

Theo Rising

Level B Philosophy Curriculum

Teacher Manual



Sharon Kaye

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Theo Rising is an introduction to philosophy for intellectually adventuresome children. As the second volume in the Royal Fireworks philosophy curriculum, it is designed to be suitable for children in first grade. Because of the perennial appeal of philosophy, however, this volume could be of interest to children of any age. Although it presupposes no prior familiarity with philosophy, it is loosely linked to the first and third volumes in Royal Fireworks' philosophy curriculum.

Theo Rising 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 *Theo Rising* fall into three parts, corresponding to the three central philosophical skills we want children to develop: ***posing an inquiry***, ***examining competing theories***, and ***using a criterion for theory evaluation***. 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 each day for fifteen days. 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 based on Bloom's Taxonomy, and a suggestion for an activity that the student(s) can do.



PART I: Posing an Inquiry

Chapter One. Theo's Deep Question: What Is the Realist Thing that Exists?

Summary

Six-year-old Theo wakes her cat, Athens, to tell him that she is going to create a universe and that the secret to creating a universe is to figure out what the realist thing that exists is.

Philosophical Basis

The word *philosophy* comes from joining the Greek words for love (*phile*) and wisdom (*sophia*). The great ancient philosopher Socrates said, "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us." Socrates's follower, Plato, wrote many dialogues describing Socrates's search for wisdom. These dialogues are the oldest surviving philosophy books.

There were philosophers before Socrates whom we call the Presocratics. Not much is known about them, since their writings have been lost. Nevertheless, we know that they made crucial initial steps in the search for wisdom by trying to explain reality in a natural way.

Prior to the Presocratics, people believed that gods and goddesses caused the world to be the way it is. If there was a lightning storm, for example, they imagined that Zeus was throwing thunderbolts because he was angry. The Presocratics rejected these supernatural myths in favor of careful observation, measurement, and experiment—i.e., science.

Discussion Questions

1. **Remembering**
Why did Theo create room in her closet?
2. **Understanding**
Why do you think Theo has a poster of Socrates on her wall?
3. **Applying**
Give an example of something you created.
4. **Analyzing**
What would make something more real than something else?
5. **Evaluating**
Do you think Theo is correct to suppose that everything in a universe comes from "a little of the most real thing there is"?
6. **Creating**
If you were going to create a universe, what would you use to make it? What would you include, and what would you leave out?

Activity

Theo wants to create an entire universe in the small space of her closet. Draw a picture of what you think a small universe would look like.

Chapter Two. A Related Question: What Is the Universe Made Of?

Summary

Theo explains what she means by her question. She wants to know what the universe is really made of.

Philosophical Basis

The search for a natural explanation of the world led the Presocratics to wonder what reality is made of. They looked around them and noticed many different kinds of things: stars, clouds, trees, rocks, people, shadows, dreams. They sought to identify a single, underlying building material for the universe.

The branch of philosophy dealing with the origin and nature of the world (or the universe as a whole) is **cosmology**. Anaximander was a Presocratic philosopher who wrote a book about cosmology called *On Nature*. Only a few lines of the book have survived, and they are the earliest writing we have about philosophy (sixth century B.C.).

In these famous lines, Anaximander described how all things are related to a single, underlying building material that he called the *apeiron*: “From it all things are generated and also destroyed, according to necessity...over the course of time.”

Discussion Questions

1. Remembering

Theo tells Athens that they will have a job in their new universe. What is it?

2. Understanding

Why is Theo so excited at the beginning of this chapter?

3. Applying

Give an example of a time when you were excited by possibilities. What had happened that made new things possible?

4. Analyzing

Why did Athens jump up on the dresser and point to himself in the mirror?

5. Evaluating

Do you think the universe came from something, or do you think it was simply always there?

6. Creating

If you were Theo, what are some of the possibilities you would be excited about?

Activity

Imagine that everything in the universe was made of something good to eat. Draw a picture showing a scene from that universe, or tell a story about that universe, and be sure to include what everything is made of—for example, marshmallow clouds, cotton candy trees, pizza tables, and peanut butter and jelly sandwich mattresses.

Chapter Three. Ideas Popping into Theories

Summary

When Theo falls asleep, kernels of ideas pop out of her ear. Athens throws them out the window, where they grow into vines. Soon a vine reaches in through the window, grabs Athens, and pulls him away.

Philosophical Basis

The problem with Anaximander's *apeiron* is that it is an invisible power—almost as supernatural as the gods and goddesses he was trying to leave behind. Other Presocratics, therefore, rejected Anaximander's hypothesis. Observing the change in seasons, they identified two basic powers:

1. Humidity, which changes things from dry to wet
2. Temperature, which changes things from cold to hot

They realized that these powers can be combined in four different ways to create “**The Four Elements**” of nature:

1. Dry and cold create earth
2. Cold and wet create water
3. Wet and hot create air
4. Hot and dry create fire

Most Presocratics agreed that earth, water, air, and fire are the basic building blocks of reality. Many were convinced, however, that one of the four had to be the ultimate source of the other three. Four different philosophers—Anaxagoras, Thales, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus—each picked a different element as the ultimate one. As Theo's story progresses, we'll examine each of their theories in turn.

Discussion Questions

1. **Remembering**
What did a vine do to Athens?
2. **Understanding**
Why did Theo climb out the window?
3. **Applying**
Tell about an idea you had while you were asleep. Was it a good idea?
4. **Analyzing**
Why do you think kernels started popping out of Theo's ear?
5. **Evaluating**
Do you think Athens should have awakened Theo? Why or why not?
6. **Creating**
Write a poem about ideas popping out of someone's head. What happens to the ideas after they pop out?

Chapter Six. Theory Two: Water Is the Realist Thing that Exists

Summary

The blue vine theorizes that water is the realist thing that exists. Water can change from liquid to solid to gas. There is more of it on this planet than there is earth, and it is the main ingredient in human beings.

Philosophical Basis

An important problem remained for Anaxagoras's version of *apeiron*: How did it start swirling around? Ingredients cannot mix themselves. To solve this problem, Anaxagoras hypothesized that an intelligent power in the universe, which he called *nous*, must have started stirring the *apeiron* in order to make our universe.

For Thales, Anaxagoras's *nous* was too much like the gods and goddesses that the Presocratic philosophers were trying to leave behind. Thales asserted instead that the "Gods are in all things," by which he meant that the power to move and change must be a natural part of the world, not an outside supernatural force.

Thales came to the conclusion that "all things are from **water**, and all things are resolved into water" on the basis of observing water's life-giving power: "nourishment of all things is moist, and even the hot is created from the wet [i.e., air, which is moist] and lives by it."

Discussion Questions

1. Remembering

The blue vine shows Theo the three forms of water. What are they?

2. Understanding

What does it mean to say that water is dynamic?

3. Applying

When a puddle dries up, where does the water go? How?

4. Analyzing

Do you find the blue vine more convincing than the brown vine? Explain your answer.

5. Evaluating

Scientist Loren Eiseley once said, "If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water." What do you think he meant?

6. Creating

Tell a story in which water goes from a force for good to a force of destruction.

Activity

Roll a paper towel into a long, skinny wick. Place one end in a cup filled with water. Place the other end in an empty cup. What do you think will happen? Wait awhile and see. What is your theory on how this happens?