



## 2015 Washington State High School

The Center hosted another successful Washington State High School Ethics Bowl at the University of Washington, on January 31, 2015, involving over 100 high school students and teachers, as well as lawyers, philosophers, other educators, and UW students who volunteered their time as judges, moderators, and coaches.



It was inspiring to observe all the students who participated with such enthusiasm. We appreciate the hard work of the teams, including winner Newport High School, second place winner Lakeside High School, third place winner West Seattle High School, and the winners of the Award for Civil Dialogue - The Bush School Team 1 and Tesla STEM High School Team 1 (both schools received a trophy and \$250 cash award). First place winner Newport High School went on to compete in the National High School Ethics Bowl in April at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, making it to the semifinals there. Congratulations!

Utilizing case studies relevant to high school students, involving such ethical questions as cheating, plagiarism, peer pressure, use and abuse of social media, privacy, and relationships, the High School Ethics Bowl is an exciting and fun way for students to deepen their understanding and appreciation of ethical and philosophical issues. More information on the cases for this year's High School Ethics Bowl is available at <http://nhseb.unc.edu/>



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. 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 respond to commentary and questions.

For a student perspective of participating in a High School Ethics Bowl, please read Lakeside High School student Courtenay Roche's [blog post](#) "Discussing Morality at Washington's Second Annual High School Ethics Bowl".

We greatly appreciate all our generous 2015 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



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## From the Director

One of the highlights of this year has been the new philosophy program we instituted at the on-site school at Seattle Children's Hospital. Each week since the fall I have been leading two philosophy sessions there, one with younger students (kindergarten through third grade) and the other with students up through high school age, all of whom are hospitalized at Children's. We have explored a range of philosophical topics, including what it means to be alive, whether one individual life is more important than another, the nature of happiness, the possibility of robots thinking for themselves, and whether friendship has to be reciprocal. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to work with these students and am learning so much from them.



This has been another exciting year for the Center. Our [Philosophers in the Schools program](#) is growing steadily. Faculty, graduate students from the Department of Philosophy and the College of Education, undergraduates, and volunteers have been leading regular philosophy sessions in approximately 50 public elementary, middle and high school classrooms around Seattle this school year, as well as co-coaching High School Ethics Bowl teams in 10 local high schools. The [2015 Washington State High School Ethics Bowl](#) was held at UW on Saturday, January 31, and was a wonderful event (see front page article).

For the fourth consecutive year, we facilitated a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for teachers at John Muir Elementary School, and in March we ran a workshop about philosophical inquiry in classrooms for 20 elementary, middle and high school teachers and graduate students. We're also excited about [Third Biennial PLATO \(Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization\) Conference](#), which we will be hosting at UW in June, sponsored in part by the Department of Philosophy and the College of Education.

The continued increase in the number of classrooms welcoming philosophical exploration into the curriculum inspires and energizes us, and we feel very fortunate to be working with so many thoughtful, creative and dedicated teachers and students.

## Philosophers in the School

This year has seen the Center's work take root in more classrooms than ever before. 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. We have added a program that involves 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.



Thanks to a grant from the Squire Family Foundation, the philosopher-in-residence program is now in its second year at John Muir Elementary School. This program provides the school with more consistent access to philosophy instruction as well as offers teachers the opportunity to work more directly with the philosophy instructor in their classrooms. This year, I am in five classrooms (kindergarten, first grade, fourth grade, and two fifth grade rooms).

One of the delights of returning as the philosopher-in-residence is having the chance to build long-term relationships with teachers and students. The relationships I build with the teachers make it easier to collaborate with them on content, so that I can coordinate my sessions with what they are learning in the classroom when that is beneficial. When the fifth graders were studying biodiversity and extinction, for example, we worked on philosophical questions related to why humans tend to be more upset about the potential extinction of pandas versus the Columbia River Tiger Beetle. This led to a rich and provocative discussion about the role of cuteness in determining how much we care about different kinds of animals. Several students noted that cuteness can also impact how much we care about different humans.

The relationships I have built with the students have been equally rewarding. It is wonderful to see someone who struggled to master the difference between a statement and a question as a kindergarten blossom into a first-grader who is able to say "I disagree with your idea because..." And, of course, it is lovely to be greeted in the hallways by children who recognize me and look forward to the philosophy portion of their day.

Karen Emmerman  
Philosopher-in-Residence, John Muir Elementary School

## Focus on the Classroom

### Mind Warm-ups

David Shapiro, Education Director

Most people who regularly exercise their bodies recognize the value of warming up before vigorous activity. Runners, baseball players, and other athletes typically do some sort of stretches before their workouts or games. No one wants to pull a hamstring muscle or suffer other injury and so a series of warm-ups are generally seen as a vital part of one's physical exercise regime.

When I do philosophy with children, I like to make the same point about the importance of warming up our minds before we get into strenuous mental activity. So, for the past few years, especially in my classes with second graders at Muir Elementary, I've been beginning each session with what I call "Mind Warm-ups" to help prepare the students for our more in-depth philosophical conversations to follow. No one wants to pull a brain muscle, I say, and so, these warm-ups are a way to help us avoid doing so.

The warm-ups are simple little thought experiments that students are led through. The initial ones emerged out of an interest in having students "stretch their minds," just as they might stretch their bodies before working out. So, for example, as we settle into our circle for the day's discussion, I ask students to start stretching their minds by thinking a "really big thought, the biggest thought you can think of." I like to have them close their eyes and do so for a few seconds. Then, I'll solicit some answers. Sample responses have included, "an elephant," "a whale," "the whole earth," or even, in one case, "my uncle, who is really tall."

Now that we've thought a big thought, I ask students to think a "really small thought, the smallest thought you can think of." I've heard answers like, "a tiny little rock," "an atom," and "my baby brother." On one occasion, a student said that the smallest thing she could think of was "nothing;" this led to a five-minute discussion of whether it was possible to think of nothing. (The warm-ups often work this way, leading directly into a broader philosophical discussion.)

The responses students give can be quite surprising and even very poignant. As part of one warm-up, I asked the second graders to think as hard as they could about something really hard. (It was delightful to see them "thinking hard;" there were lots of furrowed brows and even some traditional philosophical chin-stroking.)



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When I asked them to share what their hard thoughts were, the first several were more or less what I expected: "a rock," "a diamond," "a brick." But then, a student said, "My dad." Somewhat taken aback, I asked, "Why is that a hard thought?" "Because he left us," responded the student. While this might have been a rather uncomfortable moment, the candor with which the student answered made it instead an opportunity to explore with the group different notions of "hardness," a discussion that turned out to be quite fruitful. So again, even though we were just "warming up," we were already into the main philosophical event.

Here is a typical selection of warm-up prompts. I may or may not work through all the prompts, but I usually try to end with one that leads into the day's lesson.

Think the biggest thought you can.  
Think the tiniest thought you can.  
Think the oldest thought you can.  
Think the newest thought you can.  
Can you think of an even newer one?  
Think of something really good.  
Think of something really bad.  
What makes something good or bad?

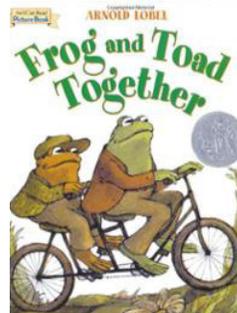
## For Parents

### 12 Philosophical Picture Books for Kids - and How to Get the Most Out of Them

Picture books often raise essential questions about topics like fairness and justice, art and beauty, ethics, life and death and the nature of reality, social and political issues, and the nature of knowledge. Clearly children's authors know that children are philosophically capable!

Although we think of picture books as being for young children, I have found that picture books also inspire lively philosophical exchanges with older K-12 students as well as college undergraduates. Listening to stories being read aloud, an experience many of us had when we were children, is conducive to creating an open and relaxed atmosphere for thinking about deep and fundamental questions.

Here are 12 of my favorites in no particular order. After reading one of these books with your children, try asking them, "What are you wondering about after hearing this story? What questions did this make you think about?"



#### 1. **Frog and Toad Together** by Arnold Lobel

All five stories in this book are philosophically interesting, as is true of all of Arnold Lobel's work. These stories, through the amusing adventures of the likable friends Frog and Toad, raise questions about the meaning of bravery, where dreams come from, the nature of willpower, cause and effect, and more.

Read all about the other 11 books at: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/naturalwonderers/12-best-philosophical-books/>

## Graduate Fellows



**Di'Anna Duran**, a first-year student in the College of Education, is one of our three Philosophy for Children Graduate Fellows this year. Her Ph.D. in the College of Education and is interviewed here.

### What brought you to Philosophy for Children?

My undergraduate philosophy professor showed our class the BBC documentary *Socrates for Six-Year Olds*. My jaw dropped when I saw in action every aspect of education as a community-based process of inquiry that I wanted to develop into my life's work: working with children/youth and sharing in their exploration of the world—its values, its complexity, and their place in it. Ever since then, I have been hooked. You could say that my entire K-12 schooling experience brought me to Philosophy for Children. I feel that so much was missing in my experience, much of which Philosophy for Children focuses on: questions, dialogue, investigation, community, and attention to what is relevant to the student. I think what my educational experience lacked, Philosophy for Children provides. It is important to me to work for something I consider to be crucial to both individual and societal well-being.

### What are you doing this year in the schools?

This year I have facilitated sessions at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Each group's dynamics are vastly different, which has been fascinating to learn from. Although I have practiced what is called "Plain Vanilla", a standard model of how a session can be run, from time to time, it has been interesting to try to tailor the sessions. I have explored whole-body involvement, using an image or piece of music to inspire a discussion, or starting from

## Supporting the Center

The Center's work is made possible by individual donations. 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 workshop for teachers.

We need to build our capacity to keep philosophy in the schools growing! 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

**Your gifts make all the difference - thank you very much!**

[www.philosophyforchildren.org](http://www.philosophyforchildren.org)

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an experience a student shares with the group. Once, I was late to class because I chose to report a car window that had been shattered with a brick. After apologizing to the class, I asked them if I had done the right thing, and that was the topic of our session. With a fifth-grade class at Whittier, we are focusing our sessions around some remarkably deep questions the students compiled as a group. We still haven't gotten through them all! I have also thoroughly enjoyed working with the Ida B. Wells High School for Social Justice, located on the University of Washington campus. The students are very bright, critical thinkers, and our philosophy sessions provide a different lens through which to view their already rich curriculum, covering topics such as: race, power, and history/histories.

### Has the fellowship helped you in thinking about your future plans? If so, how?

I chose to work with a wide range of groups in order to develop my "philosophical sensitivity," and to inform my research interest. My research focuses on how Philosophy for Children can be implemented as part of the wide range of social services offered to foster youth aging out of that system. Having experience working in social services, and with foster youth, I see how many of them are unsure about their next step, about being on their own, and what it means to be an adult. Unfortunately, many of these youth have not experienced a consistent environment—familial or scholastic—and consequently, have not developed a positive sense of self. I hope that by introducing them to philosophy, they may be able to discuss some of the questions they have regarding topics I have learned they especially grapple with, including identity, what it means to be an active member of society, honor, and respect. Speaking personally, I think developing an idea of our views and critical understanding around these topics greatly influences our ability to live confidently. The facilitating experience I have had through the fellowship has reinforced my dedication to this work, and my belief in its global value.

### Anything else you'd like to say about your work with the Center and the children?

Some of my greatest revelations have actually come from the students.



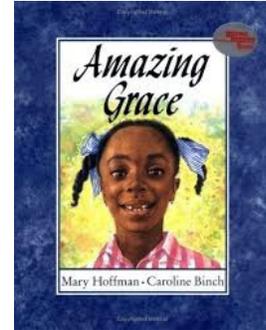
## From the Blog

### Amazing Grace

Mary Hoffman's 1991 picture book *Amazing Grace* tells the story of Grace, who loves stories and especially loves acting them out. Filled with imagination and dramatic flair, Grace decides that she will play the part of Peter Pan when her teacher tells the class that they are going to perform the play.

One student tells her, "You can't be Peter -- that's a boy's name." And then another student informs her, "You can't be Peter Pan. He isn't black." But Grace keeps her hand up to indicate that she wants to play this role.

[Read More](#)

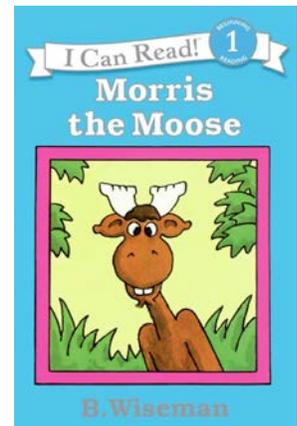


### Being alive means dying

Today I read *Morris the Moose* by B. Wiseman with a group of 6-8 year olds at the school at Seattle Children's Hospital. In the story, Morris meets a cow and notes that the cow is a funny looking moose, insisting, despite the cow's protests, that the cow must be a moose because she "has four legs and things on her head." When Morris and the cow approach a deer for help, the deer insists that they are all deer, and when the three of them ask a horse to assist, the horse claims they are all horses. It is not until the animals see their joint reflections in the water that they conclude that they are not all the same.

I asked the students if they thought the animals were confused. One of the children commented that they had been confused, but once they saw their own reflections they understood that the other animals were not the same as them. We talked about the differences between moose and cows, for example and whether a moose who looked like a cow would still be a moose. Then we wondered about what makes a moose a moose, and a cow a cow, which led us to thinking about what makes us human beings.

[Read More](#)



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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 conference will include hands-on workshops about introducing philosophical inquiry in elementary, middle and high school classrooms, as well as presentations on topics such as creating classroom communities, building school philosophy programs, developing a culturally responsive pedagogy for philosophy programs, and much more - all in Mary Gates Hall.

11 clock hours available for Washington State teachers  
Forms available at the conference

**Keynote Address: Jonathan Kozol**

**Monday June 29, 9-10:30 am**  
**Kane Hall - Walker Ames Room**

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's career has been devoted to advocating for equity for all public school children.



## Registration and Accommodations

Registration for the conference is \$150 for non-PLATO members & \$115 for PLATO members. Online registration & accommodation information: [Click Here](#)

Keynote only attendance \$15. Pre-registration required: [Click Here](#)

Conference Sponsors:

American Philosophical Association Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy

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**Conference Free for UW student volunteers - Contact Kate Goldyn [kgoldyn@uw.edu](mailto:kgoldyn@uw.edu)**