

Teaching Metaphysics Lesson Plan

Ethan Isenman, Melanie Becker, Rachael Totz

Total Time: 30-40 mins

Ages: 5-6

- I. Materials
 - A. *Stellaluna*, by Janell Cannon
 - B. Legos (7 blue, 7 red)
 - C. Notebook to write down kids “word” for philosophy

- II. Students will be able to...
 - A. Think about what makes something itself
 - B. Learn to question their assumptions
 - C. Transition from concrete to abstract discussion
 - D. Create a sense of comfort with uncertainty, with counterexamples, with discoveries/ideas that may contradict their current belief systems
 - E. Get comfortable with talking about ideas that do not have settled answers (giving them to the language to question, disagree, discuss; similar to river game)

- III. Introduction (5 mins)
 - A. Names
 - B. Does anybody know what philosophy is? (some children may have done philosophy last year)

- IV. Book (5 mins)
 - A. Read the book, ask some discussion questions

- V. Book Discussion (10 mins):
 - A. In what ways is *Stellaluna* a bird? A bat? (Follow up: What makes something a bird vs. a bat?)
 - B. *River Game* [ask kids to stand on one side of an activity area depending on whether they think answer to each question is yes or no. After each question, ask: “does anyone want to say why?”]
 1. Is *Stellaluna* a bat or a bird?
 - C. Is *Stellaluna* *Stellaluna* because of what kind of animal she is?
 1. Potential follow-up: If *you* woke up as a bird, would you still be you?
 2. So what makes *Stellaluna* herself?
 - D. Follow up questions if necessary
 1. Did *Stella Luna* change from a bat to a bird over the course of the story?

2. Did Stella Luna's opinion of Stellaluna change over the course of the story?
 3. Did your opinion of what Stellaluna is change over the course of the story?
 4. Who is most important to helping Stellaluna become Stellaluna?
- E. At the end of discussion: Ask students again whether Stellaluna is a bird or a bat, and see if any children run to different sides
1. Comment on whether any opinions have changed after discussing further

VI. The Tower of Eliot-Pearson [Thought Experiment/Activity] (10 minutes)

- A. We created this activity as a spin on the thought experiment The Ship of Theseus
- B. Start off with lego tower made of 7 blue legos, children name it: Tower of _____

1. Everyone go around and say something about the tower Eliot-Pearson
2. Oh no! A storm is coming! (Children blow on the tower) One block comes off. We replace the block with a red lego.
 - a) Is it still the tower of _____ ?
3. An earthquake comes (Children stomp their feet, four blocks fall off),
 - a) Is it still the tower of _____ ? More than half of the original blocks are gone!
4. Giants see the tower and think it's a toy, and they rip off the rest of the blue blocks! (Children rip off the rest of the blue blocks). The entire tower is now made of red blocks.

C. Questions

1. Is the tower still the same tower it was at the beginning? If not, when did the tower change?
2. Potential follow up questions to begin to transition from concrete to abstract discussions and generalize about identity
 - a) Children's response: "The tower is the same tower because it has the same name"
 - (1) If your name changed, would you still be you?
 - b) Children's response: "The tower is the same tower because everyone thinks it is"
 - (1) If we all thought *you* were someone else, would you be someone else? (Alternatively: If everyone thought Stellaluna was a bird/bat, would she be?)
 - c) Children's response: "The tower is a different tower because it's made of different blocks"
 - (1) If you woke up with a completely different body, would you still be you?

3. Finally, big-picture, abstract question:
 - a) So, thinking about what we said about Stellanina and the Tower of _____, **What makes something itself? Why?**

VII. *IF WE HAVE TIME:* Activity & Discussion: Personal Identity (Duration Dependent on Time Remaining)

- A. What are three things that are important about you?
- B. What/is there a most important thing about you?
 1. Why...?
- C. If you change and don't have that thing anymore, are you still you? Can you be you if someone does not think you have that thing?
- D. Would your friends say the same thing is important?
- E. What makes you who you are?
 1. Can you be one thing to yourself and another thing to someone else?

VIII. *ENDING:* What did we just do? (5 minutes)

- A. How is this kind of conversation different than your other classes/discussions in school?
- B. Do you like talking in a more open-ended way? What did you like about the conversation, what did you not like?
- C. [Guiding question] What do you think philosophy is using one word?
 1. Why? Are you sure?
 2. Write down children's words in notebook- ask this at the end of every lesson and watch how ideas change over time