

Book Review

Tinker Thinkers

Review by Richard Morehouse

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Susan Gardner and Amy Leask

Illustrated by Amy Moore

Enable Training and Consulting, Inc., 2014.

40 pages (There is also an optional APP that may be purchased)

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While intended for young readers, this colorfully and cleverly illustrated book with a downloadable APP, is nonetheless a rigorous examination of philosophical themes written in an interactive and conversational style. Those of you who are familiar with Professor Gardner's *Thinking your way to freedom: a guide to owning your own practical reasoning* (2009) will find much of the same playfulness, coupled with thoughtful examples and clear-headed thinking, that can be found in her more academic work. Amy Leask is a developer of APPs. On her webpage she identifies herself as a writer, educator and everyday philosopher. Her website [Kids think about it: philosophy for kids](#) is one of the ways she engages with young and not-so-young folks. Both authors have invested much time engaging with and encouraging thinkers of all ages and walks of life, something that shines through in their book.

Using the metaphor of a builder's toolbox, one that is filled with easy to follow models of good reasoning and well-formed arguments, Gardner and Leask take the young reader on an adventure of thinking. After introducing the metaphoric tools in their thinkers' toolbox, the book engages its young audience in an examination of the utility of asking "Why?"

The strength of this little book is that after engaging children in a series of questions and answers, reasons (good reasons) are provided as examples of how to support one's answers. The authors model what they are intending the young people to use, with each page providing a Vygotskian scaffold for the next step in the learning process. Vygotsky taught that education leads to fuller development, and Gardner and Leask (along with the illustrations of Ami Moore) pull the reader through these processes in a verbally and visually stimulating fashion.

The nature of how to give solid support for one's answers is demonstrated through an analogy with building, which the book illustrates visually and verbally in showing how building an argument is much like constructing a table. Importantly each of the children (six in all: Jacob, Anjali, Bai, Ada, Carlos and Poppy) asks and answers questions throughout the book regarding the strength of arguments and the role of supportive reasons.

Many readers, both young and old, are sure to enjoy innovative ideas like "sneaky silent arguments" both in terms of how these can be discovered (identified) and countered. The inclusion of these "sneaky silent arguments" is not only a clever way to engage children, but also a helpful tool for anyone interested in uncovering the many ways such sneaky tricks are

embedded in everyday discourse as well as performed in political and commercial advertising. Drawing our attention to such tricks of the trade is something this kids book is great at, and is certainly a lesson we adults could probably use a bit more instruction in.

Gardner and Leask's approach is consistent with the tenets of Philosophy for Children. The book, while utilizing a narrative approach to develop its "story" about the elements of a good argument, also effectively incorporates more traditional pedagogical strategies like text-based questions and answers. Although the book can be read by children on their own, my sense is that it is likely to be most entertaining and effective when used as a small group activity with an interested adult who can move through the narrative adventure of the book along with the kids. Also, although I'm not as technologically savvy as your typical eight or nine year old, as I still don't even have a tablet of my own, I'll wager that the APP version might even be more effective for engaging children on their own than the physical book. Having multiple media options may not be as important for old guys like me, but I'm betting the kids just love it!

This is a fun and valuable book that many young people will learn from and enjoy.

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