

PARDON ME

OVERVIEW

Giving students the opportunity to explore ethical dilemmas helps them to explore personal values and reasoning as well as hear how others think and reason. Activity 1 is designed to put them in a position of power and asked them to make a decision that will have personal, political, and social consequences. Activity 2 is the same basic dilemma but based upon a historical event. Students will be able to compare the reasoning used in the 2 activities in terms of similarities and differences. That information can be used to develop a tentative guideline for making decisions along this line.

CONNECTION TO THE CURRICULUM

Illinois State Standards: 16.C.4c, 16.C.5b, 16.D.5

TEACHING LEVEL

Grades 9-12

MATERIALS

- Copy of Activity 1
- Article on Governor John Altgeld and the Haymarket Prisoners-
<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ihs/prisoner.htm>

OBJECTIVES

- The student will take a position with reasoning on a fictional ethical dilemma.
- The student will take a position with reasoning on a historical ethical dilemma.
- The student will compare their positions and reasoning on the fictional and historical ethical dilemmas.
- The student will explain reasons for taking similar or different positions on the issue.
- The student will develop tentative guidelines for making this kind of ethical decision...

OPENING THE LESSON

- Explain what an ethical dilemma is and why it is necessary to give reasons for positions. Provide some example of fictional or historical dilemmas and the justification a person could use to support a position.

DEVELOPING THE LESSON

- Distribute Activity #1 and have the students individually read and (in writing) take a position with justification on the case. Be sure to ask if there is any additional information students need to formulate a position.

- As a class hold a discussion over the students' positions and reasoning.
- Distribute Activity #2 and have the students individually read and (in writing) take a position with justification on the case.
- As a class hold a discussion over students' positions and reasoning.
- Ask individual students if their position and reasoning was the same or different in the two cases.

CONCLUDING THE LESSON

Based on the discussion have students develop a criteria when a governor should or should not pardon someone convicted of a crime.

EXTENDING THE LESSON

- Students could do additional research on the Haymarket Riot to see if there is any new additional information available.
- Students could do additional research on John Altgeld to see what he did for the rest of his life.
- Students could be asked to identify another historical dilemma, research it, and take a position with reasoning on the case.
- Students could research if there are any specific guidelines that are used by elected officials to grant pardons.

ASSESSING THE LESSON

- Students could be asked to identify the pros and con's to Altgeld's decision and explains whether they agreed or disagreed with his choice.
- Students could be asked to verbally or in writing identify and explain criteria that should be used to determine pardons.
- Students could research and determine if they agree or disagree with other examples of elected officials granting pardons based upon their criteria. (Gerald Ford's pardon for Richard Nixon)

BIOGRAPHY

- Article on Governor John Altgeld and the Haymarket Prisoners-
<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ihs/prisoner.htm>

PARDON ME

You are governor of a state. In a small, fairly poor community there has been a great deal of unrest. The townspeople have been complaining for years there is something wrong with their water. Too many people have developed illnesses, many children have been stillborn or born with abnormalities, and the general life span of the townspeople is considerably shorter than the national average. State and federal testing has shown nothing but the community still feel there is something wrong. They blame the chemical plant located just outside of city limits on a river that runs through the town. The plant is part of a nationally known company that has immense political and economic power on both the state and national level. In fact, the company is a heavy contributor to your political party in general and your campaign in particular. The company stands by the various testing reports and refuses to shut down the local plant or make any changes in how the chemicals are manufactured. In the past year the issue has become a crisis. In this small community of 15,000, 5 babies were stillborn, 2 born with abnormalities, and 15 cases of serious illness (some terminal) were reported. Several individuals in the community have become extremely outspoken about the situation and some have called for drastic action. They cite as evidence the fact that many state and federal employees responsible for the testing have “retired” from one job only to be hired into high paying jobs by the company. At a town meeting the outspoken members have rallied the town to the point a political protest at the plant was organized. On the day before the protest some of the outspoken members were heard to say what they ought to do is just burn the plant down or destroy the machinery necessary to produce the chemicals. The company got wind of the situation and hired extra security in case of trouble. Police were also notified they needed to be on hand to handle the crowd. At the appointed time about 500 protesters showed up carrying signs and demanding to have a conversation with management. Management refused. Nasty phrases shouted by some protesters stirred the crowd. A shot was fired and a riot broke out between the police and the crowd. Several people were injured and 3 died. One protester died from being trampled as did a policeman. Another protester died from police fire. Investigation was unsuccessful in discovering who fired the first shot. The original outspoken townspeople were arrested for conspiring to start a riot. They were tried and convicted. Each received a 100 year prison sentence. Some people in the town were very unhappy with the verdict contending the court and jury were biased. As evidence they cited the fact that the judge was related by marriage to the companies CEO and 10 of the jurors had direct or indirect connections to the company. Furthermore, no evidence was presented showing the original outspoken townspeople were the ones making angry statements during the actual protest. As governor, you have been asked to pardon the convicted. If you do, you know your political career will end. However, you agree the evidence is shaky and the judge and jury probably were biased. What should you do?