

Responsibilities Toolkit

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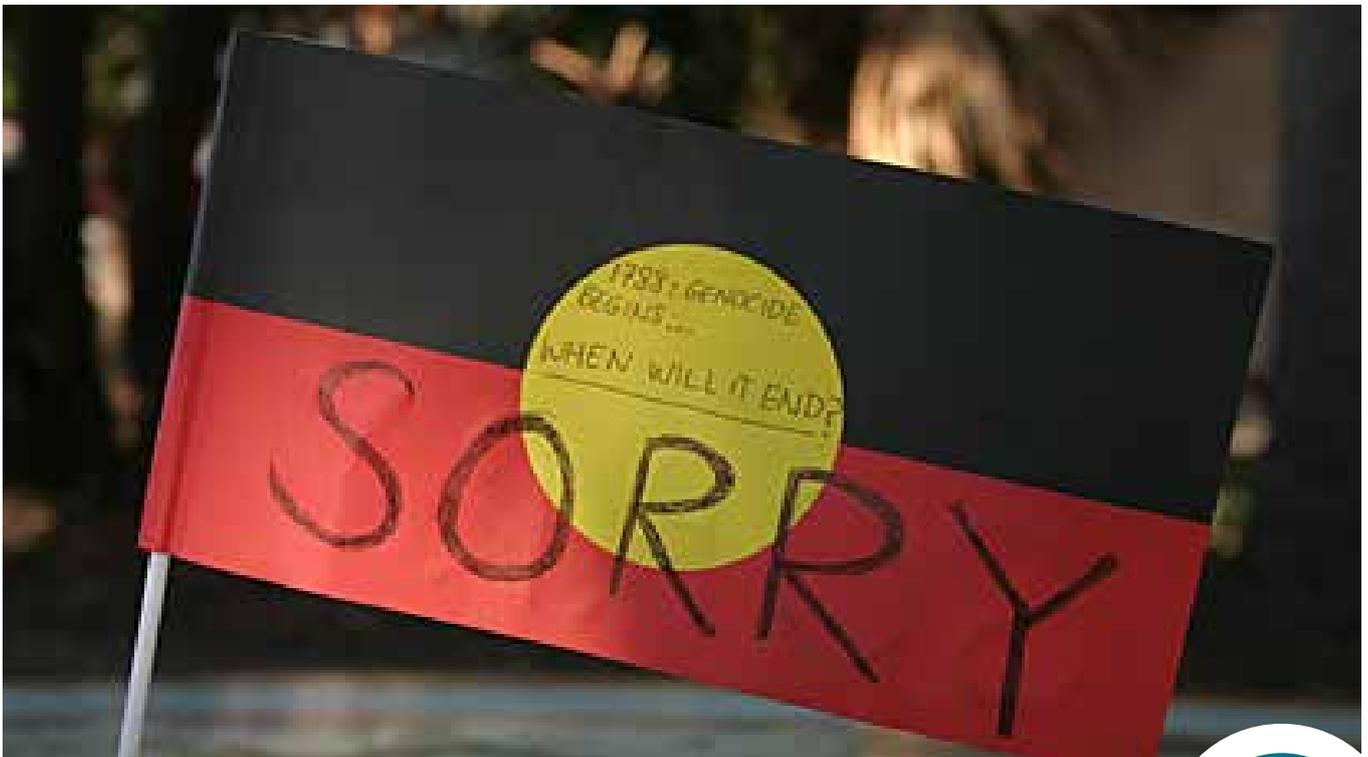
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Q1: WHAT ARE CONCEPTS?

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 think that: “We are not responsible for the consequences of our ancestors’ actions.” To examine this claim we need to first look at what counts as **responsibility**. We are then able to evaluate our claim in the light of our understanding of a shared concept of **responsibility**.

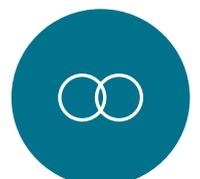
Concepts are abstractions constructed by thinking beings – like us – with sufficiently large brains. But some concepts are more abstract than others. For example, we can imagine a child deriving the concept dog from numerous instances of four-legged creatures that she encounters in her daily experience,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

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*....

Q: 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 **responsibilities**. **Responsibilities** 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 responsibilities against the above criteria questions. **Responsibilities** 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, **responsibilities** 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 **responsibilities** 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 **responsibilities** is an important philosophical concept. That is why we think **responsibilities** is a **Big Idea**.



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Q3: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THIS CONCEPT?

HOW IS RESPONSIBILITY A CONTESTABLE CONCEPT?

Used in a moral sense, the term “responsibilities” (also “responsibility” and “responsible”) refers to those duties or obligations that we have in virtue of holding a specific position in society or, more generally, that we have upon reaching a certain level of maturity, whereby we describe someone as (morally) responsible for their actions. When, for example, a teacher or parent asks a group of children “Who is responsible for this mess?”, she is making certain assumptions, including that the deliberate behaviour of someone in the group caused the resulting mess, and that that individual could be held accountable because of their age or level of maturity. While our responsibilities are similar to our duties and obligations, being morally responsible is a quality that attracts either praise/reward for doing the right thing, or blame/punishment for doing the wrong thing.

It is interesting to note that some responsibilities (and duties) are *reciprocal* in the sense that one person’s responsibilities to another are matched by that other’s responsibilities to him/her. An example of reciprocal responsibilities in most societies occurs in the relationship between parents and children (*Social Inquiry* 261). On the one hand, parents are responsible for the well-being of the children they bring into the world, at least up to a point; on the other hand, as parents become elderly and more dependent, it is the (adult) children who assume a degree of responsibility for them. However, this kind of mutuality may vary considerably over time and among different cultures and societies. For example, in Confucian tradition, the imperative of *filial piety* is strongly emphasised, although contemporary ideas of what constitutes a family, along with a growing focus on *individualism* and the trend toward living longer, have produced tensions which are not easily resolved.

Not all responsibilities are reciprocal or mutual. Society in general, and parents or guardians in particular have a responsibility to educate children, but it does not seem that children have the same responsibility in return (although in the process of education, adults stand to learn a great deal from them!). Still, we can say that through their actions, parents instil the value of education in children, which the latter enact by ensuring that *their* children are educated, in turn. Again, such a neat model is tested in practice when, for example, some people do not have children of their own (*Social Inquiry* 266). This leads to the broader question of whether those who are educated (however this idea is defined) have a responsibility to ensure that others (in the society, or even in the world?) receive an education, in turn.

There are several ethical and social issues that students can think about here. One is the connection between responsibilities, duties and obligations, on the one hand, and *rights* or even expectations, on the other. Is it reasonable to answer questions like “Why should parents educate their children?”, and “Why should children care for their elderly parents?” by appealing to the right of children to be educated and the right of the elderly to be cared for? How do we respond to someone who claims that he does not expect anything from others and, accordingly, he has no responsibilities to anyone except himself? And how reasonable or *realistic* is it to insist that part of being *persons in the world* involves accepting that we are, to a certain extent, all responsible for one another (even strangers in far-off places)?



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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: **Responsible**

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:

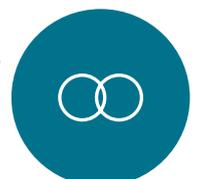
Begin by getting the students to write a **DEFINITION** of the contested concept.

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:

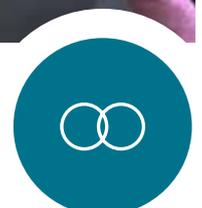
- Students revisit their original definition and edit as necessary
- Come together as a class and students share their new definitions
- Discuss come to a final definition

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.



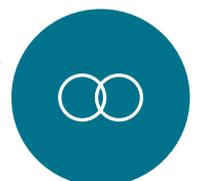
Q5: WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

RESPONSIBLE

?

**NOT
RESPONSIBLE**



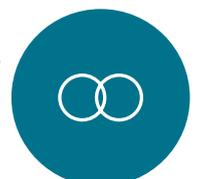
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WORD CARDS FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

What is a person's responsibility? To be...

Honest	Empathetic
Fair	Equal
Moral	Safe
Forgiving	Brave
Supportive	Respectful
Helpful	Happy



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Kind	Tolerant
Generous	Conscientious
Caring	Non judgemental



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SCENARIO EXAMPLES FOR A CONCEPT GAME:

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



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In a family of five, everyone receives the same amount of food at dinner time.

In some countries Muslim women are not allowed to wear a burqa (religious head covering), while nuns are allowed to wear their habit.

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a lower life expectancy and poorer health when compared to the non-Indigenous population.

All Australian citizens have the right to vote in the election.

Until recently, in Saudia Arabia women were not permitted to drive.



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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 **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.



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Q: HOW DO I USE DISCUSSION PLANS?

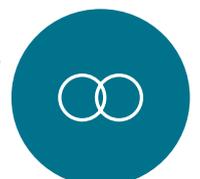
A: As you proceed around the circle the questions become more complex and abstract. The first ones are easy - homely personal, but not too personal ...

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

DISCUSSION PLAN FOR RESPONSIBILITIES

DISCUSSION PLAN: "RESPONSIBILITIES"

1. Why should I be responsible for anyone else?
2. Why should we expect anything from others?
3. Why should parents educate their children?
4. Why should children care for their elderly parents?"
5. Why should I be responsible for people in far-off places?



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Q7: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

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.

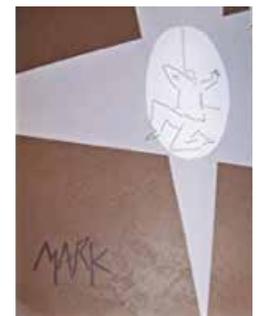
Grade Range: 7-12. Target Grades: 7-8



Discussion Plan: How should animals be treated? Discussion Plan: Killing animals	P.23
Discussion Plan: Eating animals, Discussion Plan: Hurting animals.....	P.24
Discussion Plan: When are we obliged to protest?.....	P.206
Leading Idea No: 11: Living with others and living with ourselves, Exercise: Living with others and living with ourselves	P.218
Leading Idea No. 11: Living with others and living with ourselves.....	P.218

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 2: Reciprocal duties and responsibilities.....	P.261
Exercise: Who is responsible to whom?	P.263
Leading Idea 3: Non-reciprocal duties and responsibilities	P.266

