Ethical Capability – a selection of classroom resources

Levels 3 to 6

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Introduction

The annotated selection of classroom resources in this document illustrates the kind of resources that can be drawn on when designing teaching and learning activities for Ethical Capability.

Each resource is aligned to one or more Ethical Capability content descriptions from Levels 3 to 6. The resources can be used as stimulus for discussions or as models for making decisions or reasoning in response to ethical problems.

These resources may also be used to enrich the learning of knowledge and skills in other curriculum areas, enabling students to go deeper with their understanding of particular learning area contexts.

When designing learning activities the appropriate aspect of the relevant achievement standard should also be taken into account. For support with explicit teaching and assessment, see ‘Introduction to explicitly teaching and assessing the capabilities’ on the [Overview of the capabilities page of the VCAA website](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-10/resources/Pages/OverviewoftheCapabilities.aspx).

Links to Ethical Capability, Levels 3 and 4

Content descriptions

Understanding Concepts

* Explore the contested meaning of concepts including fairness and harm and how they can seem to differ in different situations [(VCECU004)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU004)
* Explore the extent to which particular acts might be regarded by different people as good or bad, right or wrong, better or worse, and explain why [(VCECU005)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU005)
* Discuss the ways to identify ethical considerations in a range of problems [(VCECU006)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU006)

Decision Making and Actions

* Explore how apparently wrong actions can sometimes lead to good outcomes and the reverse [(VCECD007)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD007)
* Discuss the role of personal values and dispositions in ethical decision-making and actions [(VCECD008)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD008)

Achievement standard

By the end of Level 4, students use concrete examples from a range of contexts to explain the contested meaning of concepts and significance of acts. They explain how to identify ethical considerations in problems.

Students use examples to evaluate ethical actions in relation to their outcomes. They explain the role of personal values and dispositions in ethical decision-making and actions, recognising areas of contestability.

Links to Ethical Capability, Levels 5 and 6

Content descriptions

Understanding Concepts

* Examine the contested meaning of concepts including truth and happiness and the extent to which these concepts are and should be valued [(VCECU009)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU009)
* Discuss how ethical principles can be used as the basis for action, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought on these principles [(VCECU010)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU010)
* Examine how problems may contain more than one ethical issue [(VCECU011)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU011)

Decision Making and Actions

* Explore the significance of ‘means versus ends’ by considering two ways to act when presented with a problem: one that privileges means and one ends [(VCECD012)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD012)
* Discuss the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making [(VCECD013)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD013)

Achievement standard

By the end of Level 6, students evaluate the meaning of ethical concepts and analyse their value, identifying areas of contestability. They explain different ways to respond to ethical problems and identify issues related to these.

Students identify different ethical issues associated with a particular problem. They identify the basis of a range of ethical principles and explain the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making.

Summary of resource alignment to Ethical Capability, Levels 3 to 6

| **Resource name** | **Resource type** | **Suitable as introductory stimulus** | **Ethical Capability content descriptions,  Levels 3 to 6** | | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **VCECU004** | **VCECU005** | **VCECU006** | **VCECD007** | **VCDCD008** | **VCECU009** | **VCECU010** | **VCECU011** | **VCECD012** | **VCECD013** |
| VAPS Understanding Concepts Right and Wrong | Downloadable ‘toolkit’ for teachers | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| The Naughtyometer | Card game | ✓ |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Vote with Your Feet – Would You Rather | Game (printable posters) | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |
| *The Giving Tree* | Picture book | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘What’s Fair?’, *What Makes Me Me? And Other Interesting Questions* | Video | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| ‘Is it ever OK to lie?’, *Short & Curly with Carl Smith, Molly Daniels, Dr Matt Beard* | Podcast | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |
| ‘Should grown-ups lie to you?’, *Short & Curly with Carl Smith, Molly Daniels, Dr Matt Beard* | Podcast | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |
| ‘Happy’ | Song | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  |
| ’13 Billion Feet of Subterranean Awesomeness’ | Video |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |
| *Dr De Soto* | Picture book |  |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |  |
| ‘A true Zoo character: Mollie’ | Online article |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |
| ‘River Kids Special’, *Behind the News* | Video |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘Judge Lie’, *Behind the News* | Video |  |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |
| ‘I have a message for the human race’ | Video |  |  |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| *The Island* | Picture book |  |  |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |  |  |

Selected classroom resources

**Resource name:** VAPS Understanding Concepts Right & Wrong

**Resource type:** Downloadable ‘toolkit’ for teachers

**Source:** [Victorian Association for Philosophy in Schools (VAPS)](https://www.vaps.vic.edu.au/ethical-capability/understanding-concepts/)

About the resource:

VAPS is a subject association that provides support, training and resources for teachers and schools teaching philosophy. It has developed a suite of teaching tools and training courses for the planning, development and implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F–10’s Ethical Capability.

These downloadable ‘toolkits’ will aid teachers in the exploration of Ethical Capability concepts from Foundation to Level 10. The toolkit VAPS Understanding Concepts Right & Wrong will aid exploration of the Levels 3 and 4 concept of fairness and the Levels 5 and 6 concept of happiness. Each toolkit features a summary of relevant concepts, an overview of the nature of contestable concepts, a range of concept games with accompanying instructions, sample discussion plans and advice for teachers on developing discussion plans and further readings. This toolkit is particularly suited to introducing students to the content descriptions for the first time; however, it can be used at any stage of their learning.

**Resource name:** The Naughtyometer

**Resource type:** Card game

**Source:** [The Philosophy Man](https://www.thephilosophyman.com/free-p4c-resources/ks1/naughtyometer), Jason Buckley

About the resource:

This thinking game asks students to consider a range of behaviours and rank them from the most to the least ‘naughty’. There are printable cards/posters that can be used for small-group or whole-class discussions exploring the ethical dimensions of each type of behaviour. This resource also includes guiding questions and leading ideas that teachers can use to help promote deeper thinking. This resource is suitable as an introductory stimulus for the early stages of inquiry (Levels 3 and 4).

**Resource name:** Vote with Your Feet – Would You Rather

**Resource type:** Game (printable posters)

**Source:** [The Philosophy Man](https://www.thephilosophyman.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Vote-With-Your-Feet-Early-Years-Example.pdf), Jason Buckley

About the resource:

This collection of printable questions and illustrated posters promotes comparison of different scenarios as better or worse. A series of ‘would you rather …’ scenarios are accompanied by questions to prompt deeper thinking. For example, the scenario ‘Would you rather be chased by a bear, slithered on by a snake or kissed by a monkey’ is accompanied by the question: ‘Is it worse to be scared, disgusted or embarrassed?’

Many of the accompanying questions prompt consideration of how values or dispositions might influence judgments of better or worse. This toolkit is particularly suited to introducing students to the Levels 3 and 4 content descriptions for the first time; however, it can be used at any stage of their learning.

**Resource name:** *The Giving Tree*

**Resource type:** Picture book

**Source:** Shel Silverstein, 1964, *The Giving Tree*, HarperCollins Publishers Inc., New York, USA

About the resource:

This classic picture storybook tells the simple yet thought-provoking story of a little boy and a tree who loves him. As the boy grows, he asks more and more from the tree, and as the story unfolds it provides opportunity to explore the concept of fair treatment of others (in how the boy treated the tree, and the tree the boy) and the environment (Levels 3 and 4), including to what extent harm to the environment and others is reasonable. This could be extended to introduce the concepts of means and ends (Levels 5 and 6) through consideration of whether the tree was treated as a means (something that helps us achieve what we want) or an end (something that we do something for, or that has equal status to humans), and how the actions and words of the boy show this.

It also provides opportunity to explore the concept of happiness and to what extent achieving happiness involves acting in self-interest and acting in the interests of others (Levels 5 and 6). Students could also explore the link between conscience and ethical principles (Levels 5 and 6): for example, by considering whether the boy evaluated his actions against any ethical principle(s) and which principle(s) could have been used to guide him, and how conscience can help to evaluate actions. Students could also consider whether the tree’s happiness after each of its acts of giving should make a difference in how we evaluate the actions of the boy and the tree; this could be linked to an exploration of fairness, means and ends, or ethical principles and conscience. This resource is suitable as an introductory stimulus for the early stages of inquiry.

**Resource name:** ‘What’s Fair’, *What Makes Me Me? And Other Interesting Questions*

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** Mosaic Films for BBC (may be available on [ABC iview](https://iview.abc.net.au/show/what-makes-me-me/series/1/video/ZX9585A003S00))

About the resource:

This five-minute animated short film is part of a series of films exploring ethical and philosophical concepts through everyday questions. This episode explores the concept of fairness (Levels 3 and 4) by inviting students to consider problems associated with sharing the carrying of belongings and food. The episode incorporates students’ perspectives on the issue. The stimulus provides opportunity to broaden a common student perception of ‘fair means equal’ through consideration of the different needs, resources and abilities of the children in the story. The resource could prompt thinking about whether acting fairly also includes consulting with others who have an interest in the problem. This resource is suitable as an introductory stimulus for the early stages of inquiry.

**Resource name:** ‘Is it ever OK to lie?’, *Short & Curly with Carl Smith, Molly Daniels, Dr Matt Beard*

**Resource type:** Podcast

**Source:** Carl Smith, Molly Daniels & Dr Matt Beard, 2016, ‘Is it ever OK to lie?’, *Short & Curly with Carl Smith, Molly Daniels, Dr Matt Beard* (available on [ABC Radio](https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/shortandcurly/is-it-ever-okay-to-lie/7516204))

About the resource:

This ethics podcast for kids asks curly questions about the right thing to do and includes acted scenarios, and contributions from ethicist Matt Beard from The Ethics Centre and upper-primary school students. Each episode includes ‘pauses’, inviting thinking time for listeners. This episode explores the temptation to lie (Levels 5 and 6) by presenting a scenario in which a boy will gain half-price entry to a fun park if he lies about his age at the entry gate. It is the parent who suggests this course of action with the view that there will then be more money to spend inside the amusement park. This resource could prompt a discussion exploring the intentions (good or bad) and the consequences (beneficial or harmful) of telling a lie versus telling the truth at the admission gate. Students may consider whether kind lies, little lies and white lies are OK and if so, when? And if not, why not? This resource is suitable as an introductory stimulus.

**Resource name:** ‘Should grown-ups lie to you?’, *Short & Curly with Carl Smith, Molly Daniels, Dr Matt Beard*

**Resource type:** Podcast

**Source:** Carl Smith, Molly Daniels & Dr Matt Beard, 2019, ‘Should grown-ups lie to you?’, *Short & Curly with Carl Smith, Molly Daniels, Dr Matt Beard* (available on [ABC Radio](https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/shortandcurly/should-grown-ups-lie-to-you/11178686))

About the resource:

This ethics podcast episode presents a scenario in which parents make up the story of the Needle Ninja, who rewards children with lollies, cakes and toys if they are brave when they are required to have an injection. The two hosts are joined by an ethicist from The Ethics Centre and a ‘brains-trust’ of school children who share their thinking on the issue. This resource could prompt a discussion exploring the intentions (good or bad) and the consequences (beneficial or harmful) of parents telling this story to their children (Levels 3 and 4). This could be extended to Levels 5 and 6 by considering whether telling this story constitutes lying and the implications of this; for example, we know telling the truth is valued, but lying in this example has a good outcome. Does the means (the Needle Ninja rewards) then justify the ends (immunised, healthy children)? This resource is suitable as an introductory stimulus.

**Resource name:** ‘Happy’

**Resource type:** Song

**Source:** Pharrell Williams, ‘Happy’, GIRL, Columbia Records, 2014, track 5 (music video available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ZbZSe6N_BXs&feature=youtu.be))

About the resource:

‘Happy’ is a song written, produced and performed by American singer Pharrell Williams. It was written for the children’s animated feature film *Despicable Me 2*. It is an upbeat soul song that has been released in countries all over the world. It would be a good stimulus to begin to explore student thinking and feeling about ‘happiness’ (Levels 5 and 6). The lyrics ask us to think about what happiness is for each of us and how we act when we are happy. Students may consider what the lyric ‘Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth’ means and whether they agree. Discussions may explore whether we are in control of and responsible for our own happiness, what creates happiness for different people, and whether it is important to be happy all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, or none of the time. This resource is suitable as an introductory stimulus.

**Resource name:** ‘13 Billion Cubic Feet of Subterranean Awesomeness’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** The Philosophy Man, Jason Buckley (available on [Vimeo](https://vimeo.com/129772595))

About the resource:

This two-and-a-half-minute video follows ‘The Philosophy Man’, Jason Buckley, as he explores the Son Doong caves in Vietnam. He questions whether it is fair that he, a privileged tourist, has access to this vast natural wonder when most of the local people would not be able to afford the same opportunity. He also questions the plans to set up a tourist cable car through the caves that would allow far more people access to the site in the future but may result in damage to the caves.

Students may consider whether they think these plans will help or harm the local citizens, animals in the area and the environment generally. Currently only 250 people get to visit the caves each year. Should the development plans go ahead, or should the site be kept as it is now? Links could be made to Levels 3 and 5 by discussing the intended and unintended consequences of actions already taken and that might be taken, and by considering how values influence points of view on what should be done. Links to Levels 5 and 6 include identifying the ethical issues involved in this scenario; considering the value of happiness and how important it is in decision-making; and identifying an ethical principle(s) that could guide decision-making.

This resource can be used to consolidate learning after completion of introductory lessons.

**Resource name:** *Dr De Soto*

**Resource type:** Picture book

**Source:**  William Steig, 1982, *Dr De Soto*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, USA

About the resource:

Doctor De Soto is a clever and committed mouse dentist with a sign outside his surgery declaring ‘Cats and other dangerous animals not treated’. However, when an ailing fox begs to be admitted, Dr De Soto and his wife decide to offer treatment to the fox. When the fox then returns for follow-up treatment with the intention of eating the dentist and his wife, Dr De Soto must devise a plan to outfox the fox. This stimulus provides opportunity to explore Levels 3 and 4 including values and dispositions; for example, students may discuss the kind nature of the De Sotos and to what extent the fox’s nature made it difficult for him to resist wanting to eat the De Sotos. The stimulus also provides opportunity to discuss the significance of intended and unintended consequences, what we might be able to foresee and not foresee, and how this should influence our decisions; for example, students may consider Dr De Soto’s plan to outfox the fox. This resource can be used to consolidate learning after completion of introductory lessons.

**Resource name:** ‘A true Zoo character: Mollie’

**Resource type:** Online article

**Source:** [Culture Victoria](https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/land-and-ecology/melbourne-zoo-and-you-150-years/a-true-zoo-character-mollie/) (please note that the Culture Victoria site will soon become part of [Victorian Collections](https://victoriancollections.net.au/))

About the resource:

The story of Mollie the orangutan is taken from a special edition book that tells the story of the development and work of the Melbourne Zoo over its 150+ years of history. Even though animal care and welfare has dramatically improved since Mollie’s day, this story will prompt thinking and discussion about the motivations of Mollie’s keepers and the visitors, and the potential intended and unintended consequences of their actions, including what was foreseeable at the time (Levels 3 and 4). This could be extended to consider whether animals are a means or an end, or both, depending on the situation, and further, whether the end (why something is done) justifies the means (how something is done). For example, students may consider whether keeping wild animals in captivity (the means) is justified by the work undertaken by zoos to save animals from extinction and safeguard animal habitats (the end) (Levels 5 and 6).

The stimulus also provides an opportunity to explore how the perception of harm (Levels 3 and 4) to animals in different situations (for example, in zoos or research, or in satisfying a need for clothing and food resource) has changed over time. This could be extended to consider to what extent it is reasonable to undertake acts that cause harm to animals, whether animals and humans should be treated differently, and which ethical principle(s) or worldview(s) underlie different perspectives on this issue (Levels 5 and 6). This resource can be used to consolidate learning after completion of introductory lessons.

**Resource name:** ‘River Kids Special’*, Behind the News*

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** ‘River Kids Special’, *Behind the News*, 2018 (available on [ABC](https://www.abc.net.au/btn/features/river-kids-special/10559652?jwsource=cl))

About the resource:

Behind the News (BTN) is an educational news program featuring and explaining news and current affairs events. This episode looks at life along the Murray River, Australia’s largest river system and our biggest ‘food bowl’ region. It is narrated by a Ngarrindjeri boy, Tyrone, and viewers meet other children and families living and working along the riverbanks. This stimulus provides opportunity to discuss what it is that people value about the river (Levels 3 and 4), which could be extended to consider links between the river and happiness (Levels 5 and 6).

The stimulus demonstrates how sometimes there are conflicting wants (for example, keeping the river clear of snags for boats destroys the home of the Murray Cod), and this provides opportunity to explore the concept of fairness (Levels 3 and 4) or the nature of an ethical dilemma (Levels 5 and 6). This could be extended to explore the ethical principle raised in the stimulus of ‘working together even in the bad times’ (Levels 5 and 6) and what this might mean for guiding how some of these conflicts are resolved. The open nature of the stimulus provides the opportunity to construct learning activities linked to any of the other Ethical Capability content descriptions across Levels 3 to 6, particularly if further research on ethical issues associated with caring for the Murray is undertaken. This resource can be used to consolidate learning after completion of introductory lessons.

**Resource name:** ‘Judge Lie’, *Behind the News*

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** ‘Judge Lie’, *Behind the News*, 2009 (available on [ABC](https://www.abc.net.au/btn/classroom/judge-lie/10539320))

About the resource:

This episode of BTN will allow students to explore the severe consequences of not telling the truth in legal situations (Levels 5 and 6). While truth is valued by our society, we know that people tell little white lies for a variety of reasons and often with few consequences. However, not telling the truth in a courtroom or within a legal document can come with serious costs – maybe even a jail sentence. This resource illustrates our obligation to tell the truth under law by analysing the example of a well-respected Australian judge who committed perjury when he lied about who was driving his car after it was photographed by a speed camera. With this discussion stimulus, students can apply earlier knowledge and understandings of this concept to reason and draw conclusions for themselves about the extent to which our society values and obligates us to tell the truth.

**Resource name:** ‘I have a message for the human race’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** Zoos Victoria, 2004 (available on [Vimeo](https://vimeo.com/73596136))

About the resource:

This is one of many videos that Zoos Victoria has produced to highlight the impact that human civilisation is having upon animals in the wild. In this clip, the focus is the orangutan and the devasting impact that palm oil production is having upon their rainforest habitat. Using a combination of voiceover and digital effects, it appears the orangutan is ‘speaking’ for herself, delivering an emotive plea to humans on behalf of her species.

This resource could prompt discussion of the disposition of empathy and its role in decision-making and actions (Levels 3 and 4), including whether humans can truly understand what animals are thinking and feeling and to what extent this matters in helping to decide actions. This could be extended to discuss means and ends (Levels 5 and 6), including how actions might vary depending on whether the animals and the rainforest are viewed as ends (what we do something for, or what we respect as having status equal to humans) and/or means (a way to help us achieve what we want). The resource could also prompt discussion of why the treatment of animals and their habitat as well as our purchasing decisions sometimes involve ethical considerations (Levels 3 and 4). Students may also discuss the orangutan’s statement ‘Don’t feel guilty; you didn’t know’, exploring conscience and how being informed consumers could and should affect our decision-making (Levels 5 and 6). This resource can be used to consolidate learning after completion of introductory lessons.

**Resource name:** *The Island*

**Resource type:** Picture book

**Source:** John Heffernan (author) and Peter Sheehan (illustrator), 2005, *The Island*, Scholastic Australia, Gosford, Australia (also available read aloud by the author on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bdF79h3Ohs))

About the resource:

*The Island* explores a range of ethical concepts through its colourful illustrations and detailed written text. It tells the story of a blind sea urchin who finds a sea monster that brings happiness to all those around it; however, the people of the village seek to capture the creature to ensure their own happiness.

This picture book can be used as a provocation to help students explore whether we need to seek out happiness or whether it finds us (Levels 5 and 6). Students may consider whether the plan was fair for everyone in the village (Levels 3 and 4) and whether it is ever OK to pursue our own happiness at the expense of others (Levels 5 and 6). This resource could be used to extend students’ ideas and understanding of why we value and seek happiness in our own lives. This resource can be used to consolidate learning after completion of introductory lessons.