

# PHIL 2143: Philosophy for Children – Fall 2025

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(Canvas msgs are preferred)

**Office Hours:** Wed 12-2                      **Office:** Renaissance Park 412

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## Required Texts:

- *Big Ideas for Little Kids* – Thomas Wartenberg
- *Various Reading Posted on Canvas*

**Children’s Books – *You are required to pick ONE* from each bullet group (or just the one if there aren’t options – Feel free to get used copies if they are the BIG versions and in decent shape)**

- *I Want to be a Vase* – Julio Torres OR *Lou* – Breanna Carzoo
- *Frog and Toad Together* – Arnold Lobel OR *A Little Bit Brave* – Nicola Kinnear
- *Fredrick* - Leo Lionni
- *Tops and Bottoms* – Janet Stevens OR *Please, Please, the Bees* – Gerald Kelly
- *More Dung! A Beetle Tale* – Frank Weber OR *The Squish* - Breanna Carzoo
- *I Want My Hat Back* - Jon Klassen
- *The Fate of Fausto* OR *The Moose Belongs to Me* – Oliver Jeffers
- *The Lorax* – Dr. Seuss OR *Tidy* – Emily Gravett
- *Noodlephant* - Jacob Kramer OR *The Big Orange Splot* – Daniel Pinkwater
- *Rot – The Cutest in the World* OR *The Pidgeon Needs a Bath* – Mo Willems

## Course Description

In this course we will explore some of the “big ideas” within the discipline of philosophy – e.g. what’s the right way to act, what makes something the sort of thing it is (it’s “essence”), what, if anything, justifies punishment? – by *teaching children philosophy*. You will learn the methodologies and tools of philosophical inquiry (i.e. how to approach, untangle, and answer philosophical questions), the context of some of the central questions that philosophers debate (e.g. how should we go about deciding what the morally right thing to do is?), all with the aim of **enabling you to facilitate philosophical discussions with preschool and elementary school children**. In both our seminar room and when we work with the children at their schools, we are aiming to create a “*community of inquiry*” – a group of people who are engaged in a collaborative enterprise to work through difficult or tricky philosophical questions together. Within this community you, your colleagues, and the children you work with are all budding philosophers who are encouraged to ask philosophical questions, develop their own views and answers to these questions, articulate reasons for their views, and to listen to and learn from one another. Creating and sustaining such a community will be a large part of our work in this course.

## Learning Objectives and Course Goals

One of the best ways to develop and sharpen your grasp and understanding of any subject area or skill is to be put in the position of teaching others about it or how to do it. That’s what you are going to be doing. Specifically, you are going to learn about various philosophical debates, ideas and strategies for teaching children philosophy through children’s literature. You’ll do this by creating your own discussion guides, lesson plans, novel question sets, games/activities and book modules on various children’s books. The aim of this is to hone and develop your critical thinking and reading skills, pedagogical abilities, and familiarize you with several sub-disciplines within academic Philosophy. You are also going to be contributing to an ongoing “Teaching Children Philosophy” project – a database for teachers who want to introduce philosophy into their classrooms.

You can group the **skills** that you will develop in this course into two categories: “philosophical” and “pedagogical”:

## **Philosophical**

*At the completion of this course a student will know how to:*

- Argue for a position on a philosophical issue in an articulate and clear manner and clearly support it with good reasons
- Figure out if they agree or disagree with what’s been said on a philosophical issue/question (i.e. someone else’s position) and how to present an objection or counterexample to a claim that has been made
- Present a real (i.e. “concrete”) example of the abstract issue being discussed
- Identify appropriate children’s literature for sparking philosophical discussions
  - Identify and distill the philosophical issues/questions that this literature aptly illustrates
    - Create lessons plans, activities, and discussion guides meant to teach children about these issues

*At the completion of this course student will know:*

- The “form” that a Philosophy Discussion follows – the “rules” for conducting a fruitful philosophy discussion
- What makes a question or issue “philosophical”
- What progress looks like when it comes to a philosophical discussion or debate

## **Pedagogical**

*At the completion of this course students will know how to:*

- Facilitate a productive philosophical discussion with your peers and young school children
- Help students discover through reflection, expression in words, and support with reasons, their own answers to philosophical questions that interest and concern them
- Harness students’ natural curiosity (through a learner-centered pedagogy) to engage with philosophical questions.

## **Service Learning and Community Impact Goal**

The service learning and community engagement aspects of this course are the time that we spend preparing for and working with local students. Our aim is to enrich their lives through the development of their critical thinking skills. Further, we want these students to realize and appreciate that they can engage in constructive conversations with one another about important “philosophical” questions and ideas. We aim to teach them that their ideas matter, to take their own and others’ ideas seriously, and have constructive and meaningful dialogues with others – a skill they will take with them throughout the rest of their lives.

**Learning Activities** (What you need to do to accomplish the preceding goals):

- **Carefully follow assignment instructions and pay attention to any grading rubrics and due dates for all the assignments.**
- Do all the readings **prior to class**. What you get out of class is proportionate to what you put into it (also, you probably won’t be able to do well unless you do all the readings). Reading philosophy is different from reading in almost any other discipline and it can be **hard** (and take a long time). So, while each week’s reading assignments may be relatively short, they can be difficult. You will get the most out of the class if you read each reading *carefully* and *more than once*, both before *and* after class.
  - I will run class on the assumption that everyone has done the reading prior to coming to class – class is where we will delve into the details of each reading and assignment
- **Print out and bring** reading assignments and any reading notes you’ve taken to class each day.
- Be in your seat ready to participate at the beginning of class and remain until the end of class – being late will take away from your participation grade.
- Keep up to date on your journal entries, participate in class discussions, attend all class sessions, and school visits
- **Refrain entirely from the use of cell phones, including texting** (just put them away for the class **or – better yet – don’t bring your phones to class**). I am not going to stop

my lecture to call you out on it, but I remember who uses their phones in class and it will negatively affect your grade.

- **No Computers in Class.** Why not? First, there are some studies out there which claim that they impede student learning. Second, it can be really distracting to the students around you – if, for example, you are doing something besides notetaking on your computer, e.g. Instagram, reddit, etc. If computers could play a helpful role in the class, I will allow them (they probably won't)
- **Ask questions** when you are unclear about concepts; **I LOVE questions** and will **never ever** treat any question as if it was not worth asking.
- **CLASS ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED**

### **Methods of Student Assessment (Grade Breakdown)**

**Lesson Plans / Discussion Framework / Activity Description / Narrative:** 40% (Required for *every* classroom visit and due before your school visit)

**Journal Assignments:** 10% (5 entries worth 2% each)

**“How We Do Philosophy” - Rules Assignment:** 5%

**Perusall Assignments:** 10%

**Self-Assessments:** 10%

**Book Module Project:** 20%

**Summative Final Paper Assignment:** 5%

### ***Important Note:***

***My intention is for most of this class to function as a discussion.*** There will be a reading (usually an article we are reading about a philosophical ideas) and we will come to class to talk about it (or someone will present about it). Accordingly, **a significant portion of your**

assignments (and your grade) will revolve around preparing you for these in class discussions. Because of this, *many of these assignments cannot be made up late* (Perusall, Self-Assessments, etc.) – the purpose of these assignments is to prepare you for class discussions, after the discussion has already happened...not much sense in turning them in. This is also why **ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED** – so much of the course is built around you engaging with the material on your own and then bringing your thoughts, questions, and insights about it into our community (the classroom) to discuss it. If you do not think you can regularly attend class, this might not be the course for you.

**Site Visit *Preparation and Execution*** (What you do to get ready for working with children)

*Lesson Plans / Discussion Framework / Etc.*

One of the main ways that you'll prepare for working with the children is through the creation of your **lesson plans**. These are the materials that you (and your partners) will use to prepare you for your discussion on a particular book and the ideas contained therein. These lesson plans are also the guiding framework that you will bring with you to each classroom visit. They should include things like: you defining the vocabulary (i.e. philosophical concepts) which will be key in your discussions with students (and how you want to present these concepts to them), what questions you might want to use to guide and facilitate the discussion toward the key philosophical ideas in a story, activities or games you invent which illustrate the philosophical idea you are exploring, and anything else which you think will assist you in the classroom. You'll also have to prepare "story matrices" or other visual aids - visual aids that will help guide and facilitate your discussions and which we will bring to the school every week. I will also ask that you describe any activities/games/etc. that you plan on doing with the children (and what they seek to illustrate philosophically). **These cannot be made up if late.**

## *Journal Assignments*

Your experiences working with children and trying to teach them Philosophy will be filled with success and failures – things that “work” and make your discussions fruitful and things that don’t work, get you off track, waste time, confuse people, etc. Accordingly, for the first half of your visits (5 of them), you will keep and maintain journals (maintained on Canvas). Here you will document your experiences, thoughts, success, failures, etc. that you encounter throughout your semester working with children. Your posts will be a mixture of responses to my prompts, reflections, etc. of your experiences working with the children. These will address things such as: challenges you faced when facilitating a philosophical discussion on a particular book, what questions, tactics, etc. you found helped you facilitate a productive discussion – i.e. a discussion in which every student felt as if they got to think about, formulate, express, and discuss their view(s) on a particular philosophical question/issue. This is a place for you to reflect upon your experiences in the classroom so that you can document what has worked for you and what hasn’t. While there is no specific word count/limit – the expectation is that these will be thoughtful and substantive (i.e. not just a couple hasty sentences). Again, you will only do this for your first five visits. **These cannot be made up if late.**

## *“How We Do Philosophy” Rules Assignment*

When working with children, there is a structure to “how we do philosophy”. Students need to listen to each other, wait until it is their turn to offer their own thoughts and opinions, and so on. You and your partners will construct your own set of “rules” of how we do philosophy that you will bring to every session that you have working with the children. I will offer you guidelines, but you need to come up with your own personalized set of rules. Accordingly, at the beginning of the semester your group will draft a set of rules, offer a detailed justification for each rule, and present them to the class.

## *Perusall Assignments*

Just like we discuss our thoughts about the readings in class together, you are also going to be working through the readings with your colleagues outside of class. For this course we are going to be using **Perusall** - a sort of group annotation software. As you'll see, I'll pick several readings throughout the semester that you and your colleagues will read and comment on them together. The way that Perusall works is that you and your colleagues' comment upon a reading with questions, comments, flagging, etc. and Perusall grades it through their proprietary algorithm (with my own guidelines and supervision). We can also pose and answer questions to each other on the readings. You are expected to read through each assignment on Perusall carefully and fully and provide many substantive comments and questions on each reading.

- **What your Perusall assignments require:** you carefully read each document from beginning to end, highlight what you think are important parts of the reading, write comments/questions/etc. on the document itself, respond to other students' comments...some combination of all of those. **The purpose of these assignments is to prepare you to discuss these readings in class - you are required to do each Perusall assignment *before* we discuss the reading in class – you will not receive any credit for late assignments. *Please be sure to keep up with your Perusall assignments.***

### *Self-Assessments & Class Participation*

Participation in our class is essential integral to your learning. I want you all to participate – the more the better. There are many ways in which, and modalities through which, you can participate. Perhaps the most obvious way to participate is to contribute to our in-class discussions. This is not, however, the only way in which you can actively engage with the course or course materials (also grading participation based only on verbal, in-class participating, can sometimes be exclusionary). ***Attendance is essential in this course – you are expected to come to every class session*** (unless you are sick). Considering this, you and I will be using self-assessments to explore and communicate your engagement with the course, its materials, and activities. **Four self-assessments are due in the term – they will not be accepted late.** The highest you can assess yourself on each one is 3%, and the self-assessments in total will count for 10% of your final grade. Thus, you can receive full credit even without engaging at the highest level over the entire term. I typically give you whatever grade you have given yourself (though, obviously it's my prerogative to do otherwise for cause – e.g. you never come

to class and give yourself a “3”). Examples of engaging with and participating in the course include (but are not limited to):

- Contributing to class discussions; organizing study groups to discuss class outside of our classroom (e.g. to help each other with assignments)
- Engaging with the contributions of others in a charitable manner, talking about course material with family, friends, or others who might be interested outside of class
- Searching for, discovering, and watching/listening to/reading articles, lectures, podcasts, videos, blogs, from outside of class and sharing your finding with others (and me!).
- Sharing your learning and research strategies, skills, and habits with other people in the course
- Raising conversations on social media like Instagram or Twitter; sharing relevant news or examples with classmates; translating or simplifying course materials so they can be more accessible to people outside of the university or in other disciplines; suggesting and discussing with me ways to improve the course at any point in the term; and so on (this list is not exhaustive).

### *Book Module*

Your big final assignments in this course will be to create a book module for a children’s book which is not yet in the “Teaching Children Philosophy” database. For this assignment you will create a reading guide that a teacher could use who wants to introduce some Philosophy for Children into his or her classroom.

### *Summative Term Paper*

This paper seeks to serve as an extended explanation and exploration of what you are producing in your final book module assignment (where you create your own brand-new book module) AND a reflection of the work you’ve done in this course this past semester.

### **Communication**

Important announcements and assignments will be communicated to you via email, in class, or via Canvas. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. Check your email often and don't miss class. If you do, check in with another student in class. Write their names and contact information in a place where you will be able to find it later.

Of course, you are always welcome to Canvas message or email me. But please keep in mind:

- **I do not check my Canvas messages or email before or after business hours** (i.e. outside 9 am – 5pm) this includes weekends.
- I respond promptly, but not always on the same day.
- **I do not answer questions that are clearly answered by the syllabus or assignment instructions.** I just delete those emails. If you're not hearing back from me, that may be a hint to double-check the relevant materials.

### **Office hours**

If you have class during my office hours, let me know and we'll try to work out an alternative time to meet. Otherwise, just show up. If I am in with someone or my door is close, knock and let me know you've arrived. No need to email me to make an appointment.

## **Other Course Policies**

### **Absence Because of Religious Beliefs**

Any student who is unable, because of his or her religious beliefs, to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study, or work requirement will be provided with an opportunity to make up such examination, study, or work requirement that he or she may have missed because of such absence on any particular day; provided, however, that such make-up examination or work should not create an unreasonable burden upon such school. Students should make appropriate arrangements with me in advance of the absence, preferably at least two weeks before the religious observance.

**Special Needs:** I will make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities or special needs that may affect learning or performance. Any student who requires special arrangements for attending class or doing assignments please speak with me as soon as possible. Please visit the Northeastern University Disability Center's website for information regarding requests for academic accommodations: <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/>

**Support Services:** If you or someone you know would like to discuss confidential information about health or mental health care, please contact Northeastern University Health and Counseling Services (<http://www.northeastern.edu/uhrs/counseling-services/>) or We Care (<http://www.northeastern.edu/wecare/>). To receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, illness, or etc., you must register with the **Disability Resource Center**. This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss it.

**Academic Honesty:** *Using ChaptGPT is a form of plagiarism (and cheating) – don't do it.* Failing to indicate when material is taken from someone else is academically dishonest and intolerable. All work you hand in must be your own and the proper attribution of ideas and language must be done with care. If your discussions of class topics with your friends, dogs, parents, etc., are helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even your Googling bounty. A copy of Northeastern University's Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy can be found at <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy/>. Any instance of plagiarism, cheating, or the like (see ChatGPT) could result in the perpetrator's receiving a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. I will make use of the plagiarism detection services available through Canvas, and your papers will be archived in the Canvas database. If you have any questions about this policy please come talk to me. Accidental plagiarism is still plagiarism. If in doubt, cite, cite, cite. In short, do not plagiarize. I *will* fail you and report you to the administration.

## Course Reading/Assignment Schedule<sup>1</sup>

Date	Topic & Focus	Reading Assignment & Assignments
9/3	What is Philosophy? What is Philosophy for Children (PFC)?	<b>Film Screening:</b> “Teaching Children Philosophy” & “Picture Book Philosophy”
9/8	What is Philosophy? What is Philosophy for Children?	<b>Big Ideas for Little Kids</b> – Preface, Ch. 1, Ch. 2, Ch. 3  <b>Plato Was Wrong</b> Ch.1 – “What is Philosophy” <i>Canvas</i>  <b>Philosophy in Education</b> – Pt. 1 & Pt. 2” <i>Canvas</i>
9/10	What Philosophy for Children Looks Like	<b>Big Ideas for Little Kids</b> – Ch. 4, 5, 6  <b>Philosophy in Schools</b> –  Kennedy, “Developing Philosophical Facilitation: A Toolbox of Philosophical “Moves” <i>Canvas</i>  Jackson, “Philosophical Rules of Engagement” <i>Canvas</i>
9/15	Facilitating a Philosophical Discussion -  <i>I Want to Be a Vase or Lou</i>	Fisher (Teaching Thinking) – Ch. 2 “Philosophy for Children” <i>Canvas</i>  Jenkins, “The Philosophy of Flirting” <i>Canvas</i>
9/17	Prepping for <i>I Want to be a Vase or Lou</i>	
9/18-19	<b>FIRST SITE VISIT</b>	<i>I Want to Be a Vase or Lou</i>
9/22	Reflecting on and Deeping Practice & Bravery	Fisher – Ch. 3 & 5 <i>Canvas</i>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated assignments are due by class on the date indicated, readings are subject to change at my discretion.

	<b>Frog and Toad - <i>Dragons and Giants</i> or <i>A Little Bit Brave</i></b>	<b><i>Big Ideas for Little Kids</i></b> – Ch. 7,8, 9 Pears, “The Anatomy of Courage” <i>Canvas</i> <b>Frog and Toad, <i>Dragons and Giants</i> OR <i>A Little Bit Brave</i></b>
9/24	Prepping for <i>Frog and Toad</i> or <i>A Little Bit Brave</i>	
9/25-26	<b>SECOND SITE VISIT</b>	<i>Frog and Toad Together</i> or <i>A Little Bit Brave</i>
9/29	The Value of Work <b>Fredrick</b>	<b><i>Big Ideas for Little Kids</i></b> – Ch. 10 Appiah, “The Philosophy of Work” <i>Canvas</i> Graber, “Bullshit Jobs” <i>Canvas</i>
10/1	Prepping for “Fredrick”	
10/2-3	<b>THIRD SITE VISIT</b>	<b>Fredrick</b>
10/6	<b>Fairness and Justice</b>	<b>Markkula Center</b> – Justice and Fairness, <i>Canvas</i> SEP – Exploitation Sect. 2, <i>Canvas</i>

10/8	Prepping <i>Tops and Bottoms</i> OR <i>Please, Please, the Bees</i>	
10/9-10	<b>Fourth Site Visit</b>	<i>Tops and Bottoms</i> or <i>Please, Please, the Bees</i>
10/15	<b>A Good Life</b> <i>More Dung! A Beetle Tale</i> or <i>The Squish</i>	Alpert – There is Nothing Better than Good Enough, <i>Canvas</i>  Thomson – The Swedish philosophy of lagom: how “just enough” is all you need, <i>Canvas</i>  OR  Danaher – “Failure: A Philosophical Analysis” <i>Canvas</i>  Livingstone, “Failing Successfully” <i>Canvas</i>
10/16-17	<b>Fifth SITE VISIT</b>	
10/20	<b>Punishment</b> <i>I Want My Hat Back</i>	Feinberg – The Expressive Function of Punishment, <i>Canvas</i>
10/22	Prepping <i>I Want My Hat Back</i>	
10/23-24	<b>Sixth SITE VISIT</b>	<i>I Want My Hat Back</i>
10/27	<b>Our Relationship to Nature and Animals</b> <i>The Fate of Fausto</i> OR <i>This Moose Belongs to Me</i>	TBD & Du Toit “Is Having Pets Morally Permissible,” <i>Canvas</i>  OR  Leopold – <i>The Land Ethic</i>
10/29	Prepping <i>The Fate of Fausto</i> OR <i>This Moose Belongs to Me</i>	

10/30-31	<b>Seventh SITE VISIT</b>	<i>The Fate of Fausto</i> or <i>This Moose Belongs to Me</i>
11/3	<i>The Lorax</i> OR <i>Tidy</i>	Rolston, <i>Environmental Ethics – Duties to and Values in the Natural World</i> – pg. 1-32 and 232-245, <i>Canvas</i>
11/5	Prepping <i>The Lorax</i> OR <i>Tidy</i>	
11/6-7	<b>Eight Site Visit</b>	<i>The Lorax</i> OR <i>Tidy</i>
11/10	<b>Community and Difference</b> <i>Noodlephant</i> or <i>The Big Orange Splot</i>	Rawls, “ <i>Civil Disobedience</i> ”(required) King, “ <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> ” (optional)OR Mills “ <i>On Liberty – Ch. 3</i> pg. 52-69)
11/12	Prepping <i>Noodlephant</i> or <i>The Big Orange Splot</i>	
11/13-14	<b>Ninth Site Visit</b>	<i>Noodlephant</i> or <i>The Big Orange Splot</i>
11/17	<b>Aesthetics and Relativism</b> <i>Rot – The Cutest in the World</i> OR <i>The Pidgeon Needs a Bath</i>	Hume – <i>On the Standards of Taste</i>
11/19	Prepping <i>Rot</i> or <i>The Pidgeon Needs a Bath</i>	
11/20-21	<b>Tenth Site Visit</b>	<i>Rot – The Cutest in the World</i> OR “ <i>The Pidgeon Needs a Bath</i> ”
12/1	Prepping for your book	Picking Books together
12/3	Workshopping your book	Running your lesson plan by the class
12/4-5	<b>Eleventh Site Visit</b>	