



LESSON FIVE

RIGHT VERSUS WRONG: KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

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RIGHT VERSUS WRONG : KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to identify wrong decisions and give examples of why they are wrong and who or what is affected.

ACTIVITIES

- What's Wrong?
- Determining "Wrong"

CLOSURE AND TRANSITION

If one choice is clearly right and the other is clearly wrong, then we will most often choose to do the right thing, unless we lack the moral courage to do so. But sometimes things aren't so clear, especially in this complex and interconnected world in which we live. What do we do when one choice is right and the other choice is also right? In the next lesson, we'll begin to think about these kinds of dilemmas, especially as they relate to water resources.

HOMEWORK

- Complete the "Personal Water Inventory" from Lesson Four.

OPENING DISCUSSION

Follow-up to Lesson Four homework:

- What are the four tests you read about in the homework for determining if a decision is right or wrong? Why might we sometimes need to test for wrong? Why would someone be tempted to do the wrong thing? Let's list some examples. Do you think some people do the wrong thing without even realizing it? Why would this happen?

Introduction to Lesson Five:

- Sometimes making an ethical decision depends on a person's ability to understand the difference between right and wrong. One definition of wrong is "not in accordance with an established standard," such as our code of ethics. This lesson considers four tests for determining if a decision is wrong and applies these tests to specific instances, such as the Chernobyl incident studied in the previous lesson.

WHAT 'S WRONG

PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to begin a discussion about how to determine if a choice is wrong, and to consider the factors that can contribute to making a wrong choice.

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

You will need:

- Four cards with one each of the following labels:
FRONT PAGE, GUT FEELING, ROLE MODEL, LEGAL
- Large sheets of paper or flip charts
- Markers
- Four copies of the “What’s Wrong?” reading

Before class:

- Arrange a way for students to access the school library or Internet news services.

PROCEDURE

Part One: Determining What’s Wrong

1. Begin by giving students 15 to 20 minutes in the school library or on the Internet to find one news article about an action or situation that they feel is clearly wrong. Have them write down the headline and a few notes to remind themselves of the story.
2. Back in the classroom, reconvene and ask students to share their findings with the class. Ask students to describe what was wrong with the situation in the story and how they determined it was wrong.

Part Two: Applying Four Tests for Wrong

1. Break the class into four groups in four corners of the room so everyone has space to move around.
2. Label each group as LEGAL, GUT FEELING, FRONT PAGE, or ROLE MODEL.
3. Give each group a large sheet of paper, markers, and one copy of the “What’s Wrong?” reading.
4. Ask each group to read “What’s Wrong?” by either picking someone to read it aloud or splitting it up so that everyone reads part of it aloud.

5. After each group has read the reading, ask them to discuss the ideas of “temptation” and “rationalization” to make sure they understand these concepts.
6. Then, on their large sheets of paper, ask students to list examples of things that would fail the specific test that their group represents. For example, the LEGAL group might come up with several examples of choices that would break the law, such as speeding or drinking alcohol as a minor.
7. When all groups have finished their lists, come back together as a class and ask each group to present a description of the test they represent and to share their list with the class. Allow for discussion after each group presents.



WHAT 'S WRONG

It usually isn't difficult to make a choice between doing something wonderful, which you and those around you would admire, or doing something terrible, something that nobody would understand or respect. But certain factors can make a choice seem right, even if it isn't. Perhaps the most common of these factors is temptation. Temptation can lure us into rationalizing that certain choices are right when, on close inspection, they are clearly wrong.

An "Easy" Choice between Right and Wrong

Suppose you are sitting in a park eating your lunch with a group of people. After you have finished eating and everyone is ready to go, you and the others gather up the trash and head for the garbage can to dispose of it. Along the way you drop an empty potato chip bag on the grass. Do you kick it under a nearby bush and hope no one saw it? Of course not! You know that someone works hard to keep the park clean and you'd hate to see litter around the bushes there. You know what you would think of yourself, and what others would think of you, if you left the trash on the ground. In this case it is not difficult to pick up the trash and throw it away.

A Temptation

Now suppose you are hiking in the mountains. You are relieved to eat up the food that has been weighing down your backpack. But there is food and trash leftover from the meal and you feel your pack is already overloaded for the even steeper climb you have ahead of you. You know you're not supposed to leave any trash or food out in the woods because it can cause damage to wildlife, as well as be an eye-sore for other hikers. But you also know that no one else is around and if you stick it into a crevice in the rocks, no one will ever see it. Even though you know it is wrong, you may be tempted to leave the trash. Maybe repacking your backpack to fit the trash and leftover food and carrying the weight would be a little harder than picking up the potato chip bag in the park!

Rationalization

Now suppose you are still on the hiking trail. You could start repacking that garbage, but your mind would start posing all sorts of questions. "Is this really a big deal? It's only one little bag of garbage in this vast wilderness. I have a long way to go and maybe I can come back for it on my return trip. How likely is it that an animal will find it be harmed by it? And what if another hiker did find it there? I've been hiking before and seen trash that others left behind and it didn't bother me too much. Wouldn't it be okay for me to do this only this one time?" All these questions are a way for your mind to rationalize

making the choice to leave the trash. You're trying to convince yourself that making the decision to litter really isn't wrong.

Understanding temptations and rationalization can take time, and making wrong choices along the way can be part of the process of learning to make right ones. All of us have made wrong choices at some point in our lives. Perhaps the best strategy for making right choices is to be aware of every signal that may indicate a choice is wrong, such as the Legal Test, the Gut-Feeling Test, the Front-Page Test, and the Role-Model Test.

DETERMINING “WRONG”

PURPOSE

The purpose of this activity is to discuss the meaning of “wrong” and practice four ways to discern right from wrong.

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

You will need:

- Copies of the “Experimenting at Chernobyl” worksheet for each group
- Copies of “Explosion at Chernobyl Information Sheet” in Lesson Four for each group as needed
- Copies of the “Case Study” worksheets for each group

PROCEDURE

- Split the class into small groups of three to four students each.
- Give each group one copy of the “Experimenting at Chernobyl” worksheet and ask each group to elect a scribe to take notes on the worksheet.
- Ask the groups to consider the Chernobyl incident from the previous lesson and to work through the questions on the worksheet as a group.
- Remind them to record all of the facts that they remember from the previous lesson before they start discussing the Chernobyl incident. Pass out the information sheet from Lesson Four if needed.
- After each group has had enough time to complete the worksheet, come back together as a class.
- Now give each group a copy of one of the case-study worksheets and ask them to elect a new scribe to take notes.
- When all of the groups have completed the worksheets, reconvene as a class and ask someone from each group to report their findings.



EXPERIMENTING AT CHERNOBYL

Getting the Facts

- How many people were in charge of the control room on the night of April 26, 1986?
- Why were the engineers trying to shut down the reactor?
- How many alarm systems did they have to override?
- How did they keep the alarms from going off and automatically shutting down their experiment?
- Did these engineers know what they were doing?

1. Was there a wrong decision made at Chernobyl on the night of April 26? If you are unsure, try applying the four tests for wrong:

LEGAL TEST: Do you think it is legal to shut down the reactor for this experiment?

GUT-FEELING TEST: What do you think the engineers' instincts were telling them?

FRONT-PAGE TEST: If you were one of those engineers, how would you feel if your experiment came out on the front page of your local newspaper the next day?

ROLE-MODEL TEST: Ask each person in your group to give you the name of someone they respect, and have them describe what he or she would probably do in this case.

2. How was this a wrong decision or a right decision?

3. Who or what was affected by the decision?



CASE STUDY 1

When Rick got a new refrigerator he wondered what to do with his old one. He was getting ready to haul it off to the dump when his neighbor, Paul, came by and mentioned that there was a \$50 charge to dispose of old appliances at the dump. Paul told him about a large ravine on his property, back in the woods, where he had dumped some of his old appliances. Paul told Rick he was welcome to dump his old refrigerator back there since no one would ever know. Should Rick do it?

1. If Rick agrees, is he making a wrong decision? (If you are unsure, try applying the four tests for wrong):

LEGAL TEST: Is it legal to leave the refrigerator in the woods? Explain your answer.

GUT-FEELING TEST: What do you think Rick's instincts are telling him?

FRONT-PAGE TEST: If you were Rick, how would you feel if the incident came out on the front page of your local newspaper the next day? What might the headline say?

ROLE-MODEL TEST: Ask each person in your group to give you the name of someone they respect, and have them describe what he or she would probably do in this case.

2. How would this be a wrong decision, or how would it be right?

3. Who or what would be affected by the decision?



CASE STUDY 2

Jana lives across the road from a wildlife preserve where local biologists are working to restore the population of several woodland bird species. In order to secure a safe breeding habitat for these birds, they have asked that no domestic animals be allowed in the preserve. But Jana has two big dogs and she loves to walk in the preserve with them since they have so much energy and love to run. She knows the dogs would never hurt the birds and she has seen others take their dogs there, so should she go ahead and do it anyway?

1. If Jana walks her dogs in the preserve, is she making a wrong decision? (If you are unsure, try applying the four tests for wrong):

LEGAL TEST: Is it legal to have dogs in the preserve? Explain your answer.

GUT-FEELING TEST: What do you think Jana's instincts are telling her?

FRONT-PAGE TEST: If you were Jana, how would you feel if details of your dog walk came out on the front page of the local newspaper the next day? What might the headline say?

ROLE-MODEL TEST: Ask each person in your group to give you the name of someone they respect, and have them describe what he or she would probably do in this case.

2. How would this be a wrong decision, or how would it be right?

3. Who or what would be affected by the decision?



CASE STUDY 3

Marcus has always loved marine mammals and hopes he will see one in the wild as many people in Florida do. One day, while fishing with his friend on the edge of a tidal lagoon, Marcus sees a manatee swimming near the surface of the water. He quickly takes off his T-shirt, ready to dive in and swim with the manatee. His friend reminds him that manatees are protected animals, and that people are not allowed to touch them or even go near them, especially in the water. But Marcus knows he isn't going to hurt the animal; he just wants to touch it and swim with it. After all, he has heard people say how cool it is to be in the water with these animals. Should he do it?

1. If Marcus gets in the water with the manatee, is he making a wrong decision? (If you are unsure, try applying the four tests for wrong):

LEGAL TEST: Is it legal to touch the manatee? Explain your answer.

GUT-FEELING TEST: What do you think Marcus's instincts are telling him?

FRONT-PAGE TEST: If you were Marcus, how would you feel if this incident came out on the front page of your local newspaper the next day? What might the headline say?

ROLE-MODEL TEST: Ask each person in your group to give you the name of someone they respect, and have them describe what he or she would probably do in this case.

2. How would this be a wrong decision, or how would it be right?

3. Who or what would be affected by the decision?