

## **The Queen vs. Dudley and Stephens (1884) Notes (adapted from Michael Sandel's *Justice*)**

*This situation comes from a real life case in the UK from the 19th century.*

*England was able to dominate much of the world through the strength of its navy. Part of the cause of this was the orderliness of its navy in addition to the size and strength of its ships.*

a. *A ship in the South Atlantic 1300 miles from the nearest land, details came from a local newspaper account at the time, 4 in the crew, Dudley captain, Stephens first mate, Brooks was the sailor, excellent character, 4th crew member Richard Parker 17 years old cabin boy, orphan, first long voyage, thought the voyage would "make a man out of him."*

b. *The facts of the case were not in dispute, sometimes in court cases, people disagree about what happened, but not this case. The question here is a moral one.*

*While on the voyage, a big wave hit the boat and the ship went down. The 4 crew members, however, safely escaped to a lifeboat. The only food they brought with them were 2 cans of preserved turnips and no fresh water.*

c. *The first 3 days they ate nothing, 4th day they opened one of the cans and ate it, the next day they caught and ate a turtle. They ate the other can of turnips in little bits for a couple of days. After that, they ate nothing for 8 days.*

d. *Imagine yourself in the situation, what would you do? Let's hear about what they did. After those 8 days, the cabin boy was laying at the bottom of the lifeboat, sick because he drank sea water and appeared to be dying and was in a coma. On the 19th day the captain suggested they all have a lottery to see who should die to save the rest. By "dying to save the rest" we mean that a person would die and be eaten by the rest of the crew. Brooks, said no, didn't like the idea, but the next day the captain told Stephens we should kill the boy. Dudley, always good at taking directions, stabbed the cabin boy in the neck with a pen knife. The next 4 days the 3 of them ate from the body and blood of the young boy....and then they were rescued.*

e. *Dudley described the rescue in his diary, on the 24th day, as we were having our breakfast (pause for dramatic effect for the kids to consider what this means), a ship appeared at last. They were then taken back to England and arrested and tried. They argued that they acted out of necessity, better one should die to save 3 than all 4 should die. The prosecutor disagreed and said murder is murder and put them on trial*

f. *Was what they did morally permissible. How many would vote not guilty? Hear responses.*

g. *Take responses, ask: what if they asked permission? Then what? Try to see who was against it before and now for it*

h. *What about the cannibalism aspect? Does that in and of itself make it wrong?*

i. *What about the lottery aspect? Consent? What if the loser backs out? again try to decide where the tipping point is.*

j. *Does it matter that the cabin boy was an orphan and had no family? Greater good? Does that argument fly?*

*This whole conversation is to force kids into think about the issues of right and wrong in ambiguous situations. We aren't really trying to come to a consensus one way or another but to tap into their own ability to reason ethically and morally.*

### **Optional activity if time permits**

Ask the kids to make a t chart and have them fill it in to list all the reasons the actions of those sailors was ethical and not ethical. Use any appropriate language you can.

Ethical	Unethical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Saved more lives by killing one person</li><li>• Cabin boy was an orphan</li><li>• Likely would have starved to death if they hadn't eaten the boy</li><li>• Boy would have died anyway, probably first</li><li>• Very tough circumstances, lack of options, forced to make a choice</li><li>• Putting the boy out of his misery, boy was suffering</li><li>• The actions themselves are punishment enough.</li><li>• Other men had people who depended on them, families</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Boy did not give his consent to being killed and/or eaten</li><li>• Very simply, the boy was murdered</li><li>• They were not prepared</li><li>• Boy had his whole life ahead of him.</li><li>• They may have been saved at some point.</li><li>• Were not considering the consequences past their own survival</li><li>• Considering this ethical would weaken our perceptions of murder</li><li>• Sets a bad precedent of selfishness.</li></ul>