



Philosophical Enquiry for KS2

The Witch who hated words

Can you imagine a world without words?

<p>Philosophical Content</p>	<p>Possible Concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LANGUAGE: Words, Language, Meaning, Communication, Signs EPISTEMOLOGY: Thought, Understanding, Experience, Expression, Learning LOGIC: Possibility and Impossibility <p>Possible Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What would a world without words be like? Could people express themselves in a world without words? Could people understand each other in such a world? Would communication be possible? Would people be able to learn? If so, what might learning look like? Would people be able to plan, hope, reflect or want in such a world? Would people be able to <i>think</i> in a world without words? What are words? Are words and thoughts the same or different? How are they related? Where do words come from? Might there have been a time when humans had no words at all? Why do we use words? Could we manage without them? Can you have a thought but be unable to express it in words? Can you say something in words, but be unable to conceive of it? Do words create thoughts or do thoughts create words? Or both? Some people in our world lack words (e.g. babies) can they think? If they can, might their thought differ from yours? If so, how? Is a person's thinking <i>better</i> if they have more words?
<p>Philosophical Method</p>	<p>Participant Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PICTURE the story, think AHEAD to the consequences of the strange spell, EXPLAIN what you understand by concepts like thought and word. Think BACK to a moment where something changed your mind or confirmed your position * <p>Facilitator Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record a response then review the response, Speculative Questions **
<p>Materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passing pom-pom, Circle of chairs, Whiteboard and pens

PREPARATION		5 min
Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce everyone if necessary. 	
Ethos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly establish or reiterate your class rules. E.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We're always asking questions ○ We share what we really think ○ We care what other people think too ○ We give reasons for our claims ○ We're not scared to disagree ○ We are willing to change our mind ○ We speak one at a time ○ We encourage speakers by listening and looking at them 	
STIMULUS		15 min
Presentation of Stimulus 1	<p>The witch who hated words</p> <p>There was once a witch who <i>hated</i> words. She hated the blah blah blah of the marketplace and the jibber-jabber of the schoolyard. She hated the wiggles and squiggles in books and newspapers, letters and street signs. She hated the chitter-chatter of the radio and the blither-blather of the television. But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't escape them, she was surrounded by words. Words made their way out of people's mouths and off the written page and into her head, filling it up completely. She despised them. "If only there could be a world without words!" she daydreamed. But how?</p> <p>Well, being a witch, an obvious solution presented itself. A spell!</p> <p>So, she brewed a revolting potion with a shrivelled ear and blackened tongue and crooked finger and bent thumb and the pages of a book with all that it teaches and a pencil and a pen and some scrabble pieces.</p> <p>But just before she said the magic words "Words be gone!" she hesitated. These words would be the last words she would ever speak. And then what?</p> <p>"What would a world without words be like?" She thought. Would it really be a world that she wanted?</p>	
Thinking Time	<p>Give the group a moment to think. Write up the following speculative question to help focus their thinking time:</p> <p>What would a world without words be like?</p>	
Sharing Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the children to share their ideas with a partner. • Next invite as many pairs as possible to feedback. • The facilitator should capture key ideas on a whiteboard and return to them later in the discussion. • It is likely that the children will initially focus on superficial features of such a world. <i>E.g. There would be no labels on food, no lyrics in songs.</i> Push them to think in greater depth about systemic differences between such a world and ours, e.g. would there be stories, metaphors, instructions, rules? 	

Presentation of Stimulus 2	<p>Thinking Without Words</p> <p>“Words be gone!” may be the last words I ever speak, thought the Witch.</p> <p>“But I’ve just noticed something about these thoughts of mine”, she thought again. “These worries and doubts, these questions and queries — they’re made of words too.”</p> <p>“These words, the very words I am thinking now, will be the last words I ever think!”</p> <p>“Well good riddance!” She suddenly said aloud. “I hate words and the world would be better off without them”</p> <p>In a world without words I can still daydream and scheme and remember and reflect, I can still think without words... <i>can't I?</i>”</p>	
QUESTION(S)		1 min
Prepared Question	<p>Write up the following philosophical question:</p> <p>Could you <i>think</i> in a world without words?</p>	
DIALOGUE		35 min
Record a Response	<p>Before the discussion begins, ask each child to privately record their initial response on a whiteboard, beginning “Yes/No/Maybe because...”</p>	
First Thoughts	<p>Begin the dialogue with a paired discussion. Invite the children to share their intuitions based on what they wrote down.</p>	
Collecting Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite children with strong intuitions that either yes you could think in a world without words, or no you couldn’t, to share their reasons. • Document these reasons on a whiteboard. e.g. “<i>Yes you could think, because you could think in pictures</i>” OR “<i>No you couldn’t think because thinking is saying words in your head</i>” 	
Getting Focused	<p>Begin to identify key issues. These issues may come from children who do not have strong intuitions either way. These can be students for whom the answer rests on the resolution of particular questions (<i>e.g. about the nature of thinking, types of thought, the purpose of words or the limits of language</i>) or the need for particular definitions (<i>e.g. the meaning of thought, word, language etc.</i>)</p>	
Digging Deeper	<p>Break the group into pairs to address any tricky issues. Set them a specific question to structure this conversation.</p> <p>The following questions could be helpful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are words? What are thoughts? What is thinking? • Do we need words? Could we manage without them? 	
Final Push	<p>Return to the original question pressing for revised answer(s).</p>	

Last thoughts	Depending on time, go around the circle once, hearing from everyone. Encourage the children to respond. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Yes because...” • “No because... “ • “I’m undecided because...” 	
Review the Response	Invite the children to retrieve their whiteboards and read their initial response. Alongside it, using a different colour pen, they should summarise their view at the end of the session. Is it the same, somewhat different, or radically different?	
REFLECTION		5 min
Reflection on the Content	Ask your students to consider: What explains the similarity or difference of your responses at the beginning and end of the enquiry? Was there anything specific that you thought or that someone else said?	
Reflection on the Enquiry	Ask your students to consider: Is it necessary for people to change their mind in a philosophical enquiry, can you have a good dialogue where no one budes at all?	
EXTENSION		20 min
Further Discussion	Animals, foetuses, new-born babies, sleeping people, people with some disabilities, some very old people and all unconscious people do not speak, read or write. We may say (at least in a particular moment) that they don’t have words. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this mean that they don’t think? 	

* This is the metacognitive language of *Thinking Moves A-Z* by **Dialogue Works**. For more info see <https://dialogueworks.co.uk/thinking-moves/> or ask us about our accredited Thinking Moves Training.

** A list of this language for facilitation accompanies these resources.

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Thinking Space c.i.c.
Public Philosophy Projects

101 Beechwood Road, Sheffield S6 4LQ
info@thinkingspace.org.uk
www.thinkingspace.org.uk

twitter.com/Thinking_Space_
facebook.com/ThinkingSpacePhilosophy
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