

GARNET LYNDON

Big Questions for Brave Minds -
My Little Philosopher

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

Some books tell you what to think. This is not one of those books.

This book was made for curious hearts—young and old alike—who aren't afraid to ask the questions that don't have easy answers.

Within these pages lies a journey through big ideas, told through small stories. Stories that invite children (and the grown-ups lucky enough to read alongside them) to explore what it means to think deeply, feel honestly, and live wisely in our wonderful, complicated world.

You'll meet philosophers from across time and around the globe who spent their lives wondering about the same things you might wonder about:

How should we treat each other?

What makes something fair or unfair?

Why are we here?

What makes a good life?

And how do we know what we know?

But this isn't just a book about other people's thoughts—it's

about discovering your own.

Each chapter opens a door to:

- **Critical thinking** – learning to question, wonder, and see things from different angles
- **Creative imagination** – expressing your thoughts through art, words, and play
- **Emotional wisdom** – understanding that our feelings are an important part of how we make sense of life
- **Natural connection** – recognizing that we are part of something much larger than ourselves

The stories you'll find here are small but the questions they contain are enormous. They might make you laugh, scratch your head, or feel a flutter of something new in your heart. Sometimes, they might even leave you with more questions than answers.

And that's exactly as it should be.

This is not a book of answers—it's a book of beginnings.

Whether you're eight or eighty, these pages are meant to be explored with an open mind and a gentle heart. Read them slowly. Talk about them with someone you trust. Draw in the margins. Ask "what if?" and "why not?"

If this book makes you feel something—curiosity, confusion, wonder, or even a little spark of courage—then it's doing exactly what it was meant to do.

INTRODUCTION

Because the world doesn't need perfect thinkers.

It needs honest, open-hearted ones.

With wonder,

Your fellow philosopher

“But I’m good at listening if you want to.”

Slowly, Leo began to talk. His family had moved to Brightpatch just a month ago. He missed his old friends. He felt invisible in this new school where everyone already seemed to know each other.

“I feel like I don’t matter here,” Leo whispered.

Mina looked straight into Leo’s eyes. “You matter,” she said firmly. “And not just to me. You matter, period.”

The next day, Mina brought an extra chair to her lunch table and saved it for Leo. The day after that, she introduced him to Zara the rabbit, who loved to draw just like Leo did.

Something small but significant had begun to shift in Room 12.

Javier the hedgehog started bringing extra pencils to share when he noticed someone had forgotten theirs. Zara began leaving tiny drawings on people’s desks—personalized notes that said “I see you” without words. Omar the owl organized a buddy system for math, so no one had to struggle with difficult problems alone.

Slowly, the classroom began to change. Colorful artwork appeared on walls that had been blank before. The bookshelves became more jumbled as students shared their favorite stories. During group projects, chairs scraped across the floor as kids eagerly formed circles rather than staying in rows.

Sometimes it was messy. Sometimes it was noisy. But it was also warmer, somehow—as if the air itself had become kinder.

One morning, the students arrived to find that someone had painted a new sign above the classroom door. In rainbow letters, it read:

“Love is something you DO.”

Ms. Finch, their teacher, looked at the sign thoughtfully. Then,

instead of asking who had broken the “no messes” rule, she smiled.

“I think,” she said, “this might be more important than our old rules.”

By spring, the changes had spread beyond Room 12. A student-led garden appeared in a corner of the schoolyard that had always been empty. Kids from different grades worked together to build birdhouses and plant flowers. Even Principal Badger, who had always been strict about keeping the grass unruffled, could be seen occasionally helping with the watering.

On the last day of school, as Mina packed up her even-messier-than-usual backpack, Ms. Finch handed her a small envelope.

Inside was a note that read: “Thank you for teaching me that love isn’t just something we feel—it’s something we do. You helped our classroom grow into a garden.”

Mina smiled, tucking the note carefully into her pocket. The garden would need tending over the summer, of course. But she wasn’t worried. Seeds of kindness, once planted, have a way of continuing to grow.

Think Together

- What specific things did Mina do that helped others feel seen and valued?
- Why do you think some people at Oakberry School were

uncomfortable with Mina's questions and actions at first?

- When have you felt truly seen or heard by someone else?
What did they do that made you feel that way?
- What's the difference between rules that keep us safe and rules that might keep us from showing love?
- Have you ever shown love through your actions? What did you do and how did it feel?
- Can love be quiet sometimes? Can it be loud other times?
What might "quiet love" and "loud love" look like?

- If you were going to add one new rule to your classroom or home that would help love grow, what would it be?

Philosophy Window: bell hooks and Love as Action

bell hooks was a remarkable thinker who wrote her name without capital letters because she wanted people to focus on her ideas rather than on her as a person. Born in Kentucky in 1952, she grew up during a time when many people were treated unfairly because of their skin color or because they were girls instead of boys.

Through her life experiences and deep thinking, bell hooks came to an important realization: love is much more than just a warm, fuzzy feeling. In fact, she believed love isn't mainly about feeling at all—it's about doing.

“Love is an action,” she wrote. “Never simply a feeling.”

While many people talk about love in greeting cards or songs, hooks focused on love as a powerful force for creating better classrooms, homes, and communities. She outlined what she called a “love ethic” that included:

1. **Attention** - Truly seeing and hearing each other
2. **Care** - Taking action to support others' growth and well-being
3. **Knowledge** - Learning what others need and how to respond

4. **Responsibility** - Showing up consistently for those we care about
5. **Respect** - Treating everyone as having equal value and importance
6. **Trust** - Building safe spaces where people can be their true selves
7. **Commitment** - Choosing to keep loving even when it's difficult

hooks believed that learning to love well is perhaps the most important skill we can develop. “To love well is the task in all meaningful relationships,” she wrote. “Not just romantic ones—all of them.”

She also thought that love requires both courage and practice. It takes bravery to speak up when something isn't fair, to apologize when we make mistakes, or to reach out to someone who seems lonely. And just like learning to read or ride a bike, we get better at loving through daily practice.

Perhaps most importantly, bell hooks taught that love isn't just personal—it's political. When we choose to act with love, we help create a world where everyone is valued and can thrive. She called this “revolutionary love”—love big enough to transform not just hearts and minds, but entire communities and systems.

Your Turn: “Love Is a Verb”

Materials needed: Paper, coloring supplies, optional: magazines for collage

When bell hooks said “love is a verb,” she meant that love is most powerful when it's expressed through actions. Let's explore what love looks like in action!

1. Create a “Love Action List” by dividing your paper into three sections:

In the first section, write or draw **3 ways you can show love at school or with friends**. These might be:

- Noticing when someone feels left out and including them
- Standing up for someone being treated unfairly
- Really listening when someone shares something important
- Celebrating others’ successes without jealousy

In the second section, write or draw **2 ways you can practice loving yourself**. These could include:

- Speaking kindly to yourself when you make mistakes
- Taking care of your body with rest, movement, and nourishment
- Making time for activities that bring you joy
- Asking for help when you need it

In the third section, write or draw **1 way you could help your larger community**. This might be:

- Picking up litter in a park
- Creating art that brightens a public space
- Writing a letter to express concern about an issue you care about
- Finding ways to support those with less than you have

At the top of your page, write: **“I choose love.”** Decorate your list with colors, patterns, or images that remind you of what

love in action feels like.

Bonus activity: For one week, try to do at least one action from your list each day. Keep a small journal noting what you did and how it affected both you and others.

Wonder More

bell hooks believed that love—real, active love—has the power to help us grow into our fullest selves. When we act with love, we not only nurture others but also become more whole ourselves.

She wrote: “The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom.”

This means that even small acts of love can be revolutionary. When Mina sat beside Leo and told him he mattered, she wasn’t just being nice—she was helping create a classroom where everyone could feel valued. When the students started checking in on each other and sharing their resources, they weren’t just being helpful—they were building a community based on care rather than competition.

Love doesn’t always mean being perfectly agreeable or avoiding difficult conversations. Sometimes, loving someone means gently telling them a truth they might not want to hear. Sometimes, loving your community means speaking up against rules or practices that aren’t fair.

Love in action requires courage. It asks us to notice when things aren’t right, to extend ourselves for others, and to believe that our small actions matter—that they can, drop by drop, help create the kind of world we wish to live in.

What’s something you could do today—something specific

and concrete—that would put love into action? It doesn't have to be big or dramatic. Remember how Mina's simple act of sharing a cookie and listening without judgment started a chain reaction of kindness.

Question to carry with you: How might my actions today help love grow in the spaces where I live, learn, and play?

What If Someone Sees the World Differently?

Inspired by R.D. Laing

R.D. Laing challenged how we think about madness, sanity, and how society shapes the mind. For kids, we can gently explore his ideas about feelings that don't get heard, people who seem different, and how understanding others can be an act of deep care. Here's a story that reflects Laing's belief that sometimes what we call "crazy" is really someone trying to express pain no one is listening to.

The Boy with the Umbrella on Sunny Days

In the town of Clearville, weather forecasts were simple: rain meant staying inside, clouds meant wearing jackets, and sunshine meant everyone went outside to play, laugh, and enjoy the brightness.

Everyone, that is, except for Remy.

On the sunniest days, when other children raced to the playground, Remy would slowly walk to school carrying a large blue umbrella. He'd open it wide above his head, even though there wasn't a cloud in sight.

"The sun feels too loud," he'd explain when asked. "It's like the brightness is shouting at me."

The other children would exchange glances.

"But the sun doesn't make noise," they'd say, giggling behind their hands. "That's just weird."

Teachers would gently suggest he put the umbrella away. "You'll feel better if you act more like the other children," they'd say. "It's important to fit in."

Even Remy's parents worried. "We just want him to be normal," they whispered when they thought he couldn't hear.

But Remy kept his umbrella open, walking through sunny days in his small circle of shade, his eyes less squinted, his shoulders less tense.

Alia noticed. She sat behind Remy in class and watched how he relaxed when he could sit in the shadowy corner, how he flinched when the classroom got too bright or too noisy. She saw how he covered his ears during fire drills when others just held their hands over their hearts.

One quiet afternoon during library time, Alia sat down next to Remy.

"What's it like?" she asked softly. "Inside your head, I mean."

Remy looked up, surprised. No one had ever asked him that before.

He thought for a moment. "It's like..." he paused, searching for the right words, "everyone's shouting, even when no one's talking. Colors are so bright they hurt. The lights buzz like angry bees. Tag bells sound like ambulances."

“That sounds hard,” Alia said.

Remy nodded. “The umbrella helps. It makes a small, quiet space.”

The next day was brilliantly sunny. As Remy walked to school under his blue umbrella, he heard quick footsteps behind him.

“Wait up!” called Alia. She was carrying a small red umbrella, which she opened with a flourish.

“I thought maybe I could try it your way today,” she said, falling into step beside him.

Under their umbrellas, they walked together, noticing things often missed in the rush to get to school: the pattern of shadows on the sidewalk, the whisper of leaves in the slight breeze, the way the world seemed calmer, less harsh.

At recess, instead of running to the swings, Alia joined Remy under the oak tree where he always sat. She’d brought paper and colored pencils.

“Can you show me what a loud sun looks like?” she asked.

Remy picked up a yellow pencil and began to draw jagged, spiky lines radiating outward. Alia drew too—a softer sun with gentle rays.

“They’re both real,” Remy said, looking at their drawings side by side. “Just different.”

Gradually, other children grew curious. What were Remy and Alia always drawing under that tree? Why did they sometimes laugh so hard when no one had told a joke? A few brave souls wandered over to look.

“Can I try sitting under the umbrella?” asked one boy.

“Could you draw what music looks like to you?” asked another.

Soon, a small group gathered regularly in the shade of the oak tree. They discovered that Jamie, who everyone thought was

just shy, actually felt words get stuck in her throat when too many people looked at her at once. They learned that Zeke, who was always fidgeting, could focus beautifully when allowed to hold something soft in his hands.

Their teacher, Ms. Chen, noticed the change. One day, she joined their circle.

"I've been watching," she said, "and I'm wondering if we could make our classroom work better for everyone."

Together, the class brainstormed. They created "quiet corners" with soft pillows and noise-canceling headphones for anyone who needed a break. They made a signal system for when someone felt overwhelmed. They took turns being "sensory buddies," noticing when a classmate might need help navigating a loud assembly or a chaotic cafeteria.

As weeks passed, something remarkable happened. The classroom became more peaceful. Children who had struggled began to thrive. Even those who had never needed an umbrella found they sometimes enjoyed the quiet corners.

And one bright afternoon in late spring, as the children walked to the park for a class picnic, Alia noticed something different. Remy was walking beside her, squinting slightly in the sunlight—but his umbrella was folded and tucked under his arm.

"The sun still feels loud," he told her when she asked, "but not as scary anymore. I know I have a safe place to go if I need it."

Alia smiled. "Sometimes I still like using mine, though," she said, twirling her small red umbrella. "You helped me notice things I never saw before."

Remy nodded. "Different isn't wrong," he said. "It's just... different."

Think Together

- Why did Remy carry his umbrella on sunny days? What was he actually trying to tell people? _
- Why do you think it was hard for others to understand what Remy was experiencing?
- How did Alia's approach differ from how others treated Remy? What did she do that made a difference? _
- What changed in the classroom once people started listening to each other's needs?

- Have you ever felt like Remy, experiencing something that others didn't seem to notice or understand? _
- Do you know anyone who sees, hears, or feels the world differently than most people? How could you better understand their experience? _
- Why might it be valuable to have people who experience the world differently in our communities? _

Philosophy Window: Laing and Listening Deeper

R.D. Laing (1927-1989) was a Scottish psychiatrist and philosopher who had unusual ideas for his time. While most doctors were focused on “fixing” people who behaved or thought differently, Laing suggested something radical: perhaps what we

call “madness” or “strange behavior” isn’t always something broken—it might be a person’s way of coping with a difficult world, or expressing truths that others aren’t ready to hear.

Laing believed that when someone acts in ways we don’t understand, our first response shouldn’t be to try to change them, but rather to listen deeply to what they might be trying to communicate.

He wrote: *“Insanity is a perfectly rational adjustment to an insane world.”* By this, he meant that behaviors that seem odd might actually make perfect sense if we understood what that person was experiencing.

For example, if Remy in our story had been seen by doctors in Laing’s time, they might have simply labeled him as “troublesome” or “attention-seeking.” But Laing would have asked: What is Remy’s umbrella telling us? What truth is he expressing that we’re not hearing?

Laing had three important insights that changed how many people think about differences in how minds work:

1. **Trust the person’s experience:** Even if someone’s perceptions seem strange to us, they are real and valid to that person. Remy really did experience sunlight as “loud.”
2. **Look for the meaning:** Unusual behaviors often have their own logic and purpose. Remy’s umbrella wasn’t just weird—it was a creative solution to his sensory challenges.
3. **Healing happens through genuine connection:** Real help doesn’t come from forcing people to act “normal,” but from creating safe spaces where all experiences can be shared and understood.

Laing believed that many mental health struggles come from

feeling disconnected—from ourselves, from others, from meaning. He thought society often makes this worse by labeling some experiences as acceptable and others as “crazy.”

“We are all in a certain sense in touch with one another’s madness,” he wrote. “We just forget to speak its language.”

By this, he meant that we all have moments of fear, confusion, or seeing the world in unique ways. When we remember this, we can connect with others across differences with compassion rather than judgment.

Your Turn: “The Other Side of the Umbrella”

Materials needed: Paper, folding ability, coloring supplies

1. Take a piece of paper and fold it in half.
2. On one side, title it “My Umbrella” and draw or write about:
 - A time you felt misunderstood by others
 - What you were really feeling or experiencing inside
 - What you wished others had said or done to help you feel heard
 - How it felt to not be understood

On the other side, title it “Their Umbrella” and draw or write about:

- A time when someone else seemed upset or acted in a way you didn’t understand
- What you thought at first
- What might have been happening for them that you couldn’t see

- What you could do next time to understand them better

At the fold in the middle of your paper, draw an umbrella spanning both sides, symbolizing how understanding creates shelter and connection.

At the bottom of the page, write: *Everyone's feelings deserve a safe space.*

Bonus activity: With a trusted grown-up or friend, practice asking these questions when someone seems upset or is acting in a way you don't understand:

- "What's happening for you right now?"
- "How can I help?"
- "What do you need?"

Wonder More

R.D. Laing believed that the first step toward healing—both for individuals and for communities—is listening. Not the kind of listening where we're just waiting for our turn to speak, but deep listening that seeks to understand another's experience, even when it's different from our own.

This kind of listening requires courage. It asks us to step outside what feels familiar and comfortable. It invites us to consider that there might be ways of experiencing the world that we've never imagined.

When Alia asked Remy what it was like inside his head, she was practicing this brave kind of listening. She didn't try to correct him or change him. She simply created a space where his truth could be spoken and heard.

And something powerful happened: not only did Remy feel less alone, but Alia's understanding of the world expanded. She discovered new ways of seeing and being that she might never have noticed otherwise.

Perhaps this is one of the great gifts that comes from truly listening to those who experience the world differently—they can show us aspects of reality we've been missing.

As Laing wrote: *"We can see other people's behavior, but not their experience."* The only way to glimpse that experience is to ask, to listen, and to believe what we're told, even when—especially when—it differs from our own perspective.

Today, many people who were once labeled as "different" or "disordered" are teaching us that neurological diversity—having many different kinds of minds—is natural and valuable. Just as biodiversity strengthens an ecosystem, having people who think, perceive, and respond differently strengthens our human community.

Question to carry with you: Who do you know that might need someone to hear their story—not to fix it or change it, but simply to understand it?