

Australian Teacher

Creative & Original Thinking

Suitable age group:
10 and older



Is it better to learn a musical instrument or a foreign language?

What do *you* think? (examples from personal experience can be given).

Debate, Discussion or Writing Exercise

(Curriculum areas covered: Music, Society & Environment, LOTE)

Teaching Prompts...

Learning to master a musical instrument and becoming proficient in a foreign language both require a lot of time and effort.

Being able to play a musical instrument can bring great pleasure to oneself and to others. Sometimes it can even bring in an income (buskers, professional entertainers etc). Playing in a group or band has other benefits, such as friendships and feelings of camaraderie. And you can always play by yourself.

Being able to speak another language can be useful when visiting other countries. It, too, can bring monetary benefits (interpreter, translator etc). However, unlike playing a musical instrument, you need someone else to speak with, though reading in that new language is something that doesn't require another person.



Rogue Asteroid



Image from How Stuff Works.

Most of you are aware that in many countries -and even *between* countries- there are disagreements, conflicts, and even wars, between peoples of different ethnic backgrounds and religious persuasions. There are arguments and fights over who owns certain lands and territories, where borders should and shouldn't be, etc etc.

As an example let's consider two prominent religious faiths where tensions arise from time to time, sometimes, alas, with loss of life: Islam, the religion of hundreds of millions of Muslims, and Christianity, the faith adhered to by equal -if not more- numbers of Christians.

We must remember that there are a great many devotees of both Islam and Christianity who are peace-loving and tolerant; the last thing they want or seek is tension or disharmony between their two disciplines.

It is the so-called 'hard liners' or 'fundamentalists' who adopt a no-tolerance attitude to those who don't follow their particular faith and it is usually these more radical believers who are too-ready to engage in aggressive behaviours.

The scenario below is extremely unlikely to occur and if it ever did it would probably be millions of years in the future.

Imagine...astronomers discover a massive asteroid hurtling towards our planet. There is no doubt that a catastrophic collision will occur and it is just 12 months away! Millions will surely perish -perhaps billions. The worst case scenario is that *all* life (human, animal and plant) will be wiped out, forever.

Suppose now that two brilliant scientists, colleagues in a leading astrophysical research facility, come up with a way of deviating the rogue asteroid off its path; the scientists are certain that they can successfully accomplish the task but it will require the cooperation of governments of all nations because the best minds around the world are

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needed to work together if the mission is to succeed. And to add to the drama, *both* of the afore-mentioned scientists are needed to work on and carry out the plan -one of them working alone would not be able to succeed (and the whole world knows this).

Now, one of the scientists is Muslim, the other Christian.

Talk about or Write about

1. Would you say that all radical Islamists and all radical Christians would want the two scientists to succeed in their quest to deviate the asteroid's path? If your answer is 'No', why might some not want the collision to be averted?
2. It is likely that all -or at least the majority- of people on Earth would not want the catastrophe to occur. This would mean that people from all the world's nations (including people of all faiths) would need to show their support for *both* scientists. Can you see that if life on our planet faced extinction in this way the world's peoples would begin thinking as **one** (and stop quarrelling with one another over relatively minor issues)? And can you also see that something like this (an asteroid threat) could 'wake people up' and make them see how insular and thoughtless they'd been in their thinking...about themselves and about one another?
3. Consider this quote from Jeffrey Bennett: "*A little perspective on our place in the universe makes any form of geographic, ethnic or religious hatred seem just plain ridiculous.*" Can you see why Jeffrey Bennett made this statement? Do you agree with his sentiments? Why/Why not?
4. Let's say that all the governments of the world got behind the two scientists and, to the relief of all, the asteroid was steered off into outer space; Earth was saved! Can you see that shock and despair would turn to joy and excitement? Would not all the fundamentalist Christians regard the Islamic scientist favourably? And, just as surely, the Christian scientist would be held in awe by the radical followers of Islam. What could such an outcome (the saving of our planet) do for peace and harmony on Earth? Would the feeling of triumph and euphoria last or would some people lapse back into their old ways, once again regarding those whose culture and beliefs differ with suspicion?
5. So far, we have talked about Muslims and Christians. Of course there are many other great -and long standing- religions and doctrines (and this is to say nothing about the fact that both Islam and Christianity have sects within their own ranks). The world's Hindus, Buddhists and followers of Judaism -along with millions who adhere to other faiths- would have had more than a passing interest in the rogue asteroid and the terrible consequences it posed for Earth. The world could just as well have been spared if one or both of the brilliant scientists represented a religion that was neither Islam nor Christianity. And, of course, to accomplish what they did, the scientists need not have any religion at all.

Sometimes we have to stop and think: Is a world with so many differing beliefs and value systems, a 'healthy' world, a 'safe' world? What comments would you care to make on this? (include in your response any thoughts you may have on how individuals, groups and/or governments can work towards making our world -with all its diversity- a healthier and safer place to be).



Sporty v Brainy

Debate, Discussion or Writing Exercise

Most people would say that it's good to be sporty and it's also good to be brainy. But which of these is best, and why?

Teaching Prompts...

- * What are the advantages of being sporty? Are there any disadvantages?
- * What are the advantages of being brainy? Are there any disadvantages?
- * Which -sportiness or braininess- is of most use in life beyond school?
- * If someone is not so sporty and would like to be, are they able to get better at sport through practise and training?
- * Can extra study and practise make a person brainier?
- * Someone who is lucky to be both sporty and brainy might be lacking in other areas. They might be envious of those who have qualities such as: sense of humour, cheerfulness, kindness, etc. If you were to list the 5 most important qualities you could have would sportiness be one of them. How about braininess? Make your list.



Does Every Problem have a Solution?

Suitable for whole-class discussion or as a writing exercise.

The Wise Crow (a fable of Aesop)

It was a very hot day. A crow wanting to quench his thirst searched the forest but he could not find water anywhere. “I’m going to die of thirst if I don’t find some water soon,” he thought.

At last, he came across a pitcher at the edge of the forest. There was a little water in the bottom of the pitcher. But the neck of the pitcher was very narrow. The crow could not reach the water. The crow -being very clever- soon had a plan.

He went about collecting small stones and started to drop the stones inside the pitcher one by one. Slowly the water in the pitcher started to rise, till it came up to the brim.

The crow was delighted. “At last I can quench my thirst,” thought the clever crow. He drank the water from the pitcher and flew away happily.

Moral: *Every problem has a solution.*

Do you agree with the story’s moral that every problem has a solution or do you think there are some problems that don’t? Back up your view with one or more examples.



Two Famous People

Thomas Edison, one of the most prolific inventors in history, produced more than 1 000 inventions in his workshop in New Jersey, USA.

Edison's desire was to create devices that could be useful to a majority of people.

He is credited with developing the phonograph, used to record and play back music. Another invention attributed to Edison is the motion picture camera.

Probably Edison's most famous invention is the light bulb, used all over the world in homes, businesses, factories and towns.

Walt Disney, cartoonist, animator and film producer, created many unforgettable characters, loved by children in lands near and far. Probably the most famous Disney characters are Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pluto and Goofy.

Walt Disney also made many outstanding films, including Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Jungle Book, Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, Cinderella, Treasure Island, The Shaggy Dog and Pollyanna.

Disneyland theme parks, another initiative of Walt Disney, have given pleasure to millions of families.

In your opinion which of these two men have made the most difference to humans' lives? How would the world be different without Edison's inventions? How important to people are Disney's characters, films and theme parks? Who do you think, Edison or Disney, would be more satisfied with their contribution to humanity? Whose work would you have liked doing the most, Edison's or Disney's?

Debate, Class Discussion or Written Exercise

“The Traditional Indigenous Lifestyle is better than the Modern Western Lifestyle.”

Present a good argument saying why you agree or disagree with the above statement.

Note to Teachers:

Information, thoughts and ideas for this topic may be found on the Australian Studies page where you can click on ‘Our First People’ and scroll down to Dreamtime and Dreaming. Australian studies is [here](#)



Are We Alone?

Suitable for whole-class discussion or as a writing exercise.



We live on planet Earth, one of 8 major planets in the solar system which is centred on the Sun.

The Sun is just one of billions of stars in the Milky Way galaxy.

It is probable that many of these stars also have planets revolving around them

The Milky Way is but one of billions of galaxies in the universe.

So it is quite likely that there are billions of planets 'out there'.

Do you think there may be other life in the universe? If not, why not? If so, might some of this life be intelligent and what physical form might it have?



Is Stealing worse than Lying?

Suitable for whole-class discussion or as a writing exercise.

We all know and understand that it is not good to steal or lie but we would do well to examine these notions more closely.

- Are there degrees of stealing? Is stealing a car worse than stealing a pencil? If so, what makes it worse?
- If you take someone else's property with the intention of returning it at a later time is it stealing?
- Are there degrees of lying? Is a student who lies to his parents about his English test result telling a bigger lie than a child who says she didn't take a biscuit from the jar -when she actually did? If so, why?
- Is it OK to tell a lie and then say you were only joking when you get caught out?
- Can you think of any situation where it would be alright to steal?
- Would you care to relate a lie that was told to you?
- When you were little did you ever tell a lie to your parents? Would you like to share it here?
- Have you ever had anything stolen?
- Adults may be punished severely -even jailed- for stealing but are not punished for lying? Why do you think this is?



Pale Blue Dot (Carl Sagan)

(Suitable for whole-class discussion or as a writing exercise -especially appropriate for Gifted/Talented groups)

From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of particular interest. But for us, it's different.

Consider again that dot. That's here, that's home, that's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar", every "supreme leader", every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.

Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

[Click here for 3.44 video.](#) [Click here for info.](#)

Talk about or Write about

- 1) What does Carl Sagan mean by *confident religions*?
- 2) Sagan places quotation marks around the terms *superstar* and *supreme leader*. Why do you think he does this?
- 3) What is meant by *the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot*?
- 4) What do you think is the central message (or messages) that Sagan is trying to convey here?

