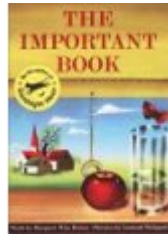


The Important Book

Words by Margaret Wise Brown, pictures by Leonard Weisgard
Haper Collins
Ages 4-8



This is a re-presentation of a book first published in 1949. The illustrations are contemporary. The pattern of the book is that the writer suggests various things like: rain, a spoon or a daisy. For each item, the writer lists some qualities or purposes and gives an opinion as to the most important. So a spoon isn't flat and can be held in the hand: 'But the most important thing about a spoon is that you can eat with it.' The book ends on the subject of 'you'. The writer, speaking to each reader, says:

'It is true that you were a baby, and you grew, and now you are a child, and you will grow into a man or into a woman, but the most important thing about you is that you are you.'

The book is a starting point for talking to young children about concepts like 'important', 'change' and 'identity'. It could also be a good book to use if you are in the early stages of building up the children's inquiry skills because dialogue about it is likely to provide opportunities for using vocabulary like 'example', 'category' and 'reason'. The following suggestions could be split into two 40 minute sessions.

Suggestions before reading

I've done the following things myself with children aged from 4 to 8 and they worked out well. Tell the children you are going to read them a book called 'The Important Book'. Without letting them see the cover, ask them what they think the book might be about. If someone says, 'important things', ask them to give an example of an important thing. They could say all kinds of things like: fairies, lions, sitting up straight, controlling yourself or precious things. Write each of their ideas on a piece of paper and put into the centre of the inquiry circle. This collection of ideas will provide a starting point for dialogues about what is important, how and why. For example:

- You could choose one or two of their suggestions and ask them to list qualities, purposes or reasons why they think the thing they suggested is important. In response, they might say a lion has sharp claws, roars, has a tale and so on. This is a good opportunity to ask children whether each new suggestion is similar or different to previous ones (eg. 'sharp teeth' and 'big teeth' are similar because they are both about teeth). When you have collected the children's ideas, ask them what the most important thing about a lion is. If they suggest an action like 'being kind', and some reasons why being kind is important, then you could explore with them if a general rule is that important actions are ones that lead to good or bad outcomes or that they affect lots of people.
- Draw a circle the children can see and put dots with initials of their suggestions in the circle. So one dot might stand for 'lion' and one for 'sitting up straight'. These are their examples of important things. Point outside the circle and say: 'if those things are important, what would things out here be?' Someone will probably say 'things that are not important.' Ask them if they can think of anything that is not important and give a reason. Ask other people whether they agree or disagree with reasons? It's possible that a child might suggest something for outside the circle that is already in the circle. This could lead to talking about whether something could be both important and not important or whether something could be important to one person and not to another. An interesting question could be: 'Should some things be important to everyone?'

The last page of the book is particularly interesting ('The most important thing about you is that you are you.') I often read only the last page and ask children either to:

- Think of a question about what is said on that page. I then write the questions down (See p4c craft on creating questions)

- Share what interests them about what is said on the page. Then I help them to create questions.

In a dialogue about one or more questions, there might be opportunities to talk with children on what changes about people and what stays the same, how people grow and what are the most important things that are special about 'you'.

'What makes you, you?'

Children might want to discuss a question like this. If they don't, you might like to raise it with them in a follow-up session.

During the inquiry, or afterwards in a special session, you could suggest items and ask them to say if they think they are special to 'you' and if they change over time. Such things might be:

- Your face
- Your name
- Your hair
- Your thoughts
- Your brain
- Your shoelaces
- Your clothes
- Your fingernails
- Your memories
- Your family

I suggested 'your shoelaces' to a group of 4-5 year olds recently and one said he thought they did make him special. I asked why. He said: 'because I can't tie them.' A section of dialogue followed about whether things you can and can't do make you, you and if the 'you' changes as you learn to do new things.

Another couple of questions that get to a similar discussion are: 'What could change about you and yet you would still be you?' and 'What couldn't change about you for you still to be you?' There could be opportunities to ask follow-up questions like:

- If you changed your name would you still be you?
- If you and I swapped brains would I be you and you be me?
- If you lost your memory would you still be you?
- Do you think it's possible that everyone in this room could think the same thoughts?
- If your skin colour changed, would you still be you?

Important

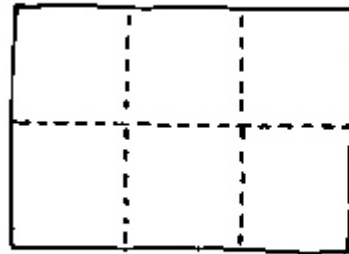
The concept 'important' could be introduced and explored in many curriculum areas over time. In different contexts, important might suggest:

- Striking (for example some aspect of a picture, a piece of music or writing)
- Powerful
- Produces good or bad effects
- Useful
- Dangerous
- Impressive
- Famous
- Meaningful
- Valuable

Encourage children to use the concept 'important' to deepen their dialogues. They can get used to saying what they think is important about something under discussion

Thinking and writing

Make books with blank pages (such as a zig-zag book) and with the title 'Important'. Encourage children to write or draw anything they like in the books. Collect them up to read or ask infant children what their marks say. As a structured piece of writing for children aged around 8, ask them to explain why one thing they can think of is more important than another and give reasons: 'X is more important than Y because ...'



Zig-Zag Book

