

**Alien
Adventures
in
Philosophy**

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Optional build-up activities for Alien Adventures in Philosophy

Philosophy for children (P4C) is a terrific way for children to develop their thinking and communication skills and tackle big questions of their own choosing. Teachers usually really enjoy it too, but they often struggle to put it into practice because it's a different way of working and schemes of work are thin on the ground. Alien Adventures in Philosophy is a "philosophy in role" scenario, developed for introducing P4C through an interactive frame-story that links together a variety of philosophical and problem solving episodes.

I usually start with groups from scratch on the day, but if you can do these activities first it will help to build excitement and anticipation and start to develop the skills your young philosophers will be exercising. The activities could be run on separate days, or together. Text in italics is for you. Non-italic text is meant to be read to the children, but if you enjoy storytelling, it's even better if you put it into your own words. They run in a sequence, but it doesn't matter if you only do all, none or just the first one: I can pick up from wherever you are at.

Thanks to Professor Jason Howard of Viterbo University for inspiration, and to Rod Cunningham, Christine Easom and the staff of Middleton and Peasehall schools for ideas for many of these activities.

ACTIVITY 1: Setting the Scene & Drawing Planets and Aliens

This is mainly a quick activity to build anticipation, but is a good opportunity for stretching the imagination and can generate some confident talk.

Next week, someone is going to visit us to do some philosophy. If you know anyone called "Sophie" or "Sophia", their name means "wisdom" in Greek. [Check understanding of "wisdom"] "Philosophy" means "love of wisdom" and philosophers have been asking difficult, juicy questions for hundreds of years – questions like:

Where did the universe come from?
Can you think without using words?
Can it ever be right to lie? Could a machine ever have feelings?

[If anyone has any answers to any of these questions, be prepared to take an opportunistic detour to explore them!]

You are going to be doing your philosophy in a special way, because you are going to be doing it in outer space!

It's the year 2500. Travel has become so fast and cheap that you have already seen the most interesting places on earth. So you and a small band of brave philosophers set off to explore the galaxy in search of intelligent life and a new planet to call your own.

On each planet that you visit, you will meet...aliens. Some will have problems they want you to solve, and sometimes the aliens themselves will be your problem. Some will be friendly, some won't. And if something goes wrong with your spaceship, you'll be a long way from home, so you'll have to repair it yourselves.

You will need all your powers of thinking, inventing, and working together to succeed.

Before you can get started, you're going to need some planets to visit and some aliens to meet.

Half the class/one in each pair should draw aliens, the other half planets. Encourage imagination and weird and wonderful names. Usually I only have time for quick pencil drawings but I'm sure this would be an engaging art task. Reserve these for use on the day I visit. If you notice any aliens that have many arms, keep them handy. You could use the pictures as an opportunity for writing describing the planet or alien, perhaps like an entry in a Lonely Planet guide.

ACTIVITY 2 – Choosing a final destination

This is an activity about giving reasons, and changing your mind in response to the reasoning of others.

You need to decide which sort of planet you want to head towards as your final destination. It's got to be somewhere that you could make into a home. There are three planets that have not been claimed by intelligent life forms yet. One is a warm planet covered in jungle. One is a watery planet spotted with desert islands. The third is very similar to earth's moon.

I'm going to put out three sheets with different places on them, and you've got to decide which would be the best place to live and why. You need to think of your **BEST REASON** for choosing that one. I'm going to put them on the floor, and I want you to go and stand by the one you think would be the best place to live. So, would you rather live on a planet covered in jungle, full of desert islands, or one that was like the moon?

It's a good idea to ask them not to move until they have decided on a best reason for their choice (avoids sheeping).

Once they've decided, start asking them for the reasons for their choices. Get them to notice that people have different reasons for the same opinion. See if anyone agrees or disagrees with any of the reasons given. After you have heard some reasons and responses, see if anyone wants to change their mind, and find out why.

Then start throwing in extra information, e.g.

What if there were plenty of things to eat in the jungle?

What if there were plenty of things to eat you in the jungle?

What if I said it was always summer on the desert islands?

What if I said there was gold on the moon-like planet?

Each time you change the scenario, it's likely that some people will move and others will not. This gives further opportunities for showing how some people find some reasons more convincing than others, that people disagree and that disagreeing is OK – in fact it makes things interesting.

You can keep varying the scenario in response to the reasons the children give. Then there are a few directions you can take this in: you can make it an exploration of making fair decisions – how should you decide which one to head for? What about the people who thought differently?

Or you could broaden it out as an imaginative task, giving them the option of going further out into space to seek undiscovered planets, and asking them to come up with a list of criteria for a suitable planet. When you feel you have got as much out of the activity as you can, finish it with:

Well done! Now that you've decided what sort of final destination you want to travel towards, you're nearly ready for take-off. In the next part of your mission, you'll meet your spaceship. It's very advanced but be warned – it has a mind of its own.

ACTIVITY 3 - The Cowardly Spaceship

It's now time for the group to take over their spaceship ready for their voyage. This activity touches on a whole range of thinking skills: exploring meanings, giving examples, making comparisons; and it builds the turn taking and listening skills or collaborative thinking that are important for P4C to work.

Now that you have decided where you are headed, it's time for you to go and meet your spaceship and say hello to it. Your spaceship is waiting on the launch pad, freshly repainted in the colours you asked for.

You stand there for a moment, admiring this magnificent transport. But you are a little surprised that the ship has not let down the steps and welcomed you. After an awkward silence, one of you coughs and says, "Er. Good morning, could you let us in, please?"

A small hatch opens, and a loudspeaker pokes out from it. "No!" says the spaceship.

"Why not?" you ask.

"I've heard what you want to do, zooming off across the galaxy to goodness knows where. You have no idea what dangerous worlds there are out there. We could get crushed by a comet, or sucked into a black hole, or I could get taken apart by androids and sold as spares! I was quite happy taking tourists to the moon until you bought me. This isn't my sort of thing at all."

"Well, you'll just have to be brave," you say, feeling slightly put-out that you

have spent a lot of money on a machine that is being so difficult.

"Being brave wasn't part of my programming," says the spaceship. "I have some idea what it means, but I'm not at all convinced it's a good thing. So unless you can explain to me what real bravery is and why it's a good thing, I'm not going anywhere. You can cut off my power supply, but I'm staying put!"

The philosophers now need to have a discussion exploring what bravery is and why it's important. Effectively, it's what we would call in P4C an "enquiry". This is just a dress rehearsal, if you like, so it doesn't have to be especially deep or prolonged. Here are suggestions for organising it:

Crucially, everyone needs to be sat in a circle so that they can all see and respond to one another.

Tell them that you are going to be playing the part of the spaceship: so it's no good asking you the answer. They have to work it out for themselves, and when the spaceship feels it understands what bravery is, and why it's a good thing, it will open the doors and let them on board.

To start with, get them to discuss their ideas in small groups. You could give them the prompt of thinking of examples of bravery. Then have hands up to hear their ideas.

After the first person has spoken, remind them that you are being the spaceship (and not a teacher!), so you can't choose who speaks next. Each person that speaks has to choose the next one by calling out the name of someone who has a hand up. To be fair, they should try to choose people who haven't spoken yet. This is a simple but important change that shifts their focus from expecting answers from you, the "sage on the stage" to the group enquiring together with you as a "guide on the side".

At any time, you as the voice of the spaceship can intervene to ask questions, make connections between things that have been said, and keep them motivated by commenting on things that

now makes sense to you and what is still puzzling.

Every enquiry is different, and there are competing reasonable answers to the question, so just follow the flow of the discussion and throw in some of these questions or ones of your own where they seem appropriate.

Some questions you might use:

Can you think of some stories where the characters were brave?

Do you have to be strong to be brave?

Do you have to face danger to be brave?

Can a bad person be brave? What about someone fighting on the wrong side in a war?

Do you have to fight to be brave? Can it be brave not to fight?

How do you become brave if you don't think you are?

Are you more brave if you are scared and still do something, or if you do something without being scared?

Is carrying on fighting if you know you can't win brave or stupid?

Why are people who are brave treated as heroes?

Is it better to be brave? Could it sometimes be better not to be?

What would the world be like if there were no brave people?

What would the world be like if there were more brave people?

If you have anyone who is very sharp and has been listening very carefully to the scenario, they might suggest that the spaceship has already been brave by refusing to do what it's told.

Once you feel they have had a good go at explaining (and understanding for themselves)

what bravery is and why it's a good thing, sum up for the spaceship and set up the story for the next episode. It's best if you can reflect a few of the things that have been said, and also uncertainties that remain. Something like:

“Well, I still don't feel terribly brave myself, and I'm still scared about going on this trip, but you've convinced me that I can be brave and scared at the same time, and that it's worth trying to be brave. So I'm going to be as brave as I can, and let you on board to start your adventure.”

I hope you find these activities useful and interesting and I look forward to meeting you and your class. I'll bring some other episodes with me that you can use to continue the adventure if you so choose. Don't be concerned if you feel your class haven't said that much, or have gone round in circles: it's a different way of working and it takes time for you and them to get used to it, but even having a go for five minutes will give help you get more out of the session I run. You are welcome to email me at jb@outspark.org.uk or ring 07843 555355 with any questions.

INTERLUDE & EPISODE 1 – Pleased to eat you

This episode is the only one I recommend is always used. It includes details of the take-off and landing ritual which is a good way to book-end the sessions. The central philosophical questions is “What makes human beings special?” as approached via an encounter with man-eating aliens. There’s a lot more to read and a lot more guidance than there will usually be – don’t panic that there will be this much preparation in the future, it’s just to get you started.

There are some actions and sound effects for taking off and landing etc. that help to build up atmosphere and enthusiasm, and also become the signal for getting the children into a different frame of mind ready to philosophise. What I provide here is a verbatim script of what I say, which I find works well, but feel free to have your own routine.

*It is **meant** to be a bit silly and to get the children a bit overexcited. Some noise and laughter releases tension and brings everyone together. It “sells” the whole activity to the children, and in any case why on earth shouldn’t you all enjoy a bit of fun? “Mix a little silliness with your serious plans. It’s good to have a little foolishness in the right place.” (Horace, 1600 years Before OFSTED).*

You’re finally ready for departure. You’re seated in your positions for launch. You take a final look out of the window and wave goodbye to earth. Now you need to make sure you are securely attached to your seats. Grip on to your chair with both hands. As we take off, we’ll start with a quiet hum which will get louder and louder.

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm
mmmmmm

Once you have reached maximum volume, start shaking your chair as you say

And you’re off, and you’re rising higher and higher above the earth...and now the atmosphere thins and all goes quiet and peaceful... and now you’ve escaped from earth’s gravity, and you float weightlessly out of your chairs... and now the artificial gravity generator kicks in and you’re sucked back to your seat.

Now, it’s a long way to your first planet, and you don’t want to spend the next 200 years playing “I spy” in space. It gets rather boring. Let’s have a go. I spy with my little eye, something beginning with “s”. Yes that’s, right, star.

So instead you’re going to go into suspended animation. Get yourselves into a pose, and then when I click my fingers, you’re going to be frozen like that for 200 years. Ready? *[click fingers]* so, 200 years pass by as you sail through space, passing comets and stars and asteroids. Now you’re getting close to the first planet on your journey, so when I click my fingers again you’ll yawn and stretch as if you are waking up from a deep sleep. Ready? *[click fingers and yawn and stretch yourself]*

Now it’s time to land on the surface of Gondogoxergax, your first planet. As you come in to land, we’ll start off with a very high pitched sound, then it will get deeper and deeper until you touch the surface of the planet and the doors open with a swishing sound. Ready? *[hold your fingers high in the air and make a high-*

pitched whine. As you move your hand down, take the sound as deep as you can, then use your hands to indicate the doors opening, with a tssssssssshhhh sound.]

You go down the steps of your spaceship, eager to see this new world. You take your first breath of the sweet alien air, which smells a bit like toffee, and look around. All over the planet, you can see tall purple cactuses. And walking towards you, you can see a group of aliens that look very happy. They come up to you and, since they have eight arms each, it only takes a few of them to shake hands with all of you. As they shake your hands, they say, "Hello! We're so pleased to eat you."

You think, "Oh, bless them, they don't understand English very well." So in the way people do when they are travelling abroad, you say very slowly and loudly, "No, no. You... mean...pleased...to...MEET...you."

And the aliens look you up and down and say, "Oh no. There's nothing wrong with our English. We definitely mean, pleased to EAT YOU!" And with that, they use their many strong arms to tie you hand and foot to the purple cactuses! Oo! Ouch! They start sharpening their knives, and discussing what sauce to have with you.

In the middle, between the cactuses you are tied to, is what looks like a huge spa bath, the sort a rock star would have in his house. Only this bath is soon going to be much too hot to be comfortable. At the moment, it's a nice,

warm 30 degrees. When it reaches 100 degrees, it will be boiling hot and ready to cook you.

So, now, speak to the person at the cactus next to you and decide how you think you are going to escape!

[While they get their thoughts together, have a well-deserved breather after your hectic bit of narration. In the discussion you are about to have, you should use the "pass it on" protocol described in Activity 3.

The aim of this phase of the enquiry is to get as many children to contribute as possible, overcoming shyness and getting the whole class working together as a team. At the moment, they are engaged in deliberation dialogue – making decisions for action. This is a more familiar and accessible form of dialogue than philosophical enquiry dialogue, so it's a good way to warm up.

None of their ingenious escape suggestions will work, because it's their philosophical skills that will eventually win the day, but acknowledge their ideas and enjoy their imagination. Make it up as you go along – they are! But by way of example, here are some of the most common attempts and the responses I give:

Cut the ropes on the spikes of the cactuses – Good idea. But although they're sharp enough to hurt you, they're not sharp enough to cut the rope.

Wriggling out of the ropes – the knots are too tight. There are lots of cub scouts on this planet.

Kicking the aliens in the knackers – these aliens have the sense to store all their tender bits in places you can't get at them

Overpower them – they have more and stronger arms than you do

Fart horribly – the aliens are going to eat bits of you you don't even know you've got, so they're not going to be put off by a nasty niff

Pretend you're poisonous – the aliens know that if your meat is fresh and well-cooked, you're not going to catch anything from it... and you're going to be very fresh and very, very well-cooked.

Threats that earth will send an avenging army – excellent! All those meaty soldiers to capture with our superior technology.

You may also get arguments that begin to move it towards the rights and wrongs of eating people.

If you let us go we'll bring back lots of others – if it's OK to eat some humans, surely it must be OK to eat all humans, including you (and they don't trust you)

Eat something else – they could survive by eating purple cactuses, but we'd get bored. Just like you could survive without eating meat. We just like the way you taste.

When you feel that they have had a good chance to try escape strategies, move the discussion onto an ethical plane by using this bit of script

While you continue to rack your brains for ways to escape, one of the aliens comes up to *[pick a child]* and says. "Erm. You are looking rather delicious, and I'm really looking forward to eating you. I'm so bored of cactus. The only thing is, when we had an earthling to dinner once before, just before we boiled him, he shouted out, 'Don't do it! Eating human beings is wrong!' But we never got to find out why he thought it was wrong, because ... we ate him. But it gave me indigestion thinking about it. So if you can convince us that eating people is wrong, we'll let you go. And if you can't then at least I won't get indigestion this time."

So, it looks like all your other attempts to escape are going to be unsuccessful. To survive and continue your adventure, you're going to have to convince the aliens that it's wrong for them to eat you – the sort of thing that should be a crime. Talk to the person at the next cactus and see what's the

best reason you can find that eating humans is wrong.

Once they have had a chance to gather their thoughts, go back to the format of passing on the discussion across the circle, intervening from time to time as the alien spokething to give a reaction to what they have said, ask questions, be puzzled, point out inconsistencies and so on.

You will probably find that some children will remain fixed on coming up with James Bond plans to engineer an escape by non-philosophical means, but reemphasise that no such plans are going to work – they must argue their way out.

You can put the problem into sharper focus for them by using the following bit of script at an opportune moment:

While you are trying to convince the aliens not to eat you, one of them has been going through the belongings of ... And he finds a lunch box, with some special treats ... has been saving to eat on his first planet to remind him of home. And in the box is a plastic bag. And in the bag is a sandwich. And inside the sandwich is... a fat, pink piece of moist, juicy ham. And the alien looks at it, and says, "This came from a pig, didn't it? And I don't suppose the pig wanted to die. So, if it's OK for you to eat this, it must be OK for us to eat you!" And he licks his lips and sharpens his knives.

So you need to come up with something that makes people special, and means that it's not OK to eat you even if it's OK to eat meat from other creatures.

You can also let them know that the aliens don't eat each other – they would think that was gross. If they cross-examine you on it, you may need to be vague and say you've never really thought about it.

Some of the things they might pick out that make humans important are speech, intelligence, being able to make things, emotions, being individuals, making plans, giving each other names, knowing right from wrong.

There may also hit on the idea that the aliens wouldn't like it if humans ate them, so they shouldn't eat humans – but as with various other points, you can retort (as an alien) that you wouldn't like it if a pig ate you, but that doesn't stop you eating a pig.

You're looking all the time for follow up questions, and ways to get them to go deeper – like using "second why".

e.g. "Why shouldn't we eat you?" "You shouldn't eat us because we're more intelligent." "Why is that important?"

We weren't made to be eaten – OK, we won't eat you (hurrah!) – we'll eat your children instead.

The pig was already dead, we're not. – But someone had to kill the pig so you could eat it.

I'm a vegetarian! – The aliens can run a test on you to see if it's true – if it is, maybe they'll let you go – why?

We're at the top of the food chain – No, we're at the top of the food chain.

You're not looking for one specific answer – just for the group to build on each other's ideas and come up with some plausible answers. In particular, at this stage, you're looking for participation: you can be more rigorous in making sure they think hard later on – now, you want to get them enjoying working together in this format, and getting used to passing the discussion fairly across the circle.

When you feel they've made a good effort, and before the discussion runs into the sand, go to "last words".

The water is at 98 degrees now, so it's your chance for some last words before you find out if you're going to be boiled alive or allowed to continue your adventure. Talk to the person next to you for half a minute, and then we'll go

round the circle one last time and give everyone the chance to speak if they want to.

If you don't have anything you want to say at the moment, you can just say "pass". But if you have a reason why it's wrong to eat people, or you want to remind the aliens of a good reason you heard earlier, now's your chance. We'll just go round once, and try and keep it short and sweet.

Last words are, for me, an important part of the ritual of doing philosophy with children: it's often the time when people sum things up in a good formula, or when children who haven't spoken much show they have been thinking by contributing some new insight. Just go round clockwise or anticlockwise, and if you're one of these pedagogical superheroes who can remember six things at once, start just before a child who lacks confidence so that they can remind people of a well-rehearsed argument before someone else does. After last words, recall some of the arguments that have impressed the aliens and bring it to a close, for example.

The water is now at 99 degrees. The aliens go into a huddle, with all their many arms tangled together. Some of them look angry and some of them look confused. Eventually, they turn back to you, and one of them says.

"All this talk about eating has made us really hungry. And you do all look quite delicious. However, we've heard what you have had to say, and some of your reasons for us not to eat you seem to be good ones. You are more like us than we first thought – you too have emotions, and make plans, and have families that would miss you if we ate you just as our families would miss us.

Interlude 2 – The Intergalactic Sphinx Competition

Bring them back out of suspended animation.

You are approaching your next planet [choose one of the children's planets and describe it a little] when your spaceship slows, slooows, sloooooooows... and stops. Before you can ask the computer what's wrong, you hear an announcement as though an enormous loudspeaker is just outside the window.

"Welcome to the intergalactic sphinx competition, the annual festival of riddles and teasers to pain the brain. Let me tell you the rules.

We will give you three brainteasers.

If you refuse to participate, we will pulverise you. If you fail to guess any of the answers, we will vaporise you. If you try to escape, we will pulverise you and then vaporise you.

If you have heard one of our brainteasers before and you answer it without having to think, we will disenvogulise you. And you don't want to find out what that means. So don't call out if you have heard it before.

If you can guess all three answers, we will not pulverise you, vaporise you or disenvogulise you., but will send you on your way with a friendly wave.

Ready? Here is your first teaser:"

With all these teasers, check first if anyone has heard them before, and ask them to sit and watch their friends puzzling. Have each guesser choose the next.

"A black man drives a dark car down a lane surrounded by trees. His headlights aren't working and there are no streetlamps. There is no moon. A black sheep crosses the road. He still hits the brakes and stops the car in time. How is this possible?"

Possible clues are: think of the picture you have in your mind. Is there anything in your picture that you have made up for yourself, but I haven't said; how does he see what's happening.

"A father and his son are out driving. The old man loses control and the car hits a tree. The father is killed instantly, and the boy is taken to hospital. When he gets there, he is taken straight into the operating theatre. The surgeon arrives, takes one look at the boy and says, 'I cannot operate in this child, he is my son.' How is this possible?"

Clues – what does the surgeon look like. Sure?

"A man is put into a prison cell that has no doors and no windows. In the morning, he has escaped. How?"

If you prefer something none of them will have heard, try this riddle:

"I can save people's lives, and I can kill them. I can lift up the strongest man, but the weakest child can push right through me. What am I?"

You might use the opportunity to get them telling some of their own brainteasers, or suggest they do so later once they are out of danger. How many clues you give and how easily is up to you.

"Bravo. You have solved three of our most fiendish brainteasers, and are free to go." They send you off with a friendly wave, but it soon falls behind.

Episode 2 – Alien Inheritance

RESOURCES – One activity here is to be done in groups of 4-6 pupils. You will need a complete set of alien inheritance sheets ALBERT, BERTHA etc. for each group, and to take a stack of 15 post-it notes and cut them so that each group has 15 strips of post-it note they can distribute around their sheets.

You're now ready to land on the planet. (Go through the landing routine from Activity 3).

Once again, some aliens are here to greet you. This time, they are moving quite slowly, as if they are feeling sad. One of the aliens introduces herself.

“It is a shame that you are visiting our planet at such a sad time. Our richest and most famous couple, the 15765s, have just been killed in a terrible accident. They were having dinner in their favourite restaurant, and it turned out the fish wasn't cooked properly. It swallowed both of them in a single gulp.”

“Nonetheless, you maybe able to help me. Their death was so unexpected that they had not made a will to say how they wanted their vast fortune to be shared between their children. So as the supreme judge of our people, it is my job to decide. I am worried that whatever I do, some of the children will think I have been unfair, and people will accuse me of taking bribes to give some of them more than they deserve. Will you help me?”

If they are reluctant to take up the challenge, the supreme justice will point out their spaceship is parked on the lawn of the supreme court, and has already been clamped.

“We have a saying on our planet that four minds are better than two, as each of us has two minds to begin with. So I'd like you to get into four/five/six groups and for each group to make up its own mind about what would be fair.”

“These are the ten children. You must decide how big a share each should get, or if some of them should get nothing at all.”

Read out each card, checking they understand along the way. Then explain that each group will have a set of cards, and 15 post-it note bits each representing a billion spondoolicks, the local currency. They have to stick the post-it notes onto the alien sheets to show who should get what and whether anyone gets nothing at all. After everyone has finished, they will be asked to explain their decision and why they think it is fair.

Practical questions that come up: yes, they can split the slips; no, they don't have to give some to everyone; yes, they can do other things with the money; no, they can't pocket it themselves.

The best general structure for this activity is for groups to reach their own decisions, then report back, and then be invited to ask questions of other groups.

“We have a saying on our planet, ‘The truth is a nut, not a fruit.’ [You could see if they can guess what is meant by that] We mean that it is not something you can get at easily: you have to break it open, by arguing and challenging one another's ideas. It is not unfriendly to disagree with one another, for you are all friends of the truth. So, please, begin: would one of you question another and ask why they have said differently to you.”

ALBERT & BERTHA – The straightforward biological son and daughter. If the others are

given equal shares, why might they feel aggrieved? Would they be right to?

ALBERT II – The clone. Is he the same person as Albert? If he is given less, are they being “clonist?”

BERTHA II – The computer copy. Can a computer never be a person? Or does she need the money more because she is depressed?

CHARLES - The transplanted brain. Is a person in their brain, or their whole body?

DAVID – The amnesiac. Are you the same person if you can't remember who you are? Does it make a difference that didn't recognise his father?

ETHAN 1 OR B – The one who remained at home. Is he the “real” Ethan? Is there something you could never copy in this way?

ETHAN 2 OR A – The one who appeared at the destination. Should he and the other Ethan have half a share each? Is he the one who is meant to be there, and the other Ethan is “a mistake”?

FRED – The mail order replacement. Is it wrong for a child to be “ordered” in this way? Even if it is, is that his fault?

GERTRUDE – The computerised favourite child. Can a computer ever have feelings? Should you take the parents' wishes into account?

Principles

These are some of the principles that can be uncovered to justify different distributions.

Equality - Some groups may interpret fairness as equality and split the inheritance equally.

Safety net – some may give a little to each, so they can afford to live, and share out the rest

Relatedness - Others may work on a principle of relatedness – privileging the biological children.

Categorising – some may only count biological children

Needs – giving more to those that need it most (the amnesiac, the depressed computer)

Respect for the dead vs. the good of society – should they just guess what the couple would

have wanted, or should they make a decision based on what is best for society.

Some groups get interested in the questions of personal identity it raises, others are more into the issues of fairness that arise.

Be alert to deeper questions that arise and that take the discussion to a more general level, and be prepared to follow trails where they lead – but also to bring it back to the task in hand if many of the children are getting lost. This activity is about justifying a point of view, and being prepared to change it. Ask if people have changed their minds in response to anything they have heard, and acknowledge their reasons for doing so.

They don't have to reach a consensus. In fact, if they reach one too easily without really thinking about it, adopt the role of one of the disgruntled offspring who they would disinherit, or who is only being given an equal share when he or she feels they deserve more.

You could also use this as an opportunity to record some big questions to go in a question book as examples for future P4C sessions that are more open.

Once you are satisfied that they have made a good effort, and that the activity has squeezed as much thinking from them as it can, sum up for the alien supreme justice, recalling what they have said and finishing with.

“You have shown that you can change your minds when you see a good reason, but that you do not all rush to agree with whoever was last to speak. We have a saying on our planet: a mind that never changes is like a stone in the mud. A mind that never stays the same is like a straw in the wind. A mind that changes with good reason is like a boat steered by a good captain. Thank you and good luck!”

ALBERT

BIOLOGICAL SON

ALBERT II

A flesh and blood copy (CLONE) of Albert. All his memories, feelings at time of cloning were the same as Albert's but they have since developed different interests.

BERTHA

BIOLOGICAL DAUGHTER

BERTHA II

COMPUTER COPY of biological daughter, Bertha. All her thoughts at the time of copying were the same as Bertha's, but not having a physical body has made Bertha II depressed.

CHARLES

The TRANSPLANTED BRAIN of their second biological son, put into a specially grown body after a car accident

DAVID

BIOLOGICAL SON WITH TOTAL MEMORY LOSS. After he was bitten by a poisonous sheep David suffered total amnesia about his life before the attack. He has been told he is their son, but has no memory of it at all.

ETHAN 1 OR B

Biological son Ethan was being teleported to another planet at the start of his gap year. This body REMAINED ON THE HOME PLANET after he appeared at his destination.

ETHAN 2 OR A

Biological son Ethan was being teleported to another planet at the start of his gap year. He APPEARED ON THE DESTINATION PLANET but his body on the home planet also remained in the booth.

FRED

**MAIL ORDER REPLACEMENT
of a son who drowned in a pool
of vinegar. Ordered from a
catalogue and grown in a
laboratory to the parents'
specification.**

GERTRUDE

**COMPUTERISED CHILD,
artificially intelligent, always
did as she was told (she had
been programmed to do so)
and the favourite of the parents**

Interlude 3 – Diminishing Mexican Wave

After taking off from the previous planet or waking up from suspended animation, you decide to have a celebration: a diminishing Mexican Wave.

This works a bit like an ordinary Mexican wave, except that each time it goes round, the actions get smaller and smaller.

It's a combined livener/concentrator. The idea is that by the final actions, the whole group are looking carefully around the circle to see exactly what to do and when the wave gets to them. It gets them used to looking around the circle and inured to being the centre of attention.

I usually go from standing and lifting my arms in the usual way, to putting my hand on my nose, closing the fingers together, and then lifting my little finger up – but do whatever you like as long as the motions get smaller and require more concentration.

Episode 3 – Friends

As you finish your celebration, you notice a quiet sniffing sound. It gets louder and louder until it's a deafening wail, and you notice that the whole ship is shaking. You realise that it's the spaceship's computer. Naturally, you ask it what's the matter.

“It's just seeing you all enjoying yourselves. It makes me feel terribly sad and lonely because I don't have any friends. I don't think anyone would want me as a friend because I don't know how, and I wouldn't be able to tell who to make friends with because I don't know how you can tell if someone is a real friend or if they're just pretending to be a friend to get you to do something....”

The spaceship shakes violently from side to side as the computer sobs.

To get the computer back on an even keel, they are going to have to explain to it what friendship is all about, and how you can tell a real friend from someone who's just pretending. Boiling it down to a single question, it's “How can you tell if someone is a real friend.”

They may well try to prove to the computer that they are its friends – but it's going to be suspicious that they are just saying that to get it to behave.

There are various ways they could tackle the question: looking for examples of people being good friends would be a good start; maybe the ingredients of a good friend; the relationship you have to have – do you need to like the same things?

Whatever they come up with, make sure they really prod at it and challenge each other's thinking – perhaps have a focus on counterexamples. So if someone says you can always trust your friends, what about if you were going to do something really bad that would get you into trouble? Or that friends are kind to each other – if you have a fight with a friend or you argue about something, are you still friends when you're arguing?

Can you be friends with a dog? Can a child be friends with a grown-up? What about with a teacher? Can animals be friends to each other? Can you be friends with someone straight away? Is someone your friend just because you say they are? Can you be someone's friend but them not be your friend, or is it always both ways? If you are someone's friend, does that make you a friend of their friends?

Depending on how much they get into it, they might write/illustrate a guide to friendship for lonely computers.

Friendship is a rich concept for looking at ideas of sameness and difference.

When they eventually convince the computer that they (and it) understand friendship, the computer will perk up.

Now that I'm not feeling so down anymore, we better make up for the time we've lost while I've been

blubbing. We'll have to go to warp speed.

As a variation on the take-off and landing book-ending of sessions, you can go round the circle with each person in turn going "ping!" or some other noise of your (or their) choice. As you point, each person makes the noise, and the rotations get faster and faster until you make a double punching movement and everybody goes "ping!" at the same time, at which point you will all disappear into a space-time worm hole, ready to emerge at the other end at the start of your next session.

Interlude 4 – The Cramped Landing Module

This teamwork exercise is a human version of those picture puzzles you see with one square missing. The team will have to get a member from one corner of the grid to the opposite corner, with only one person moving at a time.

The chairs will need to be arranged in a grid, with one more chair than you have pupils. When you ask pupils to sit down, the chair at the bottom right of the grid needs to be kept empty (may be best to simply add this after everyone has sat down). If you are working with a full class of thirty, you could have an extra empty seat somewhere else in the grid to speed things up.

Three of the corners should be occupied by a volunteer who will benefit from being at the centre of some hectic instructions from his or her peers. Write the name of the volunteer at the opposite corner to the volunteer on the Launch Module Security Reset Button and fold over the paper to cover it, then place it in on the floor within reach of the empty chair.

Moving only one person at a time to occupy the empty seat, they have to transfer the pupil from the top left to the bottom right. At most one bottom can be off of a chair at any time: they have to wait until the person who is moving has sat down before the next person moves.

Your next planet has a very rocky, uneven surface, so you're not going to be able to land your whole spaceship. Instead, you'll have to leave it orbiting

the planet while you go down in the much smaller landing module.

Please take your seats. Strap yourselves in securely. You need to gently fire the boosters of the landing module as you part from your spaceship, so there will be a quiet "shhh" sound as you start them up.

You've disengaged successfully from the spaceship, and you're now drifting gently down towards the surface of the planet.

Suddenly, there's a jolt. The landing module has been hit by a bit of floating space junk, some rubbish thrown out of the airlock by a previous visitor.

The onboard computer starts shrieking "Malfunction! Malfunction! I am being stolen. Initiate intruder ejection countdown."

To your horror, you realise that the impact of the junk has damaged the computer. It thinks it's being stolen, and unless you can reset it, you will all be ejected into outer space!

You can see the security reset button.

On the flap below it will be the name of the person whose fingerprint is needed to reset the computer. BUT only one person can move at a time, and they can only move one seat at a time. If there is more than one bottom not on a seat at the same time, you will all be ejected. You can only move up, down, left or right, not diagonally. Anyone making a diagonal move will be ejected.

*Check they understand that only one person
Count the moves as they go, to emphasise that
they have to take it one move at a time. It may
take a while for them to work out how to “move
the empty space” to where they need it to be.
Resist the temptation to interfere: the longer it
takes to achieve a task like this, the greater the
satisfaction.*

*Somebody may come up with the idea that if they
make a diagonal move, they will be ejected,
making it easier for the rest to complete the task.*

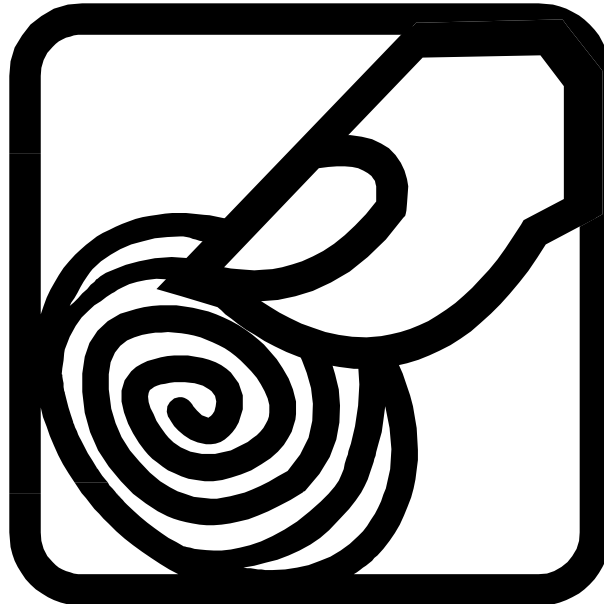
*If they choose to do this, let them – but they will
only have enough air to last them a minute or two
while they wait to be rescued. There won't be
time to rescue more than one person, so lots of
ejections won't work.*

*Don't forget to rescue the self-sacrificing hero if
they choose this option. In any event, eventually
the right person will end up within reach of the
reset button, and press their thumb onto it, at
which point:*

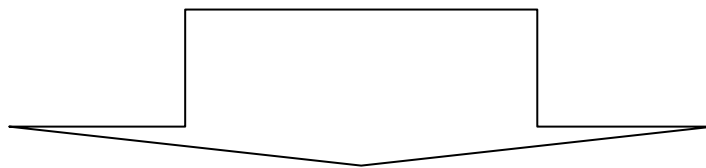
You reset the computer successfully.
“I'm very sorry. I don't know what I was
thinking. Some of you probably think I
never do, but that's another story. Now
let's get you down to this planet before
we get hit by anything else.”

The “shh” sound of the engines
returns, and you land on the surface of
the planet, safe and sound.

INTRUDER DETECTED. EJECTION
SEQUENCE COUNTDOWN INITIATED



SECURITY RESET FINGERPRINT REQUIRED
FROM PASSENGER NAMED BELOW



A large empty rectangular box for entering the passenger name.

Episode 4 – The Naughtyometer

This exercise involves pupils reflecting on the relative heinousness of misdemeanours from not handing in homework to bullying, through the context of an alien schoolteacher who missed the behaviour training.

The core of the episode is a ranking activity in groups (I would advise no more than six members), followed by giving and reflecting on reasons.

Then there is a surprise in store when it turns out that schools on this planet are, by earth standards, rather old-fashioned in continuing to employ corporal punishment.

Children can be very harsh judges, so they may think that's fine. But if they do, presumably they would think so back on earth. You might get strongly opposed views, or a consensus in one direction or the other. If they all agree, this may be the time to play Devil's Advocate and force them to come up with some good reasons to justify their views.

As well as the scripted questions, there are other aspects of this scenario that might interest children: is the teacher a bit of a hypocrite? Is the "footmaster" of the school being reasonable? Why are they called a footmaster? (Do these aliens keep their brains in their feet.)

If they take off at a tangent, run with it for a while. It's beginning to build the skills of question development etc. that will be invaluable when you turn to regular P4C.

You land in a rather bleak landscape. It doesn't look as though there's much life in this area of the planet, but you can see a small village and you head towards the biggest building in it.

It turns out that this is the local school. Young aliens of different sizes are slithering around the playground, eye-wrestling, using one another as skipping ropes, and playing marbles with eggs that occasionally start to hatch and run away from the game.

You go inside, and you find a stressed looking alien puzzling over some slips of paper.

"Hello. I'm 13765," says the alien teacher. "I wonder if you could help me. I'm new here, and I've had lots of children doing bad things on my first day. I need to sort things out before the footmaster gets back. But I missed the naughtyometer session at teacher training college. It's rather naughty, but my favourite band were playing in town, so I went to see them instead.

I've got these ten children who have all been naughty, and I need to put them in order of which was worst."

The alien clicks its teeth, and several sets of the cards it has been puzzling over tumble out of the printer in the corner.

Once they have made their rankings, in role as the alien teacher ask why they have ranked some as worse than others, being particularly alert for interesting disagreements between and within groups. They can change their order at any time.

The cards are in pairs or threes to help explore particular concepts and questions:

Acting vs. letting happen – is it any worse to do something than to let it happen? (pushing vs. letting fall)

Context vs. absolutes – is stealing from a child worse than stealing from a school, or is all stealing equally wrong?

Hurting individuals vs. damaging authority – is upsetting a child by calling them a bad name worse than being rude to a teacher?

School and home – is there less excuse for not working at school than at home?

Action, retaliation, observation – is hitting someone back worse than watching someone get hit and doing nothing about it?

This time, they have to come to a final decision, even though some people will still disagree. So part of the task is to work out a fair way of deciding. Once they have the final verdict:

“Thank you. I’ll call them in now,” says the alien, still looking gloomy. She gets the young aliens to line up in order, next to the cards that describe what they have done.

“You five,” pointing at the ones who were considered least bad, “will stay behind after school and moisten the slime in all 7;p[her not to?”

But it’s better if the discussion arises naturally. They may, of course, decide that it’s none of their business, but if they are letting themselves off the hook too easily:

As you turn to leave, one of the little aliens who is about to get caned points to the child who saw someone hitting someone and did nothing about it. “You’re at least as bad as them! Worse, because there’s more of you and you could stop it easier!”

But if they are adamant that they don’t wish to get involved, that’s their prerogative. The teacher may have personal misgivings about what she is doing, but feels that rules are rules. How else is she going to keep discipline? Isn’t it unfair for the victims of the children’s bad behaviour if the offenders don’t receive a proper punishment? Won’t it just happen again if they get off lightly? Won’t others start doing the same things?

The class may come up with some practical ideas to wriggle out of the problem – give them a warning this time – but it’s best if they have to tackle the point of principle (so perhaps the miscreants have already been warned).

As well as specific issues relating to fairness and punishment, there are wider moral questions here. Does following rules absolve you from responsibility for your actions? Or is this a different sort of violence which is acceptable? Are right or wrong in the raising of children universal, or is it up to each culture to decide on issues like these?

If they can come up with a morally convincing and practicable alternative, the teacher will go along with it, before assisting them by showing them the route to their next planet on the interactive hologram.

Back to the launch module, strap in and take off (use the high-energy version this time to finish on an energetic note, especially if there has been some heavy or emotive thinking or (not speaking facetiously) you are going to have to visit your child protection officer because of casual revelations from a child during the enquiry.

**Not doing any
homework for a
whole week**

**Not doing any work
in school for a
whole day**

Hitting someone

**Stealing a pen from
a pupil**

**Stealing a pen from
the school**

**Seeing someone
hitting someone,
and doing nothing
about it**

**Pushing someone
you don't like over
so he hurts himself**

**Letting someone you don't
like fall over so she hurts
herself, when you could
have caught her.**

**Hitting someone
back**

**Calling another
pupil a bad name**

**Calling a teacher
a bad name**

Interlude 5 – Intergalactic Passport Control

This is a reworking of a popular icebreaker game from outdoor education: players have to get themselves organised into a series of different orders (from A – Z by first name, and then from youngest to oldest using only sign-language to communicate etc,) while keeping hold of a rope or string at all times.

It requires a lot of cooperation, communication and physical closeness, so it's a good one to use when bringing a group of strangers together. There's also the opportunity for pupils to be creative in finding shortcuts to solve the challenges faster.

You'll need a length of rope or string about the length of your classroom.

As described below, it gets children used to using "slice and splice cards" which you can use in your regular teaching as a way of forming groups and changing from one talk structure to another. You could just use names and ages if you prefer.

You're about to move from one galaxy to another, so you need to pass through intergalactic passport control.

You need to collect a ticket and leave your spaceship, holding onto this lifeline to stop you drifting off into space. So at all times you must keep at least one hand on this rope. You can swap hands, but you must never let go of it altogether.

Give out the slice and splice cards. A very efficient way to do this is to throw them all in the air and let them float down. This also starts to build up a fun association with these cards for when you use them in your own lessons.

Now get one hand on the rope. Remember you have to keep in contact with the rope at all times.

So you have your tickets, and you're ready to go through interstellar passport control.

Just then, the border guard reaches the end of his shift, and is replaced by someone else.

"Show me your tickets! No! That won't do. You're all mixed up. I need to process you one colour at a time. Get yourselves sorted out so that everyone with the same colour is standing together, and then I'll process you. And make sure you don't let go of the rope and drift off into outer space. It creates lots of paperwork."

Check they know what they need to do, and then let them get on with it. Just remind them they can't let go of the rope, and let them work the rest of it out for themselves.

If you or any colleagues with you find yourselves itching to interfere and help them, because they are struggling or taking too long or talking over each other, resist (and think about the implications of that response elsewhere in the curriculum). If someone comes up with the bright idea of moving the cards rather than the people, say that's a good idea but the guards might notice and get cross.

Once they are grouped in colours:

Just as you finish grouping yourselves by colour, another border officer with a more impressive uniform arrives. He speaks to the one who told you to line up in colour order, then says, "No, no! These are earthlings, so they need to be processed in shape order, not colour order. Haven't you read Intergalactic Travel Regulation 33, Subsection C? Earthlings, please rearrange yourselves so that those of you with the same shape on your

tickets are standing together. Be quick about it. And don't let go and drift off into space. There's enough rubbish floating about as it is."

Once they are grouped in shapes:

Just as you finish grouping yourselves by shapes, *another* border guard with a still more impressive uniform and two bodyguards arrives.

He speaks to the officer who told you to line up in shape order, then says, "No, no, no! Haven't you read the new policy, you idiot? All earthlings travelling in groups of ten or more have to be processed in number order."

You might start getting some customer complaints at the moment, as the travellers decide that passport control are being unreasonable. If so, you might use it as an opportunity for dialogue. Are they just doing their job? Is there any reason for these rules? Why are the rules different for them just because they are earthlings? Why should the junior staff have to obey the unreasonable orders of their superiors?

If they stand their ground and refuse to comply with any more changes, you might choose to have the border guards accept their point of view and let them through anyway – or they can complete this final rearrangement before you let them pass you, showing their tickets, and as they pass, coiling up the rope and directing them back onto their spaceship which has been searched and approved.

Episode 5 – Earth minus God

This planet tackles religious issues. You are on sensitive ground here. It's possible colleagues or parents will misunderstand what's going on, and think you have been propagandising for or against religious belief. If you are in a faith school or are notorious on the staff for being a Richard Dawkins fan, you might want to let a senior colleague know what you are doing in advance – not by way of asking permission, but because a

garbled account of the enquiry after the event may create the wrong impression.

Two sorts of objections come up, both stemming from a rather authoritarian, paternalistic view of how education works and a concomitant low opinion of children's capacity for reasonable thought.

In the first, people picture a lesson as the teacher telling you stuff, with the limit on the interaction being a drawn-out game of snap where children try to match the answer the teacher already has in mind. Philosophy for children is so different to this that you may need to re-educate your objectors by directing them to somewhere like www.p4c.com (About P4C>Benefits of P4C>Videos).

In the second sort, they may think that children have no business asking questions like this, and should believe what they're told to until they come of age; or that childhood is a time of innocence free from such concerns.

I'm not sure you can do philosophy for children under those conditions, as it's tantamount to saying, we're all for children thinking deeply – as long as it's not about things that really matter. It goes against the whole spirit of P4C, which is to recognise children as enquiring minds in the process of making their own meaning in the world, rather than being given it.

If some parents feel their children should not be exposed to points of view that differ from those they hear at home, their children are exactly the ones who need P4C the most. The challenge to their views will come from their peers and not from you, and they will be listened to with respect in their turn.

Probably the most awkward possibility if you are working with younger children is if someone makes the "God - Father Christmas: nice idea, shame they don't exist" move. No tips on that one, I'm afraid.

The story acts as a "distancing technique" (a rather extreme example, if you take it literally) – a popular way for dealing with controversial topics that enable a more frank exchange of views because people can be a little more detached.

You land on the surface of another planet. This one feels very much like home. There are oceans surrounding continents, seasons and soap operas on the television. Some things are different. The people are green and a foot taller than human beings, there are no trees and when animals are scared they run backwards instead of forwards – but apart from that it seems just like earth.

But you feel there's something else that's different too, but you can't put your finger on what it is.

The day after you arrive, you decide you'd like to go and see the sights of their capital city. You'll visit some of their most impressive buildings during the day, and then go to the theatre in the evening to see a show. So you type words like, "monument", "gallery", "museum", "palace" into your tourist guide, and it comes up with lots of suggestions. But when you type in "church", it says "error – no matching word". So you try "cathedral", and "mosque" and "temple"...

And you soon realise what it is about this planet that is different to earth.

You can pause here to let them work it out for themselves.

Nobody on this planet has ever heard of the idea of God. It's not that they used to have religions, but have stopped believing in them; or that they have people who believe in God, but just worship in their own homes. They have never, ever heard of the idea of God at all, so they don't even have a

word for God in their language. So how would you explain to them what "God" means?

This is a preliminary question before you get into the bigger topic. Bat it around for a while. . If someone wants to use a dictionary, that's fine – but once you've heard the definition, ask whether that is all that God means, or is there more to it than that. And is the meaning different for different people?

During the discussion, someone may say that they don't think you should tell the aliens about God, in which case the enquiry can move seamlessly onto that new question. Or move it on yourself:

Now that you've decided how you would explain the idea to them, there's another question you need to decide. Should you tell them about the idea of God, or should you leave them as they are, never having heard of God at all?

Children in Year 7 and older can sometimes reach a very quick consensus that no you shouldn't, because religion leads to wars. If that happens, you can ask them to play "Devil's Advocate", or in this case, God's advocate. What arguments would someone have for the opposite conclusion?

Some questions in waiting on this topic are:

How might their planet change if you introduce them to God? What do you think it would be like in 500 years?

How would our planet be different if nobody had heard of God?

Should the missionaries who introduced Christianity to Britain have left the British alone too? Should missionaries have taken Christianity to Africa?

In wars that involve religion, is the religion the cause for the war, or an excuse for it? What's the difference between a cause and an excuse?

If you don't believe in God, can you still think of reasons for telling them?

If you don't believe in God, can you still think of for not telling them?

If nobody believed in God, would people still be good?

Would civilisation have got started without the idea of God?

Can you have God without religion, or religion without God?

At the end of the enquiry, after last words, take a vote on whether to tell them about God or not (including any other alternatives that emerge during the discussion – such as telling them God but not about religion). That's their decision (although if the majority decide not to, someone could always blurt it out as an individual). If they decide not to tell them:

You spend a few more days enjoying the company of your alien friends. Having decided not to tell them, you find it's sometimes quite difficult to keep the secret – when someone sneezes and you say "Bless you!", you have to do some quick thinking. Even as you say "Goodbye", your translating machine nearly gives the game away showing that that came from "God be with ye". But you manage to stick to your plan, and leave the planet to carry on without the idea of God entering the minds of its citizens.

If they decide to tell them:

You explain to the aliens about the idea of God. Some are fascinated, some are confused. Some are grateful to you for letting them know, and others say they were perfectly happy before and see no need to change anything. You get the feeling their discussion could go on for a very long time, so you make your goodbyes and head back to the spaceship.

Interlude 6 – A Sticky Situation

This is another outdoor education teamwork exercise transplanted to outer space. You need a good amount of room – outdoors is best.

You haven't gone far, when there's a sudden jolt as something hits your spaceship. Your onboard computer tells you you have been struck by another piece of space-junk left behind by an ignorant traveller.

You're going to need to leave the safety of your spaceship to make repairs. So you go out in groups of five, each carrying a pot of glue.

At this point, you need five volunteers. They need to stand in a small circle close to each other.

As you start work, the spaceship swerves suddenly to avoid a passing asteroid, knocking you about, and tipping over the glue so that you end up stuck together.

Each person needs to shake hand with someone across the circle, and keep doing so. Then with their other hand, they need to shake someone else's hand. Now everybody in the circle should be connected to two different people, tangling everyone together.

Now, without losing contact, they need to disentangle themselves into one big ring.

It's worth getting the others to watch for a minute as they try to do it, and then having a quick debrief as to why it did or didn't work. If it worked well, they were probably patient, listened to each other. Without making too big a thing of it, establish a rule that if a group starts being silly and unsafe, they'll have to sit out.

If someone is overexcited and sabotages success by pulling on all the others in their group, have their group sit down for a minute and work out what they need to do to succeed. Then give them another chance. You can combine groups into

larger circles to repeat the exercise with added difficulty.

Children (and adults) get a remarkable amount of satisfaction out of succeeding in challenges like these; they require and reward cooperation, and if a large group has to persevere for some time, their satisfaction is all the greater. It is worth doing a quick debrief about how they succeeded.

You'll sometimes find the knot resolves into two separate circles – or two that are linked together in a chain.

Episode 6 – The Askers

This episode begins to develop a skill that will be important when the adventure comes to an end and you continue with traditional P4C – the skill of identifying juicy philosophical questions that will lead to an interesting discussion.

You land in a large square in the middle of a city. You can see that some big event is in progress, because lots of alien photographers lined up outside a big building hardly notice you arrive, and keep snapping pictures of glamorously dressed aliens as they walk, tentacle in tentacle, from expensive looking cars along a red carpet.

It turns out that you have landed just in time for the Askers, one of the most important events in the calendar of the Interrogophiles. Interrogophiles are aliens that love questions, and this is the awards ceremony for the best questions of the year.

As most of the aliens prefer to hang upside down from the ceiling, there are some cheap seats left on the floor right at the front.

In each category, the nominated questions appear on the floor of the

stage, and then a presenter opens an envelope and declares the winner. Then a spotlight shines on the winning question, and the alien that asked it flies down to collect their Asker, a small statue in the shape of a question mark.

You could split these up, with one child pretending to be the announcer for each winner..

And the winner of Most Romantic Question is, “Who stole the stars and put them in your eyes?”

Most confusing question goes to “Is this really a question?”

The Asker for Most Interesting Scientific Question goes to “If you put a coat on a snowman, will it melt faster or slower?”

Most Interesting Mathematical Question goes to, “If a creature born with two arms grows an extra arm on every arm every year, and it has a hand on each arm, how many gloves would you need to buy to give it a complete set for its eighteenth birthday?”

Most amusing question, “Do you know how to keep someone waiting for an answer?”

..and now, to the most eagerly awaited category of all, the Juiciest Philosophical Question.

The nominations are...

Spread out the questions on the following pages around the floor.

The presenter for this category opens the envelope. “And the winner is...Oh

dear. Oh dear, oh dear. I better read you what the judge has said:

“I have read all the questions, and I thought they were all ever so interesting. I didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feeling by saying that one question was more interesting than any of the others. I think they’re all marvellous, so they should all have the prize.”

A rumble of disapproval goes round the hall. This is the award that everyone’s been waiting for.

“Well, I don’t know what to do. We can hardly appoint a new judge now, as I’ve already said who asked the questions. Unless we have some people here who don’t know any of the contestants, and who won’t be biased...”

All the eyes of the thousands of aliens hanging from the ceiling turn to you. The presenter says, “It would be very helpful if you could choose a winner. It should be the question that you think is the most interesting. One that people will have different points of view about, and that would lead to the most interesting discussion. The sort of question you could enjoy talking about with a group of friends while you wait for your dinner to hatch. After all, it’s not much of a competition unless you have a winner, is it?”

You can bat around the question of whether a competition needs to have a winner or not for a while. If they decide it does, they’ll then need to choose a winning question. If they argue it doesn’t, the presenter will come up to them and say quietly:

The crowd are getting rather angry. I would strongly advise that you choose a winner. The last time there was a tie between two questions, the judges were split. It was horribly messy, and I don’t want that to happen to me or to you.”

Looking around, you can see that as well as loving questions, Interrogophiles are also fond of their food. A few of them are beginning to drool.

So in the end, they will need to indicate which question they think is the best by standing next to it. For all questions that have at least one person standing next to them, invite someone to say why they thought that was a particularly juicy question. If there are some questions nobody thinks are very juicy, you could ask why some of them didn’t attract any interest.

Once the various questions have been championed, invite people to change their minds if they want. If there is a clear winner, let that go forward as the decision, or have a vote-off between the front runners. Whatever happens, when a winner is eventually decided, a disgruntled runner-up swoops down to dispute the decision.

The presenter, looking very relieved, says, “And finally, the winner of the Most Juicy Philosophical Question is...”

But while the audience is still applauding, an angry alien swoops down from above and says, “This isn’t fair. How would you know what makes a juicy question? You’re not even from our planet. My question was much juicier.”

From the noise in the crowd, you can tell that some people agree with him,

and some don't. It seems like a riot might break out at any moment.

The disgruntled alien makes you a challenge. "If you think that question is so juicy, prove it! Try to answer it here and now, and we'll see how it goes. I bet you run out of things to say after five minutes because the question isn't juicy enough."

The audience rustles its leathery wings in approval of this suggestion. You notice just how sharp the teeth of the Interrogophiles are, and you decide it might be a good idea to do as they ask.

The presenter, who is keen for you to succeed, offers to host the discussion.

Now you go into a normal enquiry into whichever question they have chosen. This is starting to move towards more traditional P4C in that they have chosen the question, albeit from a menu they have been given.

It's helpful for you if you can get the question chosen just before going to a break, so that you have time to think about the philosophical depth to the question. You don't want to dictate the direction of the discussion, but you want to be able to keep things going if they stall, and be alert for ways you can challenge the children to think more deeply if they reach easy conclusions.

One way of preparing is to identify some "questions in waiting", which help you to explore aspects of the main question or of particular answers to it. You can use these to move the discussion onto new territory if it stalls or goes round in a circle (metaphorically, rather than literally). Here's one example.

If you got paid to play, would that mean it was work?

Do some people do the same things for play that other people do for work (and vice versa)?

Is play usually/always fun? Is work usually/always not fun?

Can you do work you're not paid to do?

Is there anything that could never be work?

Is there anything that could never be play?

What makes the difference between something being work and play?

After the discussion has led to some possible answers and you feel the children have done some interesting thinking, draw it to a close with last words – going round the circle with everyone having a final chance to speak, or one of the other strategies in Pocket P4C.

The alien who was a bad loser has to accept that you've demonstrated the juiciness of the question you chose. He flies sulkily back to his place in the audience. The alien who is now confirmed as the winner of the Asker for Juiciest Philosophical Question makes a long thank you speech, that includes his parents for looking after her when she was an egg, her teachers, her wonderful husband and, of course, you for showing how juicy her question was.

The audience applauds, which causes them to fall off the ceiling. While they are flying about, you make your exit.

Interlude 7 – Tribal Storytelling

This is a simple bit of interactive storytelling – a tribal ceremony at which a story is told and the philosophers contribute some actions. It's a good opportunity for some children to enjoy reading to the class and seeing people respond – and if you wanted to, you could get them to write their own stories afterwards along similar lines and perform them in groups: just get them to choose a setting first, then the action groups, and the rest will follow from there. (to be continued)

**If you got paid to
play, would that
mean it was work?**

**Does being happy
make you
successful, or does
being successful
make you happy?**

**Are right and wrong
the same forever?**

**Which are better,
boys or girls?**

**Is it better to be a
child or an adult?**

**Would the world be
better if nobody
could ever lie?**

**Which is longer, the
past or the future?**

