What can we learn by listening to other species?

**Lessons 1 & 2 P4C: ‘If I’d have done a murder, I’d be getting less hassle.’ The felling of the Sycamore Gap tree.**

Ideally, push the tables to the sides and arrange the chairs in a circle. Display the stimulus slide, perhaps also reading the accompanying article. Give students 5 minutes to jot down their initial reactions: thoughts, feelings, connections. Make clear that this is personal to them – there is no right answer and they can choose what they share. In small groups, trios work well, students have 5 minutes to share their reactions – making sure to listen carefully (what might this involve?). Then, students have 3-5 minutes to generate a question inspired by their discussion (and not about the stimulus). This can be written on a piece of A4 and placed in the centre of the circle or displayed on the whiteboard. Each group could then explain the thinking behind their question or celebrate a question from another group that they think is particularly interesting. The class should then vote for which question they would like to explore in depth. This can be done in a variety of ways e.g. heads down and thumbs up, one or two rounds. If time, the question could be pulled apart e.g. assumptions, definitions needed.

In the second lesson, at least 20 minutes should be devoted to the discussion. A warm-up could be helpful e.g. What you rather? Be able to breathe under water or fly? Explore a rainforest or a mountain range? Students could then focus on the enquiry question and jot down their opening idea … or we could launch straight into the discussion. If a student wants to speak, they offer their hand rather than putting their arm in the air. They try to build on what has gone before and then choose someone who has not spoken (recently). The teacher acts as facilitator, gently making sure the guidelines are followed and noting key points. It may be appropriate to pause and discuss a question/idea in trios before returning to the bigger group (especially if the enquiry is being run as a whole class group rather than a more suitable group of 12 or so). At the end, students should be invited to share their ‘final’ thoughts. This should be optional.

A possible homework could be to record their thinking journey, in any form. Illustrated diary entries work well.

Try to pick up the questions, ideas and emotions generated in the following lessons.

**Lesson 3**

**What can we learn from elephants?**

Use a T/F quiz as a way in, designed to create intrigue and link to the video clips. Information taken from [https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/fascinating-facts/elephants#:~:text=The%20African%20Savanna%20(Bush)%20elephant,up%20to%2060%2D70%20years](https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/fascinating-facts/elephants" \l ":~:text=The%20African%20Savanna%20(Bush)%20elephant,up%20to%2060%2D70%20years).

There are two excellent video clips to discuss:

**Planet Earth III, Episode 3, 42:56 – 47, 5 min clip**

Elephants = “essential gardeners”, their grazing creates space for other animals, they healed this piece of land (in Chad, central Africa). Did they forgive humans? What does this mean? Could link to the fact about an elephant’s temporal lobe/memory in the quiz. Also, the different ways of communication.

The ranger talks of the elephants being his family, one elephant being his “son” – contrast to the man accused of cutting down the sycamore – what do you think he means? Have you experienced anything similar? What are the students’ reactions to the transformation? The richness of this land? What can we do to help nature heal itself? How can we communicate our ideas? Does elephant communication have something to tell us here?

**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnrAi1t9KKs**

**What can elephants teach us about life? BBC Ideas.**

A fascinating and accessible 3 minutes. Deals with grief.

These experts suggest that elephants are more like us humans than we might think.

Time for individual reflection – perhaps using the elephant template. Students can write a word to describe their emotional reaction to the lesson on the elephants trunk. This could be an interesting element to discuss at some point … perhaps after the teacher has had time to look at the different responses. Are students hopeful, despondent, encouraged, upset? Are negative emotions more or less helpful when thinking about how we can tackle the environmental crisis? David Clough: we should respond to climate change WITH our “co-congregants” (unpack this term – is it helpful?), perhaps we would feel less overwhelmed and lonely.

**Lesson 4**

**What guidance does the Bible provide? (& What can we learn from chimpanzees?)**

Card sort (in pairs/fours) – match the Biblical teachings to their meanings. Children will soon realise that there are more meanings that there are quotes. It can be challenging to interpret such ancient texts and apply them to issues in our modern lives. There isn’t universal agreement as to what they mean … but (arguably) that’s what makes them so interesting! There is a lot of debate about the meaning and use of Genesis 1:26-27. Is this suggesting dominion or stewardship? A view of humans as superior to other species or simply different? Is this a prophetic vision of a perfect world rather than the world of the writer?

Use extracts about Dr Jane Goodall’s work to enliven the debate around Genesis 1:26-27 and how close human beings might be to other species. Children could then think about the extent to which they agree with the various teachings.

**Possible creative challenge/hwk**: how could we plan a Sabbath day that respects both humans and other species … providing a sense of rest for all? E.g. Eat meat-free, go for a walk in nature (with your dog), do something creative involving nature e.g. leaf rubbing and give that to someone else, feed and watch the birds, take part in some “Citizen Science” e.g. The Big Garden Birdwatch (perhaps we could do this at school?) Why might this be helpful/relevant today? Perhaps also, why not? Design an invitation/poster to get other people involved in your day of rest and respect, try one and record your activities and thoughts.

**Lesson 5**

**How might other species inspire people in our area?**

Show the slide comparing the nave of Ely Cathedral with the avenue of trees at Wandlebury Woods. What similarities do the children notice? Why might this be? Make links to God as Creator. Cambridge Eco Mosque can be used to deepen children’s thinking. Take a “Wonder Walk” around the village – taking time to use our sense to connect with nature e.g. the resilience of wildflowers poking up through cracks in the pavement. Listen to birdsong. How might this inspire people? Links to Music could be made here e.g. The Lark Ascending by Vaughan Williams. What signs can we find in our church that nature has inspired people for centuries in our area?

**Lesson 6**

**What can we do to help nature heal itself?**

What is the “best” response? Is any action better than none? Are some forms of action unacceptable?

**Accompanying Units**

**Eco-poetry: slowing perception and deepening appreciation of nature**

Children to compose poems which are about a natural wonder that is not named but instead slowly revealed in order to engage the reader and make them think.

**Spirited Arts: visual response to the questions, ideas and emotions raised**