Ethical Capability

Unpacking the Content Descriptions

Foundation–Level 6

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Introduction

This document contains key concepts and ideas to unpack Ethical Capability content descriptions from Foundation to Level 6. The sample learning activities that are listed could be used to support explicit teaching and/or consolidation of learning.

Foundation–Level 2

**Content description:** Explore the meaning of right and wrong, good and bad, as concepts concerned with the outcomes of acts ([VCECU001](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU001))

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] identify and describe ethical concepts using illustrative examples from familiar situations and a basic vocabulary about ethical problems and their outcomes.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Sometimes we describe acts as good, bad, right or wrong due to the outcomes of these acts.
* When we are deciding if we believe that an act is/was ethically right or good, or wrong or bad, one thing to think about is what the outcome is/was likely to be.
* The use of the words ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ can show how we judge the effect of an action or decision on people’s lives or on animals or the environment.

**Sample learning activities:**

Select a text that has a simple example of right and wrong or good and bad, such as *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfitser (North-South Books, 1992).

Question students about what might happen if the character makes a potentially damaging or negative decision. For example, ask, ‘Why might the character choose to do this? Who may be affected? How might they feel? How might we judge these acts?’

Record and display relevant vocabulary about the impacts, highlighting students’ connections to the focus concepts of good and bad, right and wrong. These words could be grouped with like terms and connected with a visual graphic, for example, an associated emotion.

Ask, ‘What could happen if the character makes a different decision?’ Discuss how using the word ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ to label a decision involves thinking about its effect on ourselves and others. For example, a person could judge a decision as bad or wrong, and what they mean by this judgement is that the decision led to hurting others or ourselves. If a person judges a decision as good or right, this might be because it helped ourselves or others, such as helping them to feel happier. Judging whether something is right or wrong, good or bad, includes thinking about how a decision impacts on the person who made the decision and others.

**Content description:** Explore the type of acts often considered right and those often considered wrong and the reasons why they are considered so ([VCECD002](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD002))

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain acts and situations that have ethical dimensions, using illustrative examples.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* There are some acts or things we do that many people agree are right or wrong.
* We give reasons for labelling acts as right or wrong, based on the following considerations:
* how they affect people or other factors we are interested in, such as animals or the environment
* whether an expectation has been met
* whether a responsibility was carried out (this can be linked to expectation and intentions – think of why we would praise or blame someone).
* If we believe that in a particular situation an act is right or good (such as listening well in order to contribute to teamwork), then we must also believe that a contrasting act in that same situation (such as not taking turns to speak and listen to the team) is wrong or bad.
* A negative judgement is relative to what is judged as right. In other words, if we think something is wrong, it is often because we have in the back of our minds a vision of what is right.

**Sample learning activities:**

Students categorise the following acts as right or wrong, and discuss reasons for their decision using the key concepts and ideas they have learnt:

1. helping a hurt friend
2. cheating in a game
3. taking something without asking
4. making sure everyone gets a turn at a game
5. breaking a toy because of jealousy
6. breaking someone’s toy accidentally
7. lending someone pocket money before they have done some chores
8. asking someone to play with you
9. using materials in the garden to build a cubby without asking.

Guide and prompt students, and record the reasons they give to justify their judgements alongside these acts, providing feedback on their coverage of key concepts and ideas.

**Extension** (to support [VCECU005](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU005) at Levels 3 and 4)

Print out a list of the acts above, and cut them out for students. Ask students to place two different acts (such as the third and ninth act from the list above) along a line that has ‘better’ at one end and ‘worse’ at the other. Ask students to discuss their placements.

**Content description:** Explore the effects that personal feelings can have on how people behave in situations where ethical issues are involved ([VCECD003](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD003))

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain that personal feelings may influence the way people behave in situations where ethical issues are involved.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Feelings can influence intention, what decision is made, how an action is undertaken and how we might reflect on the outcome.
* We each have personal feelings and our behaviour is often connected to these feelings.
* Our feelings may also relate to how we think people ought to live and behave.
* Sometimes a feeling might influence the attitude we have, for example, whether we have an attitude of recklessness or cautiousness towards something.
* We can reflect on how our feelings have or could impact upon our decisions, actions and reactions.

**Sample learning activities:**

Outline a scenario that involves an ethical issue and personal feelings. For example:

Imagine you are part of a team. Another team member is feeling angry or distracted and is unable to contribute to the team. The rest of your team works together and reaches the goal, so the teacher offers the whole team some free time as a reward.

To what extent do you think being angry or distracted stopped this team member from being able to contribute? Do you think the angry or distracted team member should get to share in the reward? Why do you think this? What are you feeling about this situation? Why? How much do you think your feeling contributed to what you think should be done? What might that team member think? Would everyone feel the same/agree? Why/why not?

Give students time to think, record and share their opinions and justifications, and to reflect on how their feelings may be influencing their position, using the sample key concepts and ideas to assist them.

Compare whether people feel the same or differently about the situation or the decision reached and the role feelings played in this.

An example of a more complex scenario is:

What about a feeling that could influence someone to act rightly or wrongly, for example, how confident an individual team member feels? Could this lead to either good (for example, encouraging others) and/or bad (controlling) behaviours? Why/why not?

What about other feelings that could lead someone to different kinds of behaviours? Why might the same feeling lead to different behaviours?

Levels 3 and 4

**Content description:** Explore the contested meaning of concepts including fairness and harm and how they can seem to differ in different situations [(VCECU004)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU004)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] use concrete examples from a range of contexts to explain the contested meaning of concepts …

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* The meaning of ethical concepts can be contested, that is, not everyone always agrees about their meaning.
* The meaning of ethical concepts is usually expressed as a set of distinctions (identifying what makes something different from something else) and criteria.
* The meaning of a concept may be contestable due to:
* different views on how different parts of life or different concepts relate to each other; for example, a person’s view of privacy and a person’s view of friendship might come together to influence their view on what it means to be a good friend and to what extent this involves the sharing and telling of secrets – that is, ‘a good friend does/does not tell secrets’
* different observations and experiences of how the concept is used in language and culture
* different views on or experiences of where authority on these concepts is located, for example, laws, family or other social institutions.
* Common ideas about what fairness might involve include one or more of:
* treating everyone the same
* treating individuals according to what they need or deserve
* reciprocity or paying back what is owed.
* Common considerations in deciding whether something is harmful or not in an ethical sense (that is, categorising it as ‘wrong’) are one or more of:
* deliberate intention
* physical effects
* mental effects
* financial effects
* environmental effects
* how much suffering was involved (magnitude and length of time)
* who or what was affected
* the outcome overall and whether it was good or bad.
* One area of disagreement about fairness and harm is who gets to decide whether something was fair or harmful.

**Sample learning activities:**

Students watch an extract of a film involving slapstick comedy and discuss whether or not the scenario was harmful, using the considerations learnt in previous lessons.

Next, students are put in scenarios where they can experiment with ideas about what might be fair/harmful in different situations, then students discuss what they think is fair/harmful and why. Note why there are disagreements and to what extent these involve different ideas on what these concepts mean and provide feedback on the coverage of key concepts and ideas.

Some possible scenarios include:

* a running race:
* with some having a head start
* with everyone having the same start
* with people getting a different start according to a criterion such as age, height or their running skills
* a throwing task such as getting a ball in a goal:
* with some throwing from different spots/distances
* with everyone throwing from the same spot
* with people throwing from a spot to suit their needs.
* looking over a fence to watch a spectacle:
* with everyone treated the same no matter the height of the fence
* with everyone sharing blocks to stand on according to height so everyone can see over the fence.

OR

Read a text that draws out criteria of fairness or harm such as *Who Sank the Boat?*, written and illustrated by Pamela Allen (Penguin, 1992), where the mouse’s weight is what finally makes the boat sink. Discuss if it is really the mouse’s fault and if it is fair to blame the mouse. Note why there are disagreements and to what extent these involve different ideas on what these concepts mean, using the key concepts and ideas as a guide.

**Content description:** 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)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU005)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] use concrete examples from a range of contexts to explain the … significance of acts.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Reasons why different people might make different ethical judgements about an act include:
* they disagree about what is of value or most important
* they have had different experiences that affect their understanding of relative harm or benefit
* they have different knowledge about the situation or similar situations.
* Culturally some acts can be regarded differently ethically, for example, making eye contact. Note here that cultures may have the same underlying ethical value, such as respect, but express it differently.

**Sample learning activities:**

Give students an example of a dialogue between friends who are evaluating a particular act differently, for example, two different perspectives on telling on a friend to a teacher where one friend thinks it is acceptable to tell and the other does not.

Give students time to think, record and discuss the reasons why these friends may be regarding the act differently, using key concepts and ideas they have learnt about why people differ in their judgements.

Students annotate the dialogue accordingly.

Students use the key concepts and ideas to discuss questions they would like to ask the two friends to check why there are different evaluations; for example, ‘Has this happened to you before?’

**Content description:** Discuss the ways to identify ethical considerations in a range of problems [(VCECU006)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU006)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain how to identify ethical considerations in problems.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Ethical considerations can be identified by looking for particular characteristics.
* Characteristics of an ethical issue include:
* the right thing to do is not clear, including whether it is better to do nothing
* the outcome/s could be judged as good, bad, right, wrong, better or worse
* the act/s involved could be judged as good, bad, right, wrong, better or worse
* people disagree on the ethical significance of what was involved; for example, they disagree whether borrowing without asking counts as stealing
* it involves a concern about how to live, what sort of society we should have and/or how we should treat others
* people disagree on how much the intention matters
* it is not clear who is, or should be, responsible.

**Sample learning activities:**

Provide pairs of students with different simple, short stories where they must identify an ethical issue in each of them and the characteristic/s of each issue (that is, what makes it an ethical issue).

Pairs of students then match up with a second pair and explain why they think it is an ethical issue.

In a whole-class review, question students about what they identified as an ethical issue and how they identified it.

As a whole class, students develop criteria for what makes an issue an ethical one, using the key concepts and ideas as a guide.

Record ways to identify these ethical considerations on an anchor chart (a poster that makes thinking visible). For example, create a chart that shows key guidelines or processes and display it for future reference. Leave space on the chart for students to place sticky notes about ethical issues uncovered later in independent or group reading texts.

**Content description:** Explore how apparently wrong actions can sometimes lead to good outcomes and the reverse [(VCECD007)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD007)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** Students use examples to evaluate ethical actions in relation to their outcomes.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Sometimes our intention is good and we act accordingly, but the outcome is bad. For example, you help by tidying up a friend’s workspace so they can get outside to play on time but you don’t ask them first and they get upset. The intention may have been good, but the outcome was not.
* Sometimes an apparently wrong action might have a good outcome. For example, you may need to make a decision about whether to break a promise. If you value trustworthiness this would be a wrong action, but if you break that promise because it concerns someone’s safety, which then leads to the outcome of the person being safer, we might say the outcome is nevertheless good.
* Sometimes the outcome might start off as good or bad but end up as the reverse in the long run. For example, if you never let a younger brother or sister lose at a game they might enjoy it more; however, later on at school when they play with their friends and do lose sometimes, they may not know how to handle it very well.
* There are many reasons why right/wrong actions can have unintended outcomes.
* Some of the reasons actions can have unintended outcomes include:
* something we failed to predict happened either due to lack of our own knowledge or through something we could not reasonably have foreseen
* we come to learn something new and have to act in light of this knowledge against what we originally thought (for example, breaking the promise)
* we forget to identify all the factors and people who might be impacted over the short and long term.

**Sample learning activities:**

Provide pairs or small groups of students with a range of scenarios that could lead to good/bad outcomes, or both, such as:

* an act with an intention of generosity and an expected outcome of making someone else better off (example scenarios: sharing lunch, helping a friend with homework, providing welfare)
* an act with an intention of looking after self-interest and an expected outcome of being happier (example scenarios: playing with a pet because you are lonely, being the fastest to find eggs on a hunt, cheating in a game because everyone else does)
* an act with the intention to meet a duty and an expected outcome of avoiding harm (for example, keeping a promise or being respectful or honest).

Students use a graphic organiser with different branches and stems to list an act and as many possible outcomes from the scenario that they can think of for all stakeholders, including the person doing the act. Discuss whether the outcomes are good or bad and reasons why some outcomes might be different to what was intended, using key concepts and ideas as a guide.

Students construct a story or role-play showing how one kind of act can sometimes result in good outcomes and sometimes in bad outcomes.

OR

For a more complex activity, introduce the students to the idea of Chaos Theory (also known as the Butterfly Effect) and the idea that small actions and events can create far-reaching change. Ask students to think about whether outcomes might initially be good or bad but in the longer term have the opposite effect.

**Content description:** Discuss the role of personal values and dispositions in ethical decision-making and actions [(VCECD008)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD008)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain the role of personal values and dispositions in ethical decision-making and actions, recognising areas of contestability.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* In general, values are something that are thought to have worth.
* In ethics, values refer to ethical concepts such as fairness that are thought to have ethical importance. Key considerations include:
* what are values and which do I/we have?
* how are our values shaped?
* how do peoples’ values differ?
* how could/have my values influenced my ideas?
* how could/have my values influenced my decisions in the past?
* Dispositions are qualities of mind or character. Key considerations include:
* what kind of dispositions might be ethically good to have (known as virtues)?
* are our ideas about virtues influenced by what we value, or is it rather that a particular character drives us towards valuing certain things?
* to what extent are dispositions such as being honest, cautious, persistent, selfish, proud or compassionate necessary for ethical decision-making?
* are there some dispositions that are more important than others?
* can someone have particular virtues and yet make a wrong choice? For example, honesty and bravery are often thought to be virtues but could someone be honest and brave and yet make the wrong choice?

**Sample learning activities:**

Discuss a range of Aesop’s fables involving characters with different traits/dispositions and values, and explain what role these traits/dispositions played in the decisions and actions that were taken, and any areas of disagreement about this.

Students create character profiles, recording the actions connecting to underlying values/dispositions displayed in the texts. These profiles could be compared and sorted into desirable and undesirable dispositions, highlighting areas of contestability.

In response to a given dilemma, students create a character profile featuring themselves or the kind of person they aspire to be, titled ‘My Character Matters’. They select virtues and annotate the character profile with examples of decisions and actions they could enact that illustrate the virtues, with a ‘but’ to show an area of contestability regarding its role in decision-making. For example, ‘I am honest so I want to tell the truth, but I will also think carefully about what the truth is in this case.’

OR:

Rewrite part of a story based on how you might have behaved, according to your values/dispositions, if you were in the character’s position. Then reflect on the difference that values/dispositions make to decision-making.

Levels 5 and 6

**Content description:** Examine the contested meaning of concepts including truth and happiness and the extent to which these concepts are and should be valued [(VCECU009)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU009)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] evaluate the meaning of ethical concepts and analyse their value, identifying areas of contestability.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Common disagreements on the meaning of happiness include its association with pleasure versus contentment, versus excitement or versus struggle, and whether happiness is an emotion.
* Valuing happiness relates to how important it is compared to other values, to what extent it is a goal in life and its link (if any) to meaning and purpose in life.
* Disagreements also arise in relation to what is necessary for happiness and are linked to what happiness means (‘If happiness means …, then what is necessary to achieve it is …’).
* In terms of ethics, common disagreements concerning truth concern the ethical status of ‘white lies’, exaggeration, omission, etc. and whether these are acceptable, and to what extent, in regard to ethical issues, there is a distinction between perception and truth.
* What circumstances if any might justify telling a lie? Are there harmless lies? Are there helpful lies that avoid creating pain and discomfort? Are there times when telling the truth can be harmful?
* A common reason for valuing truth ethically is that it is useful, although not all truth could be useful.
* Another reason for valuing truth ethically is that valuing truth fosters trust, which is important for human relationships.

**Sample learning activities:**

Students read and discuss a text such as the article [‘First Person: Happiness Is … Being an Aussie’](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/06/130604-australia-aussie-happiness-lifestyle-better-life-index-survey/) (National Geographic website) to assist in developing survey questions to explore key concepts and ideas on the meaning and value of happiness. Survey questions could include the following:

* Which words do you think help describe what happiness means? Cheerful, content, carefree, calm, excited, optimistic, involved (include blank boxes for respondents’ own suggestions)
* Is happiness a feeling?
* What creates happiness for different people?
* What is necessary to enable you to be happy? Savings, friends, a job, a good reputation, a hobby, a good education, a car, health, lots of possessions, quiet time, struggles (include blank boxes for respondents’ own suggestions)
* Is it important to be happy: all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, none of the time? Why?
* Is happiness an important goal to have in life? Why? Is it the most important goal? If not, what is more important?

Students survey a variety of people on their perceptions of the meaning of happiness, what brings us happiness, and its value, using the questions developed in class.

Students are asked to find a partner and together analyse the different responses across their surveys to identify areas of agreement and disagreement on the meaning of happiness and its value.

They present their findings and overall conclusion to the class, incorporating their own justified view on what happiness means and on how important it is. They are asked to identify at least two reasons people might disagree with their own view.

OR

Students can read a stimulus related to the concept of happiness such as the picture book *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley*, written by Colin Thompson and illustrated by Amy Lissiat (Lothian, 2005). Students discuss: What is happiness? Is it the same for everyone? How might we try to obtain it? Does gratitude relate to happiness?

Students could then investigate the relationship between needs and happiness. They make connections with the text and consider how needs such as food, clothing and shelter might relate to happiness.

OR

Students could engage in a thought experiment, such as imagining they are stranded on an island and what they would take if they had a limited number of items they were allowed to bring, why they would take these things and to what extent these things are necessary for happiness.

**Content description:** Discuss how ethical principles can be used as the basis for action, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, worldviews and philosophical thought on these principles [(VCECU010)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU010)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain different ways to respond to ethical problems … They identify the basis of a range of ethical principles …

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Ethical principles are concerned, in a general way, with the ‘right’ way to act.
* Ethical principles build on something that is valued to create a general guide to action. For example, if authority is valued, then obeying authority could be a guiding ethical principle. When faced with a situation where the right thing to do is unclear, someone might look to the general principle of obeying authority to help guide them.
* Whether to use an ethical principle/s in a specific situation requires:
* some extra thought, for example about consequences in a particular case or duties or obligations that exist
* also thinking about what a general principle might mean in a specific case – in the ‘obeying authority’ example above, does it mean (in the case of sport) obeying a particular rule or obeying the coach who is telling players to break the rule?
* Ethical principles can be derived from cultural norms and other forms of socialisation, philosophical thought and/or religious and nonreligious worldviews, which results in people taking on particular beliefs/values that then lead to the ethical principles they live by.

A sample list of ethical principles can be found in the [List of Ethical Principles](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/viccurric/ethics/List_of_Ethical_Principles.docx) document on the VCAA website.

**Sample learning activities:**

Investigate differing cultural norms concerning the importance of the individual relative to the family or wider community, and how this may influence views on loyalty, obligation and responsibility, and then investigate how this influences views on what are appropriate guiding ethical principles.

OR

Students can investigate a range of different acts, the context in which they occur and the ethical principles that influenced these acts. For example, they could investigate how a superhero acted in a situation (such as acts undertaken to capture a villain) and ask:

What ethical principles does the superhero appear to have? How might the superhero have come to place importance on these ethical principles? What ethical principles are at play that makes readers see the superhero and their acts as good/bad?

Students then look at how the superhero might have acted if they were following a different ethical principle or were operating in a different cultural context. For example, a superhero might follow the principle of justice, but what if they followed the principle of beneficence (being generous/charitable)? What if this superhero was raised in a different context (for example, a world with other superheroes)? What if this text was created in a different cultural context (for example, leading to different ideas on what was deserved/justice)?

**Content description:** Examine how problems may contain more than one ethical issue [(VCECU011)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU011)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] identify different ethical issues associated with a particular problem.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

Reasons more than one ethical issue may be involved in some problems include:

* different interests or views on what is important, or different cultural perspectives
* competing alternatives on what is the best way to act in a particular situation, with neither being fully acceptable (a dilemma)
* different disciplinary or stakeholder frameworks through which the problem is approached, meaning that different factors in the problem are attended to (for example, historical, economic or geographical frameworks, which raise different issues).

**Sample learning activities:**

Students explore the nature of an ethical dilemma in which there is a choice to be made between at least two options, none of which gives a fully ethically acceptable result, and identify the issues involved and why there is more than one issue. For example:

* a scenario based on choosing friends to invite when there are limited places, such as invitations to a birthday party
* whether to tell the shop owner that their friend is stealing expensive medicine for their poverty-stricken mother
* whether to stop and help someone and miss an important audition
* whether to quit a sporting team in a small town because of disinterest, knowing that there will not be enough players and the team will fold.

OR

Students may build on the superhero activity (see sample learning activity for VCECU010, on page 15) to explore situations where two competing principles, such as justice and beneficence (being generous/charitable), create a dilemma. For example, the superhero wants to deliver justice for the victims of the crimes committed by the villain, but in doing so they may cause harm to people, other creatures or the environment (for example, someone is injured in a chase). Students identify the ethical issues involved in the particular situation and why it is a dilemma.

**Content description:** 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)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD012)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain different ways to respond to ethical problems and identify issues related to these.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Exploring ‘means versus ends’ is concerned with how we approach decision-making.
* Privileging (giving priority to) ‘means’ occurs when someone goes into a situation believing that how they act is the most important consideration even if it means that the outcome is not ideal. (‘I did the right thing even though …’) In this case they may know in advance what the right thing to do would be, and it becomes a duty to act this way.
* Privileging ‘ends’ occurs when the consequences are considered to be the most important consideration and how we act to get them is considered less important. (‘I might have done … but at least we achieved …’) In this case they may not know the right thing to do until they have weighed up all the foreseeable consequences for this specific case.
* When responding to ethical issues, we need to consider:
* who/what is impacted by the decision/act and to what extent
* what values, dispositions, principles or schools of thought are underpinning the decision/act. For example, are they influenced by a view that emphasises consequences, duties or having the right character/dispositions (virtue ethics)?
* Consequentialism privileges ‘ends’ or consequences, such as classic utilitarians acting to increase happiness of the majority.
* Duty-based or rule-bound (deontological) acts generally privilege ‘means’.
* Virtue ethics privileges ‘means’ because it emphasises an individual acting in line with their disposition.
* What are the different ways we might respond? For example, should we be informed by theories from consequentialism, duty-based ethics or virtue ethics, or should we draw from each?
* Each way of responding has its own set of issues and implications.

**Sample learning activities:**

Students consider the meaning of the commonly asked question ‘Do the ends justify the means?’ and the implications of a ‘yes’ response and a ‘no’ response. They explore this through short examples and use these to identify areas of disagreement or problems that might arise from a ‘yes’ and a ‘no’ response, using key concepts and ideas they have learnt about privileging means and privileging ends to help clarify why there might be disagreements or problems.

Example scenarios:

* A parent is able to see text messages sent between their child and their child’s friends on the child’s device. They monitor these messages, believing it is for their child’s safety. The parent does not tell the child as they believe the child would get very upset and modify their use of text messages so that the parent would not get an accurate picture of what is going on.
* In the story of Robin Hood, Robin claims to ‘rob from the rich to give to the poor’.
* A team captain selects someone who they know is not the best player, leaving a better player out who has had plenty of turns. (Extension: What if it were the finals, or against a team that they have never managed to win against?)

**Content description:** Discuss the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making [(VCECD013)](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD013)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:** [Students] explain the role and significance of conscience and reasoning in ethical decision-making.

**Sample key concepts and ideas:**

* Conscience refers to an inner sense of what is ethical, although the knowledge of this might initially have come from an external source (see sample key concepts and ideas for VCECU010, on page 15).
* Conscience involves self-awareness and self-assessment.
* This inner sense sometimes feels like a check against an ideal observer or ‘better self’ or against an ethical standard that has been accepted by that person.
* Conscience can be influenced by intuition or by reason and knowledge.
* Reasoning can be used in ethical decision-making to help ensure points of view make sense logically and are expressed clearly, for example, to ask who the ‘we’ is in a claim that ‘we should …’; to structure a way to compare alternatives or evaluate a suggestion, such as demanding evidence; and to think about thinking, that is, thinking about how a point of view has been thought through or presented.
* Some people claim that valuing reasoning encourages people to put aside bias to seek the best argument to help decision-making, although many would say more than just this is required, such as a willingness to seek the common good, a good character or a willingness to monitor feelings.

**Sample learning activities:**

Students consider examples where reasoning might be able to play a strong role and others where it might be more difficult, for example, comparing situations of more or less pressure. This could be explored through scenarios based on the sporting field or emergencies when there is little time to stop and think in contrast with other situations where there is more time to think.

OR

Explore a scenario based on the ideas in the Ancient Greek story of the Ring of Gyges (in particular, posing whether possessing a ring of invisibility that means one would never get caught would make a difference to ethical decisions) and discuss the role of conscience in deciding what to do.