



## Book Reviews

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Phillips, Christopher. *Ceci Ann's Day of Why*. Tricycle Press, 2006.

———. *The Philosophers Club*. Tricycle Press, 2001.

Inspired by the spirit of Socrates, author Christopher Phillips has a passion for profound questions. Troubled by the demise of philosophical inquiry in “everyday” life, Phillips is committed to encouraging philosophical dialogue in ordinary settings. As Phillips writes in *Socrates Café* (2001), he is committed to “[rekindling] the childlike—but by no means childish—sense of wonder.” Across the country Phillips rekindles this wonder in discussion groups by using instances of Socratic dialogue and questioning. A question is posed—for instance, “what is home?”—and participants proceed by suggesting and contesting answers, supported by rational argument. The purpose of these meetings is not to achieve a final answer or a harmonious consensus. Rather, the purpose is the process: the discovery and articulation of wonder-begetting questions. In *Ceci Ann's Day of Why* and *The Philosophers' Club*, Phillips shares this passion and methodology for Socratic questioning with a younger audience.

In *Ceci Ann's Day of Why*, the reader follows a little girl named Ceci Ann through a day of questioning. Every sentence in the book is a question posed by Ceci Ann: “Why is there sky?”, “Why are there words?”, “Why is there why?” Shino Arihara, the book's illustrator, does a phenomenal job situating these questions in the circumstances of Ceci Ann's urban life. The warm yet ordinary images capture the natural fluidity of the child's curiosity. In fact, the book's content rests primarily upon these illustrations. Without them, we would know nothing about Ceci Ann. Here, this is not a drawback. Phillips's sparse sentences encourage interpretation past the text, into the images, and beyond. Indeed, in keeping with his Socratic mission, the ideal reader will model Ceci Ann's penchant for questioning and initiate their own “day of why.”

Like many of the images in the book, where Ceci Ann expresses her questions in the company of her parents, *Ceci Ann's Day of Why* would work well to prompt dialogue between children and parents. These sorts of dialogues have numerous benefits for young children. They sow seeds for critical thinking skills. They utilize existing vocabulary. They encourage language acquisition. And, most

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importantly, they provide parents (or mentors) with an opportunity to affirm the child's desire to learn. Besides the child, Phillips would likely agree, these dialogues can also benefit the parent or adult-mentor, the older reader, the more knowledgeable interlocutor. Why? Because through these dialogues enchanting questions can emerge: Why are kids so curious? When did I grow past wondering at the world? Why, after all, do we ask why? These sorts of questions, Phillips works to demonstrate, have perennial value.

In *The Philosophers' Club*, a book written for an older audience, somewhere between late elementary and early middle school, Phillips follows a similar course. The book is mainly constituted by questions. But *The Philosophers' Club* is written in a more complex form. The book is divided into ten philosophical questions. For each question, there is a dialogue, presumably by the “philosophy club,” a cheerful group of children depicted in the illustrations. Each dialogue is followed by an additional page of questions. The questions cover a broad expanse of philosophical terrain, from ethics to epistemology and metaphysics to philosophy of mind.

Unfortunately, the text offers no direction for pursuing these profound and potentially disorienting questions. Unlike *Ceci Ann's Day of Why*, the illustrations do little to facilitate the reader's thought. For instance, the question, “Is there a difference between a true belief and a false one?” is accompanied by an image of the philosophy club at the movies; they are neglecting the movie, because they are more intent on pursuing their epistemological investigation. In another instance, the question, “How can you love wisdom?” is portrayed by the philosophy club dressing themselves in togas, eating apples, and wielding wooden swords in the backyard. Along with doing nothing to facilitate the young reader's thought, these overly cute images, devoid of strife, are not developmentally appropriate for late elementary or early middle school students. They do not accurately represent the social lives of the targeted demographic. Or, if they do, this diverse bunch of cheerful and inquisitive children, playing in tree houses, and romping around museums, is a very specific, product of suburbia.

As a book of mere questioning, devoid of answers or hints for paths of inquiry, Phillips would have done better to illustrate these questions with simple images, perhaps photographs. For the questions “What is here? When is here? Where is here?”—as opposed to a bunch of children sitting on pillows, watching the stars on the steps of a pantheon-like structure (with one boy towards the back giving another girl a thumbs-up sign)—Phillips would have done better to insert a picture of a desert or the surface of Mars. Then, the potentially disorienting question would resonate with a potentially disorientating (but actual) place. Of course, if Phillips exchanged the utopian images of these young philosophers, for images of this sort, what would be gained in accuracy would be lost in purpose. The book would no longer be “The Philosopher's Club” (for children). It would become a coffee table book with recipes for profound thoughts, suitable for Mr. and Mrs. Everyday, suitable for their progeny too.

## Call for Submissions

*Questions* publishes philosophical work by and for young people, including stories, essays, poems, photographs and drawings, etc. In addition, articles related to doing philosophy with young people, reviews of books and materials useful for doing the same, lesson plans (include description or transcripts of student responses), classic thought experiments redefined/modified for modern audience interests and demographics, transcripts of philosophy discussions, photographs of classroom discussions, and more are sought.

Images, whether photographs, drawings, paintings, et al. should be sent as uncompressed TIFF files (with at least 300 dpi resolution.) Written submissions should be sent in Word, WordPerfect, or Rich Text File formats (as .doc, .wpd, or .rtf). Scholarly articles should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style* for textual and citation manners; please use endnotes rather than footnotes.

Be sure to include contact information with your submissions. A copyright release is needed for publication. All submissions should go to [QuestionsJournal@gmail.com](mailto:QuestionsJournal@gmail.com)

Submissions for the next issue should be received by **March 31, 2010**. After initial review and editing, they will be blindly reviewed and selected by the larger editorial board.