



University of Washington
Center for Philosophy for Children

Philosophical Children - New Video Showcasing the Center's Work in Seattle Elementary Schools!



For Parents

Ten of the Best: Books to Introduce Children to Philosophy

Books for Keeps, an online children's book magazine, lists ten of the best books for encouraging children to think for themselves and to engage in philosophical discussion.

UW Robinson Center Saturday Program

The Saturday Program is an enrichment program offered by the Robinson Center for Young Scholars for students currently in grades K-8. These classes are intended to provide students with challenge, inspiration, and fun, in a collaborative, supportive learning environment.

This year and for the past several years, Center former student and volunteer Dustin Groshong teaches a popular philosophy class for the Saturday program. Winter quarter registration for the program opens January 4.

<https://robinsoncenter.uw.edu/programs/enrichment/saturday/>

From the Director



It is hard for me to believe, but 2016 will be the Center's 20th anniversary. I've been reflecting about the development of the Center over the past twenty years, and thinking particularly about the successes and growth of the past few years. Some highlights:

Since 1996, the Philosophers in the Schools program has introduced philosophy to thousands of students in 60 different schools, and currently serves 600-700 students annually, most of them in year-long classes.

More than 50 faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and volunteers are involved each year in bringing philosophy into local schools.

In 2013 we launched a "Philosopher-in-Residence" program, funded by the Squire Family Foundation and now in its third year, at John Muir Elementary School in south Seattle.

Since 1996, over 500 teachers have attended workshops made possible by the Center.

In the Newsletter

For Parents	1
From the Director	1
Philosophers in the School	2
Focus in the Classroom	2
UW Summer Camp	3
Graduate Fellows	4
High School Ethics Bowl	5
Supporting the Center	6
Board and Staff	6

We began hosting the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl in 2014. Each year, over 100 high school students participate in collaborative conversations about complex and difficult ethical problems, and UW philosophy students help coach the high school teams.

The Center annually provides philosophical tools and support for hundreds of parents through public talks and online resources.

The Center now offers four annual graduate Philosophy for Children fellowships.

Each month the Center's resource-rich website and other online resources reach thousands of visitors.

The Center is a national leader in pre-college philosophy, and Center staff members, who have published five books and many articles, theoretical and practical, about pre-college philosophy, are frequently invited to give talks and lead workshops across the United States.

In celebration of our 20-year history, in 2016 we plan to launch a fundraising campaign to expand our capacity and ensure sustainable resources for this important work. We hope you will join us in supporting the Center's efforts to strengthen pre-college education and empower young people through philosophical inquiry!

Philosophers in the Schools

Each year, lively and rich philosophical conversations take place in more and more Seattle classrooms. From kindergarten and primary school classes in which



young children grapple with questions like, "What is a friend?" to high school students reflecting about the basis of knowledge and the definition of a good life, our staff, students and volunteers work to inspire philosophical discussions with young people all around Seattle

This fall the Center is running over 20 philosophy classes in Seattle public school classrooms in four elementary schools and three high schools. Debi Talukdar, in her second year as a Philosophy for Children Graduate Fellow, describes one of these classes:

This year I am doing philosophy in a third grade classroom at John Muir Elementary, an ethnically diverse school. For many of the students, this is their first time engaging in philosophical inquiry. Contrary to my first-time experiences in other classrooms, the kids in this class were very vocal about their curiosity regarding my background, as we moved around the room doing introductions. They were visibly excited to know that I was Indian. I told them a quick story about how my life brought me to Seattle and answered many questions about the Taj Mahal. This seemed to break the ice and engage everyone right from the start.

We explored the meaning of the word philosophy and discussed how we were going to "do" philosophy in these weekly sessions. We then examined the idea of thinking and wondered if it was possible not to think. The students were excited about this because most of them were convinced it is impossible to not think and were eager to share why they thought so. The classroom teacher has been very supportive of her children engaging in philosophical inquiry, noting that she wants the children, who are predominantly from minority communities, to feel like philosophy is something within their reach. It's important to her that her students see themselves as empowered thinkers.

In another session we read *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson, a poignant story about a new girl in class and how many students, including the narrator, are mean to her. This story sparked an interesting discussion, with many children candidly sharing their own experiences with bullying and offering ideas on why bullying happens. The following week we continued this conversation, reading *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes, which raises similar issues. Then Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* helped the class to think more deeply about the nature of friendship.

The students are already becoming more comfortable and confident in their participation in philosophical inquiry, and some of the quieter children are now contributing to our discussions. I look forward to continuing to spend my favourite morning of the week with them.

Focus on the Classroom

Is it Better to be a Kindergartener or a Dog?

Sara Goering, Program Director



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Many great philosophical ideas can be found - in simpler form - in the best children's picture books. Discussing the difference between quantity and quality of pleasures, John

Stuart Mill famously notes that "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is only because they only know their own side of the question." Lovers of *Hostess Ding Dongs* and campy movies may flinch when reading this quote. Are we really fools who know only our side of the question? Are there higher quality pleasures that yet await our untrained tastes? Similarly, animal rights advocates may worry that the pig in question is not fully appreciated. Why diminish his satisfaction? Are we sure that he would really prefer a human life?

Over the past several years, I have explored this question with Kindergarten students at John Muir Elementary school by reading and discussing the picture book *I Am the Dog* by Daniel Pinkwater (illustrated by Jack E. Davis). In this book, a boy and his dog change places for a day, and thus have a chance to get to know the "other" side of the question. (continued on page 3)

The dog eats at the table, brushes his teeth, goes to school, does his homework, and takes the boy to the park. The boy sleeps on the rug, eats kibble, as well as his dog's homework, and delights in the simple pleasures of playing fetch with a stick. A lady in the park even gives him a cookie (and he is allowed to eat it!). At the end of the book, they agree to trade back, and the penultimate page reports, "Both of us had learned something." The final line is a zinger: "Being a dog is better."

The kids are always happy to think about what it would be like to be a dog, and occasionally they also touch on whether we could really know what it is like to be a dog (or a bat!) even if we tried to switch places like the boy in the story. But they typically want to concentrate on that big final point. Is being a dog really better? Some are initially convinced it must be so: dogs get to sleep a lot, they get to eat whenever they want (though most kids recognize that dog food is not particularly appealing), they get to go to the park and play, and they don't have to go to school. There's almost no responsibility at all! A dog's life is simple and easy; apparently a kindergartener's life is not.

But then some kids always start second guessing the book's conclusion. Dogs seem to be controlled by humans; they can only go to the park when the humans take them, and they can only eat when humans remember to feed them. They aren't really free in the ways that humans are. Someone will always point out that kindergarteners typically also have to ask permission to go to the park, and are not allowed to eat whatever they want, when they want it. Dogs can play with sticks and romp at the park. But kids could also do those things, and they can play on the climbers.

Usually, the discussion focuses on the issue of going to school. On the one hand, the children recognize school as an imposition on their day. They have to go to school, and dogs don't (although some of them know about obedience school, and ponder the similarities and differences between it and kindergarten). But going to school gives them an opportunity to learn. Sometimes a child will claim that dogs can't learn, but they are usually met with a chorus of stories about smart dogs who learn lots of tricks. Still, dogs can't learn to read. Dogs can't read great books, like *Frog and Toad*. Reading is also a way to learn about parts of the world that you can't experience directly.

The children quickly start to see important differences between dog and human life. They also recognize the hardships that can go with finding out about the larger world: learning about injustice, recognizing our limited powers to correct it, and gaining a sense of how little we know. By the end of the discussion, they

may not have answered the question about whether it's better to be a satisfied dog than a dissatisfied human child, but they have had a great conversation about the value of education and why learning is valuable even when it's a struggle and leaves one somewhat dissatisfied. And that's a great satisfaction - and also a higher pleasure - for the philosophy facilitator.



UW Summer Camp

This past summer saw the first collaboration between the Center for Philosophy for Children and the UW Summer Youth Program. The UW Summer Youth Program provides enrichment for youth in the arts, science, and math, and encourages student creativity and exploration across the domains. Philosophy contributes to the camp not only because it helps youth develop reasoning skills, but because it inspires them to explore the world more deeply.

The summer camp is offered over an eight-week period, with the workshop themes changing every two weeks. Children participate in two-week sessions, with some children attending all eight weeks. We worked with the 9-11 year old upper elementary group, which included some students who had participated in philosophy sessions through the Center's in-school offerings, and we worked with the younger elementary group of children from ages 6 to 8. We spent some time developing an understanding that philosophy involves thinking about some of the big questions we have about our lives, and subsequent discussions concerning thinking about thinking and the possibility of not thinking were met with much enthusiasm.

We tried to align the philosophical stimuli used with the themes for the week. A favorite activity was the one we did for the Inventor's Workshop. Using simple kitchen tools, the children were asked to think of creative new uses for them, and we talked about the role imagination plays in inventions. Another great discussion, in the weeks dedicated to exploring the (continued on page 4)

Pacific Northwest, was based on a Native American folktale about Raven stealing the sun to bring light into this world. It appeared that the children were using the same story in their drama session so it was particularly interesting to look at the same tale from the philosophical standpoint. We explored whether what Raven did was fair, considering that he stole the sun but also his intention to bring light to the rest of the world. We played the game "Telephone," as a warm-up game for the last theme on communication, and were able to move the laughter and excitement to a discussion about the difficulty in keeping the message the same from the start until the end.

In the Raiders of the Lost Artifact session, we worked as four small archaeological groups to choose three artifacts that best defined the idea of various assigned dig sites; e.g., a birthday party, doctor's office, or book store. As the object of the activity was to have another group guess our dig site in as few guesses as possible, we had intense discussions around the question, "What are the three most important and unique items one finds in these places?" We struggled to arrive at a consensus, and through the discussion we not only learned about one another, but realized how one's unique cultural knowledge and varied personal experience build a mental image of a place or experience. This discussion led us to question what history is, and whether there is one history or there are many histories.

Over the course of each of the four two-week sessions, the students' engagement and global diversity led us all to new questions, perspectives, and understanding, and our eyes were opened to a whole new level of awareness. This - for both teachers and students - is a priceless part of this work.

Graduate Fellows

Our four graduate fellows this year come from the Department of Philosophy and the College of Education.



Bridget DuRuz is a PhD student in the Education Department at the University of Washington where she is a coach for Teacher Candidates. She has degrees in Philosophy and Curriculum Design, and comes from a teaching career in gifted education, and as a specialist in both math and music. Her

research interests center around creativity and equity, and bridging the role of Philosophy for Children and methods in Teacher Training. She is also involved with the UW Center for Philosophy in Schools and leads P4C sessions for Kindergarten and 4th grade. She attributes being a third generation native Seattleite -

www.philosophyforchildren.org

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exposed to the openness of the Pacific Northwest - to her appreciation of creativity and ingenuity and to her curious nature of all things connected.



Joseph Len Miller is a graduate student in the philosophy department at the University of Washington, Seattle. His research focuses on ethics and moral psychology - specifically, questions involving moral

development and moral judgment. Currently a teaching assistant in the philosophy department, he is also the Ethics Instructor for the Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars. In addition to his academic interests, he also has an interest in making philosophy accessible to those outside of the university setting and has worked with a wide-range of children and teens outside of academia.



Dustin Schmidt is a PhD student in the Philosophy Department at the University of Washington, Seattle. His primary interests are in Environmental Ethics. Dustin is developing a dissertation that critiques geoengineering as a morally defensible intervention to address climate change,

arguing that geoengineering reflects a problematic understanding of the relationship between human beings and the non-human natural world. Dustin has taught Contemporary Moral Problems at the UW, as well as many courses such as Environmental Ethics, Medical Ethics, Introduction to Philosophy, and Logic as a Teaching Assistant. This is his second time being involved with The Center for Philosophy for Children, having worked with students at Chief Sealth High School in 2013.



Debi Talukdar is working towards her Ph.D. at the College of Education at the University of Washington, Seattle. Her research focuses on the role of philosophical inquiry as a tool for reflection in teacher education. She also teaches an introductory course in early childhood and family studies. Debi has previously worked with children and teachers at schools in India, and with the foster

care/residential care system in the UK. When she is not working, she enjoys yoga, traveling, and cooking. This is her second year participating in the Center's Philosophers in the Schools Program and is excited to continue this work!

High School Ethics Bowl

We're excited to announce that the [2016 Washington State High School Ethics Bowl](#) will be held on Saturday, January 30, 2016, in Savery Hall at the University of Washington.



A High School Ethics Bowl helps students deepen their understanding and appreciation of interesting ethical and philosophical issues. Ethics bowls typically utilize case studies relevant to young students, involving wide-ranging ethical questions such as cheating, plagiarism, peer pressure, use and abuse of social media, gun control, privacy, and relationships.

Although the High School Ethics Bowl is competitive, it promotes dialogue and collaboration. Teams do not have to take pro/con positions; in fact, they can agree with each other. They are not required to refute each other's points, but rather to offer commentary on one another's arguments.

Teams are judged according to the quality of a team's reasoning and how well team members contribute to a civil and thoughtful discussion, organize and present their cases, analyze the case's morally relevant features, and anticipate and preemptively respond to commentary and questions. Judges for the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl are drawn from the local legal, education, and philosophical communities.



Registration for the High School Ethics Bowl has begun, and the deadline for registration is December 18, 2015. The registration fee is \$100 for each team. Limited scholarships are available for schools unable to pay the fee. To register: [Fill out registration form](#)

High school teams typically include three to five students (and can also include a couple of alternates) and a coach (ideally, a high school teacher). Each school may enter up to two teams in the competition. We anticipate that there will be 18-22 teams involved in the January event. UW philosophy students are assigned to interested teams to help the students prepare.

Teams prepare for the competition using cases prepared by the National High School Ethics Bowl, which are now available [here](#)!

We greatly appreciate our generous High School Ethics Bowl sponsors:



**WASHINGTON INTERSCHOLASTIC
ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATION**

University of Washington College of Arts & Sciences, Division of Social Sciences
University of Washington College of Education
University of Washington Department of Philosophy
University of Washington Program on Values in Society
University of Washington School of Law

Supporting the Center

The Center's work is largely made possible through individual donations. Gifts from donors help fund our Philosophers in the Schools program, the Philosophy for Children graduate fellowships, our parent programs, and our annual workshop for teachers.

We are working to build our capacity to keep philosophy in the schools growing! Resources are needed to provide more support and education for teachers and reach more young people eager for engagement with essential questions and sustained inquiry.



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We hope you will consider supporting our work.

You can donate online [here](#).

You can also send a check to the Center for Philosophy for Children, mailed to:

UW Center for Philosophy for Children
University of Washington, Box 353350
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Your gifts make all the difference - thank you very much!

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