

Thoughtings

Puzzles, Problems and Paradoxes
in Poetry to Think With



Peter Worley and Andrew Day

Foreword by Michael Rosen

Thoughtings is a poetry collection with a difference.

The name 'Thoughtings' was inspired by a 5-year old who, when asked to explain what thinking is without using the word 'think' said 'It's when you're thoughting'.

Children love pondering big philosophical questions like 'Does the universe end?', 'Where is my mind?' and 'Can something be true and false at the same time?'. These verses capture that impulse in the growing mind and feed it further.

These are not poems or, at least, not in the traditional sense of the word... They are a kind of poem specifically designed around a particular puzzle or problem that might be thought more philosophy than poetry.

Here's to the joy of puzzlement!

Peter Worley leads The Philosophy Foundation in its mission to transform thinking in education. He lives and works in South East London with his wife Emma and their daughter Katie.

Andrew Day is a writer of plays, films, stories and poems. He joined the Philosophy Foundation as quickly as he could when he found out they bring Philosophy into schools. His degree in Philosophy & Social Anthropology has been invaluable in teaching various things to people of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds - from inner city nurseries to international banks.

This book is suitable for adults and children.

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Foreword, or Forward? Or Backward? Or in both directions at the same time?

by Michael Rosen

This collection of poems is very, very irritating. It's irritating like having toast crumbs in your bed. It's irritating like having toast crumbs in your brain. Let me explain: most of the time we go about looking and listening, talking and playing, making things, going places without wondering too much too often why exactly we're doing it. It's as if it's all one great big flow of stuff: get up, have a wee, wash, breakfast, out the house, school or work, do stuff, come home, watch TV, have something to eat, argue with some people you live with, go to bed. Or something like that.

All the time this is going on very nearly all of us are using words and phrases. But what are they for? How do they work? Do they just tell us what's there, what we have to do, what we should do? Or are they a bit more mysterious than that? Are they secretly attached to strange ways of thinking that we only know about when someone points it out. Do you remember a scene in *Alice in Wonderland* where there is an argument about whether 'I mean what I say' is the same as 'I say what I mean'? The more I think about that, the more it feels like toast crumbs in my brain.

Well, this book is like that. It's full of puzzles and possibilities. It asks us questions but they're not the kind of questions that necessarily have a right or wrong answer. They might be the kind of question which might have several right answers, or even no answer at all. It might be a question which is just a

puzzle that we can sit and think about as a puzzle, something amazing or odd about the way we humans think and speak.

No matter how old or young we are, we're all used to the idea that school and education is about stuff that we have to get to know. It's in books, on the internet, on worksheets and on the whiteboard. Every day, we're supposed to get hold of some of that stuff, get more knowledge or more skills. Meanwhile, that secret thing I spoke about is going on. We're not only learning stuff. We're also learning how to think ABOUT stuff. We get set in our ways of thinking. We might get to think, say, that if it's written down in a book, it must be right. But what if it isn't? How could you tell? What kind of thinking would you have to do, to figure out that what was written on the page is wrong? And if it is wrong, how did it get put in the book? Was someone just wrong or were they trying to trick you? How could you tell?

More toast crumbs in your head?

Well, I did warn you. But maybe you didn't believe me. Or maybe I'm wrong.

Anyway, this is a book of thoughtings. Thoughtful, thought-making pieces of writing.

One last thing: getting toast crumbs out of your bed is fun. They jump up and down. Some of them refuse to be swept out. Some of them find new places to hide. Some invite you to nibble them. Getting toast crumbs out of your mind is just like that too.

A Thoughtroduction

by Peter Worley and Andrew Day

Everything in our collection of *Thoughtings* was inspired by the thoughts of children as voiced to us in our daily work, visiting primary school children and running philosophy sessions. We turned their insights, brainwaves and verbal entanglements into puzzles and poems for the young – and when we took them back to the classroom, they went down a storm.

Once teachers saw how engaging these pieces were for their pupils, they started to ask us how to get hold of them. So we've collected them together and expanded their range. They can be read for fun or used as a starting point for discussions. Many of them also get children thinking about language itself.

Children love pondering big, philosophical questions like, 'Does the universe end?', 'Where is my mind?' and 'Can something be true and false at the same time?' These verses capture that impulse in the growing mind, and feed it further.

If you want to know how we use these poems with children turn to Appendix I on page 191. Regularly updated lesson plans that make use of these *Thoughtings* are available if you become a member of The Philosophy Foundation website (www.philosophy-foundation.org). You can find a sample lesson plan in Appendix II on page 195.

Here's to the joy of puzzlement!

Question to class:

What is thinking? But try to answer without saying the word 'thinking' in your answer.

Year 1 (age 5) child:

It's when you're thoughting.



Introduction

Are Things Always What They Seem To Us To Be?

Are things what they seem to us to be?
'The sky is blue,'
Or so say you
But I am not so sure.

The sky *looks* blue
But when it's night
It isn't any more.

I have a chair and it is green
And my friends agree
That it is green
When they've seen
My chair.

But turn off the lights
And the green is gone
Yet can you say to where?

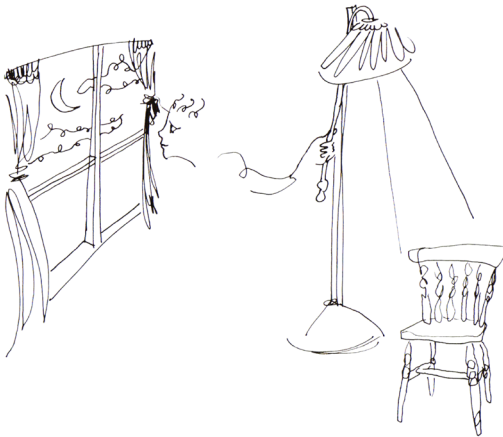


Are things always what they seem to us to be?
Please read on and take the time to think on it for
me ...

Thoughtings

Questions for 'Are Things Are Not Always What They Seem To Us To Be?':

- ❖ What is *colour*?
- ❖ Is the colour of a chair *in* the chair itself?
- ❖ Where is the colour of something?
- ❖ If you put a green chair in a *completely* darkened room what colour is it?
- ❖ If two people disagree about what colour something is, who is right? How would you know who is right?
- ❖ Is how something looks the same as how it is?
- ❖ Is 'looks' the same as 'is'?
- ❖ Are things always as they seem to us to be?



Where's Mr Nobody?

Where's Mr Nobody?
I can't seem to find him.
And wherever I look he's
Not there.

We were talking together
About mythical creatures
That inhabit a land called
Nowhere.

I say 'talking together',
But he didn't say much
Or have a great deal to
Say to me.

But that's why I like him
Coz he always agrees
And I don't disagree with
Nobody!

Questions for 'Where's Mr Nobody?':

- ❖ Where is Mr Nobody?
- ❖ Where are mythical creatures?
- ❖ How many horns does a unicorn have?
- ❖ Can you talk to someone who's not there?
- ❖ Can something be 'not there'?

Socrates

There was a man called Socrates
He had a big belly and knobbly knees
His beard was white and fuzzy as cotton
His head was bald as a baby's bottom.

His eyes were bulgy and his ears stuck out
His nose looked like a piglet's snout
He was famous for being so ugly
But something about him was really lovely.

Crowds of people would follow him round
They all came running when they heard the
sound
Of Socrates in the street each day
They'd all press in, asking, 'What did he say?'

But there were others listening in
Who thought, 'He's evil – this is sin!
We have to stop this ugly thought.
Arrest him – take him off to court!'

What did he say that alarmed them so?
Just this: 'My friends ... what do you know?'

Questions for 'Socrates':

- ❖ What was lovely about Socrates?
- ❖ If you knew Socrates, do you think you would like him or not?
- ❖ Is Socrates' question easy to answer?
- ❖ Is it possible to have a beautiful mind? If it is, is it better than a beautiful face, or not?

Questions for 'Lines':

- ❖ What do you think the poet is doing in the poem?
- ❖ What do you think the poem means?
- ❖ What is the poet trying to choose?
- ❖ Why does the poet ask the question at the end?
- ❖ Should we make our own choices in life?
- ❖ When should we listen to others?
- ❖ Is it better to choose for ourselves or to let others choose for us?
- ❖ Do you have to choose whether to choose or not?
- ❖ The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre said we are 'condemned to be free'. What did he mean? And do you agree?
- ❖ What is a choice?
- ❖ Are we really free to choose?



It Wasn't Me!

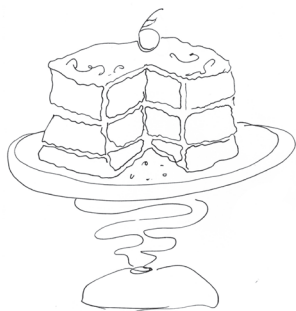
When I ate the chocolate cake
There was nothing I could do, sir,
It wasn't me that made me eat it
It was my tongue and taste buds thereupon, sir,
I tried to resist, tried to look away
But the cake kept calling to me, sir,
I'm disposed to be weak around chocolate cake
It's the way I'm made, it's my family-make
And if it's down to me it's totally hopeless
I'm just a poor, innocent victim of deliciousness,
you see, sir!



Are You Free?

Questions for 'It Wasn't Me!':

- ❖ Is the speaker in the above poem responsible for eating the cake?
- ❖ Is he/she right to blame their taste buds?
- ❖ Can you blame your parents for your weaknesses? Your genes perhaps?
- ❖ Are you free to resist temptations? If you fail can you blame anyone or anything?
- ❖ When are you not responsible for doing something?



Outroduction

Bliss

Blue is blue
What's true is true
Two and two
Is four!

It's really very
preliminary
I want to hear
No more

Silly talking
Billy *squawking*,
I've had enough
Of this

Philosophy,
So leave me be
In ignoramus'
Bliss!

Thoughtings

Questions for 'Bliss':

- ❖ What is the poet trying to express?
- ❖ Do you agree with what the poet is expressing?
- ❖ What is the point of philosophy?
- ❖ Is it better to be a satisfied pig or a dissatisfied human?
- ❖ The philosopher Socrates famously said, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' What do you think he meant by this? Do you agree with him or not?
- ❖ Is it better to be in ignorant bliss or is it better to know the truth, however uncomfortable or unpleasant it may be?

“Plato said that “Philosophy begins in wonder”, and *Thoughtings* provides a wonderfully rich variety of ideas, concepts, mysteries and questions for children to wonder about. Each Thoughting poem aims to stimulate curiosity about some aspect of young people’s lives and – as an optional learning avenue – the nature of the language we use to understand it. Consequently teachers will find this a ‘quick entry’ resource for stimulating thinking and communication skills in the classroom.”

Will Ord, Thinking Education Ltd

“A stimulating and imaginative range of catalysts to thought.”

Nigel Warburton, The Open University

“*Thoughtings* is a delightful, clever, rich resource. It pokes, prods and tickles childrens’ minds by turning life’s conundra into light and inviting poemy thingies. Accessible, funny and provocative, this collection brings out, rather than stuffs in, learning and will guide your pupils to the lost goals of education: to question; to think; to enquire. *Thoughtings* creatively combines the ancient art form of poetry with the ancient Socratic method of question-asking to produce a warm and welcome counterpoint to the strictures of a utilitarian curriculum.”

Paul Ginnis, Independent Trainer and Author

“If you want to do some thinking aerobics and some brain gymnastics then this is the book for you. I always thought that philosophy and poetry were linked by more than the letter P and this book proves it!”

Ian McMillan, Poet, Broadcaster and Comedian

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