

*'What is the most important part of a fork?'*

This is just one of the questions that myself and 6 other student commissioners asked the Year 7 students at Queen Eleanor School in Stamford last week. The technical term for this type of question is a 'Thunk'. I first became interested in Thunks about a year ago when I decided that there needed to be something in lessons to give a short mental break from either intense learning (therefore increasing the standard of work after the 'break'), or to regain focus when it is lost within a class. I then discovered Ian Gilbert's Thunks which are surprisingly simple questions at first glance, which are actually very thought provoking, make you look things in a different light, and are renowned for causing 'severe brain ache'. Other examples include: 'What is the happiest colour', 'If I paint a window black, is it still a window?' and 'How many bricks makes a wall?' At the Student Commission showcase event last year, one of our visitors from Queen Eleanor asked me to visit her school to work with her students on these 'Thunks'. A group of us then got together and went through several weeks of planning to ensure that everything ran smoothly on the day.



We divided the students up into smaller groups and allocated a Kings Commissioner to each one to discuss one of the Thunks; this worked very well with the students engaging from the very start. We had the students – who were in groups of around 10 – moving around after three minutes to a new Thunk. Jemma Cook's Thunk of 'Is there more future or more past' proved to be particularly popular with the youngsters provoking thoughts such as 'there is more past because the world will end one



day' compared to 'it depends on how old you are'. Other Thunks included 'Is there more happiness or sadness in the world' led by Alfie Page, 'If I borrow a million pounds, am I a millionaire?' led by Joe Price and 'Does everything have a taste?' led by Clara Hart.

After the first round, we then had the students going through a second rotation with a new set of 6



Thunks, but this time, instead of a civilised conversation, the commissioners were more creative in holding the discussions. For example, Jake Alston's argument-tennis went down a storm, with the students having to 'verbally serve' arguments to another student on the other side of the 'net' and whoever made the best argument – as decided by the group – would win the point. Similarly, Isobel Hopkins' approach was with a game called 'pistols at dawn' where the same principal was applied, however a dramatic death was in order if your argument was not as good as the opposing team's.

The group we worked with, which totalled about 65, seemed to thoroughly enjoy the session, and this was reflected in the feedback sheets we asked them to fill out. 'Words to describe how they felt' included 'amazing', 'excited', 'confused' and 'more confident'.



As a group we are hoping to carry out this workshop with our own year 7's early in the new year, and then based on their feedback, along with that from the Queen Eleanor students, we are going to produce an information pack explaining what we do, and offer it to other schools in Peterborough. This is a very exciting project to be working on, and our vision is to eventually have all schools experiencing the great benefits of the 'Think'.

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