



Moral Agency: Philosophy and Responsibility in Elementary School

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Elementary Grades Language Arts & Social Studies

Keywords: Philosophy, language arts, class discussion, Socratic seminars, mentor texts

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Young children have such great inquisitive minds. They wonder and question lots of things about their environment and the world in which they live. As a teacher it is my job to foster their curiosity and to guide them in learning how to think big ideas and clarify their thinking about what they know and wonder about. This curriculum unit does that in a very specific way. It teaches young scholars how to think and wonder like philosophers. In this unit being written for second grade students (and easily adaptable to other elementary learners), students will get a slice of what a philosopher is and studies, who some well-known philosophers are and the contributions they made to the study of philosophy, what moral agency is, and how to discuss topics in a philosophical manner. Several strategies will be employed to help students understand philosophy, including using mentor texts and specific questions, engaging in class discussions, including a Socratic circle, and creating their own definitions for big ideas such as bravery, right and wrong, and motivation, based on what students already know as well as the ideas they learn from others. This curriculum unit will be taught in a language arts class, toward the end of the school year when students have strong relationships with each other and can trust each other when sharing opinions and ideas.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 19 students in 2nd Grade Language Arts.

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Torriann Martyn Dooley Kennedy

Why is the sky blue? Why do I only have one brother? How does the microwave heat food up? How does a seed become a flower? What does it mean to be brave? What makes something beautiful? Young children have such inquisitive minds. They are constantly asking questions and seeking answers in order to learn new things. One of my motivations for becoming a teacher was to help children discover how great learning is and to show them how to find the answers to the questions they ask. Another career that supports the function of asking questions and looking for answers is that of a philosopher. Philosophy is “the study or creation of theories about basic things such as the nature of existence, knowledge, and thought about how people should live.”¹ Philosophers engage in learning about basic things through asking questions and looking for different lenses through which to find answers. Thomas E. Wartenberg, author of Big Ideas for Little Kids, states that “philosophy comes naturally to the young and needs to be viewed as something they can legitimately pursue, so we should foster their interest rather than snuff it out.”²

I teach second graders who have very inquisitive young minds. They wonder about all sorts of things and I want to teach them how to wonder philosophically, which includes thinking critically. I am writing this curriculum unit to help my students understand two important things. The outcome of this curriculum unit is for my students to know what philosophy is in general and who some important philosophers were. Students will also come to understand the various topics philosophers explore and begin to recognize for themselves what it means to be a morally responsible individual. These two ideas are very important for young learners to know and experience as they begin to understand life through a liberal arts framework.

What is philosophy?

It is important for young learners to know developmentally appropriate information about what philosophy is. In an effort to get students “College and Career ready” (a vision for the district in which I work) it is important to provide them with information about things they could study in college or do as a career. Philosophy is an important part of a liberal arts curriculum and by providing young learners with experience and exposure to it they may feel more excited and comfortable about it when they go to college. This was not necessarily the case for me when I engaged in philosophy courses during my undergraduate years, but I think that if I had been taught at an earlier age to think and act like a philosopher I would have appreciated studying philosophy a lot more. Students can

begin to understand that being a philosopher means thinking about the world and wondering about things.

Philosophy is about questions and wonder. It's about thinking about things in different ways and understanding that there is more than one way to process and comprehend information and ideas. Philosophy is not about one concrete or specific solution or framework, but rather all the ideas and ways something can be examined, thought about, and discussed. One way philosophers think about things is through definition. Defining what something is by describing what it is and what it is not: an apple is a fruit, it is not an orange. Second grade students are able to brainstorm characteristics that describe what an object or an idea is and also what it is not. By going through this exercise with various objects they are familiar with they will be able to apply the skill to things or abstract ideas they are not familiar with.

It is so important to teach philosophy to young children because they are already natural philosophers. According to Wartenberg, "childhood is a time during which many specifically philosophical ideas arise that children think about a great deal. So it makes sense to allow children access to philosophy as a way of honoring what's special about their unique way of life."³ By fostering a classroom setting that allows students to discuss the big ideas they ponder and think about, the young children are doing what they do naturally – thinking critically about certain issues that they ponder in life.

Philosophical questions are "questions for which there is no such agreed-upon discipline that provides the method for their solution."⁴ Wartenberg suggests that these questions can be categorized as Big Ideas. Subtopics under that heading that students can access include: "justice, right and wrong, truth, reality, beauty, knowledge, and meaning."

When philosophers are discussing a particular issue or topic, Wartenberg suggests there are six rules to follow.

1. "Present a real example of the abstract issue." Students can identify and share examples related to the topic being discussed. Teachers can model this to get the conversation started if necessary.
2. "State your position on an issue in a clear manner after taking time to think." Students need to be motivated to take time to think about what they think and to compose in a clear way how to communicate their position to others. Students also need to be taught how to advocate for themselves and if they do not understand what someone is saying, then they can ask questions to gain clarity.
3. "Support your position with reasons." Once students express their position, they need to back it up with a reason (or multiple reasons) for why they chose it. Students can reference literature, real-world situations, beliefs and values, examples, etc. as claims

to why they think what they think. During this part of a philosophical conversation, students can also turn to their peers to ask for help in supporting their positions.

4. "Figure out if you agree or disagree with what has been said." Students will learn to listen to the ideas and claims of others and agree or disagree with both their position and their reasons. Using the words "agree" or "disagree" makes the discussion safe for students as opposed to "right" or "wrong."
5. "Present a counterexample to a claim that has been proposed." This really deepens the thinking of students because they are forced to think about and consider an idea from multiple perspectives.
6. "Put forward a revised version of a claim in light of criticism." The student who made the initial claim and offered the reasons that supported it is now able to reevaluate what he/she said and revise his or her thought based on ideas or feedback from peers and from the counterexample.⁵

All of these things will help students understand what philosophy is and how to approach philosophy in the elementary school classroom.

Moral Responsibility

One of the big ideas philosophers ponder is related to moral responsibility. What does it mean to be morally responsible for one's choices and actions? How does that look in everyday life?

Young learners in the environment that I teach have a lot of struggles related to character. There is a lot of code switching between behaviors and expectations taught in the home and what is taught and expected in school. For example, some of my students are taught that if someone does something to you (like hit you), you do it back. Schools need to be safe places and more often than not students respond to someone accidentally bumping them as "hitting" them and fights break out because they've been taught to respond to any altercation with violence. I would like my students to realize they have a choice in this situation. I want to teach them how to problem solve and accept responsibility for their actions and the consequence of their actions, both short term and long term.

Becoming a morally responsible individual involves thinking about things like character. Children can observe different ways people act or behave, and figure out how they themselves want to be characterized. Young children need to figure out their moral compass and be reminded of the defining character they want to exhibit, so when there are outside influences on their lives, they can make decisions based on who they are as a person. In defining character, children can learn how choices and behavior impacts character. I want to instruct the students in my class that they have a choice in their decisions and that their choices have consequences. This directly aligns with literacy when students are taught about the relationship between cause and effect. Aristotle, a

well-known philosopher, frames human agency by “defining things like voluntary and choice, and by setting out the conditions for when something is or is not voluntary and by setting out when he thinks we should blame someone.”⁶

Philosophers regard moral responsibility as an “idea that we are sometimes accountable for our behavior in such a way that we deserve praise or blame for it.”⁷ Thinking of the duality between praise and blame, students can begin to understand the choices they make as being praiseworthy or blameworthy. Choices and actions can be neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy, and when students are taught that vocabulary and how to think about their actions as being praiseworthy, blameworthy, or neither, then everyday situations, exceptional situations, or troubling situations that occur in the classroom can lead to a discussion of whether or not the action was praiseworthy, blameworthy, or neither, and why? If students can meet to think about and discuss these questions they will have greater understanding and ownership over the choices that they make as individuals.

By encouraging philosophical thinking, this curriculum unit will help my students to understand what moral responsibility is. They will be able to identify situations in a classroom and school setting that can be defined as “right” or “wrong.” And, I would like for them to identify their human agency so they understand they are a person who can make voluntary choices. Students will learn how to think about making intentional choices by looking at conflicts that do or could happen in a classroom setting and brainstorming different points of view related to the situation as well as different solutions for how a situation can be handled.

The moral responsibility part of this curriculum unit will be used throughout the school year as the foundation for the class meetings we will hold in our classroom. The philosophy part of this unit will be integrated into language arts by including reading, speaking and listening, and writing.

Philosophical Topics

In order for students to understand what philosophy is, they should know some of the things philosophers study. Philosophers are interested in a number of issues that relate to the idea of moral responsibility. For example, they are interested in ethical issues such as how to characterize moral virtues and how to understand right and wrong action, and they are interested in moral psychology, which deals with motivation. The classroom activities in this curriculum unit will allow students to explore what bravery is, right and wrong in relationship to the environment, and issues relating to willpower and motivation.

Background Information

This curriculum unit will be taught in a self-contained second grade classroom in a PreK-5 school in Charlotte Mecklenburg, a large urban public school district. Teachers on my grade level work together and create thematic units with integrated connections across the subjects of math, science, social studies, and language arts. We develop and use a relevant and rigorous curriculum. As we implement the national Common Core standards for Language Arts and Math, and state-created Essential Standards for Science and Social Studies, prior knowledge of students, along with observations and assessments, inform instruction in the classroom. Student assessments include district mandated tests in the subjects of reading, math, science, and social studies. We gather information about our students through self-reflection, portfolios, grade level pre- and post-unit assessments, formative and summative assessments, and classroom observations. In the classroom and at the school, students have access to numerous technologies including computers with internet and instructional software, calculators, overhead and data projectors, TV, VCR/DVD player, CD player, cassette players, and iPads. Some students have access to technology at home. My school's population is about 850 students. There is an approximate one to twenty-two teacher to student ratio. The demographics of my school include 66% African American, 14% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 4% other. Approximately 2/3 of our students live in poverty.

I am creating and teaching this curriculum unit to help my students engage in higher level thinking by using children's literature as a lens for asking big questions in hopes of understanding varying perspectives and answers to them. This curriculum unit will be taught in my second grade class, and while behavioral ideas and questions will be used during class meeting time as a response to situations that are occurring in the classroom, intellectual ideas and questions will be used during literature time as a response to stories being read that relate to the big ideas in philosophy. Thomas E. Wartenberg's book Big Ideas for Little Kids along with other ideas and resources will be a primary source to aid me as a classroom teacher who is attempting to integrate philosophy into second grade. I intend for this unit to span over two school weeks.

I am creating this curriculum unit while engaged in a "Human Agency" seminar at Davidson College in the fall of 2014. Seminar leader Meghan Griffith is leading a small group, which includes teacher fellows from PreK-12, to help us understand what human agency is and how it relates to philosophy. The seminar is organized in a discussion style based on assigned readings that support fellows' understanding of human agency. As a result of taking this seminar I am learning how to think more deeply and to look for answers and understanding of things that are not necessarily apparent. I hope that will translate into the curriculum unit I am writing for my students through the lessons and ideas that I teach.

Teaching Strategies

Concept/Mind Map

Students will create a concept or mind map as a visual that illustrates and describes all the things that they think about and wonder about. A concept map could look different for different students. Students draw a picture and use words as a visual to demonstrate what they are thinking. They can draw lines on their illustration to connect and link their ideas. Students will choose a philosophical idea or question in the middle of a circle in the middle of a page. From that circle, students will start to brainstorm with pictures and words everything they know about their idea or question. Then, as they continue to think about it they will use books and the internet to learn what other people know and say about their idea and concepts. They will add what they learn to their visual so that by the end of a few days of thinking about one thing, they will have a page filled with everything they know and others say about one topic. Students will use this visual to create a concluding statement or definition for their idea and be able to defend it to other students.

Discussing Ideas

After students identify things they wonder about, I want to teach them how to think while they are reading. In the article, “The Examined Life, Age 8,” author Abby Goodnough describes a philosophy discussion with second graders using the book The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein as the primary text for their discussion. Speaking and Listening Standards for 2nd graders include 2.L.1 “Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups” (Common Core State Standards) and 2.L.3 “Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue” (Common Core State Standards). By discussing the book The Giving Tree and the philosophical questions that young learners can engage in, students will learn to understand the role of a philosopher and can begin to see themselves as philosophers. It is the role of the teacher to “facilitate a philosophical discussion among students in which the students work out among themselves their own answer(s) to philosophical questions stemming from a story that has just been read to them.”⁸

Biography

In addition to reading and discussing literature it is important for students to understand who some philosophers are. Second grade students 2.H.1.2 “Identify contributions of historical figures through various genres” (North Carolina Essential Standards for Social Studies). I can teach students some basic background information of known philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Confucius. These men are historic philosophers who represent both western philosophy (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes) and eastern philosophy (Confucius).

Socrates was Plato's teacher and in turn Plato taught Aristotle. Socrates is considered the "Father of western philosophy." He was born around 470 BCE and died around 399 BCE. He was born and lived in Athens, Greece. His father was a mason and Socrates did that in his early career before becoming a philosopher. Socrates tried to "establish an ethical system based on human reason rather than theological doctrine. He pointed out that human choice was motivated by the desire for happiness. Ultimate wisdom comes from knowing oneself. The more a person knows, the greater his or her ability to reason and make choices that will bring true happiness." Socrates was known as a questioner. He was known as someone who asked questions to seek truths. He claimed to be wise because he acknowledged what he did not know.⁹

(Biography.com offers great summaries of the lives of Socrates, a picture of what he is described to look like and a short video clip that can be shared with young scholars as they are introduced to him as a person.)

Plato was a student of Socrates. He is thought to have lived between 428BCE – 348BCE in Athens, Greece. He concerned himself with "justice, beauty and equality, aesthetics, political philosophy, theology, cosmology, epistemology, and the philosophy of language." Many of Socrates's ideas and teachings were recorded by Plato in his early scholarly years, and then he began to write about his own ideas and questions. Plato prioritized mathematics in education as well as focused on ways to make society more fair and just.¹⁰

Plato's famous student was Aristotle. Aristotle may have lived between 384BCE – 322 BCE. He was born in Stagira, Chalcidice, Greece and died in Chalcis, Euboea, Greece. He attended Plato's Academy, and eventually became a teacher and opened his own school, Lyceum. His students studied a wide range of subjects and wrote lots of findings. Aristotle was interested in all sorts of topics, such as the workings of nature, logic, and human virtue. He "believed that knowledge could be obtained through interacting with physical objects." While some of his specific scientific beliefs have been proven wrong in today's time, his scientific work was very important to the development of science. Aristotle also made important advances in logic by developing the syllogism. In ethics, he "prescribed a moral code of conduct for what he called 'good living.'"¹¹

While Socrates was the "father of western philosophy," Rene Descartes is the "father of modern philosophy for defining a starting point for existence, 'I think; therefore I am'." Rene Descartes lived between 1596-1650. He was born in La Haye, Touraine, France and died in Stockholm, Sweden; and he was educated at Jesuit College of Henri IV. He studied a variety of subjects extensively throughout his life including rhetoric, logic, math, music, astronomy, metaphysics, philosophy, ethics, law, theology, and medicine. He included math and logic along with his study of philosophy and used it to lead to some of his philosophical ideas which included the idea that the mind and body are distinct substances, united in the living human person.¹²

Confucious was a Chinese philosopher and teacher. He lived between 551 BCE and 479 BCE. He “focused on creating ethical models of family and public interaction, and setting educational standards.”¹³ His teaching practice evolved around loving others and demonstrating self-discipline. His goals for leaders and educators were to teach people to live with integrity.

Defining Objects and Ideas

An important part of philosophy is for thinkers to be able to define ideas. A stepping stone for students creating definitions for ideas is for them to begin defining objects. By starting with concrete objects to help them learn about definitions, they will be able to deal with more abstract ones. Students will engage in an exercise where they will describe concrete objects by defining and listing what they are and what they are not. We will engage in this exercise using various objects that can be found around the classroom. Students could describe a book, a desk, a pencil. An example of how they would describe a book by what it is and what it is not is by saying a book is something you read. It has words in it. It has pages that are made out of cardboard or paper. It sometimes has pictures. It is three-dimensional. It is not round. It is not a liquid. It is not loud. It does not move on its own. It does not talk.

Students will then progress to describing ideas by defining and listing what they are and what they are not. Students can wrestle with coming up with terms to describe bravery, willpower, respect, happiness, hope, love, courage, etc. While students may not work with all of these ideas, they may think about a few, or even work in groups to come up with multiple responses for one and then share with the entire class.

Point of View

Philosophical or not, it is best practice for students to be able to understand and think about varying points of view on a certain topic. Great books to use with second grade students, or any elementary students, that engage students in thinking about and considering different points of view are the various versions of the Three Little Pigs. Although there are various versions of this story, the main idea is that the big, bad wolf goes and destroys the house of the first little pig and the second little pig, but then the third little pig outsmarts him. In some versions the big, bad wolf kills and eats the first two pigs, and in other versions they run away to the next pig’s house. After reading and hearing this story, students can characterize each of the pigs. Students can describe their own feelings and emotions at the time the wolf comes and destroys their home. Students can do this by acting out the parts to a peer, writing down how the pig feels or how they would feel if they were the pig, or drawing a picture to illustrate how they think the pig is doing and feeling. After students have been given a chance to examine and describe how the pigs feel and think, they should be challenged to think about how the wolf is doing,

feeling, and thinking. Students should be reminded that there are two points to every story and that while they may disagree with the actions of the wolf, they need to be able to understand his point of view. I will give my students time, most likely in small groups, to brainstorm ideas and emotions they think the wolf may be feeling throughout the story. After they've had time to process and share, I will read the book, The True Story of the Three Little Pigs to them which is told from the wolf's point of view. While this story may be sarcastic and unbelievable to adults, young learners usually listen and respond to this story animatedly. In the story The True Story of the Three Little Pigs the wolf tries to convince the reader that he is innocent. He was only trying to borrow sugar from his neighbors and they were rude to him and didn't let him in or share with him. Another way to get students to think about these stories is to discuss the characters' motivations. What did the characters do and say and what do you think motivated their actions?

Socratic Seminars and Socratic Circles

A Socratic seminar is used to replace a "lecture" method of teaching. "Socrates valued the knowledge and understanding already present within people and thought that using this knowledge could potentially be beneficial in advancing their understanding."¹⁴ In a Socratic seminar, teachers ask students questions that lead to discussion, analysis, and research. The questions lead students to "examine their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and logic."¹⁵ In a Socratic circle, all the students in the class or in the group read a common text and take notes about it on their own. The teacher, or even students, pose a question(s) related to the text. The group breaks up into two circles. The inner circle engages in a ten minute discussion related to the text, while the outer circle silently watches and listens. Then the outer circle evaluates and gives feedback to the inner circle related to their discussion and conversation skills. Next the two circles switch places and roles and repeat the process where the new inner circle discusses the text or question for ten minutes and then the new outer circle gives feedback related to the discussion and conversation skills of the inner circle.

This can be done with students as young as second graders. It is helpful to set expectations for what the teacher wants to see – students staying in their seats, looking at the person speaking, writing notes; and what the teacher wants to hear – inner circle discussing the text and respectfully agreeing or disagreeing using "I agree with _____ because" or "I disagree with _____ because" statements, while the outer circle gives feedback related to the discussion: "I like _____ response because she restated what _____ said before her and then added her own idea," or "I like how patiently _____ waited for _____ to finish speaking and then he respectfully disagreed and gave a reason why."¹⁶

When preparing for a Socratic Seminar there are several question types the leader (teacher or a student) can write to encourage dialogue.

- “Closed-ended questions – questions about the facts – have one correct answer
- Open-ended questions – questions about inference and opinion – *What do you think? Why?*
- Literary Analysis Questions – looking at structure – *Why did the author?*
- Connection Questions – text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world – *How is this like _____?*
- Universal Theme Questions – how does this text reflect the human experience – *What does this piece have to say about... ?”¹⁷*

Read Alouds

Second graders and elementary age students benefit greatly by being read to. In addition to learning how to listen to stories, they should also be learning how to think about the stories they listen to. As a classroom teacher I try to use mentor texts and mentor videos to support any new ideas and standards we’re working on in the classroom. In order to get students to think philosophically about an abstract thought or idea, it is helpful to find characters in stories that also grapple with the same or similar questions or ideas. Thomas E. Wartenburg, in his book Big Ideas for Little Kids offers a couple of specific book titles that can be used that lend the way to philosophical questioning. His website is a rich resource that has many book titles, lesson plans, and exemplar questions that a teacher can use. Using read alouds as a mentor text serves many purposes. One of the authors that Wartenburg references, and that I particularly enjoy reading to my students, is Arnold Lobel. He is the author and illustrator of the Frog and Toad characters. In the book Frog and Toad Are Friends I will use the chapter “Spring” as a mentor text for students to think about and discuss honesty. In the same book, the chapter “The Story” will lend to a discussion on what friendship is and how far a person will go for a friend. In the book Frog and Toad Together the chapter “The Garden” illustrates the idea of patience. The chapter “Dragons and Giants” lends itself to a discussion about bravery and courage. And, the chapter “Cookies” is a great mentor text to use to get students to think about willpower. “The Dream” chapter teaches the idea of humbleness and encourages the reader to consider the differences between making himself seem bigger than he actually is or humbling accepting his similarities and differences to others. The book Days with Frog and Toad includes some philosophical beginning points as well. In the chapter “Tomorrow” young scholars will discuss the value of promptness versus procrastination. “The Kite” will be used to discuss the value of perseverance.

Research Based Exploration

Children are very inquisitive by nature and often have lots of questions about things they wonder about. If they can be taught to ask questions and seek out answers they will be learning how to research things that interest them. Second grade students are responsible to “participate in shared research and writing projects” and “recall information from

experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question” (Common Core State Standards). By creating questions that they are curious about (either on their own or with a peer), and by conducting the research to find answers, students will be engaged in philosophical thinking. The underlying idea of including research in this curriculum unit is not for students to learn how to do research, but ultimately to learn how to look at one particular thing through a variety of lenses. I want students to generate a philosophical question related to something that they are curious about and to utilize a variety of tools to figure out the answer to their question. I want them to find authors who support their answers using different definitions and examples. I want students to poll their peers to see what they think about the question they’re wondering about, and even dig deeper to challenge their peers to explain why they think and respond the way that they did. Examples of philosophical questions and ideas that students could research through a variety of methods include justice, right and wrong, truth, beauty, knowledge, love, courage, respect, happiness, willpower, etc. If students are able to discover different ideas or responses to the question that challenges their thinking, and they come up with a logical progression of what the definition is for the idea or topic they’re studying in order to describe to others what they know, have learned, and concluded, then they are acting like philosophers. While teaching students how to think about questions and look for answers I also need to “help them discover through reflection, express in words, and support with reasons their own answers to questions that concern them.”¹⁸

Classroom Activities

What is bravery?

Speaking and listening is a huge language arts focus that is integrated across the second grade curriculum. Students are taught how to “participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and large group.”¹⁹ They are trained and practice discussion rules that are established in the classroom which usually involve sitting and looking at the speaker, asking and answering questions related to the topic, and describing what they know and remember about what is being discussed. By integrating language arts’ standards with the social studies standard of “identify contributions of historical figures (community, state, nation, and world) through various genres,”²⁰ I want my students to consider the value of bravery and determine, discuss, and define what bravery is. Students will understand what bravery is by reading fictional and historical stories of bravery, engaging in a small group discussion, and creating their own definition. This lesson will occur over several days. In my classroom I am envisioning spending a day discussing prior knowledge about what students think bravery is; one day examining a real person who was brave by doing a shared reading of his biography and having students discuss traits and actions that made him brave; one day listening to the story of brave fictional characters and determining if they were in fact brave or not; and one day creating a conclusion for what bravery is and what it means to my second grade students. Students will work through all of this

facilitated in small groups with the teacher guiding the groups and monitoring the discussions.

1. Students will start by collaborating and discussing in groups what bravery is and what bravery is not by creating a two-column chart in their notebooks where they list everything they think or know about bravery.
2. Once small groups have established their individual lists related to their beliefs about bravery, they will share with the whole class and look for trends in similarities and differences.
3. Students will both read and listen to mentor texts related to bravery. (This may happen over several days). I am going to intentionally couple both fiction and nonfiction texts to illustrate the idea of bravery. Students will examine the idea of bravery using fiction. Students will listen to the Frog and Toad story titled “Dragons and Giants.” First we will create as a class a visual representation of what the story is about using a story frame that includes characters, setting, problem, solution, beginning, middle, and end.
4. Once students demonstrate they know the basic ideas of the story, we will transition to small discussion groups. There students will engage in dialogue about the story and the characters and decide if they are brave or not and what makes them brave. Some of the questions Wartenburg suggests using with this book when discussing the idea of bravery include: “Were they afraid? How can they be brave if they were afraid? Do you think Frog and Toad would have been dumb to try to fight the snake? Can people who do brave things actually be a little dumb?”²¹
5. In social studies, students are supposed to learn about historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. We have access to a whole class set of books titled The Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr. so we will use that as our whole class shared reading text. Students will read the story together and then discuss the main idea and details from the story. We will create a visual representation through words and pictures that outlines the ideas in the story. It is important to make sure students understand the basic information about a story first before they can discuss it.
6. Once students demonstrate what they know about the story, then I will pose questions related to bravery. Was Martin Luther King, Jr. brave? How do you know? Do you think he was scared? Is it possible to be brave and to be scared? I will write these questions on sheets of paper and hand them to each small group. Students in the groups will discuss these questions as well as any questions they may create related to bravery.
7. Once groups have been given time to discuss the questions (and I will gauge their conversations based on how much time we have left before we have to transition as well as when students begin to get off-task and start discussing something else), we will then examine how their current ideas of bravery relate to the earlier ideas they had when they created their two column chart.
8. Moving from discussing bravery in the context of two stories to the context of what it is, students will discuss their ideas on bravery. Wartenburg offers the questions of

“Ask children to make a brave face and explain why that face is brave. Can you tell that your classmates are brave by looking at them? How can you tell if someone is brave? What do you think bravery is?”²² Students will meet in their small groups and discuss these ideas and questions. They will review what they originally wrote in their two column chart, reference the story boards of both The Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Frog and Toad story “Dragons and Giants” to create a new, more detailed definition that they can defend citing examples from discussions and books of what bravery is to them.

Right or Wrong

Next students will be taught to think about moral responsibility in the context of how to take care of the environment. I’m going to again couple Social Studies with Language Arts. In Social Studies second grade scholars are supposed to consider and explain “how people positively and negatively affect the environment.”²³ Students will understand and explain how they can positively and negatively affect the environment by reading The Giving Tree and engaging in a Socratic Seminar. Moral responsibility relates to students understanding that their actions relate to their character and that the choices they make have consequences. Using a book about nature, students will also have to think about how their choices matter to the world around them. There are many themes and ideas that emerge from the book The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein, but for the purpose of integrating social studies and language arts, my students will focus on the natural aspect of the story and the relationship between the boy and the environment. They will consider the philosophical aspect of the story, whether it is right or wrong to destroy something in nature.

1. Students will read the story The Giving Tree. I will read it aloud from the book, but will prepare a typed copy of the text for students to read from and take notes on.
2. We will create a visual representation of what is happening in the story. I will model for students how to create a storyboard in their journals where they will illustrate with pictures and words the transformation of both the tree and the boy in the story – we will draw the tree getting smaller as we draw the boy getting bigger. We will use words to label what the boy is doing with the tree he is taking and how it makes both the boy and the tree feel. The model visual I create will hang in the classroom while students are discussing the story.
3. Students will be given time to independently think about and reflect on the story. I will encourage them to write ideas and questions they have that they think will lead to a good discussion about the book.
4. I am going to have students write a response to the prompt “Do you think the boy was right or wrong and why?” I want them to do this in order to show growth or change in their answer from before the discussion to after.

5. I am going to introduce Socratic circles to my students. I'm going to tell them that they are going to be sitting in two groups. Each group will have a chance to talk and each group will have the job of listening. We will go over the discussion rules that are in place in our classroom – look at the speaker, wait your turn, respectfully agree or disagree by saying “I agree with ____ because” or “I disagree with ____ because,” giving reasons to support your idea, staying in our seats, using a loud, clear voice so everyone in your group can hear you. I will also go over the expectations of the listeners. Those students will get an index card on which to write about how well the students do in the discussion. They will be told to look for things to compliment and things to correct – both body language as well as ideas.
6. The class will be divided into two groups. I intend to try to evenly heterogeneously divide my class so each group includes students at different levels of maturity. Students are going to sit in two circles and we are going to discuss this book using Socratic circles.
7. The first question I am going to pose to get students to think about the environment is, “Do we need trees and why?” Then as I steer students into thinking about the text and thinking about right and wrong, I will ask, “When did the boy do something wrong?” I could also pose: Is something wrong if it makes you happy? How do my choices matter to the world around me? What are their consequences and why is it up to me to think about this? Is the boy to blame for what happens to the tree? Why should he care about the results of his choice? The Wartenberg book (pages 114-115) includes other specific questions that can be used when discussing this text. As a teacher I need to be listening to the conversation the students are having and if they take the topic in a different direction, I will be ready to ask questions (if needed) to either steer them back to a morality discussion or follow up on the discussion they are having.
8. Socratic Circles last for 10 minutes for each group (which is probably as long as second graders can sit still and talk about something), so when time is up, the outer circle is going to be given a chance to give feedback to the inner circle. I will then give students a small brain break before I have them change places and switch groups.
9. Students will switch places and the new inner circle will discuss the story using the same questions posed to the last inner circle and the outer circle will be given an index card to write down behaviors to compliment or correct. After ten minutes of the inner circle discussing, the outer circle will have a chance to give feedback.
10. All students will return to their seats and write about the discussion. They will respond to the same prompt, “Do you think the boy was right or wrong and why?” And they will be asked, “How did the discussion help you better understand about right and wrong?” And, “Will this story or discussion lead to any changes in your life?”

I created and included a “Speaking and Listening” Rubric in Appendix II that students will complete to evaluate their interaction and engagement during the discussion.

What Motivates Us?

What motivates us? What causes us to act or think the way that we do? Why do we respond to situations in a certain manner? It is important for young learners to understand what motivates them in order to help guide the decisions they make or even the impulses they have. If students can figure out what motivates them then they can create a plan for achieving their end goal. For a lot of second graders they are motivated immediately by external rewards – candy, stickers, and praise. However, what if they could figure out what is driving their life? Why should they come to school? Why should they try or do their best? One of the biggest things I try to instill in my students is the value of a good education. If I could help them figure out their motivation for learning and being successful scholars instead of imposing mine on them then their achievements may be far greater than I could ever wish for them. Motivation styles could be accomplishment, connection, security, influence, and enlightenment.

1. First students will learn what each motivation style is. They will create a visual representation by folding a paper in sixths and labeling each part. (The extra section will be for their name). We will create a student friendly definition for each heading too.
2. Then we will brainstorm as a whole class certain behaviors and actions that students engage in throughout the day – completing classwork, following directions, helping a friend, getting in an argument, persevering through a problem, giving up, etc.
3. Students will independently choose a behavior, write the behavior, their response to when it happens – their motivation for how they respond. (I will model this for them: “I write lesson plans in order to influence my students to learn.”).
4. After students have tried this with a couple of different behaviors, they will get in groups of three or four to share with their peers how they react to things and why they think they do that.
5. I want my students, thinking philosophically and big picture, to make predictions for how what motivates them now will have implications for their adult life. This is asking a lot from little learners, but I think that if students work together they will begin to discuss and challenge each other to think how completing classwork teaches them to never give up and to follow through on responsibility. Students will pair up with others who choose the same motivation from that behavior and discuss what the long term effect would be. For instance, students who do it because of an “enlightenment” motivation may say they will be smarter, while students who do it because of an “influence” motivation may say they want to lead others to be able to do the right things in life.

I hope this curriculum unit will enlighten my students and teach them to reflect deeper about whom they are as human agents who can think, make choices, and act in morally responsible ways. I also want my students to think, question, and wonder in a philosophical manner and engage in great discussions with their peers in a thoughtful way. Through reading, writing, speaking, and listening this curriculum unit supports many of the common core language arts standards.

Appendix I: Implementing Teaching Standards

2.RL.1 & 2.RI.1 Students ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

2.RL.3 Students describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

2.RL.5 Students describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action of the story.

2.RI.6 Students identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain or describe.

2.RI.8 Students describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.

We will be using mentor texts to motivate our philosophical questions. Prior to students discussing a big idea, they are going to access common core standards for reading literature and informational text to demonstrate understanding of the story we read.

2.SL.1 Students participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 3 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

2.SL.3 Students ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

Throughout this entire curriculum unit students will be communicating with one another and engaging in dialogue to share what they think about a specific topic or focus that they are contemplating philosophically.

2.W.2 Students write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

2.W.8 Students recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.




























Second graders are going to prepare notes and ideas before and after discussing a topic. Writing helps students clarify their thinking as well as visually illustrates the progression of their thinking before and after a class discussion.

Appendix II – Speaking and Listening Rubric

My school is very data driven and students not only need to be taught, but assessed. Responding to the need of collecting data on students, I'm including a Speaking and Listening Rubric that students can use to self-assess and peers can validate. Any of the things on the rubric can be changed or adapted.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: *At the end of your discussion, please fill in the smiley face that best reflects your work. Then pass your paper to someone in your group to initial if it is correct.*

	 I did it <u>ALL</u> of the time.	 I did it <u>MOST</u> of the time.	 I did it <u>SOME</u> or <u>NONE</u> of the time.	Initial
I looked at the person talking.				
I waited my turn to talk.				
I stayed in my seat and with my group.				
I asked a question or gave an idea related to the topic.				
I gave reasons to support my ideas.				
I used respectful language like "I agree with _____" or "I disagree with _____".				
I spoke loud and clear, but only my group heard me.				
I spoke in complete sentences.				

Write (in complete sentences) what the best thing you did or said in group was.

Set a goal for what you're going to do better the next time you meet with your discussion group. _____

Resources

Adler, David A., and Robert Casilla. *A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Holiday House, 1989. This elementary grade "friendly" book documents the life and achievements of Martin Luther King, Jr. with pictures and words.

"Aristotle - Biography." Bio.com. Accessed October 14, 2014.
<http://www.biography.com/people/aristotle-9188415>. This website offers biographical information about the life and influence of Aristotle. It has background information for teachers.

"Confucius – Biography." Bio.com. Accessed November 20, 2014.
<http://www.biography.com/people/confucius-9254926#synopsis>. This website offers biographical information about the life and works of Confucius. It has background information for teachers.

Goodnough, Abby. "The Examined Life, Age 8." *The New York Times*. April 17, 2010. Accessed June 12, 2014.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/18/education/edlife/18philosophy-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. This article describes how philosophy is used in a 2nd grade classroom and suggests the book and questions used.

Griffith, Meghan. "Human Agency: Some "Foundations"." Lecture, Human Agency Seminar from Charlotte Teachers Institute, Davidson, NC, September 18, 2014. This lecture and handout helped form a discussion about agency, ideas from Aristotle, and definition of moral responsibility.

Griffith, Meghan. "Some of My Thoughts About Philosophy and Foundations." Lecture, Human Agency Seminar from Charlotte Teachers Institute, Davidson, NC, September 18, 2014. This came from a one page summary that provided background information about Philosophy and Foundations.

Lobel, Arnold. *Frog and Toad Are Friends*. New York: Scholastic, 1970. This book contains short stories that can be used as mentor text for young readers.

Lobel, Arnold. *Frog and Toad Together*. New York: Scholastic, 1971. This book has short stories that can be used as mentor text for philosophical discussion. The story "Dragons and Giants" which I will use with the idea of bravery can be found in this book.

Lobel, Arnold. *Days with Frog And Toad*. New York: Scholastic, 1979. This book has many short stories that can be used as mentor text.

"PLATO Sponsors." Teaching Elementary School Philosophy : PLATO: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization. Accessed June 13, 2014. <http://plato-philosophy.org/getting-started/teaching-elementary-school-philosophy/>. This article describes reasons and ways to teach philosophy to elementary students. It provides background information for this unit.

"Philosophy." Dictionary.com. Accessed September 19, 2014. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/philosophy?s=t>. This resource website offers a definition for the word philosophy.

"Plato - Biography." Bio.com. Accessed October 16, 2014. <http://www.biography.com/people/plato-9442588#final-years>. This website offers a picture and biographical information about Plato. It can be used as reference material for a teacher.

"Rene Descartes Biography." Bio.com. Accessed October 16, 2014. <http://www.biography.com/people/rené-descartes-37613>. This website is a resource for the life and work of Rene Descartes. It is background information for teachers.

"Socrates Biography." Bio.com. Accessed October 14, 2014. <http://www.biography.com/people/socrates-9488126>. This website offers historical information about the life and work of Socrates. It includes a quick video that can be shared with students.

"Socratic Seminar Guidelines: A Practical Guide." HubPages. Accessed October 30, 2014. <http://hubpages.com/hub/Socratic-Seminar-A-Practical-Guide>. This website offers step-by-step theory and information on how to host a Socratic Seminar in the classroom.

"Socratic Method." Learn NC. Accessed October 29, 2014. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4994>. This website offers background information and guidelines for how to run a Socratic seminar.

"Socratic Method." Socratic Method. Accessed October 29, 2014. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4994>. This website is a resource for what the Socratic method is and includes hints for how to use it in the classroom.

"University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children." University of Washington's Center for Philosophy for Children. Accessed June 13, 2014. <http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/>. This website includes philosophy lesson plans that can be used to teach philosophy in the elementary classroom.

Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy Through Children's Literature*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009. This book is a wealth of ideas for how and why to teach philosophy to elementary age students. It includes specific plans for what books to use and what questions to ask.

Notes

- ¹ "Philosophy," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/philosophy?s=t>, (accessed September 19, 2014)
- ² T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 5.
- ³ T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 14.
- ⁴ T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 28.
- ⁵ T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 32-35.
- ⁶ M. Griffith, *Some of my Thoughts about Philosophy and Foundations*.
- ⁷ M. Griffith, *Human Agency: Some "Foundations."*
- ⁸ T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 27.
- ⁹ "Socrates," <http://www.biography.com/people/socrates-9488126>, (accessed October 16, 2014).
- ¹⁰ "Plato," <http://www.biography.com/people/plato-9442588#final-years>, (accessed October 16, 2014).
- ¹¹ "Aristotle – Biography," <http://www.biography.com/people/aristotle-9188415>, (accessed October 14, 2014).
- ¹² "Descartes," <http://www.biography.com/people/ren%C3%A9-descartes-37613#later-life-death-and-legacy>, (accessed October 16, 2014).
- ¹³ "Confucius," <http://www.biography.com/people/confucius-9254926#synopsis>, (accessed November 20, 2014).
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- ¹⁸ T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 17.
- ¹⁹ "English Language Arts Speaking & Listening Grade 2," <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/2/>, (accessed October 29, 2014).
- ²⁰ "Essential Standards Second Grade Social Studies," <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/acre/standards/support-tools/unpacking/social-studies/2nd.pdf>, (accessed October 29, 2014).
- ²¹ T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 56.

²² T.E. Wartenberg, *Big Ideas for Little Kids*, 56.

²³ “Essential Standards Second Grade Social Studies,”

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/acre/standards/support-tools/unpacking/social-studies/2nd.pdf>, (accessed October 29, 2014).