Key Stage 2 (Y5 & 6): Thinking through the Odyssey

About this session
Your students will be told the story of the Lotus Eaters from Homer’s Odyssey. They will then have a philosophical enquiry, led by a specialist philosophy teacher from The Philosophy Foundation. Your students will explore the philosophy of happiness and be introduced to what ancient Greek and modern philosophers have had to say on the subject. The session is student-centred and will develop critical and creative thinking through dialogue. Students will explore their own, and other people’s ideas of happiness in an engaging hour.

Session outline
• During the sessions students may be introduced to several ‘philosophers of happiness’.
• Aristotle (384-322 BCE) thought that happiness (or more precisely eudaimonia - the reflective and rational flourishing of one’s potential as a human being) was the end goal of all human action.
• Epicurus (341-270 BCE) famously understood human actions in terms of pleasure, though his precise philosophy is often misunderstood and misrepresented.
• John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) thought that ethics and policy-making should be directed towards ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’. This underlies the philosophy known as utilitarianism.
• The children are brought to consider the value of happiness and pleasure through the story of the Lotus Eaters in which a juice is introduced that makes the drinker always happy and forgetful of their worries. Odysseus has to make a choice whether to drink the juice or not.
• A debate may be arranged during the session.
• Pictures of some of the related ancient Greek collection from the British Museum will be shown during the session.
• **Key themes:** Happiness, Ancient Greek, Philosophy, Aristotle, Epicurus, Odyssey, Homer
Thinking through the Odyssey

Preparing for your session

- Talk about the meaning of the word ‘philosophy’. Explain what philosophers do and stress the importance of thinking hard about things we assume we know about already.

Following up your session

- Continue the discussion and ask your students to make a wall display of the different philosophers they have been introduced to.
- Search the ancient Greek area of Museum’s website for the objects from the session, or objects relating to the Odyssey and Homer.
- Visit www.philosophy-foundation.org for more resources on philosophy in schools including The If Odyssey: A Philosophical Journey through Greek Myth and Storytelling by Peter Worley, which will enable you to run similar sessions yourself.

Curriculum links

KS2 History - Ancient Greek
KS2 PSHE & Citizenship - developing confidence and responsibility, making the most of their abilities