



Philosophy
Circles

The Owl and the Magpie

I've written this very short story to hint at two "world philosophies" - contentment vs. consumerism if you like.



Fetch a class-size set of shiny spoons from the school canteen. Gather some twigs from outside. Lay them out in front of the pupils and ask them to pick which they like the best. Hear some reasons. *Why are some picking the shiny spoon? Because it is pretty? Why is pretty important? What is attractive about the twigs?*



Read the stimulus and dig into the characters' motivations. *Why did the magpie go for the spoon? Why did the Owl pick twigs?*

Delve into some deeper questions, using concepts from the story.

Who do they relate with most? Why is that?

What are the consequences of people being like the magpie? What about the owl?

Is it better to be like the magpie, or the owl? Why?

If one is better, should we tell people? Or let them do as they like?



Although we've provided a list which could conceivably be in chronological order, don't be tempted to cram them all in. Each could probably last a session on its own. I'd recommend beginning with the first and see where it's taken.

NEXT STEPS

I have taken several year groups to the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple in North London, and each time they are set a challenge by their host: to turn off their mobile phones from 6.30pm. It was a homework that never failed to catch their attention, and many rose to the challenge. You could provide a similar challenge to your pupils, perhaps about TV.

If you/they are interested, you could take a look at the Mindfulness in Schools Project:

<https://mindfulnessinschools.org/bring-mindfulness-to-your-school/>

The magpie was showing off his latest find – a shiny spoon that a human family had left behind.

“Don’t you think my nest is looking beautiful?” he said to the owl.

The owl looked at the different things the magpie had found – foil, sweet wrappers, hairbands, shoelaces, a drinks can. “Very pretty, I’m sure. But why do you need all these new things? My nest is perfectly comfortable just with twigs.”

The magpie looked across at the owl’s nest, which was brown and the same all over. “Very cosy, I’m sure. But don’t you get bored having a nest which is so ordinary, and never changes? Nobody has a nest like mine, and there’s always something new to look at.”

The birds shared a look. The magpie flew off in search of his next treasure. The owl watched him go, and then looked at the sunset.