



Fall News

Our year is off to a very strong start! The [Philosophers in the Schools program](#) continues to grow. This fall faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and volunteers are leading regular philosophy sessions in about 50 public elementary, middle and high school classrooms around Seattle, including several middle schools new for the Center. We are looking forward to the second annual [Washington State High School Ethics Bowl](#), to be held at UW on Saturday, January 31, and Center volunteers and undergraduate students are co-coaching teams in 10 high schools. We're also excited about the [Third Biennial PLATO \(Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization\) Conference](#), which we will be hosting at UW in June.



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From the Director



It's All About Thinking Well

The first month of the school year brought philosophy into a record number of classrooms in the Seattle area. The rapid growth of our Philosophers in the Schools program at this time is particularly gratifying - especially given the ever-increasing pressure to focus on standards and test scores, which can have the effect of reducing classroom inquiry and providing less time for learning that seems important and relevant to students.

We believe that education is meaningful for young people when the subjects being addressed matter to them, when they recognize their significance and care about understanding their content. This is the way students learn to think well, which we contend should be education's central objective. The Center has a particular focus on reaching students who are least likely to have access to academic enrichment programs, as we find that it is often students who are somewhat disengaged from school who respond most readily to the open and intellectually safe environment of a philosophy session.

In learning how to think well, more important than knowing the answers is being comfortable with questions. Students engaged in philosophical inquiry learn to trust their own ideas and questions, to be unafraid of questions to which they don't know the answers, and to think for themselves. After all, as one second grade philosophy student put it, "It's what you think that makes you who you are."

- Jana Mohr Lone



Philosophers in the Schools

From kindergarten classes in which young children grapple with questions like, "What is willpower?" to high school students analyzing the basis of knowledge, staff, students and volunteers from the Center delve into philosophical discussions with young people all around Seattle.

The Center's undergraduate program continues to grow, with our long-standing relationships with many public elementary school teachers providing opportunities for UW students to learn how to facilitate philosophical classroom discussions with children. In the spring, this work was recognized by the Provost as an example of [innovative teaching](#). This year the Center has also developed a project involving philosophy graduate students creating lesson plans and presenting them in middle and high school classrooms, which has enabled us to multiply the number of classrooms in which philosophy is being introduced.

The Center's [philosopher-in-residence program](#) in the Seattle public schools, started last year and continuing this year at [John Muir Elementary School](#), is made possible by a grant from the [Squire Family Foundation](#). We are fortunate to have philosopher Karen Emmerman, who received her Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Washington in 2012 and started working with the Center in 2010, as the John Muir philosopher-in-residence. We are hoping to expand this program to other schools in the next several years.

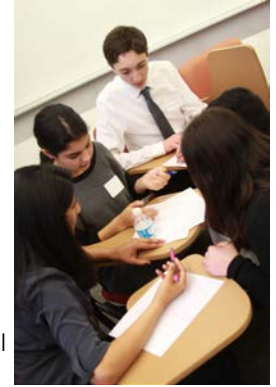


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High School Ethics Bowl

Check out our [new video](#) about the 2014 Washington State High School Ethics Bowl!

We're excited to announce that the [2015 Washington State High School Ethics Bowl](#) will be held on Saturday, January 31, 2015, 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, privacy, and relationships, as well as political and social issues such as free speech, gun control, cloning, parental consent, and stem cell research.

Although the High School Ethics Bowl is competitive, it is intended to promote 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 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 and philosophical communities.

Registration for the High School Ethics Bowl has begun, and the deadline for registration is December 15, 2014. The registration fee is \$100 for each team. Limited scholarships are available for schools unable to pay the fee. To register: <http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/downloads/eb2015registration.docx>

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 20-26 teams involved in the January event. Teams prepare for the competition using cases prepared by the National High School Ethics Bowl, which are now available [here!](#) The Washington State High School Ethics Bowl will be choosing for the January 31 competition from the first 12 cases only, so teams can ignore cases 13, 14 and 15.

The winner of the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl will advance, with expenses paid, to the national competition, which will be held at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill on April 10-11, 2015.

For Parents

An Interview with Natalie Singer-Velush, ParentMap Managing Editor and parent of Whittier Elementary School student



What is your experience with philosophy for children?

I hadn't realized consciously that my husband and I, as parents, could "do" philosophy with our kids, or that they were primed for philosophical inquiry, until I met Jana Mohr Lone through my work (I am the managing editor of ParentMap magazine in Seattle, and we wrote a story about the Center for Philosophy for Children). However, even before I met Jana and started to think specifically about philosophy and kids, I did see in my children (I realize now) an interest in self-discovery and a deep inquisitiveness. There was a period of time when my daughters, who were then preschoolers, and I were in the car a lot. As we drove to and from preschool, story times, the grocery store, they would pepper me with questions -- anything they could think of, whatever came to mind, about how things worked, how things came to be, why, why, why.

I found that I really enjoyed this discussion time in the car, when it seemed like the kids were hyper-focused and primed for considering everything from how garbage trucks worked to why birds fly but we don't. I also noticed that this was a time when we could explore questions about ideas, right and wrong, and feelings without interruption.

Later, as I became more aware of how to have guided philosophical discussions, and that -- really --

philosophy was everywhere, in our favorite storybooks, all around us, we began to do more of this talking at home as a family. Now my children, who are 7 and 9, ask us to give them philosophy questions at the dinner table.

Please tell us about any discussions you've had about philosophical questions with your child(ren) at home.

We've had philosophical conversations about many, many things. Sometimes these happen purposefully -- my kids ask for a question to get us started, or my husband and I want to introduce a topic. Other times they come up naturally, out of the usual events and incidents our kids experience in their lives -- challenges they have with friends, something they read about or see in a movie, a question or decision they face.

Some of the topics we have discussed: Why are we here on this planet? How did the first person get to be here? Is it OK to steal if you are starving and someone else has a lot? What does it mean to be a friend? Is it more important to keep a friend's trust, or to keep them safe? Why do we have challenges in life -- why isn't everything easy? Do animals have feelings? Who is in charge of our lives?

Our approach as parents during these and many conversations with our kids is to guide them but really mainly to sit back and let them conduct their inquiry without trying to give them any answers or direct them. When you keep quiet as a parent at first, it is fascinating to see what kids come up with. Having two kids work on these conversations together is interesting also -- we have the situation where they are battling for air time, but also it is an introduction to learning how to make a reasoned argument, think critically and defend your ideas. A few times, when we see our kids have one certain fixed opinion or another, we challenge them to then argue the other side, just to experience that perspective. They seem to enjoy this.

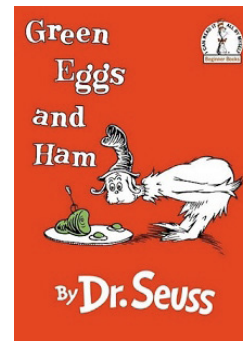
Have the Center's resources been helpful to you?

Yes, especially the book lists and sample questions. Now that our kids ask for these questions, it is useful to get new ideas -- and also a great reminder that almost every aspect of life has a philosophical component.

Focus on the Classroom

Green Eggs and Ham

Do you like green eggs and ham? How do you know?



A kindergarten philosophy session with Center Program Director Sara Goering starts with a reading of Dr. Seuss's much-loved rhyming book, *Green Eggs and Ham*. Most of the kids are

familiar with the book, and this provides an opportunity to call attention to the ways we can read texts differently at different times and with new purposes, and so discover fresh possibilities within their pages.

Why does the main character start out believing that he does not like green eggs and ham? Two answers are common: "Because he doesn't like that Sam-I-am!" and "Because they're green!" The first response can lead into a discussion about whether our tastes change depending on where we are (in a boat, in the rain, in the dark or on a train) or who offers what we are considering tasting. The students recognize the effects of peer pressure, and also the ways that what we see and smell can alter how we taste. The second, perhaps more common response, leads into a discussion of why green foods might be suspicious and potentially unlikable. Usually we can acknowledge and then put aside worries about mold and rot, and turn our attention to the novelty of the green eggs and ham.

How do we know if we like something we haven't tried? The kids, recognizing what happens in the story - after many refusals, he tries them, and **LIKES** them! - are quick to recommend that we have to try things to know if we like them or not. This itself is somewhat surprising, coming from children who, like many children, often adamantly refuse new (sometimes green) foods at the dinner table. Perhaps they see the accuracy of the general principle, but find it difficult to put into practice, especially when faced with a steaming plate of, say, Brussels sprouts.

(Continued on Page 4)

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The students generally do feel confident that trying is the only way to know if they will like something. How many times do we need to try a food in order to know if it is to our taste or not? Is one taste enough? One tiny taste? When does someone become a competent judge? Most students can point to their own experience of not liking something, and then acquiring the taste over time (or the reverse - thinking they like something, then discovering it's not really very good after repeated exposures). They are sometimes remarkably specific: it takes seventeen times to really know; it takes at least a hundred!



In most classes, we expand from eating foods to other activities - can we know if we like soccer, music, a new video game, etc., after our first experience? Sometimes we immediately feel confident that we like it, but most of the kids acknowledge that you have to give an activity at least a few (or 17+) chances to really know. They often seem very satisfied with the discussion and the fact that they appear to have consensus on this point. At this point you can ask them if they can think of any counter-examples to our general principle. If no one offers any, pose this question (with reassurances that it is only hypothetical): what if you were to propose stomping on their feet with your big clunky shoes? Would they like that? No! Would they need to try it (17+ times) to know if they do not like it? Of course not! They are quite sure, and equally in agreement. And in this moment, they sit in a moment of distinct cognitive discomfort. The principle they were so certain about, that we need to try things at least a few times to know if we like them or not, turns out not to work. This is a great moment for active philosophizing. How could they approach this problem? Is there a way to make these two views compatible? Is there a reason the principle does not apply in the case

of their feet being stomped upon? Is the principle itself not sufficiently described?

The children recognize the puzzle, and accept it as one of their own making. They're motivated to figure it out. They start thinking about other ways of knowing, ways that require extrapolation from other experiences, comparison of related kinds, and trust in others. While time limits mean that we often just get started on figuring out whether and why our intuitive responses to these two situations are justified, the students generally leave the philosophy session contemplating issues of justification for the basic kinds of knowledge they claim to have in their everyday lives.

We might not expect that they go home eager to try green foods 17+ times, but hope that they are thinking carefully about whether they have any good reasons for refusing it. Perhaps the result of this is that they learn to do reason this thoroughly "here and there, and everywhere!"

Graduate Fellows

Beginning last year, we instituted three Philosophy for Children graduate fellowships, open to graduate students in the Department of Philosophy and the College of Education. Our three fellows this year are: Janice Moskalik, who is with us for the second year and who was featured in last spring's newsletter; Di'Anna Duran, who is a first-year student in the College of Education and is focused on developing the application of Philosophy for Children/Community of Inquiry for "at-risk" youth - Di'Anna will be featured in our spring newsletter; and Debi Talukdar, who is working on her Ph.D. in the College of Education and is interviewed here.

Debi Talukdar

As a child, I grew up in a school system where critical thinking and questioning were generally not encouraged. I have never been pleased about this, so now I am excited for the opportunities to bring philosophical inquiry into the K-12 school system as a fellow in the Philosophers in the Schools program. In

an ideal world, philosophy wouldn't be an optional and additional component to school curricula. It would, in fact, be embedded in classroom content and instruction.



This year I will work with fourth and fifth grades at Whittier Elementary School. In the past few weeks I have observed a number of these sessions and it amazes

me how deeply philosophical the students can get. Anyone who thinks elementary-aged children are not equipped or ready for philosophical inquiry is seriously mistaken! I will take on facilitating the fourth and fifth grade sessions next quarter and hope to encourage these kids to continue to wonder.

I will also be helping facilitate a professional learning community for teachers at John Muir Elementary School. The focus of this PLC is to philosophical inquiry and writing, and we hope to facilitate reflective teaching practices in classrooms. This is particularly interesting to me as my research focus for doctoral study at the UW College of Education is in the area of developing reflection as a core skill for good teaching. The PLC gives me the opportunity to explore this idea through philosophy

I have worked in schools before in various capacities, but doing philosophy at the K-12 level has been a new experience for me. It has involved being open to unlearning a lot of mainstream notions of what it means to teach, question, and learn. The UW philosophy for children courses have been especially useful for learning how to facilitate philosophy sessions with children, as the courses are centered around modelling typical pre-college classroom sessions.

I am excited about all the wondering ahead!

From the Blog

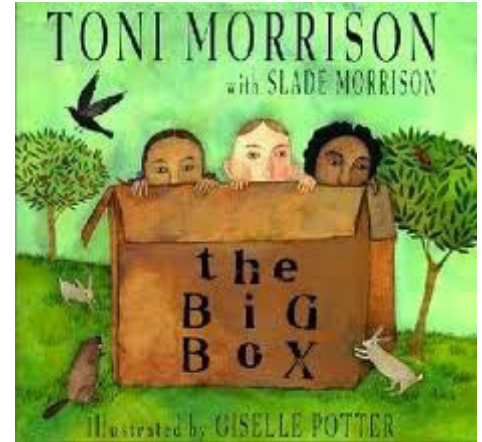
Freedom and Following the Rules

In a third grade classroom at John Muir Elementary this morning, I read Toni Morrison's *The Big Box* with the students. The story is about three children who are put into a "big box" after the adults in their lives conclude that they can't "handle their freedom." The box is full of toys and their parents visit weekly and bring additional toys and treats, but the children are not allowed out of the box.

After the story, the students wrote down in their philosophy journals the questions about which the story led them to wonder. We did a "turn and talk," during which the students shared their questions with one another. We then listed some of their questions on the board, which included:

- Does playing around mean you can't handle your freedom?
- Why do they have to go in the big box?
- Why do the parents only visit on Wednesdays?
- Why would their parents put them in the box?
- Do the kids like being in the box?

[Read More.](#)



Soap! Soap! Don't Forget the Soap!

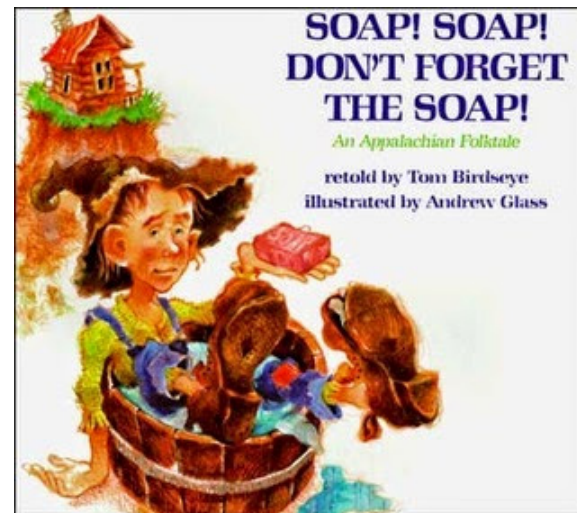
Soap! Soap! Don't Forget the Soap! is an Appalachian folktale, brought to life in a great read-aloud picture book by Tom Birdseye with illustrations by Andrew Glass. The story's main character, Pug, is a young boy "with such a poor memory some say he'd forget his own name."

One day Pug's mother, who believes in him despite constant evidence of his forgetfulness, sends him out to the store for some soap. But Pug quickly forgets why he is going where he is going.

After a series of misunderstandings with various members of the community, all of which are brought on by Pug inadvertently offending each person, resulting in a series of mishaps, Pug brings the soap home to his mother. Apparently transformed by the challenges of the day, from then on Pug "never forgot a thing his mama told him . . . not ever again . . . for the rest of his life."

Why do we remember what we remember? Is remembering a choice?

[Read More.](#)



Join us Wednesday, December 10th at Ballard Beer Company for Pints for a Purpose benefiting the Center for Philosophy for Children. A dollar from every pint sold will go to the Center!

[More Information](#)

Supporting the Center

“Philosophy is the one place in school I can think my own thoughts and express them.”
“In philosophy, I feel free to ask questions and think out loud.”



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Bringing philosophy into K-12 schools creates a forum for students to explore meaningful questions and talk about them with their peers.

Over the past few years, demand for the Center's work has grown exponentially. The breadth of our work is made possible largely through donations from our individual supporters. This year gifts from donors helped fund the growth of our Philosophers in the Schools program, three Philosophy for Children graduate fellowships, and our annual summer workshop for teachers.

It is becoming increasingly important for us to build our capacity in order to involve more students and schools in our work. We are thrilled that teachers, students and administrators recognize the value of making space for philosophy in schools, and **we need your help** to expand our programs, provide more

resources and education for teachers, and reach more students eager for engagement with essential questions and sustained inquiry.

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
Seattle, WA 98195

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Thank you to our board of directors for all of their support!

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2015 PLATO Conference

Philosophy Learning and Teaching
Organization

June 29 & 30, 2015
University of Washington

Equity & Inquiry

The 2015 PLATO Conference will include hands-on workshops, papers, and presentations exploring the theme of Equity and Inquiry, as well as a poster session showcasing pre-college philosophy programs and initiatives.

Keynote Address: Jonathan Kozol

Noted educator Jonathan Kozol is the National Book Award-winning author of *Savage Inequalities*, *Death at an Early Age*, *The Shame of the Nation*, and *Amazing Grace*, among others. Kozol has devoted nearly his entire life to the challenge of providing equal opportunity within our public schools to every child.

Call for Proposals

We welcome proposals for workshops, presentations/papers, and the poster session from professors, graduate students, teachers and others practicing and/or interested in pre-college philosophy.

Deadline for Proposals: December 1, 2014

For more details: <http://plato-philosophy.org/third-biennial-plato-conference-june-2015-call-for-papers/>

Questions? Email: info@plato-philosophy.org

Registration and Accommodations

Registration for the conference is \$150 for non-PLATO members & \$115 for PLATO members. Online registration & accommodation information: <http://plato-philosophy.org/third-biennial-plato-conference-june-2015-call-for-papers/>

Conference Sponsors:

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ICPIC, The International Council of Philosophical Inquiry with Children, will be holding its 17th international conference in Vancouver immediately before the PLATO conference, on June 25-27, 2015. For more details: <http://icpic2015.educ.ubc.ca/>

