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Group: 9th Grade	**boys:** **girls:**
Date: Character Education/poetry #1	**Duration of lesson:** 1x 80 min
Aim of the lesson: For students to adopt the method of a philosophical dialogue to investigate questions that interest the students, and they decided to address.	**Learning materials:**

Status of the Students' Knowledge: The students do not need to have had prior knowledge of engaging in a philosophical dialogue.

The content of the lesson (and justification):

a) Photocopies of the poem to hand out to students, a whiteboard to write questions and ideas on.

Approach (and justification):

Creative and critical thinking is most efficiently developed through a dialogue of a community of peers that is committed to investigate together the questions they are interested in seeking answers to. Creating and developing a community of inquiry is an exciting and diverse project for students in preschool, primary-, or secondary school. Robert Fisher Ph.D. has described the development of a community of inquiry by comparing the behavioural patterns that characterise a group that is starting out as a community of inquiry with that of a group that has evolved into a developed community of inquiry. His method can be viewed here (Sigurðardóttir, 2013).

What does the teacher do?	**What do the students do?**
The teacher has two roles, both the traditional one of a moderator, while he/she also tries to encourage the students to engage in the conversation so that they themselves keep it going and are at a certain liberty to determine the direction of the conversation.	Have students sit in a circle so that everyone in the group can look at everyone else during the discussion.
At the start of the dialogue the teacher reminds the students of the dialogue rules, that the group has decided on, see e.g. the teacher's notes for the Dialouge Rules.	You choose what suits you and the group best: sitting on the floor, sitting on chairs, sitting at a table or any other installation that springs to mind.
	When the students have settled in, you distribute copies of the poem and the group reads it outloud together. Each student can

The work process that we recommend in this assignment is basic recipe for a philosophical dialogue. This type of work is described in more detail in the teacher's notes for the [Basic Recipe for a Philosophical Dialouge.](#) In the next column, you will find a glossary of the process.

When you moderate a philosophical dialogue, it is advisable to keep the following points in mind:

• It is the students who ought to talk amongst themselves. You should guide them in how to do it well.

• Listening is a basic condition for conversation to take place. You remind the students of that by saying, for example: 'did you catch what… said?' or 'can anyone summarise for the group what we are discussing now?'

• It is an indication of quality of a philosophical discussion when it goes into depth about the topic at hand, rather than just naming countless examples of the same thing. While students provide arguments, perspectives and examples that shed new light on the subject matter, the dialogue is still on the right track. If students start to jump from one thing to another or repeat what others have already said, the conversation will become worse, and it is likely that the participants will soon get bored.

• Remember to take time at the end of the lesson to ask the students to summarise what they have heard and learned from the conversation. This can be done in various ways, for example by having everyone write in a notebook how they want to answer the original question or by taking turns and having everyone say what they want to they would like the question for the next session to be.

read one sentence, and those who do not want to read just say 'pass'.

Call for questions from the students and write them up on the whiteboard so that everyone can see them. Write the name of the questioner after each question so that you can ask her/him for explanations or elaborations later on in the process.

When students do not have any more questions or the whiteboard is full, the students must choose one question (or a category of similar questions) to start the dialogue.

The voting process is quick, but if the group is just starting out, it may be fitting to keep the voting anonymous. It is a good idea to assign each question a number on the whiteboard, and have each student write down the number of the question he or she chooses. The tickets are collected by the teacher or a student, the votes are counted and then a conversation is held based on the chosen question.

A Variation of the Theme

To give the students a better opportunity to relate to the content of the story before they formulate questions, you could let them re-enact the situation the story tells and solve a specific problem. For example, you can let the group (or an individual who enjoys having the spotlight on him or her) imagine that they are graduating from high school and have to decide whether to take a year off to travel before they go to junior college or get a job or work for a year to save up some money. Each participant in the circle takes on the role of a particular age, for example

'I am 6 years old', 'I am 30 years old' and 'I am 75 years old' – what decision would each 'I' make?

When put in the position of having to pay the travel debts, some of the 'I's would probably choose work over travel. Others might consider the memories and experiences of a long journey important for promoting the independence and openness needed to succeed in higher education.

Such a game could be used to bring out different points of view on issues such as drug use, smoking and responsible sex. The game is not expected to elicit clear and definitive answers in the student group, but it can broaden the students' thinking about these issues. Perhaps more diverse interpretations could be made in the student group by encouraging them to present their 'I' in a dramatic way as some kind of a 'ghosts of the past and the future' as Dickens does in his Christmas Carol.

The Philosophy of the Poem – Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a theory of ethics that considers the act or behaviour that leads to 'the greatest happiness for most' to be the right one. In order to decide what is the right thing to do, you should, according to this theory, calculate how many people benefit from the benefit in question and how much that benefit will be, and then subtract the number of people who will suffer from the same decision and how much their suffering will be. In other words, it is best to do what maximises happiness and minimizes suffering. Further information on Utilitarianism can be found on Wikipedia and on the Science Web.

Utilitarianism can be criticised in various ways. For example, it is difficult to accurately predict the consequences of one's decisions, and it is very difficult to measure happiness and probably not worth the time to go through this measurement process every time a moral decision has to be made. The essence of Utilitarianism, however, is that an act is considered good if its consequences are good, rather than that the act is judged good or bad because it follows or breaks some pre-given rule.

It is also important according Utilitarianism that the interests of all individuals have equal value. When assessing impact, therefore, all individuals have 'one vote and no one more than one.' You can try out the exercise, which the story is based on, on yourself by doing the following thought experiment: If happiness is very important to you in life, is happiness then not equally important no matter in what period of your life you experience it? Imagine that you are 30 years old when you make a decision concerning a particular dilemma. The consequences of this decision on your life should be as important to you when you are 70-71 years old as the consequences for your life when you are 30-31 years old (as long as you are still alive and well). It is based on this idea that the characters of the story emerge, one character for each year I have lived and all have equal voting rights when it comes to decision making.

The Philosophy of the Poem - Caution or Freedom

It is obviously far-fetched to be able to look at an entire lifetime just as an eagle looks over its hunting grounds. One may even be concerned about the impact that such an overview could have on the nation's consumption patterns and economic growth, if everyone were to constantly make decisions in light of the fact that they would have to save for old age. But the other extremes are certainly present when people make decisions that have serious consequences and

can even destroy body and soul just to enjoy the slightest quick pleasure. Such decisions would not be successful in the eyes of the 'I'-jury.

Perhaps the most important question that the story might raise is 'To what extent should I consider in the future when I am faced with a decision?' Psychology, for instance, on the one hand that the ability to resist temptation and wait for a reward is strongly linked to how successful one is in life (see, for example, the Ted Talk, Marshmallow Experiment. But when you are young or in love, such calculations about real life decisions seem to place you in the category of strong-willed individual with a mind like a spreadsheet. Would a person in love, for instance, be interested in discussing his or her future marriage with a view to figuring out the pros and cons of the marriage? Or does her or she rather follow their instinct, based on emotions?

If it is hard or weird not to feel particularly connected to the year you are living right now, then is it not much harder to try to connect with another person's life? How can the happiness of others matter to me as much as my own? It can easily be said that calculating happiness is really just too difficult, even out of the question. On the one hand, the logistics seem to be too complex, and on the other hand, it can also be argued that it is completely unrealistic to expect empathy for individuals to the extent that they can weigh the pros and cons regardless of their own situation and feelings at any given time. In fact, it seems inhuman to give more weight to those closest to you than to strangers, or to value your own life more than the lives of others. But playing around with the status quo, 'completely neutral' can be a good thought experiment and push us a little more towards empathy and caring for other people in the past, present and future.

MY

first ghost, was a photo of a corpse that used to hang upon the wall
in my grandmother's living room
a little girl that died alone from a strange epidemic
she looked so peaceful that I thought she was sleeping

it wasn't until granny fell on the floor in a trance
and her voice transformed into a bright voice of girl
I realised that those who sleep without waking up are
     grief generators

I clutched hard at the doll
my aunt gave me on her deathbed

the spirit of the girl
the spirit of the medium
the spirit of the ghosts
thin blue mist that floated
into the dolls head

this doll never slept
it stared at me
with eyes full of sorrow
that always seemed
on the verge of telling
me something
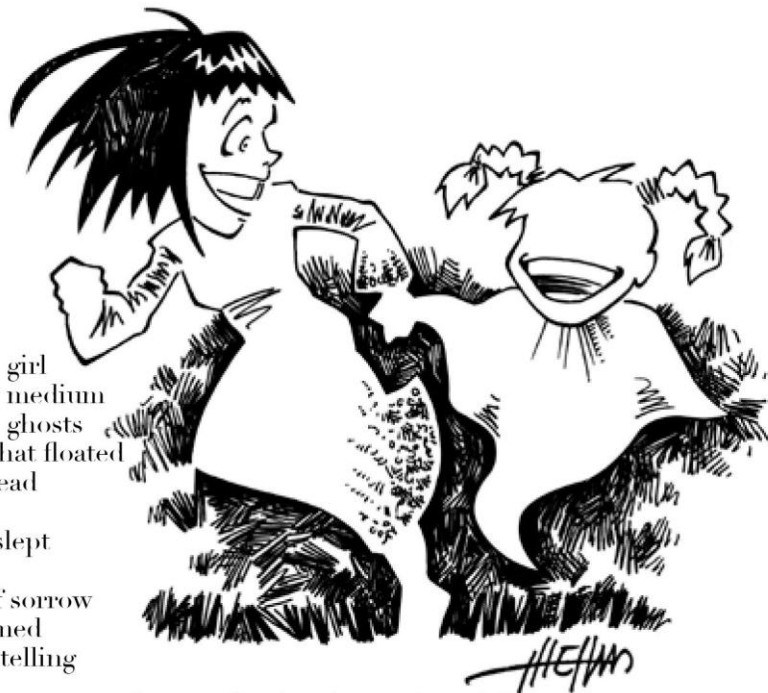
years later a friend stole my ghostdoll
and every time I see the girl
it looks like the light blue mist has blown into her head
and the eyes of the doll stare vividly back at me

I avoid meeting this girl
who is always dressed in big white dresses
with pale pink roses in her hair