

Ethical Dilemmas

Adapted from an activity on the Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children website

<http://depts.washington.edu/nwcenter/lessonsclassroom.html>

Introduction

A dilemma can sometimes simulate lively discussion and raise further questions for inquiry. Here are four dilemmas you could use with children from the age of 7 upwards. Of course you will have to think about your response to the dilemma first and plan some possible moves in the dialogue. You might also try out 'Believers and Doubters' as an alternative structure for the discussion. This is explained at: <http://p4c.com/articles/believing-and-doubting-game>

The dilemmas involve the following themes:

1. Lying
2. Friendship
3. Animal Rights
4. Obedience and Authority

Dilemma 1

A girl is taken to a carnival by her dad. It is her tenth birthday and he's promised her that she can choose any 5 rides. But as they approach the gate, he discovers that he's forgotten his wallet. This is the last day of the carnival and it's too far to go home and come back before it closes. He counts the change in his pockets and tells his daughter that he has enough money to pay the entrance fee and they can go inside and look at all the exhibits and the parade, but there wouldn't be any money for rides, OR she could lie about her age and say she was five and get in for half-price, which would leave enough money for the 5 rides. They walk to the gate and the ticket seller asks the girl, "How old are you?" What should she say?

What would you do in this situation? Why?

Dilemma 2

You are spending the afternoon with a friend of yours who isn't very popular. You run into a group of your friends who invite you to go to a movie but they say that your unpopular friend can't come. What is the right thing to do?

Dilemma 3

You have a little sister who is very sick. The only way to save her is to inject many kittens with the illness she has and try out various medicines to see if they will work. What should the doctors do? Do animals have a right to life? Are we justified in using them in experiments? In eating them?

Dilemma 4

You are in an art class at school. The teacher tells the class that today each student is to paint a painting of their best friend in the class. The class is uncomfortable with this, and one student points out to the teacher that some kids will have lots of kids painting them, and other kids won't be chosen at all. The teacher insists that this is what the students should do. Almost all of the students don't want to do this. What should you do?

Is it disrespectful to disagree with your teacher? With your parents? Your friends? Can you disagree and still be respectful?
