



EduTrend Contents

P4C · TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITY · HIGH SCHOOL

Can Machines Think?

Turing's test and Searle's Chinese Room

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

60 minutes

Circle and pairs · up to
30

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

Can Machines Think?

Students learn about Alan Turing's 1950 paper "Computing Machinery and Intelligence", which proposed the imitation game: if a machine can hold a conversation that we cannot tell apart from a human's, we should consider whether it thinks. They then meet John Searle's 1980 Chinese Room argument, in which a person follows rules to answer questions in Chinese without understanding it. They enquire into whether machines could ever truly think.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain the Turing test;
- explain the Chinese Room argument;
- evaluate replies;
- construct a reasoned position.

KEY WORDS

Turing · Searle · understanding ·
imitation game · Chinese Room · AI

CURRICULUM LINKS

Philosophy: philosophy of mind.
Computing: artificial intelligence.
Modern languages: translation.

1**STIMULUS**

Share something to
think about

2**THINK**

Quiet thinking time

3**QUESTION**

Create and choose
a question

4**ENQUIRE**

Reason together

5**BUILD**

Agree, disagree,
add

6**REFLECT**

Last words

Materials (per class)

- Imitation game card
- Chinese Room card
- Reply cards
- Question and thinking-move cards
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Read the stimulus and note possible concepts.
- Prepare question and thinking-move cards.
- Set out a circle so everyone can see each other.
- Print the worksheets.

SAFETY

Everyone may pass. Discuss ideas, not people,
and use the story or invented examples rather
than personal situations.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Stay neutral: ask for reasons, examples and counter-examples rather than giving your own view.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Stimulus	Present the imitation game and the Chinese Room.	<i>“What did you notice?”</i>
10–22 min Questions	Students create questions in pairs and vote on one.	<i>“Which question is most interesting to talk about?”</i>
22–52 min Enquiry	Enquire into the chosen question, building on each other’s ideas.	<i>“Can machines think?”</i>
52–60 min Last words	Each person says one last thought or passes.	<i>“Has your thinking changed?”</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Defend a view on whether machines can think.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

Turing proposed replacing the question “Can machines think?” with a test based on conversation.

Searle argued that running a program is not enough for understanding, and many replies to his argument have been proposed.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Passing the Turing test proves a machine has feelings.” That is debated.
- “Searle said computers are useless.” He questioned understanding, not usefulness.
- “The debate is settled by modern AI.” It continues.

Adapting the activity

Support

Focus on the Chinese Room.

Stretch

Write a reply to Searle and his response.

WORKSHEET 1

Our questions

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

Our questions

Question	Who asked	Votes

WORKSHEET 2

Turing or Searle?

Compare.

Turing or Searle?

	Turing	Searle
Main idea		
Example		
Strength		
Objection		

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

**Is following rules the same as understanding? Before the enquiry I thought...
Now I think... because...**

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Asks a philosophical question	Gives reasons and examples	Listens and builds on others

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Can Machines Think? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Technology and Humanity programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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