

Contents

Preface

Using literature as a stimulus for inquiry in Years 5 - 8.....	5
What is a philosophical classroom?	7

Chapter 1: Guidelines for use

Themes and issues	8
Levels of texts	8
Activities, Discussion Points and Issue Questions	9
The English classroom	11
Literature based programs	11
Class novels	12
Wide reading programs	12
The use of short stories	12
Links with curriculum documents.....	12
Incorporating philosophical inquiry into the curriculum	13

Chapter 2: The community of inquiry

The community of inquiry discussion method	15
Improving thinking and oral expression	16
The roles of teacher and student	16
The place of literature	18
Facilitation: adding depth and tenacity to a discussion	20
The second why	20
Recognising a philosophical topic	21
Maintaining focus and direction	22
Teacher checklist for a community of inquiry	23

Chapter 3: Strategies which encourage pupil participation

Teacher questions	24
Questioning to promote deeper and broader thinking	26
Student questions.....	27
Expectations of student performance	27
Grouping.....	28
Learning to wait.....	29
Reviewing and evaluating a discussion	30
Evaluating a session	31
Evaluating individual student's progress	31

Chapter 4: Issues and texts

Issue 1: Power Authority Ownership

Rebel (Baille) level 1 33
Little Riders (Shemin) level 1 34
Daughter of the Wind (Staples) level 2 35
Tuck Everlasting (Babbit) level 2 37
Taronga (Kelleher) level 3 38
The Red King (Kelleher) level 3 39

Issue 2: Change Communication

The Shrinking of Treehorn (Heide) level 1 40
Tuesday (Wiesner) level 1 42
Window (Baker) level 1 43
The Tent (Paulsen) level 2 44
Gulf (Westall) level 2 46
So Much To Tell You (Marsden) level 3 47
Blame the Wind (Disher) level 3 48

Issue 3: Existence Reality Identity

The Watertower (Crew) level 1 49
The Bamboo Flute (Disher) level 1 50
The Wreck of the ZANZIBAR (Morpurgo) level 2 51
The Snow Spider (Nimmo) level 2 52
Maniac Magee (Spinelli) level 3 53
Tanith (Jordan) level 3 54

Issue 4: Justice Injustice Law Good Evil

The Deliverance of Dancing Bears (Stanley) level 1 55
The Angel With the Mouth Organ (Mattingly) level 1 57
I Am David (Holm) level 2 58
The Dark is Rising (Cooper) level 2 59
Friedrich (Richter) level 3 60
a Cage of Butterflies (Caswell) level 3 61

Issue 5: Courage Loyalty Friendship Trust Relationships

Number the Stars (Lowry) level 1 62
Onion Tears (Kidd) level 1 63
Bridge to Terabithia (Paterson) level 2 64
The Cay (Taylor) level 2 65
Angel's Gate (Crew) level 3 66
Foxspell (Rubinstein) level 3 67

Issue 6: Fairness Sameness Difference Rights Freedom

Boss of the Pool (Klein) level 1 69
No Guns for Asmir (Mattingley) level 1 70
The Secret of Nimh (O'Brien) level 2 71
Shiloh (Naylor) level 2 72
Galax-Arena (Rubinstein) level 3 73
The Fat Man (Gee) level 3 74

References 77

Preface

Using literature as a stimulus for inquiry in Years 5 to 8

Good literature raises thought provoking ethical, social and logical issues. This book contains activities, discussion questions and teaching strategies found to be successful when dealing with these issues. The material selected caters for a range of interests and abilities appropriate for students in Years 5 to 8 in response to the growing awareness of the diversity of students in their early adolescence. It takes into account the need to consider ways of assisting successful adolescent development by ensuring they are engaged in activities which assist them to:

- develop a sense of personal worth and social values which become part of their life,
- gain acceptance by and support among peers,
- think more reflectively and abstractly, and
- become aware of, and interact with, the social and political world around them. (Eyers, 1993; Schools Council, 1993)

The approach used in this text is a response to the needs of those teachers who are concerned about improving the skills of oral communication, together with those who are already using the philosophical inquiry approach in their classrooms. It takes into account the differentiated curriculum and the various levels of cognitive development and literacy levels. The ideas presented are designed to be used in classrooms using literature as a resource for fostering critical and creative thinking. A variety of practices have been incorporated to emphasise participation and negotiation, experiential and active learning, discussion and reflection. This includes the use of co-operative learning approaches, questioning techniques, and small group work.

Reading and writing can be seen as natural outgrowths of conversation, the child's natural mode of communication. A well-structured inquiry program should emphasise:

- linking reading, conversation and writing,
- the use of resources (print, screen, music) which include experiences that are meaningful to the students,
- wondering about the complexities and puzzles of everyday life, and
- the examination of concepts such as reality, power and equality that are critical to an understanding of the students' own and others' lives.

Thinking and Talking Through Literature

Students are capable of recognising the circumstances that call for appropriate use of skills; for example, when it is best to ask a question, and when it is important to point out an assumption. This ability is only acquired by practice, and classroom dialogue is the mode of obtaining such practice.

Both abstract (conceptual) and concrete thinking can be explored through inquiry. The exploration of issues which are problematic for the student, yet connected to their own experience, is the starting point. Students need the opportunity to respond with their own ideas. This belief differs from the common argument that critical thinking is knowledge-dependent and therefore beyond the reach of young children. A lack of knowledge should not stand in the way of their ability to think, reflect and inquire.

Students need the opportunity to ask questions, to dig more deeply for meaning, and to explore their own beliefs, attitudes and values. Sound thinking should occur in all disciplines. The curriculum must be intellectually challenging, and use resources which foster dialogue and reasoning about the issues raised. Using literature as the resource allows students to explore complex issues which may affect their lives from the safe distance of a fictional situation. Exercises and discussion suggestions, like those included in this book, model the ways one should proceed in the examination of the philosophical dimensions of any issue. Follow-up questions must reinforce the classroom discussions and provide practice in the thinking skills the teacher is aiming to develop.

Children begin to think philosophically when they start to ask 'why?' and learn to reason when they have a motive.

Thinking allows us to communicate with other people.

Thinking allows us to learn to make choices for ourselves.

Thinking helps us to understand other people...

Work being done in classrooms using the community of inquiry demonstrates that children can deal with abstractions long before the onset of Piaget's so-called 'formal stage'. By the upper primary years students generally have command of logical reasoning together with a concern for interpersonal and social aspects of life and an interest in moral and ethical questions like fairness and equality.

Chapter two provides detailed and practical information about the community of inquiry, the approach recommended in this book for fostering deeper thinking about issues. This approach is a response to the calls to reimagine literacy in the middle years of schooling. It provides students and teachers with the opportunity to read together for pleasure while maintaining intellectual rigour and involving issues that connect the key learning areas across the curriculum. (Kruse, 1996)

What is a philosophical classroom?

This book describes in detail the philosophical inquiry approach to using literature. The highlighted words in the checklists below are key concepts. Each point is spelt out fully, with implementation examples, in this text.

Teachers would need to be able to recognise a philosophical issue and be able to formulate questions to address it. As well they need to assist their student to:

- appreciate the process of **wondering** about, and **reflecting** on, issues and ideas,
- value the **asking of questions** about the nature and significance of objects and ideas,
- seek out, and **listen carefully** to, others' points of view,
- carefully present and **evaluate reasons** to support one's own ideas,
- develop an awareness of, and reasons for, their **values** and beliefs, and
- appreciate the process of **offering and assessing reasons**.

In order to create the appropriate classroom environment and foster higher order thinking, it is important that teachers:

- provide **resources which raise questions** about value laden situations,
- aim to have **students responding to one another** rather than the teacher – eye contact should be possible,
- allow **l-o-n-g-e-r wait times** to give all students the chance to reflect and then formulate their ideas and join the discussion,
- **encourage, not suppress, discussion** of philosophical issues as they emerge,
- talk less and encourage **more student talk**,
- avoid the seeking of a particular end point,
- establish an **environment which encourages student questions** about issues,
- **model good reasoning, reflection and listening skills**, and
- make explicit the higher order thinking that is occurring.

This discussion model is known as a community of inquiry.