



EduTrend Contents

P4C · ASKING PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS · MIDDLE SCHOOL

What Makes a Question Philosophical?

Testing questions against four criteria

Ages 11–13

Level: Intermediate

50 minutes

Circle and small groups
· up to 30

Activity 03

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

ACTIVITY 03 · AT A GLANCE

What Makes a Question Philosophical?

Students receive a mix of questions: What is the capital of France? Is it ever right to steal? How many legs does a spider have? What is time? Can a robot be a friend? They test each against four criteria: open to reasonable disagreement, about a concept, important to people, and not answerable by looking it up. They rewrite weak questions and enquire into what philosophy is.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- apply criteria to questions;
- explain what philosophy is;
- rewrite questions to be philosophical;
- distinguish empirical and conceptual questions.

KEY WORDS

philosophical · concept · empirical · contestable · criteria · rewrite

CURRICULUM LINKS

Science: investigable questions.
RE: ultimate questions. English: question types.

1	2	3	4	5	6
STIMULUS	THINK	QUESTION	ENQUIRE	BUILD	REFLECT
Share something to think about	Quiet thinking time	Create and choose a question	Reason together	Agree, disagree, add	Last words

Materials (per class)

- Question cards
- Criteria checklist
- 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 03 · 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
0–8 min Stimulus	Share the mixed question cards.	<i>"What did you notice?"</i>
8–20 min Questions	Students create questions in pairs and vote on one.	<i>"Which question is most interesting to talk about?"</i>
20–44 min Enquiry	Enquire into the chosen question, building on each other's ideas.	<i>"What makes a question philosophical?"</i>
44–50 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)

Rewrite three factual questions as philosophical ones and explain the change.

ACTIVITY 03 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The philosophy in brief

Empirical questions can be answered by observation or research; conceptual questions are about the meaning of ideas.

Philosophical questions are often contestable: reasonable people disagree after thinking carefully.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Philosophy has no answers.” It has better and worse answers.
- “Science answers everything.” Some questions are about meaning and value.
- “Weird questions are philosophical.” They must be about big ideas.

Adapting the activity

Support

Use two criteria only.

Stretch

Find a question that is both scientific and philosophical.

WORKSHEET 1

Criteria test

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Tick each.

Criteria test

Question	Open	Concept	Important	Not look-up

WORKSHEET 2

Thinking moves

Use these in the enquiry.

Thinking moves

Thinking move	My example
I agree with... because...	
I disagree with... because...	
An example is...	
A counter-example is...	
Building on what... said...	

WORKSHEET 3

Last words

Before and after.

Can science answer every question? 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 Makes a Question Philosophical? is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents P4C Asking Philosophical Questions programme (middle school, level: intermediate). 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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