any philosophical view of the world must necessarily include a way of thinking about the relationship between human beings and their environment, only in the last half of the twentieth century has this relationship been the subject of an ongoing philosophical debate.

The most obvious reason for the development of this new area of philosophical interest is the impact that advanced technology has had on human life on the planet. For the first time in the history of the human race, we have to face the possibility that our own actions may result in the destruction of many forms of life, including, perhaps, our own human one. This is a sobering possibility that has given rise to numerous social and political movements, from recycling to initiatives to reduce pollution and limit growth.

Philosophers have not been insensitive to the importance of this issue. So they have begun to focus their attention not only on current environmental concerns but also on how the human-nature relationship has been theorized throughout the history of Western thought. The result has been a rethinking of the appropriate way for human beings to live their lives in a natural world whose resources are clearly finite and evidently dwindling.

One of the startling results of this new attention on the human-nature relationship is the realization that there has been a tendency in Western thought to think of the natural world as existing simply for our use. The roots of this way of thinking extend back at least as far as the creation stories in the Old Testament, where God creates human beings and gives them *dominion* over all the other beings in the world (*Genesis*, I, 26). This biblical story explicitly

states that humans were intended to be the *rulers* of a world whose creatures and resources they were free to use as they saw fit.

Perhaps surprisingly, this view had no serious challenges within Western thought until the twentieth century. Even the radical critic of society, Karl Marx (1818–1883), used this way of thinking in his attempt to develop an alternative to the capitalist economic structure. He saw industrialization, with its ability to produce levels of material wealth never imagined in earlier epochs, as an unmitigated good, so long as it could be freed from the tyranny of private ownership. He never countenanced the possibility that what seemed like a great boon to humankind—technological innovation—might also contain the seeds of its own undoing, a possibility that we all now must face.

Once we begin to consider alternative roles for human beings besides that of being *rulers* over the natural world, the question of how to specify what those roles are arises. One important alternative suggests that a more appropriate role would be as *caretakers* of a world that we have inherited and are to pass on to our descendants in a way that allows them to likewise live fulfilling lives in concert with it. Accepting the notion that we are but caretakers of the natural world would have a huge impact on how we treat it. Instead of thinking of it as something simply there for us to use, we would have to think of ourselves as having an obligation to take care of it, to ensure its continued well-being. This would mean that we would have to undertake its preservation, treating it as something to which we often need to subordinate our own, more narrow interests and needs.

An example of such a caretaking role is the system of national parks in the United States. When the U.S. Congress passed a law in 1916 setting aside these areas of wilderness, it outlawed the development of areas of the natural world in the United States that had not yet, at least in theory, been fully developed. One rationale for this was the need to preserve some wilderness for future generations, so that they could have a sense of what the natural world was like before the impact of humans and their technology. Although even this setting aside of natural areas has not been without its critics, it does provide one example of how an attitude of caretaking in regard to nature could affect our way of treating the environment.

Even if one accepts the idea that it is more appropriate for humans to think of themselves as caretakers of the natural world rather than as its rulers, there is plenty of room for debate about what exactly this entails in relation to specific environmental policies. After all, we cannot live without using the natural world to preserve our lives. Even "low-impact" lifestyles require us to eat living things—even if only plants—and to consume other resources to clothe ourselves and keep ourselves sheltered. So we still have to ask questions about what the appropriate level of the consumption of resources is for humans and how we should go about justifying it.

Not all philosophers who reject the idea that humans have the right to make use of the natural world as they see fit would accept the idea that we ought to conceive of ourselves as its caretakers. An alternative view has been developed based on the idea that natural objects deserve our *respect*. The idea of respect is one that has had a fundamental role in ethics, but it has generally been used to characterize the nature of our relations to one another. Indeed, our own rules for conducting a philosophy discussion make use of this notion by stating that children should treat each other with respect. Applying this notion to the natural world has been an unusual move that is not without its problems, for few would agree that *every* natural object, even an annoying mosquito, needs to be respected!

There are other fundamental questions that animate environmental ethics. One is whether nature or natural things have a value in themselves or whether their value comes from their relationship to human beings, the only beings that are valuable on their own or intrinsically. This problem can be illustrated in relation to the national parks example: Were these parks created because wilderness itself has intrinsic value—that is, is something worth preserving for its own sake? Or, alternatively, were they developed because wilderness has value in relation to human beings, say, as a place for them to recover from the strains of their everyday lives or as the source of a unique experience that should be available for future generations? This is an illustration of a basic question that remains unresolved, even if one rejects the notion that humans have a right to do what they will with nature.

* * *

The question of the appropriate relationship that human beings should have with nature is raised by the story of a boy and a tree in Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964). In it, the boy's relationship with the tree undergoes a series of transformations. As a young boy, he climbs on the tree, plays with its leaves, swings from its branches, and eats its apples. The boy loves the tree, and the tree loves him. In a refrain that gets repeated later in the story, albeit with some qualification, we read, "And the tree was happy." But as the boy gets older, things change. As a young man, he wants money to spend on his girlfriend, so the tree gives him its apples to sell. When the boy then becomes a young adult, he wants to have a wife and family and for that he needs a house, so the tree tells him to cut its limbs to build the house. When the former boy returns to the tree as an older adult, disillusioned and wanting a boat, the tree selflessly tells him to take its trunk and fashion a boat out of it. When the boy does so, he leaves the tree barely alive, a mere stump. In the book's final episode, the boy returns as an old man, looking for a place to sit and rest. He finds it in the ever-faithful tree, even though all that remains of it is a stump.

Although many readers see the boy-tree relationship as a metaphor for the child-mother one, we choose to explore the book along a different route, one that highlights the issues I just outlined in environmental philosophy. So in discussing this book with the children, we ask them to reflect on the changing relationship with the tree that the boy has at different stages of his life. At first, although the boy uses the tree and its various features as a source for his enjoyment, he does so in a way that does not harm the tree. We might characterize the relationship this way: The young boy *respects* the tree and its *integrity*, even as he benefits from his relationship to it. But in the next three stages—that is, as a young man, a young adult, and an adult—the boy's relationship takes a more and more *destructive* course as he first takes the tree's apples to sell, then cuts down the tree's branches, and finally takes its trunk. When the boy returns as an old man, he once again takes up a less invasive relationship with what remains of the tree—its stump—and simply sits on it and rests. It's not a stretch to take *The Giving Tree* to be a parable about different types of relationships that human beings can have with nature, and then to use it to initiate a discussion with the children about how humans *should* treat the natural world.

A good place to begin is with a story matrix that details the different stages of the boy-tree relationship. If you set up the basic framework on both axes of the chart, the children will enjoy filling in all the rest of the boxes with you (see table 13.1).

Table 13.1. Story Matrix for *The Giving Tree*: Does the Boy Treat the Giving Tree in an Ethically Acceptable Manner?

Stages of the Boy's Life	*What Does the Boy Take from the Tree?*	*Why Does He Take It?*	*Is the Tree Happy?*	*Is What the Boy Does Ethically Acceptable?*
Young Boy	Only some leaves for a crown	To play	Yes	Yes
Big Boy (Adolescent)	Its apples	To sell to get money for a date	Yes	??
Young Adult	Cuts off the branches	To build a house for his wife and family	Yes	??
Adult	Cuts down the trunk	To make a boat	Not really	??
Old Man	Nothing. Just sits on the trunk	To rest	Yes	Yes

?? indicates that children may have different views.

Once you have finished the matrix, if there is a stage at which at least some of the children have thought the boy does something wrong in using the tree as he does, that's where you can begin the discussion. There is room for a great deal of disagreement about if and when things go awry, for some children might think that selling the apples is already problematic, while others will contend that even cutting down the tree's trunk and leaving it a stump is fine. So one option is to get those children who think that the boy did something wrong at some point to explain why they think that what he did at that stage was wrong and why what he did at a prior stage was not, and then asking all the children to say if they agree or disagree and why.

* * *

The story provides the children with two opportunities for philosophical thinking. First, most children think that the boy's relationship with the tree changes at some point from one that might be characterized as respecting the tree as an autonomous being to one that could be seen as exploitative and that certainly involves not treating it respectfully. In developing their rationale for this belief, the children wind up thinking about the basis for their moral evaluation of the boy's action. Second, because the tree is a part of nature, the children also can reflect on the morality of human-nature interactions, opening up an abstract philosophical issue from their engagement with the story.

In moving to a more abstract level, you might encourage the children to see the story as a parable, though whether you want to discuss this with them explicitly depends on whether you think they can understand this concept. A parable is a story about specific characters that is intended to be understood as having a more general meaning or moral. *The Giving Tree* can be thought of as a parable about how human beings interact with nature. The children's discussion of it can move from the specifics of how the boy treats the tree to the philosophical question of how human beings should treat the natural world and all the objects within it.

* * *

Once the children have proposed some reasons for their assessments of the boy's actions—remember, there need be no agreement at this stage, though there could be—they are prepared to think about the general issue of how human beings should treat natural objects. You might ask them whether their assessments of the boy's actions can be generalized into claims about how people should treat all natural objects. The sample discussion in chapter 18 shows how a discussion of *The Giving Tree* can address this issue.

The children will likely need some help deciding whether they would accept an ethical principle derived from their assessments of the boy and his actions. So you might ask them to think about a different context to which their claims apply. For example, if they have said it was wrong to cut down

the tree trunk because the tree was then no longer capable of growing, you might ask the children whether they think it is always wrong to do anything to a natural object that will cause it to no longer be able to grow. What about building a house? Or eating a fish? Odds are, they will see problems with this general principle. If that's true, they will be ready to engage in the attempt to think of a more acceptable principle that justifies their view.

* * *

Using *The Giving Tree* to provide an example to support a general principle treats the book as a series of thought experiments. As we have seen, thought experiments are one of the most important techniques in philosophy, for they mobilize people's intuitions in a way that helps them decide what they think about general principles. Here, the story is a touchstone that allows the children to formulate their views about the human-nature relationship. The benefit of using thought experiments in this way is that it takes abstract theories down to specific cases about which it's easier to know what one thinks.

THE GIVING TREE, BY SHEL SILVERSTEIN

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: Giving and Altruism

The tree keeps on giving to the boy until it has nothing left to give, but the boy never gives anything to the tree.

1. Do you think the boy is selfish? Why or why not?
2. What about the tree, is it selfish?
3. Is being selfish always wrong?
4. Is there a word for someone who keeps on giving without thinking about herself or expecting something in return?
5. Why do you think the tree is not happy after giving the boy its trunk?

Topic: The Nature of Giving and Gifts

In the story, the tree gives the boy many gifts.

1. Have you ever given something away and later wished that you hadn't?
2. Is it easier to give something away if the person who receives the gift truly appreciates it?
3. When you give something to someone, do you expect something in return?
4. When you are given something, do you feel that you owe something to the person who gave you the gift?

5. Would you give something you really need to someone you love if they really need it too?

Topic: The Nature of Love

Early in the book, we read that the tree loved the boy.

1. Why do you think the tree loved the boy in the beginning?
2. Why do you think the boy loved the tree?
3. Are the two "loves" the same type of love?
4. Do people need to have a reason to love someone?
5. Do you treat people that you love differently from the ones that you don't?
6. When you love someone, how do you show him or her that you do?
7. Have you ever been angry with someone you love because she went away for a while, or because she did something you did not like?
8. Can you be angry with someone and still love her?

Topic: Happiness

The tree is not really happy after giving the boy her trunk.

1. Is the boy happy at the end of the story?
2. Is the tree happy?
3. If you were the tree, would you be happy? Why?
4. Have you ever done something just to make someone else happy?
5. Does doing things to make others happy make you happy?
6. Do you need a reason to be happy, or can you be happy for no reason at all?
7. Can you be happy and sad at the same time?

Suggested Follow-Up Activities

Have the students draw or write something that they think the old man could have done with the stump that would have been better than just sitting on it.

Try breaking the kids up into small groups to think of some examples of ways we treat natural things that they do not approve of. Have them find reasons to explain their view. Perhaps each group could make a poster explaining their ideas and present them to the whole class.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

- *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss
- *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton

Chapter Fourteen

Morris the Moose: Teaching Logic

As you probably have already noticed, one of the central skills required of a philosopher is the ability to present a well-reasoned argument to justify one's beliefs. So it won't come as a big surprise to discover that philosophers have a special field devoted to the study of reasoning: logic. What is likely to be more surprising is finding out that human beings are not naturally very good reasoners.

Consider the following bit of reasoning: Only lawyers lie. Jacques is a lawyer. Therefore, Jacques lies. Now, you might not be fooled by this example of bad reasoning, but many people are. The problem is that, even if the only people who lie are lawyers, this does not entail that every lawyer is a liar, only that anyone who is not a lawyer is not a liar. Although it may be easy to spot the problem in this form of reasoning when I explicitly call your attention to it, many people use similar reasoning in their daily lives, with unfortunate consequences. It's for this reason that logicians develop lists of the typical *fallacies* involved in reasoning. Fallacies are basic patterns of reasoning that people often accept but that are not valid.

Logic as a philosophical concern goes almost all the way back to the origin of philosophy. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) invented the field by cataloging the correct forms of deductive reasoning—that is, reasoning that yields true conclusions from true premises. His idea was that good reasoning did not tell us what statements were true, only how to reason in a way that preserves the truth of one's assumptions. He held that logic concerned the *form* of arguments, not their *content*.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), an obscure German mathematician, realized that Aristotle had made a mistaken assumption in his logical system, so that a more adequate formal

system was needed to capture the nature of valid reasoning. All contemporary logic can trace its roots back to Frege's ideas.

* * *

Gottlob Frege was a German mathematician and philosopher who taught at the University of Jena. It was only through the influence of the great British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) that Frege's views were transmitted to the broader philosophical community. Despite being relatively ignored in his own lifetime, Frege exerted a huge influence on the development of philosophy in the twentieth century.

Central to Frege's project was the idea that our ordinary statements—like "All liars are lawyers"—could be represented in a formal system that abstracts from the specific concepts involved in the statement. In this case, if we let "F" stand for "lawyers" and "G" stand for "liars," then we get the following "translation" of the statement into logical notation, where "x" is a variable that ranges over all people:

$$(x)\ Fx \rightarrow Gx$$

where (-) is the logical notation for "all" and $\rightarrow$ is the logical symbol that stands for "implies that." So the logical version of our simple English statement reads as follows: "For all people, if the person is an F (lawyer), then that person is also a G (liar).

Even if you find this symbolization confusing, the important point should be clear: Frege thought that, by using this formal notation, the logical relationships between our concepts would be clearly represented. This allows us to better analyze the reasoning that is being used without being distracted by the content of the claims being reasoned about.

Frege thought that it would be possible to reduce all of mathematics to logic alone. Another very important logician, Kurt Gödel (1906–1978), showed this to be impossible. Nonetheless, Frege remains an important influence on contemporary analytic philosophy. During the twentieth century, logic was one of the fastest developing fields of philosophy, with philosophers using Frege's ideas to capture a wide range of types of reasoning that could not previously be adequately represented formally.

* * *

Morris, the eponymous hero of Bernard Wiseman's book *Morris the Moose* (1989), is a good example of someone who makes mistakes in his reasoning. Morris repeatedly makes the same error: He thinks that every animal he encounters is a moose like him. But what's fascinating about him, at least from a philosophical point of view, is that he constructs a variety of fallacious arguments to support his erroneous view. An enjoyable way for

children to learn about fallacious forms of reasoning is for them to analyze Morris's mistakes.[1]

Morris runs into a number of different animals. When they attempt to show him that his belief that they are moose is false, Morris is always ready with a response, one that shows him to be an exemplary bad reasoner. For example, when the cow Morris encounters tells Morris that she gives milk to humans in order to prove to Morris that she is a cow and not a moose, Morris is nonplussed, simply responding that she happens to be a moose with a milk-giving-to-humans ability. From Morris's point of view, the cow is just an unusual moose, one that has an ability that most moose lack. But she is a moose nonetheless. Morris can view any animal as a moose, so long as he is willing to adjust his concept of moose in such a way that all of the other animals' nonmoosey characteristics are treated as simply unusual forms of "moosedom."

The problem with this way of reasoning is that it is *ad hoc*. That is, when confronted with a problem about his belief that the cow is a moose—she produces milk for human consumption—Morris revises his concept of moose in an arbitrary way that allows him to maintain his belief. Arbitrarily adjusting our concepts to take account of problems with them will not produce the sort of correct theories that we are attempting to produce and needs to be avoided.

Sometimes, however, it is all right to adjust our concepts to take account of new evidence. In fact, many scientific discoveries involve us changing our concepts in just this way. But these are cases of legitimate conceptual change or clarification, ones in which the change has a broader justification than that it simply saves a belief we want to save.

Morris's fundamental blunder, then, is a logical one, and children can enjoy discovering the fallacy he uses for themselves. But because the philosophical issues raised by *Morris the Moose* can be hard to grasp, it's important to think carefully about how to raise this issue.

For example, you might ask them, while showing them photos of a cow and a moose, if they think the two look alike. Presumably, they will say, "No." You can respond by saying something like, "OK, that's very interesting. But you know, Morris thinks the cow is a moose. Because he's a philosophically inclined moose, he always backs up his ideas with reasons. Do you remember what his reasons are for thinking that the cow is a moose?" (You can read them page 7 of the book again.) As they answer, put their answers into the story matrix for the book (see table 14.1). And it would be useful to include both the cow's responses and Morris's replies, so that the children can refer to them during the discussion.

One way to move the discussion along is to ask the children why Morris thinks the fact that the cow has those three characteristics means she is a

Table 14.1. Story Matrix for *Morris the Moose*: Is the Cow Really a Moose?

What Reasons Does Morris Give for Thinking the Cow Is a Moose?	*How Does the Cow Try to Convince Morris That She Is a Cow?*	*How Does Morris Respond to Her?*
She has four legs.	She says she moos.	He says he can moo, too.
She has things on her head (horns).	She says she gives milk to humans.	He says she's just a moose who gives milk to humans.
She has a tail.	She says her mother is a cow.	He says her mother can't be a cow because she's a moose.

moose. If they immediately respond by saying that Morris thinks that anything that has four legs, a tail, and things on its head is a moose, you're set, for they have just put forward a general definition of a moose as being an animal with those three properties. If they don't immediately go there, you might ask them if those three things also apply to Morris, and thus moose in general. Once they realize that they do, you might try asking them why Morris makes the assumption that the cow is a moose.

* * *

I want to take a short detour here in order to explain Morris's mistake. Here is the general pattern of his fallacious reasoning:

All As are B.
C is a B.
Therefore C is an A.

This is known as "the fallacy of affirming the consequent." Let's see why it is a fallacy.

Morris begins with a true claim:

> All moose have four legs, a tail, and funny things on their head.

He also makes a correct observation:

> This animal has four legs, a tail, and funny things on its head.

Given the truth of the first statement, the following hypothetical statement is also true:

> If this animal were a moose, it would have four legs, a tail, and funny things on its head.

From this, Morris makes an invalid inference:

This animal is a moose.

As I have said, this is an example of the fallacy of affirming the consequent. When one has a conditional statement—something of the form "If one thing is true, then something else is also"—it is a mistake to reason that if the "something else" is true, the "one thing" is also true. And that's exactly what Morris does.

* * *

Now that you understand this fallacy, you can decide whether you think it's something that the children will be able to discover for themselves. One way to help them do this is to ask them what's wrong with the following inference:

All peaches are fruit.
This apple is a fruit.
Therefore this apple is a peach.

They will recognize that something has gone wrong here and so will try to find an explanation for the problem.

Less difficult is asking whether Morris is right to believe that anything that has four legs, a tail, and things on its head is a moose. Here, you can ask them for examples of four-legged horned creatures with tails that are not moose, besides cows and deer. This might help them understand his mistake.

A different discussion would result from focusing on how the cow tries to show Morris that his reasoning is wrong. The matrix already has the answer: She points out three properties that she has that Morris lacks. The first is that she says "MOO!" The second is that she gives milk to humans. The final one is that her mother is a cow.

At this point, you might ask the students if the cow is a good philosopher or not. More pointedly, you can ask them why the cow mentions those three features and whether they do similar things in their philosophy discussions. The cow here attempts to provide a *counterexample* to Morris's proposed definition of a moose. The reason that the cow herself is a counterexample to Morris's moose definition is that, although the cow has all the properties that Morris says moose do, she also has some features that moose lack: mooing, giving milk to humans, and having a mother who is a cow. Her point is that moose don't do these things.

Morris's responses to what the cow says show three different ways to respond to a proposed counterexample. First, Morris says that he can moo, too. This is a straightforward rejection of the claim that there is a feature of one

thing that is not a feature of the other. A counterexample can sometimes be rejected because you don't think it really is a counterexample. That's Morris's first strategy.

Morris also takes a different approach, one that I have already mentioned. He revises his notion of moose. Before meeting the cow, Morris probably didn't think about whether a moose could give milk to humans. But now, confronted by an animal that he thinks is a moose and that claims to give milk to humans, Morris simply revises one of the features he thought was characteristic of moose. From now on, Morris would have to claim that there are two types of moose: those that give milk to humans and those that don't. Rather than rejecting his belief that the cow is a moose, Morris simply revises his notion of what a moose is.

Morris's final move is simply to deny the claim made by the cow, using his own belief to deduce the falseness of her assertion. Since he knows that the cow is a moose, he confidently asserts that her mother *could not be a cow* since she has a daughter who is a moose. This fallacy is called *begging the question*. You can prove anything to be true if you start out by assuming it and then "deducing" its truth from that very assumption. This is another familiar type of logical fallacy, though people do not often make it in as bald a fashion as our friendly but misguided moose, Morris.

At this point, it's advisable to skip to the end of the story, when Morris and the other animals look at their reflections in a pool of water. Here, the focus moves away from pure logic into the realm of epistemology and metaphysics. One issue is why, after looking in the stream, Morris no longer thinks that the cow (or the deer or horse) is a moose. He actually supplies the answer directly: "You . . . do not look at all like me. . . . You cannot be [a] moose" (Wiseman 1989, 28).

Morris is now implicitly proceeding by means of the following principle:

> Principle D: Two things that do not look at all alike cannot be the same type of thing.

This is actually a *metaphysical* principle, since it concerns the nature of reality.

In fact, there are actually two issues here:

1. What determines whether two things look alike?
2. If two things look different, are they necessarily different *types* of things?

Let's reflect on each of these questions separately.

The first question is whether it is a matter of fact that two things look alike or whether that determination depends on a context that must be assumed

at least implicitly. One way to raise this issue is to show the children three pictures—one of a painting of a man, one of a sculpture of a man, and one of a painting of a cow—asking them which two things look alike. The idea is, first, to see if some of the kids disagree about which two things look alike. If they do, ask them to explain why. If they all agree, you can play the devil's advocate by saying that you disagree. Then ask them to explain why they answered as they did and to say why they think you answered the way you did.

The idea is for the children to think about whether determining *likeness* or *resemblance* depends on the context one assumes in making the determination. If they are thinking about what the artworks are *of*, then the sculpture and painting of a man look alike in terms of their *subject*. But if they are thinking about the type of objects that they are, the two paintings look more like each other than either of them to the sculpture. Context here is crucial.

The second issue raised is whether Principle D is valid. You can begin a discussion of this question by asking the children to think of other examples of Morris's principle. Here, too, you can help them along by showing them an apple and a banana, and asking whether they look anything alike. Hopefully, they will say no, although if they don't, you can ask them why they think that. If they do, you can follow up by asking whether that means they aren't both fruit. If they say no, that shows that Principle D does not hold in general.

But in the context of the book, Principle D yields sound results. After all, Morris did come to the right conclusion using it. So you can follow up by asking when it is all right to conclude that two things that don't look alike are different types of things and when not. This is actually a real philosophical puzzle that the kids may enjoy thinking about.

One attempt to answer this question claims that *science* tells us when. That is, when science says that two things that look different are really the same type of thing, they are; and when science says that two things that look different really are different, they are. To see the plausibility of this answer, consider whether steam and snow look at all alike. What about snow and ice? If you think not—which I hope you do—do you also believe that they really are the same type of thing—namely, water? If so, how do you know that? One answer might be that you have experienced, say, ice melting. But another answer is that science explains this by showing that they both are composed of the same type of molecule, H_2O.

* * *

One of the uncanny features of *Morris the Moose* is that the different animals—Morris, the cow, the deer, and the horse—sound like they are participating in a philosophy discussion, despite all having the delusion that all the other animals are members of their own species. To justify their beliefs, they express their ideas and then attempt to convince the others to accept their

view. But they don't just say, "You're wrong and I'm right." They present what are in essence *arguments* to justify their views. And this is precisely what we are hoping the students will do in *their* philosophical discussions. So you can end your discussion of *Morris* by calling the children's attention to the philosophical character of the animals' discussion with one another. You can do this by asking them whether the way that the animals talk to one another reminds them of what they are doing in their philosophy lesson. Hopefully it will, and you can ask them to explain exactly what features of the animals' discussion they think are philosophical and which are not.

MORRIS THE MOOSE, BY BERNARD WISEMAN

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: Reasoning and Truth

When Morris sees a cow, he thinks that the cow is a moose. When the cow says she's not a moose, Morris explains to her why he knows that she is one.

1. What reasons does Morris give for the cow being a moose?
2. Explain the reasoning that Morris uses to conclude that the cow is a moose.
3. What is wrong with Morris's reasoning?

Topic: Logical Fallacies

The cow tells Morris that, among the reasons she is not a moose, is that she produces milk for humans and her mother is a cow.

1. How does Morris respond to the cow's claims?
2. What mistake does Morris make in his reasoning?
3. Can you think of other examples of logical fallacies—bad forms of reasoning?

Topic: Knowledge and Truth

Morris thinks that he knows *that the cow is a moose.*

1. Do you agree with Morris, that he *knows* that the cow is a moose?
2. Is there more to knowledge than having reasons?

Topic: Reasons and Truth

In order to explain why he thinks that the cow is a moose, Morris gives a reason for his belief—namely, that the cow has four legs, a tail, and things on its head.

1. Give an example of something that you know for which you have a good reason.
2. Give an example of something you know for which you don't have a good reason.
3. How do you know the thing you said in response to question 2?
4. As a result of what you've now said, do you think that everything you know you know for a reason?

Topic: Persuasion

The cow tries to persuade Morris that she's not a moose, but a cow.

1. How does the cow do this?
2. How does Morris respond?
3. Has anything like this ever happened to you?
4. Why do you think people keep saying they know something even though they don't?

Topic: Anger

When he sees Morris and the cow, the deer thinks they are both deer. When Morris hears this, he gets angry and yells at the deer.

1. Does yelling make Morris right?
2. Why does he yell?
3. What do you think he should have done to convince the deer that he is wrong and that Morris is not a deer?

Topic: Sensory Experience and Belief

When the animals drink, they see their own reflections.

1. Why does seeing their own reflections convince the animals that they were wrong?
2. There is a saying: "Seeing is believing." What might this saying mean? Do you agree with it?
3. Why isn't Morris convinced when the other animals tell him that he is wrong?
4. Can you think of other situations in which people have persisted in their mistakes despite having evidence that they are wrong?
5. Can you think of situations in which new evidence has made people change what they think?
6. Why is it so hard for Morris to admit that he made a mistake?
7. Do you think that people have a hard time admitting that they are wrong? Why?

Topic: The Nature of Philosophy

The animals all disagree with one another about who is what.

1. When the animals disagree with one another, how do they try to convince each other that they are right?
2. What are the specific ways in which the animals talk to each other that remind you of how you discuss philosophy?
3. Are there differences between having a philosophical discussion and the way the animals disagree with each other?
4. Can philosophical discussions be settled by looking?

Suggested Follow-Up Activity

Ask the children to draw pictures of two things that look different but are really the same underneath.

Ask the children to find examples of things that look really similar but are very different.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT LOGIC

- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll
- *Let's Do Nothing!* by Tony Fucile

NOTE

1. A word of warning. When I discussed this book with some precocious six-year-olds, they pointed out that adult female animals of different species are all called "cows." Clearly, this points to an ambiguity in how the word *cow* is used, for the book assumes that it applies to only female *bovines*. It's worth being prepared to explain how the book uses the word should this issue arise.

Chapter Fifteen

Many Moons: Teaching Epistemology

Whereas ancient Western philosophers took metaphysics and its attempt to understand the structure of what exists as the most basic field of philosophical inquiry, modern Western philosophy—which began in the early seventeenth century—is characterized by the view that epistemology, the theory of knowledge, is the fundamental area of philosophy. Epistemology seeks to establish the possibility, nature, and extent of human knowledge.

The reason that modern Western philosophers put epistemology ahead of metaphysics is that they believed we had to establish the trustworthiness of different sources of knowledge—perception, reason, and intuition being three such sources—before we could legitimately articulate the structure that reality had to have. After all, whatever structure reality actually has, we humans can only gain access to it by means of our mental and perceptual capacities.

One of the fundamental problems for the epistemologist is determining whether any of the standard sources of knowledge available to human beings is adequate to the task. Descartes (1596–1650), the "father" of modern philosophy, took reason, rather than sense perception, to be the only source of certain knowledge. Whereas the senses are liable to deceive us, Descartes argued, reason provides knowledge that is indubitable and, hence, true.

Descartes' reliance on reason goes hand in hand with his belief that God implanted that faculty within each one of us and that He did so in order for us to be able to distinguish truth from falsity. Modern epistemologists tend to eschew reliance on a divine being, which makes their task all the harder: How can you, in the absence of a divine guarantee, show that there is a source of knowledge that is reliable, one that won't lead to error?

One major line of thinking about a reliable source of knowledge takes issue with Descartes's claim that knowledge must be infallible. Recent philosophers have developed accounts of knowledge that don't require the use

of foundational premises—that is, statements that are immune from doubt. All that is necessary, they hold, is that we achieve relative certainty: We can take a claim to be certain while using it to investigate other claims, knowing full well that we can make it the subject of our investigations at some other time using other premises. Rather than seeing human knowledge as an edifice needing a secure foundation as Descartes did, contemporary epistemologists have adopted Otto Neurath's (1882–1945) comparison of it to a raft whose planks are adequate to keep it afloat even if they have to be repeatedly replaced when they are discovered to have rotted.

Another important issue, and the one that is the central one in *Many Moons*, is whether knowledge is relative. The *epistemic relativist* rejects the idea that there are universal standards for assessing claims about knowledge. Instead, she believes that the validity of knowledge claims can only be assessed relative to a specific framework. The believer in astrology would hold, for example, that the time and date of a person's birth determine many facts about them and their life because of the positions of the stars at that very moment. She might say, for example, that, being a Scorpio, I am passionate but obsessive. And her acceptance of the astrological epistemic framework would justify this claim.

Those who believe that science provides us with the most accurate knowledge of most phenomena would likely disagree with the claim that a person's life is determined by the position of the celestial bodies at the time of their birth. One reason for this is that there is no clear mechanism by means of which such determination is supposed to take place, and natural science requires the presence of such mechanisms in its naturalistic explanations.

A relativist would say that each claim about astrology—the believer's claim that affirms its truth and the skeptic's denial of its validity—are true *relative to the framework* within which it is made—so that astrological claims would be true within the astrological framework but false within the scientific one. Many philosophers, however, reject relativism in favor of an *objectivist* conception of knowledge. Objectivists hold that there is only one set of criteria to be used to assess the legitimacy of all knowledge claims.

What an objectivist claims about the truth of astrology would depend upon her specific epistemic framework. You can be an objectivist and believe in astrology. But if you do, you have to say that the one and only criterion for justifying knowledge is astrological in origin. Scientific claims, when they contradicted with astrological ones, would have to be declared false—lacking in justification, on this view.

* * *

The question of whether or not all knowledge is relative is the central issue that comes to the fore in James Thurber's imaginative tale, *Many Moons*. The

story revolves around the Princess Lenore's statement that she needs to have the moon to cure her upset stomach. Isn't it impossible for anyone, even her father the King, to get the moon for Lenore? Let's see why not.

Princess Lenore's request for the moon meets with understandably skeptical responses from the King's councilors—who are supposed to solve his problems, not agree that they can't be solved. Each of the King's three top advisors appeals to his special area of expertise to explain why it is absolutely impossible to satisfy the princess's request. Although each has different beliefs about the moon—the Lord High Chamberlain thinks it's 35,000 miles away, larger than Lenore's bedroom, and made of molten copper; the Royal Wizard, that it's 150,000 miles away, twice as big as the palace, and made of green cheese; while the Royal Mathematician claims it's 300,000 miles away, half the size of the kingdom, and made of asbestos—they are unanimous in thinking that Lenore's request cannot be fulfilled.

Thurber is here satirizing what we might call "the epistemic pretensions of experts" who take their specialized knowledge to show their superiority in all matters. And it can't be denied that it is entertaining to watch Thurber poke fun at the King's experts, all of whose claims about the moon we know to be false, for contemporary scientists (Are they the ones who really possess knowledge in our culture?) tell us that the moon is composed of various minerals, has a diameter of 2,159 miles, and averages a distance of about 240,000 miles from the earth. (So, actually, the Royal Mathematician was not all that far off, though he's wrong about asbestos being one of the components of lunar rocks.)

The least pretentious member of the King's court, the Jester, solves the problem of Lenore's "impossible" request. He hasn't done any of the "amazing" things that the King's counselors have, such as the Royal Magician's figuring out the distance between the horns of a dilemma (Incidentally, can you figure out what fallacy is contained in the Mathematician's boast to have determined *that*?) so he has the virtue of epistemic humility. He doesn't just assume that the moon cannot be gotten for the princess because of his own beliefs about its size, composition, and distance from us. His novel idea is to ask Lenore how big *she* thinks the moon is, how far away, and what it is made of.

What he finds out—that she thinks it's no bigger than her thumbnail, made of gold, and only as far as the tree she sees through her bedroom window—allows him to get "the Moon" for her. He has the Royal Goldsmith—himself another one of those pesky experts who denies his own ability to make the moon because of his own beliefs about it—cast a small golden charm of the moon for Princess Lenore to wear around her neck.

When the Jester presents the moon to the princess, she is ecstatic. She puts the moon around her neck and, of course, her stomachache miraculously disappears.

At this point in the story, *Many Moons* appears to adopt a *relativist* conception of knowledge. As I've said, the relativist in regard to knowledge holds that there is no such thing as knowledge pure and simple. She holds that knowledge claims are always justified with reference to some framework or other.

Consider the Royal Wizard. As a magician, he operates within what we can call "the magical framework" and, indeed, his claims to knowledge are all based on the assumption that he has magical powers, the sorts of things posited within that framework. That's why, for example, he can squeeze blood from an orange.

People like me, who operate in a knowledge framework that more or less gives pride of place to science, think that such a claim is nonsense—"Blood? From an orange? Impossible!" one of us might respond to the Wizard if we could—the sort of thing that only makes sense in the fictional worlds of fairy tales, such as this one. We reject the claim that the Royal Wizard was actually able to do what he says he did.

Each of the King's three royal advisors is an expert about a specific area of knowledge and makes his claims from within the framework of his expertise. But these claims conflict with one another. The moon, for example, can't be made 100 percent of green cheese as the Royal Mathematician maintains and also 100 percent of molten copper as the Lord High Chamberlain says. At least one of those claims about the stuff that composes the moon must be false, if one holds an objectivist position in regard to knowledge.

But's that a view the Jester explicitly rejects. Saying that he admires the knowledge possessed by each of the King's advisors, he concludes that what each of them says must be true. Since they appear to contradict each other, the only way to salvage the truth of all of their claims is to take truth and knowledge to be relative to a specific framework.

The Jester's acceptance of epistemological relativism allows him to solve the King's conundrum. As a relativist, he also thinks that the princess's beliefs about the moon are justifiable within her own epistemic framework. That's what prompts him to ask her to explain her own beliefs about the moon's size, distance from us, and composition to him. Once he has heard her responses, it's easy to get her an object she thinks is the moon.

A quick aside: What the princess gets is a *representation* of the moon, rather than the moon itself. But to discuss the distinction between a real thing and a representation of one would return us to metaphysics, for these are two very different modes of being. See how many different types of philosophy a single story can generate?

My analysis of the story might suggest to you that relativism is the philosophy of knowledge that *Many Moons* endorses. But I don't think that's so. You'll see why not as I discuss the second half of the story.

The ever-fretful King is now worried that the princess will realize that she doesn't have *the* moon when the real moon rises and shines through her bedroom window that very night. This time, the Royal Advisors come up with cockamamie schemes—Wrap the entire castle so the princess can't see the moon! Really?—each more worthless than the next. Only the Jester maintains his calm and, as a result, saves the day.

Once again, the Jester turns to Lenore to provide the solution. He simply asks her how she could have the moon around her neck when it's also shining in her bedroom window.

Lenore's answer is a triumph of fallacious reasoning (see chapter 14). She explains that the moon is like other things—teeth, unicorn horns, and flowers are her examples. When one falls out or is cut, another one grows to take its place. So when one moon disappears, a new one has to grow to take its place the next night. And that's why—at least in her belief system—having the moon around her neck is perfectly consistent with another one shining through her window that night.

Lenore's ability to provide a *reason* for her belief is both amusing and intriguing—and both for the same reason. Lenore doesn't just happen to believe irrational things. She has come to hold her mistaken beliefs through an attempt to make sense of things that she sees. In this respect, she joins Morris (chapter 14) as a nascent philosopher gone wrong.

Children may be nervous and upset at the prospect of losing a loose tooth as well as at seeing flowers bloom and then die. As they try to understand what happens in these cases, they may—perhaps with the help of fairy tales about unicorns and other mythical beings—form their own explanations for such occurrences.

That's clearly what Lenore has done. She forms her beliefs about what happens to the moon when it disappears by taking the moon to be similar to other things that she has experienced ceasing to exist. These other things—teeth, unicorn horns, and flowers—all get replaced by new versions of the ones that have fallen out or ceased to exist. The moon is like those other things, the princess reasons, so when it disappears, another one has to come along and take its place.

It's tempting to simply be amused by this charming aspect of *Many Moons*. But it actually exposes a significant problem with human reasoning related to the ones we investigated in chapter 14.

The princess's reasoning is an example of an *argument by analogy*, one of the standard forms of argumentation but also one of the trickiest. In fact, *Many Moons* exposes the *fallacious* use of this argument form. As Nelson Goodman (1906–1998), the well-known American metaphysician, philosopher of science, and aesthetician, emphasized, everything is like everything

else in some respect. That's why arguments from analogy are problematic: They ignore significant differences between things. Lenore's modeling of her beliefs about the moon on facts about teeth, unicorn horns, and flowers leads her to having false beliefs, as even young readers of the book realize.

But if we say that Lenore's beliefs are wrong and that's why she didn't realize that there was only one moon that she didn't actually have around her neck, we are implicitly rejecting the truth of relativism. Most philosophers believe that, for a belief to be knowledge, it must be true, so relativism cannot be the correct view of knowledge. Objectivism, the view that there is only one, objective truth, is their favored view of knowledge.

* * *

As usual, a good place to begin a discussion of this book is with its story matrix (see table 15.1). With the children's help, you can fill in all the different beliefs about the moon that each of the central characters has. You can also have a row for the truth about the moon, which they are likely not to know but which you can fill in on the basis of the best scientific knowledge that we possess. (It's fine to leave this off or to fill it in as the discussion progresses.)

One example of a good question to initiate the discussion is the following: Each of the King's advisors had a different belief about what the moon is, what it is made of, and how far from the earth it is. Could they all be right about those things?

Table 15.1. Story Matrix for *Many Moons*: What Do the Characters Say about the Moon?

The Character	*How Big They Say the Moon Is*	*How Far Away They Say the Moon Is*	*What They Think the Moon is Made Of*	*How Many Moons Are There?*
The Lord High Chamberlain	Bigger than Lenore's room	35,000 miles	Molten Copper	1
The Royal Magician	Twice as big as the palace	150,000 miles	Green Cheese	1
The Royal Mathematician	Half as big as the entire kingdom	300,000 miles	Asbestos	1
The Princess Lenore	No bigger than her thumbnail	As far away as the tree outside her window	Gold	Many!
What's the Truth?	2,160 miles across	240,000 miles	Minerals	1

This might result in the children having a disagreement about the nature of belief (or knowledge). Some of them might say that each of the advisors is right from their own perspective—the relativists—while others—the objectivists—might say that none of them were right. (I doubt that any of them would think that one of their bizarre beliefs was the correct one, but you never can tell!)

If that's what happens, you might ask them to think about a simple statement that they all know to be true, say, that 2 + 2 = 4. Is it possible, you could ask, for someone to be right if they thought that 2 + 2 = 5? This might generate a discussion of what makes something right or true, the sort of thing that we can know.

Another tack would be to ask whether the Jester was smarter than all the King's other advisors. This would likely move the discussion along a different route, focusing more on the issue of what qualifies a person as knowing something rather than on the nature of knowledge itself.

Whichever route you choose, *Many Moons* is sure to generate a fascinating discussion about the nature of human knowledge.

MANY MOONS, BY JAMES THURBER

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: Do the King's Advisors Know about the Moon?

Each of the King's advisor's thinks he knows how big the moon is, how far away, and what it is made of.

1. What do each of the advisors say about the size, distance, and composition of the moon?
2. Are any of them right?
3. Do they know what they claim to know?

Topic: Who Does Know about the Moon?

The Jester turns to the princess to find out her beliefs about the moon.

1. What does the princess say about the size, distance, and composition of the moon?
2. What, if anything, is she right about?
3. What is the difference between knowledge and belief?
4. Is there anyone who knows the actual size, distance, and composition of the moon?
5. How do they know what they know?

Topic: Magic

The Royal Wizard claims to have squeezed blood out of turnips and rabbits out of silk hats.

1. Do you think that the Royal Wizard was able to do what he said he could do? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe that magic is possible? Why or why not?
3. What makes something magic?

Suggested Follow-Up Activities

Ask the children to draw their own view of the moon. How does it compare to the ideas of the moon found in the book?

Or have them, perhaps in groups, construct an accurate model of the relative sizes and distances of the sun, earth, and moon. Of course, this is not philosophy, but it's a way to use philosophy to lead into a scientific investigation.

You could also have them try to think about any magical beliefs they might have and whether they really think they are true and why.

MORE BOOKS ABOUT EPISTEMOLOGY

- "The Dream" by Arnold Lobel in *Frog and Toad Together*
- *Gotta Go! Gotta Go!* by Sam Swope
- *Horton Hears a Who!* by Dr. Seuss

Chapter Sixteen

Knuffle Bunny: Teaching the Philosophy of Language

Until the twentieth century, language was not a significant area of philosophical investigation. This was because many philosophers thought that thinking took place in the mind, so language was simply a vehicle people used to communicate ideas they had already formulated mentally. Language was, as philosophers like to say, *transparent*, something that functioned like a window, allowing ideas and thoughts to be transmitted but without making any contribution of its own.

Things changed fundamentally in the twentieth century, for philosophers began to see language as having a crucial role in the very articulation of our thoughts and not merely as a diaphanous medium for their transmission. Philosophy of language therefore moved into the center of the philosophical landscape, for the contention was that language itself had to be understood prior to raising any other philosophical questions. Indeed, twentieth-century philosophers often transformed traditional philosophical issues into questions about language. So instead of asking what made an action right or wrong, they would focus on questions about the language of ethical assessment, trying to understand, for example, how the word *ought* was used to express our approval or disapproval of an action.

Once language is recognized to have fundamental philosophical significance, almost all philosophical questions get recast. For example, the epistemological question of how our ideas are able to reflect the nature of the world gets transformed into the question of how language is able to get a "hook" onto nonlinguistic reality.

One of the central theories in the philosophy of language relies on distinguishing between two elements of a word's "meaning": its *reference* and its *sense* (Frege 1960). The idea is that words have a double sort of reality. On the one hand, they pick out objects and/or their properties in the world by

referring to them. The word *rabbit*, for example, refers to actual rabbits. But words also have a *sense*, something that is similar to what we ordinarily refer to as the word's meaning. The sense of *rabbit* would include such features as being furry and four legged, for these are features of the word that help us know what objects in the world it picks out.

Although this conception of language is one of the most important in the philosophy of language, many of its features have been challenged. For example, this account suggests that meanings can be attached to individual words just as a piece of luggage has a label with your name and address attached to it when you fly somewhere. But philosophers have argued that individual words do not possess meanings that they somehow are bound to. Words acquire meaning, they assert, by reference to a range of related concepts. They emphasize, for example, that to say that a book is red is to also imply that it is not green or blue, and so on. Color words, they point out, acquire their meaning only through their role within a whole system of related ones. If this contention is correct, then meanings have a systematic structure that is not captured through the sense-reference theory of linguistic meaning.

There have also been philosophical skeptics about the entire concept of meaning. In a famous argument, Willard Van Orman Quine (1908–2000)—one of the most important American philosophers of the twentieth century—argued that the concept of meaning is fraught with so many problems that we would do better to dispense with it in favor of a more scientifically respectable notion founded on a theory of human behavior (Quine 1960). We could know the linguistic behavior of people, he asserted, but not what their words "mean." In his skeptical view, there is simply no fact of the matter about what our words really mean, for one could develop competing theories of linguistic meaning that are equally well confirmed.

I mentioned that there has been vexed disagreement among philosophers about how language "hooks" onto the world. One theory of the language-world connection is *ostension*, or pointing. When we point at something while saying a word—such as saying "rabbit" as we point at one of the furry creatures—we are creating a word-world link. But other philosophers have argued that ostension already presupposes that we understand how to pick out from its environment the one object that has been pointed to.

Think about someone standing in the door of a room looking in and just saying, "Look at that!" Without more understanding of the context, it is impossible to know what she is pointing out. Once we learn what the context is—that her favorite painting, for example, is just visible from where she stands at the room's entrance—we will have a way of knowing what she is "ostending," but without the context we will be hard-pressed to understand

what object her statement is intended to pick out. This example shows why some philosophers believe that ostension presupposes the existence of a word-world link rather than explaining it.

Another fascinating issue is how children learn a language. It's amazing that children have the ability to acquire language on the basis of what is actually a rather limited range of evidence. Sure, parents generally spend a lot of time talking to their young children, but they often utter nonsense syllabus such as "Goo goo." How is a child able to sort through this range of linguistic evidence and come up with an understanding of its native tongue relatively easily and quickly? This is one of the great mysteries of human life.

One of the simplest theories of language acquisition is that children simply have to learn what the "names" are for the "things" in their world. If we imagine a child to be a pint-sized adult—that is, equipped with a mature understanding of the world but simply lacking the knowledge of what word goes with what object—then this seems like a plausible view. A child's task becomes the relatively simple one of figuring out how to match words to their respective objects.

Once one reflects on the nature of language, the shortcomings of this view emerge. For one thing, it treats language as if it were primarily a map of the world, so that the child's task is simply to find the right labels for each of the objects that belong on the map. But philosophers have argued that a more fundamental role of language is coordinating our actions and understandings. In an interesting thought experiment, the great twentieth-century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), imagines a primitive form of language that consists of one person saying, "Slab!" to his assistant. The assistant then goes and brings a slab to the person for him to use in his building project (Wittgenstein 1953). The point is that the linguistic expression "Slab!" is not used by the person giving the order as a label for an object but as a way to get something. The slogan for this view of language is "a word's meaning is its use."

One very interesting issue is what features a symbol system needs to possess in order to actually be a language. One suggestion, presupposed by the "Slab!" example, is that a language must be understandable by more than one person. There cannot be—or, so many philosophers assert—a *private language*, a language whose essential characteristic is that one and only one person can understand it. On this view, language is an essentially social phenomenon that requires the existence of others in order to be understood.

Another candidate for a necessary feature of language is that it be capable of applying to new circumstances. Philosophers often call this feature of language its *generativity*, the fact that it can be used in situations that have never been previously encountered. You can, for example, understand all

of the sentences in this book, even though you probably had not previously encountered any of them or, at most, a few.

At an even more basic level, a language might be thought to require terms that refer to objects and others that refer to actions, although our "Slab!" example suggests that one linguistic item might be able to combine both of those functions.

One putative feature of a language that is *not* necessary is that it be made up of sounds. Sign language is a language, but it is composed of gestures, not sounds. This is a useful example to keep in mind during the children's discussion.

* * *

Many of the issues about the nature of language that I have just enumerated emerge in Mo Willem's book *Knuffle Bunny* (2004). Knuffle Bunny is the name of Trixie's favorite stuffed animal. When Trixie leaves the laundromat with her father, Knuffle Bunny gets left behind in the washing machine. Trixie's attempts to get her father to realize what has happened—"Aggle flaggle klabble!" she exclaims and does everything else she can to let him know how unhappy she is—are met with incomprehension. When they return home, Trixie's mother immediately asks where Knuffle Bunny is and her father realizes that the stuffed animal has been left behind. When Trixie is reunited with Knuffle Bunny, she utters her very first words: "Knuffle Bunny!" Every cloud has, as they say, its silver lining.

One question raised by this book that has led to many interesting discussions among the children we work with is the rather obvious one of why Trixie is not able to communicate with her father. Of course, the answer—that she can't use language—is one the children will all likely agree with, but you can use their unanimity to initiate an inquiry into what Trixie knows and does not know. Clearly, Trixie cannot speak in the sense of uttering sentences, though she certainly can make noise. But can she think? She obviously realizes that Knuffle Bunny is missing, but when she says, "Aggle flaggle klabble!" is that baby-talk for "Help! Knuffle Bunny is missing"? Or is it more like her screaming "Waaaa!" as she does a few pages later? The issue here is whether very young children are able to think, or whether they simply react to their feelings with sounds that are better assimilated to pain-expressing behavior like crying than to linguistic utterances.

The story matrix for this book prepares the way for this discussion by comparing what Trixie is doing when she utters, "Aggle, flaggle, klabble!" and when she cries, "Waaaa!" It is helpful to show the children the two illustrations in which Trixie utters these "cries" because there are important features of each that the children might want to refer to in filling out the matrix (see table 16.1).

Table 16.1. Story Matrix for *Knuffle Bunny*: Is Trixie Really Talking?

	When she says, "Aggle, flaggle, klabble!"	*When she cries, "Waaaa!"*
What is Trixie trying to do?	Communicate	Express her unhappiness
Is what she does meaningful?	??	Yes
How does she behave?	She points and gestures.	She gestures.
What's in her mind?	A thought: We left Knuffle Bunny behind	A feeling of unhappiness

?? indicates that the children may disagree.

So a good place to begin the discussion is by asking the children why Trixie's father doesn't understand that Trixie is trying to make him realize that Knuffle Bunny was left behind in the laundromat. After all, Trixie might be thought to be saying something like "Stop!" Why isn't that enough to get her father to realize his mistake? Aside from the fact that he's a little clueless, why can't he understand her message?

* * *

The root issue here involves a distinction between language and other forms of human behavior. We can and do communicate with others in different ways. When someone cries, she often communicates a feeling of sadness, although she could also say, "I am feeling sad." What's the difference between crying and uttering that sentence? Is there something that language can communicate that can't be communicated without speaking?

As part of this inquiry into the nature of language, the children might be interested in discussing the relationship between thought and language. Some of them may think that Trixie has the thought, "Knuffle Bunny is missing," but others will probably take her to be behaving in a way that is more like crying. If the children do disagree in this way, your asking them how these different views could be compared and how they could decide if one or the other is the better one is a way to get them involved in a very interesting philosophy discussion.

* * *

The question of "theory choice," as this topic is called, is an important one in philosophy. Some philosophers hold that all theories can be compared in light of certain basic values, such as simplicity and explanatory power. But others hold that different theories are *incommensurable*, that there is no way to decide between competing theories, for there is no neutral standpoint from which to compare them. This idea was actually first expressed by the theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), who held that different frameworks—he focused on the aesthetic, the moral, and the religious—were incommensurable, so that there was no way for a person within

one framework to convince another that it was a better framework. (Compare this to our discussion of epistemological relativism in chapter 15.)

* * *

A topic that we have found the children really enjoy discussing is what our lives would be like if we lacked a common language. We all know the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, in which God, to make sure that human beings do not transgress the limits he has set for them, creates different languages so that the tower's builders cannot communicate with one another, thereby dooming their project. You might ask the children what they would do if they couldn't talk to one another: How would they manage to play together? Could they find a way to get someone to do something simple, like pick up an eraser? This can turn into a fun game that will also bring to the children's awareness how fundamental a feature of our lives language is, as I suggest in the Suggested Follow-Up Activities section of this chapter.

If everyone agrees that language plays a crucial role in human communication, the children might be interested in considering what the necessary features of a language are. You could ask them whether they think that there could be a language that only one person understood and that no one else could ever come to understand. You might also ask them whether they think a language has to be spoken or not. Using the example of sign language, you could also ask them to consider why that is a language, since it seems to consist completely of a person moving their body. This question is especially interesting if they have concluded that there is an important distinction between Trixie saying "Aggle, flaggle, klabble!" and just crying out "Waaaa!"

Sign language is a language that does not use sound. But it still has some elements of the structure that something must have to be a language. There are individual units of meaning, much like words, but that include facial expressions and gestures, such as placing both hands on one's heart while looking lovingly to signify love. These gestures are capable of being combined into signifying units that express thoughts or make assertions, such as "I love you." The example of sign language will help the children to think about what a language is and how it works, the basic question raised in the philosophy of language.

KNUFFLE BUNNY, BY MO WILLEMS

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: The Nature of Communication

Before Trixie could even speak words, she went on an errand with her daddy to the laundromat.

1. How did Trixie communicate with her father before she could use words?
2. Could Trixie do anything other than cry to try to get her dad to realize her bunny was missing?
3. Have you ever had trouble communicating something to someone? If so, what made it difficult? Did you solve the communication problem? How?
4. Why doesn't pointing help Trixie's father understand what's bothering her?

Topic: Language and Behavior

When Trixie realizes she left her favorite stuffed animal behind, she tries to tell her father through her actions.

1. Are there some things that actions are better at communicating than words?
2. Does the way a person acts while saying something affect how you understand what they are saying?
3. How do you know when someone is being silly or serious with his or her words?
4. Is language just as dependent on behavior as it is on words?

Topic: Meaning

When Trixie finally speaks, she says, "Knuffle Bunny!"

1. There are lots of words that you haven't looked up in a dictionary, so how do you know what they mean?
2. Are there words or concepts that you just learned today? This year?
3. Does a blind person's idea of red differ from yours? Does she know what it means?

Topic: Language and Thought

Even though Trixie could not speak, she was still able to think about what she was trying to tell her father.

1. How does language shape our thoughts?
2. When you learn more, can you think more?
3. Can you think without words?

Topic: The Nature of Language

Before Trixie could talk, she tried to communicate with her father through her own language.

1. What is necessary for something to be a language?
2. Could there be a language that only one person could understand?

3. If your best friend didn't speak your language, could you still communicate with her or him?

Topic: Language and Animals

Trixie also tried to communicate with Knuffle Bunny.

1. Do animals have thoughts? How can you tell?
2. Do animals have a language?
3. When a dog barks at something, is he trying to tell you something?
4. When you command your dog to "sit" and he sits, is this because the dog understands what you said?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

The following is an experiment that you can conduct with the children that focuses on how words and gestures are used to communicate. Have the children form a circle around you. Place *Knuffle Bunny* on the ground and tell the group that one at a time, they are to give you *one* direction on how to pick the book up off the ground. The children can only use their words; no hands or gestures are allowed, and only one instruction per person. As the facilitator, make sure to take everything they say literally, so that you act like a robot that has never picked up a book before. The objective is to help the children reflect on how much we as humans rely on body language and gestures to communicate. You might even repeat this experiment but limit the children to make one gesture and not using any words at all.

After the children, working collectively, get you to pick up the book, have them reflect on the exercise by asking them the following questions: What did you learn? What did this exercise show us about communication? Have your thoughts or opinions changed? You might even have them write about the experiment you have conducted with them.

Another option is to have the children attempt to communicate with each other without using any language—either spoken or American Sign Language—but only sounds or gestures made up on the spot. Then ask them to discuss the difficulties they encountered and what that might tell them about language.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

- *Albert's Impossible Toothache* by Barbara Williams
- *Let's Do Nothing!* by Tony Fucile

Chapter Seventeen

Emily's Art: Teaching Aesthetics

Imagine that you are the judge of an art contest for first graders.[1] There would be paintings of all different sizes, shapes, and styles. What criterion would you use to decide which piece should be awarded first prize? Should the picture of a house that really does look like a house be the winner? What about the painting that shows how much a child loved her mother? And what about the very colorful abstraction that captures your eye with its striking design?

Emily's Art, an imaginatively illustrated picture book by Peter Catalanotto (2001), raises just such questions. In it, Emily, a highly talented young artist, paints pictures that are, though not realistic in any obvious sense, skillfully done and express her thoughts and feelings about her subjects. A painting of her mother, for example, has multiple images of her mother to show how busy she is preparing everyone's breakfast and, in a painting of her dog, Thor has huge ears because he hears so well.

As we read the book, we see how talented an artist Emily is as we come to appreciate her nonrealistic style of painting. Everyone in Emily's school knows she's the most talented artist in the class, because, like her best friend, Kelly, they often come to her to ask advice about their paintings. So when Emily loses the school art contest because she has entered her picture of Thor and the judge dislikes dogs intensely, the question of how works of art should be judged emerges intensely for the book's readers.

The children's usual response to the judge's decision is simply, "That's not fair." But exploring why it's not fair leads into an interesting discussion of how we make judgments in which we evaluate the quality of works of art.

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with questions about art, although its purview is larger than that, extending to more general questions about appreciation, be it of works of art, natural things, or anything

else. For our purposes, it's useful to focus on the basic questions about art that form the subject matter of aesthetics.

The central question in aesthetics raised by *Emily's Art* is whether there are objective standards for the evaluation of works of art. Philosophers disagree about this fundamental issue. Some argue that there are such objective standards. The grounds for this view are varied, but some have to do with what we ordinarily think about art. Museums are generally taken to be repositories for the *great* art of the past. But the term *great* makes an evaluation of those works, claiming that they are about the *best*—another *evaluative* term—ever produced. Doesn't this commit us to the view that there are objective standards that we use to justify classifying such work as great? We need some grounds for making our normal evaluations of works of art other than our own subjective experience of them.

Of course, there are philosophers who are skeptical about the existence of such standards. What, they ask, could possibly count as such a standard? One of the differences between art objects and other things is that there are no specific properties that always make an artwork good. Think about *being detailed*, a criterion often proposed as a "good-making" feature of works of art. Although we might admire a painting by Rembrandt for the meticulousness of its detailed rendering of a gold chair, the accumulation of detail in another work might be judged to make it fussy, a term of evaluative disparagement. According to such skeptics, there are no objective criteria that can be used to evaluate works of art.

But now you might wonder whether such skepticism about objective standards doesn't make all evaluation of artworks pointless. Sure, a critic might tell you how good this painting or that film is, but all that would mean is that he *liked* it and nothing more. All objective evaluation of art would be made pointless. Our beloved "100 Best" lists would merely be expressions of people's tastes, no more than that.

A response might begin by pointing out that such a situation might make sense when we are simply talking about our own reactions to things like foods. One person might prefer chocolate ice cream to vanilla, for there is general agreement that flavor preferences are merely subjective. One mark of their subjectivity is the fact that you can't really argue about them. If you prefer chocolate ice cream to vanilla, and I prefer vanilla to chocolate, there's nothing that either of us could say to the other to convince him that he is *wrong*. Wrongness and rightness have no role to play in regard to such preferences. You get to be the arbiter of your own tastes, and no one can tell you that you are wrong. But making claims about the merit of works of art seems different, for we do think that there must be some standards to justify our evaluations of them.

One piece of evidence for this contention is that we think that it makes sense to have critical arguments. While we would just laugh at someone who tried to convince us that *we* liked vanilla ice cream better than chocolate when we denied it, it makes perfect sense for critics to argue whether Van Gogh's *Lily* is a better painting than, say, Whistler's famous portrait of his mother. But if there can be rational disagreement about the evaluation of works of art, then it would seem that there would have to be objective standards by which such disagreement could be adjudicated.

To this, the skeptics would respond by saying that those who think that there are objective standards of artistic evaluation fail to consider the importance of artistic experts—that is, critics, artists, art historians, and the like. All that these critics can base their assessment of works of art on is their own experience. When they disagree with each other, they are not just trying to bully the other into submission, however. Their goal is to get the other to see what they see, to experience what they experience. So if a critic says that Van Gogh's painting is better than Whistler's, he'll point to different features of Van Gogh's painting in order to help those who disagree with him notice how those features contribute to *Lily* being the great work he thinks it is—that is, one that causes him to experience the intense sort of pleasure that art can bring.

* * *

So this is the question that the inappropriate judging of the art contest in *Emily's Art* raises, for our intuitions that the judge made a mistake suggest that Emily's work is objectively better than her friend Kelly's. Doesn't our intuition that the judge was wrong require us to accept objective criteria by means of which to evaluate artworks?

In order to prepare the children for such an abstract discussion, it's helpful to begin, once again, with a story matrix. (See table 17.1.) Since Kelly's painting of a butterfly—copied from Emily's example—wins the prize, a good place to begin is with a comparison of her painting and the one that Emily enters into the art contest—her portrait of her dog, Thor. You might begin by asking the

Table 17.1. Story Matrix for *Emily's Art*: Comparing Emily's Painting with Kelly's

	Emily's Painting	*Kelly's Painting*
What is it a painting of?	Her dog, Thor	A butterfly
Are there things you like about it?	Colorful, detailed, expressive, etc.	Looks like a butterfly
Is it a good painting?	Yes	??
Why?	It's colorful, etc., and original.	Not original

?? indicates that children may have different views.

children what, if anything, they like about each of the paintings. There are many features that they could list on the matrix. You can then ask them whether they think the paintings are good, and what justifies those judgments.

Beginning with this comparison between the two paintings serves a couple of purposes. First of all, it is something that each child can take a stab at answering without any prior knowledge about art. It would be a mistake to think that all children have had very much exposure to art other than that which they make. Starting with these two paintings helps acclimate all the children to discussing a topic that they otherwise might feel uncomfortable discussing. We have often used a "go-round" here.

Second, such a comparison can produce a set of criteria that the children can use as a basis for their evaluation of the two artworks. For example, here are some candidates proposed by a group of fifth-graders at the Jackson Street Elementary School for why Emily's picture was good:

- good for a first grader, but not something I'd want to hang in my room or pay $1,000,000 for or anything
- lots of detail
- nice colors

As you'll see, getting such specific standards of artistic merit out on the table is helpful later in the discussion.

If the children haven't discussed Thor's ears, consider asking them why they think Emily gave Thor such long ears. The book actually has the answer: because he hears so well. But it might be worth asking them if they like paintings that are more realistic. Here, you could even bring in a realistic painting of a dog such as those to be found on William Secord's website, dogpainting.com, and have them discuss which painting they think is better. (If you do this, you could add a column to the matrix for Secord's picture.) This would allow them to enter into a critical discussion of the relative merits of two paintings of dogs, Emily's and Secord's.

Although the children may perceive the following question as irrelevant, I suggest that you now ask them what flavor of ice cream they like best. Once they have all had a chance to answer, you can ask them to explain why they like the one that they do and whether they think that they are right about what they think.

Introducing this topic is intended to provide a contrast to the question of evaluating artworks. You might know the famous saying, "there is no disputing taste." (For Latin fans: *De gustibus non est disputandum.*) The case of tastes, in which it seems evident that there is no objective basis for our claim to like one more than the other, is different from that of art. We don't just say we prefer one painting to another, but say that one is better.

The children are now ready to discuss this book's big idea: Do you think there is any difference between saying that you like chocolate ice cream better than vanilla and saying that Emily's painting is better than (or worse than) the realistic one by Secord? Since, as we have seen, philosophers disagree about the answer to this question, we can expect that the children may as well. Once again, as a facilitator you can play devil's advocate or, at least, try to draw each position out of the answers the children give.

The fifth-graders I just referred to did a great job of setting up the disagreement. One student said that he thought that there was no difference between the case of taste and the case of art: "When I say that Emily's painting is good, it's just like saying I like chocolate. The two cases are the same." In order to get the other position developed, the facilitator asked the fifth-graders, "When a judge judges works of art, how does she do it?," to which another student responded by saying that the judge can't just use her own preferences. "Otherwise," he continued, "people will just paint for the judge. If she likes windmills, then everyone will just paint windmills. A judge has to judge on the basis of features of the pictures, like their having detail or interesting colors. She can't just use her own taste."

* * *

One of the difficulties of leading a philosophical discussion among children that I already pointed out is being content when they reach what appears to be an unresolvable disagreement. So much teaching involves asking the children to come up with the *right* answer that it can be difficult to feel good about having a discussion that ends with the children disagreeing with one another.

It's important, however, to realize that this is what usually happens in professional philosophical discussions. Philosophers simply disagree about most of the fundamental questions they address. I've already pointed out that, although many philosophers think that there have to be objective criteria of artistic evaluation, others simply reject that notion as ill founded. In facilitating philosophy discussions, you have to get used to the idea that disagreement, if it is expressed respectfully and courteously, is a good thing, not a bad one.

Nonetheless, it is very important to make sure that the children realize that they have accomplished a lot even if they have not *solved* the problem that was raised and wind up disagreeing with one another. I have two suggestions about what you can do to make the children themselves realize that disagreement is simply part of the game of philosophy.

The first is to tell them that disagreeing is one of the things that philosophers do. (If I weren't so opposed to mentioning the names of famous

philosophers to elementary schoolchildren, I'd suggest that you tell them that Kant believed in objective standards of artistic evaluation but Hume did not.) But second, you should point out that what the children are now disagreeing about is a very sophisticated point that they have themselves reached by means of their very interesting discussion. It's important for them to realize that understanding an issue in a more sophisticated manner is at least as important as finding a resolution to it. It's always useful to point out to them how far the discussion has come, perhaps by giving some highlights in its development.

* * *

Emily's Art raises other philosophical questions that you should feel free to discuss as well, especially if the children are interested in them. An obvious one is what makes an action fair or just. The judge's awarding first prize to Kelly is a clear case of an unjust action, so it would be easy to initiate a discussion of fairness—one of the basic concepts of social and political philosophy—by means of this incident. (You may recall my discussion of this big idea with my son when he was in first grade.) Another feature of the story is the friendship between Emily and Kelly. Since the two are "best friends," you could initiate a discussion of what makes someone your best friend or, more generally, whether it is important to have friends. The concept of friendship has received attention from moral philosophers going all the way back to Plato and Aristotle, so it is an eminently suitable subject for a philosophical discussion. Letting the discussion go where the children want to take it is more important than making sure that they understand the issue about aesthetic evaluation.

EMILY'S ART, BY PETER CATALANOTTO

Questions for Philosophical Discussion

Topic: The Nature of Contests

In this story, Emily's school has an art contest and the students discuss different kinds of races.

1. Who has been in an art contest?
2. What other types of contests have you been in?
3. Does a contest always have to be a race?
4. Have any of you ever seen a science fair?
5. How is a winner decided in a running race? Science fair? Art contest?

6. Are there differences between a science fair and a foot race—even though both have a winner? If so, what are they?
7. Does the judging/winning differ between the two? If so, how?
8. Is one contest easier to judge than the other? If so, how?

Topic: What Is Art?

In this story, Emily's artwork was not chosen as the winner of the art contest.

1. What are some things that you think are art?
2. Does art have to be made by a human being?
3. What's the difference between a painting of a dog and a real dog? Can both be beautiful?
4. Does a painting of a beautiful dog have to be a beautiful painting? Why or why not?
5. What makes something a work of art?

Topic: Evaluating Art

In one of Emily's paintings, she has four mothers. She said it was because her mother is so busy in the morning.

1. What does Emily mean when she says this?
2. What is special about her paintings?
3. Because Emily's paintings don't look like the things that exist in real life, are her paintings not as good as other paintings? Why or why not?
4. Who should be able to determine whether a painting is good or not?
5. What happens if two people disagree on whether or not a piece of artwork is good?

Topic: Art Expertise

In order for a winner to be chosen in the art contest, there has to be a judge. The judge in Emily's Art *is the principal's mother. The judge explains that she is qualified to be the judge of the contest because her cousin is married to an artist.*

1. Does being the principal's mother make someone a good judge? Why or why not?
2. Does having a nephew who is an artist make someone qualified to judge an art contest? Why or why not?

3. Should there be a special person to be the judge of an art contest?
4. How should the judge choose which painting is the best?
5. Does the painting that wins the contest have to be realistic or beautiful?

Topic: Art Interpretation

The judge loved Emily's picture when she thought it was a rabbit, but when Emily's teacher told the judge it was a dog, she changed her mind and chose another picture.

1. Why does the judge change her mind and choose another picture?
2. Is this how a picture should be judged?
3. Should it matter that the judge viewed Emily's painting as one thing and Emily had something else in mind?
4. Is it possible to know what an artist was thinking when he painted a picture?

Topic: The Nature of Feelings

Emily goes to the nurse when she's not feeling well. The nurse asks her what's wrong.

1. Does Emily's heart literally hurt? If not, what does Emily mean when she says that she had hurt her heart?
2. Have you ever had your heart hurt?
3. Why does Emily's heart hurt?
4. How is hurting your heart different from hurting your arm or leg?
5. Is the healing process different for each type of hurt/pain?

Topic: The Nature of Friendship

Emily and Kelly are best friends.

1. Is it important to have a best friend?
2. What makes someone your *best* friend?
3. Do you think life would be hard without friends? Why or why not?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Have the students make a painting that expresses their feelings about something.

MORE PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT AESTHETICS

- *Ish* by Peter Reynolds
- *Matthew's Dream* by Leo Lionni
- *Crocodile's Masterpiece* by Max Velthuijs

NOTE

1. You may think that it's not smart to have a first-grade art contest. In this chapter, I don't go into that issue. It could, however, make an interesting topic for a philosophy discussion in its own right. For example, why might people think that an art contest is inappropriate but sports events with winners and losers are not? Discussing this would lead to an interesting conversation about competition.

Part IV

IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Eighteen

A Sample Discussion of *The Giving Tree*

We've now gone through the rationale for doing philosophy with young children, the basic method for facilitating philosophy discussions, and a series of picture books that introduce children to most of the central areas of philosophy. Together, these constitute the basic materials that you will need to use to start introducing philosophy discussions into your classroom or, indeed, home.

Still, something may be missing. You may be wondering what an actual philosophy discussion looks like.

In order to meet that need, this chapter is a record of a discussion that took place at the Island Bay School on June 19, 2013, at a Parent Evening. The Parent Evening was planned as a way of showing the children's parents what was taking place during the philosophy sessions at the school. The ten children who took part were members of a philosophy discussion group for the children in the Upper School. They were all around ten years old, and most had had a little exposure to philosophy before this discussion took place, but not a great deal. Sondra Bacharach and I facilitated the discussion.

The book we discussed was *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (see chapter 13 for a discussion of the philosophical issues raised by the book). After reading the book aloud, I proceeded to ask the children to fill in the story matrix for this book. For each of the stages of the boy's life—beginning as a young child and ending as an old man—we asked the kids to answer the following two questions: "What did the tree give the boy?" and "Did this make the tree happy?" All we were doing was getting the basic elements of the plot into the matrix.

We moved on to more philosophical territory with the question, "Do you think that what the boy did was morally all right or not?" Thinking about what the boy did as a young child, everyone was in agreement that what he

did was fine. Elizabeth actually presented a brief argument to support this view: "Yes, because it's not harming anyone." Alex supplemented Elizabeth's claim: "It's okay because the boy's playing on the tree makes them both happy." "It fulfills both their needs," Justin added. It's worth noting that the children were implicitly endorsing different accounts of what makes an action morally permissible: no one is harmed, both parties benefit, both of their needs are fulfilled. Noting this in the story matrix gives you a resource to return to later, should you want to.

I was surprised that disagreement already began when we turned to the second stage. That's when the boy takes the tree's apples in order to get money to spend on his girlfriend. "He doesn't care about the tree," said Trevor. "He just wants to get money." "That's right," chimed in Amy. "He's just thinking about himself. He's selfish." "I disagree with Trevor and Amy," responded Abraham. "The tree doesn't need the apples and, anyway, they'll just fall off. She doesn't mind it, so it's fine for the boy to do it."

Again, the children make reference to some underlying moral principles. Trevor and Amy suggest that a moral action must take into account the interests of both parties to an interaction. Only thinking of yourself is selfish, they say. But Abraham's response suggests that it's all right to appropriate resources that are renewable and perishable.

Given what they have said so far, it's no surprise that the tree's gift of his branches created more controversy in our discussion. More of the children were upset by what happened to the tree at this stage. "It's not okay," said Lucy. "He doesn't visit the tree anymore, so she's expecting that he'll come if she gives him the branches." "But he needs a house," countered William. "And the tree didn't make a fuss." "Yeah," added Steven. "It's the tree's decision, and she says, 'yes.'"

At this stage, the children are more or less reiterating claims about the morality of actions that had already previously been articulated. The interesting addition is about the idea of consent. Steven's claim that the tree consented to what happened to her references that important notion in ethical as well as political theory. It's also worth noting that Lucy's point about the tree's expectation could be taken to imply that the tree's consent was achieved only by the boy's deception.

Once the boy who had now become a man took the tree's trunk, disagreement blossomed. "There's almost nothing left of the tree," Sandy exclaimed, "and that makes it wrong. And the tree's not happy. It's not okay." "But the tree agreed to it," said Adam, "so it's okay. She could have said no." "That doesn't matter," said Lucy, "he's using the tree and that's wrong."

Sandy's introduction of the view that using someone or something else for your own purposes is wrong marks an important addition to the discussion. In fact, it resembles Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) famous claim that moral-

ity prohibits us from using others exclusively as means rather than treating them as ends.

I was very pleased with the discussion to this point, though not surprised. I had worked with two of the children the previous year when I was in Wellington for five months, and I had been really impressed with their philosophical ability. In a sort of crash course, I had met with all the children each of the previous two days, and all of them, even the ones who had not done philosophy previously, impressed me with their interest and persistence in discussing philosophical issues.

It was with a little bit of trepidation that I told them that I was very interested in everything that they had said, but that I now wanted to pose a more difficult question. "In philosophy," I said, "it's important to say what you think and why. But you also have to think about whether your reasons hold good in all circumstances. So I'd like you to look at the reasons you've given for saying either that what the boy took was fine or what the boy took was wrong, and see if you accept those answers as general principles."

My worry was groundless. The children rose to the challenge. As you might expect, Lesley was the first out of the gate: "When both people agree to something, then it's fine." This is a good place for the discussion to begin, I thought, for they are saying that, if two people agree to take part in an interaction, then it's a fair interaction. This is the sort of principle that economists often use to justify unequal distributions of goods. So long as the parties engage in the interactions freely, there are no grounds on which to criticize them.

"But what about being selfish," Amy asked. "It's not right to do what's selfish even if the other person agrees." Amy's point made a nice addition to the discussion, for it suggested that the morality of an action had to do with a person's motivation for doing it more than the type of action it was. If you only considered your own welfare—and you were selfish—then that meant that your action was wrong, for that's not the sort of motivation that is a moral one. A moral person needs to consider how his or her actions will affect others and be motivated by a concern for them, not just himself or herself.

Unlike me, Sandy was not impressed. "That's not right," he countered. "If you really need something, then it's okay to be selfish." "Yeah," said Albert. "If you absolutely need something then you can be selfish." "But not if you just want it," Adam added.

Although a number of the children were attracted to this principle, it's not one that can withstand critical scrutiny, although ethicists do discuss situations involving real need to get us to question our moral beliefs. So if a father steals a drug that he can't afford but his son needs to stay alive, should he be punished? We find ourselves torn about cases like this, although we wouldn't think that stealing something to satisfy a need is all right unless the person were in really dire circumstances.

It would have been nice to have the opportunity to follow up on Sandy's suggestion, but the discussion took another turn. Lesley reiterated a version of her earlier view: "It's okay to take whatever you need as long as it makes the other person happy." This principle can be interpreted in a number of different ways. On the one hand, you could say that it legitimates any action that the person affected by the action consents to. On the other hand, the children might have been supporting a stronger requirement for an action being a moral one; namely, that it increases the other's welfare or happiness.

At this point, we began a discussion of the merits and defects of the first principle: that if you really need something, it's not selfish to take it. A first question that my cofacilitator, Sondra, asked was what we mean by selfish. Amy said it was doing something and thinking only about yourself. This seemed to satisfy everyone, so we moved on.

Rachel claimed, "It's not selfish if the thing you take can grow back." According to this, of course, taking the apples from the tree would be fine, but not the trunk and maybe not even the branches. The children were here moving toward a distinction between renewable and nonrenewable resources and stating that there was a moral difference depending on which of these one took. And Lesley's addition made it clear that this is what they were driving at: "It is too selfish if the thing is destroyed by your taking of it."

Unfortunately, at this point, even though our discussion had only gone on for thirty minutes, we had to bring the discussion to an end. It was a weekday evening, and the children had school the next day. So I asked the children to make a comment on the discussion, and we then had a "go-round." I should mention that both Sondra and I made comments during it, a practice that I endorse and always follow. Only one girl refused to make a comment and that was perhaps because her parents had made her take part in the class. All the others chimed in freely, and it gave the evening a nice finish to have each of them comment on the issue we were discussing.

I found this discussion really satisfying. It moved from a very good conversation about *The Giving Tree* in which the children had disagreed about the morality of the boy's actions in taking various things from the tree to a more abstract discussion in which they had put forward different moral principles. Not only did they state two opposing principles for justifying actions but also they suggested modifications of those principles to take account of issues that they had seen arise during the earlier part of our discussion.

In chapter 7, I mentioned the stages of a successful philosophy discussion. The discussion I have just reproduced is an excellent example of what I described as the initial philosophical discussion as well as the discussion of Big Ideas. At the initial stage, as you saw, the focus was on thinking about the actions portrayed in the book—the boy's taking of various things from

the tree. But at the Big Ideas stage, we moved away from the specifics of the book and discussed the question of when it was moral to take something from someone else.

If you feel as if the discussion was left hanging, you are right about that. But that is a virtue of a philosophy discussion like this. It means that there are ideas left hanging that can be picked up for further examination at another time.

Here, for example, a number of topics suggest themselves:

- What makes an action selfish? Although the children had suggested that it was only thinking of yourself, they had also suggested modifications of that view by denying that taking something you absolutely needed was selfish. And, as I suggested, this could itself lead into an interesting discussion that might include, for example, the question of whether it was ever all right to be selfish.
- The children had also adumbrated the distinction between renewable and nonrenewable resources. Although it would take a science lesson to explain that distinction, a philosophy discussion could investigate whether society ought to adopt the principle put forward by the children: that it's only okay to take renewable resources from nature.
- Finally, there is the idea that, if both parties agree to someone taking something, it's morally permissible. If we generalize to the notion of an exchange, then we get the basic principle of neoclassical economics: If both parties to an exchange agree to it, then it is morally permissible. The children had already suggested some reservations about this principle, and it would be interesting to move with them into a discussion of the economy and what sorts of exchanges were legitimate and what not.

One of the rewarding things about introducing philosophy into elementary schools is seeing how engaged children can be in discussions of abstract issues. Using a picture book is a great way to motivate their involvement. And, as I hope this record has shown you, children are able to discuss issues that surprise people not used to discussing philosophical questions with them.

I also hope that this record of a discussion lets you see one example of how to move from a discussion focused on a book to one about the Big Ideas that are the real essence of philosophy. I chose this discussion not only because it was such a good one but also because I did not use a concept map to get to the Big Ideas, choosing instead to follow the lead of the children in their comments on the boy's actions.

I hope this discussion record inspires you to try facilitating an elementary school philosophy discussion. With a willing teacher and a bunch of excited kids, the sky really can be the limit.

Chapter Nineteen

Conclusion

One day, my three-and-a-half-year-old son, Jake, had finished watching a video. I decided that he had watched enough for now, and I told him he couldn't watch another one. As a young philosophy student, he responded the way kids and philosophers do: "Why?" I told him that two videos were too much. He thought about this for a while, puzzled. After a moment, he looked at his hand and held up two fingers. "Daddy," he asked, "are these too many fingers?" "No," I replied. "Then two videos are not too many videos," he asserted. I was so surprised at a three-year-old child's ability to make this analogical argument, unsound as it was (see chapter 15 for a discussion of the fallacy involved), that I let him watch another video.

I mention this story for two reasons. First, I think it demonstrates yet again that children are natural-born philosophers, interested in discovering the power of rational thought and eager to use it in many aspects of their lives. But I also think it shows what can happen to children when we allow them to be the free and independent thinkers they aspire to be: They can use the skills we have fostered in them in ways that we may not always find suit our own adult agendas. If we really want to give our children the freedom they want and deserve, including the freedom to pursue their philosophical interests and to develop their argumentative skills, then we have to accept the consequences—young children who are more assertive, more intellectually independent, and less pliable than their teachers and parents have traditionally taken their children to be.

Although this may be a scary prospect to some people, it should not be. The philosophically sophisticated children who come out of my Teaching Children Philosophy program may require us to give them reasons for what we want them to do more often than other kids do, but if we step back and think about what this means, we should be extremely gratified, for their very orneriness is exactly what we want to foster. Among other factors, my interest

in introducing young children to philosophy is founded on the belief that doing so will nurture their inquisitiveness and help them develop independence of thought. The success of this attempt will result, in part, in our finding ourselves confronting children who are less compliant, less willing to simply do as they are told, and who want to know more often why they should be doing what we are asking or telling them to.

I want to emphasize that I believe this to be a genuinely good result, annoying as we all may find it at times. If we only had a nation of adults who once had been philosophically sophisticated children, what a difference it could make! Think about what the world would be like if all adults had a solid background in philosophy from their elementary educations! For one thing, "politics as usual" would really have to change, for citizens would no longer put up with the rationalizations they keep getting asked to accept. Our workspaces would also change, for workers would be ready to engage in dialogue with their supervisors about the structure of their jobs. And advertisers would have to reckon with a more critical and demanding public. It's hard to know where this would end, how far-reaching the impact of widespread philosophical educations would be!

So as you decide to take even some tentative steps at initiating philosophical discussions among children, realize that you are part of a worldwide social movement that could have dramatic impact on human life on this planet. As each of us does what he or she can to foster philosophically sophisticated young people, we are working toward the broader goal of not only giving each young person the chance to develop an important natural interest they have but also helping to develop a more reasonable society and world.

* * *

I hope that this book is only the first step in your ongoing engagement with teaching children philosophy. I have focused on providing you with a step-by-step guide for beginning to discuss philosophy with young children. Many of the specific features of what I have suggested are intended to make engaging in philosophical discussions with young children something that would not be difficult to do, even if you have little or no philosophy background. For this reason, I have advocated using a pretty standard methodology with a number of specific steps to it.

Once you become comfortable talking with children about the philosophical issues that they find interesting, you can, to use Wittgenstein's (1953) famous metaphor, throw the ladder away. That is, once you've been helping children discuss what makes something the right thing to do or how they know that they are not dreaming now, you will find that you can engage them in philosophical discussions based on children's books without necessarily having to go through all of the specific steps I have described in this book.

Just as children are natural-born philosophers, we all have it in us to become skilled facilitators of philosophical discussions.

If you become interested in developing your talents as an elementary school philosophy facilitator, you will need to learn more philosophy than I have explained in this book. Even though I maintain that you can *begin* to facilitate such discussions without a background in philosophy, people who commit themselves to being facilitators find that they *want* to fill in the gaps in their philosophical educations because they realize this will help them be more perceptive as they listen to children's comments.

I recently published a book that attempts to provide the more comprehensive introduction to philosophy you may find yourself wanting. It's called *A Sneetch Is a Sneetch and Other Philosophical Discoveries: Finding Wisdom in Children's Literature* (2013), and it introduces philosophy using children's picture books. You will find it listed along with a number of other useful resources in the appendix immediately following this chapter.

* * *

You'll recall that I began this book with what might have seemed like an outlandish claim: that children are natural-born philosophers. By now, I hope you're convinced that it is not an exaggeration at all. And if you've tried using what you've found in this book to actually initiate philosophical discussions with young children, I'm certain you'll agree with me. In fact, I expect that it's seeing what children can do when given the opportunity to take part in a philosophy discussion that's more effective than any argument I can muster to convince you of their interest and ability. Seeing is believing, as the saying goes, and nothing surpasses the amazement you'll experience when you actually witness a child making an insightful philosophical claim. As I also mentioned at the outset, it was my actual experience with children—including my own son—that convinced me that they deserve to have the opportunity to discuss philosophy in their classrooms.

If you use this book to help bring philosophy to the lives of elementary schoolchildren, you will be doing them—and our society—a big favor. You also will be opening yourself up to what I believe is one of the most wonderful experiences possible, for children will continually startle you with the novelty of their insights and the enthusiasm of their engagement. For me, one of the greatest benefits I have received from working with children is the rediscovery of the joy that characterized my first encounter with philosophy, that ancient form of reflection on the nature of what it is to be a human being on this strange, funny, and frustrating globe on which we find ourselves. I hope that you will find yourself having similar experiences as you embrace the project of teaching children philosophy!

Appendix

Suggestions for Further Investigation

The appendix contains a variety of different suggestions for continuing your investigations into discussing philosophy with children. It includes books, articles, and websites that I have found useful in my own work with kids.

To aid others' attempts to discuss philosophy with children, I have developed a website that I urge you to look at: www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org. The website has two parts. The first part contains *book modules* for a wide range of children's books. You'll recognize a book module as having a similar structure to the chapters of this book that focused on individual books and specific philosophical topics. Along with a short summary of the children's book, the modules have both a short introduction to the philosophical issues raised by the book and a set of questions to use to initiate philosophical discussions among young children.

Undergraduates in my Philosophy for Children course have developed most of the book modules on the site. Every year, I ask each of them to choose a children's book that they think is philosophically interesting and to develop a module that they will put up on my website. The list of books we have available for you continues to grow each year.

We have made the site as user friendly as we can. In addition to a listing of the books in alphabetical order, we have grouped them by philosophical field (such as ethics or metaphysics) as well as by more specific subjects (such as bravery or essentialism). I hope that you will take advantage of the site and use the materials it contains to teach an even wider range to topics than I have been able to include in this book.

You'll even find some book modules for chapter books on the website. Children in the upper elementary grades are able to read these books by themselves, so you can continue to have philosophical discussions with older children by using them. I have been able to structure lessons around short

chapter books such as *The Real Thief* (Steig 1973) with children as young as second grade. This requires integrating philosophy time into the curriculum on a more frequent basis since the books take longer to read and understand. But once again, doing philosophy is a great way to meet the Common Core Standards for language arts.

In addition to the book modules, the website contains almost all the materials I use in teaching my course. I have put them there so that anyone who is interested in teaching a similar course can freely borrow from what I have developed. When I set out to develop this course, I was unable to find any models to use in creating it. I have placed the material on the website to encourage others to develop similar courses. I have been heartened to learn that various such programs have been created. You can see them listed as Associated Programs on the site.

Recent years have seen the publication of a number of excellent books for introducing philosophy to children. They use a variety of different strategies to do so. They will be a big help to you if you want to design your own way of discussing philosophy with children.

- *Philosophy in Schools: An Introduction for Philosophers and Teachers* (2013), an anthology I coedited with Sara Goering and Nicholas Shudak, has many interesting chapters discussing how to do philosophy with children.
- *Philosophy and Education* (2012), edited by Jana Mohr Lone and Roberta Israeloff, is another anthology with excellent advice about how to teach children philosophy.
- David Shapiro's *Plato Was Wrong!: Footnotes on Doing Philosophy with Children* (2012) has lots of activities that can be used to introduce philosophy to children.
- Jana Mohr Lone's *The Philosophical Child* (2012) explores how the author has introduced children to philosophy.
- David Kennedy's *The Well of Being: Childhood, Subjectivity, and Education* (2006) is a theoretical brief for doing philosophy with children.
- Matthew Lipman wrote many books both for and about doing philosophy with children. His most comprehensive statement is *Thinking in Education* (2003).
- Gareth Matthews wrote three books about philosophy for children. All of them are useful. *Philosophy and the Young Child* (1980) explores the ability of young children to discuss philosophical ideas. *Dialogues with Children* (1984) is a record of a number of conversations that Matthews had with children at St. Mary's Music School in Edinburgh, Scotland. It vividly demonstrates children's ability to discuss philosophy. *The Philosophy of Childhood* (1994) is a more theoretical work that examines many of our unfounded assumptions about children.

- *Teaching Thinking*, by Robert Fisher (2008), has both a theoretical brief for introducing philosophy into elementary schools and a lot of practical advice.
- *The "If" Machine* by Peter Worley (2011) contains detailed instructions on how to introduce children to many of the classical thought experiments in the Western tradition.

It is hard to find an introduction to philosophy that is really useful for developing a more substantive knowledge of the field. That's why I wrote *A Sneetch Is a Sneetch and Other Philosophical Discoveries: Finding Wisdom in Children's Literature* (2013). It introduces the main fields of philosophy through discussions of sixteen children's picture books. I hope you'll find it to be a great way for you to get a better sense of the entire field of philosophy.

- Another introduction to philosophy is *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter* by Donald Palmer (1994). It focuses more on the history of philosophy but gives a clear account of the views of the major philosophers.
- A very good, short introductory text is Thomas Nagel's *What Does It All Mean?* (1987).
- The online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu) has in-depth articles on most philosophical topics. It is a refereed online resource, so it is trustworthy. However, the articles are often quite difficult because they are addressed to professional philosophers.
- There is a radio show run by two professional philosophers from Stanford called *Philosophy Talk*. They interview guests on a wide range of philosophical issues. Their website allows you to listen to any of their previous programs: www.philosophytalk.org. My students have found this to be a good way to begin their introduction to various areas of philosophy.
- A novel that is a very popular introduction to the history of philosophy is Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (1991).

Here is a list of websites that can be helpful to you. Be warned, however, that websites are ephemeral creatures: They come and go quickly, often with no warning and leaving no trace. All I can say is that all of these were alive and kicking when I finished writing this book.

- The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC): cehs.montclair.edu/academic/iapc/
  This is the place where it all began. Founded in 1974 by Matthew Lipman, the IAPC focuses on teacher training as well as coordinating philosophy for children worldwide.

- The International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children (ICPIC): www.icpic.org
  ICPIC aims to strengthen communications among those in different parts of the world who are engaged in philosophical inquiry with children. The website includes links to many other sites.
- Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children: philosophyforchildren.org
  There are a variety of resources on this site that are useful in developing philosophy lessons. The center also offers a variety of different activities for those interested in teaching philosophy to young people.
- UK Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education: sapere.org.uk
  This site has a guide to philosophy for children activities in the United Kingdom.
- Philosophy for Children—New Zealand: p4c.org.nz/
  This website has a guide for introducing philosophy into the curriculum with focus on New Zealand and includes a listing of events and training.
- Philosophy @ Island Bay: https://sites.google.com/site/philosophyislandbay/ and Thinking Stories: https://sites.google.com/site/thinkingstories/
  These are two sites I have developed in different contexts that contain more book modules to use for introducing children to philosophy.
- Philosophy for Kids: University of Massachusetts: www.philosophyforkids.com
  This website, developed by the late Gareth B. Matthews, focuses on allowing children to do philosophy by finishing or beginning stories that they are philosophically interested in.
- Wondering Aloud: philosophyforchildren.blogspot.com/
  This is a blog focusing on philosophy for children developed by Jana Mohr Lone, director of the Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children.
- Kids Philosophy Slam: www.philosophyslam.org
  This site presents contests on specific areas that children can enter to test their philosophical skills.
- VisioNaivity (Denmark): home12.inet.tele.dk/fil
  This website is a hub of Philosophy for Children resources, including information on different philosophers and philosophical stories.
- Philosopher's Island: Middleton Cheney Primary School: www.portables2.ngfl.gov.uk/pmpercival/philosophy
  This site allows you to enter a narrative in which you have to develop your own philosophical responses to the situation depicted.
- Philosophy & The Enquiring Child: www.creative-corner.co.uk/schools/tuckswood_archive/Philosophy/index.html
  This site is one school's attempt to provide a broad array of philosophical activities available for young children.

- Philosophy by Topic: users.ox.ac.uk/~worc0337/phil_topics.html#children
  This web page contains a list of resources grouped by region; it is part of a larger site.
- Help! My Child Is a Philosopher, a website developed and maintained by Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek and Peter Singer. http://www.mychildisaphilosopher.com/
  Be warned that anything you post on the site becomes their property.
- Philosophical Horizons: http://www.memphis.edu/philosophy/philhorizons.php
  A precollege program at the University of Memphis.
- The Philosophy Shop: http://www.thephilosophyshop.co.uk/Home.html
  Another UK organization that certifies practitioners.

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