



EduTrend Contents

P4C · LANGUAGE AND MEANING · HIGH SCHOOL

What Is a Game?

Wittgenstein, definitions and family resemblance

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

What Is a Game?

Students try to write a definition of “game” that includes football, chess, solitaire, hide and seek and a toddler throwing a ball against a wall, but excludes everything else. Each definition meets counter-examples. They then read Ludwig Wittgenstein’s suggestion in *Philosophical Investigations* that games share overlapping similarities, like family resemblances, rather than one common feature. They enquire into whether all words need definitions.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- construct and test definitions;
- explain family resemblance;
- evaluate theories of meaning;
- construct a reasoned position.

KEY WORDS

definition · meaning · use ·
Wittgenstein · family resemblance
· concept

CURRICULUM LINKS

Philosophy: philosophy of
language. English: definitions and
dictionaries. Science: classification.

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)

- Game example cards
- Definition templates
- 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	Challenge groups to define “game”.	<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>“Do all words need definitions?”</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 all words need definitions.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

In *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein used the example of games to argue that many concepts are held together by family resemblance.

He also linked meaning closely to how words are used in everyday life.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Dictionaries fix meanings.” They record usage.
- “If we can’t define a word, we don’t understand it.” We use many words well without definitions.
- “Family resemblance means anything goes.” There are still similarities.

Adapting the activity

Support

Define “game” for four examples.

Stretch

Test family resemblance on another word, such as “art”.

WORKSHEET 1

Our questions

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write questions the stimulus makes you wonder about.

Our questions

Question	Who asked	Votes

WORKSHEET 2

Define it

Test.

Define it

Definition attempt	Counter-example

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

**Does meaning come from how we use words? 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

What Is a Game? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Language and Meaning 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.

© 2026 EduTrend Contents. This activity may be printed and copied for use with students in your own school, club or home. It may not be resold or published elsewhere. Photos: Jerry Wang / Unsplash.