



EduTrend Contents

P4C · TIME AND CHANGE · HIGH SCHOOL

Is Time Real?

Augustine, McTaggart and the nature of time

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

Is Time Real?

Students read Augustine's puzzle from the Confessions: he knows what time is until someone asks him to explain it. The past no longer exists, the future does not yet exist and the present has no length, so how can time be measured? Students then meet J. M. E. McTaggart's 1908 argument that time is unreal, which contrasts past, present and future with earlier and later. They enquire into whether time is real.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain Augustine's puzzle;
- explain McTaggart's A- and B-series;
- evaluate views of time;
- construct a reasoned position.

KEY WORDS

time · present · Augustine ·
McTaggart · A-series · B-series

CURRICULUM LINKS

Philosophy: metaphysics. Physics:
time and relativity. RE: time and
eternity.

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)

- Augustine summary card
- A- and B-series 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	Share Augustine's puzzle and McTaggart's two series.	<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>"Is time real?"</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 time is real.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

Augustine discussed time in Book XI of his Confessions, written around 400 CE.

McTaggart's paper "The Unreality of Time" (1908) introduced the terms A-series and B-series, still used by philosophers today.

Common ideas to listen for

- "Physics has settled what time is." Philosophers and physicists still debate it.
- "McTaggart said clocks don't work." His argument was about the nature of time.
- "Only the present exists" is obviously true. It faces objections.

Adapting the activity

Support

Use Augustine's puzzle only.

Stretch

Compare the views with how physics describes time.

WORKSHEET 1

Our questions

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

Our questions

Question	Who asked	Votes

WORKSHEET 2

Two series

Compare.

Two series

	A-series	B-series
Key words		
Example		
Strength		
Weakness		

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

Does only the present exist? 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

Is Time Real? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Time and Change 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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