

Question Mark

Level A Philosophy Curriculum

Teacher Manual



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Question Mark

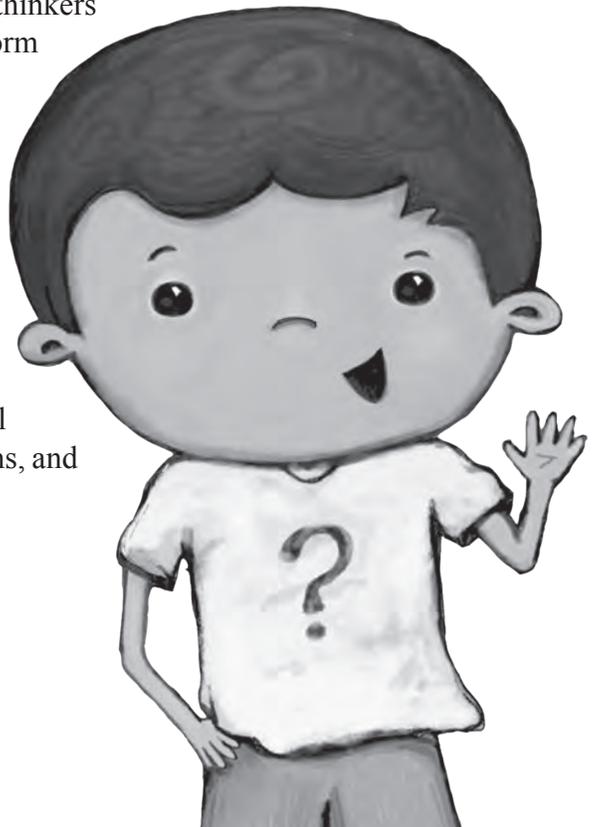
The *Question Mark* book is an introduction to philosophy for intellectually adventuresome children. As the first volume in the Royal Fireworks philosophy curriculum, it is designed to be suitable for young children. It presupposes no prior familiarity with philosophy. It is loosely connected to the second and third volumes in Royal Fireworks' philosophy curriculum.

The *Question Mark* book is less of a textbook and more of a picture book, with mind-opening ideas and activities conveyed through words and images working together. As the instructor, you can think of this volume as a single picture book with fifteen chapters or as a series of fifteen individual picture books that build a single storyline.

The fifteen chapters of the *Question Mark* book fall into three parts, corresponding to the three central philosophical skills we aim to impart: **questioning**, **doubting**, and **being certain**. These are fundamental skills that have inspired great thinkers throughout the history of civilization to build and transform the intellectual world.

You and your student(s) could read one chapter at a sitting. Or you could read one part each day for three days. You could even read the entire book in one day if you make sure to take plenty of breaks for talking and thinking about what you've read.

This instructor manual is a guide that provides for each chapter a summary of the plot developments, a philosophical basis for the key concepts of the chapter, discussion questions, and a suggestion for an activity that the student(s) can do.



PART I: Questioning

Question Mark One.

A deep question: What is reality?

Summary

In the first chapter we meet Mark, a five-year-old boy who is at the beach. He makes shadow puppets with his hands. As he is wondering whether they are real, they come alive.

Philosophical Basis

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato told the Allegory of the Cave in his famous work *The Republic*.

Imagine a group of people watching a shadow-puppet show in a cave. Since they cannot see the puppeteers and have never left the cave, they believe that the shadows are real.

One day, one of the people leaves the cave and learns that the shadows are images of puppets, which in turn are images of the animals that live outside the cave. Amazed, he goes back into the cave to explain his discovery to the others, but they don't believe him, and they refuse to leave because they are enjoying the shadow-puppet show.

Plato used this allegory to argue that there are levels of reality. Most people assume that what they see around them is the whole truth. But according to Plato, what we see around us is just a shadow of the truth. He wrote, "The philosopher is in love with truth, that is, not with the changing world of sensation, which is the object of opinion, but with the unchanging reality which is the object of knowledge." **Philosophers** are the people who search for another level of reality behind what we see.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Mark choose not to make any more shadow puppets? Would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?
2. What is the difference between people and their shadows?
3. Suppose your shadow came alive. What would you say to it? What do you think it might say to you?
4. Make a list of things that are real and a list of things that are not real. How can you tell the difference?

Activity

See how many different shadow puppets you can make. Which ones do you think look real enough to come alive?

Question Mark Two. Another deep question: Do other people see things the same way I do?

Summary

Mark tries to tell his mother about the shadows that came alive, but she dismisses him as tired. This makes Mark wonder whether he and his mother see things differently.

Philosophical Basis

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote that “All human beings by nature desire to know.” He helped Plato establish The Academy, a school for philosophers that is considered to be the first university. At universities people gather to share knowledge and ideas about anything and everything—even if they end up disagreeing about which of those ideas are actually true.

Knowledge starts out as an idea. Through the ages, philosophers have distinguished themselves by striving to come up with new ideas and to understand those who see things differently. A sympathetic and tolerant attitude promotes a healthy atmosphere for debate.

A **debate** is an argument among friends. Plato and Aristotle were the best of friends, even though they argued about almost everything! The eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote that “Truth springs from argument amongst friends.” In order to argue with friends, you have to try to understand how they see things.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever seen something happen that other people think happened in a different way? Explain.
2. If you were Mark, how would you try to prove to your mom that the shadows came alive?
3. Why do you think Mark’s mother decided that Mark needed to rest in the shade?
4. Do you ever see things that other people don’t see? Do you try to tell them about what you’ve seen? If so, do they listen to you?

Activity

Draw a picture of a person you know with a shadow that becomes something else. Why do you think that person’s shadow became what you drew?

Question Mark Three. The difficulty of sharing deep questions with other people

Summary

Mark meets three shadow rabbits with the confusing names of Who, What, and Why. Mark's sister Jenny and his brother Kyle, who can't see the rabbits, accuse Mark of thinking about weird stuff.

Philosophical Basis

The fifth-century Greek philosopher Hypatia said, "Reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all." Hypatia loved to think about all kinds of questions, such as, *Where do thoughts come from?*

Becoming a philosopher has been difficult for both men and women throughout history. The philosopher's job is to think about things in new ways. This can be fun, but it also tends to frighten and anger authorities. Every great philosopher has suffered **persecution** for disturbing the status quo; many have been hurt or killed for refusing to conform to the usual way of thinking. You have to be brave to ask deep questions.



Hypatia was not just a philosopher but also a woman, which made it even harder for her, since women were not allowed to have a career in those days. She tried to run a school for philosophers in Alexandria, Egypt. Though her talent was widely recognized, she was eventually stoned to death by an angry mob.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been afraid of something that you discovered was not frightening after all? Explain.
2. Can you think of any reasons why it might be good to think about weird stuff sometimes, the way Mark does? What are those reasons?
3. Make a list of the weirdest things you can think of. What makes them weird?
4. If you had your best friend's brain, what would you see that is different from what you see now?

Activity

Imagine a conversation between Mark and the three rabbits. Act out the different parts.

Question Mark Six. The difference between a deep question and an ordinary question

Summary

The rabbits ask Mark what question he used for their missing brother's name. Since Mark can't remember, they make suggestions, which Mark rejects as "ordinary" rather than "deep."

Philosophical Basis

John Dewey was the greatest American philosopher of the twentieth century. He was especially concerned with education and contended that traditional schools often deaden rather than stimulate the mind. In his view, "we only think when we are confronted with problems." He believed that children learn by trying to solve problems that are meaningful to them. Such problems might be as ordinary as how to make muffins or as deep as deciding what to deem true.

Dewey developed a view called **pragmatism**, according to which the truth is not universally the same for everyone. Rather, each individual decides what is true for him or her based on what works in that individual's life. Although science is the greatest source of truth because it works so well for so many people so much of the time, it has not answered our deepest questions. According to Dewey: "Man lives in a world of surmise, of mystery, of uncertainties."

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think that Mark didn't remember the fourth rabbit's name?
2. How would you explain to the rabbits what kind of question Mark is trying to remember?
3. What deep question would you have suggested to Mark? What makes your question deep?
4. What do you think is the answer to the question "What is the question?"

Activity

Make a list of possible names for the fourth rabbit that seem likely based on the names of the first three rabbits. Then choose the name you think is best, and pretend that you are Mark and are trying to explain to the rabbits why that name is the correct one.