



# Praise for *The If Machine*

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‘This is a timely and valuable contribution: a capacity to think critically is the key component of any education, and Worley is an inventive enhancer of children’s ability to think for themselves.’

**Professor A.C. Grayling, Master of  
New College of the Humanities**

‘...a lucid and well-thought-through resource that should have children entertained and educated at the same time.’

**Dr Stephen Law, Senior Lecturer, Heythrop College,  
University of London**

‘Philosophy with my Year 6 class was a revelation. Children who had never felt confident enough to speak up came out with such insightful comments that others had no choice but to start to take them seriously. Every school should have philosophy as part of the curriculum.’

**Amanda Crook, Primary Teacher**

‘If you had any doubts about whether you could do this, this book gives you the confidence to be able to go out and do it.’

**Julie Odege, Primary Teacher**

‘A very well-organised and thought-out book... One of the most striking things about this book is its intellectual rigour, its grounding in the work of real philosophers and its implicit belief that children will respond to big and important ideas.’

**Martin Spice, *Times Educational Supplement***

‘Peter is skilled at making a potentially complex subject as accessible as it could be... Each session is clearly laid out, graded for difficulty as well as age-suitability, and accompanied with information about the relevant philosophical question.’

***Teach Primary***

**Other titles from Peter Worley**

*100 Ideas for Primary Teachers: Questioning*

*40 Lessons to Get Children Thinking*

*Once Upon an If*

*The If Odyssey*

# **The If Machine**

**30 Lesson Plans for  
Teaching Philosophy**

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**Peter Worley**

**Illustrated by Tamar Levi**

**BLOOMSBURY EDUCATION**

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For my parents, Ian and Lorraine, and my parents-in-law,  
Chris and Jocelyn, whose support, at different times,  
has been invaluable.

‘Education to independence demands that young people should be accustomed early to consult their own sense of propriety and their own reason.’

G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831)

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A companion website to accompany this book is available online at:  
[www.bloomsbury.com/if-machine-2e](http://www.bloomsbury.com/if-machine-2e)

Please visit the link to access the downloadable resources.

# Acknowledgements

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# Preface

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In the preface of the first edition of this book, I likened doing philosophy to entering a labyrinth by drawing an analogy with the ancient Greek story of Ariadne and Theseus. The children were identified with Theseus, who enters the labyrinth (philosophy) in the story, and Ariadne represented the facilitator in two important ways: she provides Theseus with what he needs (a wooden unthreading device called a ‘clew’) to navigate his way around the labyrinth. But Ariadne is importantly not with Theseus when he does so. She therefore offers two central themes of facilitation that run, like threads, throughout this book: i) *presence*, the extent to which the facilitator acts to impact on the discussion, and ii) *absence*, the extent to which the facilitator does not act, or refrains from acting, to impact on the discussion. What I didn’t say then was that facilitation itself can feel like entering a maze! The art of good facilitation is about getting the balance between these two principles right.

Nearly ten years have elapsed since the publication of the first edition of *The If Machine* (and my first book). Eight – nearly nine – books later and a lot has happened since then, both in terms of The Philosophy Foundation and in terms of the ideas in the book. However, it is remarkable how many of the ideas central to The Philosophy Foundation’s approach to doing philosophy in schools and other public settings were captured in that first edition. Even the most important addition to our approach since then, *open questioning mindset* (see below and page 13), is only new in name; its spirit runs throughout the book’s first edition.

Since writing the first edition, I have done a lot of training for people to be able to run the sessions from this and my other books. Here are some of the insights I can offer from my experience of training philosophers and teachers for anyone approaching this book for the first or the fiftieth time. Firstly, both teachers and philosophers can do this stuff. Philosophers we train need to learn sufficient pedagogy; teachers, sufficient philosophy. But in both cases adopting the right mindset makes everything else fall into place more easily and, perhaps most importantly, it means that there is less work for facilitators to do. So, it is the mindset that is the most important thing to get right, more specifically, an *open questioning mindset* (OQM).

In its simplest formulation, OQM is where the facilitator *listens actively* to what is being said; it is where the facilitator *listens for what the pupil is*

## Xii Preface

*thinking or saying* (or trying to say), then asks the pupil to say (if they can) *why they think what they think*. For practical purposes, that's all you need to know to get started! This contrasts with a *closed questioning mindset* (CQM) where the facilitator listens out for (or seeks out) *those who think what the facilitator is looking for* and where the children start to *say what they think the teacher wants them to say*. This means that the basic mechanism for running philosophy sessions is very simple: A] *invite the children to say what they think* and then *why they think it*. To encourage critical engagement with each other's ideas, you may also extend this to: B] *invite them to say what they think about each other's ideas* and then *why they think what they think about each other's ideas*. The next thing to do is listen out for any *diversity of ideas* (different and conflicting ideas) and follow that diversity. A philosophical enquiry will often emerge if you stick to this mechanism.

And, if you do stick to this basic mechanism, then as a rule, *let the group do the work*: step back, listen and enable (usually done by giving permission by passing a talk ball). If there are hands up, go to them, thank the speaker, pass the ball. It's that simple. Of course, as you will see in the 'Teaching strategies' section (see page 34), there is more you can do and there will be situations that call for more. But, in many cases (more than one might imagine), your default move when facilitating philosophical enquiries will be to *be quiet, pass the ball and listen*.

This new edition has five extra lesson plans covering different topics from the sessions in the previous edition. They have been tried and tested in classrooms by myself, my colleagues at The Philosophy Foundation and other teachers. We have added in some new concepts such as *open questioning mindset* and teaching strategies such as the Hokey Kokey method, and also a hints and tips section at the front of the book (see page 55) to make reading this advice easier than before. But I think one of the most valuable additions is the troubleshooting section (on page 222). If you need help with your facilitation or with managing the group, then take a look there. We have included some of the most frequently asked questions from training courses and observations of classroom practice.

I hope you find the new edition of *The If Machine* both enjoyable and helpful.

# Table of sessions

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## Star ratings

\* Easy

\*\* Moderate

\*\*\* More difficult

The star ratings are here to give you a guide as to the difficulty level of the sessions. This is not necessarily age related. For example, *The Ceebie Stories* can all be used with children aged seven and upwards, but some of the sessions will be more challenging than others. The key to dealing with challenging sessions is clarity of presentation. Make sure that you are familiar with the sessions and that you understand them yourself. Do not be afraid to try a more difficult session with your class: you will often find that your class surprise you.

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
The Chair	Things and what they are to us Perception Points of view Names and referring terms	61	7<	**
The Meaning of Ant Life	Purpose and design Existentialism God and religion Value	69	9<	**
Can You Step in the Same River Twice?	Change Arguments Identity Necessary and sufficient conditions Rivers and water cycles	73	8<	*

## XIV Table of sessions

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
Republic Island	Group decision-making Politics Fairness Rules Society Citizenship Islands	78	7<	*
Let's Get Lost!	Loss Finding Knowledge Bereavement Grief	87	5<	*
The Ring of Gyges	Power Doing good Moral responsibility	91	8<	**
The Prince and the Pig	Happiness Values Points of view Animals	96	5–11	*
The Ship of Theseus	Identity Personal identity Change	102	9<	**
Here and Elsewhere	Migration Cultural identity Personal identity Cultural relativism Morality and rules of etiquette	108	7<	*
The Happy Prisoner	Freedom Freedom of the will Moral responsibility	114	9<	**
Goldfinger	Language Meaning Precision and accuracy Happiness Wishes	119	5–9	*
The Ant and the Grasshopper	Work Welfare Care Justice Fairness	126	5<	*

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
The Frog and the Scorpion	Nature/nurture Free will Choice Moral responsibility Self-interest Self-control Weakness of the will	131	All	*
The Book of Life	The future The self Choice Free will	137	10<	**
The Shadow of the Pyramid	Arguments Wisdom Problem-solving Sophistry	142	9<	**
The Wand	Science Testing Causation Connections Belief Proof Superstition	153	9<	**
Billy Bash	Self-control Emotions Belief Happiness	156	6<	*
Thinking About Nothing	Existence Language Reference Meaning Numbers Maths Ancient Greece	163	8<	**
The Six Wise Men	Parts and wholes ('one-over-many') Points of view Knowledge Wisdom Working together	167	7<	**
Yous on Another Planet	Personal identity Identity Humanity	173	10<	***

# XVI Table of sessions

Session title	Themes	Page	Age	Star rating
The Ceebie Stories: Friends	Friendship Relationships Empathy	178	7<	*
The Ceebie Stories: The Tony Test	Artificial intelligence Computers Thinking Language	183	7<	**
The Ceebie Stories: The Robbery	Responsibility Knowledge History Choice	188	7<	***
The Ceebie Stories: The Android	Being human Analogy Personal identity	195	7<	*
The Ceebie Stories: The Lie	Dilemmas Decision-making Values Friendship Lying	199	7<	***
The Ceebie Stories: The Rebuild	Change Personal identity Materials	205	7<	**
The Ceebie Stories: Finally Human?	Being human Analogy Self-conception Personal identity	209	7<	**
To the Edge of Forever	Arguments Infinity	211	7<	**
Where Are You?	Personal identity Who am I? Minds and brains	214	8<	**
The Fair Well	Fairness Justice Wishes	218	7<	**

# Section 1:

**How to do philosophical enquiry in the classroom**

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# Introduction

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## Who is this book for?

This book has been written as a resource for anyone who wants to do philosophy with children in schools, youth groups or other settings. The material has been gathered from over 16 years of experience doing **philosophy** (you will find words in bold briefly explained in the glossary on page 228) with children from ages three to 18. This book has been written specifically for use with children between five and 13; however, with some minor adjustments, many of the lesson plans may be used with children younger and older than this. If you have not studied philosophy then please note that this book and online material have been written to provide an introduction to the relevant philosophical material. This will help to give you a basic philosophical awareness so that you can feel more confident and get more out of the philosophy sessions in your class. This book also aims to serve as a general introduction to philosophy as a subject, and hopes to spark your interest to learn and read more about it.

One great thing about philosophy is that children do not need to be familiar with it to be able to do it. To be able to facilitate philosophic discussions, however, it helps to have a basic awareness of the philosophical topics and debates that surround the sessions provided in this book. This will help you to encourage – or to identify – philosophical insights from the children. These, in turn, will help you to navigate the philosophical direction of the sessions. It is important to be aware that philosophy is much more than simply talking together and sharing ideas: it is a certain *kind* of thinking about certain *kinds* of topics (see ‘philosophy’ in the glossary). The kind of thinking that philosophy engenders can be applied to almost any subject. At the beginning of each session I have included a quick summary introduction of the philosophy that lies behind it, and at the end a guide to further reading available on the companion website that accompanies this book.

Do remember that the information about philosophy you find in this book and the companion website is *not* information to be taught to children in the

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philosophy sessions; it is there to help you develop a philosophical awareness to help with the facilitation of the sessions. In other words, it assists you to be able to spot the philosophy in the sessions and guide the discussion appropriately. From this point on, while you are reading this book and doing philosophy with children, you are not a teacher, you are a ‘curious facilitator’. By this I mean that you are as interested in the ideas being discussed as the children and will do all you can to help the children explore ideas, but you will not be teaching them as you would in your normal role as ‘teacher’ and you will not be expressing your own ideas.

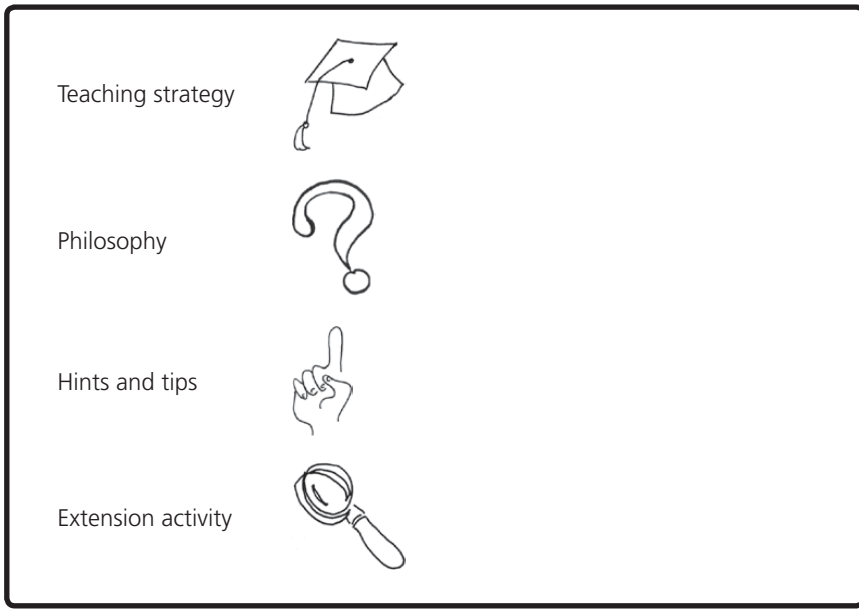
Philosophy in schools is underpinned by **community of inquiry** (CoI) pedagogy: an approach to education that puts critically collaborative investigation at its heart. If you do philosophy regularly with your class and become familiar with the methods and teaching strategies (page 34) in this book, you may find it can impact and inform your normal class teaching. This happens by developing transferable skills in the children such as speaking and listening, reasoning, questioning and autonomous thinking, as well as critical and creative thinking. The teaching strategies should also help you to develop your teaching by giving you greater confidence with questioning and discourse skills, engendering a more collaborative relationship with your class and an atmosphere of active learning and **enquiry**.

### The structure of this book

This book has two sections and a companion website. The first section, ‘How to do **philosophical enquiry** in the classroom’, begins with an introduction to the subject of philosophy with children, and outlines my philosophical enquiry method (PhiE). There is then a full and comprehensive list of the teaching strategies that are covered in this book. These strategies can be used in any educational setting to help deepen thinking by developing questioning skills that will elicit more from the children, and engage the children critically with the material and with each other.

The second section, ‘The PhiE sessions’, contains 30 sessions on different philosophical topics. The sessions are designed to last one hour, and can be extended over more than one session depending on how much discussion is generated by the questions and enquiries. Some sessions such as *The Chair*, *Republic Island*, *Billy Bash* and *The Shadow of the Pyramid* are designed to span more than one session. Each session includes a series of boxes that draw your attention to various features. These features include ‘Teaching strategies’,

‘Philosophy’, ‘Hints and tips’ and ‘Extension activities’. These can be easily identified by the icons shown below.



The companion website that accompanies this book includes a copy of the illustrations that accompany the sessions, which can be downloaded as a visual supplement for the stimuli, and you will find some selected arguments, indicated in the book, also available for download. Additionally, the website provides an introduction to the philosophy that inspired the sessions. These ‘philosophy nuggets’ include the following:

- Philosopher and topic: the philosopher and the topic behind the session.
- Biography: a brief outline of the history of the philosopher.
- Big idea: a bite-size version of the relevant idea associated with the philosopher.
- Main publication(s): a reference to the philosopher’s most well-known publication(s) or the one most relevant to the topic. Interested readers are advised to seek these as further reading.
- Useful quote: a short quote from a primary source that captures the philosopher’s view on the relevant topic.
- About: a short discussion about the philosopher and the topic.
- Food for thought: this section is designed to get the reader thinking and engaging with the philosophical questions and issues that arise from the philosopher’s idea. Dine on them with your friends to properly engage with these ideas.

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### How to use this book

To use this book, begin by reading Section 1 thoroughly before trying to run a session. In Section 2 (page 59) the sessions can generally be used in whatever order you like. *The Ceebie Stories* are different from the other sessions in that they have a continuous narrative that connects them. For this reason it is important that they be done successively. To run these sessions in isolation, briefly let the audience know any important backstory before proceeding to the lesson plan. There is a table for quick reference on page xiii, which includes a list of themes present in the sessions, age suitability and a star rating for difficulty that will also appear at the top of each session. On the next page you will see an example session detailing the different sections of a session.

# Can You Step in the Same River Twice?

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Each session has a title, and begins with the star rating, guidance as to the age-group suitability of the session and a list of broad themes that the session addresses.

Suitable for age 8 and upwards.  
Star rating: \*

## Themes

Change

Arguments

Identity

This is followed by an introduction to the philosophical themes, issues and topics that lie behind or that may arise from the session.

## Philosophy

This is one of the most famous philosophical questions and it is thought to have been first asked by Heraclitus of Ephesus (fl. c. 500 BCE) . . .

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Next is the **Stimulus**, followed by the **Task question(s)** (TQs) you should ask, along with notes and guidance for the facilitator on how to run the session plus what they might expect from the children.

### Stimulus

*Timmy and Tina have gone to a river with their parents for a picnic and they are paddling in the river close to the riverbank swishing their fishing nets around trying to catch tadpoles . . .*

TQ: Can you say why Tina thinks it is a different river?

Give them **talk time** with their partners and find out what they think. If they are not having the Heraclitian insight, 'that it is not the same river because the water is constantly flowing', then you could present an argument between the two characters to bring this out . . .

There will be a box or boxes containing a 'Teaching strategy', 'Hints and tips', 'Philosophy', or an 'Extension activity'. The teaching strategies and hints and tips are described more generally in the 'Teaching strategies' and 'Hints and tips' sections but are given a specific context in the boxes in the sessions, thereby giving clear examples of their use.



#### **Teaching strategy: What's needed and what's enough? (page 38)**

One line of enquiry following this is to explore with the children what makes a river. Do a *what's needed and what's enough?* strategy with them on 'what is a river?' Write the word 'river' on the board, and then set them the task of listing all the features a river would need to have in order to be a river . . .

The introduction to the philosophy given at the beginning of the session is supplemented on the companion website. At the end of the sessions you will be directed to the main online philosophy for the session, and also a series of related online philosophy topics.

## Online

Main philosophy:

Heraclitus and Change

Related philosophy:

Berkeley and Idealism

Hobbes and Materialism

Leibniz and Identity

The PhiE sessions will not necessarily unfold in the way described in the book, but I have attempted to share my experience with ideas and problems that commonly occur in the sessions. Also, I have included some directions that the sessions have taken in order to share a teaching strategy.