

Key end points for this unit include to know that:

- Philosophy is the study of big questions about life, knowledge and wisdom.
- Ethics is the study of right and wrong.
- A philosopher is someone who thinks deeply about big questions.
- There are religious and non-religious approaches to ethics.
- An ethical dilemma is a situation where it is hard to decide what is right.

This unit introduces pupils to philosophy and ethics as the final part of their RE curriculum. This unit builds on all previous learning and helps children to think critically about questions of truth, morality, and responsibility, and to see how both religious and non-religious worldviews approach these issues. By engaging with philosophers past and present, pupils learn that big questions often have no single answer, but require reasoning, empathy, and reflection. This supports the wider aims of primary RE: developing religious literacy, encouraging respect for diverse perspectives, and equipping pupils with tools to make thoughtful choices in their own lives.

The unit builds directly on prior learning in earlier years: creation stories, culture and religion, words of wisdom, and Humanism. It also connects with history (e.g. leaders and ethical choices) and English (oracy, reasoning, structured writing). Pupils progress from understanding philosophy as asking big questions, to exploring ethics and morality, to comparing religious and non-religious approaches, and finally to applying philosophical ideas to dilemmas. This progression ensures that children move from foundational concepts to applied reasoning, preparing them for deeper study in secondary RE and philosophy.

Lesson Sequence

In lesson 1, pupils are introduced to philosophy as the study of big questions about life, truth, and meaning. They learn that philosophers use reasoning rather than simple answers, and that philosophy is about exploring ideas deeply. The lesson emphasises that anyone can think philosophically by asking thoughtful questions. Pupils practise identifying “big questions” (e.g. What is truth?, What makes us happy?) and reflect on why these are important. This sets the foundation for seeing philosophy as a discipline that underpins later learning about ethics and morality.

During lesson 2, pupils explore ethics as the study of right and wrong choices, and morality as knowing the difference between good and bad actions. They are introduced to dilemmas; situations where values clash and the right choice is not obvious. Through examples (truth vs. kindness, fairness vs.

loyalty), pupils see how ethics helps people think carefully about decisions. The lesson links back to shared values (honesty, kindness, fairness) and the Golden Rule, showing how ethics guides everyday behaviour. This prepares pupils to compare different ethical approaches in the next lesson.

In lesson 3, pupils learn about key philosophers and their approaches to ethics and big questions. They encounter Socrates (questioning), Plato (justice and reality), Aristotle (virtues), Kant (duties and rules), Mill (consequences), and Arendt (responsibility). Pupils see that philosophers often disagree, and that philosophy is about exploring perspectives rather than finding one fixed answer. They practise linking philosophers to questions (e.g. Should we always tell the truth?), building confidence in applying philosophical ideas. This lesson deepens their understanding of ethics by showing how thinkers have shaped different approaches.

Lesson 4 offers pupils an opportunity to compare how religious traditions and non-religious worldviews approach ethics. They revisit prior knowledge of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, recognising ethical teachings such as the Ten Commandments, zakat (charity), and the Eightfold Path. They contrast these with Humanist ideas of reason, empathy, and consequences. Through dilemmas (truth-telling, charity, fairness), pupils see that religious and non-religious ethics often share similar values, even if explained differently. This lesson highlights diversity in ethical sources and prepares pupils to apply both perspectives to dilemmas in the next lesson.

During lesson 5 pupils apply philosophical and ethical approaches to real-life dilemmas. They consider how different philosophers might respond: Kant (duty), Mill (consequences), Aristotle (virtue), Socrates (questioning), Arendt (responsibility), and Humanists (reason and empathy). Pupils practise comparing perspectives and recognising that philosophers do not always agree. They reflect on whether philosophy is still relevant today, recognising that dilemmas continue to shape human life. This lesson consolidates the unit by showing pupils how philosophy and ethics are applied in practice, encouraging them to reason deeply and make thoughtful choices.

Lesson 6 is an opportunity for assessment and to check on children's understanding of philosophy and ethics. We have also included some suggestions for an extended project (collaborative or individual) that teachers may like to do as this is the final unit of RE in primary school.

Key Concepts: Philosophy, ethics, morality, values, consequences, choice, perspective

Key Vocabulary: philosopher, ethics, morality, dilemma, command, justice, virtue