

THINK ABOUT IT

So, you want to set up a philosophy club in your school, but don't know where to start? Peter Worley has all the advice you need...

The First Rule...

The first rule of 'Phi Club' is: they must not know that it is a philosophy club. I don't mean by this that you shouldn't mention 'philosophy', or include the word in the name of your group, but it must not feel like 'just an extra lesson where we think really hard'. Sneak the hard thinking up on your members and sandwich it between thinking games/warm-up activities, especially on arrival (so students look forward to coming) and as a finale (so they leave feeling positive about next week).

For some game ideas see Robert Fisher's Games For Thinking and/or become a member of The Philosophy Foundation (TPF) website (philosophy-foundation.org), which has games aimed at developing different aspects of thinking. Collections of logical and lateral puzzles and problems make good warm up exercises, especially if people are arriving to your club in dribs and drabs; Lagoon Books publish a variety of different puzzle books of this kind.

The room

You will need to find an appropriate space in the school for your philosophy club. It should be spacious but not too echoey; it should also be reasonably free of outside noise and any distractions should be minimal. There should be just enough chairs for everyone to sit on, arranged into a horseshoe shape so that everyone can see each other, the facilitator, and the board if necessary. Move tables to one side to provide a good 'space for thinking' and to allow room for any activities or games you may want to include.

The facilitator/chair

There should be someone whose job it is to facilitate or chair the discussion. This person could be a teacher but it may also be a member of the group, particularly if the students are of GCSE or A level age. The key thing to bear in mind is that the role of the chair is not to be involved in the discussion, but to allow the group to enter into a philosophical enquiry so that there is order and relevance to the contributions. For a much more detailed description of facilitation techniques see *The If Machine* (additional resources).

The rules

Do not begin without establishing some basic rules of

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE PHILOSOPHY SHOP, BY THE PHILOSOPHY FOUNDATION (EDITED BY PETER WORLEY) – PACKED WITH HUNDREDS OF STARTING STIMULI FOR DOING PHILOSOPHY.

THOUGHTINGS (PETER WORLEY AND ANDREW DAY) – A COLLECTION OF PHILOSOPHICALLY INSPIRED, ORIGINAL POEMS FOR PRIMARY AND EARLY SECONDARY SCHOOL. THERE ARE ALSO FREE THOUGHTINGS AVAILABLE FROM THE PHILOSOPHY FOUNDATION WEBSITE.

THE IF MACHINE: PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY IN THE CLASSROOM (PETER WORLEY) – 25 PHILOSOPHY SESSIONS WITH 'THE PHIE METHOD' OF DOING PHILOSOPHY WITH CHILDREN HELPFULLY EXPLAINED.

THE IF ODYSSEY (PETER WORLEY) – A SERIES OF PHILOSOPHY LESSON PLANS CONNECTED BY THE STORY OF HOMER'S ODYSSEY WITH ONLINE SUPPLEMENTS.

THE LITTLE BOOK OF THINKS (IAN GILBERT)

PLATO WAS WRONG! (DAVID SHAPIRO)

PHILOSOPHY FOR TEENS AND MORE PHILOSOPHY FOR TEENS (KAYE AND THOMSON)

PHILOSOPHY: THE BASIC READINGS (NIGEL WARBURTON)

THE PHILOSOPHY GYM (BY STEPHEN LAW)

conduct. You may decide to agree on a set of rules that the group draws up. Alternatively, here is a suggested list (I use these rules with Year 1 children and PhD philosophy students – some of the latter have adopted 'the rules' for their postgraduate research seminars!):

The Ball Rule: this is where a ball is used to visually indicate whose turn it is to speak. If you have it then it is your opportunity to speak if you have something to say but otherwise you should remain silent except during 'talk time' (see below). The chair passes the ball balancing two over-arching aims: fairness and inclusion with dialectical demands (see 'a method of enquiry', below).

The Listening Rule: this states that when not talking you should be listening in order to understand what it is the speaker is trying to say. (Can the group say identify the difference between 'listening' and 'hearing'?)

The Hands Up / Hands Down Rule: this rule asks for 'hands up' when someone wants to say something, but that hands must be put down again when someone starts to speak.

The Respect Rule: this requires that the members of the group display appropriate behaviour and the right attitude towards each other (no rudeness). Make sure that you remind students that though they should be respectful they



'what is the fair way to distribute wealth?' requires that you answer the question 'What is fair?') Sometimes the group will simply identify an area of enquiry that interests them more. However, the chair should try not to let the discussion move off track too much. There may be more than one new question during a discussion but it's a good idea not to have too many and one should always return to the main question at the end.

6 Concluding comments from the group – the chair must refrain from providing his or her own conclusions. This is a chance for the group members

to say whether they have come to any conclusions or, if not, then to say what ideas – and whose they were – interested them the most, or whether anything in the discussion got them to change their mind, and why.

7 End with a light-hearted game or fun activity.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PETER WORLEY LEADS THE PHILOSOPHY FOUNDATION IN ITS MISSION TO TRANSFORM THINKING IN EDUCATION. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF BOOKS SUCH AS THOUGHTINGS, THE IF MACHINE, AND THE IF ODYSSEY, WHICH ARE AIMED AT BRINGING PHILOSOPHY TO SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES. PHILOSOPHY-FOUNDATION.ORG

A method of enquiry

The procedure above does not describe any method for conducting an enquiry. This is an important point because the enquiry is at the heart of any attempt to philosophise. Methods for conducting or participating in a philosophical enquiry can be very involved, but here are some key features that, in my view, should be included (adapted from the ideas of Professor M.M. McCabe):

- A philosophical dialogue should be to some extent logical – ideas should be presented as clearly as possible making use of arguments (in the formal sense) to present and support a position; group members should be ready to change their mind in light of good reasons from others. And the problem being looked at should demand the possibility of resolution.

- Philosophical dialogues should have a creative component in that they require those involved to think up scenarios to illustrate a claim or to refute another, but they also make the demand that the thinker think outside their usual way of thinking and possibly even as if they were someone else.

- Philosophical dialogues should be sequential – ideas should follow each other in some kind of order that acknowledges previous contributions in some way.

- Philosophical dialogues should begin with a sense of puzzlement following the recognition of some kind of problem or tension. A dialogue unfolds as the group then attempts to solve or resolve the problem they have identified.

- Anyone involved in a philosophical dialogue should have some kind of overview: they should have one eye on what they are saying, their own ideas and arguments, and another eye on the discussion as a whole.

JUST BECAUSE...

PERHAPS YOU THINK YOU DON'T WANT TO SET UP A PHILOSOPHY CLUB; BUT HERE ARE JUST A FEW REASONS WHY ACTUALLY, YOU DO:

- + Sustained philosophy classes have been shown to improve IQ by an average of 6.5 points (*Trickey and Topping 2007*).
- + It allows children to develop their higher-order thinking skills (See Bloom's Taxonomy).
- + It nurtures a structured approach to problem solving through logical, sequential conversation (known as dialectic).
- + It helps students improve their speaking and listening skills, and decades of research has shown how the development of these skills helps across all curriculum subjects.
- + UNESCO published a study looking at the benefits of teaching philosophy, concluding 'we consider the teaching of philosophy to be necessary and something to be reckoned with.'
- + Done well, it's extremely good fun, for you and your students alike!

are still welcome to disagree with each other if they think there are good reasons to do so.

The procedure

1 Once your introductions (rules etc.) and/or games are finished then begin by presenting a stimulus of some kind. This can be anything from a photograph or poem to a short story or even an essay/work (or extract from one) by a philosopher. See 'additional resources' for potential sources.

2 Ask a question – either there will be a question in the book that is being used or the group/facilitator will need to formulate one.

3 Talk Time – this is a chance for the group to talk in pairs or small groups about the question without having to wait their turn. This is usually no more than 2 minutes.

4 Enquiry – this is the discussion that is held by the entire group. A chair or facilitator is needed for this. Allow people to respond to each other and try to develop a sequential, step-by-step discussion based on questions, objections and replies.

5 Repeat steps 2-4 with a new question – this could be something deeper/more fundamental ('what is existence anyway?') or a question that needs to be asked in order to address the main question more successfully (e.g.