CHILDISH THOUGHT

A DOCUMENTARY BY
ACADEMY AWARD WINNER
MEGAN MYLAN



Childish Thought **joins a philosophical apprenticeship with a class of third graders as they gain the social, emotional, and critical thinking skills to grapple with life's big questions with honesty and care.** The film offers a rare glimpse into a world where wonder remains instinctive, where opinions are voiced fearlessly and listened to with curiosity, and where disagreement becomes an opportunity for discovery. Accompanying them is a reprieve from today's brittle polarization and rapid mental offloading to AI. It **invites us to imagine a world shaped by openness, trust, and the practiced art of thinking together.**



In an Omaha, Nebraska classroom, a circle of eight year-olds contemplate reality. Sam tells his classmates they might all be living inside a giant snow globe. Alice wonders if the whole class is just part of her dream. Luis says he disagrees with Alice. He knows he's awake because he smells oranges and you can't smell in dreams, but he suggests, "maybe we're like ants on a tree in the park, and we don't know there's a whole park or a world, we just know the tree."

The third graders having this layered conversation bring to it eight years of life experience, and months of practice in philosophical inquiry. There is no mention of Aristotle, Descartes, or Confucius, but the children grapple with life's big questions about meaning, truth and values that shape our ideas of citizenship and of ourselves.

The sessions are part of an international teaching movement that practices philosophy with school age children and is rooted in **an approach developed during the contentious years of the Vietnam War**. Matthew Lipman, a philosopher and educator at Columbia University, was distressed that many of his students and the American public seemed unable to think critically or clearly articulate their views about the war. He proposed that a cultivation of independent thinking in young school children could spark **a lifelong love of learning** and nurture reflective young individuals who live richer, fuller lives, and become citizens better equipped for the hard work of building society and navigating a complex world.

Vibrant classroom conversations drive the film. The **sessions are high energy, often funny, and effortlessly profound**—eternal and universal questions mix with the immediacy and vivid specificity of the children's personal experiences and perceptions of society. Teachers guide how they think and speak, cultivating careful reasoning and mutual respect. We see a community of young thinkers emerge who **listen with curiosity, evaluate based on reason, share opinions openly and disagree without demonizing.**





Over the course of the school year, what starts with seemingly playful questions about the self and reality matures into ambitious debates about our relation to each other, ethics, free will, and justice:

- *What does it mean to be strong?*
- *If the person ahead of me doesn't pay for the bus, can I get on without swiping too?*
- *Is it better for one person to be unhappy than three?*

When the discussions take flight, the children's faces reveal wonder, frustration, empathy and hard-won insight. As they grapple with profound moral and existential questions, they don't shy away from darker realities of cruelty, pain and injustice. Conversations **linger in uncertainty** rather than resolving neatly into consensus or uplifting affirmations of collective good or democratic ideals.

We decompress from these intense conversations by following a few children **beyond the classroom walls** and into their wider world. Slices of family life deepen our connection to our characters and give us an opportunity to see philosophy in action. Something as simple as hitting traffic on the ride to school, or a backyard birthday party become visually poetic scenes that allow space for the audience to process the philosophical conversations and reflect on their meaning and relevance. We see the teachers in conversation about their techniques with colleagues and parents, giving us a glimpse of the pedagogy guiding classroom discussions. The questions the students and the film examine are universal to the human experience, but their cultural and societal contexts are specific, giving the film both a stirring sense of timeless universality and a hard-nosed, real-world reality check.

Childish Thought is a film that **speaks directly to the consequential moment we are living through.** In **a polarized and brittle environment,** we confront massive challenges, shifts and unknowns—brutal wars, global warming, forced migration, political violence, racial inequity, the rapid rise of artificial intelligence. How can we maintain the very capabilities of imagination, empathy and reasoning that make us each most unique, and most human?

The film offers **a reprieve and a way forward.** Sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with children listening, testing ideas out loud, reconsidering—we witness the emergence of creative and critical thinkers, comfortable with uncertainty and dealing with each other in good faith. While their charm pulls us in, their exploration of complex issues without easy answers is also subtly disquieting. Audiences are drawn out of their comfort zone, prompted to challenge their own presumed certainties, to engage with the discomfort of deep thought, and to wonder. It invites us to imagine a world shaped by curiosity and trust—where, like these children, we exercise the muscles of thinking critically, flexibly, and fearlessly.





PROJECT STATUS

The film is in development. We have done extensive research and **established robust relationships with the leading networks of philosophy for children educators** who are eager to support the film. Additionally, **prominent scholars** have offered their expertise and insight to the project. Our research and class observations have confirmed that the sessions are indeed profound, provocative, and charming. Third graders are in a sweet spot—speaking with uninhibited honesty, yet with the language skills and world awareness to share meaningful insights.

Our next stage is crucial and intensive, scouting specific locations and casting the educators who drive the quality and vibrancy of the philosophical inquiry. We will identify a setting where the children come from a range of demographics and lived experiences, allowing us to organically demonstrate the possibility for meaningful dialogue across differences. There are vibrant programs all across the country including: Omaha, Charleston, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Las Vegas and El Paso.

We hope to begin this next phase in early 2026 and are working to raise initial support to move the film forward. It will take us through scouting, casting, and the production of a sample reel.

DISTRIBUTION

We believe this is a film distributors and audiences are genuinely hungry for. Despite a media landscape saturated with algorithm-driven distraction and division, people continue to seek out and spend time with stories that feel deeply human. Documentaries—now more popular than ever—offer a singular way to connect with what it means to be alive on this planet, in community with one another, and with ourselves. Watching children challenge each other, and themselves, to grapple with timeless and universal questions, can meet that desire for connection.

Principe Productions has a strong record of reaching broad global audiences. We bring the same creativity to distribution as to our filmmaking, maximizing reach and impact in partnership with major streamers, broadcasters, theatrical distributors and organizations whose work resonates with the films' themes. Along with philosophy and educational networks, the vibrant ecosystem of groups dedicated to civic discourse, pluralism, bridging polarization, and empathy-building offers powerful pathways to help carry the film both wide and deep in ways that endure.

DIRECTOR

Academy Award winner Megan Mylan creates documentary films with distinct intimacy including *Simple as Water*, *Lost Boys of Sudan* and *Smile Pinki.* Along with an Oscar, she has been recognized with an Independent Spirit Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, as well as Peabody, Producers Guild, and several Emmy nominations. Before working in documentary, Megan worked in the U.S. and Brazil with Ashoka, a nonprofit identifying and supporting global social entrepreneurs. She has a Bachelor's from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and Masters' degrees in Journalism and Latin American Studies from the University of California at Berkeley where she was also guest director of the Graduate Documentary program.

Principe Productions is a 501c3 non-profit film production company known for artfully crafted documentaries that **earn critical acclaim, reach wide audiences, and drive meaningful impact.** Our films screen globally in theaters and with partners including HBO, PBS, ARTE, NHK, TVBrasil, National Geographic, Hulu, The NY Times, NDTV and Doordarshan. Films are complemented by extensive social action campaigns that bring them to a wide range of education and community settings and have raised millions of dollars for charitable causes, mobilized thousands of volunteers, and informed public policy. Support for our work includes: the Ford Foundation, Flora Family Foundation, Good Gravy Films, InMaat Foundation, the WK Kellogg Foundation, Kendeda Fund, MetLife, National Endowment for the Humanities, NY State Council for the Arts, the Perspective Fund, PetroBras, the Sundance Institute, and the Gates Foundation.

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