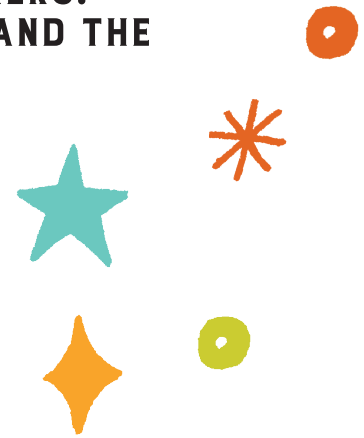


TEACHER'S GUIDE

BIG IDEAS FOR YOUNG THINKERS: 20 QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE AND THE UNIVERSE

Written by Jamia Wilson
Illustrated by Andrea Pippins
\$14.99 US/\$17.99 CAN
ISBN 9780711258358
Ages 10-14 (Grades: 5 to 9)
64 Pages
Hardcover, 9.3 x 10.9 inches



Learning Objective

Who am I? Why am I here? What is truth? Questions like these have been asked for thousands of years, and will continue to be asked for generations to come. *Big Ideas for Young Thinkers* introduces these timeless questions to young readers, and delves into the thoughts, explanations, and musings of some of the most brilliant philosophical minds. With straightforward, concise, and accessible explanations, author Jamia Wilson reassures students that, although these questions can sometimes be troubling – even frightening – to consider, they are not alone in asking them. Rather, students will ultimately learn that it is the search for answers that makes us all human.

Essential Questions in This Unit

1. What methods can you use to have a productive discussion, debate, or even argument?
2. Why is it important to have many different ways to understand ourselves and define who we are?
3. What have philosophers thought about what makes us human: life, death, love – how can we better grasp these ideas?
4. Why do people have such different beliefs about the existence of a higher power?
5. In what ways does the idea of freedom mean different things to different people?
6. What are ways to encourage and develop creativity and imagination?
7. How do our personal experiences affect the ways we understand and interpret the world around us?

Classroom Discussion Topics

1. Early in the book the author recounts her inquisitive nature as a child, saying, “the questions are often more important than the answers” (p.3). She echoes a sentiment from Socrates, one of the earliest known philosophers, who said “wisdom comes from questioning, not from thinking that you already have the answers (p. 8). Ask the students to consider these related ideas. Have they ever asked broad, sweeping questions like those covered in the book? In what ways did they find answers to those questions?
2. On page 14 the author states, “race is not biological, scientific, or real.” Ask the students to describe their first reaction upon reading that statement. Later the author adds, “while race may not be ‘real’ in a scientific sense, racism remains a global problem.” Ask the students why they think this is. What actions (small and large) can they take to address instances of racism in their lives?



3. The author describes herself as an activist – someone who speaks up about and works to change things she thinks are wrong or unfair. Ask the students if they have ever participated in a protest or other activist event. What were their impressions of their experiences? How do they think the event helped to bring about change?

4. Many philosophers featured in the book have tried to understand and describe what makes humans different from other animals. On page 8, the author states “many thinkers have wondered if humans’ search for deeper meaning is what makes us unique among animals.” Some studies on animals seem to indicate that their intelligence and capacity for emotion are greater than people have traditionally assumed. Does the class think humans are radically different from other animals? Do they think it might be possible for animals to have a sense of self? Why or why not? Do they think that capacity is limited to some animals and not others?

Student Activities

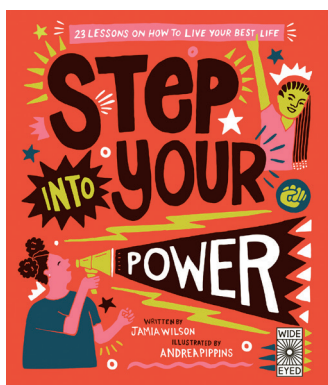
1. On pages 4-5 the author lists ways you can keep an open mind when you are in a disagreement or debate. Using those guidelines, conduct a class debate: select or have students select a topic (for example, nature versus nurture, homework should be banned, the school should require uniforms, etc.), then divide the class in half. One side should support one point of view, the other should support the opposite viewpoint. After the debate, ask students how successful they thought it was. Did one side “win” over the other? Were any opinions changed by the arguments? If so, how did they change?

2. The author discusses the ideas of superhero origin stories (p. 8) and ideal societies (p. 44-45). Using the section on imagination (p. 40-41) as inspiration, ask students to visualize their own superheroes or utopias. Have them flesh out their ideas on paper. When finished, read some or all of these stories aloud in class.

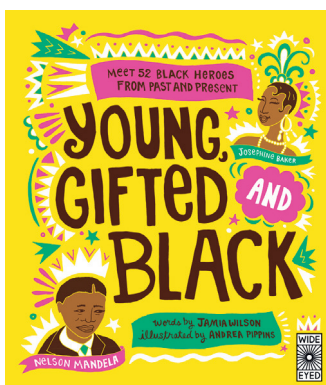
3. On page 46 the author discusses a TED talk by Sugata Mitra. The 2013 talk mentioned is called “Build a School in the Cloud,” and can be viewed at www.ted.com. As a class, watch the speech online. Ask the students to discuss their reactions to Mitra’s ideas. How do they envision the future of learning?

4. The book is filled with quotes and ideas by famous philosophers. Have each student select a philosopher, and, utilizing resources from the library or the internet, learn more about that person. Have each student create a brief report, including what the philosopher’s main ideas were and why the student selected that particular person. Encourage students to add at least one fact about the philosopher that was surprising or striking.

Further Reading



Step into Your Power
9781786035868



Young, Gifted and Black
9781786031587



This Book Is Anti-Racist
9780711245211

