

Fairness Toolkit

CONTENTS

Q1: WHAT ARE CONCEPTS?

Q2: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THIS CONCEPT?

Q3: WHAT IS A CONCEPT GAME, AND HOW DO I PLAY THEM?

Q4: WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

- Category Cards
- Concept Cards
- Scenario Cards
- Image Cards

Q5: WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS, AND HOW DO I USE THEM?

- Sample discussion plans

Q6: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

- IAPC References



Fairness Toolkit

Q1: WHAT ARE CONCEPTS?

WHAT IS A CONCEPT?

Concepts are the mental or cognitive tools we use to classify and order our experiences in and of the world. At a basic level, having a concept means being able to recognise something and distinguish and/or compare this concept with other things.

Concepts are abstract ideas. They are not straightforward and cannot simply be answered like a fact. For example, one may ascertain: “It is not fair that a teacher treats every student the same when it comes to punishing” To examine this claim we need to first look at what counts as **fair**. We are then able to evaluate our claim in the light of our understanding of the concept of **fair**.

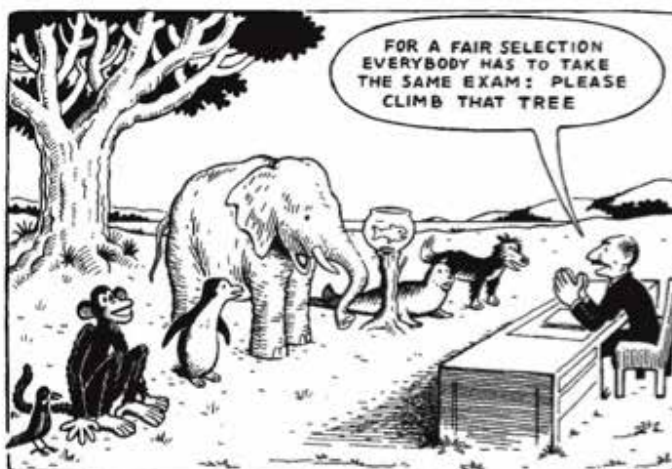
Concepts are abstractions constructed by thinking beings – like us – with sufficiently large brains. But some concepts are more abstract than others. For example, we can imagine a child deriving the concept dog from numerous instances of four-legged creatures that she encounters in her daily experience, together with appropriate reinforcement from someone already familiar with this concept. This is, in part, is a process of trial and error – excluding other four-legged creatures that for example, miaow instead of bark. Still, this concept is an abstraction - 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. Trying to be clear about what certain terms or concepts actually mean is a key part of thinking and inquiry in ethics.

Concepts related to the philosophical branch of Ethics promote deep questioning and lead to contestable answers. Philosophical concepts such as fairness, equality and respect can overlap with topics in most general subject areas. Therefore, it is easy to see how one can add a philosophical dimension to every unit of work. By discussing such concepts, students will learn to become autonomous thinkers, while also applying their subject knowledge to their own personal existences and the world around them.



Fairness Toolkit



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 person and human being are very important, as are many others such as *right, justice, duty, happiness...*

HOW DO I SCAFFOLD STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF CONTESTABILITY?

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 **Right and Wrong**. **Right and Wrong** 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 its 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 'fairness' against the above criteria questions. Fairness 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, fairness 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 'fairness' 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 fairness is an important philosophical concept. That is why we think 'fairness' is a **Big Idea**.



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Q2: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THIS CONCEPT?

HOW IS FAIRNESS A CONTESTABLE CONCEPT?

Anecdotal experience indicates that children learn to use the word “fair” from a very young age; specifically, in the negative form: “That’s not fair!”. It seems that they develop an intuitive understanding of this concept well before they can actually articulate what it really means. Adolescents, too, will usually be sharply attuned to situations that they regard as unfair, often in relation to their status as neither children nor adults. The familiarity or commonality of this concept can facilitate a discussion sparked by some examples of what they regard as unfair, from which they can then make the move from unfairness to fairness, perhaps by considering what would have to occur in order for the lack of fairness to be addressed.

One way to explore the meaning of “fair” is to compare it with the term “right” in cases where the two concepts seem to apply more or less synonymously. Yet it makes sense to say “That was the right thing to do, although it might not have been fair” (or, perhaps, vice versa?), which raises the distinct possibility that right and fair are not equivalent after all. In the instructional manual *Ethical Inquiry* (Chapter 6), the authors Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp suggest that where right and rights are chiefly features of individuals, fairness makes sense only in the context of a group of individuals, such as a society, a school, etc.

According to Lipman and Sharp (*Ethical Inquiry* 196), children’s early understanding of *fairness* rests on its relationship to such concepts as *equity*, *justice*, and *respect*, each of which warrants careful examination in its own right. But precisely because the former concept is usually more intuitively grasped than these others, it might be worth exploring with students whether it can be properly articulated without reference to them. Since the concept of equality will be considered below, we might simply point out here that the idea of treating people fairly avoids some of the difficulties associated with that of treating people equally. There may well be situations in which treating people fairly actually requires that we do not treat everyone in the same way. Many students will be familiar with the universal symbol for justice, often depicted in courts of law:

It is worth exploring if the concepts of fairness, equality and (blind) justice are all symbolised here.

The word “fair” has multiple meanings, some of which do not appear to be related (e.g. fairness as a moral concept and a fair or fairground). Then again, “fair” is also used as a synonym of “moderate” or “balanced”, in describing a the weather, or assessing someone’s health or performance, and so on. Similarly, the moral requirement of fairness could be regarded as a moderate or reasonable condition when it comes to how we treat one another. Fairness may not be all there is to moral behaviour, but it does set a minimal requirement for any social group that can lay the foundation for more sophisticated norms such as justice, respect, and care.



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Q3: WHAT IS A CONCEPT GAME, AND HOW DO I 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: **Good**

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:

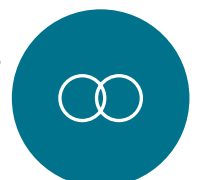
Begin by getting the students to write a **DEFINITION** of the contested concept.

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 and 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:

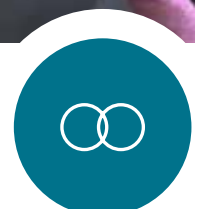
- Students revisit their original definition and edit as necessary
- Come together as a class and students share their new definitions
- Discuss come to a final definition

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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Q4: WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

FAIR

?

NOT FAIR



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WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

Moral / Immoral

Equal / Unequal

Just / Unjust

Honest / Dishonest

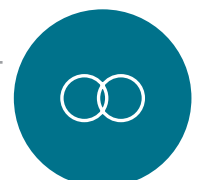
Biased / Unbiased

Acceptable / Unacceptable

Objective / Subjective

Right / Wrong

Good / Bad

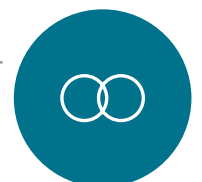


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SCENARIO EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

<p>Someone who works long hours gets paid less than a person who works less hours but has more responsibility.</p>	<p>The fastest runner wins all the races.</p>
<p>A 12 year olds gets more homework than a 5 year olds.</p>	<p>Someone who is very clever and doesn't study gets the best marks on the exam, while someone else has to work really hard to just pass.</p>
<p>A CEO of a company earns \$300,000 per year when her workers earn \$50,000 per year.</p>	<p>Some children have the latest digital devices whilst some children have no shoes.</p>
<p>I told my teacher that I think his class is boring in front of all our classmates.</p>	<p>One culture invades another culture and takes their land.</p>



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<p>Only some children get chosen to play the lead roles in a school play.</p>	<p>When mum and dad say 'no', their reason is because 'we are your parents and you must listen to what we say'.</p>
<p>When one student is naughty in class, the teacher keeps the entire class in at lunchtime.</p>	<p>In a group project no one else wanted to work, so one person did it all. Everyone in the group then received an A+ for the project.</p>
<p>There are innocent people who get sent to jail for life, while there are guilty people who get away with their crime.</p>	<p>A young person gets very ill, while a person who has smoked their whole life lives to 95.</p>
<p>Students in private schools have access to better facilities than students in public schools.</p>	

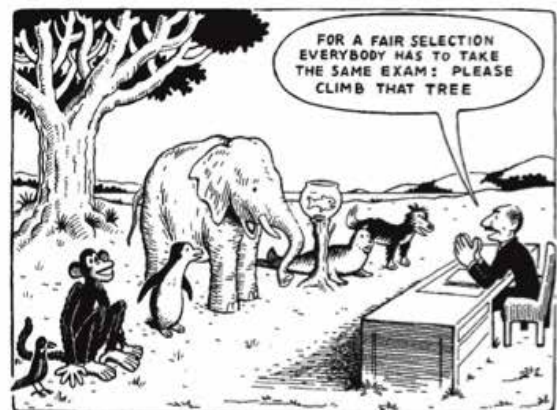
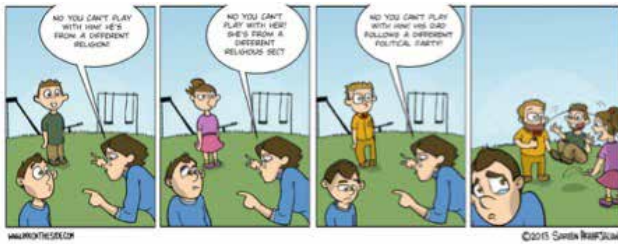


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PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:



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Q5: WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS AND HOW DO I USE THEM?

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 in question. 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 of 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.

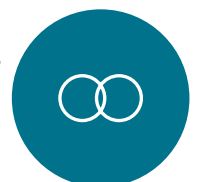


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DISCUSSION PLANS FOR FAIRNESS

1. Can you think of a recent incident or event which you thought was unfair?
2. If you witness such a situation, do you normally say or do something, or just let it go?
3. Is it fair for a class-mate to organise a party but only invite some members of the class?
4. It seems to be a fact that some people are just better-looking than others. Is it? Assuming that good-looking people are more successful in various areas of life, do you think this is fair?
5. Can you think of or imagine an example of fairness where those involved were not all treated equally?
6. Is treating people fairly the same as treating them equally? If so, why bother with two different words or concepts? If not, what is the difference between these two types of treatment?
7. Would a fair society or world be one in which everyone received what they deserved or were entitled to, no more and no less?
8. Does the law of Supply and Demand that operates in a free-market or capitalist economy guarantee fairness?
9. Is it possible that treating people fairly can involve a violation of their rights?
10. If there are situations where doing what is fair and doing what is right are not the same thing, which is more morally important?



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Q6: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

LINKS AND RESOURCES:

A variety of picture books that you can use as a stimulus for the concept of fairness. A discussion plan is provided for each story.

Piggybook

Anthony Browne

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

Sosu's Call

Meshack Asare

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

The Ant and the Grasshopper:

<https://p4c.com/the-ant-and-the-grasshopper/>

The If Machine

Peter Worley

The Meaning of Ant Life, Republic Island, The Ring of Gyges

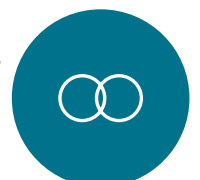
The Philosophy Shop

Peter Worley

Chapter on 'Ethics'. In particular, '*Classroom Punishment*' by Michael Hand

Thinking Stories 3

Phillip Cam – 'The Fight'



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IAPC RESOURCES

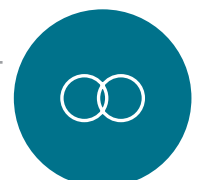
Lipman, M. and Sharp, A. (1977). *Ethical inquiry Instructional Manual to Accompany LISA*. 2nd ed. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, Montclair State College
ISBN-13: 978-0916834210

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 recognise 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 recognise 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..	Page 61
Leading Idea No. 12: Should there always be reciprocity?	Page 75
Exercise: Reciprocity, Discussion Plan: Should everything be kept even?	Page 76
Leading Idea: What is fair?, Discussion Plan: Fairness.	Page 196
Exercise: What is fair?	Page 197
Discussion Plan: What is fairness?	Page 198
Leading Idea No. 4: Rules and fairness	Page 203
Exercise: Rules and fairness	Page 204
Discussion Plan: When are we obliged to protest?	Page 206
Leading Idea No. 6: Is right fair and fair right?	Page 207
Exercise: Fair or right?	Page 208
Exercise: Right and fair	Page 209
Leading Idea No. 7: Are fair and right always consistent?, Discussion Plan: Are fair and right always consistent?	Page 210
Exercise: Right and Fair	Page 211
Exercise: Fairness, rights, privileges and obligations	Page 213
Leading Idea No. 9: Do laws apply only to what's fair?	Page 214
Exercise: Do laws apply to what's right?	Page 215
Leading Idea No. 10: Are there laws against everything unfair?, Discussion Plan: Are there laws against everything unfair?	Page 216
Exercise: What is fair and what is forbidden by the law?	Page 217
Leading Idea No. 11: Living with others and living with ourselves, Exercise: Living with others and living with ourselves	Page 218
Leading Idea No. 8: Right, perfect and fair	Page 265



Fairness Toolkit



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 8: Justice as fairness	Page 372
Discussion Plan: Justice and fairness.....	Page 373
Exercise: Justice and fairness.....	Page 374
Leading Idea 9: Injustice and unequal distribution of goods.	Page 375
Exercise: How goods are distributed in the world	Page 376
Exercise How goods are distributed in the U.S.	Page 377
Exercise: Ms. William's story.	Page 378
Leading Idea 10: Is fairness a matter of treating everyone alike?.....	Page 379
Exercise: The breaks people get.....	Page 380
Exercise: Competitiveness and distribution.....	Page 381
Exercise: Costs of discrimination.....	Page 383
Cont. Exercise: Costs of discrimination.....	Page 384
Discussion plan: Developments costs.....	Page 386
Leading Idea 13: Do people in fact get what they deserve?, Discussion Plan: Is it true that "whatever is, is right"?, and that one gets whatever it is one deserves?	Page 387

