

Lesson Plan

Discussion Theme:
Ethics

Discussion Topic:
What makes an action right or wrong?

Discussion Duration:
45 minutes

Materials needed:
Chalk/Blackboard
Two sheets of notebook paper per group

1. Goals/Objectives (1-2)

- Skill objective:
Students will learn how to respond to specific points raised by others using logical reasoning.
- Philosophical objective:
Students will learn the distinction between deontological and consequentialist ethical theories as demonstrated by the Trolley/Train Problem.

2. Lesson Plan Narrative

Have the students sitting in a circle.

Start with a game or a meditation. (see separate resource)

The main focus of this lesson is to encourage students to engage in a discussion focusing on what they believe makes an action right or wrong. The first discussion in small groups is designed to encourage students to identify what leads them to classify an action as right or wrong. Once students have stated their ideas about what is right and wrong, begin engaging the children with the ethical dilemmas below. The main activity involves a series of thought experiments that forces the

children to choose between protecting the life of an innocent man made of brick or the lives of five innocent bystanders. The purpose of this activity is to encourage the students to either 1) use their earlier definitions of right and wrong to defend their choices in the given scenarios or 2) discover issues with the ethical principles they stated in the initial discussion of the class.

Make sure to take time between each of the brick man scenarios to ask the students to explain why they made their decisions. Use this time to encourage student to engage each other through their responses. At the end of this discussion, students would have ideally discussed multiple ethical principles that are based in deontology, or consequentialism.

3. Introduction

- What do we mean by ethics?

- a . Divide the class into groups with 7-10 students each, then have them discuss what they think makes something right or wrong.

- Students may argue that society determines what is right or wrong.
- Students may argue that God determines what is right or wrong.
- Students may argue that what's right or wrong depends on who benefits from their actions.
- Students may argue that the civil law determines what is right or wrong

- Follow up:

- What determines what is right or wrong in their school?
- What determines what is right or wrong in their home?
- Do they determine what is right or wrong in their classroom / home/society?

4. Main Activity

- Trolley Problem Dilemma

- a . Draw on the board a picture of a train with a track that splits in two

- On one track, draw five people. Explain that these five people are innocent bystanders.
- On the second track, draw one person who is an innocent bystander.
- Beside the two tracks, draw one person beside a switch

- There is a train on the first track that will hit the five bystanders.
- The students only have two choices -they can allow the train to continue and hit the five people, or they can flip a switch and change the train's path so that it goes onto the track with the one innocent bystander, hitting the one bystander instead.

- Answers

- No, I would not flip the switch

- Students may say that not acting wouldn't make them a bad person because they didn't put the people on the track.

- Students may argue that they could do many things to save the person after they flip the switch. Make it clear that there is no way to save anyone after they flip the switch.

- Large Man-Trolley Problem Dilemma

- Draw a large man on a piece of paper. The man is standing on a bridge that is over train tracks with five people standing on them.

- Stipulate that the people on the tracks are innocent bystanders and that the only way to save them is by pushing the equally innocent large man.

- The same options are available as above: push the man or let the train kill the five people. There are no other options.

- Students may bring up the possibility of asking the man if he would mind being pushed. Try to get them to answer the question under the original stipulations at first, but coming back to the question of consent to be pushed can lead to interesting conversations if time allows for it.

- Ask the group their thoughts on what should be done.

- Attempt to have discussion on foundational principle behind the choice.

- Ask group how this relates to the first Trolley Problem.

- Is physically pushing the large man the same as pulling the switch?

- If yes, why?

- If no, what is the difference between killing the one man via the switch and pushing the large man?

Timeline

Game or meditation- 5 minutes

What do we mean by ethics? 5-7 minutes

Trolley Problem Dilemma 1-approximately- 15 minutes

Large Man-Trolley Problem Dilemma 2 -approximately 10 minutes

Conclusion of Ethics: approximately 7 minutes

5. Conclusion

- Get the class to explain where they think ethics are derived from (i.e. deontology, consequentialism, etc).
- Have them write on the back of their index card what influenced their group's decisions about each scenario: social expectations, personal beliefs, religious beliefs, etc.

6. Suggestion for related activities There are several thought experiments that you can use to discuss ethics. You can expand the discussion to include the scenario of a zombie apocalypse. Set up the scenario that a plague has hit the students' school, and the only way to stop the plague is to steal 5 magical necklaces from the tombs of five ancient kings. This will allow students the opportunity to discuss whether we have an ethical obligation toward those who have passed away. You may also use a more hands on activity. Pair students into groups of two. Let them know that they have the ability to either cooperate with each other or defect. They cannot inform each other of their respective decisions.

Explain that if both students cooperate, they will each get two pieces of candy or stickers. If one person says they will cooperate, but the other defects, then the one who defected will get 3 pieces of candy or stickers. If both defect, then neither participant will receive anything. Once you have explained these rules, have the pairs write their decisions on a piece of paper and hand it to you. Once both students have submitted their answers, reveal what they each decided and ask them why they

made their decision. This activity will allow them to discuss the merits of and issues with ethical theories such as virtue ethics and consequentialism.