

# Stephen Lawrence Day Philosophy Sessions

## Teacher Facilitation Pack

### Introduction

It is recommended that you read this pack through before running a Stephen Lawrence Day Philosophy session. It will give you some helpful tips about how to adopt the right kind of mindset when facilitating a philosophical discussion with both younger and older children.

### Facilitating a “philosophical” discussion

Two key ideas for facilitation are (a) *absence* and (b) *Open Questioning Mindset (OQM)*.

“**Absence**” is the idea that you are not part of the conversation, but merely a facilitator. It is also about “stepping out” and only intervening when it will be better to do so.

### Open Questioning Mindset

- The “opening-up” strategies below will help you to keep to a minimal role, so that you don’t become too *present* in the discussions (see absence above). The aim is to allow the children to develop their own ideas and avoid having them simply parrot your views. This is called “**absence**”.
- Try to also keep an Open Questioning Mindset (OQM)
  - **This is where you *listen to what they are saying* rather than *listening out for what you want them to say*.**
- In addition to using the suggested opening-up strategies, to maintain an OQM, avoid *paraphrasing* or *summarising* their ideas on their behalf.
  - **That will mean you avoid phrases like, “So, you’re saying...” or “So, what we think is...” or “What you mean is...”.**
- Also avoid *leading questions* (strongly ‘suggesting’ answers in your questions).
  - **Instead, listen actively and invite the class to comment on or challenge comments made.**

In most cases, it will be better to (a) **anchor** or (b) **anchor then open up** (see Methods: “Anchoring”), or (c) simply **pass the ball and say “thank you!”**. You can also “**pinpoint**” from time to time to encourage more precision (see Methods: “Pinpointing”).

### Controversial statements

- If someone says something that you (as a teacher facilitating the group) find objectionable or that you disagree with, try not to get involved yourself (unless absolutely necessary). Rather, activate the group to engage (“What do you think about that?”), and, if necessary, critically (“Does anyone agree/disagree with X when he/she said...”). Then open-up: “Can you say why?”).
- In short: invite enquiry around any controversial statements.
- You may, of course, hold to a strong moral position of your own and you may feel the need to voice it. If so, we recommend doing so after the enquiry. A basic rule of philosophy is that the participants of the enquiry should be told that they may disagree with any views proposed (even yours!), so long as they do so respectfully and within the rules (see below).

- They must try to provide good reasons for why they think what they think or why they disagree with someone (including the teacher/facilitator).
- The discussion is as open as possible and most topics and comments should be permitted, provided it remains respectful and mature. However, on very rare occasions, things might be said which need further attendance, e.g. where someone discloses that a possible crime has been committed, or where someone says something that is deeply offensive to another member of the group. Under those circumstances you may need to close the discussion down, speak to individuals privately and / or take it to the relevant person in the school who would deal with the issue at hand, e.g. child protection and pastoral care.

## Methods

### Basic Philosophy Session Procedure

1. Set up the classroom to form a **Talk Circle** (a circle of chairs with no tables in the way)
2. Begin by asking the class the **Starter Question**: See lesson plan for Starter Questions, Task Questions (the main question for enquiry) and Nested Questions (those questions that lie implicit behind the Starter and Task Questions).
3. Give them a minute or two of **Talk Time**.
4. **Hold a Talk Ball in the air** to indicate that a whole group discussion is about to commence. Use the ball to allow one person to speak at a time.
5. **Re-ask the Starter Question and take responses**.
6. **Note down** on the board, or on paper within the Talk Circle, any suggestions they have, for example, "X is when you....". Take 5-10 minutes over the starter activity.
7. **Read the Dilemma**. These are very short so you should be able to write them or project so everyone can see.
8. **Ask the Task Question** that accompanies the Dilemma. Write this on the board too.
9. Give them a minute of **Talk Time** in pairs or small groups. Go around and listen, but try not to get involved yourself (see OQM above).
10. **Hold the talk ball up** to indicate that a whole group enquiry will begin.
11. Re-ask the Task Question and **conduct an enquiry**.
12. At some point, and where relevant, **"If" their answers** to the first question. For example, **"If** a 'good choice' is when 'everyone is happy' [referring to an answer from the starter activity], would F's suggestion that she 'tells the truth' be the best choice?". This is known as the **"if-ing"** strategy (see "Kokey Hokey" below)

### Basic Mechanism for Philosophy: what they think and why they think it

- a) Firstly, have them say *what they think* (usually in answer to the main question) and *why they think it* (see "How to open-up closed questions" below for more on this). This elicits *a position* and *a reason for that position*. (See "Open Questioning Mindset" below for how to do this with the right mindset).
- b) Secondly, have them *critically engage* with each other by asking them *what they think about what others have said* and then have them say *why they think what they think about what others have said* (see "How to open up closed questions" below).
- c) A good structure for the pupil's responses to (b) is as follows: "I agree/disagree with X, when he/she said... because..."

### Pin-pointing

*Pinpointing* is a useful move if they simply say, “I disagree with X” without saying “When she said...”. *Pin-pointing* is when you ask: “Can you say what it was X said that you disagree with?” This helps encourage proper critical engagement: in other words, not just disagreeing by expressing a different view, but *disagreeing with what someone said and how they have said it*.

### Anchoring

*Anchoring* is when you bring the pupil back to the main question. For example:

**Question:** Are they the same or different?

**Pupil:** That one has a nose.

**Teacher:** So, are they the same or different?

**Pupil:** Different.

### How to open-up closed questions

- The Task Questions are *grammatically* closed questions, (i.e. they elicit yes/no responses or short-phrase answers) even though they are *conceptually* open (i.e. there is much more to say beyond the yes/no/one-word/short-phrase answer once opened up).
- This is to keep the questions focused and to help pupils stay on-track or not have to think too hard to get started.
- You need to remember to “open-up” any responses to the questions that the children don’t open-up for themselves.

The **most common opening-up strategies** are provided in the box below:

Example question: “Is it okay to be different?”	
Student Response	Relevant opening-up strategy
“No/yes.’ Or: ‘I think...”	“Can you say why?” (Justification/explanation/purpose/motivation)
“It depends”	“Can you say what it would depend on?” (Dependence)
“I don’t know”	“Can you say why you don’t know?” (Opening up “I don’t know”)
“Differing is not the same as being different”	“Can you say in what way they are not the same?” (Comparison)
“It’s good to be divergent?”	“Can you say what you mean by ‘divergent’?” (Clarification)
“She said, ‘I just want to be the same as everyone else?’”	“If she said, ‘I just want to be the same as everyone else’, then is it okay to be different?” ( <i>If-ing for inferencing</i> and <i>anchoring</i> back to question)
“Difference causes fear.”	“So, is it okay to be different?” ( <i>Anchoring</i> back to question)
“Difference is also about being the same.”	“Could you say more about that?” (Elicitation)
“Sometimes it’s okay to be different and sometimes it’s not.”	“Firstly, can you give an example of when it’s okay to be different?” Then, once answered, “Now, can you give an example of when it’s not okay to be different?” (Exemplification)

### Anchor, then open up!

One of the basic questioning moves in philosophy is in fact two moves: anchor, then open up! That is, re-ask the main question, then, if they don't do so for themselves, unprompted, follow this up by opening them up, like so:

**Question:** Are they the same or different?

**Pupil:** That one has a nose.

**Teacher:** So, are they the same or different?

**Pupil:** Different.

**Teacher:** Can you say how they are different? (Opening up for explanation – see above)

**Pupil:** This one has a nose and that one doesn't. (Pupil has now made explicit what was previously either implicit and unarticulated or not understood)

### Kokey Hokey<sup>1</sup>

These methods are designed to help teachers to move between abstract ('out') and concrete ('in') interpretations of a concept, as with the song: "to go 'in', 'out', and 'shake it all about'". The basic "Kokey Hokey" procedure is as follows and is the one we recommend for the philosophy sessions written for Stephen Lawrence Day:

<b>"Kokey Hokey"</b> Starts with abstract
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Start 'out' (abstract)</b> "What is X?" Encourage definitions from the class. E.g. 'What is a 'good choice'?'</li><li>• <b>Then go 'in' (concrete)</b> Tell a problematising story or scenario and ask a Task Question related to it. See 'Dilemma' and following TQ in each lesson plan. E.g. 'What is the best choice? And how should you make that choice?'</li><li>• <b>Use the "if-ing strategy"</b> At some point in the discussion connecting their definitions (abstract) to a concrete question. "So, <i>if</i> a 'good choice' is... [insert one of their definitions] then what is the best choice and how should you make the choice?"</li><li>• <b>Finally, 'shake it all about'</b> Go back to where you started and ask the pupils: "What is a 'good choice'?" (Do they think the same as at the outset?) "Is what F suggested a good choice in this situation?" "Does anyone disagree with something someone has said?" "Has anyone changed their mind?" The <b>aim</b> is to see if anyone has <i>revised</i>... (a) their definition of what a 'good choice' is, or (b) any examples of a <i>good choice</i> as being a genuine example of a <i>good choice</i>.</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> This is a variation of 'The Hokey Kokey' method, which is not used in these lesson plans. For more about this, please click on the following link (and related links after that): <https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/blog/peter-worley-a-philosophical-enquiry-strategy-for-up-against-it-secondary-school-teachers>

## **The Philosophy Foundation Resources**

<https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/login> become a member for free to access hundreds of resources for the primary and secondary classrooms across all subject areas.

Members can also see sessions being run in the classroom showing questioning strategies described in this Facilitation Pack.

<https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/shop>

### **For more on how to facilitate philosophical enquiries see:**

- The If Machine: Philosophical Enquiries in the Classroom (Worley, Bloomsbury 2011)
- 40 Lessons to get children thinking (Worley, Bloomsbury 2017)
- 100 Ideas for the primary classroom: Questioning (Worley, Bloomsbury 2019)
- Free Space: Field Guide to Conversations (Mostert, Boers, Kessels, Boom 2006)

### **Other TPF recommended books for the primary classroom**

- The If Odyssey (Worley, Bloomsbury 2012)
- Thoughtings (Worley & Day, Crown House 2012)
- The Numberverse (Day, Crown House 2014)
- The Philosophy Shop (Worley ed, Crown House 2012 & 2016)

### **For the secondary classroom**

- The If Odyssey (Worley, Bloomsbury 2012)
- The Philosophy Shop (Worley ed, Crown House 2012 & 2016)
- Provocations (Birch, Crown House 2014 & 2018)