

Works well with

- ✓ It Started in the Library
- ✓ C'est de l'or
- ✓ Nick of Time (on thought experiments)
- ✓ The Pill of Life (on thought experiments)
- ✓ The Otherwise Machine
- ✓ What Zeus Does When He's Bored
- ✓ *Thoughtings*: Are Things Always What They Seem To Us To Be?, Bliss

Philosophy: The nature of philosophy itself, thought experiments, knowledge and wisdom.

Philosophical Poetry

David Birch

Starting age: 7

For some, philosophy, like joy, is a state. It's not just an exercise or practice, not just something we do, but something we enter into. Often this state is not easily communicable and often our most absorbing philosophical discussions are with ourselves. Lucidity and sense can impoverish philosophy and thoughts made intelligible can ring out false. For some of us most of the time – and for all of us some of the time – a group discussion will not present the most fruitful conditions for philosophy. Conversation is just one way into philosophy. Poetry is another. Poetry allows us to give voice to our thoughts without having to give sense to them. For certain philosophical temperaments, the space and freedom provided by the solitude of poetry is a necessary and lovely thing.

For the following activities ask the children to write without rhyme. Rhyme is difficult and will distract them from their thoughts. The poems suggested below have a repetitive form. Again this will simplify the writing of the poems and allow the children to take each thought as it comes. Of course, if they wish to deviate from this form, they are free to – it is there as a guide only.

1. **I wonder why ...** This is a general philosophical poem which can be endlessly returned to. These poems will be revealing of the things that particularly interest the children. Ask the children to start every line with these three words. To begin with, the

children might enjoy just writing one line, then having these pooled together and read out to them as a single class-authored poem.

2. **If I could do whatever I wanted ...** A poem on unbounded freedom, an extension to 'A New World'. Have this line as their first and ask the children to begin every next line with 'I would ...'
3. **Comparisons.** Philosophy is full of imagery. Most famously, Plato described the world as a cave of shadows. And William Paley thought the world a giant watch. This latter image features in 'Are There Cogs Beneath the Wind?' The image of the world as an enormous snow globe is also described there. Highlight these comparisons to the children and ask them to write a comparison poem on what they think the world is like. Every line can begin with, 'The world is like ...' or 'The world is as x as a ...' This can serve as an extension to the session 'Are There Cogs Beneath the Wind?'

An extension to 'The Clockwork Toymaker': The toymaker describes humans as being like clockwork toys. Ask the children what comparisons they would give for themselves. Each line can begin with 'I am like ...' or 'I am as x as ...'

An extension to 'A Hole Load of Nothing': A poem about the dark. Ask the children to begin every line with 'The dark is like ...' or 'The dark is as x as ...' You might additionally ask them to write from the perspective of Mr Owl.

Something general: Ask the children to write a poem about thinking, beginning every line with 'Thinking is like ...'

The comparisons philosophers make are peculiar and strange. Encourage the children to feel free to be just as peculiar and even stranger in their comparisons. To begin with it might be helpful for the children to write comparisons of and between objects in the classroom. Once they have a feel for this they can move on to the more philosophically spirited comparisons.

4. **Sometimes I look ... But really I am ...** A poem about our private selves, an extension to 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Ask the children to repeat this two-line structure.
5. **I don't know why I ...** A poem on how we are mysterious to ourselves, an extension to 'Revelation'. Ask the children to think about the things they don't understand about themselves or their bodies.
6. **When I am by myself ...** A poem on separateness, an extension to 'The Ticklish Grump'. Ask the children to think about what it is like for them when they are by themselves. What do they do? What don't they do? What do they think about? How does it feel? How is it different from being with others?

7. **We are all the same because ... We are all different because ...** This poem is an extension to 'The Magician's Misery' and is about the curious coexistence of idiosyncrasy and commonality.

Source: Kenneth Koch's *Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children To Write Poetry*.

Writing a Philosophy Project

John L. Taylor

Starting age: 16

If you enjoy thinking about philosophical puzzles, why not try turning your ideas into a project? Project work is a great way to practise some of the skills which you need to be a good philosopher. It is also a good way of developing as an independent learner. You can do project work just for its own sake, or as part of an assessed qualification (for example, the Lower or Higher Tier Project Qualifications, or the Extended Project). Here are some tips.

Getting started

The key thing with a good philosophy project is choosing an appropriate philosophical question. Have a think about the ideas in philosophy which interest you most: this is a good place to begin. You will have to work at your project over a period of weeks or even months, and you won't find it easy to keep going unless the question is one that really interests you. Think about some of the most enjoyable discussions you have had about philosophy, or about the topics you've read about which seem most exciting. (The contents of this book may well help with this: first find the entries that most interest you and then use them for discussions with your class, friends or family.) Pick one of these as a starting point.

Once you have picked a topic area, you need to select a research question. Philosophy is all about the big questions of life – the most fundamental questions of all. Is there a God? What is the meaning of life? What is the difference between right and wrong? Am I the same person that I was when I was born? What is time? Is the mind the same as the brain? These questions are deep and challenging. It is best not to try to solve one of these within your first ever philosophy project. Instead, think about selecting a more specific, simpler question (which can still be linked to one of the big questions, but which will be easier to write about in the time you have available). The big questions of philosophy are like mountains: you are trying to find