

Lesson: What would you do?
Age Group: High School students

Introduction:

Today, we are going to be exploring your own morals and ethics with a scenario.

Story:

A ship weighing 559 tons carried salt, coal and china, along with 65 passengers, mostly Irish and Scottish families. There was thick fog as the ship entered the icefield west of Nova Scotia on the night of April 19. But rather than slowing down as other ships nearby were doing, the American captain, 48-year-old George Harris, kept the William Brown sailing at a brisk ten knots. At 8.45pm, as the sailors on watch peered through the hazy darkness while the passengers relaxed below deck, there was a jolt and an ominous noise. The ship had scraped along a flat ice floe. Fifteen minutes later, there was a horrifying jolt and thunderous noise as the ship collided head-on with a massive iceberg. The iron bows crumpled, a gaping hole appeared on one side and water began pouring into the ship, destroying the ship. After Captain Harris had given the order to his crew to abandon ship, they busied themselves launching the two boats on deck, one a longboat, about 20ft to 24ft in length, which had only oars and no rudder, the other a 'jollyboat', rounder and smaller, but more seaworthy. It was abundantly clear that there was not enough space in the boats for all 65 passengers. Who do we save and who do we leave behind?

From:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2595669/Would-YOU-throw-lifeboat-save-A-terrifying-shipwreck-freezing-ocean-savage-battle-survival-A-new-book-poses-ultimate-moral-dilemma.html>

Activity 1:

Answer these general questions:

Please take your time, reflect, and write down your answer.

After you can share it with the group about what other people think.

1. What would you do in this situation? Would you throw someone out of a lifeboat to save yourself?
2. Are you a bad person because you want to save yourself?
3. There were children on deck. Would you save the children? Why or why not?
4. If there are animals on deck, would you save animals? Why or why not?
5. How would anyone choose who to save?
6. Do peoples' morals and values change when it is a life or death situation?

Activity 2:

Put yourself in that person's shoe and answer the question:

1. You are captain Geroge Harris. You steered the boat into an ice floe and now water is leaking into the boat. There are only two boats on deck and they can't fit everyone on board.
 - a. What would you do in this situation? Would you throw someone out of a lifeboat to save yourself even though you caused the shipwreck?
 - b. If you chose yourself, are you a bad person because you want to save yourself?
 - c. Knowing there are children in danger, would you give up your seat for the child?
2. You are a mother or a father and have one boy and one girl. You know who the captain is and that he was the one that caused the shipwreck.
 - a. If you were forced to save one, would you choose to save yourself or your kids? Why?
 - b. Do you think that the captain deserves to get on the lifeboat even though he was the one that caused the shipwreck?
 - i. If you believe that should get on, why?
 - ii. If you believe that he shouldn't go on, why?

Now, look at your answers for the two scenarios. Are your answers similar or very different?

If your answers are similar, why?

If they are different, why do you think they are different?

Wrap Up:

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. No one would really know how to react until they are placed in the situation. But people in different situations think differently. The purpose of this lesson is to get you to think about your morals and values and apply it to a thought experiment like the one that was explored during this lesson.