



BUT WHAT IF...?

By Steven Hoggins

Counter examples are used to disprove general claims about the world. 'Stronger men are better', Calicles claims in Plato's Gorgias. Socrates replies by saying that the numerous common men are stronger than the upper classes though they are prima facie not as good. This is a counter-example. The general principle may hold for most things but not everything. I think counter examples are encapsulated beautifully by the children's utterance, 'yes, but what if?'

'you must wear a jumper if you leave the house'

'yes, but what if it's hot?'

The good thing about counter-examples is that they get us to think beyond claims that seem on the surface to be true such as: Lying is wrong, men can grow beards, computer nerds have no social skills, walking is easy.

Story

Casey is an 'always' sort of person. By that I mean that Casey thinks you should always do things, no matter what. You should *always* tie up your shoe laces, you should *always* do what you are told. You should *always* sit down. You should *always* read books. you should *always*... and on and on and on. whenever she heard a good idea she would say 'Well you should always do this,

Paris, on the other hand, is more of a 'but what if...?' kind of person. By that I mean Paris doesn't think you should always do things. If someone says 'You should always sit down' Paris will say 'but what if you are playing?', 'But what if you are lining up?' 'You should *always* sit down' Casey and Paris would have conversations like this Get the children to join in with the repeated refrain of but-what-if:

Casey: You must always brush your teeth

Paris: But what if I am eating, I can't brush my teeth and eat at the same time!

Casey: Always be quiet in the classroom

Paris: but what if you can't hear me? but what if, it's a shouting game? but what if my teacher tells me to shout?

Ask the children to play this game. You are going to be Casey and they have to be Paris. Offer the children the following rules and ask them to say what Paris would say: 'but what if...?'. You can make up your own too.

Always eat your food

Always help people

Always Let other people go first\

Always be happy

Always wear a coat outside

Always say please

Always tell the truth

Never shout

Don't talk

Don't run with scissors