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The Bystander's Dilemma

Thinking Skills and Values Exploration in the Social Studies

Developed
by
Louise Jacobsen & Mary Furlong

Introduction

In the following historical and contemporary case studies, you will witness events that raise complex questions. And you will be challenged to think about how you would act in certain situations. There are no “right” answers to the questions posed. You will, however, deal with a very difficult question in each case study:

“When should I take a stand?”

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Individual Report Form

Name: _____

- I. After reading the case study, complete part I (A and B) independently before going on to group discussion.

A. Case Study Data Sheet # _____

Title of Case Study _____

Name of bystander in this case _____

B. Your Decision...

1. What was your decision?
2. How did you reach your decision?
3. What is likely to happen as a result of your decision?

- II. Appoint one person to be the group leader. The group leader will lead discussion. Begin your discussion only after all group members have answered the questions in part I.

A. Group Discussion

1. What was the issue in the case?
2. What decision did each individual in your group reach?
3. Turn to your Case Study Data Sheet. Beginning with part I., discuss each question as a group, and write answers to each question on the back of this form.

- III. Stop! Your teacher will conduct a Group Leader Panel.

Discussion

- IV. After the Group Leader Panel Discussion, answer the following questions on the back of this sheet.

A. On Reflection...

1. Did the discussion by the small group and panel change your opinion on this issue? If so, explain.
2. When should someone take a stand?
3. What are some conflicts that may arise that could make it difficult for someone to take a stand?
4. Can you recall any situations when you have been a bystander? What was the situation and what did you do?
5. Do citizens have a responsibility toward their fellow citizens? If so, how much?

Case Study Data Sheet I

A Dilemma In the Era of McCarthyism

Background

The United States and the Soviet Union were allies in World War II, but because of American mistrust of Stalin and dislike for the Communist State, they were, at best, uneasy allies. Even during the War and in the midst of battle, Americans were becoming increasingly concerned about Soviet expansion into liberated territory. This concern increased until many Americans were convinced that the Russians were trying to take over as many countries as possible with the ultimate goal of world domination. Worse still, it was believed that Communists already had infiltrated many American institutions, including the army, State Department, and universities. A climate of fear prevailed and “containment” of Communism, both abroad and at home, was to be the American response, the watchword, of the post-war years.

The United States Senate and the House of Representatives both set up committees to investigate allegations of Communist infiltration of American institutions. Extensive hearings were held and many individuals were questioned; on the flimsiest of evidence, their loyalty was disputed.

One Senator in particular, Joseph McCarthy, was notorious for his success in stirring up people’s fears to the point of hysteria, and for turning the hearings into “witch-hunts”. An individual was essentially presumed to be guilty. The vaguest association with anything or anyone deemed to be Communist, no matter how far-fetched or distant in the past, might result in the loss of one’s friends, career, or reputation. Any criticism of the hearings would result in an attack on the critic. Even high officials, while privately appalled, were afraid to speak out for fear that their own reputations and careers would be ruined.

The Situation

John Carpenter is a freshman member of the United States Congress. He has worked very hard to reach this important office. Although not born wealthy, he built up a successful law practice and received the support of many influential individuals and businesses when he ran for office. He is married and has two small children. He comes to Washington with many ideas and with the desire to serve his country and constituency well, but he observes that the whole country is caught up in a wave of fear, both of Communism and of the power and influence of McCarthy and his followers.

John believes that McCarthy is an unstable fanatic who is ruining the lives of many innocent people. He has kept silent until now, partly to wait for an opportune moment and partly to avoid a dangerous confrontation that could destroy all his hopes and plans to do good for his country. However, McCarthy has recently accused a close friend of John’s, named Frank—a man who originally helped and advised John in his career. John knows Frank is innocent and, in fact, a patriot and a credit to his country. He is uncertain of what to do. Should he speak out against McCarthy and the “witch-hunt”, using his resources as a member of Congress to help his friend, Frank? Should he remain uninvolved? Should he gamble his future, without being sure he can win? What would you do if you were in John’s place?

✱ *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

McCarthyism Questions

- I. If your decision was to get involved:
 - A. Would you have taken a stand if you did not have a friend under attack?
 - B. Had your friend actually been a Communist, would you have spoken out for his rights to express his views?
 - C. If you knew that your brother had once had ties to the Communist Party, would you have risked involvement on behalf of your friend?
- II. If your decision was not to get involved:
 - A. Would any of the following have made a difference in your decision?
 - 1. If you were independently wealthy?
 - 2. If the President personally asked you to lead the fight for the good of the country?
 - 3. If you had a personal grudge against McCarthy?
 - 4. If your parents were immigrants from a Communist country?
 - 5. If you could enlist a group of other members of Congress to speak out with you?
- III. How should the average citizen have dealt with McCarthyism?
- IV. Are there “witch-hunts” today? If so, how should we, as citizens, deal with them?

Case Study Data Sheet 2

White-Collar Crime: Two Dilemmas

Case 1

Maureen, age 22, is employed at the local college bookstore as a bookkeeper. She is in charge of handling cash receipts, and for several days has suspected that Julie, a sweet and friendly cashier, is cheating the store by ringing up only a small portion of the amounts purchased by friends. One day Maureen notices that Julie has rung up only \$4.00 on her cash register for a friend's large stack of books. Maureen does not know what to do. Should she call the security guard to stop Julie's friend and compare the actual price of the books with the sales tag? Should she tell her boss and let him handle it? Should she do nothing, since she has no real proof, and Julie is not keeping the money herself? What would you do if you were Maureen?

Case 2

Michael is a hard-working, ambitious man who wants to get ahead. He works for a large electronics firm and has become the protege of the company president, who has promised to promote him quickly if he does well as the purchasing agent. In the course of his work he checks freight bills and discovers that the freight company is consistently charging too much. Michael calls up the head of the freight company and asks, "Why have you been overcharging us to the tune of \$38,300 in this past year alone? Our firm may have to take legal action against you." The freight company president laughs and says, "Michael, you'd better talk to your boss first before you do anything rash; he's been dividing the money with me." Michael hangs up, stunned. What should he do? On the one hand he realizes that these "under the table" payments are illegal. On the other hand, Michael does not want to jeopardize his standing in the company and his "in" with his own boss. What would you do if you were Micheal?

✱ *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

I. For Case 1

If your decision was not to get involved, would you have acted differently if:

- A. You did not like Julie?
- B. Larger sums of money were involved?

If your decision was to get involved, would you have acted differently if:

- A. Julie was the daughter of your boss?
- B. Julie and you were good friends?
- C. The store overpriced its goods?

II. For Case 2

If your decision was not to get involved, would you have acted differently if:

- A. You were not happy with your progress within the company?
- B. The president found out that you knew what was going on?

If your decision was to get involved, would you have acted differently if:

- A. You were told you were being evaluated for a big promotion?
- B. Your wife was seriously ill and faced an expensive course of treatment?

II. Do you think white-collar crimes are as serious as other crimes? Is there a moral difference between someone who robs a liquor store with a gun and someone who steals company funds?

IV. Is it wrong to cheat on your income taxes? Do you consider it a crime?

V. Is it wrong for office workers to “borrow” office supplies? Do you consider it a crime?

VI. Is it wrong to pad an expense account? Do you consider it a crime?

VII. Should people who commit white-collar crimes be sent to jail? How should they be treated? Explain your position.

Case Study Data Sheet 3

A Dilemma In the Era of Slavery

Background

As the nation expanded in the 1800s, sectional differences over slavery became sharper and, at times, very emotional. Besides being a serious political and economic issue dividing the North and the South, slavery was becoming an increasingly important moral issue as well. Small but dedicated groups against slavery worked to stir up public opinion on the issue. They publicized the evils of slavery through lectures and articles, in newspapers and in popular books such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Quakers, because of their religious beliefs, were particularly active in the anti-slave movement.

As slaves in the South, blacks were legally considered property: their rights were subject to the whims of their masters. Despite the best efforts of the slave owners to suppress all slave “rebellions” the desire for freedom was so strong that many slaves braved high odds—and heavy consequences if caught—to escape North. Free people, both black and white, took great risks to help the slaves. The punishment given to those caught helping slaves to escape could be very severe, yet the Underground Railroad flourished and brought runaway slaves to new lives in the North.

The Situation

John and Martha are Quakers living near the town of Oxford, Maryland. They have a small farm and live off the land and the sea. They do a lot of crabbing and fishing off the Chesapeake Bay. They have three children, Seth, age 12, Emily, age 10, and Mark, age 7.

John and Martha believe that slavery is wrong. Along with other members of their church community, they oppose slavery. For the past fifteen months, they have helped to hide runaway slaves who have escaped from plantations in the South. Usually the slaves appear in the middle of the night. They are taken from the main house to the shed. There they are given new clothes, their shackles are removed, and they are fed. When it seems safe, Seth leads the runaway to a predetermined route during the night.

One Saturday John and Martha hear a knock at the front door. It is a local authority, who warns John and Martha that they are under suspicion of harboring runaway slaves. If caught, they will be arrested and put in jail.

Late that night there is a knock at the door. John peers through the curtain and sees three slaves at his doorstep. What should he do?

✱ *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

Slavery Questions

- I. If your decision was to get involved, would your decision have changed if:
 - A. You knew your home was being watched at night?
 - B. You might lose your farm if you were caught?
- II. If your decision was not to get involved, would your decision have changed if:
 - A. You had no children?
 - B. The authorities had not come to inform you of the danger to you and your family?
- III. Was race a factor in your decision? Explain.
- IV. Is there ever a time when a law should be ignored? Explain.
- V. Should religious beliefs take precedence over civil law? Explain your position.

Case Study Data Sheet 4

Youth Gangs: Roland's Dilemma

Roland has lived on the South side of Los Angeles his entire life. He is fourteen years old and a good student at Central High School. He enjoys sports and likes to spend most of his time with his girlfriend, Charlene. Unlike his older brothers, Bobby and Henry, so far he has managed to avoid getting into any kind of trouble.

Bobby and Henry, members of the 81st Street Gang, tell Roland that the gang provides them with companionship as well as protection from the other neighborhood groups. Roland knows that sometimes Bobby and Henry are involved in violent incidents. Usually one gang member gets into a fight with someone from another gang and then both gangs "go to war" to back up their friends and protect their turf. Recently there has been trouble between the 81 st Street Gang and the Portland Avenue Gang. Both groups claim the territory of Greenland Park as their own.

On a Saturday night in late summer, a fight breaks out in Greenland Park between the two gangs. A member of the Portland Avenue Gang is shot. The other members of the Avenues openly declare war on 81st Street. The following Monday a car drives past Roland's house and fires a few shots. Roland hears the noise and runs into the living room. His younger sister, Brenda, is lying on the floor with blood all over her face. Roland calls out for his brothers to help. They rush Brenda to the hospital, but she loses her left eye.

Bobby and Henry tell Roland that the family needs to get revenge. They are going to a meeting that night with the other members of the 81st Street Gang, and will work up a plan. They tell Roland that he better show up at the meeting.

Roland calls Charlene and tells her what has happened. She pleads with him not to go to the meeting. "Roland," she says, "once you get involved in gang activity, you can never get out. It can only lead to more violence and it will destroy your life." Roland hangs up the phone feeling concerned and upset. He has only a few hours before he has to make a decision. Should he go to the meeting or stay home?

✱ *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

Youth Gang Questions

- I. If your decision was to go to the meeting:
 - A. Would you have made this decision if your brothers told you not to get involved?
 - B. Would you have made this decision if Brenda had not been hurt?
- II. If your decision was not to go to the meeting:
 - A. Would you have made this decision if Brenda had been killed?
 - B. Would you have made this decision if you were not doing well in school?
 - C. If your father and uncle had been members of the 81st Street Gang, would your decision have been the same?
 - D. If Charlene had suggested that you go to the meeting, would your decision have been the same?
- III. Is revenge a proper motive in choosing to get involved?
- IV. Are there some situations in which you must get involved, even when you disagree with what is going on?
- V. How important is the influence of your family on your personal decision making?
The influence of your peers? Who has the most influence on the decisions you make?

Case Study Data Sheet 5

The Witness's Dilemma: Violent Crime

It is early afternoon on a grey winter's day in a large city. Ellen Lerman, a high school sophomore, is home from school with the flu. Bored and miserable, she sits staring from her bedroom window at the street below. Suddenly there is a loud popping noise from the grocery store directly across the street. A good-looking, well-built young man sticks his head out the door, glances up and down the street, and swiftly walks around the corner and out of sight.

Moments later Mrs. Murphy, an elderly neighbor, goes into the store and comes out screaming. She grabs a passerby by the arm, dragging him back into the store. A few minutes later the police come, an ambulance arrives, and people begin to gather on the sidewalk by the store. A body is brought out on a stretcher and taken away in the ambulance, and the crowd disperses. Ellen, feeling suddenly drowsy, gets into bed, turns on her radio, listens for a few minutes, and soon drifts off to sleep.

That evening Ellen's family is listening to the television news and eating dinner; it is Mr. Rossi, the owner of the store, who was taken away in the ambulance. He had been shot in an apparent robbery attempt, and had died on the way to the hospital. Four hundred dollars was missing from the cash register. Mr. Rossi was alone in the store at the time of the shooting, and the police have no leads. (A local association of grocery owners and clerks has posted a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest and capture of the murderer.) Ellen's family is quite upset by the killing. They have known the Rossis for many years and often run over to the grocery store for last minute purchases. It seems particularly disturbing that this incident took place right in front of their house, and they feel more worried than ever before about the crime problem in their city.

Ellen listens to the news quietly; inwardly she is in turmoil. She is in a dilemma and is uncertain of what, if anything, she should do. Should she tell the police about the guy she saw leaving the store and the loud popping noise she heard? Should she keep quiet? Ellen is on probation for shoplifting some clothes from a department store a few months ago; she's not sure she wants to have to testify in court. What if the man or his friends come after her for speaking out? What if she identifies the wrong person? It's not likely but it could happen. On the other hand, the reward would be very nice to have, and Mr. Rossi was a decent man besides. Should she go to the police or stay silent?

✱ *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

Violent Crime Questions

- I. If your decision was to go to the police, how important was the reward in your decision?
- II. If your decision was to stay silent, would you have come forward if:
 - A. The victim was a close friend?
 - B. The murderer knew you had seen him?
 - C. You recognized the potential murderer?
 - D. At what point should an individual who is a witness to wrongdoing get involved?
- III. Consider the following situations and state how you would react. What variables are important in reaching a decision?
 - A. You see a child steal an apple in the grocery store.
 - B. You observe one child at school day after day taking another child's lunch money.
 - C. You see someone throw a brick into a jewelry store window and run off with jewelry.
 - D. You see a man pulling a woman into his car against her will.
 - E. While driving, you see a car, run over a dog and drive off without stopping.
 - F. While riding the bus, you see several teenagers hit some of the passengers and take their money.
 - G. You see a man knock an elderly woman to the ground and steal her purse.
- IV. In the famous Kitty Genovese case in New York City, a young woman was repeatedly stabbed in front of a large group of onlookers. Not one of the many people who watched the murder was willing to get involved or even call for help.
 - A. Why do you think no one helped Kitty Genovese?
 - B. Do you think you would have acted differently if you had been there? Explain.
 - C. What would be the effect on our society if incidents like this became commonplace?

Case Study Data Sheet 6

The Holocaust: Heidi's Dilemma

Background

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was chief of the German Nationalist Socialist Party (Nazi) from 1920 and Chancellor of the Reich from 1933. He held absolute power in Germany and pursued an aggressive, expansionist foreign policy, which led to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Under Hitler, Germany controlled much of Europe. However, a turning point in the war came in 1943, and by 1945 America and her allies were able to stop Hitler and defeat Germany.

Using the concept of race struggle as the prime force behind human history, Hitler and his followers implemented the most systematic, wide-spread and destructive anti-Semitic policies ever known. While other "non-Aryans" also were subjected to persecution and abuse, Hitler saved his special hatred for the Jews. Jews were depicted as the source of all of Germany's ills and problems. They were viewed as an evil race whose ultimate aim was to destroy the "Aryan" race and dominate the world. The elements of this myth were previously used by German and Austrian anti-Semites at the end of the 19th century; and, in general, anti-Semitism had been common throughout Europe for centuries. Hitler's plan, however, was the most devastating: the total extermination of the Jews. Hitler personally followed and controlled this "final solution" to the "Jewish Problem."

The Holocaust, the massive genocide of six million Jews, is one of the most tragic periods of Jewish history and for all humanity as well. Millions of Jews lived under Nazi rule. Tortured by anxiety, insecure in the present, unable to anticipate the future, Jews were helpless in the face of a machine ready to crush them. Many of the victims had made important contributions to their countries in fields such as science, law, medicine, and the arts. Nonetheless, young or old, rich or poor, educated or ignorant, every Jew was condemned.

The extermination of the Jews in Nazi-controlled territories was carried out in a number of ways. The Jewish victims became slave laborers to be worked to death or shot. There were mass executions of men, women, and children who were forced to dig their own graves. Gold crowns on teeth were knocked out to enrich the German treasury. Fat from human bodies was converted to soap and human skin was made into lampshades, etc. Millions were gassed or burned alive in ovens.

Hitler attempted to keep the destruction of the Jews a secret. Sophisticated methods of deception, fraud, and camouflage were employed to prevent the Jewish community and others from learning of the massacres. The very monstrosity of the events made it seem unbelievable. Despite the secrecy, the truth about the destruction of the Jews was known to certain party and government officials quite early, and stories gradually spread throughout Germany.

Helping a Jew or other minority member could mean death to the person who exhibited such courage. Still, there were countless individual acts of sacrifice and heroism by Jews and non-Jews during this period. Denmark and Holland were two nations who took active roles in helping their Jewish citizens.

The Situation

Heidi is a young Dutch girl who lives in a small house in Amsterdam with her family. She has a best friend named Greta, but lately she has not seen too much of her and when she does see her, Greta is quiet and withdrawn. Heidi wonders if it is because of Germany's new leader, Hitler, and his policies. Greta is Jewish. Heidi has heard the bad things that are being said about the Jews. She does not believe them, because she knows Greta is a good person. One day they do manage to talk, and Greta becomes very upset and finally tells Heidi about the awful persecution and ugly abuse that is going on. In fact, one of Greta's uncles has just been arrested for daring to speak out against Hitler. No one knows what has happened to him. Greta has heard stories of Jews being taken away in the night and never being heard of again. Greta and her family are living in fear. Upset and feeling sorry for her friend, Heidi invites Greta home for dinner.

That night after Greta leaves, Heidi tells her family what Greta has said about the ugly things done to Jews, simply because they are Jews. Heidi's parents are aware of Hitler's particular hatred for the Jews, but they believe it is not wise to speak out against the new order. They do not want to put their own family in jeopardy and so they tell Heidi it would be best not to associate with Greta.

A few hours later Heidi answers a knock on the door. It is Greta and she looks terrified with tears streaming down her face. "Heidi, I went home after dinner—my family was gone, but their dinner was still on the table, and there were spots that look like blood by the door. They have been taken, I know it. What can I do now? I have no place to go. Will you help me?"

Heidi must make a big decision. There is a secret room in the attic where Heidi often goes to be alone. She is afraid for Greta and wants to help her. But she knows her own family's safety will be in danger if she helps her friend. What should Heidi do? Should she take Greta to the secret room? Should she ask her family to help?

✱ *Take out your Individual Report Form and read the directions.*

Holocaust Questions

- I. If your decision was to get involved (and to help Greta):
 - A. How would you help Greta? Would you hide her in the secret room?
 - B. Would you tell your parents?
 - C. If Greta had another place to stay, an aunt's house, would you suggest she go there after a few days?
- II. If your decision was not to get involved (not to help Greta):
 - A. If your family encouraged your friendship to Greta, would your decision have been different?
 - B. If Greta asked you to help her hide for just a few days, until she could make arrangements to go to her aunt's in another city, would your decision have been different?
- III. The basis of the Holocaust was a myth conceived by Hitler to promote his policies at the expense of the Jews. How does one expose this myth?
- IV. What actions would have helped to save the Jews:
 - A. Speaking out against the regime?
 - B. Helping Jews and other minorities to escape?
 - C. Spreading word of the atrocities to other lands?
 - D. Other:
- V. The monstrosity of the crimes made the Holocaust seem unbelievable. What actions could/should be taken by individuals or countries to prevent this type of disaster from happening again?
- VI. What would you risk your life for? Under what circumstances, if any, would you put your family in jeopardy?