

## Open and Closed Questions & the Agree/Disagree Game

### Issues:

- Understanding the role and importance of open questions in philosophical and other forms of inquiry.
- Understanding the role of disagreement in discussion and debate?

### Learning Objectives:

- Children will be able to classify questions as open or closed, and be able to formulate their own open questions as a basis for discussion.
- Children will be able to justify their claims by giving reasons to support what they believe, and to disagree with one another in a reasoned and polite manner.

### Contents:

- Lesson plan
- Notes and Suggestions
- Resources     Agree/Disagree cards  
                    Open questions  
                    Open and Closed cards



Lesson plan

Activity	Activity Content	Aim
<p>Introduction</p> <p>10 mins</p>	<p>Introduce open and closed questions by posing some sample questions to the class, for example,            CLOSED: How many days in a week? What is 130+100? What is the capital of England?            OPEN: What is love? Can computers think? What makes us happy?            Ask for answers to the questions and point out the correlation between the answers. i.e. the closed questions will get the same answer from everyone whereas the open ones will elicit a range of responses.            Ask a closed question to which we may not know the answer. For example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many children are in school today?</li> <li>• When did the Universe begin?</li> </ul> <p>Point out that even if we don't know the answer to these questions they are still judged to be closed, because there is only one answer regardless of whether we know it or not.</p> <p>Explain that open questions are the kind we are interested in, because these can be debated, and tend to lead to interesting discussions. We might discuss how to establish the truth of a closed question, but there is not much room for discussion beyond this.</p>	<p>Understanding open and closed questions.</p> <p>Definitions and examples</p>
<p>Small group work</p> <p>Feedback and group</p> <p>10 mins</p>	<p>Ask groups to think of one closed question and two open questions. Go around the groups and ask them to share their questions. These can be written on a board or on paper on the floor. Ask for clarifications where appropriate and invite challenges where a question may have been mis-classified.</p> <p>For higher level classes you may want to make the distinction between debate questions and imaginative ones (see Notes and Suggestions).</p>	<p>Formulating open and closed questions</p>
<p>Game: Agree/Disagree</p> <p>Group work</p> <p>Presentation</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>Decisions</p> <p>20+ mins</p>	<p>Select or vote on which of the open questions is likely to be most interesting to debate and turn it into a statement.</p> <p>Use this statement to conduct an agree/disagree game            Divide the class into groups in accordance with whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Ask each group to think of the best three reasons to justify their position. (Appointing a scribe and organiser can help to speed up this process.)</p> <p>Ask the groups to share their points. The "agree" should go first. Once the arguments have been presented, individual children may challenge any of the points by either 'agreeing' or 'disagreeing' with it, and giving their reasons for doing so. (There is no need to remain in the prescribed teams for this part of the exercise).</p> <p>When the major points and disagreements have been aired, ask everyone to stand and take the opportunity to re-think their original decision in the light of the points made. Pupils may then move to the opposite side should they wish to do so.</p>	<p>Constructing and presenting an argument</p> <p>Offering challenges and defences</p> <p>Re-evaluation</p>
<p>Thinking time.</p> <p>5 mins</p>	<p>Take a few minutes to discuss what points were the most powerful and persuasive. This is most important if a number of students have switched sides.</p> <p>The value of being able to re-evaluate and change your mind should be stressed as a positive thing to do.</p> <p>Take some time also to point out the value of disagreement in making it possible to examine our positions in more detail by putting them to the test.</p>	<p>Reflection</p>

## Notes and Suggestions

Open and closed questions can sometimes be confusing, go slowly and ensure that everyone seems clear before moving on. It may be useful to use an explanation such as “Open questions are open to discussion whereas closed questions cannot really be argued debated about so are closed to discussion”

Children may readily come up with open questions that are imaginative in nature, for example, ‘What would happen if we could fly? These sorts of questions can be distinguished from the kind of open questions sought after here, as they lead only to speculation. They may be of great use in creative exercises, but do not require the kind of justification that is the basis for debate.

Advanced game.

This game can also be played very effectively by having an ‘undecided’ group in the middle of the room, with the ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ teams at either end. The undecided group should move either towards or away from the ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ teams, in accordance with how convincing their arguments are. The more convincing, the closer they should move to that team. It is recommended that this version of the game replace the basic form above once the class are familiar with the exercise.

When doing an “agree / disagree” game it is essential that you do not disclose your own opinion, as this will bias the class.

### Key Concepts:

Being able to identify and formulate open and closed questions is a key stage in developing the ability to engage in philosophical inquiry, and to exploring the fundamental concepts, values and issues that underpin all disciplines and subject areas. Philosophical issues are, by their very nature, open to debate and most (not all) philosophical questions are thus “open”. Some thinkers argue that questions that are closed in nature belong to the physical and social sciences and have no place in philosophy, but this is debatable. If a class “solves” a philosophical question by coming to complete agreement on an issue, then they have ceased doing philosophy. Should this occur, it is worth returning to the topic several weeks later to discover if anyone has changed their mind, which will invariably have happened and the issue will once again become of philosophical interest.

### Further Reading:

- On Open and Closed Questions:  
[http://www.changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/open\\_closed\\_questions.htm](http://www.changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/open_closed_questions.htm)
- On Philosophy and methodology  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/philosophy/whatis.shtml>

**I AGREE**

**because...'**

**I DISAGREE**

**because...'**

## Resources

## Open questions

Below is a list of open question that can be used for the Open/Closed question game and for any future discussions the class might have, and may serve as a model to invent your own questions.

- How can you tell that someone is really your friend?
- Is it possible to have a race with others that is fair?
- What is the difference between a secret and a lie?
- Is there ever a time when it's not wrong to steal?
- At what age do we start thinking?
- Is it possible to be happy all of the time?
- Does your name make you who you are?
- Does everyone have the same rights as each other?
- What is imagination?
- Can you be kind to everyone?
- Can computers think?
- Is it possible to always be good and never bad?
- Are sweets better than vegetables?
- Are we dreaming right now?
- What's the most important thing in life?
- Should you get rewards for doing well in school?
- Should everyone *have to* give to charity?
- Is playing games is better than working hard?
- What makes something true?
- Are girls smarter than boys?
- Are boys stronger than girls?
- Is it possible to lie to yourself?
- Can we think about nothing?
- Are you same person that you were when you were born?
- Should we always listen to each other's opinions?
- Is it wrong to criticise another person's opinion?
- If we all think something is true, does that mean it's true?
- What makes you who you are?
- What does a newborn baby think about?
- What makes a good friend?

**OPEN  
QUESTION**

**CLOSED  
QUESTION**