



PHILOSOPHICAL PLUMBING

Philosophical Plumbing worksheet
Difficulty: ■■■□

The woman in this picture is Mary Midgley. She was a famous philosopher.

Philosophers think very hard about some of the most important questions in our lives, **Big Questions**. Questions like:

“What makes things right or wrong?”

“Do we all see the world in the same way?”

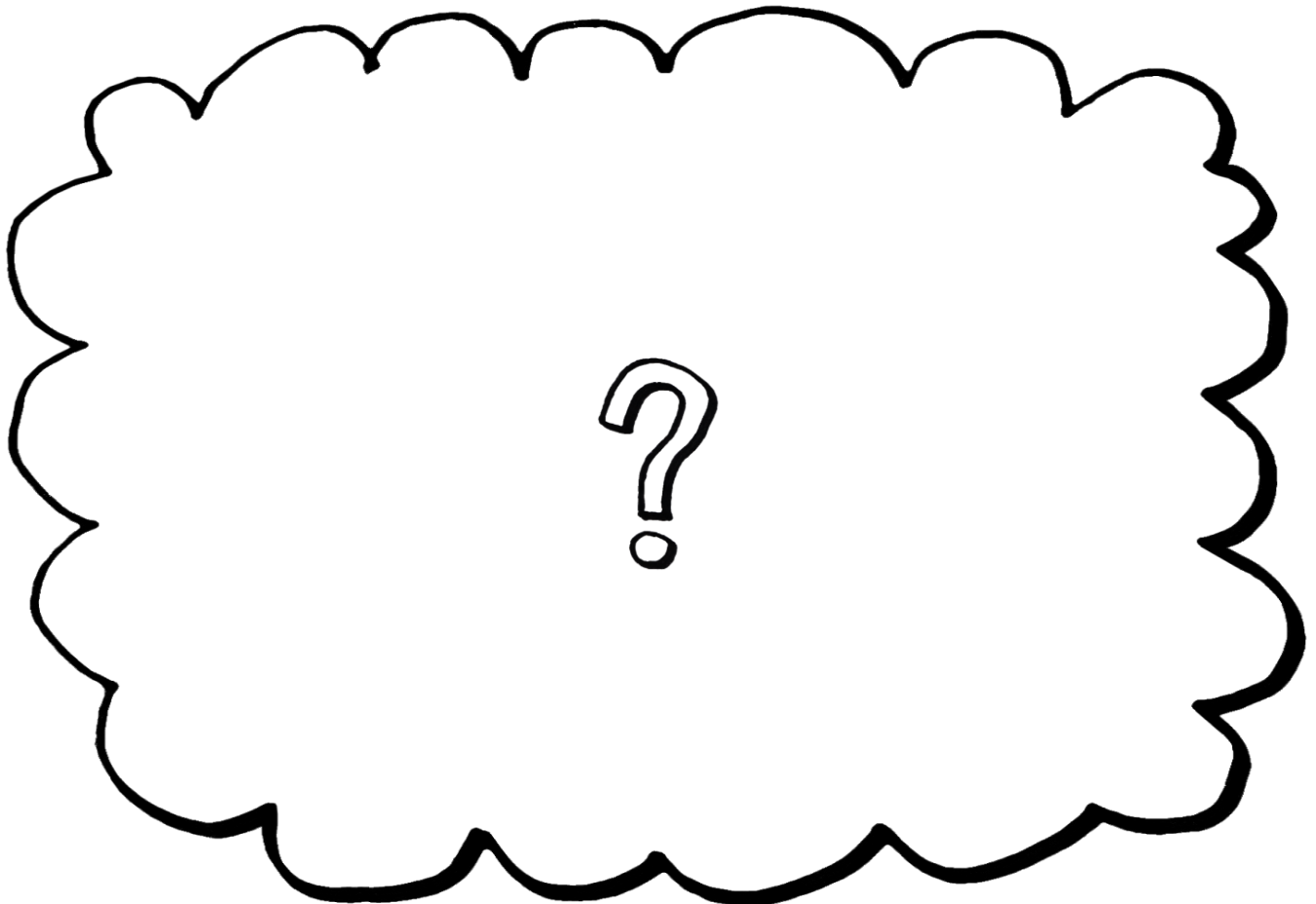
“How can we know anything?”

If you think very hard about questions like this, that makes you a philosopher too, like Mary Midgley.



ACTIVITY 1

Can you think of three more Big Questions?



One of the things that Mary was interested in was the way that our thinking can go wrong.

She thought that philosophy (the kind of thinking that philosophers do) was a bit like plumbing.

Plumbing is the word for everything that carries water from one place to another: things like water pipes, water tanks, sewage works and reservoirs. A plumber is someone who is specially trained to fit and mend the plumbing.

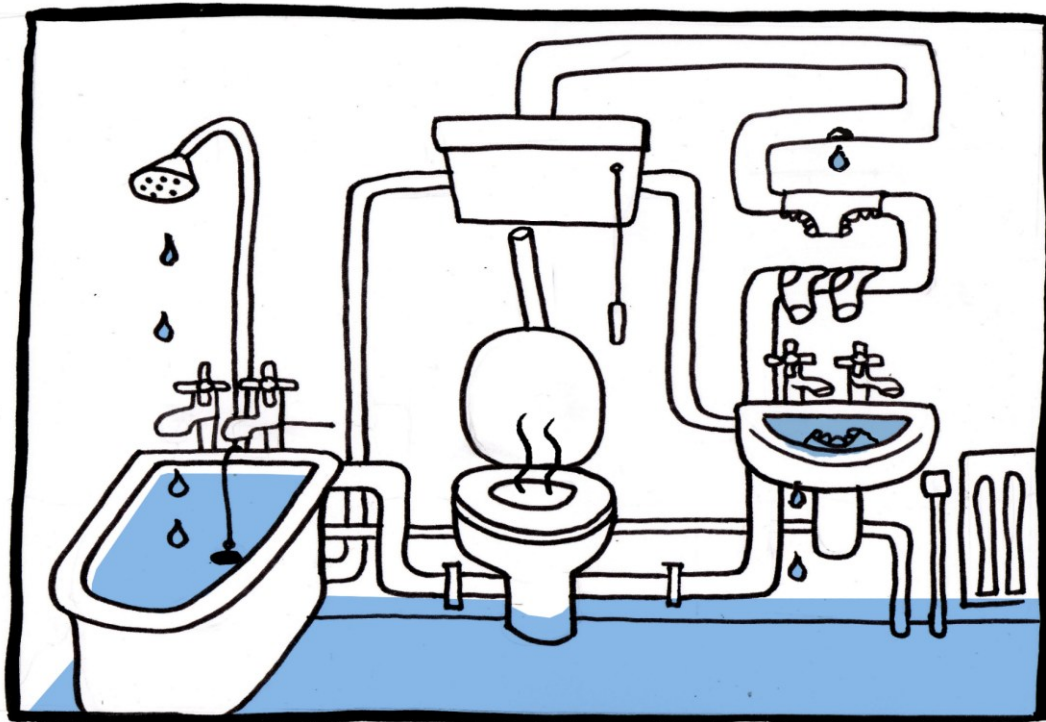
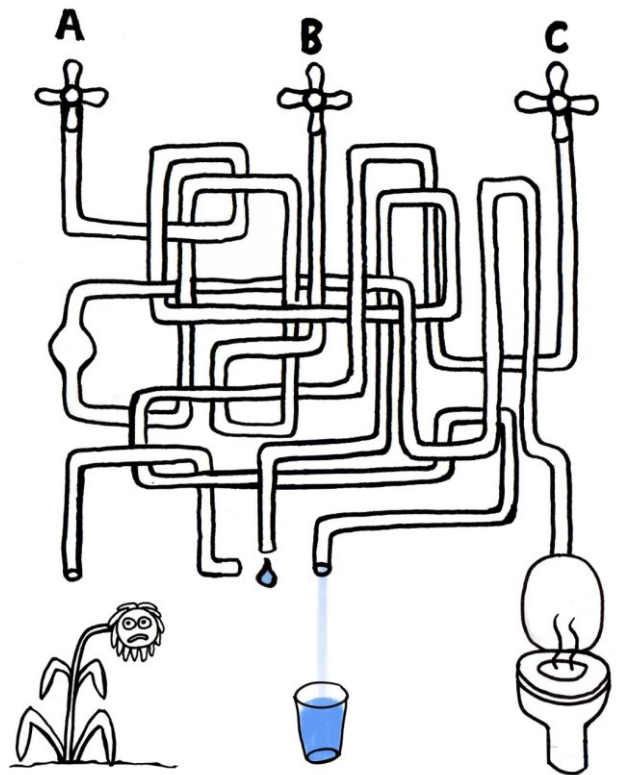
ACTIVITY 2

There's a problem with the plumbing...

Which tap do you need to turn off to prevent the glass overflowing?

Which pipe do you need to connect to water the flower?

Which pipe do you need to unblock to flush the toilet?



The pipes in our kitchens and bathrooms can break or they can get blocked. When this happens, water doesn't flow properly through the system. The taps might stop working or the toilet might start to leak. If the leak is below the floorboards or in the attic it might take a long time to spot. The first clue might be a very nasty smell!

ACTIVITY 3

Why has the bathroom floor flooded?

How would you fix this?

What other problems can you see?

Mary thought that our ideas can sometimes get broken or blocked too. When this happens, our thinking doesn't flow properly.

ACTIVITY 4

Can you think of a time when your thinking didn't flow and you got really stuck? Perhaps you couldn't understand a piece of schoolwork or you didn't know how to answer a question. Or maybe you didn't know what a word meant. Who or what helped you?

If our ideas go wrong, there might not be water everywhere, but it can still get us in a real mess. We may find that we don't know what to do. We might feel confused or angry. Sometimes we can make bad decisions.

Mary thought that some ideas can cause blockages in a lot of people's thinking at the same time! When this happens we all get stuck together. Here are some ideas that Mary thought caused big blockages.

Sometimes people think...

...humans aren't like other animals.

...science will always solve our problems.

...girls like pink and boys like blue.

...animals don't matter.

... we don't really need each other and can get along all by ourselves.

ACTIVITY 5

Let's do some philosophical plumbing.

Sometimes people think:

"we don't really need each other and can get along all by ourselves".

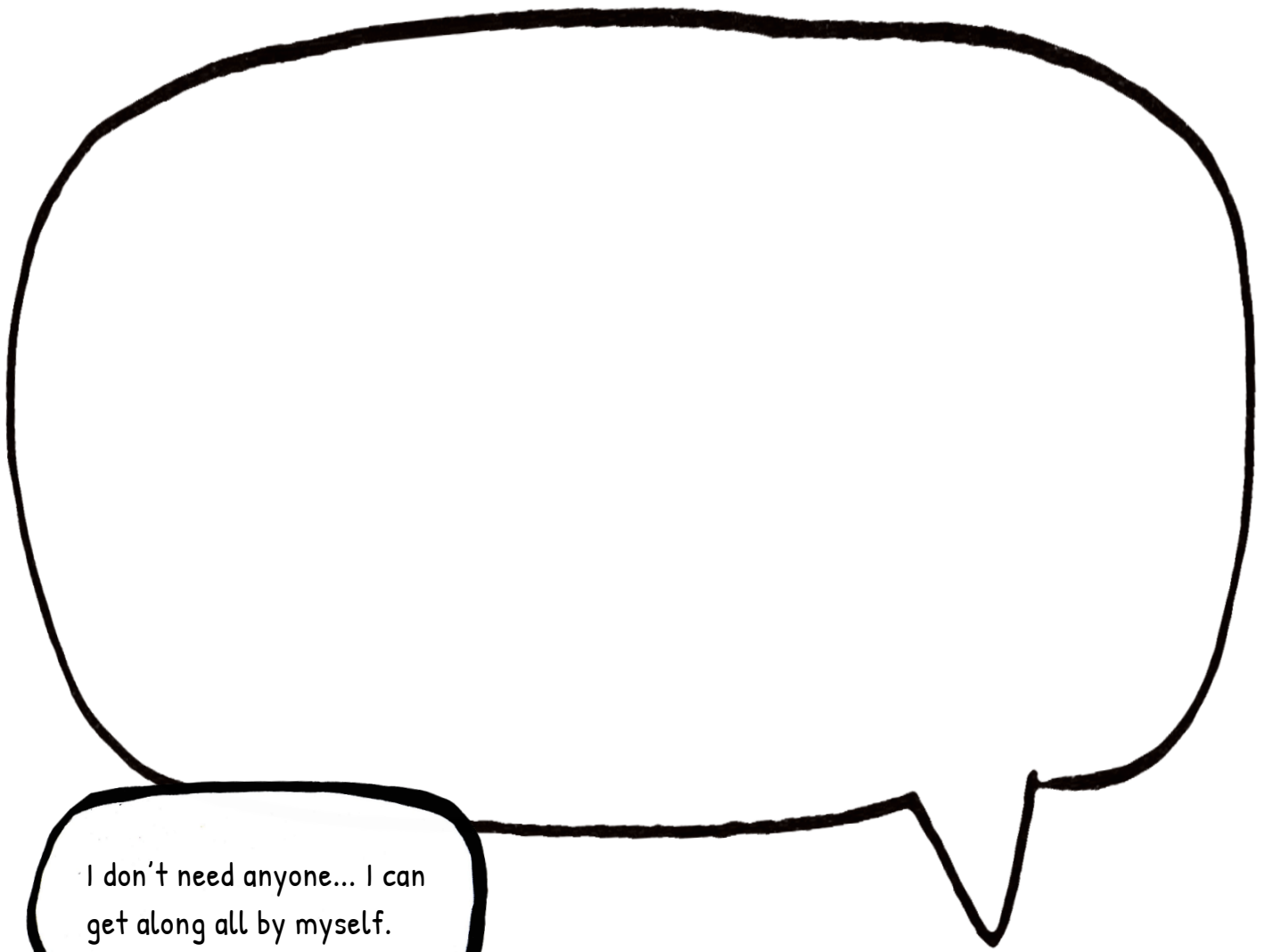
Let's imagine someone who thinks this.

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|--|--|
| <p>What kinds of things might they say and do?</p> | <p>What positive things would they miss out on?</p> |
| <p>What bad decisions might they make?</p> | <p>Why might they be confused or angry?</p> |
| <p>Who might they upset?</p> | <p>How might a person who thinks this get stuck (like a blocked pipe)?</p> |

This bad idea has caused a lot of mess! There might not be water everywhere, but people are upset, angry and lonely, and things are going wrong.

Now it is time for a philosophical plumber to fix the problem.

A philosophical plumber needs to find the blockage (the bad idea) that is causing the mess and replace the bad idea with a good one. The philosophical plumber needs to be thoughtful and creative.



I don't need anyone... I can get along all by myself.



ACTIVITY 6

How would you help this person fix the mess by changing her bad idea?

What would you say to them?

Philosophical plumbers need to be creative. Sometimes the best way to replace a bad idea with a good idea is by using our imagination. Here is an activity that a philosophical plumber could use to unblock the idea that “we don’t really need each other and can get along all by ourselves.”

Do the activity and think about how it works.

ACTIVITY 7

Who do you need, and why are they important to you? Think about family and friends, but also think about people who do jobs that provide all the things you need.



When we listen to each other and share what we know, we can learn more than we can on our own.

The pipes in our houses join up with pipes that go all over our towns to other people’s houses. These join up with factories, shops, sewage works and reservoirs all over the country. A blockage in one place can cause a mess elsewhere.

Ideas are like this too. When different people’s ideas go wrong, the bad ideas can join up and cause bigger problems. Nobody can fix the whole thing on their own. Mary thought that everybody should be a Philosophical Plumber, and everyone should ask a Philosophical Plumber for help if their thinking gets into a mess.

CHALLENGE

On page 3 there were 5 ideas that Mary thought caused big blockages. In activities 5 and 6 we looked at “Sometimes people think that we don’t really need each other and can get along all by ourselves.”

Pick a different idea from the list that interests you and do activity 5 and 6 again.