Where the Wild Things Are
by Maurice Sendak

Questions for Philosophical Discussion
by Claudia Catalano

One night a forest grows in Max's room.

1. Do you think the forest was real? Why/Why not?
2. How can we tell if the forest is real or not?
3. Could the forest be real to some people but not to other people?
4. If you think something is real, does that make it real?
5. If everyone agrees something is real, does it have to be real?
6. Can something be real for you but no one else?

When Max is at home, his mother makes the rules. But when he goes to where the wild things are, he's in charge.
1. When do you have to listen to other people's rules?
2. Do you feel powerless then? Does that feel bad? Is anything good about it?
3. Do you ever get to make the rules? When?
4. Do you feel powerful in these situations? Does that feel good? Is there anything bad about it?
5. Would you like to make all the rules all the time?

Max is lonely and wishes he were where someone loved him best of all.

1. Can you think of a time when you felt lonely? What made you feel lonely? (around the circle)
2. Can you think of a time you felt loved? What made you feel loved? (around the circle)
3. Do the wild things love Max?
4. Does Max's mom love Max?
5. Can you feel loneliness and love at the same time?
6. Can you be lonely even if you are with other people?
7. Can you feel loved all by yourself?

Guidelines for Philosophical Discussion
by Jayme Johnson
Max has an attitude problem. Like most of us under the influence of an attitude problem, Max stomps around, spreading as much of his inner turmoil into his environment as possible. For as many of us know, a bad attitude can be highly contagious. Max's attitude is so bad that when his
mother sends him off to be alone, he feigns not even to care. Instead, Max creates a world of his own, a world of wild and nasty things of which he is the wildest and nastiest. He stomps and growls and spreads terror across his imaginary land, and the wild things of Max's world only encourage him to go further. But a bad attitude can only last as long as one has the energy to maintain it, and when Max gets tired, he realizes that his stint of wild behavior has left him tired and alone.

The Wild Things allow Max to be as terrible as he wants, but they do not love him. He soon wishes to leave his imaginary forest and return to a place where someone loves Max most of all. Max has changed. We might even say that he adjusted his attitude. But what is this attitude of Max's? And how is it something that can go from good to bad, and back to good again? Trying to gain an understanding of what an attitude is raises interesting philosophical questions. Further, understanding how such a thing can be good or bad raises even more. The idea that an attitude can be good or bad is reminiscent of an important ethical idea. A philosopher named Immanuel Kant once posited that the only thing that can be good or bad is our will. What we will to be the case, thought Kant, is what makes our actions morally right or wrong, no matter what the consequences. Perhaps one's attitude is like one's will. Kant thought that allowing our emotions to enter into our judgments clouded our reason. Allowing our anger or boisterousness to play a role in determining our actions seems to be a lot like having a bad attitude. Max wanted to will terrible and wild things to be the case. His willing this, on the view being proposed here, is synonymous to having a bad attitude. Thus, one way to understand Max's attitude problem is as Max having a bad will. This raises another point of discussion. Was Max wrong to behave the way he did, to will terrible and wild things to be the case? On Kant's view, it seems that Max was wrong to behave that way.

Another interesting philosophical point can be found in the fact that, after a while, Max's attitude changes. He goes off to his bedroom alone as foul as ever, and in the course of his adventures in his imaginary place, comes to think that maybe it wasn't so fun there anymore. Max's change in attitude is marked by feelings of remorse, and longing for his mom. If we put this idea back into the context of Kant, we might say that Max's will is no longer being effected by his anger, but is instead under the influence of his loneliness. This raises a discussion point about whether Max really has a good will when he has his change of heart. Kant might suggest that Max's will still is in the grip of his emotions, and hence, not clear enough to be good. So even though it seems like Max is doing the right thing when he returns from the land of the wild things
all hungry and missing his mother, someone with Kant's view might suggest otherwise.