

Happiness Toolkit

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Q1: WHAT IS A CONCEPT GAME?

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, after looking at the picture above, one may ascertain: “What this person is doing would make everyone **happy**.” To examine this statement, we need to look at what counts as **happiness** to ourselves and to others. We can then proceed to assess the claim in light of our understanding of a shared concept of **happiness**.

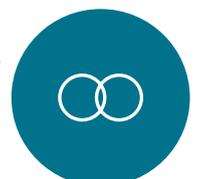
Concepts are abstractions constructed by thinking beings – like us – with sufficiently large brains. But some concepts are more abstract than others. For example, we can imagine a child deriving the concept dog from numerous instances of four-legged creatures that she encounters in her daily experience,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

HOW IS HAPPINESS A CONTESTABLE CONCEPT?

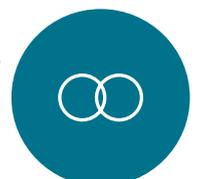
Happiness is often regarded as a state of mind: a feeling that lies somewhere along a spectrum from contentment to elation. Pursuing happiness for its own sake is called ‘hedonism’, and how successful we are in achieving this kind of happiness often depends on our external circumstances. This kind of happiness is also fleeting, because the pleasures we get from material goods, sensory experiences, money and even status tend to wane. We risk getting stuck on a ‘hedonic treadmill’, constantly seeking new pleasures just to maintain the same level of happiness.

A very different conception of happiness is the ancient Greek *eudaimonia*, translated as ‘human flourishing’ or ‘well-being’. To achieve this kind of happiness, we need practical wisdom: the knowledge of how to live well. We need to understand what is truly worthwhile and what sort of happiness is worth having. Many philosophers have claimed that only an ethical life can be a truly flourishing life, and the best way to achieve it is by using rational thinking to act ethically. A happy person is therefore one who cultivates virtue, or good moral character – and this kind of happiness can be far more enduring than the short-lived pleasures of the hedonist.

Other conceptions of happiness include being engaged in the ‘flow’ of an absorbing activity, having meaningful social relationships and a sense of belonging, finding meaning in a quest, and accomplishing our goals.

Philosophers disagree about what role luck or accident plays in a happy life, and to what extent happiness lies within our control. The English word ‘happiness’ is rooted in the idea of chance: the happy person has good ‘hap’ or fortune. On the other hand, it might be argued that happiness depends on the choices we make, in which case we must be responsible for our own happiness.

We might measure our happiness in terms of our progress towards ideals of what makes a good life. This view of happiness encourages us to think about how satisfied we are with our lives as a whole, rather than merely how contented we are at a particular moment in time.



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

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: **Happy**

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

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:

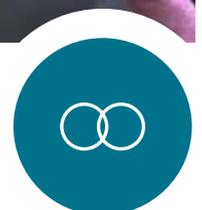
- Students revisit their original definition and edit as necessary
- Come together as a class and students share their new definitions
- Discuss come to a final definition

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.



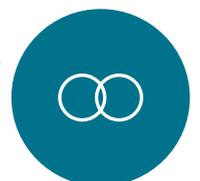
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Q4: WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

Peace	Freedom
Fear	Understanding
Pain	Ignorance
Education	Beauty
Friendship	Being Alone
Family	Dreaming



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STATEMENT EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

Feeling pleasure	having one friend
being challenged	eating your favorite food
being at peace	finishing something successfully
changing the world	being scared about something that will happen
doing whatever you like	understanding something new
having a group of friends	being hurt



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SCENARIO EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

You find a necklace on the ground which is worth a lot of money .	Spending the weekend at your friends house eating nothing but junk food.
You have achieved half of the goals you set out at the start of the year.	Sleeping in until 11am on a sunny Saturday morning.
Hearing your friend laugh at your joke.	You win the lottery and give all your winnings to a charity.
You get offered a spot on the school debating team. You say no because you don't like public speaking.	On the weekend you spend your time reading, drawing and relaxing by yourself.
You reach the top of a mountain, take off your shoes and see that your feet are sore and blistered.	I get to play my video game with no restrictions.
I am allowed to stay outside and play sport until dark.	Getting the best of ground award, but your team loses the game.



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PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:



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PICTURE EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:



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Q5: WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS?

Following the structure of many of the discussion plans devised by Lipman and his colleagues in the p4c teacher resource manuals, the following questions reflect the shift from more “concrete” to more “abstract” thinking in relation to the concept of **happiness**.

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.

One of the teacher’s key roles in guiding discussion and inquiry is to encourage all students to participate without fear of being judged as wrong or stupid, while modelling and encouraging the sense that good thinking matters whereas sloppy or careless thinking is to be avoided where possible. 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.

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

DISCUSSION PLAN FOR HAPPINESS #1

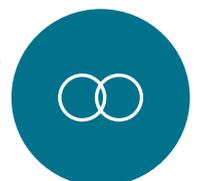
1. In our discussions today we have thought about how place and happiness are connected. What do you think a place needs for people to be happy?
2. Could different people have different ideas about happiness? What makes you say this?
3. Can everyone be happy in the same place, at the same time? Explain why or why not.
4. Did being in school today make you happy? Why do you feel that way?
5. What do you think is the most important question you considered today? Why?

DISCUSSION PLAN FOR HAPPINESS 2

1. Can you think of anything that can make you happy but can have negative consequences or outcomes?
2. Looking at your list, is there anything that makes you happy that you could go without? What things could you not go without?
3. Are there things that do not necessarily make you happy, but can have positive outcomes?
4. What criteria do you have for happiness? what about other people? brainstorm a list of things that make you happy, and organise them from least to most important.

DISCUSSION PLAN FOR HAPPINESS #3

1. Compare these models for happiness by different philosophers and rate them. How happy would they make you? your group? the community? which model is best?
 - -happiness in life requires positive experiences. You need to have a higher balance of positive experiences over negative experiences.
 - -happiness in life requires satisfaction with your life. When you compare all the good things in your life with others, you should have more.
 - -happiness in life requires you to have a positive mood. People in life who have a positive mood or are happy more are the happiest.
 - -happiness in life requires a personal decision. You create a personal criteria for what makes you happy, so you only you can decide if you are happy.
 - -happiness in life is not important for a good life. You have an ethical requirement to be good and live a good life, which happiness will sometimes be a part of.



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Q6: ARE THERE ANY OTHER GREAT RESOURCES FOR EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS?

The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley

Book by Colin Thompson.

This picture story book tells the story of a sweet mouse who feels his life is very lucky, which is contrasted with humans who rarely feel grateful. A great discussion builder about the conditions of happiness for us, others and the community.

You're a Good Man , Charlie Brown by Clark Gesner.

Based on the Peanuts comic series.

Through song, this text makes reference to the simple pleasures in life. Charlie and his peers come to understand that happiness can be brought about by the things we encounter in everyday life. Students can create their own comic strips depicting events in their lives that make them happy.

Voices in the Park

by Anthony Brown.

This picture story book narrates a day at the park through four characters perspectives, some which are objectively 'happier' than others. It is a good way to develop an awareness of how people can see the same experience in different ways, and personal criteria for happiness.

The Happy Owls

by Celestino Piatti

This picture story book narrates a group of bickering owls who have a happy life.

The Day the Crayon Quit

by Drew Dewart

A picture book where a box of crayons decide to protest against being used. Explores the concept of happiness and unhappiness where the crayons articulate reasons for their decision to not being used.

The Princess and the Happiness

by Ulk Starke and Silke Leffler

Set in the Fairy-Tale Forest, something or someone has stolen the king's happiness. The princess sets off to find the culprit and encounters a number of curious and intriguing characters along the way. Students can consider whether happiness is something that can be stolen or taken away.

And then there's Jason Buckley The Philosophy Man!

Sustained Support to Make Thinking Fun www.thephilosophyman.com



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100 - What Do You Need to Be Happy?

This is another "Thinkers' Game", in this case an "In Or Out" where they must decide what they would or would not have to have in order to be happy. Aimed at younger children but worth looking at as a structure for activities for other ages.

The Porculent Potholer & The Survival Lottery

Two of the tracks from my Thinkers' Stories DVD. These particular ones are most suited to Year 7 up. Both are retellings of famous thought experiments that explore the limits of maximising the happiness of the many when it comes at the expense of the few. Teaching notes are attached.

The Porculent Potholer is at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfAjuJldclc>

The Survival Lottery is at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNpHyY7sloA>

Should they whet your appetite for buying the DVD (£20), info is at
www.thephilosophyman.com/resources

