



Problematic Situation for Jane Eyre: Who Should Survive?

Purpose of the Strategy

This activity, adapted from one found on the following high school English teacher's website: www.iop.com/~grimaldi//LOTF/who_should.htm, is designed to help students understand differing perspectives or problems within the text of Jane Eyre, especially regarding the judgment of others. The society in which Jane lives is rife with judgments and values doled out by those of higher class, determining who is worthy of a good education, a good home, good treatment, a good marriage, the inheritance, etc. Much is determined by social station and tradition, little by actual capabilities or individual worth. In this activity students will utilize problem solving and decision making skills in determining priorities and values. This will help them to approach the text from varying perspectives that will help them understand the society and the characters in the novel, creating personal interest in and connection to the text.

Directions

Present the following situation to students:

The year is 1830 and a severe storm has crippled a small ship, the S.S. Guppy, and the only remaining lifeboat has room for only seven people. You have no hope of reaching civilization, but there's a fairly good chance that you can make it to one of many small, uncharted, and unpopulated islands in the area. You may have to remain on such an island for years. Your task is to choose which seven people should be allowed on the lifeboat, and hence, be allowed to survive

Have each student read through the situation and the list of individuals in the boat and come up with their own conclusion. Then have the class divide into groups of four. Go over the Group Decision Instructions and give them 20 minutes to come to a consensus of which 7 people they would save and why. They should also be able to defend why they have chosen **not** to take others. They will be expected to defend and present their findings to the class.

Assessment

The problematic situation strategy allows you to assess student participation in group activities, thinking/reasoning skills, ability to negotiate decisions, and general ability to make choices based upon priorities and values. Discuss with the class what they learned from this activity and how they can relate their value judgments to the value judgments made by the characters in the novel.



Who Should Survive?

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1. **Dr. Lewis:** thirty-seven, professor of history at Oxford, in good health (rides daily), hobby is botany, enjoys politics, married with one child (Robert).
2. **Mrs. Lewis:** thirty-eight, rather obese, diabetic, married to Dr. Dane, has one child.
3. **Robert:** ten, mentally retarded.
4. **Mrs. Potter:** twenty-three, barmaid in an ill-famed pub, worked as a prostitute, married at age sixteen, fled from her husband at age eighteen.
5. **Juan Garcia:** three months old, healthy.
6. **Mary Evans:** eighteen, factory worker, wears spectacles, artistic.
7. **Mr. Newton:** twenty-five, in last year of studying medicine, suspected homosexual activity, music as a hobby, an aesthete.
8. **Mrs. Clark:** twenty-eight, daughter of a minister, well-educated, single and desires never to be married or have children.
9. **Mr. Blake:** fifty-one, and ex-sailor, married with four children, enjoys outdoors, much experience in construction, quite handy, sympathizes with anti-black views.
10. **Father Williams:** thirty-seven, Catholic, priest, educated at Cambridge, active in civil rights, athletic, farming background, often criticized for liberal views.
11. **Dr. Gonzales:** sixty-six, doctor, two heart attacks in the past five years, loves literature and quotes extensively.

GROUP DECISION INSTRUCTIONS

Consensus is a decision-making process for making full use of available resources and for resolving conflicts creatively. Consensus is difficult to reach, so not every ranking will meet with everyone's complete approval. Complete unanimity is not the goal—it is rarely achieved. But each individual should be able to accept the group rankings on the basis of logic and feasibility. When all group members feel this way, you have reached consensus as defined here, and the judgment may be entered as a group decision. This means, in effect, that a single person can block the group if he thinks it necessary; at the same time, he should use this option in the best sense of reciprocity. Here are some guidelines to use in achieving consensus:

- 1. Avoid arguing for your own rankings. Present your position as lucidly and logically as possible, but listen to the other members' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.**
- 2. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the next-most-acceptable alternative for all parties.**
- 3. Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and to reach agreement and harmony. When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily, be suspicious. Explore the reasons and be sure everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Yield only to positions that have objective and logically sound foundations.**
- 4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as majority vote, averages, coin flips, and bargaining. When a dissenting member finally agrees, don't feel that he must be rewarded by having his own way on some later point.**
- 5. Differences of opinion are natural and expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance that the group will hit upon more adequate solutions.**

From: Jay Hall. (1971). Decisions, Decisions, Decisions. Psychology Today. Pp. 51+