



**The Start-up Kit<sup>©</sup>**  
**Lessons for Young Beginners**  
**3rd Edition**

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## Lesson 1: Making the Community Ball

### Creating an intellectually safe community

The Community Ball is the thread (or, shall we say, the yarn) that holds the philosophy circle together. Not only does it monitor the class by identifying the present speaker, but it, more importantly, empowers the students to communicate their own ideas, call on one another to speak, and self-regulate the course of the dialogue. It also provides a visual representation of the community itself. All the little pieces of yarn that make up the ball represent the members of the community-- the pieces are as diverse in color as the students are in thought and expression, yet unified at the center by the inquiry and their respect for one another. The very act of making the community ball together marks the beginning of our own creation of an intellectually safe community.

### Directions and illustrations for making your own community ball

#### Materials

- ✓ A folded piece of lightweight cardboard or posterboard about 8 inches long and an inch wide
- ✓ A piece of heavy-duty string, to place in the middle of the cardboard-- make it at least 2 inches longer-- on either side-- than the cardboard. This is what will hold the ball together.
- ✓ Colorful yarn

#### Objectives

- to successfully make a community ball
- to introduce ourselves and get to know one another a little better
- to introduce fee-la-so-fee
- to do all this playfully-- thereby setting the tone for the whole year

The ball is made simply by wrapping yarn around and around the piece of cardboard (with the strong string sticking out from both ends) until it's pretty thick all the way around. Then the cardboard, but not the string, is pulled out of the clump of yarn. Next, tie the string as tightly as possible. You'll see how the yarn forms a loop from the center (it may, when tied tight enough, form a bagel shape). Cut the yarn at the top of this loop (or around

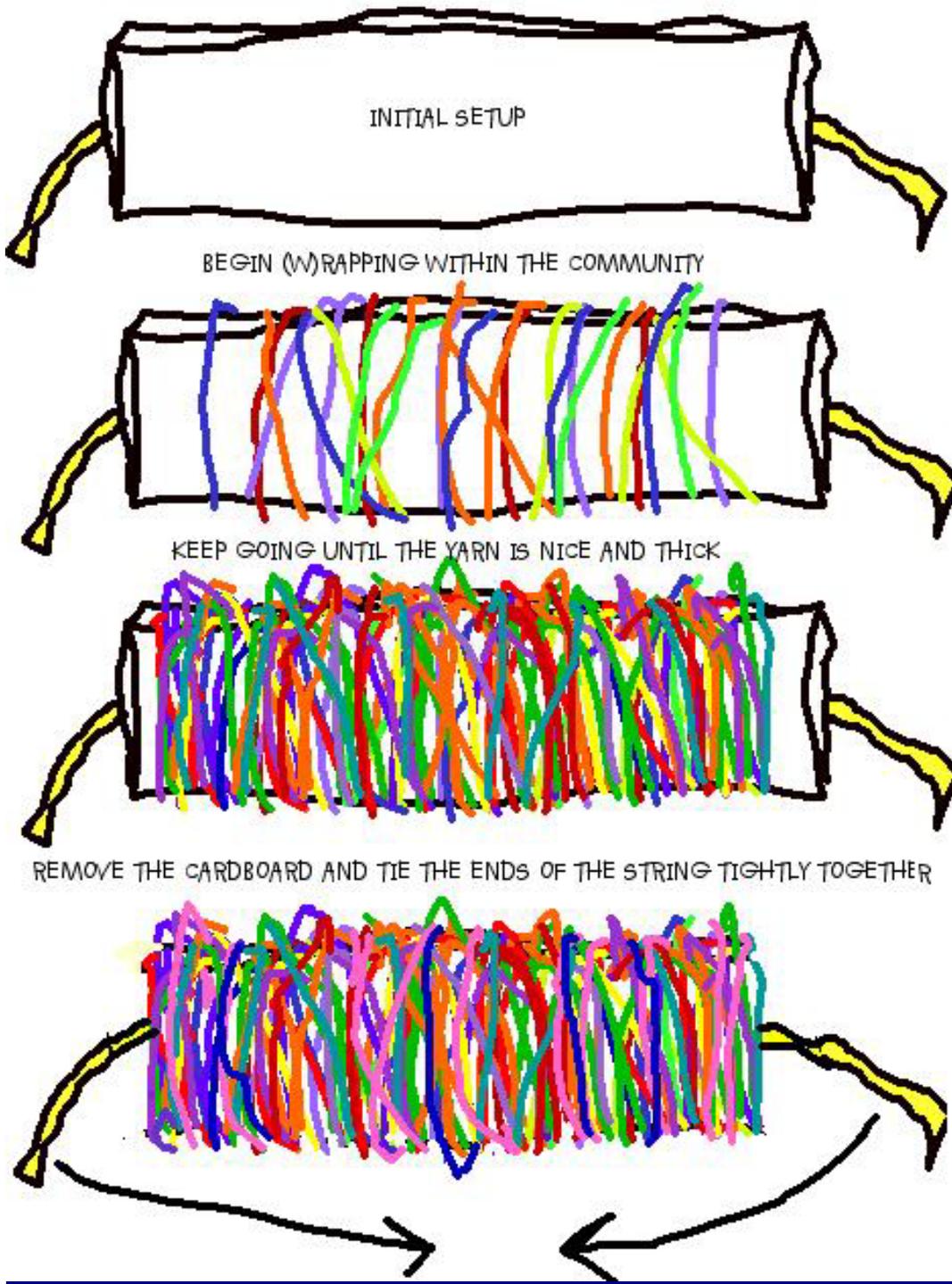
the outside edge of the bagel) all the way around. Fluff the ball, shake out the loose yarn, and trim the long pieces and VOILA... a beautiful community ball!

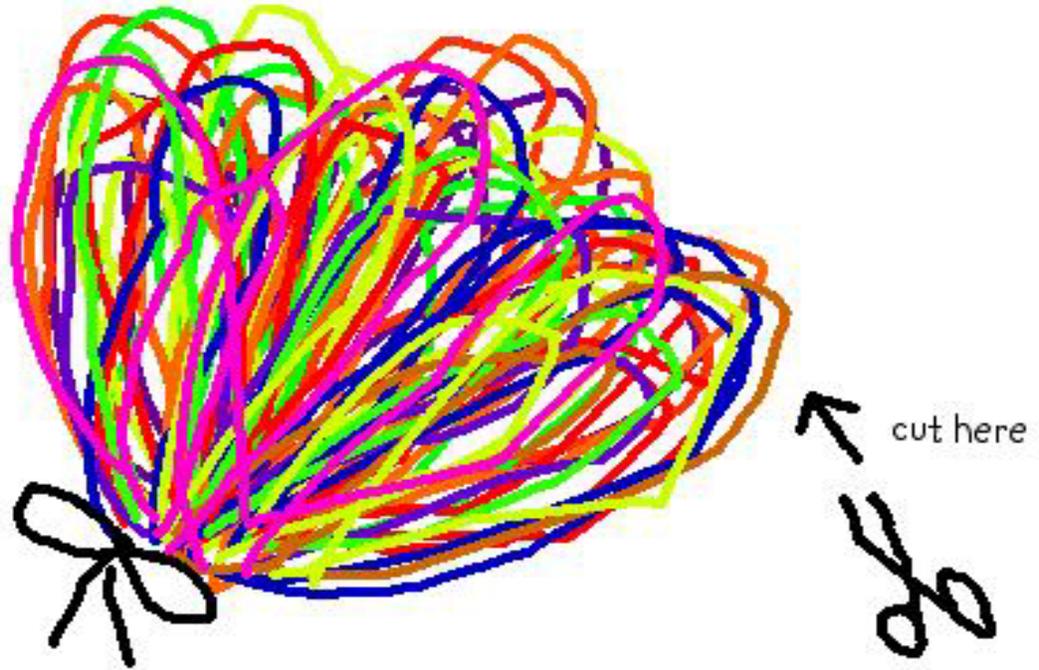
(SEE DETAIL ILLUSTRATION on pg. 6-7)

To do this in class, all the students should be seated on the floor in a circle so that everyone can see one another. Explain that as one person is wrapping the yarn around the cardboard, her neighbor can feed her yarn from the larger ball. Depending on the grade level (and this can, and should, be done with every grade level), ask the student to share some information about him/herself. In a kindergarten class, you may ask what they like to do. However, since this may not take enough time to get enough yarn wrapped around the cardboard, you can ask a follow-up question about what they have just shared or ask each student to repeat what the child before has just said. To complicate things at a higher grade level, you may want to ask each student to name something they like to do (or what they like to think about, etc.) that begins with the same letter as their first name and also to repeat what each and every student has shared up to her turn. This is not only creative and fun, but it also provides a nice heuristic devise to help remember each student's name at the beginning of the year.

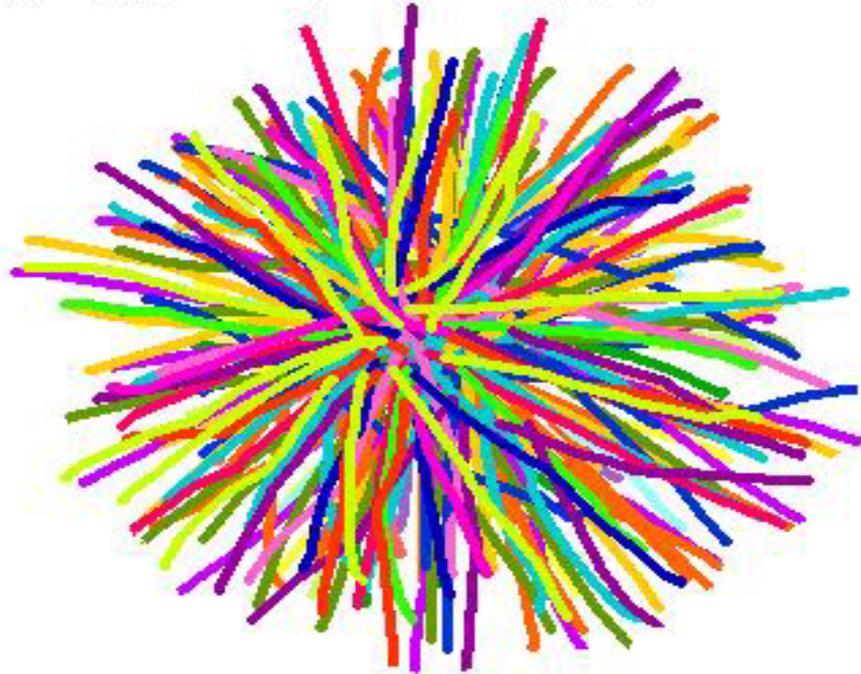
Since this is the very first lesson, you may want to explain that what you are going to do each week, in this circle on the floor, with this ball, is called **FEE-LA-SO-FEE** and that Fee-la-so-fee is going to be so much fun because we can share our ideas together and have a great time learning. Because this is such a silly word to them, it's fun to say it as playfully and as dramatically as possible and then have them all join in.

Illustration - How to make a Community Ball





FLUFF OUT THE YARN, PULL OUT LOOSE PIECES, TRIM THE WILD ONES, AND...



YOU'VE GOT A COMMUNITY BALL!!!

### SPEED BALL - A community ball cooperation activity

While this activity may take the whole length of your session, if you have extra time you can play a speed game with the community ball. The game begins with every member of the community raising her hand. Once the timer is set, the members try to pass the ball to each participant just once in the fastest amount of time. There are a couple of rules: the student with the ball must call out the name of the person she is throwing it to before doing so and no one can throw it to someone on either side of herself. You may want your students to record their times to provide incentive and see how their cooperation has progressed (or lagged) over the course of the year.

The students often enjoy the physically active nature of this game after a full session of intellectually active philosophy. Or, on the other hand, if the session seems to be falling apart due to restlessness, especially with the younger ones, a round or two of SpeedBall can end the session on an enthusiastic note.

### The “Rules” of the Ball – Who’s Got the Ball? And the Right to Pass

While your philosophy session should not have to be dominated by rules and regulations-- since P4C is grounded in the spontaneous and creative thinking that children naturally engage in-- the students do need to learn how to “safely” dialogue with one another. Indeed, Philosophy with Children operates best when certain “rules” of safe and respectful inquiry are *internalized* by the members of the community. This process of internalization can only take place if it is taught early-- alongside other fundamental aspects of P4C.

The first “rule” is the [Who’s Got the Ball?](#) rule. Simply, a member of the community can only speak once he/she has been tossed the community ball. Thus, the ball marks the direction of everyone’s attention and active listening. Since safety is paramount in our community, it is essential that each member respect the designated speaker and allow him/her to contribute to the dialogue in her own time and manner. Students often get impatient with classmates who are having trouble articulating their thoughts or are taking too long with their turn. So as to avoid the development of this kind of attitude and restlessness, it is necessary to stress early on the

“virtues” of patience, understanding, and community cooperation. Since our goal is to **scratch beneath the surface** *together*, it is necessary to realize that everyone contributes to this endeavor and that we must (and indeed we *want* to!) give every member the opportunity to contribute. In providing such an opportunity, the other members of the community do not have a passive role-- they should be attentively listening and actively thinking (that is, in terms of the **Tool Kit: What does she mean by that?** Is she **assuming** something? Can I think of a **counterexample** to that?). Each articulation of the subject matter is another inch closer we have come to seeing what *an* answer to our question might look like. So this first rule of the ball may seem rather simple, but, indeed, it carries with it some significant lessons regarding participation and responsibility in an **intellectually safe community**.

Since teachers are accustomed to holding the voice of authority in the classroom for most of the day, it’s a good challenge to see if you can also abide by this rule. In the Philosophy Circle, we are all students as well as teachers to one another-- but this is only accomplished if the teacher is willing to entertain such a change in the classroom dynamic. Teachers have found this to be both refreshing (because it gives you a rest and a fresh perspective) and enlightening (because you may see what the kids are really capable of-- both in thinking and in maturely managing themselves).

The second “rule” of the ball is the **Right to Pass**. That is, if you’ve been passed the ball and you’ve forgotten what you want to say, are too shy to say what you wanted to say, want to think about it some more (or whatever the reason), you have every right to pass the ball to another member of the community. Because the philosophy circle is a safe place, there is absolutely no reason why anyone should feel “put on the spot” or feel like they have to contribute via speaking. In philosophy, we try to emphasize and, thus, bolster the role of the active listener, thereby refocusing our normal conception of what participation is in a dialogue. Participation involves speaking, but it also (and very importantly) requires listening and thinking.

### **Lesson 2 and 3: What is a Safe Place, Safety and Community?**

After reading this first section, you, the teacher, may have a pretty good sense of what a safe place is, but we need to help the kids realize the importance of this concept too-- but more on their own terms.

### Rounds around the circle

To begin this lesson (and many lessons to follow), it's good to start with a round around the circle. Just as when the students told something about themselves while making the community ball, invite them to share something else about themselves. You can pick a theme-- such as favorite color or animal or food. Often the students themselves will want to decide what to share and this is a great empowering strategy-- although it's difficult to negotiate which theme to pick. After it's been decided, pass around the community ball and ask them to share their name (again-- this will help all of us remember each student's name regularly) and their favorite whatever. If a student is too shy, you may want to encourage him by just asking him to share his name, but also remind him that it's okay to pass the ball along. Shortly after these beginning lessons, my young kindergartners got in the habit (all by themselves!) of asking, when the last child was tossed the ball, if any student who had passed would now like to share. In almost all cases, all the passers quickly raise their hands to speak-- and even more hands go up for those who did share but who now want to contribute additional information.

Since this is a lesson on safety, you have to figure out some way to introduce the topic. This can basically take place in two different ways-- directly (simply asking, "What do we mean by a safe place?") or indirectly (relating the topic and questions to a shared classroom or playground experience).

### Direct and indirect approaches to introducing the issue of safety

#### Direct Approach

The direct approach begins with either the question "What do we mean by a safe place?" or "What do we mean by safe?" This is a great opportunity, in addition to discussing safety, to introduce the **W (What do we mean by \_\_\_?) tool**. (It's helpful to have the different letters of the **Good Thinkers' Toolkit** (pg. 21) displayed playfully on large cards or posterboard. Young students cannot wait to find out what all these intriguing letters stand for.) The students will usually respond to these questions with examples of places that they find safe. This is a great start-- and perhaps even a good opportunity to introduce the **E (Example) tool**. (You don't necessarily have to explain this one in depth now-- but just pull out the card and let them know

that the response that was just given was a nice example of a safe place). Generally, the students' examples and definitions will be limited to physical expressions of safety-- and this is fine because it is how we most commonly use the term.

To begin to get at the idea of other kinds of safety, that is, emotional and intellectual safety (which are closely intertwined when working with young children), you can ask some questions concerning the conditions when safety *isn't* guaranteed. For example, what happens when someone isn't safe? How does one *feel* when she isn't safe? With this introduction of feelings, the students will usually introduce the emotions of sadness, or fear, or frustration and may come up with other examples of safety that are more pertinent to their own issues of safety-- which usually don't involve physical safety, but focus more on emotional safety and instances of teasing and the like. At this point, you can bring out their already empathetic natures and emphasize the need to keep everyone's feelings safe -- which means that everyone needs to be careful of what they say or do so that no one will feel sad or upset by it. Just like a big family, we are one community that is concerned with the safety and feelings of each member. The community is safe and happy only when each member feels safe and happy.

In order to introduce more the *intellectual* aspect of safety, in addition to the physical and emotional, you can remind them that Fee-la-so-fee is about sharing ideas (like the ones we shared about a safe place) and what we think about different stuff. Just as feelings are precious, so are our ideas-- each one is very important and can help us learn together. In order to learn more and more and scratch beneath the surface (you can act this out in a fun way to explain how we can dig, or think, our way to some amazing new thoughts), we need to listen to each idea and take each one very seriously. Both ideas and feelings are special and we need to practice protecting them all the time. We want to be safe together all the time.

### Indirect Approach

Often an incident can occur (perhaps in any given day) when the issue of safety becomes pressing. These occurrences (such as a spat on the playground or an unkind word in the classroom) can be turned into opportunities for positive learning. During the session in which I was going to introduce safety to my kindergarten class, such an episode occurred during our initial round around the circle. One boy stated that onions were his favorite food and the whole class let out a simultaneous "Yuck!". Luckily,

the little boy didn't break into tears right then and there so we could finish our round. Immediately afterwards though, I asked the class how they would feel if someone, or, in this case, everyone, reacted to their favorite thing in the way they had just reacted. Would they feel *safe* if this happened to them? Their responses indicated that they would not feel safe, but, rather, sad or alienated, or lonely. You can then go on to demonstrate the relation between safety and community as well as feelings and ideas.

### Connecting Safety and Community

The safety lesson could easily occupy two separate sessions. If you begin with the indirect approach (if the timing is right), this could occupy the whole first session (together with the rounds around the circle and letting them decide what to do). The second session could then be used to clarify the idea of safety as well as tying in the connection with community and the sharing of ideas together.

To emphasize each student's significance as a member of the community, I like to begin the round around the circle with the phrase, "I am special because \_\_\_\_". This is also a good time to show them the **R (reason) card** and let them know that they are giving reasons why they are so special. Sometimes this exercise is difficult because students cannot give a reason why they are special. However, if you turn the question to the community and ask the other members to give reasons why this individual is so special, you'll get really sweet responses (such as "she's a good friend" or "he looks after his little brother really well" or "she can read") which bolster the student as well as the community.

### The Community Song – strengthen the sense of community

During this second session on safety, you can also introduce the **Community Song** (use whatever tune you like):

We are one big communi-tee!

I like you and you like me.

We are one big communi-tee.

We feel safe in fee-la-so-fee!

The students love to record this song on a tape recorder and hear it played back again and again until they get it just right.

### Evaluating our Community

The final thing that can be added to your second or third lesson is the introduction of **evaluations**. Because they have just learned about safety, you can ask, “Was our philosophy circle a safe place today? Did you feel you could share your ideas without anyone making fun? Was everyone listening to your ideas?” And teach them the responses: thumbs up (Yes), thumbs sideways (So-So), and thumbs down (No way). The students really look forward to the evaluations-- just remind them of the importance of the evaluations for improving the community and, therefore, the necessity of their honesty in performing the “thumbs up/thumbs down.”

## Lesson 4: Thinking

### Thinking about thinking

By the fourth philosophy session, the students are beginning to realize that philosophy is a regular classroom activity and they may be curious about what the whole point of it is. One important dimension of philosophy is “**thinking about thinking**” or, in a way, **exercising one’s brain**. The purpose of this lesson is to make this explicit. This, of course, can be done in a very playful way. To begin, I like to review what we’ve been doing for the past few sessions, especially at these still early stages and with the younger students. This may be a good time to be explicit about the giving of reasons (pull out that big, colorful **R card**), using the word ‘**because**,’ and asking questions like *Why?* and *How Come?* It’s always nice to start, again, with a round around the circle to loosen everyone up and to get those brains and mouths working. Sometimes the students will insist on choosing for themselves what they share when going around the circle-- with the younger ones, it usually involves sharing their favorite animal, color, or food. But this is perfect because we can practice our asking of *Why?* or *How come?* and can exercise our giving of reasons. Secondly, you might want to review the newly introduced ideas of **safety** and **community** with the students and reemphasize their importance for philosophy. Thirdly, reviewing the **community song** will be fun and a great segue into today’s dialogue.

### Philosophy as “exercising our brain”

Since our goal is to think about philosophy as “exercising our brain,” you may want to begin with a brief dialogue about exercise and the importance of exercise in one’s life. This may be difficult with the youngest students so to make the topic more concrete, you can begin with **examples** of other activities that involve exercising different parts of one’s body. For example, you may ask, “What part of our body was exercised when we sang the community song?, or when we go to music class?” or “What part of our body is exercised in P.E. class or when we run around the playground?”.

### Agreeing and Disagreeing safely

Allow the children ample time to toss the ball back and forth and hear what others think. You may encourage them to **agree or disagree** with what was said by another student or simply point out that one is agreeing or disagreeing with another student. At some point, students may get upset because others often disagree with them. It is very important that we, as teachers, explain that every time one student disagrees with another, both students are helping our community scratch even further beneath the surface. Part of **safety** is creating room for disagreement. By disagreeing, we are not arguing, but trying to come to a better understanding together. It is important, even at the youngest age, to learn how to learn from one another without thinking of disagreement as a personal offense. Also, it is important to ward against the thinking that “everyone is entitled to his opinion” without the necessity of having to support one’s views or being held responsible for those views. Philosophy fosters the ability to truly dialogue with others-- which means a continuous challenge of oneself and others in one’s community. **Genuine dialogue** cannot get off the ground if we all agree with one another or, if we disagree, we never explore our differences together. Back to our lesson...

After some discussion of some of these varying activities (which may seem obvious to us-- but much more fluid and fun to a youngster), you can quickly revisit their responses and then ask, “So what part of the body does fee-la-so-fee exercise?” Answers may range from our mouths (from all the talking) to our ears (because we have to listen hard-- this is important too!) to our arms (from throwing the ball around) to our stomach muscles (because

they help us to sit up straight). All these are good answers-- especially if they are accompanied by good reasons. You may need to give them a nudge to help them think about fee-la-so-fee as the sharing of ideas. But where do these ideas come from? Our heart? Possibly... but also our BRAIN! Fee-la-so-fee is about the exercising of our brain and about thinking really hard. If you still have some time and their brains aren't over-exercised yet, you can ask "What do we mean by exercising our brain?". You may get some really creative responses about how we have to stretch our brains around ideas or how our imaginations and brains have to work hard together to produce ideas-- or you may just end with a bunch of tired-out brains! Don't forget to evaluate for listening, safety, and how hard they exercised their brains today.

## Lesson 5: Giving Reasons

### The Oreo Cookie Dilemma: Problem solving and Reason giving exercise

At this point, the students are getting a sense of some of the basic tools of the Good Thinker's Toolkit-- the **W**, the **R**, and the **E** tools should have been pointed out and emphasized throughout the earlier dialogues. This particular lesson really emphasizes the power of giving good reasons as well as the necessity of creative problem solving. It's also really fun for teachers and students alike.

The only prop you'll need, other than the community ball, is some kind of treat that they'll all love-- for example, cookies, gumdrops, m&m's-- but each piece should be relatively small. I usually wrap one piece (or one cookie) neatly in plastic wrap and then store the rest out of sight.

To begin, tell the students that you have a very difficult problem that you need help solving-- this gets them interested pretty quickly. You may want to ask them, "**What do we mean by** a problem anyway?". But if this doesn't get off the ground, you can ask if they think problems are good or bad. Be sure to ask for **reasons** and/or **examples** to support what they think. In describing my problem, sometimes I make up a little scenario, such as "I really wanted to give you all a treat because you've been such good thinkers in fee-la-so-fee, so I went to the store and bought a whole bag of Oreos. However, when I was riding my bike home from the store, I hit a bump and all the cookies fell out and landed in a huge puddle-- except for this one"

(and then I pull out the sacred cookie from my bag). “What should I do? I only have one cookie, but we have 1, 2, 3... 25 students in the class!”

Immediately, hands goes up or things are shouted out about how best to distribute the cookie: cut it 25 pieces, give it to the nicest student, give it to me, give it to the teacher, buy some more and wait until next week... Be sure to ask for reasons if they don't automatically provide one. “Why should we split it? What is your reason for saying that?” After awhile you'll find that you have a lot of pretty good ideas with pretty good reasons supporting them, but no way to decide between them. At this point, I like to go around the circle and ask each student if I should give the cookie to her and why or why not? What is your reason? I claim that I will give the cookie to whoever has the best reason. In some classes, all the students will say that they want the cookie and claim that they are the hungriest or the most deserving or whatever. In other classes, students are too concerned about being hated for taking the only cookie and so they insist on some “fair” way of distribution-- which usually includes dividing it or waiting until there is enough for everyone-- or leaving it up to chance-- either by throwing it up in the air and whoever gets it gets it or choosing a name out of a hat. In the end, despite all the good solutions and reasons given, there really is no best way to decide who should get it. I begin to unwrap the precious cookie and suggest that we each take a nibble and pass it around the circle. This suggestion usually meets a protest of groans. At this point, it's fun to start to nibble on the cookie and then take a big bite out of it-- just to see the look of astonishment on their faces. And then I pull out a huge bag with enough treats for everyone and they all cheer. What fun!

## Lesson 6: Plain Vanilla

(Asking, Categorizing, and Choosing Philosophical Questions for Community Dialogue)

step #1: READ

step #2: QUESTIONS ( ASK, CATEGORIZE AND DEVELOP CRITERIA)

step #3: APPLY CRITERIA/CHOOSE A QUESTION & PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

step #4 EVALUATE THE DIALOGUE

A criterion for the success of a dialogue with and among children is beginning with a good question. And clearly a mark of a good question is the students' interest in finding an answer to it. Such questions are not difficult to locate for students are always brimming with questions. However, a difficulty may lie in choosing which questions would foster a genuine philosophical dialogue. What criteria should be applied for selecting philosophical questions and who should be determining these criteria? In the following lesson (consisting of six distinct stages), I lay out a definite strategy for choosing questions that are philosophical and yet entirely provided, evaluated, and then carefully selected by the students in order to begin an engaging and thought provoking dialogue.

“**Plain Vanilla**” represents one strategy for eliciting topics (through questions) for philosophical discussion and often begins with literature-- either a specific Philosophy for Children novel, such as *Pixie* or *Elfie*, or a short story, fable, poem, and so on. Literature provides a treasure chest full of wonderful treasures for us to marvel at and explore. As we peer into the keyhole of the chest, what we see is a small portion of the entire contents of this chest. If we talk about these treasures based on what we saw through this tiny keyhole, the discussion that would ensue would be only a limited, narrow version of the actual contents. A literature book, like a treasure chest, can be full of wonderful philosophical potential. If we do not develop our own philosophical thinking skills, we may end up using literature in the same way as one who peers through a keyhole. Raising a question such as, “What makes you, you?” may be philosophical in content, but if the treatment or the activity of inquiry is not philosophical, we may end up leading the students to THE ANSWER. The notion of one correct answer closes inquiry, rather than fostering it. When this happens, the inquiry never moves beyond a superficial understanding. Philosophy develops a kind of thinking that opens possibilities for understanding the world and ourselves. That is, rather than simply peering through the keyhole, philosophy allows us one way of opening the treasure chest and exploring the contents.

### Step #1 Reading

To begin a Plain Vanilla exercise, ask your community members, seated around in a circle, to keep in mind things that interest them and make them wonder as the story is read. Ideally, the students will take turns reading passages from the story-- going around the circle, section by section. Of

course, with the youngest students, it may be best for the teacher to read the story to the group

## Step #2 Questioning

### 2a. Asking Questions

Upon completion of the reading, urge members or the community to formulate questions that the story had evoked in them. Although the students are eager to respond to each other's questions as they are raised, it may be better to refrain from such quick responses until all the questions are laid out before the community, that is, literally-- on wide strips of paper on the floor.

### 2b. Categorizing Questions

When it seems that the students are satisfied with the amount and quality of their questioning (you may only have a few questions or dozens of them), it is time to categorize them, based on similarity of topic, and then, later on, to try to label each group of questions with its most pronounced theme

Although these last two steps, asking questions and categorizing them, come long before the actual philosophical dialogue (based on the final chosen question(s)), both can be seen to be highly valuable and philosophical. **For one**, simply letting the students ask their own questions allows them to begin the inquiry at their own level-- that is, their own intellectual level and their own interest level. By suspending our own assumptions, as teachers, about what might be most poignant, interesting, or educational for the students, this process allows the community, as a whole, to decide this for itself. Something as simple as this can open our eyes to both the insight and complexity of our students' mental worlds-- things we do not often glimpse in a routine school day. **Secondly**, the process of categorizing their questions, allows the students to reflect on each other's thoughts and to begin to engage in the philosophical skills of providing reasons (for their grouping), demonstrating **counterexamples** (if they disagree on another student's categorization), and displaying alternative schemas to organize their collective thoughts, to name a few.

### 2c. Developing Criteria for Philosophical Questions

Now that we have the questions and have reflected on them and grouped them, it is time to pick the one, or few, that will serve as the basis for a

philosophical dialogue. But, clearly, the question should be raised as to how we are to pick the best philosophical question for our dialogue. What **criteria** should the community employ to decide this matter? Understanding what criteria best suit a philosophical question is not intuitively obvious. Although young children certainly ask philosophical questions, they may not be able to distinguish between one and any other kind of question and, also, the line between the two is not always distinct. Not to mention that certain practical or mundane questions can become quite philosophical if we consider the question in a different light. Asking about the time of day could evoke questions about the nature of time itself. Or, we may begin to notice the **ambiguity** of our own language and, perhaps, begin to question the meaning of our words and the use of language. Clearly, this philosophical way of thinking about our own questions and thoughts takes time and practice to develop and that, in part, is the one of the goals toward which this exercise (with repeated engagement) aims.

Below I have a list of criteria that a particular group of third graders (who had been engaging in philosophy together for a few months-- some of whom had been involved in the Philosophy in the Schools Project for a couple years) had developed in order to distinguish "good questions for philosophy" from other kinds of questions. This community came up with the following (and spent quite some time discussing the last): philosophy questions... bring up lots of questions, are hard to figure out, don't have exact right answers, lead to lots of discussion, cannot be answered quickly, make you think really hard, have good answers, have lots of answers (because there is no exact answer), and "**make minds grow bigger.**" Since this particular community has had some exposure to philosophy and has participated in successful philosophical dialogues (that is, they had experienced their own "**scratching beneath the surface**"), they could readily come up with these criteria and talk about *them* philosophically (by means of asking one another for clarification of presented ideas and constructively disagreeing with classmates' standards for philosophy questions).

Before applying these criteria to the list of questions raised in step #2a, it is necessary to narrow the number of questions that are up for consideration. There are numerous ways to do this. To make things easy, since the community members are familiar with the kinds of questions they had come up with (from doing all this work of sorting and arranging) and I, the teacher, had no specific agenda with the material, the community simply voted on the group of questions that interested them the most. Because the

chosen category reflects the community's interest, there, oftentimes, are a number of questions (10 or more, perhaps) within the category to work with and investigate before final selection. You may also find that the chosen category of questions contains a diversity of questions-- varying in degrees of sophistication, but lacking any clear, decisive line by which to separate them.

### Step #3 Applying Criteria/Choosing a Question & Philosophical Dialogue

Before applying the criteria, it is reassuring to remind the community that all of these questions are very good and creative and much appreciated, but that some might work better for philosophy than others. We certainly do not want to shame or ostracize any of the students in our community (a caring sense of safety must always be maintained!) and all should feel good about their own active and safe participation in the community (regardless of the style of such participation). But, ultimately, the selection of a question for dialogue should be hands in the community itself. It is the community's responsibility (with some gentle direction) to employ the criteria that it has provided in order to determine which questions will be best for the dialogue. Choosing a question for dialogue is certainly a philosophical activity in itself and provides the opportunity for dialogue within the community. Students may agree and disagree for a whole session on just the application of these standards and then, perhaps, reconsider the criteria they established in the first place. In other words, given enough time, a lot of philosophical activity can occur just within this one step.

In applying the criteria, it is quite likely that the students will be satisfied with a number of questions to serve as the starting point for their dialogue. Before we can reach the final stage of this we need to refine, once more, our selection of questions. While it's great to have a supply of pre-selected philosophical questions, we still need to decide where to begin. Also, in the course of the dialogue, the students might feel that they have exhausted a particular question in a discussion or are simply ready to move on and, for this reason, it is good to have a few questions on reserve-- instead of relying on just one. Simply have the students rank, through a system of voting, the order in which the community will discuss the questions (knowing that we might not get through the whole list). In the end, regardless of which question finally makes it to #1, it is certain this

dialogue will be remarkable-- and for no other reason than it came entirely, from the very beginning, from the students themselves.

By this point, your community has already engaged in a number of philosophical dialogues. The dialogue that culminates this Plain Vanilla exercise should proceed in the same manner: maintain physical, emotional, and intellectual safety, foster a sense of community, and employ the Good Thinkers' Tool Kit (WRAI TEC) to the dialogue or inquiry. Laugh, learn, think, and play.

### Step #4 Evaluate the Dialogue

There are basically 8 criteria that we use to evaluate our discussions. Children indicate their ratings by using a thumbs up (great), thumbs sideways (so-so), and thumbs down (everyone was asleep). It is suggested that these criteria be written down on cloud-shaped poster board and laminated. It might be a good idea to color code the 2 parts. The criteria are broken down into two basic parts: 1) Community and 2) Inquiry.

### The Criteria

How well did we do as a COMMUNITY?

1. How well did you listen? (That means when others were speaking, were you listening? AND how well did the community listen? (That means when you were speaking, were the others listening to you?)
2. Did you participate? (Did you have a chance to talk? And if you didn't speak, were you thinking about the topic for today?)
3. Was it a safe place for you?

How was our INQUIRY?

4. Did we stay focused? (Sometimes I would ask the children to keep their eyes on the cushion and when I see all eyes looking, I would tell them that what they just did was focus. Did we do the same thing in our discussion or did we talk about recess, what we ate for dinner, etc.?)
5. Did we scratch beneath the surface and begin to unpack the topic? (Use WRAI TEC as a means of doing this. If there were many reasons

given, clarification as to what do we mean by, examples and counter-examples offered, assumptions and inferences made, that is an indication that the children are beginning to scratch beneath the surface.)

6. Did you learn something new?
7. Did you challenge your own thinking and give your brain a workout?
8. Was it interesting, did we have fun?