

Appeal to Authority

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Topic objectives

This topic provides students with an opportunity to consolidate their understanding of the idea that one's moral and/or scientific beliefs can be justified by mere appeal to authority; an idea that has been touched on in many earlier topics.

Students are encouraged to think for themselves about:

- The idea that an appeal to authority can stand in the place of an argument;
- The idea that supposed authorities come in many forms, including individuals (doctors, scientists, teachers, for example), rules, laws, mainstream or peer opinion, traditions or customs, personal observation and testimony.
- Whether we can get through our lives without appealing to authorities (doctors or scientists, for example, and rules and laws);
- Whether it is possible to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate appeals to authority; more particularly, to consider the idea that a legitimate appeal to authority requires that some or all of the following conditions are satisfied:
 - The view or ruling made by the supposed authority can be supported by good reasons;
 - Where possible, an effort is made to grasp these reasons and to consider arguments that might be mounted against them;
 - The supposed authority is an authority in the relevant field;
 - There is a degree of consensus in the relevant field.
- Whether, where these conditions are not satisfied, we are justified in questioning the view or ruling made by the supposed authority;
- The idea that to question an authority often requires great courage, as well as a readiness to think carefully and logically for oneself.

Background to the topic for teachers

One of the most common ways in which people attempt to justify their moral and factual beliefs and actions is by appealing to an authoritative source - commonly the law, cultural norms or customs, religious teachings, rules (for example, school rules), the media, technical experts such as doctors and scientists, the views of peers, or eye witness testimony – their own or others'. It is clear that mere appeal to any such authority, in the absence of evidence that the authority's view is reliable, is never logically sufficient to justify a claim or action, whether the claim is scientific or moral. In addition, history reveals all too clearly the social dangers of mere or *blind* appeal to authority: think of the Sarin gas attacks in Tokyo, the Bali and London bombings, post-civil war lynching in the American south, the Holocaust.

Of course we cannot avoid appealing to authorities - to doctors, scientists and so on. But it is important that, in doing so, we make an intellectual effort - an effort to think carefully for ourselves in order to determine whether the authority's view is reliable.

The fundamental point is this: *If a practice or belief is justified, there must be good reasons for it and those reasons should explain why the practice is a good one or why the authoritative person or text supports it.*¹

When we appeal to an authority, it is important, where possible, to make the intellectual effort to grasp these reasons, albeit in simplified form; to acquire some understanding of the reasons the authority has for believing the rule, practice or belief to be justified. We should also do our best to assess the strength of these reasons, and this will involve considering whether there are arguments that can be mounted against the authoritative claim.

Where the issue in question is a technical one, and we are not in a position to grasp or assess the relevant reasons, we should make an effort to ensure that:

- The authority in question is an authority in the relevant field. (We would not turn to an expert in cosmology for medical advice.)
- There is a degree of consensus in the relevant field. If not, all we have to go on is our understanding of the reasons and evidence on which the authority has based his or her view, and if we're not equipped to assess the arguments on which the competing views are based, we have no grounds for accepting the authority's view.

(Note that the term 'authority' is used here in the sense of 'reliable (or expert) source' rather than 'holder of power').²

¹ R.T. Carroll: <http://59ways.blogspot.com.au/2012/02/irrelevant-appeal-to-authority.html>

² For further details see Susan T. Gardner, Dirk Van Stralen, *Thinking Your Way to Freedom: A Guide to Owning Your Own Practical Reasoning*, Temple University Press, 2009, pp. 83-87. (Extract in Topic Resources)

Topic Structure and Resources

Aim of lesson	Resources
<p>Lesson 1: Introduction to the topic</p> <p>Students are encouraged to consider whether it is always right to take an authority's word without question.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 9 scripts with individual parts marked. • Additional copies to share between remaining students so they can read along (otherwise they won't know who is speaking)
<p>Lesson 2: Appealing to authority</p> <p>Students consider whether is it okay to challenge a rule, or piece of advice or opinion given by someone who is seen as an authority, such as a teacher, a doctor, the government, an older brother or sister or a friend?</p>	
<p>Lesson 3: Experts, Authority and Reason</p> <p>Students continue to think about whether it is ever OK to question an authority.</p>	

Lesson 4: Thinking for yourself

Encourages students to think about some of the challenges involved in thinking for ourselves and standing up for what is right, and how this may require a great deal of courage.

References

Lesson 1	The story of Jen and the basketball game was inspired by a true story. See 'The Book of Daniel - Transcript', Australian Story, 12th March, 2012. http://www.abc.net.au/austory/specials/thebookofdaniel/default.htm?
Lesson 2	Rosa Park's quote http://teacher.scholastic.com/rosa/index.htm

Lesson 1: Introduction to the topic

For this lesson you will need

- 9 scripts with individual parts marked.
- Additional copies to share between remaining students so they can read along.

Role Play: Jen and the basketball game

7 minutes

We are going to start this topic with a role-play. Could I have 9 volunteers please to read the parts? *Select students and hand each one a script with their part marked. Give them a moment to skim read their parts.*

Narrator: Jen is sitting on the floor, in the middle of her bedroom and all she can see are boxes. The tops of the boxes lie open, and she looks into them, one by one. Her books are there, her clothes, her basketball and her old soft toys. Jen picks up her four toy penguins, and puts them on her bed.

Jen's family has just moved house, and Jen loves her new bedroom. Her window looks out onto the garden, and from her bed she can see the trees. But she's worried. Tomorrow she will start at a new school.

Jen: I wonder what the kids will do at lunch time. Whatever it is, I hope they'll let me join in.

Narrator: Just then her brother rushes past her door.

Jen's brother: Dinner's ready!

Narrator: For some reason Jen doesn't feel hungry. Jen's dad sticks his head through the door.

Dad: Are you thinking about tomorrow, Jen?

Jen: What if the kids don't like me? What if I just get left on my own?

Dad: You worry too much. You know you had a great time at your other school.

Jen: But I was there right from the beginning. It's harder to fit in when you're older.

Dad: I'm sorry Jen. But I'm sure you'll get on really well. Maybe you should take your basketball - some of the kids might want to play.

Narrator: Next morning, Jen's father drops her at the school gate.

Dad: I don't suppose you want me to come in with you?

Jen: Of course not. I can manage on my own.

Narrator: And she does. The kids seem friendly and she sits next to Dewi. At recess, Dewi introduces her to Thanh and Matt, and they ask her lots of questions about her old school.

Jen starts to feel better. And then it's time for lunch. The kids race out, and Dewi calls to Jen on her way past.

Dewi: We have to hurry. We've only got just enough time for a basketball game. You can watch if you like.

Jen: Oh no, I can play.

Dewi: But...how? You ... you can't run...

Narrator: As soon as she says it, Dewi feels bad.

Dewi: Sorry, but you can't play basketball in a wheelchair- it's impossible.

Jen: No it's not. I used to do it all the time- at my old school.

Dewi: Were the other kids.... all like you?

Jen: You mean, in wheelchairs? No- I was the only one.

Narrator: Dewi doesn't know what to say.

Dewi: I'll talk to the others.

Narrator: Dewi runs off to talk to Matt, leaving Jen on her own.

Dewi: What do you think, Matt? Should we let Jen play?

Matt: Of course not. It would spoil everything. If Jen wants to play basketball she'll have to join a wheelchair team. She can't play with us. It's probably not even safe - for us or for her.

Dewi: She did it at her last school...

Matt: Well this is our school, and our game. And I say she doesn't play. What do the rest of you think?

Narrator: The others look uncomfortable.

Matt: Well come on, who wants to get on with the game? Time's running out.

Hannah: Okay. Let's play!

Dewi: Well count me out.

Narrator: At the end of the day, Matt, Thanh and Dewi walk home together. Dewi doesn't say much. Thanh tries to convince Dewi that they did the right thing.

Thanh: Look Dewi, I can see you're upset about Jen. But even if we wanted to, we couldn't let her play. I bet it's against the rules. You know what Mr. Steele's like - he'll say it's not safe, and he'll stop the game. And he'd be right - it wouldn't be safe.

Dewi: Well, I'm going to find out whether it's safe. I'm going to ask Jen how it worked at her other school. They must have figured out some rules to make it safe. And I'm going to talk to Mr. Steele as well.

Narrator: The next day, Dewi asks Mr. Steele what he thinks.

Mr. Steele: Sorry Dewi, but it wouldn't be safe to have a wheelchair in the middle of your basketball game. There'd be accidents, and someone could get hurt. You know we have strict rules about safety in sport, and I'm afraid we'll have to add another one: No wheelchairs in the basketball game.

Dewi: But Mr. Steele, could you talk to the sports teacher at Jen's old school? I don't think they had any accidents...

Mr. Steele: (*sounding annoyed*) Dewi, Jen's last school might have different rules. But Jen is at this school now, and she and everyone else will have to follow our rules. And you know what I said: no wheelchairs in the basketball game.

Narrator: Dewi feels miserable.

Dewi: (*as if to herself*) Maybe Mr. Steele's right. After all, he is the sports teacher, and he probably knows best. And the other kids seem to agree with him. And we ought to obey the rules.

But how can we leave Jen by herself for the whole of lunchtime? Surely Jen's old school would have been concerned about safety too. Maybe they just thought about it a bit harder, and managed to come up with a way to make it safe for Jen to play.

I'm going to find out.

Narrator: For the next two weeks Dewi doesn't play basketball. Instead, she and Jen work together at lunchtime. Jen makes a list of the basketball rules at her old school, and asks her

old sports teacher to explain to Mr. Steele how the rules worked to make the game safe. And Dewi does some research of her own so she can prove that there haven't been any accidents.

Matt and Thanh don't like what she's doing. They want keep the game just the way it is. So on the walk home, the friends don't have much to talk about. And Dewi realises that she has a lot of work to do to make things right. If she and Jen manage to change Mr. Steele's mind, what then? She'll have to try to change the other kids' minds too - and that won't be easy. And they're her friends...

Thinking about the story

23 minutes

This story was inspired by events that really happened. I'm going to give you a couple of minutes now to talk about the story in pairs and to think about whether you have any questions or comments about it. *Put students into pairs and give them a couple of minutes.*

👏 Who would like to tell us what they thought? *Take three or four responses. After each response, ask whether anyone else has come up with something similar and whether anyone has anything they want to say about the question or comment.*

Note for teachers: Following this discussion you will be asking a number of questions of the class as whole. If students happen to raise a question that is in the list of teacher questions below, don't worry. Just deal with it in the same way you deal with the other student questions. Then, when you come to the teacher questions, ask it again (students will like the fact that they have thought up a teacher question) and ask whether anyone has any more to add.

I also have some questions about the story - questions I'd like everyone to think about together.

Use your procedural questioning skills to facilitate a discussion around the following questions.

1. Remember that in the story, Dewi says to Jen at lunchtime, 'We have to hurry. We've only got just enough time for a basketball game. You can watch if you like.'

And Jen says, 'Oh no', I can play.'

Dewi says: 'But...how? You ... you can't run...' And as soon as she says it, Dewi feels bad.

Try to imagine yourself in Dewi's place. Would you feel bad too?

Take a minute to speak to your neighbor about this. *Allow them a minute.*

Now who would like to share their thoughts with the class: Would you feel bad if you had said 'you can't run' to Jen. *Take responses, and after each one, ask: Can you say why?*

2. Dewi and her friends can walk and run. Jen can't do either of those things. She uses a wheelchair to move about.

Besides walking and running, are there other things that Dewi and her friends can do that Jen- or someone else in a wheelchair- wouldn't be able to do? Can you think of some?

Take responses, and encourage discussion around this point, by asking appropriate procedural questions. For example, 'X said that Dewi and her friends can go swimming but Jen can't. What do the rest of you think?' 'Does anyone disagree/ Does anyone want to comment on what Lisa said?'; 'What makes you think that?' etc. Students are unlikely to come up with many activities that withstand scrutiny.

3. Dewi thinks that because Jen can't run, she can't play basketball. But Dewi is wrong. Jen

has found a way to play - in her wheelchair. Dewi has under-estimated Jen's abilities. In Dewi's place, do you think you might have done that too?

If someone says No, ask: Why not?

If someone says Yes, ask: Does it matter?

4. Dewi seems to care more about Jen than the other kids do. Why do you think that is?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Might it be because Dewi has got to know Jen and the others haven't?*
- *Could it be because they care more about their basketball game?*

5. Mr. Steele won't let Jen play basketball with the other kids.

- What is his reason?
- Is his reason a good one?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Mr. Steele says that it wouldn't be safe for Jen to play- that there would be accidents. Does he back this up with evidence?*
- *Dewi tells him that Jen played in her wheel chair at her last school. Does this count as evidence against Mr. Steele's view?*
- *Do you think Mr Steele should consider what Dewi says?*

6. Why don't Matt and Thanh question Mr. Steele's view that there are certain to be accidents if Jen plays? What do you think?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Might it be because they assume that Mr. Steele knows best?*
- *Might it be because, Mr. Steele's view suits them-they don't want Jen to play?*

7. Matt and Thanh want to keep their basketball game the way it is. Are they being selfish?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *If they keep the game the way it is, Jen can't play. Does that mean they're being selfish?*
- *The basketball game means a lot to Matt and Thanh. Does that mean they're not being selfish?*

8. Why doesn't Dewi just accept Mr Steele's rule?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Could it be because she realises what effect the rule will have on Jen?*
- *Could it be because she thinks there might be no good reason for the rule?*
- *Could it be because she thinks the rule is unfair?*

9. Is it ever okay to challenge a school rule?

If someone says No, ask: Why not?

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If someone says Yes, ask: When is it OK?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- Sometimes the reasons for a rule aren't clear. If that's the case, would it be okay to ask teachers if they could explain the reasons?*
- If a rule seems unfair or seems to be causing harm to some of the kids, would it be okay to ask the teacher if the class could discuss the reasons for the rule?*
- Do the adults who run the schools always know best? If they do, does that mean we shouldn't challenge the rules they make?*

10. Do you think Dewi will stay friends with the other kids? Give your reasons.

End the lesson

Next lesson we'll think more about the way Matt and Thanh were thinking and about whether it is ever OK to challenge a rule.

Lesson 2: Appealing to authority

Remember last lesson

3 minutes

Can anyone remember the story from last lesson? *Take an initial response and then ask whether anyone has anything to add. Continue in this way until the important aspects of the story are covered.*

Prompt as required:

- *Why was Jen nervous about her first day at her new school?*
- *What happens when Dewi suggests that Jen should watch her play basketball at lunch time?*
- *Why don't the other kids want Jen to play? What reasons do they give?*
- *Does Dewi agree with her friends? Why not? What reasons does she give?*
- *What does Mr. Steele think about letting Jen play? What reasons does Mr. Steele give?*
- *Does Dewi just accept Mr. Steele's ruling, or does she try to think for herself about whether Mr. Steele is right? Why does she do that?*
- *What do Dewi's friends think about what she's doing?*

The big questions

2 minutes

In this lesson we'll think some more about the way that Matt and Thanh were thinking.

Matt and Thanh don't question Mr. Steele's ruling that it would be dangerous to let Jen play. They just take Mr. Steele's word for it. They see him as the expert - as an authority on safety in sport.

Matt and Thanh think that Mr. Steele is the authority, so he knows best; they don't need to spend time thinking about whether the rule is a good one.

Are they right? Is it okay to just accept a rule or a piece of advice or opinion from someone we think of as an expert or authority? Or should we think for ourselves about it?

That's one of the big questions we're going to look at in this lesson.

And as we saw last week, Dewi does question Mr. Steele's view, even though he is an expert - an authority - in the area of sport.

Our next big question for today is this: When, if ever, is it okay to challenge a rule, or piece of advice or opinion given by someone who is seen as an authority? (For example, a teacher, or a doctor, or the government or an older brother or sister or a friend...)?

Discussion: Appeals to authority

25 minutes

Discuss the following examples in the whole group taking one or two responses for the questions marked with a hand icon and facilitating discussion of the numbered (substantive) questions using your procedural questioning skills.

Let's explore these questions with some examples.

Example 1

Suppose you are in the middle of a lesson and your teacher says that she has to go to the staffroom to collect a photograph she wants to show you. It's a big school, and the staffroom is a long way from your classroom. The teacher gives you some work to go on with and, as she's leaving, says, 'No one is to leave the room while I am gone.'

A minute or so later, one of the students sitting at the back of the room calls out, 'Hey, can anyone else smell smoke?'

'I can see it', another student replies, as more and more smoke comes rushing under the door from the room behind.

'We've got to get out!' someone else yells and everyone starts to run for the front door.

'Just a minute,' a voice calls. 'Ms. Burne said we're not allowed to leave the room while she's gone. And we should always do what the teacher says - no matter what.'

- 👉 Why do you think Ms Burne told the students not to leave the room while she was gone?
- 👉 Will the students be safe if they if follow Ms. Burne's order without thinking for themselves?

1. Do the students have good reason to disobey Ms. Burne's instruction?

Example 2

Maya is two years old and is walking along the footpath, holding her mum's hand. Suddenly, a cat runs in front of them. Maya pulls away and runs towards the road, chasing it. Her mum manages to grab her just as she's about to step off the footpath. 'Maya', her mum cries out, 'you must never run onto the road.' Maya starts to cry.

- 👉 Was Maya's mum being mean?

1. Is it important for Maya to do what her mum says, even if she doesn't understand her mum's reasons?

Example 3

Suppose it's getting late and you are in the middle of an interesting Skype conversation with your friends. Your dad comes in and says that you have shut the computer down as it's way past bedtime.

- 👉 Why is your dad telling you to go to bed?

Use procedural questions to facilitate a discussion around the following question, and the numbered questions in the examples that follow.

1. Is it important that you understand your dad's reasons?

Encourage and broaden the discussion with the following questions (if necessary and only after children have had time to think and respond):

- *Is your dad being mean?*
- *If you didn't understand your dad's reason, might you think that he was just being mean?*
- *Are you more likely to disobey your dad if you don't understand why he's making you shut down the computer?*

Example 4

Jay-Jay has been training hard for the swimming carnival. But for the past few days he has been feeling sick and now he has a horrible pain in his ear. His dad takes him to see Dr. Smart who has looked after Jay-Jay ever since he was born.

Dr. Smart uses an auroscope to look inside Jay-Jay's ear. 'Mmm... ', he says, 'it's red and swollen. It's all that swimming I'm afraid Jay-Jay. Water in your ear has led to an infection. It's

pretty bad. You'll need some antibiotics and you will have to stay out of the water for a week until it clears up, or you might end up with a burst eardrum.'

But Jay-Jay doesn't want to stay out of the water. On the way home, he says to his dad, 'Doctors aren't always right are they? I don't think I need to do what Dr. Smart says.'

1. Is it okay for Jay Jay to challenge his doctor's advice? Or should he follow the advice that Dr. Smart has given him? Why or why not?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Did Dr. Smart just guess that Jay-Jay's ear was infected or did he have some evidence for his claim?*
- *Would you say that he had strong evidence for his diagnosis and advice? What makes you think that?*

Example 5

The captain of the Australian Netball team, The Diamonds, has been advertising Swisse Multivitamins for years. She says that they help you overcome tiredness and stress. And she says that the ingredients have been scientifically proven to work. Sarah has been feeling really tired and stressed for a while now. 'I think I'm going to try those vitamins the captain of The Diamonds recommends', she says. 'I'm sure she knows all about stress.'

1. Is it okay for Sarah to take the captain's advice here? Or should she find about it for herself? Why or why not?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Is the captain of the Australian Netball team an expert netballer?*
- *Is she an expert on the way drugs or supplements affect the body?*
- *Is she being paid to say that Swiss multivitamins are good for you?*

Example 6

Jess said, 'I read that almost one-third of Americans believe that aliens have visited the earth. That's a really exciting idea, and I don't think that that many people could be wrong.'

1. Is Jess's reasoning any good? Why or why not?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Is Jess right when she says, 'That many people can't be wrong?'*
- *Do you think Jen should look at the evidence for and against the idea before she makes up her mind? Why do you think that?*

Example 7

It was early in the morning, and Annie was driving on a long straight road in the outback when she saw a strange light in the sky. She followed the light for a long time and eventually stopped the car- and then she saw the strange light descend. Then her mind went blank, and she woke up two hours later. A few weeks later Annie began to have nightmares about being abducted by aliens- aliens with wrap-around eyes. And then she drew a star map of where the aliens had come from. And guess what? There is a star formation that matches the star map Annie drew. It's in the Hyades cluster, and it's called the Seven Sisters. And it's visible to the naked eye- you can see it without a telescope.

On the basis of these facts, Annie believes she really was abducted by aliens. And a lot of other people believe it too.

1. What do you think? On the basis of these facts, should we simply accept that Annie has been abducted by aliens?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Driving in outback, Annie saw a strange light- what might it have been?*
- *Annie saw the strange light descend, and then her mind went blank- for two hours. What do you think might have caused that?*
- *Annie then had nightmares about aliens- aliens with wrap-around eyes. How could we explain that?*
- *Annie drew a star map of where the aliens came from- and it matches the star formation we call the Seven Sisters. How might we explain that?*
- *If we take all these facts together, should we conclude that Annie was abducted by aliens?*
- *Is it important that we think for ourselves about Annie's claim that she was abducted by aliens?*

Example 8

Ali is in year 5. She wants to catch the bus into the city with her friends after school on Friday, to look around the shops. Her mum doesn't like the idea. She doesn't think it's safe.

Ali says, 'It's perfectly okay for me to go to the city with my friends. Everybody does it.'

1. Is Ali's reasoning any good?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Is it likely that everyone else Ali knows goes into the city with their friends?*
- *Even if it were true that all Ali's friends go into the city together, and without an adult, does that mean it's safe?*

End the lesson

In our next lesson, we will be looking at some more examples like this.

Lesson 3: Experts, Authority and Reason

Remember last lesson

2 minutes

Last lesson we were thinking about two questions:

1. Is it okay to just accept a rule or a piece of advice or opinion from someone we think of as an expert or authority? Or should we think for ourselves about it?
2. When, if ever, is it okay to challenge a rule, or piece of advice or opinion given by someone who is seen as an authority? (For example, a teacher, or a doctor, or the government or an older brother or sister or a friend...)?

Now we are going to look at some more examples in order to help answer these questions.

Discussion: Appeal to authority

25 minutes

Use your procedural questioning to facilitate a discussion on the following questions

Example 1

Thanh says that all the other kids think it would be unsafe for Jen to play in their basketball games.

1. Does this mean that it is unsafe? Or could the other kids be wrong? Give reasons for your answer.

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *The other kids want to keep the game as it is. Could this influence their view of whether it's safe to let Jen play?*
- *Do the other kids have any evidence to show it would be dangerous? If not, does that mean they could be wrong?*

Example 2

Jack likes to think about the stars, the solar system and the universe itself. He can't wait to learn more about it in high school. He's reading a book right now, written by a famous physicist, called Stephen Hawking. A lot of physicists say that Stephen Hawking is the best in the world. Jack reads:

“Physicists agree that the universe we live in is expanding. They know this because they can see galaxies and groups of galaxies steadily moving further apart in the universe. (They have very powerful telescopes, and can make very reliable measurements.) We can imagine the galaxies as dots on the surface of a balloon. As we blow the balloon up, the dots move further apart. This expansion has been occurring since the universe was formed 14 billion years ago in a very hot, dense event known as the Big Bang.”

There is a URL to a video explaining the way scientists make their measurements and how the expansion was first discovered. Jack takes a look, and although he doesn't understand everything, it makes him want to know more.

Jack is convinced by what he has read, and now believes that the universe is expanding.

1. Does Jack have good grounds for his belief?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

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- *Is Stephen Hawking an expert in physics?*
- *In the book Jack's reading, does Stephen Hawking explain how scientists figured out that the universe is expanding?*
- *Does Jack have good reason to believe that the universe is expanding?*

Example 3

Jay-Jay's ear infection has been fixed, thanks to the antibiotics and the fact that he followed his doctor's advice and stayed out of the swimming pool for a week. But now it's his dad's turn to visit Dr. Smart. His dad has a sore knee - it's been hurting for ages, and seems to be getting worse and worse. Dr. Smart sends him to a specialist, who takes some X-rays and suggests a big operation called a knee replacement. 'If all goes well', he says, 'your knee will be as good as new'. Jay-Jay's father doesn't like the sound of an operation, so he visits another specialist. This doctor tells him that knee problems like his are tricky to solve, and that specialists disagree about what to do. This specialist thinks it would be a bad idea to have an operation, because it doesn't always work and can make things worse. He suggests an injection to reduce the swelling and the pain.

1. If the experts disagree, how can Jay-Jay's dad work out what to do? Should he just toss a coin - 'heads' he goes with the first specialist; 'tails' with the second? Why or why not? Or should he try to think about it for himself?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Would tossing a coin be the best thing to do? Or are there better ways of making a decision? Why do you think that?*
- *Would it help if Jay-Jay's dad did an Internet search for information? If so, what information should he search for?*
- *Suppose Jay-Jay's dad finds a lot of information about how often the operation doesn't work and how well the injections work, will he still have to think for himself about what to do?*
- *If he does search for information, and think for himself about it, is his decision more likely to be a good one than if he'd tossed a coin?*

Example 4

Matt and Thanh say that Mr. Steele is the best judge of whether it would be safe to allow Jen to play in their basketball games. But Dewi isn't convinced.

1. Why isn't Dewi convinced?

Encourage and broaden the discussion, if necessary, with the following questions:

- *Is Jen's old sports teacher an expert in sport safety?*
 - *Has Jen's old sport teacher had experience with wheelchair and mixed wheelchair/ running sports?*
 - *Has Mr. Steele had experience of mixed wheelchair/ running sports?*
 - *Has Jen found any evidence that 'mixed' basketball matches are likely to lead to accidents?*
 - *Has she found any evidence to show that it's possible to organize 'mixed' basketball matches so that they don't lead to accidents?*
2. Does Dewi have good reason to question Mr. Steele's judgment that it would be unsafe for Jen to play in the basketball team?
 3. Is it important that we think for ourselves about what the authorities tell us? Give your reasons.

End the lesson

Next lesson we will be discussing what it means to think for yourself, rather than merely appealing to authority for direction.

Lesson 4: Thinking for yourself

Can thinking for yourself require courage?

2 minutes

As we have seen, in order to decide whether an appeal to authority is legitimate or not, we are required to think for ourselves. This is not always easy. For one thing, it requires particular skills and attitudes - those often described as the skills and attitudes of the critical thinker.

Dewi displays a great many of these skills, and we will take a closer look at some of them in the course of following topics.

Another reason why thinking for ourselves can be challenging is that it often requires a great deal of courage. We see Dewi recognising this clearly towards the end of the story. There are many famous examples of people displaying great courage in standing up for what they believe in, and we will look at some of these examples in this lesson.

Recapping the story

6 minutes

Let's remind ourselves of the story from last lesson. *There are a couple of small changes*

 Matt and Thanh don't like what Dewi is trying to do. Matt and Thanh don't want to change the basketball rules so that Jen can play. They want keep the game just the way it is. On the walk home, the friends don't have much to talk about. And Dewi realises that she has a lot of work to do to make things right. If she and Jen manage to change Mr. Steele's mind, what then? She'll have to try to change the other kids' minds too - and that won't be easy. Will she be able to convince them that letting Jen play is the right thing to do? They're sure to be angry at first - will they even give it go? Or will they stop playing basketball altogether? And even worse, will they still want to be her friends?

The story says that Dewi realises that she has a lot of work to do to make things right.

1. What do you think she would have to do in order to 'make things right'?

Encourage and broaden the discussion with the following questions, if necessary

- *Would she have to persuade Mr. Steele to change the rules to let Jen play?*
- *Would she have to convince the others to give the new rules a go?*
- *Would she have to convince her friends that it's the right thing to do?*
- *Would she have to somehow manage to stay friends with everyone?*

2. How hard do you think it would be for Dewi to do this?

3. Try to put yourself in Dewi's place. What would it be like if your friends were so annoyed with you that they no longer wanted to be friends?

4. Dewi is trying to get the rules changed even though she knows she might end up losing her other friends. Why is she doing it?

Encourage and broaden the discussion with the following question, if necessary

- *Might it be because she thinks it's the right thing to do?*

Discussion: Rosa Parks

20 minutes

There are lots of famous examples of people standing up for what they believe in, even when it

is difficult or even dangerous. Like Dewi, these people are brave; they show great courage.

 We are going back over 60 years, to 1955. We're in Alabama, which is a state in the South of the United States of America. It's a Thursday evening. After a long day of work as a dressmaker, Rosa Parks gets on a city bus to go home.

She's very tired, but she walks past the first few empty rows of seats marked "Whites Only." It's against the law for black people like her to sit in those seats. She sits in the middle of the bus, where black people are allowed to sit as long as no white people are standing.

The bus goes on and after 5 or 6 more stops, it's pretty full. Now all the seats in the "Whites Only" section are taken. Then, at the next stop, another white person gets on. The driver orders Rosa Parks and the other black people in her row to move to the back of the bus, where there are no empty seats. All the black passengers get up - except for Rosa Parks. The driver shouts at her but Mrs. Parks refuses to stand up. The bus driver stops the bus, and walks over to her. He asks her, 'Will you stand up', and she says 'No, I will not.' The driver says that he will have her arrested. Still she does not move. So he leaves the bus, and comes back with two policemen. Mrs. Parks describes what happened next.

'The driver told the police that I would not stand up. The policeman walked down and asked me why I didn't stand up, and I said I didn't think I should stand up. "Why do you push us around?" I asked him. And he said, "I don't know. But the law is the law and you are under arrest." As soon as he said that I stood up... One of them picked up my purse, the other picked up my shopping bag. And we left the bus together... It was the first time I'd had that particular thing happen. I was determined that I let it be known that I did not want to be treated in this manner. The policemen had their squad car waiting, they gave me my purse and bag, and they opened the back door of the police car for me to enter.'

On our buses, there are usually some rules about where people can sit. On some seats there is a sign that says, 'This seat is reserved for elderly or disabled people.'

1. Do you think this is a good rule? Or do you think it's unfair? Give your reasons.
2. Suppose you are sitting in one of these seats, and someone very old gets on the bus. Would you stand up? Why or why not?
3. Can you think of any circumstances in which it would be okay to not stand up?

On the buses in Alabama in 1955, there were rules - in fact, laws - which said that white people and black people could not sit in the same section of the bus and that black people had to stand up for white people.

4. Why do you think they had these laws?

Thank you for your thoughts. I'll tell you a bit more about what happened...

One hundred years before the Rosa Parks story, Alabama was a land of slaves and slave owners. The slave owners were white and the slaves were black. Almost half the state's population was made up of slaves shipped over from Africa by slave traders. The black slaves worked on the white slave owners' big cotton plantations. Alabama was forced to free the slaves after the end of the American civil war. The state's governors were angry and so were the slave owners. And the white people thought that the slaves were inferior to them. Many white people in Alabama believed that the African Americans were less intelligent than whites were. (They thought they had scientific proof of this: scientists claimed to have found that the African American's brain was nine cubic inches smaller than the white man's brain. Of course this is nonsense.)

White people in Alabama also believed that the African Americans were lazy and irresponsible (that is, that they were incapable of organising their own lives). Many white people argued that the slaves were better off being looked after by the slave owners than trying to manage on their own, because, they said, the slave owners would give them a place to live, and food and clothing.

They thought that slavery turned slaves from savages into orderly and efficient labourers. After the slaves were freed, many white people continued to think like this about African Americans. As a result, the government of Alabama made laws aimed at keeping white and African Americans apart. It was illegal for an African American to marry a white American. Other laws banned African American children from white American schools, banned African Americans from going to white American churches, restaurants and hotels, and from sitting with white people at a concert or movie. They even had water fountains labeled 'White only' and 'Coloured'. And of course, black Americans were not allowed to sit in the same section of a bus as whites. This was called segregation.

5. Do you think the segregation laws were good laws? Or do you think they were unfair? Give your reasons.
6. Rosa Parks deliberately broke the law banning black people from sitting in the middle section of the bus when there were white people without seats. Is what she did wrong?

Encourage and broaden the discussion with the following questions, if necessary

- Was it legally wrong?
- Was it morally wrong? Why or why not?

7. Why do you think Rosa Parks did it?
8. Imagine you were in Rosa Parks' position. Would you have felt scared when the police arrested you? If so, what would you have been scared about?

This is how Rosa Parks felt, and why she did it. In 1997 she was being interviewed and she was asked "Were you scared to do such a brave thing?"

"No", she said. "Actually I had no fear at that particular time. I was very determined to let it be known how it felt to be treated in that manner - discriminated against...When I did realize [what would happen], I faced it, and it was quite a challenge to be arrested. I did not really know what would happen... I didn't feel good about going to jail, but I was willing to go to let it be known that under this type of segregation, black people had endured too much for too long."

9. Do you think it was important that Rosa Parks stood up against the way she and her people were being treated?

It turned out to be very important, although Rosa Parks could not have known just how important her action would be. Here is a description of what happened:

 The day after she was arrested, E.D. Nixon, a friend and civil rights worker, called a meeting of black leaders to discuss how to fight bus segregation.

Knowing that the city bus system depends heavily on the African-American community, the black leaders agreed to call a boycott of all city buses on Monday, December 5, three days after Rosa Parks' arrest. A new and popular minister by the name of Martin Luther King, Jr. is chosen to lead the boycott. By Friday evening the news of the upcoming boycott has spread throughout the city.

On Monday morning, December 5, Martin Luther King and the other leaders waited nervously at a bus stop to see whether their plan would work. To their relief and surprise, bus after bus rolled by with no African Americans aboard. United in protest, boycotters had chosen instead to walk, take carpools, pedal bicycles, and even ride mules to get to work instead of board the buses.

That same day Rosa Parks went to court with her lawyer. The judge found her guilty of breaking a city segregation law and fined her \$14. Declaring that the law is unjust, Rosa Parks' lawyer said he would appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

That evening thousands of people gathered to listen to their new leader, Dr. King. In a spellbinding speech, King explained why the boycott must continue. "There comes a time," he said, "that people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us for so long, that we are tired, tired of being segregated and humiliated, tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression." But above all, King asked that the protesters fight without violence. In response, the crowd rose to their feet. Thunderous applause filled the air.

One year later the Supreme Court ruled segregation on buses was illegal.

End the lesson

2 minutes

Think back over our discussions about whether it is okay to question an authority and whether it is okay to simply accept the ruling of an authority.

Is it important for people today - people like us - to look for evidence and to think for ourselves, rather than blindly following authorities? Try to think of examples to illustrate your answer.

~~~END OF TOPIC~~~

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