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Teaching Metaphysics Lesson Plan (Personal Identity)

Total Time: 30-40 minutes

Ages: 4-5

Materials: Funny-looking object (fire-spinning circus fan) and *Harry the Dirty Dog*

Goal: Introduce philosophy, metaphysics, and discussion frameworks. Discuss how appearance and behavior contribute to identity, whether they are essential or accidental properties, and what other properties make up identity.

Introduction: (5)

- Introduce ourselves
- Have kids go around in a circle and introduce themselves
- What is Philosophy?
 - Ask kids to try saying the word “phi-lo-so-phy”
 - Give examples of philosophical questions
 - Distinguish between other questions
 - No singular answer, requires more thought, may have different answers from your friends, might have no answer at all
 - What color is your shirt? VS. What are colors?
 - What is your friend’s name? VS. What makes a good friend?
- Introduce terminology
 - I think _____ because
 - I agree / disagree because

Reasoning Activity (3)

- Hold funny object and ask children to guess what it is.
- Model using the phrases “I think it is _____ because _____” and “I agree/disagree with so-and-so because _____”

What is Metaphysics? (2)

- Branch of philosophy dealing with first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, time, and space.

Read book -- Harry and Dirty Dog (5 minutes)

- Ask if the kids have any questions/anything they’re wondering about

Discussion (10)

Content questions:

1. Make sure everyone understood the story
2. How did Harry change through the story? Why didn’t his family recognize him?
3. Harry’s family did not recognize him even though he performed all his other tricks...can you think of something Harry could have done to identify himself? Perhaps brainstorm how you recognize your own pets.
4. How would we describe Harry? Other than being a white dog with black spots?

Personal Identity properties questions:

1. Was Harry still the same dog even though he looked different?
2. At the end of the story Harry likes his bath. Is he still the same dog now that he likes different things?
3. Would he still be Harry if he didn't want to go home? If he stopped loving his family?
4. Would he still be Harry if another family took him in?
5. What would you have to change about Harry that would make him no longer "Harry"?
6. What would have to change about you to make you different?

Transition (2)

- Refocus by having kids do five jumping jacks and then sit back down
- Explain that we were talking about whether it was important how Harry the dog looked, and now we're going to talk about whether it is important how we behave.

Animal Activity (10-15)

- What do bunny rabbits do?
 - When you hopped like a bunny, were you a bunny?
 - Why were you not a bunny when you acted like a bunny?
- Let's try another one. What do snakes do?
 - Were you a snake when you slithered?
- What else do snakes do? (Movement, sounds, food they eat)
 - Were you a snake when you slithered, *and* hissed, *and* ate mice?
 - Would you be a snake if you *always* hissed instead of talking? And everywhere you went you slithered? And if you only ate mice and rats?
 - Is there anything you could do to become a snake?
 - What makes a snake a snake?
- Act out more animals as time permits (Birds, lions, frogs, elephants)
 - When you were flying, were you a bird? Lion? Frog? Elephant?
 - If you were acting like an animal, what made you a person?
 - Are there other things that make us people besides the way we act?
 - What makes a person different from an animal?
 - What makes you different from your friend?

Debrief (2)

- Review what **philosophy** is:
 - Thinking about questions that we don't know the answers to, and talking about those questions with other people
- Kind of **language** that we use
 - "I think _____ because" and "I agree/disagree because"
- Recap what we discussed in **our discussion**:
 - Is Harry still the same dog even when he is dirty or likes to take baths? Are we still people when we act like animals? What makes you a person?

Ask kids to share what they **learned**