Ethical Capability – a selection of classroom resources

Levels 9 and 10

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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 9 and 10. 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 9 and 10

Content descriptions

Understanding Concepts

* Investigate the connections and distinctions between and the relative value of concepts including fairness and equality, and respect and tolerance ([VCECU019](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU019))
* Explore a range of ethical problems and examine the extent to which different positions are related to commonly held ethical concepts and principles, considering the influence of cultural norms, religion, world views and philosophical thought ([VCECU020](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU020))
* Distinguish between the ethical and non-ethical dimensions of complex issues, including the distinction between ethical and legal issues ([VCECU021](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECU021))

Decision Making and Actions

* Discuss issues raised by thinking about consequences and duties, in approaches to decision-making and action, and arguments for and against these approaches ([VCECD022](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD022))
* Investigate how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed by people and groups ([VCECD023](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCECD023))

Achievement standard

By the end of Level 10, students explain connections and distinctions between ethical concepts, identifying areas of contestability in their meanings and relative value.

Students analyse and evaluate contested approaches to thinking about consequences and duties in relation to ethical issues. They examine complex issues, identify the ethical dimensions and analyse commonality and difference between different positions. They explain how different factors involved in ethical decision-making can be managed.

Summary of resource alignment to Ethical Capability, Levels 9 and 10

| **Resource name** | **Resource type** | **Suitable as introductory stimulus** | **Ethical Capability content descriptions,  Levels 9 and 10** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **VCECU019** | **VCECU020** | **VCECU021** | **VCECD022** | **VCECD023** |
| ‘Actually it’s okay to disagree. Here are five ways we can argue better’ | Article for teacher reference only |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Understanding Equality, Fairness, Respect and Tolerance | Downloadable ‘toolkits’ for teachers | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| ‘Who Owns the Sky?’ | Video |  |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Ethical Theories and Thought Experiments: Ethics Explainers | Videos and articles | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Equality & Equality: Cartoon Gallery | Website with Cartoon Images | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |  |  |
| ‘What is Consequentialism?’ | Video |  |  |  |  | ✓ |  |
| ‘Episode 1 – Consequences’ | Video Series  Teacher notes | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| Put yourself on a triangle | Teaching  Activity | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘The lifeboat’ | Book | ✓ |  |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘Science can answer moral questions’ | Video |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ |
| ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’ | Short Story | ✓ |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Competing human rights | Self-paced learning modules | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘Is cancel culture silencing open debate? There are risks to shutting down opinions we disagree with’ | News article |  | ✓ | ✓ |  | ✓ | ✓ |
| ‘Civil Disobedience’ | Video | ✓ |  |  | ✓ |  |  |
| Talking about human rights | Magazine articles | ✓ |  |  | ✓ | ✓ |  |

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 Equality, Fairness, Respect and Tolerance

**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.

The toolkits for the concepts of equality, fairness, respect and tolerance will aid exploration of the meaning of these concepts and in understanding why they are contestable.

**Resource name:** ‘Who owns the Sky?’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** Ticket to Know, 2020 (may be available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbW9MclE6iY))

**About the resource:**

This video of just under 11 minutes provides an overview of how the law has grappled with activities that take place in the sky. Teachers could use extracts from this video as a prompt to discuss how technological developments are often ahead of the law or take time to be nuanced. If something is not illegal (yet!), does it mean that someone should be able to do it? On the other hand, if it is legal, does this make it ethically acceptable (see the case of United States vs Causby at 7:24 minutes – assuming the air force thought what they were doing was legal, was it ethically right?). The discussion could be broadened to the topic of drones.

**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, the explainers consider the distinction between ethics and the law, the concepts of respect and tolerance, and also include an explanation of the harm principle: a principle sited as an ethical decision-making tool that takes into consideration the consequences of our actions – the harm it causes or doesn’t cause to others.

**Resource name:** Equality & Equality: Cartoon Gallery

**Resource type:** Website with cartoon images

**Source:** [Equality & Equality: Cartoon Gallery](https://interactioninstitute.org/equality-equality-cartoon-gallery/), Interaction Institute for Social Change

**About the resource:**

The [Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC)](https://interactioninstitute.org/) is a training organisation with the explicit aim of creating a racially equitable society. This cartoon gallery presents a small selection of cartoons, including one cartoon with German labels, depicting the concepts of equality (gleichbehandlung), equity (gerechtigkeit) and reality. These cartoons can be used as a prompt for discussion on the connections and distinctions between the concepts of equality and equity (or fairness). It could also be used to explore their relative value (that is, which is more important) through examining and challenging the particular view of the world that is represented in the cartoons. This will also assist students in understanding the contestable nature of the concepts.

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

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:**  ‘What is Consequentialism?’, 2015, [Wireless Philosophy](https://wi-phi.com/videos/consequentialism/)

**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 five-minute video explicitly introduces one of the key approaches to decision-making: consequentialism. It begins by introducing consequentialism and goes on to discuss some of the issues with this approach. Teachers could supplement the examples in the video with others from everyday life and go on to prompt students to develop their own examples to illustrate issues arising from consequentialism.

**Resource name:** ‘Episode 1 – Consequences’, *Ethics Matters*

**Resource type:** Video series

**Source:** [*Ethics Matters*](https://ethicsmatterstvseries.com/01consequences/), 2017

**About the resource:**

*Ethics Matters* is an Australian series of documentaries, podcasts and articles designed for school use and produced by Snodger Media. As well as the documentary series, they also have a podcast on ethical issues called [*Dialogues*](https://ethicsmatterstvseries.com/dialogues/).

In this 12-minute episode, Dan Halliday introduces the concept of consequences as an approach to ethical decision-making through a series of interviews with philosophers such as Peter Singer. The episode explores the extent to which we use consequences as a guide to our decision-making, presents a number of thought experiments (such as the trolley problem) and considers the implications of using this approach. The episode includes responses to typical issues raised about consequentialism (which are further explored in Episode 2 – My Rights).

Each episode comes with [teacher notes](https://ethicsmatterstvseries.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/08/teacher-notes.pdf), links to the curriculum and some guiding questions teachers can use. Other episodes of the series (all under 13 minutes in length) can be viewed on the [*Ethics Matters* website](https://ethicsmatterstvseries.com/).

**Resource name:** VAPS Put yourself on a triangle

**Resource type:** Teaching activity

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

**About the resource:**

This activity is one among a variety of teaching tools in the Ethical Decision-making section of the VAPS resources. It can be used to explore different approaches to ethical decision-making. Students are provided with an ethical claim and asked to align themselves with one corner of the triangle (this can be done either physically, verbally or on paper). Each corner is associated with an ethical decision-making theory: consequentialism, duty-based ethics and an additional theory – virtue, or character-based ethics. The document has a range of suggestions for how to use this tool along with a variety of questions to further prompt discussion.

**Resource name:** ‘The lifeboat’

**Resource type:** Book chapter

**Source:** Martin Cohen, 2007, ‘The lifeboat’, *101 Ethical Dilemmas*, Routledge,   
New York, p.2.

**About the resource:**

*101 Ethical Dilemmas* presents 101 ethical problems through a range of scenarios, some of which directly reflect everyday life and others that are thought experiments: that is, ‘imagine that …’ scenarios that are constructed to highlight particular problem(s). There are a variety of contexts including business, the media, medicine, war and the environment. Each dilemma is accompanied by a key question that can be used to further prompt discussion.

The ‘lifeboat’ thought experiment presents a situation wherein a boat is sinking and does not have enough room on board for all of the boat’s occupants. Readers are asked to select whom should be saved and why. The thought experiment and many of the other dilemmas in the book can be used as stimulus for comparing the application of different approaches to ethical decision-making and for identifying some of the issues associated with these approaches.

**Resource name:** ‘Science can answer moral questions’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:**  Sam Harris, 2010, ‘Science can answer moral questions’, TED Talk (may be available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj9oB4zpHww&feature=emb_logo))

**About the resource:**

In this 24-minute video neuroscientist and philosopher Sam Harris explains why he thinks science can provide us with answers to moral questions. It is commonly considered that in relation to ethics, science can tell us how things are but not how they ought to be.

Some questions that could then follow are: Are values reducible to a kind of fact? To what extent can science contribute to ethical decision-making? Do you agree that there can be moral experts and if so, who would they be – does it depend on the issue? Students could go on to investigate an ethical issue, including considering the role of moral experts and science in responding to it.

**Resource name:** ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’

**Resource type:** Short story

**Source:** Ursula K. Le Guin, 2015, ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’, *The Real and Unreal Volume 2: Selected stories of Ursula Le Guin: Outer Space and Inner Lands*” Gollancz Publishing, London, UK (this short story is available from a range of sources in addition to the one provided)

**About the resource:**

In this Hugo Award winning short story originally published in 1973, the captivity and ill treatment of a child underlies the happiness of a peaceful kingdom. Citizens are aware of the child, and though some feel bad about the way the child is treated, they continue to tolerate it. This resource can be used to discuss consequentialist views that claim an ethical action is one that creates the greatest good for the greatest number, as well as objections to this view such as that it may lead to people being treated as means rather than ends in some cases (that is, objectified). It could be used to introduce this objection prior to discussing associated issues in the world today: for example, the exploitation of workers and the environment, and trade-offs that are made between cost and price; or trade-offs that are made between maximizing profit for shareholders and retrenching workers, or between health and safety/quality and price. During the discussion, students can be given the opportunity to reflect on how consequences could be compared in order to evaluate different actions, on what basis we might think a harm is tolerable, and to consider relevant laws and why they are in place.

**Resource name:** Competing Human Rights

**Resource type:** Self-paced learning modules

**Source:** [Ontario Human Rights Commission](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/competing-human-rights)

**About the resource:**

These five short modules aimed at the general public discuss one of the issues associated with duty-based ethics: that is, dilemmas that arise from competing duties or rights. These modules are for an Ontarian context and have a legal focus. However, they contain useful examples (see the third module) and general discussion prompts that can be drawn on for discussing duty-based approaches to resolving ethical problems, without requiring an understanding of legal terms such as codes.

**Resource name:** ‘Is cancel culture silencing open debate? There are risks to shutting down opinions we disagree with’

**Resource type:** News Item

**Source:** Hugh Breakey, 2020, ‘Is cancel culture silencing open debate? There are risks to shutting down opinions we disagree with’, [The Conversation](https://theconversation.com/is-cancel-culture-silencing-open-debate-there-are-risks-to-shutting-down-opinions-we-disagree-with-142377), 10 July

**About the resource:**

In this article published on The Conversation, Hugh Breakey (President of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics) explores some of the ethical issues associated with ‘cancel culture’. This resource can be used as a stimulus for identifying factors that make particular ethical issues complex and for discussing the concepts of respect and tolerance.

**Resource name:** ‘Civil Disobedience’

**Resource type:** Video

**Source:** BBC Radio 4, 2015 (may be available on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elrTpoY6AYQ))

**About the resource:**

This two-minute video narrated by Stephen Fry introduces a range of examples that can be used to discuss the distinction between the ethical and legal – in particular, whether something being legal therefore necessarily means it is ethical.

**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 identify and discuss two issues arising from duty-based ethics (duties are often seen to correlate with particular rights): that is, defining what a right is and justifying rights.