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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the study of philosophy. As you begin your journey, let us warn you that philosophy is different from most of your other studies. Philosophy is an activity which requires your participation. In some ways it is like a sport. You can study its history or its major personalities. You can examine its problems and the questions it raises. But to fully understand it, you must come down out of the grandstand and on to the playing field itself.

As you enter the “playing field” of philosophy, you will notice philosophy moves and grows through discussion and argument. That’s why philosophy, like a sport, can be fun. It is an experience of which you cannot get enough. Philosophy is not something which you can memorize and it cannot be contained in textbooks. Philosophers have written books and essays, but before they were written, the issues and problems addressed in them were first discussed and argued with other philosophers.

The three middle grade activity books have been written to get you started. They will direct and focus your thinking on some of the most important problems, questions, and personalities in the history of philosophy.

These books are not the final word on any of the subjects which they address.

Rather, look upon them as blueprints for getting you started and involved in philosophical thinking.

For example, in this book we focus on a topic in philosophy known as “ethics.” Fundamentally, ethics or moral philosophy raises the question of “what is the best way to live one’s life?” In this case, **best** is being used as a moral or ethical term. It may mean “good” or “right.” So we ask, “What is the right way to live our lives?” or “What does good living mean, anyway?”

When we begin to think about the overriding question in the **Philosophy For Young Thinkers Curriculum**, “What is human about humans?,” we are actually asking the following ethical questions about human life:

1. Who actually makes moral decisions and how?
2. What makes a decision right or wrong?
3. About whom and what should I care?

Corresponding to these questions, we have provided you with some philosophical background. This information will help you sharpen the issues under consideration. This background will also prepare you for the activities following each section. The background focus of question one is the issue of **moral objectivity**; of question two, **the need to consider all relevant facts in every decision-making situation or wide reflective equilibrium**; and of question three, **the moral push and pull of the inner self**.

Also provided in this activity book are profiles of ten major thinkers and some of their ideas about these topics and questions. It is important you gain an understanding of these topics, questions, and thinkers. This background information will give you a foundation for improving your thinking and arriving at solutions to problems proving useful to yourself and others.

Before moving further into this book, examine the reasons that have been provided for studying and practicing philosophy. Some of these reasons are the following:

1. Philosophy will connect you with your intellectual and cultural history. The ability to trace the history of an idea will help you conceptualize and understand the present, as well as the past.
2. Philosophy will help you clarify your ideas and thoughts. The power of the imagination, like that of reason, is a creator of history. The results have been inventions, laws, governments, religions, and artistic productions.

Lesson #1

The Meaning of “Good”

Concepts:

Right, wrong, good, bad

Skills:

Problem-solving analysis

Vocabulary Words:

Moral principle, fairness, equality, justice, intrinsic

Objectives:

The student will...

1. Define the meaning of “good” and give examples of good behavior.
2. Explain the relationship of motives to behavior.
3. Explain the relationship of free will to moral responsibility.

Procedures:

The teacher will...

1. Review the Problem Focus and Introduction to Part One.
2. Share objectives of this lesson with students.
3. Discuss the inquiry lesson and profile with students.
4. Engage students in oral and written activities.
5. Close lesson with a summary of student responses to James’ delirium.

Questions:

1. What was James’ response to his principal?
2. Do you agree with James’ definition of “right” and “wrong”?
3. What does it mean to say that all humans have intrinsic worth?
4. In what ways does Moore say that we can define a term?
5. What is Moore’s definition of “good”? Do you agree or disagree with Moore? State your reasons.

Inquiry Lesson: The Meaning of “Good”

Our world is sometimes confusing. We go to school, enjoy our friends, and try to spend quality time with our friends. From our schools, churches, synagogues, families, and government we are told to be good, to avoid drugs, the excessive use of alcohol, to be honest, and to treat others fairly. Yet, we have witnessed our own leaders violate these same principles. Life certainly is complex. In our world the good, the bad, and the in between have gotten all mixed up.

Consider the following example:

James, a student at Baker’s Mountain Middle School, was caught cheating on Mr. Keever’s science examination. Mr. Keever took James to the principal’s office where James was questioned about this incident.

Under examination, James admitted cheating on the test. He said, “Mr. Keever caught me red-handed. I just wasn’t slick enough to fool him. I’m guilty and ready to take my punishment so don’t preach to me!”

Extensions and Discussion Starters

1. Norman Cousins, writing in *The Saturday Review* in November, 1957, commented:

We have been living half a life. We have been developing our appetites—but we have been starving our purposes. We have been concerned with bigger salaries, bigger television screens, bigger cars—and how with bigger missiles—instead of with the big ideas on which our lives and freedoms depend.

- A. Divide the class into small groups of three to five students.
 - B. Each group is to make a list of the “big” ideas that have been foundational in creating our democratic form of government.
This may require some research, so plan time to allow students to complete their listings.
 - C. For each “big” idea listed, the group is to give reasons for its inclusion.
 - D. When each group has completed its list, have them to review each idea included and decide what moral principle supports its use.
 - E. Each group is to present their list, reasons, and moral principles to the class for discussion and review.
 - F. The class is then to make a composite list of the “big” ideas that are foundational to a democratic form of government, list the reasons for their inclusion, and state the moral principle supportive of each idea.
2. Harold H. Titus once said, “Lives are made by what they omit, but most of all by what they include.” In concluding this first section, **Moral Judgments**, make a list of the moral values which you believe are necessary for living a quality life.
When you have completed your list, create a collage illustrating these values and share your work with your classmates. Each student should be given time to explain their collage to the class after which time each collage should be put on display for others to see, question, and discuss.
 3. To date, many books and magazines have been censored in our public schools. The issue of censorship remains a sore spot with many teachers and students. Many believe censorship is morally wrong. Others think they have a moral obligation to censor the material which young people read. Can they both be right?
 - A. Research the problem of censorship as it relates to the schools. You may wish to view the film, *The Day They Came to Arrest The Book*.
 - B. Identify the major issues involved in the problem of censorship.
 - C. Interview your classmates, teachers, family, and friends to find out what their opinions are about censorship. You may wish to display the conclusions of your interviews on a graph.
 - D. What political, social, religious, and moral issues did you discover important and meaningful to this problem?
 - E. Write a position paper stating your views about the issue of censorship and the schools.

Profile #9: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)

It is said of Immanuel Kant his failures are more important than most men's successes. Kant lived by routine and, although he had many friends, he never married and never ventured more than forty miles from Königsberg, East Prussia, the city of his birth and death.

The Kant family belonged to the lower middle class and was devoutly religious. His father recognized Immanuel's academic ability and sent him to the local Pietistic College to prepare for the ministry. He continued his studies at the University of Königsberg and became increasingly interested in natural science and philosophy.

Between the years 1746 and 1755, he supported himself as a private teacher. He was then appointed to an instructorship at the University and finally, in the year 1770, was promoted to a full professorship.

Kant wrote five important books: *General Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (1755); *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); *Critique of Judgment* (1790); *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785); and *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).

The direction of Kant's philosophical interests is revealed in his reflection that "two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe—the starry heavens above and the moral law within." His concern was with nature and morality.

For Kant, reason is the only ground for certainty. Like Plato, he felt sensory experience yielded only contingent truth—truth that is always dependent on something else for its truth or falsity. Contingent statements may or may not be truth. Kant set out to demonstrate how to obtain certain knowledge—knowledge that was not contingent—in the sciences and in morality. He argued that reason (the categories of the understanding) guaranteed the certainty of scientific knowledge. Reason is not limited to specific sensory experiences, but is universally applicable to all experiences. It is the universal and complete nature of reason that drew Kant's attention.

For example, it is the nature of the mind to think in accordance with the principle that every event must have a cause. The principle of causality is one of the categories of the understanding. Thus, despite our ignorance of the cause of a given disease, we are nevertheless certain that it has a cause and this certainty is a product of reason, not observation. It is the mind, not nature, which orders our experiences causally. Otherwise, we could not be certain of the causal interconnections of events. While experience teaches us what actually happens, it does not teach us what necessarily happens.

In Kant's search for the grounds of the validity of ethics, he employs the same method by which he establishes the grounds of the certainty of science. A valid moral principle, he says, must be independent of experience and binding on all people. In short, a genuine morality, one which is objectively and universally binding, requires a rational foundation. The universal basis of morality lies in man's rational nature, since this alone is the same in everyone.

Thus, for Kant, a moral principle must be such that a man can will that all men, including himself, should act upon it. The test of consistency is the foundation of morality. He calls this the "categorical imperative." It says those actions are right which conform to principles one can consistently will to be principles for all persons, and those actions are wrong which are based upon maxims that a rational person could not will that all men should follow.

In Kant, the categorical imperative enables us to tell right from wrong actions. However, Kant says that it is not only the test but it is also the unconditional directive for behavior. It is binding upon everyone because each rational man acknowledges this obligations to follow reason. Reason prescribes duty, and the moral law holds whether or not men actually follow it.