

USING THE TOOLS OF VIRTUE



The aim of these sessions is to introduce students to the idea of developing moral reasoning and virtue, and to some of the tools they might use in order to do so. This unit focuses on moral virtue, but could just as easily be used for performance or civic virtues.

The lessons follow a pattern which is designed to represent a system that students can develop to become more morally skilful. The pattern is as follows:

1. **Notice:** notice something is not as it should be.
2. **Stop:** pause before reacting.
3. **Look:** look at the emotional reactions in the situation (yours and others).
4. **Listen:** giving and taking reasons.
5. **Caterpillar:** think about how what you do now (as a caterpillar) will affect what you become (butterfly).

The sessions are designed around a case study, to be selected by the teacher or the class. By dissecting the case study, the class will be able to see how virtue is developed.

SESSION 1: Something is not as it should be.

1. Notice.

- * Recognition of the need to employ virtue often begins with noticing that something is not as it should be and that virtue is required to respond. Begin with the part of your case study where a character realises that something is not as it should be, that something is not right. *In the Name of the Father* has several key moments of this nature. There are the sequences where the police are interviewing (and torturing) the suspects; there is the moment they are convicted and sentenced in court; there is a sequence where Gerry Conlon realises that he can't side with the IRA terrorist who has confessed to the Guildford bomb and instead decides to work with

There is a worked example in these lesson ideas: the 1994 film *'In the Name of the Father'*, which is the story of the Guildford Four, who were falsely imprisoned for the bombing of the Horse and Groom pub in Guildford in 1974.

Some other ideas for case studies are as follows:

- * *My Sister's Keeper* (film, with a teenage protagonist).
- * Oskar Schindler, *Schindler's List*.
- * Joe Simpson/Simon Yates, *Touching the Void*.
- * *Atonement*, Ian McEwan (and film version).
- * Mark Thomas, political activist: his work on the arms trade chronicled in *'As used on the famous Nelson Mandela'* or other activism in *'Mark Thomas Comedy Product'* on YouTube.
- * Aung San Suu Kyi.
- * *Erin Brokovich* (film)
- * *Silkwood* (film).
- * *Veronica Guerin* (film).
- * *Yes Men Fix The World* (film).

his father on the campaign for their release; there is the moment where Gareth Peirce, the defence lawyer, discovers the initials of Charlie Burke carved into a park bench.

2. What is not as it should be?

- * Looking at your stimulus, ask students to identify who thinks that something is not as it should be. How do the students know this?
- * Ask students to speculate on what the characters think is not as it should be. Push them to identify as much as they can: e.g. the defendants in *In the Name of the Father* might be thinking "innocent people should not be punished"; "the police



should not be corrupt”; “people shouldn’t lie”; “the courts should protect the innocent”; “I can’t trust authority” etc.

- * Ask students to identify their own responses to the situation. What do they think about it and how do they feel?

3. Noticing emotion.

- * Ask students to observe the emotional responses of as many characters as they can to the realisation that something is not as it should be. The court scenes in *In the Name of the Father* contain a

number of emotional responses: from those of the defendants and their families, to those of the police officers at the moment the verdict is announced. Ask students to try to name as many of the emotions as they can and to try to rate the strength of the emotions felt from 0 – 10.

4. Becoming more aware.

- * Ask students to spend time between lessons noticing (just noticing, rather than noticing and acting) when things are not as they should be and to make a note of those occasions.

SESSION 2: Something is not as it should be, and I need to pause.

1. Rushing in where angels fear to tread.

- * Looking at your stimulus, and the work done in the previous session, ask the students to look back at the emotional reactions they observed and rated out of 10.
- * How many emotions did they score at 8 or above? If the students felt that emotion at that strength in that situation, what would they do? Perhaps use the image or idea of a push or a propeller here: that powerful emotions drive us to respond.
- * Ask students to think of a situation of their own where something was not as it should have been, to which they had a powerful emotional response (e.g. someone insults them; they lose something precious belonging to someone else; they make a terrible mistake). This could be hypothetical. If you prefer, use a 3rd party example, such as Zinedine Zidane’s response to Marco Materazzi’s taunting in the football World Cup final of 2006.
- * Ask students to dissect the situation with a rushed, emotional response:
 - * What emotion is being felt?
 - * What is the emotion propelling me to do?

- * What is said or done?
- * What are the consequences of this?

2. With hindsight.

- * Ask the students if any of them would have acted differently if they had had the chance. If they could have replayed it, what would they have done?
- * Ask students what strategies they already have which enable them to take time to choose well in the moment and act in a way that doesn’t lead to regret or shame.

3. The pause button.

- * Some students might have suggested the idea of time-out, or some way of pausing before acting. An example of a ‘pause button’ that can buy us time before responding is mindfulness. Mindfulness of our breathing enables us to calm powerful emotions, which may make it easier to think with more clarity and focus about the situation we are in. There are more detailed instructions on how to teach mindfulness of the breath in lesson 4 of the Building Mental Health slate.
- * Ask students to speculate about the benefits and the drawbacks of pausing to decide when the heat





is on. Ask them to think of situations they have been in that would have benefited from pausing and situations that might not have. Beware the confirmation bias which makes it harder for us to try new ideas; where we just look for evidence that confirms what we already think, and find reasons to reject things that are new or challenging.

SESSION 3: Look: what do emotions tell me?

1. What do emotions tell me?

- * Our emotions are a reflection of how we interpret our environment. Some emotions are beyond conscious control (e.g. a startle or disgust reflex), but most emotions result from what we think about what is happening around us or in our own mind.
- * Introduce students to some examples of the thoughts reflected by certain emotions (on the slides).
- * Using this knowledge, ask the students to look back at the stimulus, to notice the emotions they observe, to name the emotions and to link the emotion to the thought that caused it.

2. Emotions: a window onto what we think is good.

- * The other information emotions provide us with, concerns what we think is the good. Emotions move us away from what we consider harmful, offensive and immoral towards what we consider beneficial, good, right; therefore our emotional response to a situation tells us what our values are; our vision of how the world should be.
- * Ask students to see if they can identify what the emotional responses in the stimulus tell them about what the character(s) think is the good.

3. Using emotions: character analysis.

- * *In the Name of the Father* depicts three characters who display emotion in contrasting ways. **Gerry Conlon**¹ is very much at the mercy of his

4. Finding pause more easily.

- * Ask students to spend time between lessons, pausing before reacting. Ask them to try mindfulness of breathing, or to experiment with their own technique for pausing.

emotions for much of the early part of the story. He is impulsive and does what will make him feel good, rather than being driven along by the good, or by virtue.

The film depicts his early time in prison as alternating between taking drugs to escape from the emotional pain of his situation and being explosively emotional with those who don't see things the way he does. Giuseppe Conlon is much more in control of his emotion. He is calm in contrast to the tempestuousness of his son and his ability to manage his emotion leads him to respond to his situation differently: he launches a campaign to attempt to secure their release and he also avoids conflict with other prisoners and with the prison authorities. He is guided by the good (as witnessed in his refusal to accept an offer of help from a convicted IRA terrorist) and by virtue.

There is a subplot that examines how his virtuous choices have caused him pain (e.g. working in a paint factory to provide for his family, which caused damage to his lungs). **Gareth Peirce**² is very clearly motivated by the good. Emma Thompson's portrayal of her depicts a character with a strong conception of justice and strong emotional responses to injustice, but emotions which are used to achieve actions that support the good (especially the scene where she is offered the chance to look at Gerry Conlon's file and skilfully navigates her emotions to not miss that opportunity).





- * Ask students to evaluate how well the characters in the stimulus use their emotions to get them closer to the good. Are they able to manage or control their emotions, or do they lose their temper? What impact does keeping or losing their temper have? Do they use their emotions to get something good for everyone (e.g. justice) or something good just for themselves (e.g. pleasure)?

SESSION 4: Listen: giving and taking reasons.

1. Go beyond emotion: gather reasons.

- * In moral deliberation, we need to recognise that our emotions propel us to do certain things and our reason (and the reason of others) enables us to check our emotional impulses against what is good or right.
- * We know what emotion is telling the character(s) in the stimulus to do, but ask students to identify what they think **reason** is telling the character(s) to do. For example, in *In the Name of the Father*, it is clear that reason is telling Giuseppe Conlon to respond to the situation in a different way to Gerry Conlon: whereas Giuseppe seems to respect the system and work alongside it, calmly campaigning for their freedom. Gerry initially seeks to antagonise and work against the system because his reason is telling him to retaliate against the system that has harmed him. Whereas Giuseppe's reasoning is leading him to pursue the good of justice and an end to the imprisonment of the 11 wrongly accused, Gerry's reasoning hasn't got beyond his doing what brings him pleasure or dulling the pain of his imprisonment. They act in different ways because they have each reasoned differently about what will achieve the good.

4. Learning from emotions.

- * Ask students to spend time in between lessons noticing their emotions, naming their emotions and linking their emotions to the thought that causes them.

¹ There is an article about Gerry Conlon here:

<http://thejusticegap.com/2014/06/days-wish-still-prison-days-wish-dead-2/>

² There is an article about Gareth Peirce here:

<http://www.theguardian.com/law/2010/oct/12/gareth-peirce-fight-human-rights> [both available 02/15].

2. Giving my own reasons.

- * When we act, we need our own reasons to act. But how do we develop these reasons? Ask students to place themselves in the position of one of the characters in the stimulus and ask them to generate an idea of what they would do and what their reasons would be for doing that.
- * For contrast, ask students to place themselves in the position of an anti-hero. For example, the police officers in *In the Name of the Father* acted in a way that many would condemn, but they would have had their reasons for acting in that way: ask students to work them out.
- * Ask students to try to work out how to decide which reasons are right.

3. Taking reasons from others.

- * Ask students to work out the sources of reasons other than our own desires and thinking (e.g. rules and laws; God or religion; logic and reason; heroes or paragons of virtue).
- * Ask students to look at the stimulus and ask if the 'hero' or main character looks beyond themselves for reasons to act. *In the Name of the Father*, Giuseppe Conlon seems motivated by sources of reasons such as his **duty** to his family, **moral**





principles of justice and his faith in God, whereas Gerry does not (initially) look beyond his own desires and reasons.

- * Ask students to evaluate how important it is to look to others for reasons to act, especially reasons that disagree with our own.

SESSION 5: Caterpillar.

In the children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, the caterpillar eats his way through some very colourful food so that he can turn into a beautiful butterfly. The colours of the food emerge on the butterfly's wings at the end of the story. This image could be used for the idea of the development of moral reasoning and virtue: that the things we do have an effect on the person we become.

1. Butterfly.

- * Ask students to envisage what kind of person they would like to be when it comes to deciding between good and bad, right and wrong: what kind of moral butterfly do they want to be?
- * You can use the stimulus here: for example, Gerry Conlon is on a journey of moral becoming. At the start of the story, he is selfish and self-interested, lurching from pleasure to pleasure. He is a disappointment to his father Giuseppe, who is a man of virtue and Gerry is aware of this and feels the shame acutely. Over the course of the story, Gerry becomes morally aware and develops certain virtues, which he continued to display upon his release from prison in the work he did for the wrongly imprisoned.

4. Learn to give and take.

- * In the time between lessons, ask students to practise knowing their own reasons for acting and also, looking for reasons from other sources, especially reasons that disagree with our own.

2. Inspirational butterflies.

- * Ask students to think of examples of people who exemplify the virtues (Courage, Justice, Honesty, Compassion, Self-discipline, Gratitude, Humility).
- * What do these exemplars do that students would need to emulate to make them more virtuous?
- * Perhaps use anti-heroes from your stimulus to contrast. The police officers in *In the Name of the Father* are examples of men who have become vicious by believing the wrong reasons for acting, and losing sight of the good that they are trying to uphold.

3. From caterpillar to butterfly.

- * Ask students to evaluate what they themselves need to do differently in terms of noticing, stopping, looking and listening, which will move them closer to being a virtuous butterfly.