

# Undergraduates teaching philosophy to elementary students using children's literature: some practical lessons

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## Some General Tips for the Undergraduate Students Leading the Discussions

- **Give the kids a sense of what a discussion of philosophy is all about.**

“The first time we go into a class, we have a general conversation with the children about what’s involved in having a philosophical discussion. We explain to them that philosophy requires them to act differently than they are used to, because they have to think very hard, listen to their classmates even harder, and figure out if they agree or disagree with what has been said as well as to provide reasons for what they think. In addition, we emphasize that philosophy is not so much about saying what you think but why you think it.”

— Wartenberg, Thomas E. (2014). *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature* (Kindle Locations 972-975). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Kindle Edition.

- **Make the questions you ask as concrete and specific as possible.**

*Children are not used to talking in the abstract and theoretical ways that we might in our college courses. So, for example, don't ask, "What is beauty?" Ask instead, "Can you give me an example of something that is beautiful? What makes it that way?"*

- **Prepare several more questions than you think you will be able to ask.**

*It's much better to have too many than not enough!*

- **Don't feel the need to get through a set number of questions, or to work through questions in a particular order.**

*Direct the discussion to the extent that you keep the discussion's focus on philosophical questions, but otherwise let the students' interests, questions, and comments guide the discussion.*

- **Ask questions that prime a descriptive rather than a one-word answer.**

- **While you should be flexible in the way the discussion proceeds, decide in advance what each of the members of your team will be doing during your time with the students.**

- **Arrive early!**

*Make sure you allow plenty of time to get to the school, park (if you are driving), check in at the school office, find the classroom, and get accustomed to the physical environment. Arriving in a rushed state is a good recipe for becoming flustered and distracted during the discussion.*

- **Make an effort to build a connection with students before reading the story— ask them questions and share something about yourself related to the themes of story before beginning to read** (Example: “I am going to be read you a story about a boy who is scared of the dark. How many of you have been scared of the dark? I know, I when I was little...”)
- **Start asking some basic questions as you tell the story to prepare children for the more in-depth questions you will ask during the discussion period.**
- **Follow up on a child’s response and link it to the next question or to something said previously in the conversation** (Don’t just move on, honor the child’s response and use it to deepen or further the conversation.)
- **Enthusiasm is contagious! Be dynamic!**