Is it alright to steal if it makes you feel good?

This resource will introduce young students to the philosophical skills of inquiry and reasoning. It suggests carefully structured activities and discussion around the story ‘Miss Lily’s Fabulous Pink Feather Boa’ by Margaret Wild and Kerry Argent. The activities are reproduced from the book Philosophy with young children — a classroom handbook written by Philip Cam, Liz Fynes-Clinton, Kathlyn Harrison, Lynne Hinton, Rosie Scholl and Simon Vaseo, published by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association in 2007. The book explores 12 favourite children’s stories.

Background

Philosophy with young children — a classroom handbook provides both an explanation of the foundations of philosophical inquiry, and a practical guide to developing the key skills of inquiry and reasoning through discussion of 12 favourite children’s stories. As stated in the introduction, the inspiration for doing philosophy with children is John Dewey’s belief that the fostering of thinking, rather than the transmission of knowledge, is central to school education. He believed in inquiry as the best method of learning to think, with disciplined discussion being central to it.

The chapter highlighted in this resource focuses on ‘Miss Lily’s Fabulous Pink Feather Boa’ by Margaret Wild and Kerry Argent. This wonderful story is about the Last Potoroo (who ended up not being the last one after all!) and how she stole some feathers from Miss Lily’s feather boa — because it made her feel good. This story gets to the core of ethics — courage, trust, fear, acceptance, kindness and confidence.

Order a copy of Philosophy with young children — a classroom handbook online at ACSA.
Learning outcomes
Using the story ‘Miss Lily’s Fabulous Pink Feather Boa’, students will:
• develop a greater understanding of ethics
• explore the concepts of ‘stealing’ and ‘forming the wrong idea’
• challenge their thinking to uncover assumptions
• analyse their thinking and articulate reasons behind their conclusions
• share their ideas with the class.

Reference
Ask three questions

After reading the story ‘Miss Lily’s Fabulous Pink Feather Boa’ by Margaret Wild and Kerry Argent to the class, use this activity to encourage students to focus on the philosophical themes of the story and to ask good inquiry questions.

Teacher asks questions such as:

1. ‘What were you thinking about while you were listening to that story?’
   (e.g. ‘That the crocodile was going to eat the potoroo.’)

2. ‘What things did you like about, or agree with, in the story?’
   (e.g. ‘When they were having tea together.’)

3. ‘What things did you not like, or disagree with, in the story?’
   (e.g. ‘When the potoroo stole a bit of the boa — you shouldn’t steal.’)

4. As the teacher writes up the children’s responses, she should underline the words used by the children that would be suitable to ask a question about.
   (e.g. stole, friends, being scared)

5. The teacher then suggests that the children try to ask a ‘big’ question about those things they were thinking about during the reading of the story. She could refer them to the underlined words. She might say: ‘From all those things you were thinking about in the story, could you ask a big question about experiences people might have that are the same as the characters?’

   e.g. Why do people have to steal things?
       What is stealing?
       Should you tell someone when you have stolen something?
       How do you know when someone is nice or not nice?
Focus theme: Stealing

What constitutes stealing is one of those things that everyone, including young children, has a view about. Yet it is not as simple as it first seems. The following activities ask children to explore stealing more thoroughly.

Discussion plan
1. Why did the Potoroo snip a little piece off the boa?
2. Is it alright to steal if it makes you feel good?
3. Is it alright to steal something from someone if they wouldn’t mind that you stole it?
4. Is it alright to steal if the other person will never find out?
5. If you steal only a little piece of something does that make it alright?
6. Is it alright to steal from people who have more than you?

Concept development activity
Use this Traffic Light activity to further explore ‘stealing’. It is a good starter exercise with young children’s exploration of concepts, because it deals with what falls under the concept and what does not — conceptual opposition. It is designed to enable students to explore the meaning of key concepts by thinking categorically.

Materials:
• three hoops; red, yellow or orange, and green
• several cards, approx 10 x 25 cm each

Procedure:
1. Position the three hoops in the same order as traffic lights.
2. A card labelled with the concept being explored (‘stealing’) should be placed in the green hoop. Cards need to be boldly written so that they are easily read by all members of the community of inquiry.
3. A card labelled ‘NOT stealing’ should be placed in the red hoop.
4. A card labelled ‘?’ should be placed in the yellow hoop.
5. Students (in groups or pairs) are given one of the following: cards with pictures, or cards with the following scenarios:
   • You haven’t got a pencil and the person next to you has six. You take one of theirs when they are not looking.
   • The person sitting next to you at lunch has finished eating and gone to play. They have left lots of food in their lunchbox. You are still hungry so you eat some of their leftover food.
   • You find a dog down the road and encourage it to come home with you so you can look after it.
   • Your friend has done a drawing that you really like. You do one exactly the same.
   • You keep a hat that you found in the playground because you think it is yours, but it is not.

Whether you use pictures or words will depend on the age and experience of your students.
6. Students are asked to discuss which hoop they would place their card or object in, and to give reasons for their decision. When they are unable to decide the card should be placed into the ‘?’ category, indicating that they are contestable and require further discussion. These are the ones that should lead to depth within the philosophical discussion. The same card may be given to a number of groups thus allowing for alternative viewpoints to be explored.

7. The children, one group at a time, should read or show their card to the class, say in which hoop they believe it should be placed, give the reasons for their choice, and then place their card.

8. When all cards have been placed the students are then asked to consider the placements and decide whether they agree or disagree with them. If there is disagreement about a placement it needs to be discussed reasonably and respectfully. At this point some children may change their mind in response to a justified reason from another member of the community. Alternative viewpoints allow for a rich discussion and greater depth of conceptual understanding.

9. The activity is likely to end with cards still in the three hoops, with no likelihood of agreement about final placement. This is to be expected, and in no way is a problem. The purpose of the activity is to raise and discuss contestable issues, not necessarily to resolve them.

Focus theme: Forming the wrong idea
We are all guilty of this! Sometimes we make judgements that are based on very little evidence — we jump to conclusions. This set of activities paves the way for investigating assumptions.

Discussion plan
1. Can we tell what a person is like by looking at them?
2. Should we decide what someone is like from the way they look?
3. How else can we find out what a person is really like?
4. How do we find out if we have formed the wrong idea about a person?
5. If someone finds out that you have taken something belonging to them does that mean they won’t like you?
6. If we have never heard of something should we decide it doesn’t exist?

Skills development activity
Uncovering assumptions — can you tell what people are like by looking at them?

To probe whether students are committed to their ideas from the discussion, get them to discuss whether they can tell what a person is like by looking at a picture of them.

1. Form small groups and give a picture to each group. These pictures should be of various people, e.g. someone working in an office, a ‘well dressed’ young boy, a ‘well dressed’ lady, a cricketer, someone in uniform, someone wearing jewellery, etc. Ask the groups to discuss what they think the person in the picture is like.
2. Re-form class group. Groups report back.
3. Teacher asks, ‘Can you really tell what these people are like?’ etc.
4. Following discussion teacher asks, ‘What did the activity show us about our reactions to how people look?’; ‘What do we need to know about a person to be able to make a judgment about what they are really like?’

ACSA IDEAS
IS IT ALRIGHT TO STEAL IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD?
**Skills development activity**

**Giving reasons — changing your mind**

This activity allows the students to think about and give reasons why the Potoroo might have changed her mind about Miss Lily.

1. Draw two circles on butcher’s paper. One circle is to be labelled ‘before’ and the other labelled ‘after’.

![Diagram of two circles labeled 'before' and 'after']

2. Ask the students what the Potoroo thought about Miss Lily at the beginning of the book. Write their responses in the circle labelled ‘before’.

3. Ask the students what the Potoroo thought about Miss Lily at the end of the book. Write the responses into the circle labelled ‘after’.

4. Ask students to suggest what it was that caused the Potoroo to change its mind about Miss Lily, after having formed the wrong idea. Write their responses on lines connecting the two circles.

![Diagram of circles labeled 'before', 'possible reasons', and 'after']

5. Divide the group into pairs. Ask the children to think about when they might have formed the wrong idea about someone and share this with their partner. Encourage pairs to share their discussion with the whole class group.

**Reasoning activity**

**Uncovering assumptions**

Give each student a copy of the reproducible worksheet: *Has anyone formed the wrong idea?*

Ask students to complete the worksheet.
**Concluding activity: OOO! Odd One Out**

Odd One Out is an activity through which children can sharpen their sense of logical consistency, by learning to pick which member of a set of statements is inconsistent with the others — in other words, which one is the odd one out. By attempting to explain or justify their decisions, the children must reason about the logical relations between statements.

Materials: Strips of card or paper, divided into sets of three, each strip containing a statement from the groups set out below.

Written on cards:

- Miss Lily the Crocodile is kind.
  No crocodiles are kind.
  Some crocodiles are kind.

- All feather boas are beautiful.
  Miss Lily’s feather boa is beautiful.
  No feather boa is beautiful.

- Some potoroos like crocodiles.
  No potoroos like crocodiles.
  The last potoroo liked Miss Lily.

- Some crocodiles are not dangerous.
  All crocodiles are dangerous.
  Miss Lily the Crocodile is not dangerous.

- All potoroos are cute.
  No potoroos are cute.
  The last potoroo is cute.

Procedure:
1. Students work in groups of two or three.
2. The teacher gives each group a set of cards with the following instruction: You have been given three statements, one on each piece of card. As a group, you are to decide which one of the three does not agree with the other two. Don’t worry about whether you agree with the statements or not: your task is to decide which statement is the odd one out.
3. When the task is completed, groups take turns to present their results, placing their cards in the centre of the discussion circle, with the statement that is the odd one out a little distance away from the other two. Students should be asked to explain or justify their decisions and any disagreements should be carefully considered.
Has anyone formed the wrong idea?

Write Y if they are likely to have.

Write N if they haven’t.

Draw a question mark if you can’t tell.

Underline the person who has formed the wrong idea.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your best friend says he is not coming to your birthday party.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are sad because you think he doesn’t like you any more.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>When you were in Year 1 you always won the running races.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The children in your Year 2 class say you will win again for sure this year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The neighbours said that your dog dug up their garden.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>They looked out their window and saw him do it.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Your brother had some chocolate hidden in his cupboard.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now it is gone. He says you took it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>