

# JUST THINK

## THE LIFE BOAT DILEMMA



Debate with other Year 6 who like thinking. Ask an adult at home to email us if you want to join our Philosophy Group on Zoom  
[enquiries@fundaysclub.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@fundaysclub.co.uk)

## PHILIP AND PHOEBE

### THE STORY

Four men are cast away together in a lifeboat after their ship has gone down. They have plenty of water, but no food. They try fishing but catch nothing and without food they do not have enough energy to row ashore. The chances of them being spotted are remote and they have no mobile phone or radio.

Reluctantly, the men decide they have only two options. Either they must kill and eat one of their own number to give the others a chance, or they must all die together.

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PHILOSOPHY  
PACK FIVE

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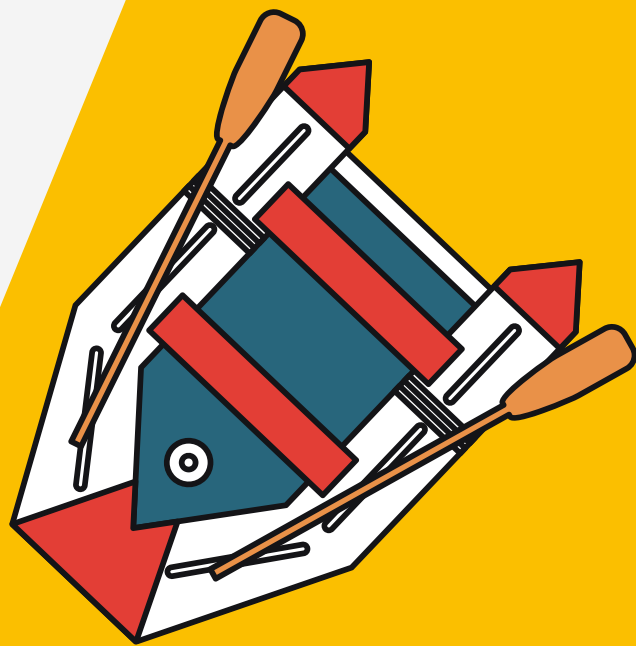


# PHILIP AND PHOEBE

## THE STORY CONTINUED

'Obviously, they should eat one of the others,' says Philip, using his cool, logical brain. 'If they don't, four men will die. If they do, only one dies. That's got to be better. They should draw lots, and the loser should be eaten.'

Phoebe, Philip's twin sister, is horrified. 'You can't be serious?' she shouts. 'That's murder! Murder is just wrong! How could you think such a thing? They must all take their chances and die together if needs be.'



## WHO IS RIGHT?

### THE QUESTION

Who is right, Philip or Phoebe?



**WHO IS RIGHT? AND WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE CAUGHT IN THIS SITUATION?**

**IS IT RIGHT TO KILL SOMEONE TO SAVE THE LIVES OF SEVERAL OTHERS?**

Discuss this with as many people as you can. When you've thought about this problem carefully, turn to the next page.

# THE LIFE BOAT DILEMMA

## PHILOSOPHY BACKGROUND

In fact, a similar event happened in 1884 in the South China Seas. After their sailing ship Mignonette went down, Captain Thomas Dudley was left in a lifeboat with first mate Stephens, Able Seaman Brooks and a youth called Parker.

The men decided that Parker should die to save them, as he was the sickest and had no wife or family to support. So Dudley killed him and the other three survived until rescued by feeding on his body.

Dudley and Stephens were later tried for murder, convicted, and condemned to death. However, because of a public outcry, the pair were pardoned and released from prison after serving only six months.

\* \* \*

The solution to this dilemma rests on the answers to two questions:

1. Is survival the most important thing of all, or is it sometimes better to die than to live?
2. Are there some acts which are so wrong that we should never do them, even to save lives?

Some philosophers believe that killing an innocent person is simply wrong, whatever the situation. Better to die with your honour intact, they argue, than to live the rest of your life with the memory of such a terrible act on your conscience. Doing the right thing is more important than life itself.

But other philosophers disagree. They define “the right thing to do” as being what leads to the best outcome. In this case, killing one of the men to save the others leads to a better outcome – fewer deaths – so it is the right thing to do, they say. According to these philosophers, “right” depends upon the situation, and no act can be ruled out completely in advance.

There is, of course, another possible solution if you had been in the lifeboat: volunteer to die so that the others could live. All of us wonder if, when faced with a similar situation, we would have the courage to lay down our lives for our friends in this way.

## THE QUESTION

This debate is ongoing and will probably take you beyond philosophy. Good luck!

**DISCUSS WITH AS MANY PEOPLE AS YOU CAN...**

# WANT THREE EXTRA TRICKY QUESTIONS?

1. In The Lifeboat Dilemma, should the others even be willing to kill a volunteer?
2. An evil dictator is killing lots of innocent people in his country. Would it be right to assassinate him?
3. Killing one person – a murderer – might save ten others by donating his organs. Should he be killed?



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## NEXT PACK

TYPES OF TRUTH

What is true?

**LOOK OUT FOR  
PACK FIVE**