Ethical Capability – a selection of classroom resources

Levels 7 and 8

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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 7 and 8. 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).

**Note:** The listed resources are provided as examples only. Teachers should review the appropriateness of each resource and use their own judgment to select resources and issues that best suit their school and student cohorts.

Links to Ethical Capability, Levels 7 and 8

Content descriptions

Understanding Concepts

* Explore the contested meaning of concepts including freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, and the extent they are and should be valued by different individuals and groups ([VCECU014](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU014))
* Investigate why ethical principles may differ between people and groups, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought ([VCECU015](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU015))
* Investigate criteria for determining the relative importance of matters of ethical concern ([VCECU016](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU016))

Decision Making and Actions

* Explore the extent of ethical obligation and the implications for thinking about consequences and duties in decision-making and action ([VCECD017](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD017))
* Discuss the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and actions ([VCECD018](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD018))

Achievement standard

By the end of Level 8, students explain different ways ethical concepts are represented and analyse their value to society, identifying areas of contestability. They articulate how criteria can be applied to determine the importance of ethical concerns.

Students analyse the differences in principles between people and groups. They explain different views on the extent of ethical obligation and analyse their implications for the consequences of and duties involved in ethical decision-making and action. They analyse the role of context and experience in ethical decision-making and action.

Summary of resource alignment to Ethical Capability, Levels 7 and 8

Note: Some picture books may be out of print or hard to find. These books may be accessed other ways, such as via read-aloud versions on YouTube.

| **Resource name** | **Resource type** | **Suitable as introductory stimulus** | **Ethical Capability content descriptions,  Levels 7 and 8** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **VCECU014** | **VCECU015** | **VCECU016** | **VCECD017** | **VCECD018** |
| ‘Actually it’s okay to disagree. Here are five ways we can argue better’ | Article for teacher reference only |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| VAPS Understanding Concepts: Freedom, Rights, Responsibilities, Justice | Downloadable ‘toolkit’ for teachers | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |
| VAPS Ethical Decision Making | Downloadable ‘toolkit’ for teachers | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ethical Theories and Thought Experiments: Ethics Explainers | Videos and articles | ✓ | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |
| What do human rights mean to you? Fitzroy High School and Melbourne Girls’ College – Aug 2016 | Video | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  |
| ‘Freedom isn’t just a word’ | Short story |  | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |
| *Fox* | Picture book |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |
| *Dreams of Freedom in Words and Pictures* | Picture book | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| ‘Face mask rules: Do they really violate personal liberty?’ | News item | ✓ | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |
| ‘Should I eat meat?’ | Scenarios and dialogues | ✓ |  | ✓ |  |  |  |
| ‘What is Consequentialism’ | Video | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ |  |
| ‘What is the tragedy of the commons’ | Video |  | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |
| The Lady of Justice (Country Court) | Artwork | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| *On Bakery Hill* (1954) and letter from Peter Lalor to Alice Dunne | Artwork and quote |  |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| Political Theory – John Rawls and ‘The Veil of Ignorance’ Thought Experiment | Videos |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Significant Impact Guidelines 1.1 – Matters of National Environmental Significance | Government document | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| Talking about Human Rights | Articles |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘Justice’ | Chapter of a teaching resource book | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |

Selected classroom resources

**Resource name:** ‘Actually it’s okay to disagree. Here are five ways we can argue better’

**Resource type:** Article for teacher reference only

**Source:** Hugh Breakey, 2019, [The Conversation](https://theconversation.com/actually-its-ok-to-disagree-here-are-5-ways-we-can-argue-better-121178), 13 September

**About the resource:**

Ethical Capability often involves encountering questions that have more than one possible response. Teachers may wish for students to discuss their views with one another, and where this is the case it will be useful to put in place basic norms to help ensure respectful dialogue and a mutual aim of ensuring that careful thinking underlies any position taken in response to a contentious question.

This article by Hugh Breakey can be used by teachers as a basis for developing norms for dialogue on topics in ethics and explains why this is important when discussing ethics. This article contains links to a wider range of norms that may also assist.

**Resource name:** VAPS Understanding Concepts: Freedom, Rights, Responsibilities, Justice

**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 Ethical Capability.

These downloadable ‘toolkits’ will aid teachers in the exploration of Ethical Capability concepts from Foundation to Level 10. 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.

**Resource name:** VAPS Ethical Decision Making

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

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

**About the resource:**

These downloadable ‘toolkits’ from subject association VAPS support the exploration of ethical obligation, duty, consequences and/or context using teacher-selected case studies, examples or scenarios.

**Resource name:** Ethical Theories and Thought Experiments: Ethics Explainers

**Resource type:** Videos and articles

**Source:**  [The Ethics Centre](https://ethics.org.au/knowledge/ethics-explainers/)

**About the resource:**

The Ethics Centre is an Australian not-for-profit organisation of ethicists. The ethics ‘explainers’ consist of articles, many of which also include short videos, typically between 3–5 minutes long. They unpack a range of concepts and ideas from ethics, many of which are aligned to Ethical Capability: for example, consequentialism and deontology (duty-based ethics).

**Resource name:** What do human rights mean to you? Fitzroy High School and Melbourne Girls’ College – Aug 2016

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/resources/what-do-human-rights-mean-to-you-fitzroy-high-school-and-melbourne-girls-college/)

**About the resource:**

In this short video, a range of secondary school students briefly state what human rights mean to them, with responses ranging from examples of human rights, to what a human right might look like in action, to more abstract definitions. It could be used as a stimulus to identify students’ ideas of what human rights are and what they mean at the beginning of a unit; these ideas can then be revisited at the end of the unit to see if conceptions have changed or become more nuanced.

The webpage also includes a link to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, which provides the opportunity to explore a range of issues such as the relationship between rights and responsibilities, including whether we could have human rights without responsibilities, reasons why some rights might be limited and how to manage conflicts between rights.

**Resource name:** ‘Freedom isn’t just a word’

**Resource type:** Short story

**Source:**  Brian Caswell and David Phu An Chien, 1999, ‘Freedom isn’t just a word’, *Australian Readers: Discovering Democracy: Lower Secondary Collection,* Curriculum Corporation*,* p. 60–61

**About the resource:**

These readers are collections of factual and fictional texts that accompany the Discovering Democracy resources developed by Curriculum Corporation (now Education Services Australia).

The selected text is a story of the migrant experience in Australia in the 1970s. Following the war, Toan’s family fled from Vietnam in small boats to Australia. Some reasons the family fled from Vietnam are:

1. ‘Never knowing what was going to be demanded of you’
2. ‘Never being able to speak your thoughts without looking over your shoulder’
3. ‘Having no control over what you own, of what you build, of who you are’.

Toan explains why life in their homeland was intolerable, asking the reader to imagine a ‘future stretching out ahead of you, without any hope of freedom’. This text could be used to explore what freedom means, why it is important, and how these experiences influenced Toan’s family’s decision to undertake a risky journey to Australia.

**Resource name:** *Fox*

**Resource type:** Picture book

**Source:** Margaret Wild (author) and Ron Brooks (illustrator), 2004, *Fox*, Allen and Unwin Children’s Books, Sydney, Australia

**About the resource:**

*Fox* tells the story of a one-eyed dog who rescues an injured bird. The bird soon begins to act as the dog’s eyes, and he acts as her wings as he runs through the forest with her on his back. Then, one day, a fox comes to join them in their cave, and this event brings about changes to the dynamics, thoughts and emotions of the characters. The story can be used to explore the tension between freedom and responsibility in the context of ethical obligations that might be involved in friendships.

**Resource name:** *Dreams of Freedom in Words and Pictures*

**Resource type:** Picture book

**Source:** Amnesty International, M Morpurgo (ed.), 2015, *Dreams of Freedom in Words and Pictures*, Frances Lincoln Children's Books, London, UK

**About the resource:**

Amnesty International is a movement of people across the globe standing up for human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This resource presents a collection of words and images from inspirational people including Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Anne Frank and Malafa Yousafzai, explording the nature of freedom and how it might be enabled. This text can be used to develop a distinction between freedom as the absence of outside interference and freedom characterised by mastery of oneself: for example, as enabled through education or the virtue of courage. It can also be used to examine how the valuing of freedom is expressed through a range of human rights.

**Resource name:** ‘Face mask rules: Do they really violate personal liberty?’

**Resource type:** News item

**Source:** Gwilym David Blunt, 2020, [The Conversation](https://theconversation.com/face-mask-rules-do-they-really-violate-personal-liberty-143634), 31 July

**About the resource:**

This text discusses a UK protest against rules mandating that face masks be worn in shops and supermarkets to curb the spread of COVID-19. It provides the opportunity to nuance a definition of freedom as absence of external interference. For students who have already explored the concept of freedom, it can be used as an introductory stimulus for discussing the concept of the common good and the link between the common good and ethical obligation, including why particular freedoms might be limited, and whether some rules might restrict freedom of choice but in doing so enable gains in other areas.

**Resource name:**‘Should I eat meat?’

**Resource type:** Collection of scenarios and dialogues

**Source:** Stephen Law (author) and Daniel Postgate (illustrator), 2011, *The Complete Philosophy Files*, Orion Children’s Books, London, UK

**About the resource:**

This text is aimed at ages 11 and up, and consists of a series of 'files' that explore arguments in response to different philosophical questions. The selected file ‘Should I eat meat?’ examines the dominant cultural attitude that it is wrong to kill and eat a human animal but not (as) wrong to eat non-human animals. It is suitable as an introductory text for students already familiar with what an ethical principle is, and can be used to further develop an understanding of why people might hold differing ethical principles.

**Resource name:** ‘What is Consequentialism?’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:**  [Wireless Philosophy](https://wi-phi.com/videos/consequentialism/), 2015

**About the resource:**

Wireless Philosophy (or Whi-Phi) is an organisation made up of philosophers, educators, illustrators, animators and online learning specialists. The website provides video content (and other links to philosophical resources) covering a variety of philosophical content, including many videos on ethics.

This short clip explicitly introduces one of the key approaches to ethical decision-making: consequentialism. It could be used as a stimulus to discuss how everyday ethical reasoning often involves considering the foreseeable consequences of our actions, and to consider why consequentialism holds that this is the best approach to ethical decision-making. It should be noted that this resource, like many that introduce consequentialism, goes on to discuss some of the issues with this approach – in particular, that this approach is too demanding. While usually explored at Levels 9 and 10 [(VCECD022)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD022), this issue can be introduced at Levels 7 and 8 to consider how our perceptions of where our ethical obligations lie might influence our evaluation of consequences. For example, we might evaluate consequences differently depending on whether friends, family or strangers are involved.

**Resource name:** ‘What is the tragedy of the commons?’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** Nicholas Amendolare, 2017, [TED-Ed](https://ed.ted.com/lessons/what-is-the-tragedy-of-the-commons-nicholas-amendolare)

**About the resource:**

The tragedy of the commons is a situation in a shared-resource system where individual users, acting independently according to their own self-interest, behave contrary to the common good of all users by depleting or spoiling the shared resource through their collective action. The concept originated in an essay written in 1833 by William Lloyd and is often cited in connection with decisions around sustainable development, connecting economic growth and environmental protection.

This short video uses a fishing scenario to explain the tragedy of the commons and can be used to explore the relationship between consequences, ethical obligation, justice and the common good. For example, students could consider:

* how decision-making from the perspective of individual self-interest involves calculating the spread of cost and benefits (that is, consequences) for the individual
* how an individual’s decision-making might change if they had a different perception of what was just, which would affect their perception of where their obligations lie and their evaluation of consequences.

It can also be used to discuss how acting to avoid the tragedy could be encouraged. Students could go on to discuss related issues such as how individuals behave regarding water restrictions in times of drought.

**Resource name:** *The Lady of Justice*

**Resource type:** Artwork

**Source:** William Eicholtz, 2002, *The Lady of Justice*, Country Court of Victoria   
(For further information about and an image of the sculpture, see Mark Holsworth, 2014, ‘Justice, with one foot forward’, [Justinian](https://justinian.com.au/featurettes/justice-with-one-foot-forward.html).)

**About the resource:**

*The Lady of Justice* is a large-scale sculpture of a female figure of indeterminate age, race or position that appears outside the County Court of Victoria. The woman is blindfolded and holds scales in one hand and a sword in the other, and is intended as a symbol of justice.

Students could be asked to consider what values they think the sculpture promotes, and from here develop criteria for describing the meaning of justice, which may include fairness and what is deserved.

**Resource name:** *On Bakery Hill* (1954)and letter from Peter Lalor to Alice Dunne (extract)

**Resource type:** Artwork and quote

**Source:** Noel Counihan, 1954, *On Bakery Hill*, [Art Gallery NSW](https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/196.2002.5/)

Peter Lalor, Bakery Hill, 29 November 1854, quoted in Rafaello Carboni, The Eureka Stockade, 1855

**About the resource:**

Peter Lalor, one of the key actors in the Eureka Stockade, (1827–1889) wrote: ‘We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other to defend our rights and liberties’.

Lalor wrote to his fiancée, Alicia Dunne, a school-teacher in Geelong:

The diggers … in self-defence, have taken up arms and are resolved to use them … I am one amongst them. You must not be unhappy on this account. I would be unworthy of being called a man, I would be unworthy of myself, and, above all, I would be unworthy of you and of your love, were I base enough to desert my companions in danger.

The artwork by Noel Counihan depicts a speech being given on Bakery Hill.

The artwork and text can be used as stimulus to discuss how perception of ethical obligations influences judgment of where duties lie and the idea of action in accordance with duty as being honourable. Students could explore what influence the experiences of those involved had on their decision-making in terms of their ‘duty’. This resource demonstrates how a historical event can be used to explore Ethical Capability and does not necessarily represent how it would be taught as part of a History program.

**Resource name:** Political Theory – John Rawls and ‘The Veil of Ignorance’ thought experiment

**Resource type:** Videos

**Source:** The School of Life (may be available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-JQ17X6VNg)) and FutureLearn (may be available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLInfO_iLNg))

**About the resource:**

John Rawls’ conception of justice is one of several different ways of thinking about justice and relates to fairness, in particular with regard to distribution of resources that we might need. These two short videos provide an overview of a famous thought experiment devised by Rawls, which asks us to consider what the guiding principles of a just society should be from behind a ‘veil of ignorance’: that is, without any prior knowledge of our own place within the social order in terms of gender, age, wealth, intellect, ability and so on. It is argued that ignorance of our future circumstances can allow us to more objectively consider how resources should be distributed and society be organised.

Using the videos as a guide, ask students to complete the thought experiment, imagining that they are meeting together prior to populating the Earth and devising the principles of justice for their society. Students could reflect on whether the thought experiment was useful in ensuring the principles were as fair as possible. They could reflect on future projects such as missions to populate Mars or the Moon and whether this process could assist in beginning societies there.

**Resource name:** Significant Impact Guidelines 1.1 – Matters of National Environmental Significance

**Resource type:** Government document

**Source:** [Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment](https://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/publications/significant-impact-guidelines-11-matters-national-environmental-significance)

**About the resource:**

This policy statement by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment provides guidance on whether an action is likely to have significant impact. Students could, for example, consider the section ‘What is a significant impact?’, which states that:

A ‘significant impact’ is an impact which is important, notable, or of consequence, having regard to its context or intensity. Whether or not an action is likely to have a significant impact depends upon the sensitivity, value, and quality of the environment which is impacted, and upon the intensity, duration, magnitude and geographic extent of the impacts. You should consider all of these factors when determining whether an action is likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance.

Teachers could work with students to identify the criteria for significance contained in this statement and provide examples to prompt students to consider whether stakeholders would all place the same importance on each of these criteria or define them in the same way. This could be extended to consider whether this way of thinking about the significance of impacts could also be used for contexts other than actions that may affect the environment.

**Resource name:** Talking about Human Rights

**Resource type:** Articles

**Source:** [*Philosophy Now*](https://philosophynow.org/issues/118)*,* 2017, Issue 118, February/March

**About the resource:**

*Philosophy Now* is a magazine written by professional philosophers for lay readers and covers a wide array of philosophical content. The ‘Talking about Human Rights’issue contains a range of articles that could be discussed with students. For example, the article by Tim Dare, ‘What are Human Rights’, could be used to develop students’ understanding of the concept of human rights and the link between duties and rights, while the article ‘Presidential Decision-making: Utilitarianism vs Duty Ethics’ by Michael Rockler introduces both approaches and uses short case studies to demonstrate how decision-making is often a mix of both of them.

**Resource name:** *‘*Justice’

**Resource type:** Chapter of a teaching resource book

**Source:** Marietta McCarty, 2006, ‘Justice’, *Little Big Minds: Sharing Philosophy with Kids*, TarcherPerigee, New York, p. 81–105.

**About the resource:**

In this book McCarty provides ideas for exploring a range of ethical concepts including friendship, responsibility, happiness, courage, freedom, compassion and love. Each chapter follows the same format and often includes examples of classroom dialogue. Although the examples are drawn from junior students, they show how children use everyday examples to explore this concept, which is applicable for all levels. The first part of the ‘Justice’ chapter explores the concept, with the second part containing tips for teaching the topic, discussion questions and exercises. In part three there is an exploration of two philosophers (Immanuel Kant and Paulo Freire) and their ideas about justice. This part also includes tips for teaching the philosophers and their ideas, discussion questions and exercises. Lastly McCarty links the philosophers to the topic of Children’s Rights, again with tips, discussion questions and exercises. There is also a resources section, allowing for further exploration of the topic.