

Zoom Philosophy Classes for Young People



When Washington State's stay at home order began last March, the Center's work with young people moved online. We ran several weekly Zoom philosophy sessions for small groups of children all spring. As a result of the positive feedback we received from students, parents and teachers, we decided to develop [Zoom Philosophy Classes](#) open to students in any location.

Four classes began in October for 7-9-year-old and 10-13-year-old students. The children in these sessions are exploring some of life's big questions, including topics such as friendship and loneliness, the treatment of animals, boredom and creativity, the environment, identity, and happiness. We use books, films, games, and thought experiments to inspire discussions of interesting philosophical questions.

The winter series of 8 weekly classes will begin the week of January 11, and [registration is now open](#). The cost for the series is \$225, and scholarship funds are available for families who require financial assistance.

Monthly Professional Learning Community

For the fourth year this year, the Center is been hosting a monthly seminar on philosophical inquiry in classrooms. This year the seminar is virtual. Approved for up to 13.5 clock hours, the seminar includes teachers and others interested in exploring how introducing philosophy can enrich student learning. Now that the seminar is online, for the first time teachers from other parts of the country can easily participate.

Sponsored by the UW Center for Philosophy for Children and the Department of Philosophy, the seminar is free. For more information, contact Center Program Director [Debi Talukdar](#).

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From the Director



As is the case for many organizations and individuals, for the Center the pandemic has brought both enormous challenges and new opportunities. The challenges stem primarily from our isolated situations and the significant stress being felt by everyone, including the teachers and students with whom we work. We are endeavoring to create and sustain community as much as is possible, given the circumstances.

Our Zoom philosophy sessions with children, for example, are reaching children around the country, many of whom had no access to our classes prior to the pandemic. We are also working with local schools to provide many online philosophy sessions for children and youth, as well as resources for teachers and parents.

Our monthly "Philosophy in the Schools" seminar for educators went online last spring, and this year includes teachers from other parts of the country as well as our local education community. We are hoping that the Center's annual June workshop will be able to take place in person in 2021, but if that is not possible, we are planning to hold a virtual event in its place.

Our High School Ethics Bowl program has also been adapted to this year's circumstances. Rather than the large winter event we have hosted in the past, this year the program will involve a series of online scrimmages among schools. We have worked with coaches and teachers to create a more flexible structure that maintains the Ethics Bowl's commitment to thoughtful, civil dialogue about complex ethical issues.

We are developing more online programs for educators and families. One of the lessons we've learned during the past eight months is that, contrary to what we might have believed prior to the pandemic, it is possible to create vibrant philosophical spaces on Zoom. As we consider in what directions the Center should plan to grow over the next five years, there is little question that virtual programs will be part of what we do. They allow us to reach people around the world for whom our work would otherwise be inaccessible, and so broaden our reach and deepen our community. We are so appreciative of all of the students, classroom teachers, and other educators who are spending some of their time with us this autumn, making possible the kinds of rich philosophical conversations that are at the heart of why the Center exists.

In The Press

[What Is Freedom? Teaching Kids Philosophy in a Pandemic](#) - The New York Times

[Conversation with Jana Mohr Lone about Philosophy for Children](#) - In Limbo

[Holding Ethics Conversations With Your Scouts](#) - Scouting Magazine

For Families: Expanded Online Resources

In response to requests from parents and grandparents, we have expanded the [resources available on our website for families](#). In April, the Center put together [resources, including questions, children's books, and short videos](#), to help parents and other adults facilitate conversations with kids about some of the questions the pandemic is raising for children, such as loneliness and friendship, illness and death, and boredom. This summer, we added [resources on other topics](#), including how we know things, relationships with animals, imaginary friends, and the nature of art.



Philosophical discussions afford an opportunity for different kinds of interactions with children because, unlike many of the topics about which we talk with children, philosophical questions don't have settled and definite answers. These resources are intended to help parents, grandparents, and other caregivers to listen to children's questions and to think aloud with them, without worrying about reaching the right answers. Sometimes asking the questions is more important than finding the answers.

Washington State High School Ethics Bowl

The [2021 Washington State High School Ethics Bowl](#) will be a different program than in the past, due to the pandemic and the challenges facing high schools this year. Flexible and free, schools can register and begin practices at any point during the year. After consultation with past coaches, we decided that rather than one competitive event this winter, schools will have the opportunity to participate in scrimmages with up to three other teams, at any point between January and June 2021.



We hope that many past judges will be willing to judge at least one scrimmage. Scrimmages will consist of two cases and will not be scored. Judges will provide feedback to the teams at the end of the scrimmage. All information and this year's 10 cases are on the Center's [website](#).

Philosophers in the Schools

We are delighted to report that the Center's two Philosopher-in-Residence programs (at John Muir and Thurgood Elementary schools) are moving forward this fall despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. All Seattle public schools are educating students entirely online for the foreseeable future, which has created a unique opportunity for us to think anew about how we partner with teachers and work with students.



Scheduling has been particularly challenging this year due to the online format. It is heartwarming to see how hard teachers are working to find time for their students to do philosophy together. When we work in-person, we conduct philosophy with the entire class at once. In the online setting, we have found that it is better to work with smaller groups of students at a time. While we worried this might inconvenience teachers, it turns out they are craving opportunities to work in small groups with their students as well. So, the format where we work with half the class while they work with the other half is beneficial to everyone involved.

Flexibility and creativity are crucial to our success this year. Many of the students at the schools we serve live with the daily impacts of systemic racism and educational inequality. Some do not have access to reliable internet, some have multiple siblings also doing school online in small spaces, and some are in families who have experienced losses from COVID-19. We are honored to serve these students and to provide a space where they can think and wonder about what matters to them during these difficult times.

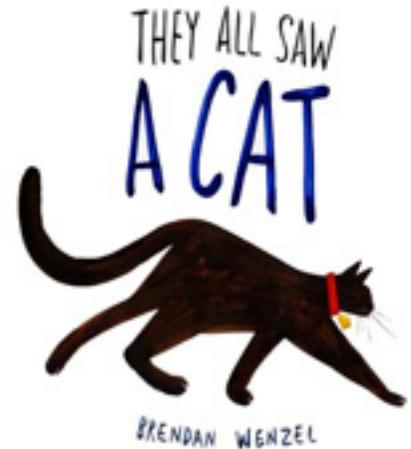
At Thurgood Marshall Debi started the year with her 4th and 5th grade students by collaboratively setting discussion norms and discussing the role of rules. Some questions we explored included “Why do rules exist?”, “Do the same rules apply to everybody?” and “Is it ever okay to break a rule?” Several students were quick to point out that even though rules are meant to prevent chaos and to keep us safe, they do not always help us do the right thing. We talked about equity in the context of how some rules, like racist laws, are unfair and are made to serve the interests of those who made them. Some students said it might be okay to break a rule if it is unreasonable.

Rules were also on the minds of Karen's third graders at John Muir. We discussed good rules for life and Black Lives Matter was at the top of their list. The students thought about specific rules that would protect Black people, for example a rule like “Don't kill innocent Black people,” as well as general rules that would improve life overall. The latter group included rules about compassion, kindness, and listening to others.

Focus on the (Zoom) Classroom

They All Saw A Cat

In our [online classes](#), we have been using many short videos to prompt philosophical discussions. The five-minute video “[They All Saw A Cat](#)” (which is based on the beautiful [picture book by Brendan Wenzel](#)) begins with a cat walking through the world, and imagines the way the cat is perceived by a child, a dog, a fish, a bat, and many other creatures. All of the beings perceive a cat, but what they perceive is quite different. At the end, the cat sees itself in the water and we are asked to imagine what the cat sees.



The book inspires questions about identity and perception.

How do our perspectives shape what we see and understand? Is a perfectly true description of the cat (or anything else) ever possible? Is the way the cat sees itself more important than the way others view it?

In one philosophy session, after watching the video, one of the students, an eight-year-old child, asked, “How do we know that the colors we see are the same colors that other people see?” This led to a conversation about the different ways each of us sees the world, and whether it is ever possible to see the world the way another person or creature does. Several children said that the only way this could happen would be if you could “exchange eyes” or somehow “be inside someone else’s body” for a time.

The students then began considering whether our knowledge about ourselves is privileged — whether how we understand ourselves is more important and somehow more accurate than the way others see us. Some children thought so, and one child said, “You know yourself better than anyone else and you shouldn’t let other people’s opinions about you change what you know.” Other students, though, observed that we can sometimes learn from other people things about ourselves that we didn’t know or fully understand.

From the Blog

The Quiet Facilitator

This autumn, as I have begun leading philosophy sessions on Zoom with children again, I have spent some time considering more deeply my role in these sessions. Part of my job as an educator is to help children learn to articulate and examine their questions and beliefs more lucidly. Additionally, though, I am responsible for helping to create an environment that nurtures understanding and trust and values each child's voice. I consciously approach my sessions by working to develop spaces for children to explore the questions that matter to them, without imposing my own views about which questions or conversational threads are particularly significant or interesting.

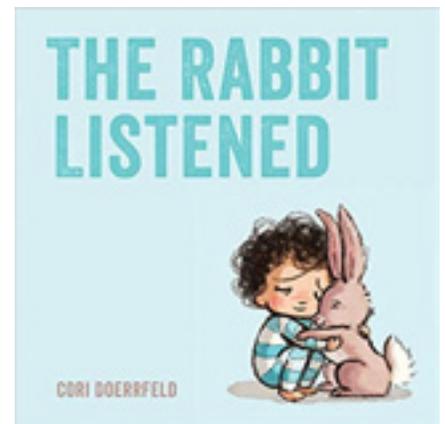


I have been thinking about the relationship between the facilitator's responsibility to construct a framework for the emergence of high-quality philosophical conversations (introducing philosophically suggestive prompts, asking good questions, helping to ensure that every voice is heard, intervening in stalled discussions) and the importance of the conversation being authentically the children's inquiry, so that my questions and comments do not push the discussion in a direction that comes from me and not the children. It is easy to say that it is what matters to the children that should control where the inquiry leads, but in the experience it can be quite challenging to determine when to let the discussion proceed without any interference and, when it seems some intervention is needed, what to say that is helpful for the process but does not influence the content. [Read More](#)

Listening

Since my previous post about the role of the facilitator in philosophy sessions, I have been thinking more about listening and specifically the roles of listening and of silence in discussions. This is the subject of the last chapter of my new book, which will be out this spring.

Almost by definition, listening requires attentiveness to silence. Appreciation of the silent intervals within a conversation allows the exchange to unfold more deliberately and makes more space for all voices to emerge. Especially for those of us who are comfortable speaking and quick to do so, receptivity requires that we refrain from always rushing in to fill the conversational pauses. A listening culture encourages us to be attentive to when to voice our ideas and when to make space for someone else to speak.



Cori Doerrfeld's beautiful picture book *The Rabbit Listened* evokes the power of a listening presence. (There is also a lovely video read-aloud put out by Dorchester County Library in South Carolina.) In the story, Taylor, a young child, is very proud after building a complex structure with blocks, until it comes crashing down. The animals around Taylor notice and each tries to help by immediately offering advice, suggesting that Taylor talk or shout about it, fix it or throw it away, laugh about it, or pretend nothing happened. Taylor doesn't respond to any of these suggestions, and eventually is left alone. [Read More](#)

Our Donors

Philosophy in schools makes space for children and youth to explore together some of the foundational questions in life that matter most to them. Students often observe that this is one of the few places in school that they feel empowered to ask their own questions and seek their own answers, building their confidence in their own perspectives and ideas. And philosophical conversations at home help families to have deeper and more mutual conversations, and to listen to children in new ways.



We need your help!

The Center's work is largely made possible through individual donations. Gifts from donors help fund our Philosophers in the Schools program, the Philosophy for Children graduate fellowships, the High School Ethics Bowl, our family programs, our monthly seminar for educators, and our annual workshop for teachers.

Resources are needed to provide more support and education for teachers and reach more young people interested in philosophy. We are working to build our capacity to keep philosophy in the schools and in the community growing! Please help us with a gift to support this work.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the Center!

You can make your donation [here](#).

You can also send a check to:
Center for Philosophy for Children
University of Washington Box 353350
Seattle, WA 98195-3350

Your gifts make all the difference - thank you!

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