
A set of ideas on beauty and using questionnaires

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Beauty is a stimulating and valuable topic and it relates to another area of philosophy – aesthetics (the branch of philosophy which deals with questions of beauty and artistic taste). Ideas discussed here could inform other subject areas. The range of choices open to pupils can provide invaluable insights into their interests, preoccupations and attitudes. The resources you will need are:

- Questionnaire on beauty
- Teachers' notes on 'Using questionnaires for P4C'
- Poems on beauty
- Samples of pupil questionnaires

Teacher's notes: Introduction to questionnaires

Questionnaires can be a good starting point for P4C, stimulating both pupils and teachers to think critically about a range of issues. Here are some of the advantages:

- If teachers use ready-made questionnaires, then pupils will start with a collection of well thought out and focused questions around a theme or concept.
- If children choose the topic and create the questions, they get a lot of practice in writing relevant questions making them clearer and more concise. Making the questionnaires develops the questioning skills that are at the heart of active, independent learning.
- The questionnaires and their results provide excellent stimulus material for enquiry and a snapshot of the existing 'common sense' of the group. The aim will be for each member of the class to arrive at their own 'good sense' after questioning and reflecting further.
- Pupils get the opportunity to explore the attitudes of their peers and compare those to attitudes of their own. They may be encouraged to change or adapt their own thinking, or to live more comfortably with their own uncertainties.
- Analysing and discussing a variety of opinions, including their own, can motivate pupils to do further research and to reconsider their own first thoughts.
- If pupils are invited to devise their own questionnaires, the range of choices open to them can provide invaluable insights into their interests, preoccupations and attitudes.
- The results of the questionnaires can be used as raw material for work on statistics and graphs in mathematics.

Stage 1: The Questionnaire on 'Beauty'

Explain and complete a questionnaire. Introduce the idea of using a questionnaire as a stimulus to your pupils. Then give each pupil a copy of the ready-prepared questionnaire on 'Beauty'. Decide whether you are going to give the questionnaire to any other classes or to parents. Pupils complete the

questionnaires anonymously. However, a possible alternative is to get pupils into groups and give each group ONE question to discuss AS A GROUP before asking individuals to complete all the questions. Then you get the benefit of a group discussion that will focus the children's minds on the topic and get their thinking going.

Why Beauty? We think it could be a stimulating and valuable topic and it relates to another area of philosophy – aesthetics (the branch of philosophy which deals with questions of beauty and artistic taste). Ideas discussed here could inform other subject areas.

Tally up answers and select interesting responses. Once the questionnaires have been completed and collected, a group of volunteers should tally up the responses that can be tallied (*i.e.*, the ones where pupils choose from a set list of alternatives or a numerical scale). Alternatively, you could pass the questionnaires from group to group with each one tallying up the responses to a single question. Also have groups look at the questions that ask for open written responses. They should pick out any responses they find interesting or unexpected or just representative of the 'common sense' of the group. An additional and valuable step could be to get children into groups and have them share, compare and discuss their answers. What are the reasons for their choices? What do they think about the choices of others?

Use the results as a stimulus for P4C. After the results of the questionnaires have been presented and discussed, ask pupils to put forward their own philosophical questions about any of the issues that have arisen, the majority and minority attitudes, possible reasons for those attitudes and the concepts suggested by the questions and responses.

Comments on the 'beauty' questionnaire.

- Note that the first question asks: 'In what sense is this beautiful?' The use of the word 'sense' may need explaining. You might say it is similar to saying 'In what way is it beautiful?' or 'How do you mean beautiful?' or 'In what respect is this beautiful?' It is an important idea to get across. For instance, someone might say something can be ugly in one sense but beautiful in another. You can help pupils be clear about what they mean through their dialogues on beauty by asking in what sense they mean something.
- The questionnaire is not meant to push a particular line of thinking about beauty but rather to explore the thoughts of you and the pupils by asking interesting questions and having dialogues in the usual P4C way. The most important thing is for pupils to explain their answers.
- There are some themes running through the questionnaire: What sort of things do children expect to recognise as beautiful in some sense? Does a sense of beauty depend on comparison and thinking (or finding meaning in something)?

Stage 2: The poems on beauty

After discussion, using the results and reports on the questionnaire as a stimulus for dialogue, give the pupils a selection of the poems we have provided. We've included them as a text file to give you maximum freedom to choose which poems you want to give to which pupils. You could give a different choice to each group or you could give the same poems to all the pupils. Use the poems as a stimulus. There is a general theme of beauty running through them so the pupils' questions and dialogues might connect with or be informed by this. Note that the objects of the poems, whether animals, plants,

inanimate objects, or concepts (as in the Langston Hughes poem 'Refugee in America), cause the poet to create significant meaning. Perhaps this, in a sense, is what it takes to find beauty in something.

Stage 3: Ongoing thinking about beauty

- Invite the pupils to keep note of things they find beautiful and their thoughts about those things. This could be done in the form of a class book that could include images and music as well as writing. You could bring things you think are beautiful too or you could present something and say: "Many people have thought this is beautiful. What do you think?"
- You could ask the pupils to suggest ways the school could be made more beautiful.

Important: You may think the work on beauty has been too text based. I chose the poems not so much because we thought the poems were beautiful in themselves but they showed people articulating thoughts about beauty. Maybe poetic language is best for this. We would prefer you and the pupils to choose examples things to put forward as possibly 'beautiful'. This would be another opportunity for dialogue.

Stage 4: The pupils choose

Invite each pupil to think of a topic they think is important. Organise a discussion and, if necessary, a vote to choose one topic as a project for the whole class. Using the questionnaire you just gave them as a model, remind them of different kinds of possible questions. Then get them into groups of three or four to create questions and refine them.

One option is to ask: 'What makes a good question?' or 'what are your criteria for a good question?' Pupils are likely to say that it should be understandable and clear. Have groups swap questions and try to improve them with their own criteria in mind. Where questions are very similar, ask the class which ones they think are most effective and why. Then make a choice yourself about what should go on the final questionnaire.

Follow the same procedure as in Stage 1 once the questionnaires have been duplicated. We've included some examples of questionnaires created by pupils.