

How do you know what I'm doing?

Philosophy Smash with Henry!

Lesson plan

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Introduction for teachers.

This is a discussion of a topic in the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of action. It focusses on how we can understand other people's actions, and how we can 'mindread': how we can work out the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of other people.

The expert (Chiara Brozzo) who is interviewed for this video is happy to be contacted by teachers who wish to teach this material. Her email is c.brozzo@bham.ac.uk

It can be used for lessons in RE or Philosophy, or lunchtime philosophy clubs. The lesson is intended to promote discussion about how we understand one another. It's primarily aimed at ages 9-13 (KS 2-3), but is also suitable for older age groups.

The lesson is designed to be done with the help of the *Philosophy Smash with Henry!* video on the same topic. It's also meant to be used with the handout and two activity sheets (all of which are available at the website above).

Learning Outcomes.

Emerging:

Appreciate and explain how crucial it is to understand the actions and minds of others, and give some examples of this in our day to day lives.

Expected:

Engage in a sophisticated philosophical discussion.

Be respectful of other views, and recognise alternative ways of looking at philosophical questions, whilst at the same time supporting one's own view with evidence and/or argument.

Explain the link between understanding the actions of others, and mindreading.

Exceeding:



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Using the information provided, give a view on how we understand others, and back up this opinion with a reasoned argument and/or concrete examples from everyday life.

Ground Rules.

Start by setting some ground rules for discussion. These can be varied based on the style and ability of the group, but they might include:

- 1) Remember to always be respectful of other people's opinions. Everyone's opinion is equally valuable.
- 2) You can give your own beliefs and opinions if you like, but you don't have to. If you don't have an opinion on the question, then just think about what a sensible opinion might be, and think about why someone might hold that.
- 3) Try not to just give 'yes' or 'no' answers, remember always to back up your opinions with reasons and arguments.
- 4) It's fine to disagree with other people!
- 5) It's fine to change your mind! Changing your mind when someone else makes a good point is a sign of maturity and a good philosophical brain.

Sentence stems:

Depending on the ability and age of your group, you may like to use the following sentence stems to encourage children to think:

Questions:

'Why do people think...? '

'Does anyone disagree that....?'

'Do people from other cultures think that....?'

Statement of views:

'I think that... because...'

'One view I think is wrong is ... because ...'

'Someone else might think ...because ...'

'Someone in my group thinks ..., but I think that ...'

'It's difficult to know the answer to this question because....'

'I think there's another sensible view, which is...'

'In order to answer this question, we would need to know....'



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Changing your mind:

‘On reflection, I’ve now realised that...’

‘At the beginning, I believed..., but now I’m not sure. I now think that...’

‘I’m not sure about... because...’

Teaching Activities.

There are two teaching activities associated with this topic: a ‘How do you know what I’m doing, and what I’m about to do?’ activity, and a ‘Mindreading’ activity. Each of the activities have their own activity sheet. They are intended to be used with the *Philosophy Smash with Henry!* video ‘How do you know what I’m doing?’ as well as the handout and activity sheets for the topic. All of these are available at the website on p.1 of this lesson plan.

The video that goes with this lesson plan is an interview between a presenter (Henry) and an expert in the philosophy of action. The expert is Chiara Brozzo, a philosopher from the University of Birmingham.

Teaching activity one: how you know what I’m doing, and what I’m about to do?

Start off by watching the first few minutes of the video, until Henry says ‘take a second and decide what you think’. There will then follow a cartoon of some books with the ‘what do you think?’ slogan. Pause the video there.

Make sure that the class understands the main puzzle that forms the basis of the topic: how can we work out what people are doing, and what they are going to do? Do a round of Q and A to ensure they understand. Ask them to give you some other examples where it’s important to understand what other people are doing, and what they’re going to do.

Show the class the next couple of minutes of the video, including the bit where Henry asks Chiara to compress her answer into 45 seconds. She will explain two main ideas:

- First, that some people think we understand what people are going to do just by watching their physical actions.
- Second, that we understand what people are going to do by guessing what is going on in their minds: by working out what their beliefs, desires and feelings are.

Distribute the handout that goes with this session (available at the link on p.1 of this lesson plan). This summarises the main ideas, in case children have forgotten them, or learn better with written material.



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Give the class time to look over the handout, and do another round of Q and A to make sure they understand.

Distribute the activity sheet ('How do you know what I'm doing, and what I'm about to do?'), available at the link on p.1 of this handout. The text of this activity sheet is in the box below, for reference.

How do you know what I'm doing, and what I'm going to do?

Philosophers and scientists have often thought about how humans can understand others, and how we can guess what each other are about to do.

Imagine you see me reach for a glass of juice. You probably have a pretty good idea of what I'm going to do: I'm probably going to drink from it. But how do you know that?

Opinion one.

We just watch other people's behaviour and work out what they're going to do, like we would with normal physical objects. For example, if you drop an apple, you know what it's about to do: it's about to fall to the ground. It's exactly the same knowing what humans are doing, and what they're going to do.

Opinion two.

Humans aren't like just normal physical objects. To understand them, we need to get into their heads. You need to know a little bit about someone's mind to understand their actions, and what they're going to do. To understand that I'm going to drink the juice, you need to know certain things about my mind: that I like juice, that I'm thirsty, and other things.

After distributing the activity sheet, break the class off into small groups. We find that groups of three-four work best, because there's less chance of two children just having completely opposed opinions and making very little headway. Get the children to discuss which of the two opinions they think is most likely to be correct. They should back up their opinions with evidence, real world examples, and/or arguments.

After this, collect together the opinions of the different groups. You may find it helpful to write the main views on a whiteboard, so that you can refer back to it later during discussion.

Teaching activity two: Mindreading.

Watch the rest of the video, including the back and forth between Henry and Chiara, and the 'final thought' section.

Distribute the 'Mindreading' activity sheet (available at the link on p.1 of this lesson plan). This activity sheet contains an exercise, focussed on how we read the minds of other people. The text is in the box below, for reference. The exercise can be done alone or in groups, depending on the teacher's decision.



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In philosophy, 'mindreading' just means our ability to understand the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of others. We do this all the time: when we see someone crying, we know that they are sad. We can even understand that other people have different beliefs from us. For example, I might not believe in God, but I know that other people do.

Think about how we do this. How can we understand what other people believe, and what they are thinking and feeling?

Read over the list of ideas in the list below, and think about them. Then, decide how you think we're capable of mindreading

How do we read minds?

Behaviour:

Watching someone's behaviour seems really important for understanding their minds. To know that someone is happy, or sad, you often look to see if they're smiling, or crying. Is behaviour the only thing you use to work out what someone is thinking or feeling?

Your own experience:

Do you think that, to work out what someone else is thinking, you might not just look at what *they* are doing, but also think about what *you* would be thinking or feeling if you were in their shoes?

Lying:

People can sometimes lie about what they're thinking or feeling. Are there any signs that you can use to tell when someone is lying?

Additional resources:

<https://aeon.co/essays/is-there-a-symmetry-between-metacognition-and-mindreading>

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2013/sep/11/rough-guide-mind-reading>

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