

Sharing the Burden

A group of seven teenagers are about to start a Duke of Edinburgh expedition. They are deciding how to split up the group kit and supplies: tents, cooking stuff, food etc.

[The parts are AARON, BARRY, CHARLIE, HAKIM, ETHEL, FRANK and JEB. Read it through, then carry on the argument and decide how you should split up the kit. BARRY and FRANK are the fittest and are used to this sort of walking. ETHEL is a good sprinter but doesn't like long distances. HAKIM is the smallest member of the group, and JEB is at least three stone overweight. CHARLIE and AARON are average.]

AARON It'll be fairest if we share it out so everyone's pack weighs ends up weighing the same.

BARRY No it won't. I spent loads buying lightweight kit and I've made sure I haven't brought anything I don't need. What was the point of that if my pack ends up just as heavy as if I hadn't bothered?

CHARLIE We should just weigh the kit and split it up so we all take the same share.

HAKIM That won't work. I'm half the size of Frank. If I end up carrying as much extra stuff as him I'll fall over backwards.

CHARLIE In that case Jeb shouldn't have to carry as much because he's unfit. He'll be huffing and puffing just with the walking.

HAKIM That's different. Jeb could be fit if he stopped stuffing himself with Haribo and skiving PE. But I can't exactly help being short, can I?

BARRY Well Ethel can't help being a girl. Are you saying she should carry less as well? I'll end up carrying everything.

ETHEL Watch it. Just because I'm a girl doesn't mean I can't do the same as you.

FRANK But on the practice expedition, you were stuck at the back moaning that we were going too fast. If we want to get there before dark we should share it out, so the slower people carry less and the faster people carry more.

CHARLIE Maybe we should start off taking the same each, and then shift it around if someone starts falling behind.

BARRY So if you want to carry less stuff, you just have to be lazy, slow, short or fat? Nice one.

FRANK I don't mind carrying a bit extra.

BARRY If you want to carry someone else's stuff, that's fine by me. I'm just going to carry my share and that's that.

JEB Who'll carry my share for a fiver?

Background Ideas

This is a scenario involving rival conceptions of fairness – you can see it as an analogy to how the burden of taxation should be spread across a society. You could use it as a stimulus for P4C, or within D of E to get some thinking going about responsibilities to a team. Each part of the dialogue raises new questions.

- Should you share things out to even out initial inequalities? (*Aaron*)
- Should people be able to keep the rewards of their own efforts? (*Barry*)
- Is it fair for people to contribute the same regardless of their ability to do so? (*Charlie*)
- Deserving vs. undeserving poor - Are people who need help because of their choices less deserving than people who can't help needing help? (*Hakim/Charlie*)
- Should people who can, do more, and people who need more help receive it? ("From each according to his ability to each according to his needs" *Karl Marx/Frank*)
- Should inequalities be arranged to benefit society as a whole? (*Frank/Ethel*)
- Does helping the disadvantaged encourage them to become dependent? (*Barry*)
- Should it be up to people if they want to help others? (*Barry*)
- Should people be able to buy their way out of contributing to society? (*Jeb*)

One way to approach this stimulus is to have the group decide what would be fair in this specific situation before settling on a question that can broaden the discussion to other contexts. You could have some members of the enquiry continuing the roles of the characters, making points that chime with their expressed positions, while the rest are 'neutrals' making reasonable suggestions.