

# Equality Toolkit

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## Q1: WHAT ARE 'BIG IDEAS'?

Philosophical concepts, which we call Big Ideas, are distinguished by having the following three characteristics:

1. **Common:** The concept is shared by everybody. It is a word commonly used by students (depending on their age), however they might not be very clear about what such concepts really mean or signify; and even if they are clear, others might well disagree (because these concepts are contestable)
2. **Contestable:** The concept will arouse argument and disagreements. Students may hold different understandings of what the concept means, and how it can be used in varied situations. This is how some concepts can rely on necessary conditions.
3. **Central:** The concept is important to use in how we live our lives and understand the world around us. In an ethical context, concepts like **equality** is very important, as are many others such as fair, justice, duty...

## Q2: WHAT ARE CONCEPTS?

Concepts are the mental or cognitive tools we use to classify and order our experiences in and of the world. Concepts are always abstractions constructed by thinking beings – like us – but some concepts are more abstract than others. For example, we can imagine a child forming the concept dog from numerous instances of four-legged creatures that she encounters in her daily experience, together with appropriate reinforcement from someone already familiar with this concept. This is, in part, a process of trial and error – excluding other four-legged creatures that miaow instead of bark, for example. Still, this concept is an abstraction because I can pat my dog but I cannot pat – i.e. interact physically with – my concept or idea of a dog.

Other concepts – including those, like good, bad, right(s), wrong, responsibility, freedom, justice, that are central in the field of Ethics – are more abstract still, in that it is more difficult to describe or imagine precisely what kinds of items in the world fall under them. There are two different points to notice here. First, even if there were complete agreement as to what such concepts mean, the words which stand for them function more like adjectives or adverbs than nouns. I can observe, hear, pat, play with and smell cats and dogs, but – so it seems – I can only observe, witness or perform actions – or, perhaps, people – that are good, bad, responsible, free, etc. Secondly – and this point is acknowledged in the Ethical Capability Framework – there rarely is complete agreement as to what such concepts mean. What counts as right or wrong, or free or just is often quite contestable or controversial, both in general terms – precisely what the words “right”, “wrong” and “free” mean – and in specific instances – whether or not a particular action or person, state, regime, etc. is actually right, good or free. Of course being contestable does not imply that the meanings of these words is actually contested. All too often, we simply assume that when we use them, those around us will mean the same thing by them as we do (even if we don't quite know what we do mean!). Such assumptions can lead to unnecessary misunderstandings and even disagreements. Trying to be clear about what certain terms or concepts actually mean is a key part of thinking and inquiry in ethics.

## CONCEPTS ACROSS AND THROUGH THE CURRICULUM

The following comments on the nature of concepts generally, the importance of value-laden (ethical) concepts more specifically, and the role that such concepts as freedom, justice, rights and responsibilities play in moral reasoning, judgement formation and decision-making, should also be considered more broadly in the context of the learning areas and capabilities that constitute the Victorian Curriculum F-10, as articulated by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority



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Given the role that concepts play in helping us to organize, classify and understand our experiences, it is not surprising that concepts permeate the curriculum (at all year levels). A curriculum is, after all, designed to provide a meaningful structure for learning, thinking about and evaluating the world around us. We are drawing connections to the curriculum when considering how concepts like justice and rights might guide our thinking in the civics and citizenship learning area or the personal and social capabilities, or of how prominently the concept of freedom has featured throughout history. The links between the curriculum and concepts are also evident in the extent to which science and technology both generate and respond to specific ethical questions, or the meanings of such key logical concepts as validity, consistency and deductive/ inductive reasoning and their role in moral judgement and decision-making. Focusing student attention on the important roles that concepts play in generating deep levels of learning, thinking and understanding should be an area of priority for teachers.

## HOW DO I SCAFFOLD STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING OF CONTESTABILITY?

**A:** Concepts can be difficult to understand as they are mental tools and can sometimes be understood in different ways in different situations. Sometimes, that makes it tricky to agree to a standard meaning to any one concept. Let us consider the concept of fish. We all know what a fish is and what a fish is not. We know that the word fish is a noun and therefore denotes a thing. Therefore, a simple concept like 'fish' is easy to understand and communicate to others. But, let us consider an important concept that is more abstract like **equality**. **Equality** is an abstract noun, therefore it is not a thing, it is an abstract idea. As part of a critical investigation, we first ask these three questions to identify if a concept is indeed an important concept.

1. Is the concept used in our common day-to-day communication? Yes/No
2. Does the concept play an important role in our lives? Yes/No
3. Is the concept contestable? Can it's meaning be debated? Yes/No

If you have answered 'Yes' to all three questions, the concept is an important one and there is an opportunity to investigate the complexity of the concept. Let us test the concept of **equality** against the above criteria questions. **Equality** is used in our common day-to-day conversations, and it plays an important role in our lives, and it can have different meanings to different people in different situations. Therefore, **equality** is an important concept and there is an opportunity to investigate its implications to our lived experiences and the way we use it to communicate to others. Remember, people are very complex and how we communicate with each other is very complex. We cannot assume everyone understands or experiences **equality** in the same way. However, the concept of fish is used in our common day-to-day conversations, and it may or may not play an important role in our lives, but the concept of fish is not debatable. We do not argue over the understanding of what the word fish means. Therefore, the concept of fish is not an important philosophical concept, but **equality** is an important philosophical concept. That is why we think **equality** is a Big Idea.



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## Q3: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THESE CONCEPTS?

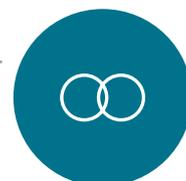
### HOW IS EQUALITY A CONTESTABLE CONCEPT?

*Equality* is also a “Three Cs” concept: it is in *common* usage, not just in ethical situations, but whenever we apply the familiar term “same”; it is also contestable because in some contexts at least, its exact meaning is far from clear. Finally, it can be regarded as *central* in so far as it is often important to be able to judge when two or more objects, quantities, situations, even people, are “the same” in certain relevant respects.

*Equality* features in such well-known statements as “All persons are equal” and “All people are equal before the law”, where it seems plausible to interpret these as *ethical (prescriptive)* rather than *factual (descriptive)* statements, although they contain the words “is” or “are” rather than “should” or “ought”. Still, it is far from clear just what such statements mean. What is clear is that equality and sameness are not the same as strict *identity* (as in “The person in the witness stand is *the very same person* as the one who committed the robbery” and even “ $5 \times 9 = 45$ ”); logically speaking, two objects are never strictly identical, because if they were, there would only be one object! By contrast, equality is a more contextual concept, so if we want to state that two things are equal, we need to make clear *in what respect* they are equal. Two chairs of different colour may still be the same (equal) *type* of chair, while two chairs of quite different types may be the same (equal) colour. Likewise, when we assert that people are equal, we need to specify in what respect they are equal. In an ethical context, “respect” here functions like the word “standard” (or, perhaps, “criterion”); so, for example, in a court of law, we can expect that people who are quite different in various respects (wealth, power, etc.) are, nevertheless, held to a common (equal) standard when it comes to judging their actions. Similarly, if it is agreed that every citizen deserves at least a minimum degree of health care provided by the State, then saying that everyone is equal in that respect means that that minimum standard applies to everyone.

If we think about the many ways in which people – whether a few individuals or everybody together – are or are not equal, various standards or criteria of identity come into play. A contest in which both sides are more or less equal is likely to be more exciting than one which is very lop-sided, where “equal” here presumably means something like “same number of players”, or “same levels of skill”, or “same number of fit players”, or “same/similar score line for much of the game”, etc. Depending on the context in which such expressions are used, it may or may not be necessary to spell out which type of sameness is intended. Notice that even here there is an ethical dimension since, presumably, some forms of inequality – having twice as many players, for example – would be labelled as “unfair”, while others – like ending up with different scores – would not be. As already noted, equality and fairness do not always coincide, but it is worth inviting students to consider such questions of meaning, rather than have a teacher or text book provide the answer. Ethically speaking, do these concepts mean the same thing? Is one more basic or *primitive* than the other?

Other related questions to think about with students might include “What types or standards of equality lie behind such (ethical) statements as: ‘The world would be a better place if there were more equality?’ or ‘Inequality among nations and even within nations is a major source of distress and conflict?’” Should we, for example, strive for a world (or society) in which everyone is treated equally? Or in which everyone receives the same benefits at the end of the day? Or in which everyone has the same opportunities to be happy and successful? Depending on our choices here, how close to or far from this ideal state is the actual world in your experience? Returning to the familiar mantra “All persons are equal”, it was suggested above that this is an ethical or *prescriptive* statement rather than a factual one, but does it follow that what it really means is “All persons should be equal?” Finally, following a line of inquiry in Lipman and Sharp’s *Ethical Inquiry* (Chapter 11), is there a connection between equality and *friendship*? For example, when people are true friends, they see themselves as *equals* in a moral sense?



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## Q4: WHAT ARE CONCEPT GAMES, AND HOW DO WE PLAY THEM?

Although each concept game will deal with a different concept, there is a standard process you can use for them all.

### 1. CONTESTED CONCEPT

Decide on your contested concept, For example: **Equal**

### 2. SET-UP

Set up the room so you have an area on the floor with a label indicating what each area represents. Often A4 cards are made with the category title. You can also use a hoola hoop to place the cards in.

For example:



The students should sit in a circle around the categories. It is important that every student can see each person in the group, as well as the three categories.

### 3. PROCEDURE

#### Part 1:

Begin by getting the students to write a **DEFINITION** of the contested concept.

By thinking about a definition of a term, the students will have to consider a range of scenarios that relate to that concept. Often they will find it challenging to write a definition that fits with every scenario.

- In small groups or individuals, students write down their definition of the concept
- As a class read out each definition and begin to write a **CRITERIA LIST** for that term
- If there are points in your criteria list that clash with one another, discuss to come to a resolution
- It is quite normal for your definition to change and evolve throughout the course of a lesson

#### Part 2:

- Get the students to return to their groups
- Each group is given a set of **EXAMPLES**. These may be words, pictures or scenarios.
- Students examine the examples one at a time, and decide which hoop they will place each example.
- An example cannot be placed without students identifying the **REASONS** they are placing it there.
- Nominate a scribe to keep a running list of these reasons.



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## Part 3:

- As a class come together go through each example
- Discuss any examples that are contested
- It is useful to write the students ideas on the board. This is important to give them a sense of purpose and progress
- While you are organising the reasons:
  - Eliminate repetitions
  - Identify contradictions
  - Seek out any necessary conditions (if appropriate)

## Part 4:

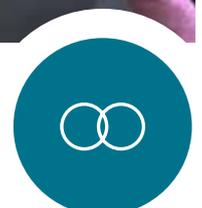
- Students revisit their original definition and edit as necessary
- Come together as a class and students share their new definitions
- Discuss come to a final definition

## Part 5:

- Always leave time at the end of your lesson for **REFLECTION**
- Students can reflect on what they have learned, clarified or discovered so far
- They can also reflect on their own thinking and contribution to the class

## Tips:

- Always ensure the students give reasons for their choices.
- Challenge the students to think of counter-examples that could show how an idea is incorrect.
- Try to combine multiple ideas into one unified concept, or show there are several different concepts in play.
- Write down student questions on the board. This provides a starting board for your next lesson.



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## Q5: WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

EQUAL

?

NOT EQUAL



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WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

**Love**

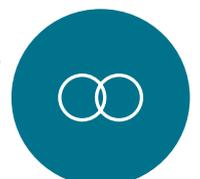
**2 Oranges**

**\$20 note**

**Affection**

**2 Apples**

**Two \$10 notes**



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## SCENARIO EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

In Australia during World War Two, only men were conscripted.	Girls toys are often pink, while boys toys are always blue.
In November 2015, the average weekly earnings of Australian male workers was, on average, 17.21% higher than those of female workers.	Rich people can find ways to avoid paying taxes, while less fortunate people have to lose up to half of their salary on taxes.
Some private schools only accept students who had parents that went to the same school.	Some private schools in Australia receive the same amount of funding as under privileged public schools.
Men are not entitled to the same amount of paternity leave as women.	Students have to wear a school uniform while the teachers do not.



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<p>In a family of five, everyone receives the same amount of food at dinner time.</p>	<p>Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a lower life expectancy and poorer health when compared to the non-Indigenous population.</p>
<p>In some countries Muslim women are not allowed to wear a burqa (religious head covering), while nuns are allowed to wear their habit.</p>	<p>All Australian citizens have the right to vote in the election.</p>
<p>Until recently, in Saudia Arabia women were not permitted to drive.</p>	<p></p>

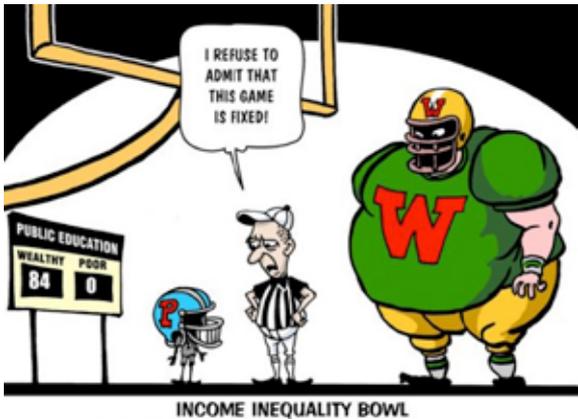


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## PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:



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## Q6: WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS AND HOW DO I USE

When conducting discussion, it is useful to have prepared some questions in advance. Discussion plans will help provide direction and structure in discussion. They may also be used to direct the students' attention to a particular aspect of the topic being examined.

Discussion plans can be sequential – that is, each question builds upon the previous question, or non-sequential, where the questions devised could be asked in any order. The latter plan allows for you to explore the topic from different angles.

Questions asked should reflect the shift from more “concrete” to more “abstract” thinking in relation to the concept of **equality**. In thinking about concepts and their meanings, students are encouraged to offer their own thoughts and opinions in response to questions or comments made by others. However, discussion is transformed into *inquiry* when and only when participants engage in such procedures as:

- Providing reasons and/or evidence (including examples and counter-examples) for their views;
- Building on one another's ideas in the interest of developing a deeper understanding of the issues;
- Balancing a sense of passion for or commitment to their own ideas with an open-mindedness that allows them to rethink issues and change their minds when it is appropriate to do so;
- Showing a commitment to getting to the truth of things while being aware of questions and issues that remain unresolved.

When conducting a philosophical discussion, the teacher should be seen as a facilitator of thinking, rather than the source and evaluator of knowledge. One of the teacher's key roles in guiding discussion and inquiry is to encourage all students to participate without fear of being judged. Teachers should model and encourage the sense that good thinking matters whereas sloppy or careless thinking is to be avoided where possible. Rather than focusing on the “correct” answers, the teacher should place their attention on the students' thinking.

The point of working as a *community* of inquiry is to develop an understanding that the ups and downs that will inevitably occur over time (a breakthrough “Aha!” moment, or a discouraging dead-end, for example) are owned by the community as a whole – and, thereby, by each and every member – and not simply by individuals who have no connection with one another.

### WHY use Discussion Plans:

- They are an excellent source of substantive questions.
- They make it more likely that the discussion will get philosophical
- They make inquiry slow down and go deeper.
- They encourage more structured thinking

### WHEN to use Discussion Plans:

- Before the class, to help you think about philosophical ideas embedded in the resource material.
- Within a whole class discussion to deepen inquiry,
- When the class breaks into small groups
- To begin a follow-up session, where a question raised previously can be explored by the use of an appropriate discussion plan.



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## HOW to use Discussion Plans:

- In an open discussion, use single selected questions from a discussion at appropriate moments in the inquiry.
- Offer the questions to the whole group in the sequences given, leaving ample time for discussion before moving to the next,
- For small group work, cut up discussion plans, handing one or two questions to each group,
- Can be used as a round robin in a whole group, each person having first opportunity to respond to their question or statement, before others are invited to comment.

## 3 KINDS of Discussion Plans:

### Series of Questions

List of questions ranging from concrete to abstract based on the stimulus material.

1. Was Mum lying when she said that there was a dragon in the matchbox?
2. Did she think she was lying?
3. If you think you are telling the truth, but it is really a lie, are you lying or not?
4. Do you have to know that something is untrue for it to be considered a lie?
5. When you don't give the "whole truth", is that lying?
6. Is there a difference between "the truth" and "the whole truth"?
7. Should you always tell the truth?

### Series of Statements

Students place a tick or a cross next to each statement and then justify their decision

1. Freedom is being able to do whatever you want.
2. Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.
3. There is no freedom without limits.
4. Freedom entails responsibility.

### Series of Scenarios

Students contemplate and discuss a set of scenarios around a philosophical theme e.g. Is it ever okay to lie?

1. you hide an asylum seeker in your house and authorities knock on your door
2. you don't want to hurt someone's feelings
3. the person you are conversing with regularly lies to you.



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## Steps in Designing a Discussion Plan:

**Step 1:** Work out the philosophical themes in the material

**Step 2:** Pick one philosophical theme

**Step 3:** Choose a discussion plan format to suit the theme and the intended use of the plan.

**Step 4:** Brainstorm questions, scenarios etc as appropriate for kind of plan on slips of paper that can be rearranged.

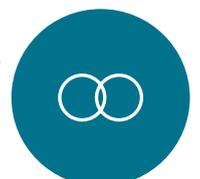
**Step 5:** Sort, prune, add. Should there be a particular order?

**Step 6:** Evaluate – have you covered elements of the theme that you want to cover?

## DISCUSSION PLANS FOR EQUALITY

### DISCUSSION PLAN: 1 “EQUALITY”

1. When cutting a birthday cake, is it equal if everyone gets the same size piece?
2. Is being equal the same as being the same?
3. Should all children have the same quantity of food for lunch?
4. Should all children have the same kinds of food for lunch?
5. Does your teacher treat everyone equally?
6. If a teacher did treat everyone equally, would this be fair?
7. Can you think of a situation where a class-mate was not treated equally, but this was fair?
8. How can everyone have equal opportunities?
9. Can you think of circumstances where are all people treated equally?
10. Should all people be treated equally?
11. Would a society where everyone was treated equally be a good one?
12. What are the different types of equality?
13. What does ‘equality before the law’ mean to you?



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## DISCUSSION PLAN: 2 “EQUALITY”

1. Would the world be a better place if there were more equality?’
2. Inequality among nations and even within nations is a major source of distress and conflict’?”
3. Should we strive for a world (or society) in which everyone is treated equally?
4. Should we strive for a world (or society) in which everyone receives the same benefits at the end of the day?
5. Should we strive for a world (or society) in which everyone has the same opportunities to be happy and successful?
6. Depending on our choices here, how close to or far from this ideal state is the actual world in your experience?



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## Q7: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

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### LINKS AND RESOURCES:

**The Fairest Teacher of Them All - Jason Buckley**

<https://p4c.com/the-fairest-teacher-of-them-all/>

**Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena**

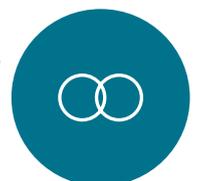
<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/LastStop>

**Let's Talk About Race by Julius Lester**

<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/LetsTalkAboutRace>

**My Dream of Martin Luther King by Faith Ringgold**

<https://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/MyDreamOfMartinLutherKing>



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## IAPC RESOURCES

Lipman, M. and Sharp, A. (1977). *Ethical inquiry Instructional Manual to Accompany LISA*. 2nd ed. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, Montclair State College  
ISBN-13: 978-0916834210

Lisa, a classmate of Harry Stottlemeier, experiences a range of physical, aesthetic and ethical awakenings as she puzzles over issues of animal rights, sexism, racism, justice, divorce and death with her classmates. As Lisa and her friends begin to recognize the ethical dimensions of their experience, they delve into the philosophical concepts as the right, the fair, the good, perfection, and naturalism. Lisa’s struggles with identity and thinking for oneself leads her to recognize her interdependence with others and with nature. This novel explores the complexity of ethical concerns and the multiple capacities involved in making sound ethical judgments.

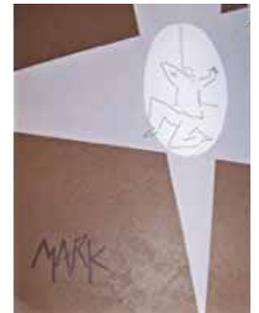
Grade Range: 7-12. Target Grades: 7-8



Leading Idea No. 4: Retaliation (“getting even”),  
 Discussion Plan: Getting Even, Activity: What would you do if ..... P. 61  
 Leading Idea NO. 12: Should there always be reciprocity? ..... P.75  
 Exercise: Reciprocity, Discussion Plan: Should everything be kept even? ..... P.76

Lipman, M. and Sharp, A. (1980). *Social Inquiry: Instruction Manual to Accompany Mark*. 1st ed. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, Montclair State College.  
ISBN-13: 978-0916834135

This instructional manual aims to support students’ thinking skill development through the conceptual foundations of the social sciences. The various exercises and discussion plans aim to identify issues within the social sciences and expose to students to conflicting concepts at the heart of each issue. These various topics fit well within a social studies curriculum unit.



Leading Idea 9: Injustice and unequal distribution of goods ..... P.375  
 Exercise: How goods are distributed in the world ..... P.376  
 Exercise: How goods are distributed in the U.S. .... P.377  
 Leading Idea 10: Is fairness a matter of treating everyone alike? ..... P.379  
 Exercise: The breaks people get ..... P.380  
 Leading Idea 11: Injustice as inequality of opportunities,  
 Discussion Plan: Bart’s story..... P.382

