

Ella Gillespie and Essex Gall

Teaching Epistemology Lesson Plan

Materials: Harold and the Purple Crayon, a purple marker, sheets of paper

Time: 30-40 minutes

Lesson Goals: To discuss what we mean when we claim we “know” or “believe” something (*P*), and examine the criteria/rules that satisfy us “knowing” that thing (*P*).

Introduction (10 min)

- Re-introduce ourselves (name and pronouns)
- Does anyone remember what philosophy is?
- Today we’re going to be talking about what we mean when we say we “know” something
 - Does anyone know something?
 - Does anyone believe something?
 - Do we think we can believe but not know?
 - Try to steer conversation towards belief vs knowledge; if we can’t parse out a difference move on
 - Have you ever thought you knew something and were wrong about it?
 - Did you then actually know it in the first place?

Physical Activity Break: reach as high as you can, then as low as you can on two feet

Book Activity (10 min) : Harold and the Purple Crayon

- Does anyone think Harold was asleep and dreaming when he was drawing his world? Does anyone think he was awake?
- How could Harold tell whether or not he was awake or dreaming?
- Have you ever had a dream that you thought was real, but when you woke up it wasn’t?
- What are some ways we can tell what’s going on around us?
 - See, hear, smell, etc.
- Harold created his own world exactly how he wanted/needed it. Can you do this in real life? Why or why not? How do you know?
- What does the word real mean? What does it mean to you to be real?
- What would you do if you had a purple crayon like Harold’s?
- What is the difference between Harold and his crayon and the things he draws with his crayon? Is there a difference? Do you think that the things he draws with his crayon are as real as he and his crayon are?
- Do you think Harold is dreaming?

Post-Reading Physical Activity: with an imaginary crayon, draw yourself a ladder and climb up it. Walk around in place, then climb back down. What did you see in the place you climbed to?

Transition Activity

- Stand up if you agree with the following statements:
 - If you believe you are awake you cannot be dreaming
 - To know you are awake you must know you are not dreaming
 - Harold was dreaming
 - You can tell if you're dreaming

Purple Crayon Drawing Activity (10 min):

- Have the kids each draw something from their imagination with a purple marker and then have them draw something in the room with them
- Activity Questions:
 - Is there a difference between the thing you drew from imagination and the thing you drew that is here?
 - Is there a difference between what you drew and what Harold drew?
 - How can we know that we can't do what Harold does?
 - Conversation should move towards experience/parents/general anecdotes as useful evidence for things we believe alongside our senses

Conclusion

- What did we talk about today?
- Did you disagree with someone at any point in the discussion? How did it feel to disagree?
 - Disagreement is valuable/good
- Did you change your mind at any point throughout the discussion? How did it feel to change your mind?
 - It's okay to change your mind! In fact, it can be great!
- Note that we have had a valuable discussion even if we haven't come to a definite conclusion