

Introductory notes

Welcome to Primary Ethics Bites! This **Bite** takes 10 - 15 minutes to complete, but you may find the ideas within are revisited in conversations for weeks to come.

Bites for the K – 2 age group are designed for children to tackle individually, with one or more siblings or peers, and/or with the assistance of an adult. The adult's role is to read the stories and questions, model genuine curiosity and to support the student to think for themselves.

This **Bite** is available in both audio and printed (PDF) formats. The same content is covered in each, so simply choose the option that best suits your student's learning environment.

If an adult is not available to assist, we recommend using the audio version as the stories and questions are read to the student for them.

Aim to be neutral when listening to the ideas expressed by your student and ask them to give the reasons behind their opinion rather than try to do the thinking and reasoning for them. Encourage the student to talk through their ideas by using expressions like 'Ok', 'Hmmm, I wonder...' and 'that's an interesting thought!'.

There is often not a single right answer when it comes to ethical dilemmas. In that way, ethics is different to other lessons like maths. Instead, what ethical inquiry helps us do is to look at a situation or idea from different points of view, and to think about the reasons *behind* those points of view. When we do this, we think more deeply about our own views, discover new ideas, and build a deeper understanding of the considerations in each dilemma. We develop our skills in critical thinking and ethical reasoning and our

ability to make well- thought-out decisions in a range of circumstances.

Should we blame the donkey?

Objectives/ethical concepts explored

- Intention, effects (consequences), judgement
- Encouraging students to think for themselves about the difference between meaning or intending to cause harm and causing harm 'accidentally' or without wanting to
- Whether side effects, such as harmful side effects, sometimes result from our own carelessness or thoughtlessness.

Knowledge & skills developed

Knowledge

- What are intentions?

Skills

- Listening
- Drawing inferences
- Giving reasons

Essential questions

- Is it fair to punish someone if they caused harm accidentally?
- Is it fair to punish someone if it was an accident but they should have been more careful or thoughtful?

Should we blame the donkey? aims to encourage students to think for themselves about the difference between meaning or intending to cause harm and causing harm 'accidentally'. Children will listen to a story *The Donkey and the little dog* and answer questions about the donkey's intention, the harm he caused and the punishment he was given.

We do not use the phrase 'intending to' or the term 'intention' but, instead, use language that is familiar to young children. It's not unusual to hear a young child insist that he 'didn't mean to' hurt another child or that he didn't do it 'on purpose'. In making such a claim, the child shows they understand that they have caused harm, but also that their actions will be judged on whether or not they are seen to have or intended to cause harm.

Overall, common-sense morality has it that a person's intentions – what she is trying or planning to do, or what she is aiming at – have a bearing on how her actions should be judged. However, there is ongoing debate about how much bearing intention has, and about what (if any) other factors we need to take into account in judging the moral worth of an action.

Are intentions the only things that count? Some philosophers argue they are. Other philosophers disagree, arguing that other factors – consequences, for example – also need to be taken into account. But then how do we balance the different factors in order to come to moral judgments? To what extent should careless acts that cause harm deserve punishment? These questions are open to be explored in this lesson.

Bites are based on Primary Ethics lessons developed for use by trained adult volunteer facilitators in NSW public schools. Our lessons are based on philosophical ethics and use a 'community of inquiry' approach – the *asking power* of the group – to work together in discussion. The community of inquiry approach provides students with the opportunity to reflect on and form their own responses and consider the ideas of others in a safe and supportive environment.

You can read more about the community of inquiry approach here:
<https://primaryethics.com.au/about-ethics-classes/what-happens-in-an-ethics-class/>

And watch this video for a great explanation of philosophical ethics:
<https://vimeo.com/199903396>