

Good and Bad Toolkit

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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. This is exemplified by the icon the is used to introduce the ethical concept of **Good and Bad**. The image is of head filled with different objects. This symbolising the different experiences, ideas and conflicting definitions and that every person will have collected when examining concepts of **Right and Wrong**.

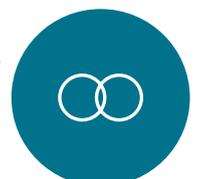
Concepts are abstractions constructed by thinking beings – like us – with sufficiently large brains. But some concepts are more abstract than others. For example, we can imagine a child deriving the concept dog from numerous instances of four-legged creatures that she encounters in her daily experience, 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.



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Q2: WHAT ARE 'BIG IDEAS'?

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.

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 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 concepts of **Good** and **Bad** against the above criteria questions. **Good** and **Bad** are used in our common day-to-day conversations (in particular in the classroom when talking **Good** and **Bad** actions or decisions). It plays an important role in our lives, and it can have different meanings to different people in different situations (what is right in one situation may not be right in another). Therefore, **Good** and **Bad** 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 also very complex. We cannot assume everyone understands or experiences **Good** and **Bad** 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 **Good** and **Bad** is an important philosophical concept. That is why we think **Good** and **Bad** is a Big Idea.



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Q3: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THESE CONCEPTS?

HOW ARE GOOD AND BAD CONTESTABLE CONCEPTS?

The terms 'good' and 'bad' can be understood as *contestable* in two principle ways. First, the terms can be understood as contestable in relation to their linguistic meaning. That is, at times we use the terms to denote moral value while at other times we use the terms to denote a non-moral preference. Consider the following two sentences: a) donating money to charity is a good act and, b) "The spaghetti was good!" In sentence 'a' the speaker is passing a moral judgement on the value of an act. In sentence 'b' the speaker is passing an aesthetic judgement (she does not mean to say that the spaghetti was 'morally good'). It is advisable then, that facilitators of a discussion on 'good and bad' draw out the distinction in the way speakers use the terms in everyday language.

The second way the terms 'good' and 'bad' can be considered contestable draws on age-old philosophical questions and debates: what is to be considered morally 'good' and morally 'bad'? Who decides what is 'good' and what is 'bad'? Are we morally obliged to behave in ways which promote a particular idea of 'the good'? These are significant and central questions in moral philosophy. However, before exploring these broader, more 'abstract' questions with students, facilitators might first draw on questions which relate more to a student's own 'concrete' experiences of the terms 'good' and 'bad'. Certainly, these terms are common in our lives from an early age; the concepts of good and bad are frequently reinforced by children's books, movies and television series (consider the moralistic fairytales of your own childhood from the 'wicked' stepmother to the 'virtuous' princess). Common too is the refrain "good girl" or "good boy", usually expressed after a child performs a behaviour desirable to a parent or caretaker. In this way, children's understanding of the term 'good' (and, when they behave 'undesirably', 'bad') is often informed by 'ways of acting' that a third party has passed a value judgement on.

The following questions draw on students' formative experiences of the concepts 'good' and 'bad':

- Think about a 'goodie' from a movie or book you've recently seen or read. What kind of personality does the 'goodie' have? What kind of things do they do that make them a 'goodie'?
- Now think about a 'baddie' from a movie or book you've recently seen or read. What kind of personality does the 'baddie' have? What kind of things do they do that makes them a 'baddie'? (Here you might like to hold a class discussion asking for various suggestions of qualities and traits of various 'goodies' and 'baddies' students can think of. Note students' suggestions on a whiteboard so you can compare them and notice any recurring themes for each concept).
- Has someone ever told you that you've been a 'good girl/boy'? What do you think you did to make them say that at that moment?



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After exploring the above questions, a facilitator may go on to ask more abstract questions:

- Are there 'bad' people in the world? If so what makes them bad?
- Can bad people do good things? Can good people do bad things?
- Is it the way we act that make us 'good' or 'bad' or is it something else?
- Can people be bad and good at once?
- Have you ever thought something was a 'bad' thing to do while another person thought it was a 'good' thing to do? How did you decide whether it was a good or bad thing to do?
- \Who decides what is good and bad?
- Is there something someone could do that is 'bad' no matter who does it, no matter where they live in the world? If yes, what is that action? (This question aims to have students consider the question of moral objectivism and moral relativism).
- Do we have to be 'good' in our lives? What makes you think we should be 'good', as opposed to 'bad'? (This question aims to prompt students into answering the question: "Are we morally obliged to act in ways which we have deemed 'good'")
- What is it to live a 'good life'? (A facilitator may prompt student responses with the following thought experiment and follow on questions: Imagine you are 100 years old. You tell your great grandchildren that you have had a 'good life'. What have you done in your life that has made it 'good'? Does living a good life mean we have to be good? Does a good life involve being as happy as possible for the longest amount possible? Is living a good life more than merely feeling good?)



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Q4: 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 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:

IS a person good if they are...

brave	sorry
scared	guilty
hungry	intelligent
angry	pretty
sad	ugly
sympathetic	silly



WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

RIGHT

?

NOT RIGHT



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SCENARIO EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

I write a thank you note to my teacher who is leaving the school at the end of the year.	I don't like one of my classmate's new shoes so I tell her that I think they're ugly.
I set up a fake email account and send people emails saying mean things about them.	I help my Mum or Dad make dinner when they're tired.
I donate toys I don't play with any more to an organisation which helps children who don't have as much as me.	I am nice to my friend's face but I sometimes tease them behind their back.
My friend is having a bad day so I pick them a bunch of flowers.	I try to convince people not to sign a classmate's birthday card because I do not like her.
I sometimes trip people over in the playground because I think it's funny.	I notice that a classmate is having trouble with their math work that I understand how to do, so I go over to their table and help them.
If my dog misbehaves I don't feed it that morning.	I told my teacher that I think her class is boring in front of all our classmates.



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PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

Are these people good or bad? And Why?



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PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:



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Q6: 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 of **Good** and **Bad**. 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.

Q: HOW DO I USE DISCUSSION PLANS?

As you proceed around the circle the questions become more complex and abstract.

the first ones are easy - homely personal, but not too personal ...

1. A quick warm-up activity played as A Round Robin.
Distribute one card per person or couple.
Each person responds with an initial thought and move on.
You can then collect questions from the group that the activity provoked.
2. On the other hand you may like read each question, one at a time, and have extended discussions with the whole group



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DISCUSSION PLANS FOR GOOD AND BAD

FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales, folk tales and fables are an engaging and age appropriate way to discuss the concepts of Good and Bad, as they are often moral driven. How these tales have changed over times also shows the contestability of the concepts of what we take to be a virtue or a vice.

A sequential discussion for the story, The Goldilocks and the Three Little bears could be:

1. Why did Goldilocks enter the bear's house?
2. Why did she eat the food, sit on the chair or sleep on the bed?
3. Was it right for Goldilocks do these things?
4. What would the bears think of Goldilocks actions?
5. What did the bears do when they found it? Is it the right or wrong thing and why?
6. Would any of Goldilocks action be right or wrong if she was an adult?

PICTURES STORY BOOK:

Analysing picture books is a powerful way to discussion concepts of Good and Bad. Everyone, readers or not, can analysis images and discuss the themes within.

A discussion plan for this book could include.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

At the beginning of the year is an ideal time to start ethical discussions about Good and Bad. When setting up classroom expectations or rules is a good time to highlight the contestability of the concepts Good and Bad. The discussion would be started by creating a list of virtues and vices and as a Community of Inquiry thinking about situations where these character traits matter.



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DISCUSSION PLANS FOR GOOD AND BAD

DEGREES OF GOODNESS (JASON BUCKLEY)

Think of someone you know who you think is a really good person. What makes that person a good person?

1. Think of something that's pretty good.
2. Now think of something that's better than pretty good, that's good.
3. Now think of something that's better than that, that's really good.
4. Think of something that's pretty bad.
5. Now think of something that's worse than pretty bad, that's bad.
6. Now think of something that's worse than that, that's really bad.
7. Now think of something that's both good and bad.
8. Now think of something that's neither good nor bad.

'THE DOG AND THE WOLF'

From Aesop's fables

The Harvard Classics, 1909-14.

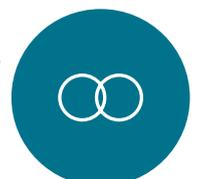
BETTER STARVE FREE THAN BE A FAT SLAVE

A GAUNT Wolf was almost dead with hunger when he happened to meet a House-dog who was passing by. "Ah, Cousin," said the Dog. "I knew how it would be; your irregular life will soon be the ruin of you. Why do you not work steadily as I do, and get your food regularly given to you?"

"I would have no objection," said the Wolf, "if I could only get a place."

"I will easily arrange that for you," said the Dog; "come with me to my master and you shall share my work."

So the Wolf and the Dog went towards the town together. On the way there the Wolf noticed that the hair on a certain part of the Dog's neck was very much worn away, so he asked him how that had come about.



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Q7: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens

The Tortoise and the Hare

Aesop's fable

The Lion King

(Where 'Scar' represents 'bad' and 'Simba/Moufasa/Nala' represent 'good')

Star Wars

(The Empire VS The Rebels can easily be read as metaphor for good and evil)

The Honest Wood Cutter, in which a wood cutter loses his ax but refuses to steal someone else's (and gets rewarded for his honesty or 'goodness')

The Wet Pants

(a story about a boy who wets his pants and a girl who spilled water on him to save him from ridicule)

The Lion and The Mouse

(a lion has a thorn in his paw, a mouse helps remove it - no matter how small you are you can still help others, i.e. be 'good')



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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.



Page 4: Discussion Plan: When should we call things “good”?

Page 244: Exercise: Can laws be bad?

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.



N/A

