

PERSONAL IDENTITY AND CHANGE

Issues:

- In what ways do we change during the course of their lives? Which things about us can change, and which stay the same? Is it possible for people to change completely? Does it make sense to say that we are the same person as we were 5 or 10 years ago, or that we will be in the future?

Learning Objectives:

- Children will be able to reflect upon and evaluate essential and non-essential aspects personal identity.
- Children will be able to undertake self-examination to better understand aspects of themselves and others.

Contents:

- Lesson Plan
- Notes and Suggestions
- Resources - Story



Activity	Activity Content	Outcomes
Introduction 3-5 mins	Introduce the theme of change by going around the circle and asking each pupil to give an example of something about him/herself that has changed in the past week. If they struggle to find examples, they might be prompted: Have they recently had a different hair cut? Eaten a different cereal from the one they usually have? Changed their library book? etc.	Reflection
Story 5 mins	Read the story <i>The Penguin Who Became a Polar Bear</i>	Listening
Pair or small group work 5 mins	Ask groups to consider whether Baba is the same at the beginning as at the end of the story. Ask each group to agree upon and write down at least three things (i) that have changed, (ii) that remain the same.	Identifying criteria
Feedback Discussion Evaluation and discussion 5-10 minutes	Ask each group to share their answers with the class. It will be useful to write these down in two columns 'has changed' 'hasn't changed' where they can be seen by all. Once all of the groups have contributed, ask the class to consider whether they want to move some of the features to the other column. They must explain their reasons for doing so. This should open up discussion and debate. Some characteristics may be relocated a number of times, and some may end up being located between columns.	Testing criteria
Group work 5-10 mins	Divide the class into small groups. Explain that, as we don't have a magic lamp to change ourselves into polar bears, we will think about what we <i>can</i> change about ourselves. The task is to discuss and formulate under two headings (i) things that we can change about ourselves, (ii) things about us that cannot change (if they did, we would be somebody else). These should be written down by the group scribe.	Reflecting on and evaluating the criteria for personal identity
Discussion and debate 10-15 mins	Bring the groups back together. Go around the groups asking for one of two examples from each heading. The resulting list of 'essential' and 'non-essential' features should be displayed on cards on the floor or on the whiteboard. These will normally be comprised of physical traits, psychological qualities, and givens, such as a person's name. If you are working with classifications on the floor (the preferred method), explain that those who disagree with a classification may move it into the other group so long as they are able to explain their reasons for doing so. The same trait/characteristic may be moved back and forth several times by different individuals so long as they are able to justify the move. See notes and suggestions	Classification, justification and re-classification
Discussion 5-10 mins	The discussion can be rounded off by asking the class to think of ways in which they would like to change if there were no limits to what we could become. This should allow for the introduction of the concept of radical transformation, for example from tadpole to frog and caterpillar to butterfly. Again the issue can be brought back to the focus of what it is that changes and what remains the same (such that the creature remains the same in spite of radical transformation). This is also a useful place to consider why it is that we would like to make certain changes about ourselves, and of alternative ways of attaining these ends.	Reflection and self-examination.

Notes and Suggestions

The point to stress in considering essential and non-essential aspects, is what it is that makes you the person that you are. Essential characteristics are those things that cannot change and you remain the same person.

It is likely that you will need to add further more significant qualities or properties to the list as the discussion unfolds, such as personality traits and having particular memories. It may be necessary to introduce some basic biology where classes are unaware of the extent to which our bodies (including brain cells) change and are replaced over time.

Extended Activity: Mystery Voices Game.

The rules:-

- Players take it in turns to try and identify the disguised voices of others in the class.
- This first player is chosen by the teacher and must face a wall so as not to see other players. Then the 'mystery voice' players are chosen, one at a time, by the teacher. The 'mystery voice' player then greets the first player in a disguised voice asking how they are. For example if the first player is called Jane they ask "Hello Jane, how are you?"
- The first player must guess who the mystery voice is. They can ask for the mystery voice to repeat their sentence only once and are allowed only one guess for per each mystery voice.
- If the guess is correct, the player with the mystery voice must say so, and then the next mystery voice, who has been chosen by the teacher, has a turn to disguise their voice. If the first player guesses wrong then they return to where the other pupils are and the winning mystery voice faces the wall and becomes the new player one, with the game continuing. If at any time the person facing the wall turns around they automatically lose and must re-join the group.

Questions to think about:

- Is everybody's voice different? Why is this so?
- Would you like to change your own voice?
- Is a person's voice part of who they are?
- What would life be like if everybody had the same voice?

Key Concepts:

Personal Identity: in every day conversations we refer to the self, the individuality of another person (you), or indeed, the individuality of our self (me). It seems that when we use these terms we are pointing at some sort of object that endures through time; that is to say, something that doesn't change but remains the same. In philosophical vocabulary, if two instances of something are in fact the same, we call this an identity. Is it the case that the instances that make up a human life have something running through them that gives them a single identity (and hence we might say that they all belong to the same person). Very famously the philosopher David Hume maintained that there is nothing in human experience that remains the same. If that is right it would seem that the notion of an enduring self – a personal identity – is something of an illusion.

Further Reading:

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Personal Identity (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal>)
- Staying Alive - The Personal Identity Game (<http://www.philosophersnet.com/games/identity.php>)
- Parfit, D. (1971). 'Personal Identity', *Philosophical Review*; Vol. 80: 3-27. Cornell University.
- Locke, J. (1998). 'On Identity and Diversity', *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; Book II Chapter XXVII. Penguin Classics.
- Hume, D (2004). *A Treatise of Human Nature*; Book 1 'Of the Understanding' Part 4 [§6 'Of Personal Identity']. Penguin Classics.

STORY

The Penguin Who Became a Polar Bear

Many miles from here lives a happy young penguin named Baba. Baba lives with his Mother and goes to Penguin School. One summer holiday while his Mother was out shopping for supper, Baba played in the loft. After opening three boxes he found a lamp. Remembering a story his Mother told him one bedtime, Baba rubbed the lamp and magically a genie appeared.



“I can grant you three wishes” said the genie, “but only if you allow me”.

“Why wouldn’t I allow you?” replied Baba.

“Because not all wishes are good”.

‘How can all wishes not be good?’ thought Baba to himself as he allowed the genie to grant him three wishes.

That afternoon, Baba was having fun playing with his kite in the back garden until, oh no, his kite got stuck in a tree.

“If only I could get my kite back” sobbed Baba, because as we all know, penguins cannot fly. Then he remembered the genie earlier that day.

“I know!” Baba exclaimed, “I wish I was a raven!”

Baba then flapped his wings and noticed they had grown in size - he had become a raven! He flew up to the tree and rescued his kite! Baba had so much fun flying in the clouds where no penguin had flown before.



An hour later a loud but distant voice shouted out “BABA! SUPPER!”, it was his Mother!

Baba knew his Mother wouldn’t like the fact that he had changed size and colour so he shouted “I wish I was a little penguin again!” and had a lovely fish supper.

Baba slept so well that night dreaming of his days adventures flying in the clouds but things weren’t so great the next day when Baba went fishing in the pond at the bottom of his garden.

Little penguins only have small beaks so they can’t fish very well.

“I’m so hungry!” said Baba out loud to himself, “if only I could catch these tasty looking fishies, I wish I was a polar bear!”

Baba had used up another wish and changed into a polar bear. At least he could catch fish now though, he caught the biggest, tastiest fish and had the greatest afternoon a little penguin could ever have.

An hour later he heard the same loud and distant voice “BABA! SUPPER!”, it was his Mother again!

Like the day before, Baba shouted “I wish I was a little penguin again!” but he looked at where his little wings should be and saw giant paws with sharp, sharp claws.

Oh no, Baba had used up his three wishes.

Slowly Baba went back to his Mother’s house and SLAM the door shut in his face.

“Mother” it’s me cried the poor polar bear.

Mother never believed that the scary looking polar bear was her son and turned the key in the door, never ever letting Baba in again.

