

Right and Wrong 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:

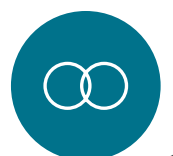
1. **Common:** The concept is shared by everybody. It is a word commonly used by students (depending on their age), however they might not be very clear about what such concepts really mean or signify; and even if they are clear, others might well disagree (because these concepts are contestable)
2. **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 right and wrong are 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 Curriculum – 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.

This is exemplified by the cartoon that is used to introduce the ethical concepts of **Right and Wrong**. We have to figure out what it is for something to be right or wrong to decide whether there anything in the cartoon could be either. This would be a conceptual question because it does not rely solely upon information or facts but asks us to generalise when we consider the meaning of the terms **Right and Wrong**. The first thing we need to do is to establish the criteria we are using to identify what is, **Right or Wrong**.



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Q3: WHAT IS CONTESTABLE ABOUT THIS CONCEPT?

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 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 concept of right and wrong against the above criteria questions. Right and Wrong is used in our common day-to-day conversations (in particular in the classroom when talking about Right or Wrong 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, right and wrong are important concepts and there is an opportunity to investigate their implications in our lived experiences and the way we use them 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 right and wrong in the same way. On the other hand, 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 those of right and wrong are important philosophical concepts. That is why we think Right and Wrong are Big Idea.



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HOW ARE RIGHT AND WRONG CONTESTABLE CONCEPTS?

The concepts of 'right' and 'wrong' are, arguably, not only central to the academic study of Ethics, but to all of our lives in that they play a vital role in our moral reasoning and judgement formation. Our conceptions of 'right' and 'wrong' are also action guiding - we often (though not always) base our decisions based on what we think the 'right' thing is to do. From a birth, caregivers, teachers, parents religious doctrines and the societal/cultural norms guide and shape our conceptions of 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour. Considering the nature of human diversity, it is no wonder then that there is rarely complete agreement about what actions, behaviours or ways of thinking are 'right' or 'wrong'. In the early years of schooling, student's first experience of the contestability of Right and Wrong may be difference between Right and Wrong behaviour with their friends in contrast to classroom behaviour. Due to the contestability of these concepts, it is necessary for the sake of clear communication (and lively, critical debate!) to be perspicuous about what we mean when we use these terms. The following questions will first draw on 'concrete' examples of 'right' and 'wrong' in the world before exploring these concepts in the abstract.

- Have you ever thought you were doing the 'right' thing, but later changed your mind? (Here facilitators might ask children to give examples of these occasions and ask the follow up question 'what made you change your mind?').
- If you think something is the right thing to do but your friends thinks it's the wrong thing to do, how do you know who is right? Can one person be right? Can both people be right?
- Is there an action that every person in the class agrees is 'wrong'?
- Do you think there is an action that every person in the world agrees is wrong? If yes, what would it be? (Some examples for discussion include: cheating, lying, hurting someone without reason, murder).
- Just because everyone thinks something is wrong, does that make it wrong?
- Who decides what is right and what is wrong? (Here, children might say 'my Mum and Dad' or 'my teacher'. You might follow up with 'and how did they learn right from wrong?' The point of this question is to have students explore the idea that notions of 'right' and 'wrong' are instilled within people by different people and or institutions).
- Before the words 'right' and 'wrong' were invented, were there still 'right' and 'wrong' ways to act?
- What kinds of acts are right? What kinds of acts are wrong?
- Can something 'wrong' lead to something good happening? Can you give an example? (This question is a natural follow up from the previous question. If students are struggling to answer this question, refer to the previous example and ask 'is this an example of something good happening as a consequence of someone doing the 'wrong' thing?')
- Can doing the 'right' thing lead to something bad happening? Give an example.
- Does every action or choice we make have to be right or wrong?
- Can an action or choice be neither right nor wrong?
- What kind of things do you need to think about when you're trying to make the right choice? (Here, students are being asked to come up with criteria for 'right action'.



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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/s:

For example: Right or Wrong

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:

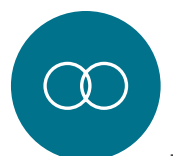
Begin by getting the students to write a DEFINITION of the contested concept.

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:

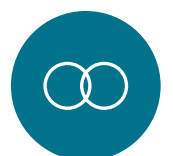
- Students revisit their original definition and edit as necessary
- Come together as a class and students share their new definitions
- Discuss in order to come to a provisional definition

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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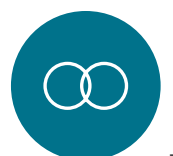


Q5: WHAT TOOLS DO I NEED TO PLAY CONCEPT GAMES?

RIGHT

?

NOT RIGHT



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SCENARIOS CARDS

<p>My teacher has some lollies on their desk and I love lollies so I decide to take one when they are not in the room.</p>	<p>I borrow a friend's toy to play with and do not give it back when they ask me to.</p>
<p>Some children at playtime ask to play with me and I tell them to go away.</p>	<p>I am patting my cat and he scratches me, so I kick him.</p>
<p>I go to the park and have a picnic. When I am finished I leave my rubbish on the ground.</p>	<p>Someone in my class is mean to my friend and I yell at them and punch them</p>
<p>My friend brings some Lego to school and I love Lego. When he is at play I take it out of his bag to play with.</p>	<p>I cross the road all by myself without an adult there to help me.</p>
<p>My family have lots of money and I want to buy some lollies so I take money without asking.</p>	<p>My friend is playing with their toy and I ask if I can play with one of them.</p>
<p>My friend has two ooshies and I take one because they don't need two.</p>	<p>I steal some food from Safeway because I am hungry.</p>



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WORD CARDS

Whispering

Copying

Stealing

Lying

Obeying

Cuddling

Swearing

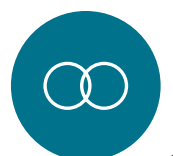
Running

Yelling

Crying

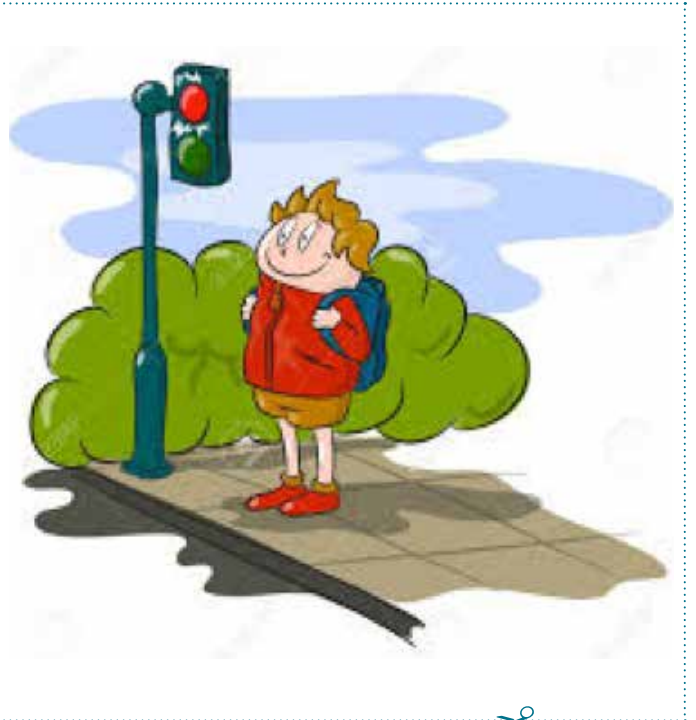
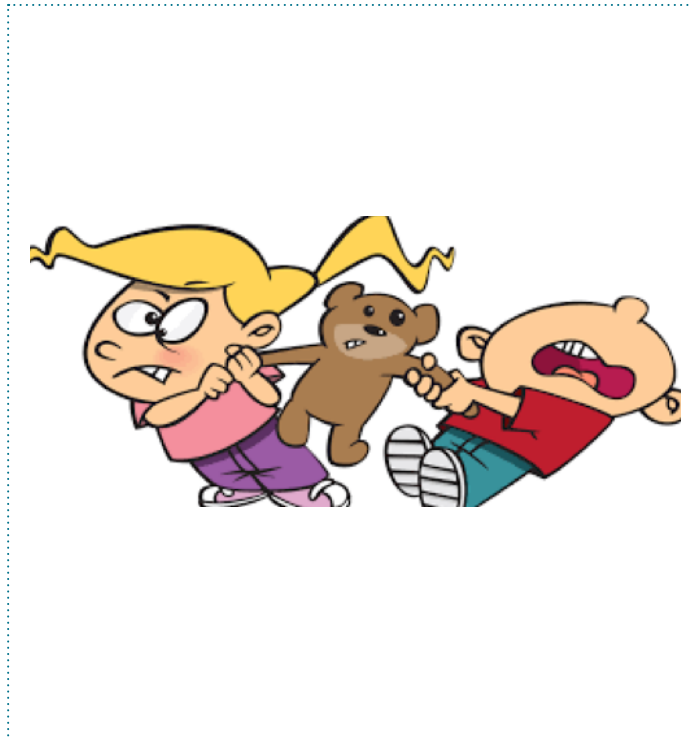
Killing

Sharing



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PICTURE CARDS



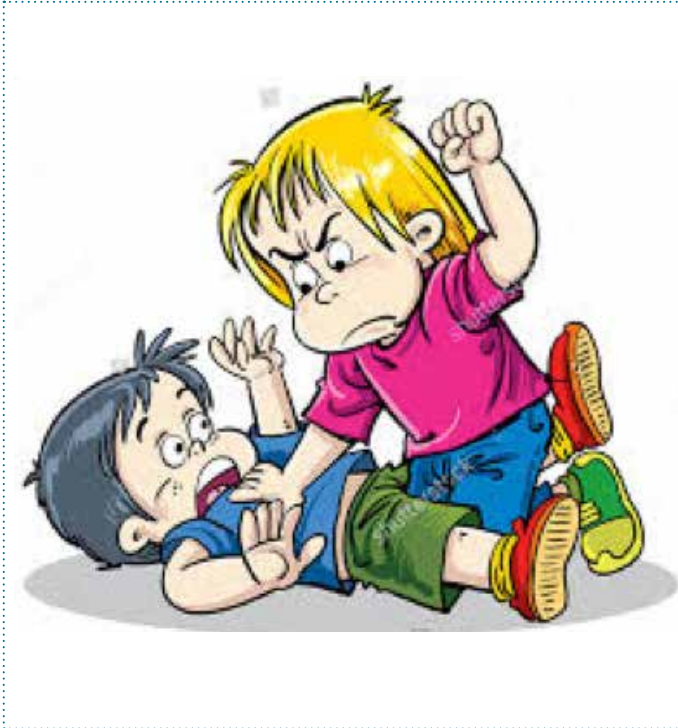
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PICTURE CARDS



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PICTURE CARDS



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PICTURE CARDS



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Q6: WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS, AND HOW DO WE USE THEM?

WHAT ARE DISCUSSION PLANS?

When conducting a discussion, it is useful to have prepared some questions in advance. Discussion plans help provide 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 Right and Wrong. 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.

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.



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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.

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?



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DISCUSSION PLANS FOR RIGHT AND WRONG

Fairy tales: Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Fairy tales, folk tales and fables are an engaging and age appropriate way to discuss the concept of Right and Wrong, as they are often moral driven. How these tales have changed over times also shows the contestability of the concepts of Right and Wrong and they have changed to reflect social norms.

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 porridge?
3. Was it right for Goldilocks to eat the porridge?
4. Was it right for Goldilocks to sit on the chair?
5. Was it right for goldilocks to sleep in the bed?
6. What did the bears do when they found out? Was it the right or wrong thing to do and why?
7. Can you think of a case where it would be right to do any of the things that Goldilocks did?

Pictures Story Book: The Rabbits by John Marsden and Shaun Tan

Analysing picture books is a powerful way to discussion concepts of Right or Wrong. Everyone, readers or not, can analysis images and discuss the themes within. The Rabbits by John Marsden and Shaun Tan is complex book dealing with concepts of Right and Wrong. A discussion plan for this book could include.

1. Are all the characters in this story good?
2. Are there any baddies in the story?
3. Which events would the rabbits think are right or wrong? 4
4. Which events would the Australian animals think are right or wrong?
5. Can you explain why the rabbits did what they did?

Classroom Expectations

At the beginning of the year is an ideal time to start ethical discussions about Right and Wrong. When setting up classroom expectations or rules is a good time to highlight the concept of Right and Wrong and its contestability. The discussion would centre on creating a list of actions and as a Community of Inquiry thinking about situations where these actions are right or wrong.



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Q7: WHAT FURTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

PICTURE STORY BOOKS

I want my Hat back – Jon Klassen

This book links Right and Wrong with stealing and ownership (very important concepts of children). It asks the questions is it right to lie? Is it right to do something bad to get something that belongs to you? Is it right to copy behaviour from others?

Fox – Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks

This beautiful book discusses friendship and how right and wrong affect our decisions with among friends. This book asks the questions, is it right to judge others based on first appearance? Is it right for the magpie to want to 'fly' like she did before she burnt it in the fire?

Voices in the Park – Anthony Brown

This book highlight how right and wrong depend on the situation. It asks, What behaviour is appropriate in a park and not else where? Do animals and humans have different concepts of right and wrong? Why is this?

Quandary

<https://www.quandarygame.org/play>

Quandary is an online ethical simulation told through comics. The characters in the story are faced with different dilemmas and the students get to 'interview' each character as they share what think what the right and wrong thing to do is.



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IAPC RESOURCES

Lipman, M. and Sharp, A. (1977). 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 9: Leading Idea: Right and wrong, Discussion plan: The word "wrong", Exercise, Same and different uses of "wrong"

Page 10: Exercise: What does right mean?

Page 155: Leading Idea No. 3: How do you tell the difference between right and wrong

Page 156: Exercise: right by rules and right by judgement

Page 157: Exercise: Deciding right and wrong in institutional settings

Page 172: Leading Idea No. 1: Is lying ever justifiable?, Exercise: Do contextual differences make moral differences?

Page 187: Leading Idea No. 3: The word "right"

Page 188: Exercise: Meanings of "wrong" and "right"

Page 189: Exercise: Distinguishing between "right" and "a right"

Page 190: Leading Idea No. 4: Is right what everyone thinks is right?, Exercise: Is right what everyone thinks is right?

Page 208: Exercise: Fair or right?

Page 209: Right and fair

Page 210: Leading Idea No. 7: Are fair and right always consistent?, Discussion Plan: Are fair and right always consistent?

Page 211: Exercise: Right and Fair

Page 215: Exercise: Do laws apply to what's right?

Page 218: Leading Idea No. 11: Living with others and living with ourselves, Exercise: Living with others and living with ourselves

Page 264: Leading Idea NO. 8: Right, perfect and fair

Page 265: Exercise: Right, perfect and fair

Page 287: Leading Idea No. 9: Are textbooks always right?, Discussion Plan: Are textbooks always right?

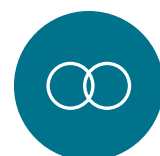
Page 334: Leading Idea No. 2: If something feels good, must it be right?, Discussion Plan: Is whatever feels good therefore right?

Page 335: Leading Idea No. 3: Relativism, Discussion Plan: Can it be right for one person to do something and wrong for another person to do the very same thing?

Page 337: Exercise: Is there an alternative to relativism?

Page 338: Leading Idea No. 5: Harry's Question, Exercise: Is it possible that something "feels good because it's right"?

Page: 399: Leading Idea No. 6: Are success and failure the criteria for that is right and wrong? Mickey's Principle, Discussion Plan: Is success the criterion of what is right and is failure the criterion of what is wrong?



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IAPC RESOURCES

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.



Page 230: Leading idea: Are things forbidden because they are wrong?, Exercise: Crime and harm

Page 232: Discussion plan: Is it ever wrong to do nothing?

