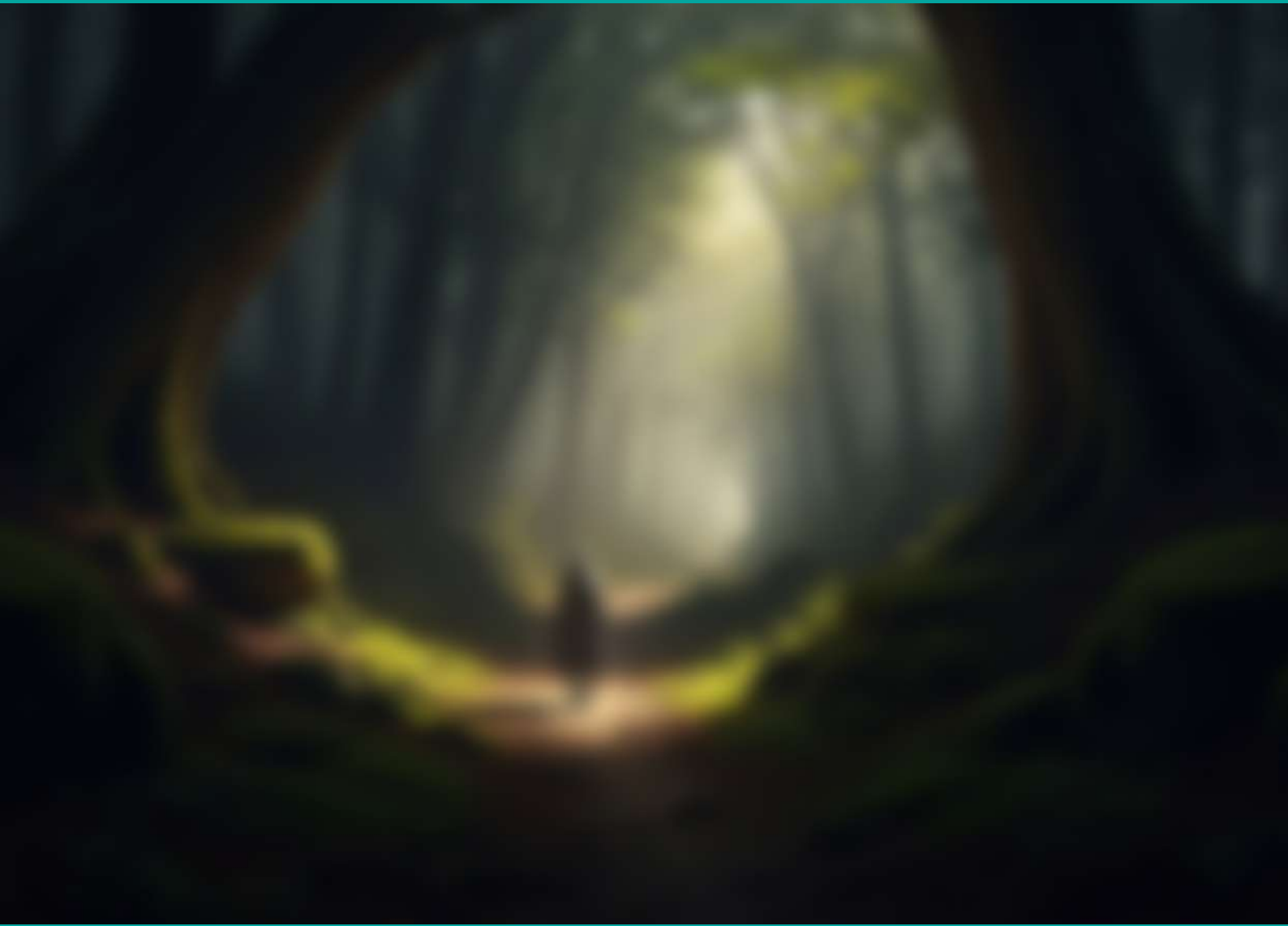


Can Doing Less Help Us Live Better?

Pupil booklet



Introduction

By the end of this unit, you will be able to answer the question:

Can doing less help us live better?

Each step has 3 resources to help you explore how different people think about how to live well, and whether doing less might sometimes be a better way to live.

1

A short recording to give some background

2

An extract from 'The Tao of Pooh' by Benjamin Hoff

3

An image to help us make links with the topic

4

Questions and reflections

Knowledge organiser

Word / Phrase	Explanation
balance	a state where different parts of life are in harmony and not in conflict
busyness	being constantly active or occupied, often without time to pause
choice	the ability to decide how to act or think
contentment	a quiet sense of being satisfied with what you have
control	trying to make things happen exactly as you want them to
effort	the energy and work put into doing something
flow	a natural way in which things happen without force or struggle
forcing	trying too hard to make something happen
harmony	living in a way that fits peacefully with the world and others
happiness	a feeling of contentment or satisfaction with life
Laozi	traditional Chinese teacher associated with the origins of Taoism
naturalness	behaving in a way that is true to your nature, without pretending or forcing
perspective	a particular way of seeing or understanding something
pressure	a feeling of being pushed to achieve or succeed
simplicity	focusing on what is essential and avoiding unnecessary complexity

Knowledge organiser

Word / Phrase	Explanation
stillness	a state of calm and quiet, both physically and mentally
success	achieving aims or goals, often linked to effort and hard work
struggle	difficulty or effort when things do not come easily
Tao	“the way” - a Taoist idea about the natural order of the universe (pronounced “Dao”).
Tao Te Ching	an important Taoist text that explores living in harmony with the Tao
Taoism	a religious and philosophical tradition that began in China
thinking	the process of considering ideas and making sense of them
value	something that is seen as important or worthwhile
wisdom	understanding how to live well and make good decisions
wu wei	a Taoist idea meaning “effortless action” or acting without forcing things
yielding	giving way rather than resisting or forcing
Zen	a tradition influenced by Taoist ideas that values simplicity and direct experience

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01

What Do We Mean by Living Well?



1.1 Video

This video explores different ideas about what makes a good life. It introduces questions about happiness, success, relationships, and wellbeing, encouraging pupils to reflect on what people value most in life.



Morning rays along a quiet woodland path

1.2 Text extract

This image was chosen because it symbolises the idea of a journey or “way” through life, connecting closely to the Taoist idea of the Tao, often translated as “the Way.” The woodland path encourages pupils to reflect on different approaches to living and the choices people make about success, happiness, balance, and meaning.

The calm natural setting contrasts with the busyness, pressure, and constant activity explored throughout the unit, helping pupils consider whether living well might sometimes involve simplicity, reflection, and harmony rather than constant striving. The winding path also suggests that there is no single fixed route through life, encouraging pupils to think openly and philosophically about the unit’s central enquiry.

Winnie-the-Pooh is a fictional bear created by A. A. Milne. He lives in the Hundred Acre Wood with friends including Piglet, Rabbit, Eeyore, Tigger and Christopher Robin.

In this book, Benjamin Hoff uses these familiar characters to explore ideas from Taoism. As you read, think about what each character can teach us about different ways of living.

1.2 Text extract

Chapter – The Pooh Way

Read from page 72 to page 75

“Eeyore. Eeyore?”

“I didn’t know you were playing,” said Roo.

“I’m not,” said Eeyore.

“Eeyore, what are you doing there?” said Rabbit.

“I’ll give you three guesses, Rabbit. Digging holes in the ground? Wrong. Leaping from branch to branch of a young oak-tree? Wrong. Waiting for somebody to help me out the river? Right. Give Rabbit time, and he’ll always get the answer.”.....

.....“Oh, Eeyore, you are wet!” said Piglet, feeling him.

Eeyore shook himself, and asked somebody to explain to Piglet what happened when you had been inside a river for quite a long time.

“Well done, Pooh,” said Rabbit kindly. “That was a good idea of ours.”



Beautiful postmodernism motion of people walking in London

1.3 Image

Modern life can often feel fast and busy. People move from one place to another, balancing school, work, relationships, responsibilities and things they want to achieve. Being active and getting things done can be valuable, but a busy life is not necessarily the same as a good life.

Sometimes we become so focused on where we are going next that we pay less attention to what is happening around us. Other people may choose to slow down, make time for others or enjoy ordinary moments. What counts as time well spent may be different for different people.

Look carefully at the image. What does it suggest about the way people live today? What might be good about living at this pace? What might be lost? If you imagined a day that you had lived really well, would it look like this?

1.4 Questions and reflections

It is useful to make a summary of what you have learnt so far using the following headings:

- What does it mean to live well?
- What makes a good life?
- Do people always agree about what matters?
- Does being busy mean you are living well?

Looking back over the last week:

- What have you done that has helped you live a good life?
- What things have got in the way of living well?
- Have you spent your time on the things that matter most to you? Why or why not?

Letter to your future self

Write a short letter to yourself to be opened later in the year. In your letter:

- Explain what a good life means to you now.
- Identify two or three things you would like to do more often to help you live well.
- Identify one thing that sometimes gets in the way.
- Describe the kind of person you would like to become.

When you read the letter again in the future, reflect on how well you have lived up to these aspirations.

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02

Why Do We Think Doing More is Better?



2.1 Video

This video explores why many people feel pressure to stay busy and productive, and why busyness is often linked with success and importance.



2.2 Text extract

Chapter – Bisy Backson

Read from page 95 to page 99

“The Bisy Backson is almost desperately active. If you ask him what his Life Interests are, he will give you a list of Physical Activities, such as:

“Skydiving, tennis, jogging, racquet-ball, skiing, swimming and water-skiing.””

“Is that all?”....

...“Whether it’s up in the sky, behind the next molecule, or in an executive suite, it’s somewhere always further along than we are – just down the road, on the other side of the world, past the moon, beyond the stars...”



Tablet checklist and productivity planning

2.3 Image

Many people believe that being busy means they are successful or important. A long list of things to do can make us feel productive, but being busy does not always mean that we are spending our time on what matters most.

Sometimes our attention becomes focused on finishing tasks, reaching goals and moving on to the next thing. This can leave little time for rest, relationships, enjoyment or simply noticing what is happening around us. Different people may therefore have very different ideas about what makes a day well spent.

Look carefully at the image. What might be gained from organising life in this way? What might be lost? Can a person be too busy to notice what really matters? What might a Taoist say about a life that is always focused on doing more?

2.4 Questions and reflections

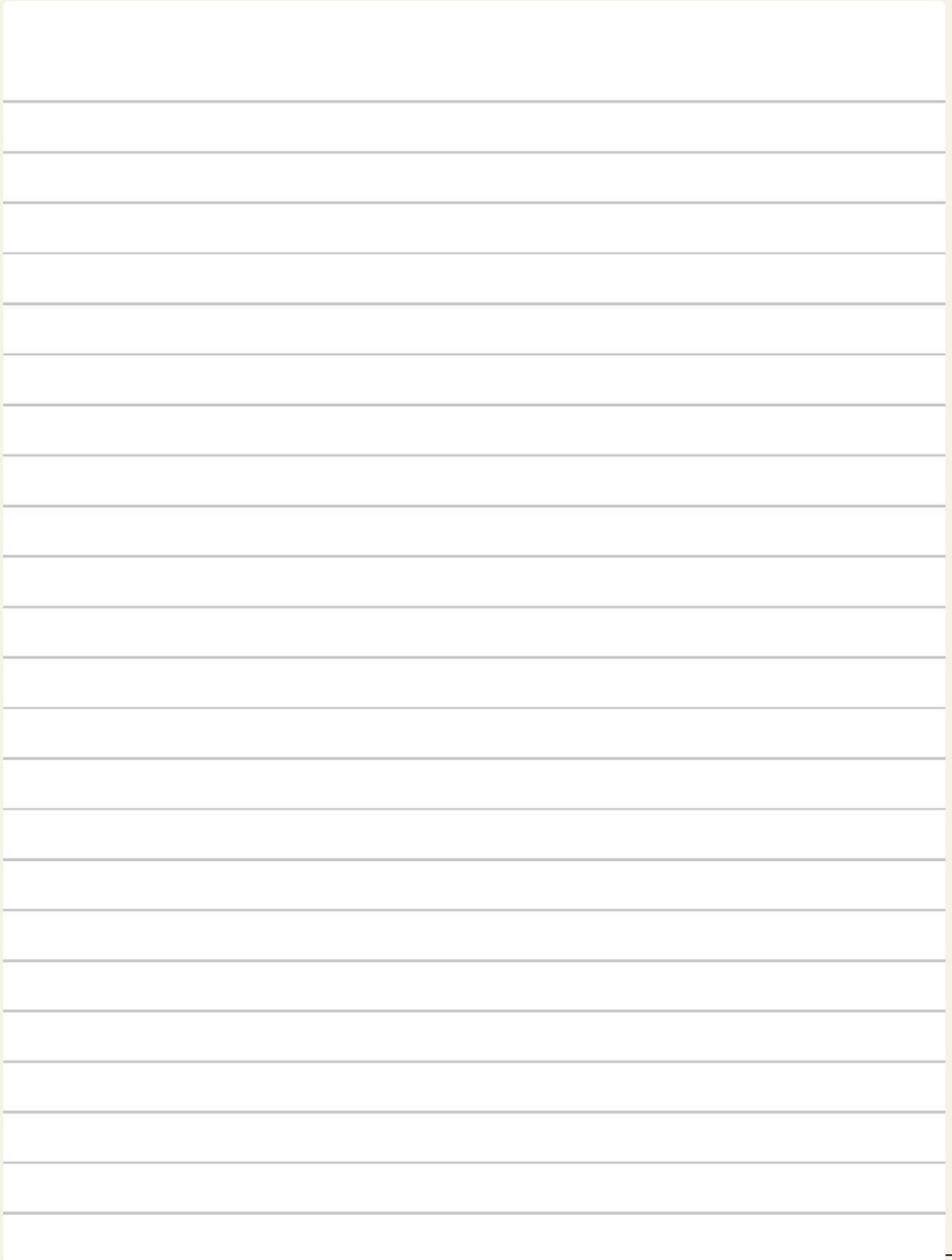
Which Questions Matter Most?

Below is a list of questions inspired by this Step:

1. Why do people want to be busy?
2. Does being busy always mean you are successful?
3. Can doing more sometimes make life harder?
4. Why do people feel pressure to achieve?
5. Is success the same as happiness?
6. Can trying too hard stop us enjoying life?
7. How is Pooh different from Rabbit?
8. Why does Rabbit always seem so busy?
9. Is being clever the same as being wise?
10. Do we always need to be doing something?
11. What really matters in a good life?
12. How might a Taoist respond to a busy lifestyle?

Your challenge:

- Read all twelve questions.
- Cross out the questions you think are less important.
- Reduce the list to five essential questions.
- Now reduce it again to three.
- Finally, choose one question that you think gets closest to the heart of Taoism.
- Explain why you chose this question.



03

**What is wu wei
(Effortless Action)?**



3.1 Video

In this interview, Bruce Lee explains the idea of “being like water.” He describes how people can respond to life more naturally and flexibly instead of forcing situations or struggling against them.



3.2 Text extract

Chapter – The Pooh Way

Read from page 67 to page 69

"By the time it came to the edge of the Forest the stream had grown-up, so that it was almost a river, and, being grown-up, it did not run and jump and sparkle along as it used to do when it was younger, but moved more slowly. For it knew now where it was going, and it said to itself, "There is no hurry. We shall get there some day."....."

..."Just how do you do it, Pooh?"

"Do what?" asked Pooh.

"Become so Effortless.""



Milford Sound, New Zealand South Island

3.3 Image

A river does not force its way forward, yet over time it can shape the landscape around it. It moves around rocks and other obstacles, following the natural course of the land rather than struggling against it. Water can appear gentle and yielding, but it can also be remarkably powerful.

Water is an important image in Taoist thought because it can represent living in harmony with the Tao rather than constantly trying to control what happens. This connects with the idea of wu wei: acting without unnecessary force or struggle.

Look carefully at the image. How might the movement of water help us understand wu wei? Can something be gentle without being weak?

3.4 Questions and reflections

It is useful to reflect on what you have learnt so far about wu wei. Choose one of the following activities to explore the idea further.

Choose **one** of the following activities.

Option A: Create a dialogue

Write a short conversation between two characters:

- One character believes that success comes from pushing harder and controlling everything.
- The other character believes in wu wei, a Taoist idea about acting without unnecessary force or struggle.

Show how they disagree and explain their different ways of approaching life.

Option B: Choose or draw an image

Find or create an image that represents wu wei.

- Explain what is happening in the image.
- Explain how it connects to the idea of wu wei.
- Explain why a Taoist might think it is a good representation of living well.

Be prepared to share and explain your ideas to the class.

04

What Happens When We Try Too Hard?



4.1 Video

This video explores how pressure and stress can affect performance. It explains why people sometimes struggle more when they overthink or feel under too much pressure.



4.2 Text extract

Chapter – Nowhere and Nothing

Read from page 141 to page 144

“Where are we going?” said Pooh, hurrying after him, and wondering whether it was to be an Explore or a What-shall-I-do-about-you-know-what.

“Nowhere,” said Christopher Robin.

.... On his way back from the K’un-lun Mountains, the Yellow Emperor lost the dark pearl of Tao. He sent Knowledge to find it, but Knowledge was unable to understand it. He sent Distant Vision, but Distant Vision was unable to see it. He sent Eloquence, but Eloquence was unable to describe it.

Finally, he sent Empty Mind, and Empty Mind came back with the pearl.”



An egg cracking under pressure

4.3 Image

When too much pressure is placed on something, it can begin to crack. People can experience pressure too. Sometimes we become so focused on succeeding, achieving more, or getting things exactly right that our effort begins to work against us. Trying harder is not always the same as doing better.

Taoist ideas such as wu wei encourage us to think differently about effort. Rather than constantly forcing things to happen, wu wei involves responding naturally and appropriately to a situation, without unnecessary struggle. This does not mean giving up or avoiding effort; it means recognising when forcing something may make matters worse.

Look carefully at the image. What might the cracking egg represent? When can trying too hard become unhelpful? How might a Taoist approach the pressure to succeed.

4.4 Questions and reflections

When does effort become too much?

Taoism does not teach that effort is always wrong. Sometimes effort is necessary. However, trying to force an outcome can sometimes make a situation more difficult.

Read the situations below. For each one, decide whether the person should:

Keep going – more effort might help.

Change approach – they need to do something differently.

Step back – pausing or letting go might be the wiser response.

1. Someone has been trying to solve a difficult problem for an hour. They are becoming frustrated and keep making the same mistakes.
2. A pupil wants a piece of work to be perfect, so they keep changing it even though it was finished some time ago.
3. Someone is learning a new skill. They find it difficult at first but improve each time they practise.
4. Two friends are arguing. One person is determined to prove that they are right and refuses to listen.
5. Someone has an important goal. Their first attempt fails, but they think carefully about what went wrong and decide to try again.

4.4 Questions and reflections

Make the Taoist judgement

Choose two of the situations.

For each one:

- Explain why you chose to keep going, change approach or step back.
- Explain what Pooh might do.
- Explain how your response connects with the Taoist idea of wu wei.

Then consider:

How can we tell the difference between giving up too easily and recognising when we are trying too hard?

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05

Can Doing Less Help Us Live Better?



5.1 Video

This video explores the importance of slowing down, being still, and taking time to reflect in a busy world.



5.2 Text extract

Chapter – Cottleston Pie

Read from page 58 to page 65

"Sooner or later, we are bound to discover some things about ourselves that we don't like. But once we see they're there, we can decide what we want to do with them...."

...“Tigger is all right really,” said Piglet lazily.

“Of course he is,” said Christopher Robin.

“Everybody is really,” said Pooh. “That’s what I think,” said Pooh. But I don’t suppose I’m right,” he said.

“Of course you are,” said Christopher Robin.”



5.3 Image

Some people believe happiness comes from achieving more, having more, or constantly looking for the next goal. Others find happiness in appreciating what is already present. The person in this image has stopped to look at the landscape rather than rushing on to somewhere else.

Taoism encourages people to live in harmony with the Tao and to recognise the value of simplicity and contentment. Living well does not necessarily mean filling life with achievements or always wanting more. It can involve paying attention to the world around us, accepting what we cannot control, and recognising when enough is enough.

Look carefully at the image. What might this person be thinking or noticing? What does the image suggest about living a good life? How might a Taoist understand the idea of being content with what you already have?

5.4 Questions and reflections

Putting Taoist ideas into practice

You have explored how The Tao of Pooh presents ideas about wu wei, simplicity, harmony and living well. Now think about what these ideas might mean in practice.

Think of a situation in which someone is trying very hard to control what happens. This might involve school, friendships, sport, a hobby or another part of everyday life.

Consider:

- What might happen if the person continues to push harder?
- How might they approach the situation differently using the idea of wu wei?
- Would doing less mean doing nothing? Explain.
- What might be gained, or lost, by taking this approach?

From Pooh to Taoism

The Tao of Pooh uses familiar characters and stories to introduce some Taoist ideas. However, Taoism is a living religious tradition and is about more than the ideas presented in this book.

Choose one Taoist idea you have encountered in this unit, such as wu wei, harmony, simplicity or living in accordance with the Tao.

5.4 Questions and reflections

Explain:

- what the idea means;
- how The Tao of Pooh has helped you understand it;
- how this idea might influence the way a Taoist lives;
- how this idea might connect with Taoist beliefs or practices.

Finally, complete this sentence:

One thing The Tao of Pooh has helped me understand about Taoism is...

06

Conclusion

Conclusion

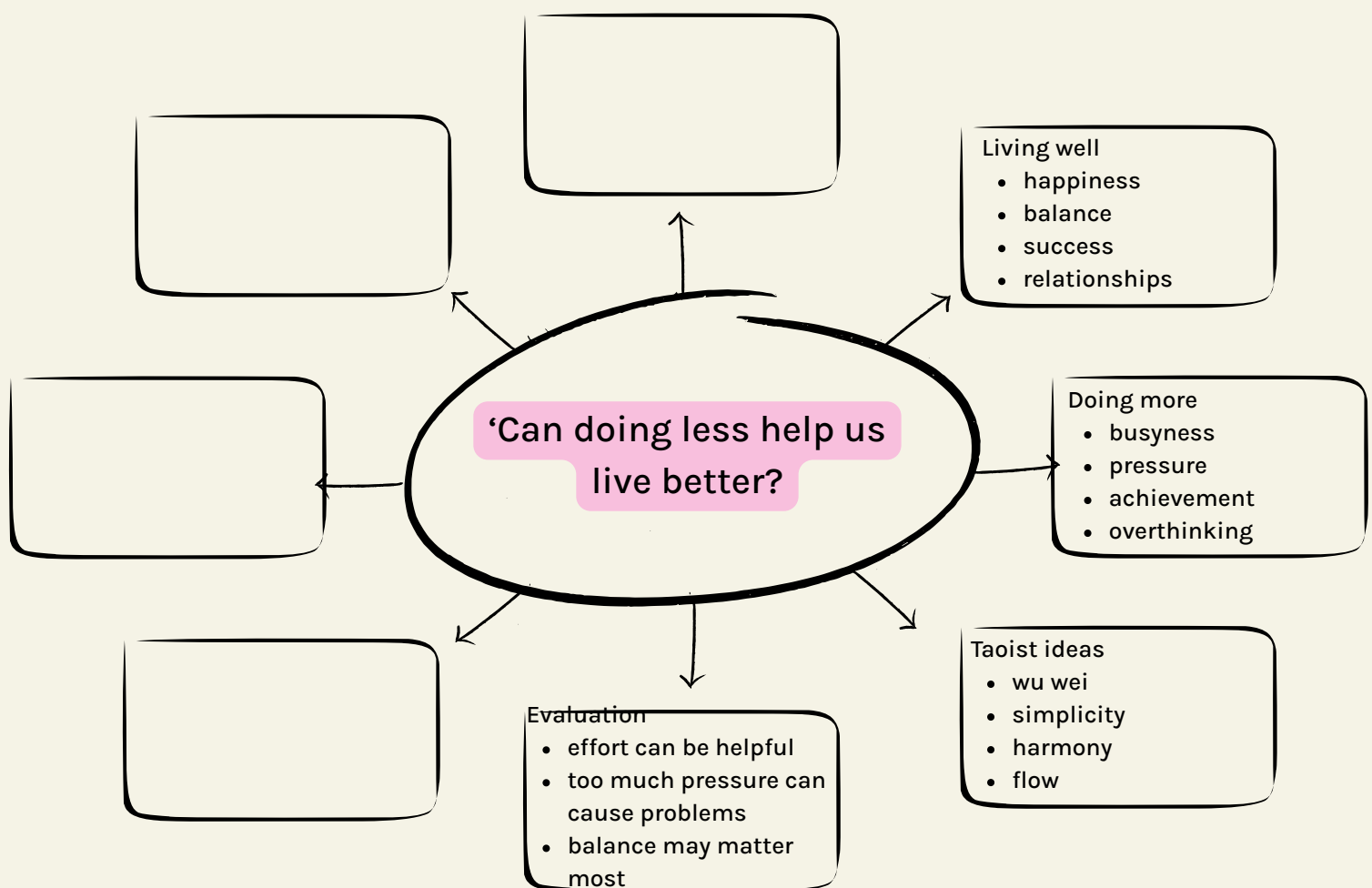
Let's draw together the threads of what you have learnt in this unit so that you can answer this question:

Can doing less help us live better?

The headlines of what we have learnt in this unit:

- People have different ideas about what makes a good life.
- Many people believe that being busy and successful is important.
- Taoism teaches the importance of balance, simplicity, and harmony.
- Wu wei means acting without forcing things too much.
- Trying too hard can sometimes make life more difficult.
- Living well may involve knowing when to act and when to slow down.

Mind Map



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**Krys McInnis**

Krys McInnis is a Religious Education consultant with a particular interest in how religious traditions help people think about meaning, purpose, and the way they live their lives. He enjoys exploring how beliefs, practices, and sacred texts have shaped cultures and communities throughout history, and how they continue to influence people today. Through his work, Krys helps pupils engage thoughtfully with big questions about religion, philosophy, identity, and what it means to be human.



Key Stage 3:
The Ambitious Years

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