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## Philosophy module: 'Wild and Free'

Prepared by Michelle Sowe, 26/04/2017

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This document includes four philosophical enquiry lesson plans and associated activities, colour coded by suitability for different ages:

All students (ages 6 – 12)

Younger students (ages 6 – 9)

Older students (ages 9 – 12)

Advanced students (ages 11 – 12)

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### 1) Wilder Than You Know

#### ***Stimulus:***

Show students the image (overleaf) from the book *So Many Days* by Alison McGhee, illustrated by Tae-eun Yoo.

#### ***Enquiry questions for younger students:***

Are humans wild? (Always / sometimes / never?)

What does it depend on?

- Our mood?
- Our circumstances?
- Our upbringing?

Are you wild?

Is it good to be wild?

#### ***Enquiry questions for older students:***

Are humans wild? (Always / sometimes / never?)

What does it depend on?

- Our mood?
- Our circumstances?
- Our upbringing?

Is it possible to be 'wilder than you know'?

How can you *know* whether you're wild?

You are wilder than you know.



## 2) Wild Things

### **Stimulus:**

The story *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

Choose how to present the stimulus from one of the following options:

- Read the book aloud.
- Have students perform the story in 'Reader's Theatre' style<sup>1</sup>. Script for up to six performers available online at:  
<http://www.thebestclass.org/uploads/5/6/2/4/56249715/wherewildthings.pdf>
- Screen the video animation. Available online at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw0\\_f9xLHfo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aw0_f9xLHfo)

### **Enquiry questions for younger students:**

When Max was sent to his room without supper...

... was he free?

... was he wild?

When Max was made King of the Wild Things and he said, "Let the wild rumpus start"...

... was he wild?

... was he free?

If Max just *imagined* being King of the Wild Things, does that mean that he wasn't *really* wild?

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<sup>1</sup> Reader's Theatre is minimal theatre in support of literature and reading. Further information:

- What is Reader's Theatre? - <http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/whatis.html>
- Readers' Theatre tips on staging - <http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/Tips2.html>
- Readers' Theatre tips on reading - <http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/Tips3.html>

**Enquiry questions for older students:**

The phrase 'throw caution to the wind' suggests acting recklessly without worrying about risks or negative outcomes.

When you throw caution to the wind, are you wild?

Does being wild make you feel free? (e.g. carefree, exhilarated)

Do you need to be wild in order to be free?

Are there other ways of being free?

Some people might say that being "wild" means being impulsive and not being able to control yourself.

If you can't help what you do, then can you really be free?

Do you need to be able to control yourself in order to be truly free?

If so, does this mean that you mustn't be wild if you want to be free?

**Recap for all students:**

Do 'Wild' and 'Free' always go together?

Can you be wild without being free?

Can you be free without being wild?

### 3) The Wild Girl

#### **Stimulus:**

Read aloud the following story, which is inspired by two published picture books: *The Forest Child* by Richard Edwards, and *Wild* by Emily Hughes.

#### **Part A (story and enquiry questions) – for all students:**

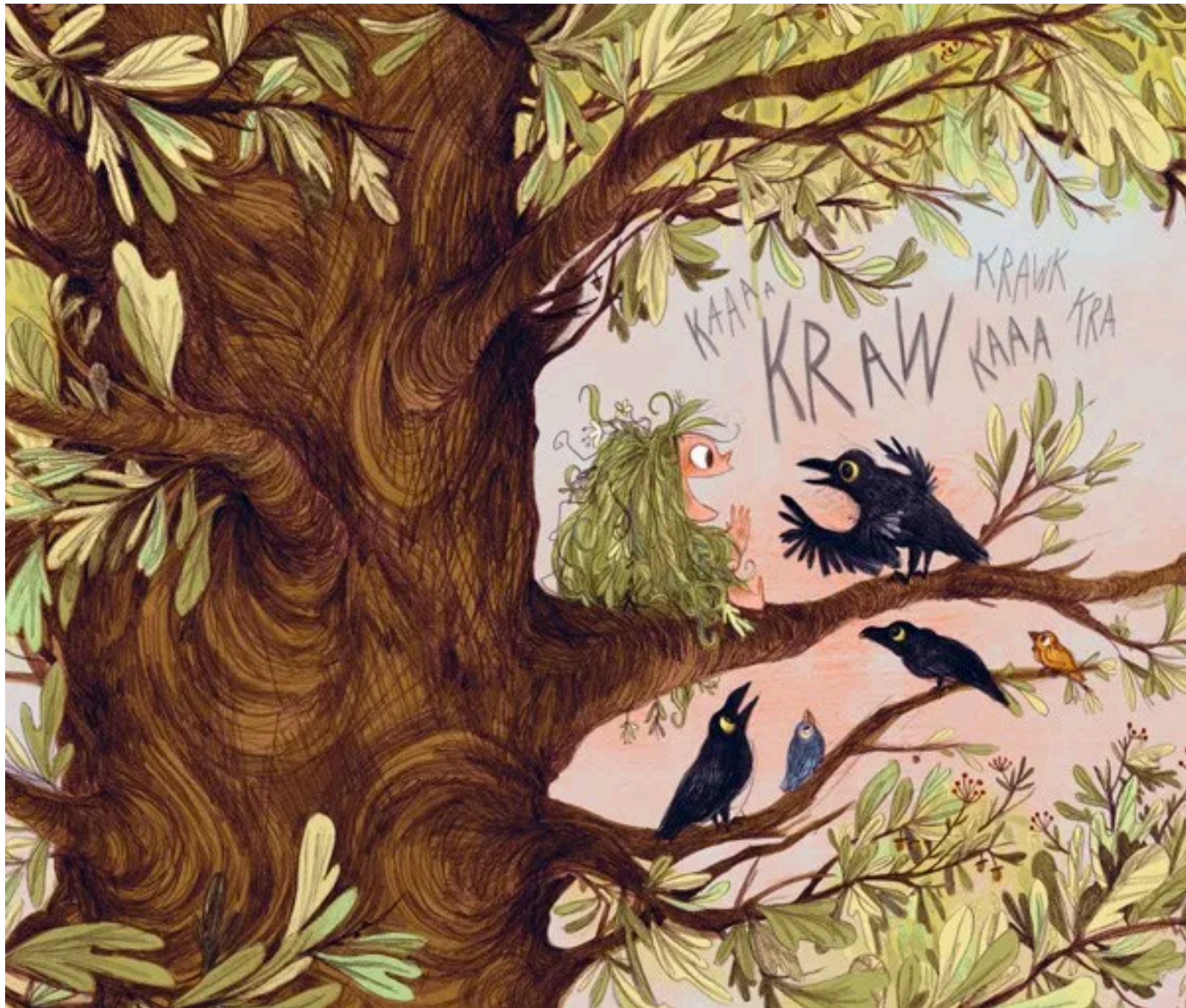
Nobody knew how the wild girl arrived in the outback, but the whole bush took her in as one of their own. The wild animals raised her and taught her everything she needed to know. The birds taught her how to speak and sing. The possums taught her how to find honey and the juiciest berries. The kangaroos taught her how to jump and play. The platypuses taught her how to dive and swim. And she understood it all. Filled with happiness, the wild girl ran through the trees, swam in the river, and lived in complete harmony with nature.

At this point, show students the **image** (overleaf) from the book *Wild* by Emily Hughes.

Would you say that the girl is *free*, living in the wild like this?

If so, do you think the girl would enjoy her freedom?





**Part B (story and enquiry questions) – for all students:**

Even though the girl enjoyed the companionship of the insects and the bilbies and the wombats and the emu, she wasn't what you might call 'civilised'. For one thing, she didn't understand human language at all. She didn't know how to say "Hello" or "I'm hungry" or "Let's play!" And she had no idea how to do the things that we do every day. Table manners, birthday parties, and hugging were all mysteries to her. She had never experienced human care or love – nor even seen another human being.

Do you (still) think the wild girl is free?

If so, do you (still) think she enjoys her freedom?

**Part C (story and enquiry questions) – for older students, after completing Parts A & B:**

One day, the wild girl was discovered by a park ranger, who took her home, looked after her, and treated her like one of the family. Gradually, the girl began to learn how to behave in the company of other people. As she slowly adjusted to her new life, she learned how to say "Hello" and "Goodbye", how to use a knife and fork, how to hug, how to cook and even how to play the violin in an orchestra. She learned the rules of her new society, and how to live peacefully among other human beings. She became *civilised*.

Is the girl still wild now?

Has she lost her innocence?

Is she *more* or *less* free now?

**Part D – enquiry questions for advanced students, after completing Parts A, B & C:**

When is (or was) the girl more likely to be *kind* and *gentle*? Was it back when she was living in the wilderness, or is it now that she has become part of human society?

Some philosophers (such as the 18<sup>th</sup> century thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau) believe that humans in the "state of nature" – that is, living in the wild – are essentially good. These philosophers believe that a sense of right and wrong is innate (or inborn) in humans.

Do you agree?



According to this view, morality is based on our feelings (like sympathy and concern for others), and we are all born with the capacity to experience these feelings.

Philosophers like Rousseau believe that when people become civilised, their ideas about what's right and wrong get twisted or warped.

Why might becoming civilised interfere with people's ideas about what's right and wrong?

*(Teachers: Consider pressures of social conformity and indoctrination by the society's leaders.)*

There are other philosophers who disagree with this picture of uncivilised people as being innately (naturally) moral. These philosophers believe that unless we become part of a civilised society, we are simply wild animals, and wild animals act on instinct – they can't know right from wrong.

What do you think of this idea?

Have you heard the expression "nature red in tooth and claw"? It means that in the wild, predators have their teeth and claws stained red with the blood of their prey, because nature is inherently violent. It's simply part of the natural order for some animals to prey on other animals. So, in the wild, killing is not morally wrong – it's just how things are.

According to this alternative view, morality is *not* based on our inborn feelings, but rather it's based on rules (*social norms*) that we agree on as a society.

For a moment, let's just suppose that this alternative picture is true, and that there's no such thing as "right" and "wrong" in the wild.

In that case, if you were completely wild, then you wouldn't be able to choose to behave well and do the right thing.

If you can't choose to do the right thing, then can you really be free?

Is it even possible to be wild and free at the same time?

#### 4) Wild vs. Domesticated

##### **Stimulus:**

Show students the following two contrasting illustrations (overleaf):

a) illustration from *Over and Under the Snow*, illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal


b) illustration from *The Animal Fair* by Alice and Martin Proven

##### **Enquiry questions for all students:**

What's going on in each of these pictures? (*Allow some time for discussion.*)

We usually think of bears as *wild* animals – like in the first picture (where we can see the bear hibernating in a cave under the snow). But in the second series of pictures – which are actually a kind of joke – the bear is *domesticated*.

Do you think that this domesticated bear is *more or less* free than the wild bear?



Over the snow, I climb one last hill. Bonfire  
smoke rises: warm hands, hot cocoa, hot dogs  
sizzling on pointed sticks.

Under the snow, a black bear snores, still full of  
October blueberries and trout.





Find a comfortable cave.



Make sure it is vacant.



Lay in a good supply of fire wood.



Stock up on goodies for snacks.



Be sure the bed is comfortable.



Set the clock for spring.

How to Sleep Through the Winter (*Hibernate*)

## ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

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### Activity 1: Get used to eating something you don't like.

This activity is inspired by an experiment in Roger Pol-Droit's book *101 Experiments in the Philosophy of Everyday Life*.

It takes some preparation. You will firstly need to establish any dietary restrictions that your students may have, and perhaps also find out in advance what their culinary dislikes are. Then, you will need to buy/prepare/cook a small sample of food/s they don't like. (Foods that many children don't like include: brussell sprouts, grapefruit, olives, okra, eggplant, avocado, mushrooms, cottage cheese, and blue cheese.)

Introduce the activity as follows:

Wild animals do lots of things without thinking. We call this 'acting on impulse'.

On impulse, wild animals seek out things they like (for example, foods they like to eat, places they like to live, and other animals they like to play with). And they avoid going near what they *don't* like.

Long, long ago – before human beings became civilised – our ancestors also used to act on impulse.

But today, we are quite good at controlling a lot of our impulses.

Some people think that overcoming our impulses is actually what makes us civilised.

If we weren't civilised, then we would just blindly follow whatever seems appealing to us, and mechanically avoid whatever disgusts us.

In some ways, we are still a bit impulsive. For example, we usually avoid eating foods that we don't like. Typically, we don't even think about it – we just say "Yuk!"

Now, as a philosophical experiment, I'm going to invite you to practise eating something you don't like. You can think of it as a step towards becoming a more civilised person!



At this point, encourage students to take even a small taste of the food/s they don't like.

Afterwards, you can discuss the experience of trying something new, and the attitude that was needed to try it.

## **Activity 2: Make paper claws, and turn them into a frisbee.**

This easy paper-folding activity is a lot of fun, and resonates with the 'wild and free' theme.

It will take only 5 – 10 minutes to teach students how to make a paper claw from any piece of A4 paper (see Method below).

Each student can then make their own set of eight or ten paper claws, which they can wear on their fingers as a dress-up costume. Pretending to be a wild animal, such as a bear, resonates with the 'wild' theme.

Once students have made eight paper claws and finished playing with them as a dress-up costume, the claws can be interleaved into an octagon (again, see Method below) and used as a frisbee. Throwing the frisbee resonates with the 'free' theme.

### **Method**

You can learn how to make paper claws, and how to turn them into a frisbee, by watching this 7-minute YouTube tutorial produced by Canadian Philosophy for Children practitioner John Simpson:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liVBiLWGeRU>

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

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When leading the philosophical enquiries described above, it's useful to bear in mind that 'wild' and 'free' are rich concepts, each associated with a variety of related concepts.

At certain points in the discussion, you may wish clarify exactly what individual students mean by 'wild' or 'free'.

The lists below present a selection of the concepts and meanings that might be expected to arise in a sustained enquiry. By familiarising yourself with these lists, you will be better able to identify conceptual nuances in your students' contributions to the enquiries.

### *Concepts in 'Wild':*

- Wild (in the sense of instinctual) vs. civilised / socialised / refined / educated
- Wild (in the sense of threatening / scary) vs. gentle
- Wild (in the sense of fierce / ferocious) vs. tame / domesticated
- Wild (in the sense of uncontrolled) vs. inhibited / restrained / disciplined
- Wild (in the sense of agitated / turbulent) vs. calm
- Wild (in the sense of enthusiastic) vs. unexcited
- Wild (in the sense of angry / furious) vs. composed
- Wild (in the sense of ridiculous / silly / madcap) vs. sensible / reasonable

### *Concepts in 'free'*

- Free (in the sense of autonomous) vs. controlled / enslaved by other forces
- Free (in the sense of allowed) vs. prohibited
- Free (in the sense of roaming) vs. settled
- Free (in the sense of voluntary) vs. forced
- Free (in the sense of unfettered) vs. restricted / regulated
- Free (in the sense of unleashed) vs. shackled
- Free (in the sense of impulsive) vs. pre-meditated
- Free (in the sense of free-spirited) vs. suppressed
- Free (in the sense of free-thinking) vs. closed-minded
- Free (in the sense of carefree) vs. troubled