

# METAPHYSICS LESSON PLAN

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## Preliminaries

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**Total Time:** 40 minutes (at most)

**Ages:** 6-7 years old (first graders)

**Materials for Students:** paper, crayons

**Materials for Instructors:** red apple, green apple, spoon, picture of weird spoon, paper and pens (to take notes and record student responses), easel and big paper (if possible)

**Learning Objectives:** Introduce students to the study of philosophy. Introduce students to the study of metaphysics. Introduce fundamental metaphysical distinction between a substance and its properties. Introduce fundamental metaphysical distinction between a substance's essential properties (essence) and its other (accidental) properties. Introduce distinctions between different sorts of properties (physical vs functional vs mental, etc.). Practice important philosophical skill of coming up with counterexamples. Introduce asymmetry between confirmation and falsification (implicitly). Introduce token/type distinction (implicitly). Introduce the topic of personal identity. Emphasize the special problems associated with personal identity that do not arise for other objects (try to get away from physical properties).

## Introduction

**5 min**

**Personal Introduction:** My name is Iman. My name is Monika. We are college students at Tufts University, and we study philosophy.

**Introduction to Philosophy:** What is philosophy? (Write out the word on big paper.) Talk about the difference between closed questions (What time is it?) and open questions (What is time?). [Other examples: What is friendship? What is love? What is happiness?] Philosophers wrestle with open questions that have no settled answers. Philosophers have different opinions about how to answer these questions. They give *reasons* to support their points of view. Emphasize "I agree because..." / "I disagree because..." language. Give example (using this language) or ask students to give example.

Anyone can be a philosopher! Today, we will be doing philosophy, and more specifically, metaphysics.

**Introduction to Metaphysics:** What is metaphysics? (Write out the word on big paper.) Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy. Philosophers who study metaphysics asks questions about the fundamental nature of reality—namely, what sorts of things there are and what those things are like.

## Substance #1: Spoon

10 min

**Spoon Activity (3 min):** Have students stand form a circle. “Now we are going to play a game. This is a spoon (hold up spoon). We are going to pass the spoon around in a circle. When you are holding the spoon, tell the class what you think is the important thing about a spoon. When you are done, sit down. When you are not holding the spoon, listen to the student who is holding the spoon. *Only the student who is holding the spoon gets to talk.* When everyone is sitting down, the game is over”

Iman hold spoon and demonstrate: “The important thing about a spoon is that it is shiny.” Pass spoon to Monika. Monika hold spoon and demonstrate: “The important thing about a spoon is that it is made of metal.” Pass spoon to first student and begin activity. Write down student responses.

**Counterexample Skill Building (7 min):** “Those were really interesting responses! Now we’re going to talk about them.” Decide which student responses to address (ones with obvious counterexamples).

“\_\_\_\_\_ said that the important thing about a spoon is \_\_\_\_\_. Let’s take a vote. How many of you agree? How many of you disagree? Now, *remember that in philosophy we give reasons for why we agree or disagree with a claim.*”

“Some of you agreed with \_\_\_\_\_ that the important thing about a spoon is \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give a reason?” Students raise hands. Call on students. Discuss their reasons.

“Some of you disagreed with \_\_\_\_\_ that the important thing about a spoon is \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give a reason?” Students raise hands. Call on students. Discuss their reasons.

If no students disagree, instructors can raise counterexamples.

**Transition (movement):** Have students stand up and form a new circle. Ask them to sit next to a new classmate for the next activity.

## Substance #2: Apple

10 min

**Skip this substance if running late on time. Save time for section on personal identity.**

**“Hot Potato” Apple Activity (3 min):** “Now we are going to play another round of the game with a different object. This is an apple (hold up red apple). We are going to pass the apple around in a circle. When you are holding the apple, tell the class what you think is the important thing about an apple. When you are done, sit down. When you are not holding the apple, listen to the student who is holding the apple. *Only the student who is holding the apple gets to talk.* When everyone is sitting down, the game is over.”

Monika hold apple and demonstrate: “The important thing about an apple is that it is crunchy.” Pass apple to Iman. Iman hold apple and demonstrate: “The important thing about an apple is that it is sweet.” Pass apple to first student and begin activity. Write down student responses.

**Counterexample Skill Building (7 min):** “Those were really interesting responses! Now we’re going to talk about them.” Decide which student responses to address (ones with obvious counterexamples).

“\_\_\_\_\_ said that the important thing about an apple is \_\_\_\_\_. Let’s take a vote. How many of you agree? How many of you disagree? Now, *remember that in philosophy we give reasons for why we agree or disagree with a claim.*”

“Some of you agreed with \_\_\_\_\_ that the important thing about an apple is \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give a reason?” Students raise hands. Call on students. Discuss their reasons.

“Some of you disagreed with \_\_\_\_\_ that the important thing about an apple is \_\_\_\_\_. Can you give a reason?” Students raise hands. Call on students. Discuss their reasons.

If no students disagree, instructors can raise counterexamples.

**Transition (movement):** Have students stand up and form a new circle. Ask them to sit next to a new classmate for the next activity.

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### **Substance #3: People (Personal Identity)**

**15 min**

**Drawing Activity (5 min):** Pass out paper and crayons. Ask students to draw themselves.

**Discussion (10 min):** Go around the circle and have students show their classmates their drawings. Have each student state three things that are important about them. Record student responses. Have a mini discussion between each student response, based on the things they think are important about them. Refer to discussion questions below for ideas on how to encourage philosophically robust discussion. Try to get away from physical properties to get to the heart of the issue. Emphasize that talk of substances gets a lot more complicated when we’re talking about people.

**Discussion Questions:** Who are you? What makes you who you are? Are there certain properties that are distinctly yours? Are there properties you have that, if you were to lose them, you would no longer be you? Can a person change and still be the same person? Can a person lose most of their physical properties and still be the same person? Are you the same person now as you were when we started this discussion? Will you be the same person when you are Monika’s age? Etc.