

# An Introduction to Philosophy for Children

With *Big Ideas for Curious Minds* and  
*Philosophical Questions for Curious Minds*

## OVERALL AIMS / CURRICULUM LINKS:

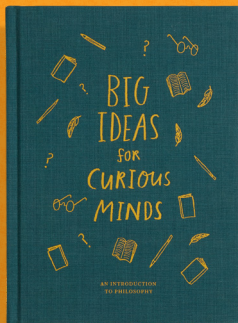
1. Develop confident, independent thinking
2. Encourage sharing and challenging of ideas
3. Encourage willingness to speculate, take risks and use imagination
4. Foster consideration and respect for others
5. Introduce important philosophical ideas



Supporting ideas for Teachers & Students

*For use in the classroom or at home.*

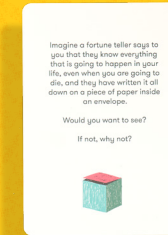
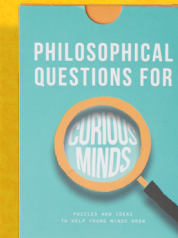
Suitable for ages 9+



## Big Ideas for Curious Minds: An Introduction to Philosophy

*Big Ideas for Curious Minds* is designed to harness children's spontaneous philosophical instinct and to develop it through introductions to some of the most vibrant and essential philosophical ideas from history. The book takes us to meet leading figures of philosophy from around the world and from all eras – and shows us how their ideas continue to matter. The book is filled with exercises and beautiful illustrations to bring the ideas of great thinkers vibrantly to life.

Suggested for curious minds aged 9+.



## Philosophical Questions for Curious Minds

Children are born philosophers – but in order to fully bring out the best of their thinking, it helps to equip them with the largest and most thought-expanding questions. This is a pack of the very sharpest, based on the biggest conundrums of philosophy, and is guaranteed to generate lively, warm and fascinating conversations among families and friends. No prior knowledge is required; all that counts is a spirit of curiosity.

The pack includes questions like: Is it ever right to lie? When might freedom not be a good thing? What's the difference between living and being alive? How does money make you happy – and when doesn't it?

With these questions to hand, conversation will forever be profound and entertaining, and minds young and old will have a crash course in the joys and adventures of philosophy.

Suggested for curious minds aged 9+.

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| Explore what makes life interesting and good; identify personal and societal problems and how to fix them; set personal goals. |    |

This Mini-Scheme of work can be used with children either at home or in the classroom. It includes material for between 4–6 lessons. The lessons can be completed in sequence or children can dip in and out of activities as they wish.

**NOTE:**

It is advised that teachers, parents or carers read through this Mini-Scheme and complete any tasks before students, to ensure that everyone is comfortable with its themes and activities.

## 1. What Is Philosophy?

### BIG IDEA / BIG QUESTION

'Philosophy' is a word from Ancient Greek: the first part, *philo*, means 'love'. The second part, which comes from the word *sophia*, means 'wisdom'. Philosophy literally means 'the love of wisdom'. It helps us live wiser lives. But what does 'wisdom' mean?

### START:

Wisdom is more than about just being 'clever' – it is also about being kind, calm and accepting of life.

1. The children reflect on a 'wise (not just clever)' person they know, including 'wise' things they said or have done, describing in detail.
2. They write a definition: 'I think wisdom means...'
3. They share their ideas with a partner.

Thinking about abstract ideas is made easier by focusing on specific examples. To help the children improve their thinking skills, this activity begins with an exemplary person and specific things they have said or done before addressing an abstract question. It also distinguishes between 'wise' and 'clever', prompting the children to elaborate on this difference.

### DEVELOP:

Ideas on 'wisdom' by reflecting on its opposite.

1. The children reflect on a 'clever (but not wise)' person they know, including 'unwise' things they have said or done, describing in detail.
2. They write a definition: 'I think the opposite of wisdom is...'
3. They share their ideas with the group.

Thinking about what an idea is *not* helps to clarify distinctions. Making distinctions is a fundamental thinking skill, and this activity shows children how they can begin to practice this skill.

**CREATE:**

Learn to become 'wiser' by thinking about responses to problems.

## 1. 'You lose a game of Connect Four to your brother'

**UNWISE RESPONSES**

Accuse your brother of cheating (though you know they didn't really).

Tell everyone how much you hate the game you were playing.

Feel that it's incredibly important that you lost, and that you won't get over it for ages.

**WISE RESPONSES**

Remember it's only a game, and that whether you have good luck says nothing about what you're like as a person.

Remind yourself that you're bound to win some other time and that there are other, more important, things in your life.

## 2. The children reflect on a new problem. For example:

a) 'A friend isn't very nice to you'

c) 'You don't like what you've been given for dinner'

b) 'A car journey is very long'

d) 'You accidentally spoil a drawing you were doing'

e) 'You have to go to bed and you're not tired'

3. They create a list of 'unwise' and 'wise' responses to this problem.
4. They can start by matching the examples below to the problems on page 2.

a) If a friend is not nice to me, then I will count to 10 to calm down before deciding on what to do.

b) If a car journey is long, then I will invent a new game to keep myself entertained.

c) If I do not like what I have been given for dinner, then I will accept that my preferences are different and politely finish my dinner.

d) If I accidentally spoil a drawing I was doing, I will take a breath and see if I can make the 'mistake' a part of the drawing.

e) If I need to go to bed and I am not tired, then I will practice exercising before going to bed or relaxing deeply.

**DISCUSS:**

Facilitate discussion that aims to help children to make further distinctions.

- Is being 'wise' and being 'unwise' totally opposite, or are there grey areas?
- Name some of the traits between 'wise' and 'unwise'.

**REFLECT:**

Share ideas and reflections on what has been learned.

- Why might two 'wise' people disagree about what is 'wise'?

## 2. Asking 'Why?' – With Socrates

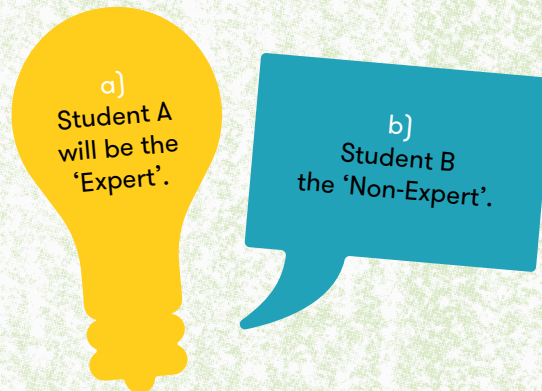
### BIG IDEA / BIG QUESTION

Socrates was always asking people tricky 'why' questions. He was not being mean or awkward; he really wanted to have an interesting discussion.

### START:

This task aims to show children that being 'unwise' does not necessarily mean lacking knowledge, but lacking curiosity or wonder.

1. Two students volunteer to role-play:



2. The Expert will talk about a topic they know.
3. The Non-Expert will only be allowed to ask questions, especially 'What is...' and 'Why...' questions.
4. The teacher may end the activity when the Expert begins to repeat their answers or the conversation goes around in circles.

This activity allows the group to see the type of conversations that Socrates had with the Sophists, and it aims to show that asking questions (not having answers) can really be a kind of wisdom. It may also show children that unlearning is just as important as learning when the Expert changes their mind in response to a particular question.

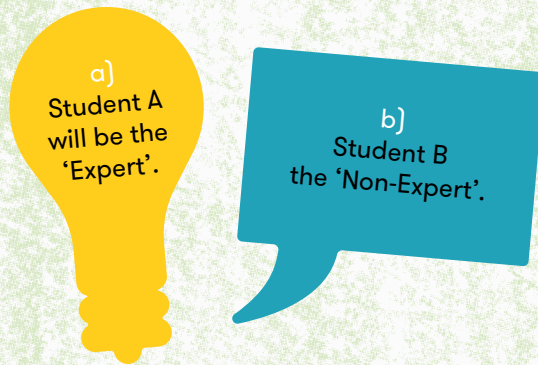
It is important to show children that this activity is about friends working together in search of truth, and that it is not meant to be a competition. This is because competition in this activity, with a 'winner' and a 'loser', will result in neither person learning about the truth.



**DEVELOP:**

Complete the task again to allow the whole group to experience the same type of questioning as above.

1. The children each write on a topic about which they know a lot about.
2. They partner up:



3. Student B asks only 'What is...' and 'Why...' questions, until Student A's answers begin to repeat or the conversation goes around in circles.
4. They swap roles so Student B has their turn.

**CREATE:**

Help children to be their own 'Thinking Friend' by showing them to how to have an inner dialogue.

1. The students take out a plain sheet of paper and divide it into two columns.
2. The left column will be the 'Expert' column, and the right side the 'Non-Expert' column.
3. The Expert column will be for answers and the Non-Expert side for questions.
4. They begin on the Expert side with a problem (e.g., I am upset with Mum).
5. Then they will move onto the Non-Expert column to ask a question (e.g., Why am I upset with Mum?).
6. Taking turns on each side, they continue the dialogue until their answers begin to repeat or go around in circles.

As they begin to ask themselves questions, children will learn to clearly define their answers and reasons, and further develop their understanding of the problem. They will also learn that 'thinking' is an activity that they can practice. They may also see progress in the specificity of their answers and the depth of their questions.

**MY INNER DIALOGUE**

**EXPERT** Identify a problem that you have  
E.g. I am upset with Mum.

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**NON-EXPERT** Ask questions about the problem  
E.g. Why am I upset with Mum?

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**DISCUSS:**

How we can uncover conflicts by asking questions.

- Why might some answers conflict with other answers?
- For example, 'I hate eating my vegetables because they taste disgusting, but I like eating my vegetables because they are good for me.'

This aims to show children that these conflicts are often hidden from us but asking questions helps us discover them. It also shows children that the 'why' questions allow them to weigh reasons and decide.

**REFLECT:**

On the 'love' of wisdom.

Remind the children that the 'Ask an Expert' activity required friendship, and that philosophy is about 'love' of wisdom, not the possession of it. They may then reflect on the meaning of 'love':

1. The students reflect on a person, activity or thing that they 'love' and write down details.
2. They reflect on a 'loving' person they know, including 'loving' things they have said or done.
3. They write a definition: 'I think love means...'
4. They reflect on the relationship between 'love' and 'wisdom'.

### 3. Being Curious

Philosophical Questions for Curious Minds

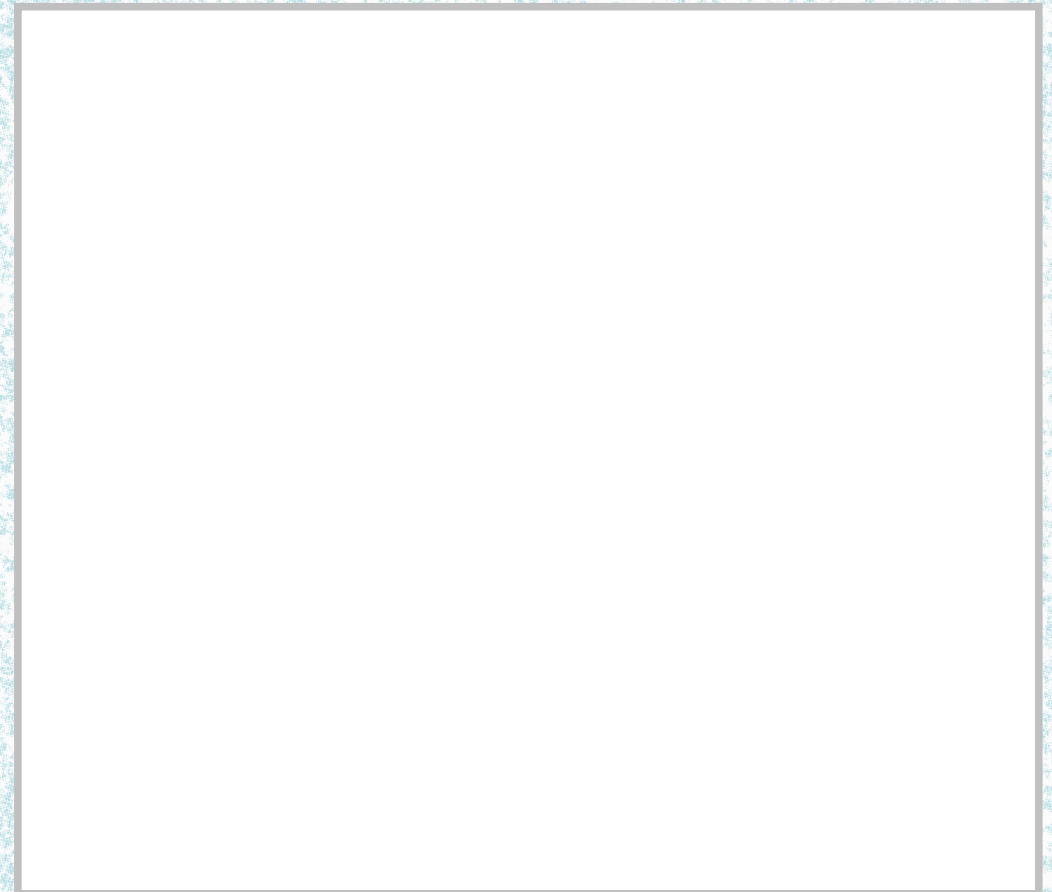
#### BIG IDEA / BIG QUESTION

Philosophical questions have no right or wrong answers – which makes them fun to think about.

#### START:

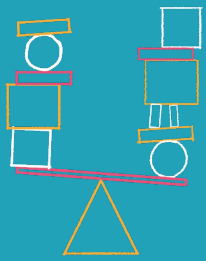
This activity aims to encourage the students to ask as many questions as possible.

1. The children each write 'Beauty' in the middle of a large sheet of paper.
2. They write as many questions about 'Beauty' as they can, filling the space on the paper as much as possible.



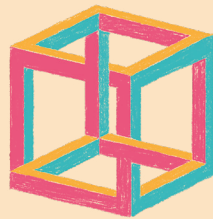
**DEVELOP:**

Briefly discuss the following questions on the cards with the group.



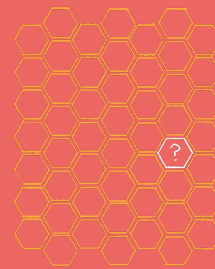
1.

What Is Right  
and Wrong?



2.

What Is Real?



3.

What Is Society?



4.

Is There a God?



5.

What Is the Meaning  
of Life?

Ask children to choose one question and, depending on which they choose, reflect on the corresponding questions on the next page that go even deeper:



1.

Can you think of an occasion where the 'right' thing to do would be to lie rather than tell the truth?



2.

Should we believe in things that we cannot see, hear, touch, taste or feel?



3.

In most countries, children are not allowed to vote. Adults say this is because children don't understand enough about how society works to have a say in how it should be run. Do you agree?



4.

Everything that happens has a cause. Dawn is caused by the sun rising. Floods are caused by too much rain. Therefore the universe must have had a cause. Believers say this must be God. Do you agree?



5.

Can you make a case why it is better to go to school (even though it is something boring) rather than spending all day in bed eating sweets and playing video games (even though it is much more fun)?

**CREATE:**

An imaginary dialogue with a friend who might disagree with them, and to empathise with their viewpoint.

1. Can you think of a friend who might disagree with you? What sorts of questions might they ask you?
2. What might be the reasons behind their questions?
3. How might you improve their reasons?
4. Would you then change your mind and agree with your friend? What further questions might you ask them?
5. Continue switching roles, asking questions, and strengthening reasons on both sides.

This activity may continue for as long as is appropriate.

Afterwards, have the children look at the questions that arose in this imaginary discussion, especially the questions they imagined their friend asking. They are to rank these questions from hardest to easiest.

**DISCUSS:**

Facilitate discussion on the question.

- Why is it important to strengthen answers we disagree with when we are thinking?

**REFLECT:**

Share ideas and reflections on what has been learned.

- Is it okay to disagree?

## 4. The Meaning of Life – With Aristotle

### BIG IDEA / BIG QUESTION

The meaning of life is about what makes your life feel interesting and good. To achieve this, what mainly counts is fixing things. When you fix something, you solve a problem that matters to you.

### START:

The aim of this task is to help children distinguish between their likes and their values.

1. The children list all the things that they like to do, when there is no homework, no chores, etc.
2. They write about one activity, person, or experience that is important or valuable to them, and describe in detail.

Having completed these tasks, they reflect on the following questions:

- Are my likes and values the same or different? Why?

They may share their thoughts with a partner or the group.

### DEVELOP:

The aim of this task is to help children develop their ideas by thinking about problems in the world.

1. The children list problems they can see in the world:

a)  
People sometimes  
argue too much,  
or are sad, angry,  
and scared.

b)  
Some animals  
need rescuing from  
cruelty, accidents,  
or injury.

c)  
Our environment  
needs preserving  
from waste.



2. They frame these problems as 'How' questions:

a)  
How might people  
argue less, and  
feel less sad,  
angry, or scared?

b)  
How might we  
rescue animals who  
need our help?

c)  
How can we  
protect  
our environment?

3. They apply these questions to themselves, and develop a list of 'Interesting Problems to Fix':

a)  
How might I argue  
less, and feel less  
sad, angry, or  
scared?

b)  
How might I rescue  
animals who need  
my help?

c)  
How might  
I protect  
our environment?

**CREATE:**

Aristotle thought that happiness was about feeling that life is meaningful, and that this is achieved by having an important goal. This task aims to show children how to create a goal.

1. The children think about one important thing they want to achieve and set a realistic date.
2. They draw a timeline of the days, weeks, and months ahead from today to their set date.
3. They list all the actions they will need to take and list them under each date along the timeline.
4. They list all the problems they will likely face, both inner and outer.
5. They list all the solutions they can think of to those problems.

(See next page for pre-set table)

Remind the students that this is an activity they can practice on a regular basis and get better at, and not simply an exercise performed once.

**DISCUSS:**

The limits of our control.

- If something happens that I cannot control, what would be the wise thing to do?

This is an opportunity for children to discuss what is within and outside of their control, and to reflect on this in light of their values.

**REFLECT:**

Share ideas and reflections on what has been learned.

- q. If I continued to be unwise, what would my life look like tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and five years from now?
- q. If I practiced being wise, what might my life look like tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, and five years from now?

Allow time for the children to use their imagination and reflect on the first question before being shown the second.

|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| <b>MY GOAL</b>                |
| .....<br>.....<br>.....       |
| ←----- <b>TIMELINE</b> -----→ |
| <b>ACTIONS</b>                |

|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| <b>PROBLEMS</b>                  |
| .....<br>.....<br>.....<br>..... |
| ↓                                |
| <b>SOLUTIONS</b>                 |
| .....<br>.....<br>.....<br>..... |