

Reflections On
Analytical Thinking for Children

All Hammets are liars.
John is a Hammet.
John says, "I am lying."
Is John lying?

My fourth grade had puzzled over this paradox for two days, alternately frustrated and then exhilarated as they thought they had the right answer. To accept that there was no right answer was very hard indeed until one little girl challenged to draw a conclusion stated, "It's just like a circle; it goes around and around, and you can't get off." Then she proceeded to draw an image on the board - a circle with two arrows, one at the top and one at the bottom to represent a paradox. Her young mind had been stretched and challenged to go beyond its usual boundaries.

"When I think, I see pictures in my mind." "When I think, it's like I see the words, and I read them in my mind." Two diverse styles of thinking, two equally bright minds, answering questions as to the nature of thought.

Can animals talk? Yes, yes chorused my group of nine-year olds. Dogs have their own language. Can dogs laugh and cry? "Yes, my dog laughs by rolling on his back and sticking all four feet in the air." Do animals have rights? These are comments from a lively discussion.

Fairness is equal treatment - a conclusion reached by my fourth grade. I then read them a story in which equal treatment does not seem fair. I challenge them to think beyond their first premise. They are involved - their minds, their feelings, their values.

Do mental activities take up space? "Yes, when I'm thinking real hard about something, I'm just thinking about that one thing at that particular time. There isn't room for other thoughts. Yes, thoughts take up space." Looking inward, a young boy thoughtfully relates to his peers his best thinking on this interesting subject.

Would it be good if no one ever died? No, no, a unanimous response. There wouldn't be room for all of us on earth. It would be crowded; there wouldn't be enough to eat; there wouldn't be privacy. Do these thoughts parallel some of your own thoughts on this subject?

Analytical thinking, fascinating, challenging, rewarding - yes, all of these for both teacher and student.

All chairs are furniture.
All furniture are chairs.

A true all sentence when reversed becomes false. Harry Stottlemeier discovering a rule of reasoning. Children participating in the process with Harry and his friends. This is all part of reading and discussing Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, a novel for fourth and fifth grade students. Harry and his friends are engaged in a systematic exploration of ideas based on the skills and techniques of philosophical inquiry. As a teacher and a class also engage in this activity, they become a Community of Inquiry cooperating with one another, respecting one another's ideas as well as their own.

What is it like to teach Analytical Thinking using Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery? It is one of the most interesting and rewarding experiences of my teaching career. I look forward to

the informality and cooperation characteristic of each session. The children and I are in an intellectual endeavor together. Sometimes their thoughts are better than mine.

We sit in a circle - essential for our Community of Inquiry. We can all see one another and hear one another. As I look around the circle, I see involved children, faces thoughtful in expression or excited in discovery. I see whole young beings eager to participate or attentively listening to others - absorbed in evaluation. I see motivation at work as they form valid opinions. It is in these moments that we really get to know one another, and I love them, and all is well with the world.

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