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# DEALING WITH DILEMMAS

**COACHING STUDENTS  
IN DECISION MAKING**

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# TOM'S DUTY



## CONCEPTUAL FOCUS: CONFLICT

### Social Situation

Tom Franklin is a very good football player. As a linebacker, he has helped his club team win six games. They have lost only once, and one game remains to be played.

This Saturday, Tom's team will play another good team. The other team has also won six games and also has one tie on its record. If Tom's team wins they will be the champions of the conference. If they lose, then the other team will be champions.

Tom is looking forward to the game. He is a loyal member of his team.

Tom is also a school leader. Tom wants his school to be one of the best schools. Last week, the principal asked him to serve on a committee.

The principal said, "Tom, it is time we took a look at the school handbook we use to introduce new students to our school. We need students like you to revise it."

Tom was pleased that he was asked to serve on the committee. He quickly agreed to do what the principal asked.

He said, "I would like to be on the committee. When will we meet?"

The principal answered, "The first and most important meeting is next Monday,

right after school. It is very important that all committee members be present for that meeting."

"I'll be there," Tom said.

On Friday, it rained all day. Early Saturday morning, Tom's football coach called him.

The coach said, "Tom, we are not playing today. The field is flooded. We'll play for the championship on Monday afternoon, right after school is dismissed. See you then."

After hanging up the phone, Tom thought, "Oh, no, I forgot. I promised the principal I would attend a committee meeting on Monday night."

Tom called his school principal. The principal said, "It's too bad that both the game and the meeting are scheduled for the same time. It's too late to change the meeting. I'm afraid you'll have to choose which event is more important to you."

Tom answered, "I feel bad about this. But, I'm going to play in the football game."

Even as he spoke, Tom was unhappy. One part of him wanted to play in the game, and the other wanted to attend the committee meeting.

---

## Discussion Starters

### COMPREHENSION

1. What game does Tom play?
2. How good is Tom's team?
3. How many games has the other team won?
4. When is Tom's team supposed to play?
5. Why is the game delayed?
6. Tom agrees to become a member of the school committee. What is the purpose of the committee?

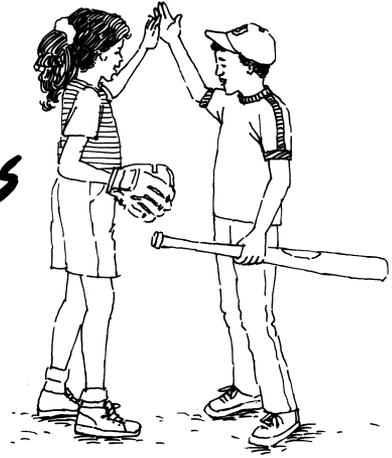
### VALUE/FEELING

10. Tom decided to play in the football game. Was this a good decision?
11. If you had been Tom, what would you have done?
12. If you had made the decision Tom made, how would you have felt?

### RELATIONAL

7. Tom decides to play in the game. How does this conflict with what the principal expected?
8. Suppose Tom had decided to attend the meeting. How might this have caused conflict with the other members of his team?
9. Tom wants to be loyal to his team. Tom wants to be loyal to his school. How are his two desires in conflict?

# Bouncers, Fly Balls, Butterfingers, and Victories



## CONCEPTUAL FOCUS: COOPERATION

### Social Situation

At Robinson Elementary School, it was a hot day. It was already hot in Mrs. Geegan's classroom when the school day began. By 11:00 A.M. students were so hot they could hardly listen to Mrs. Geegan. It was hard to pay attention. By early afternoon, it was almost impossible to breathe in the room.

Mrs. Geegan said, "We've got to get out of here. I'll tell you what. Let's go outside and play softball."

Some of Mrs. Geegan's students liked this idea. They said, "You're a great teacher, Mrs. Geegan."

Other students, however, did not like the idea. They shared their feelings.

"It's too hot to play softball."

"It's too dirty out there."

"The gnats and flies will eat us alive."

"You've got to be kidding."

Mrs. Geegan responded, "Whatever we do, we will have to do it together."

Bob, one of the students, said, "Why don't we all go outside? It's much cooler out there. Those who want to play softball can play. Those who don't want to play can talk with each other and watch the game."

Everyone agreed with Bob's idea. Soon, twenty of Mrs. Geegan's students had chosen teams and were playing.

For the first two innings, everyone was happy. Then in the top of the third inning, things began to go wrong.

The first batter in the inning hit a high bouncing ground ball toward second base. Tony, who was playing at second base, knew it was a sure out. But, he took his eyes off the ball. The ball hit the tip of his glove and bounced into the outfield. The runner was safe.

Cindy yelled at Tony, "Butterfingers!"

Greg said, "Who told you that you knew how to play?"

Linda got into the act: "Which team are you playing for? Ours or theirs?"

The next batter hit a soft fly ball in the direction of Susan in the outfield. Susan lost the ball in the sun. She could not catch the ball. This put runners on second and third.

Tony was the first to speak. "Girls should not be allowed to play this game. They've all got butterfingers. They can't catch. They can't hit. They can't run. The only thing they know how to do is lose."

Cindy answered Tony, "Look who's talking!"

Soon, most of the boys and girls on the teams were shouting at one another. Mrs. Geegan blew her whistle. Gradually, the boys and girls became quiet.

Mrs. Geegan asked the members of the teams in the field to form a small circle around her. When the twenty boys and girls were ready, Mrs. Geegan said:

"To have fun when you play a team sport, you must cooperate; to win you must cooperate; to play any team game well, all



members of a team must support all other members.”

She continued, “If we cannot play the game correctly, we will have to go back inside. I do not want to go back, and I don’t think you want to go back into that hot room either. When a member of your team makes a mistake, that person needs your support. If a team member does well, he or she can support themselves. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Mrs. Geegan,” was the response from the twenty team members.

Members of the two teams continued to play for about another hour. Tony had a lot of chances at ground balls; he did not make another error. Susan also played well.

When the game was over, the other team was ahead by a score of 13 to 11.

“They won,” Susan said.

“But it was close,” Tony added.

Hearing Tony and Susan talk, Mrs. Geegan said, “Your team won something too.”

## Discussion Starters

### COMPREHENSION

1. Why does Mrs. Geegan want to leave her classroom?
2. When Mrs. Geegan suggests playing a game, some of her students disagree. Why don't they want to play?

3. How is the argument over going outside settled?
4. After the game started, there was an argument. What caused the argument?

### RELATIONAL

5. When people work together to secure a common goal, they cooperate. Mrs. Geegan says that all team sports require cooperation. Do you agree?
6. Mrs. Geegan also insists that her class cooperate before students are allowed to go outside. Name some ways in which class members can cooperate.

### VALUE/FEELING

7. Mrs. Geegan says it is good to help people when they make a mistake. Would you help a teammate who made a mistake that cost your team a game?
8. Suppose you wanted to help a person who made a mistake that cost your team a big game. How might you help the person who made the mistake?
9. Let's say you are one of the girls who chose not to play. When Susan fails to catch the ball, Tony says girls should not be allowed to play. When Tony says this, how do you feel?
10. Mrs. Geegan said, “We'll play as a team, or we'll all go inside.” Was this a good way to handle the problem?

## From the Teacher's Perspective

To use a standard format of structured dilemma, (1) assign the dilemma and remind students of the topic, concept, or idea that is currently being studied; (2) inform students that the stimulus situation is relevant to the current focus of study; and (3) indicate that once students have had an opportunity to study the social situation, they will be expected to respond, personally and publicly, to directions and questions.

Next, allow students a period of time in which to study the resource. This should be a quiet time in which no talking or excess movement occurs. You must be especially alert, for it is the teacher who is most likely to disrupt student attention by talking, moving about, or engaging in some other distracting activity. The importance of this period of quiet study will be emphasized for each of the five formats of structured dilemma presented.

When students have studied the resource, distribute the discussion starters and ask students to write answers to the questions and directions. Do not distribute discussion starters before students study the social situation, to keep them from looking for answers to the discussion starters. When students are writing their initial reactions to discussion starters, it is important that they work alone.

Once students have written responses to the discussion starters, use these questions and directions to ascertain that students have (1) comprehended the social situation; (2) framed relationships between the social situation and the current focus of study; and (3) reacted personally in terms of their values and feelings toward the social situation. You do not have to use all the questions in the discussion starters, and you should use questions that you have developed. Each classroom is different, so it is unlikely that you will use the questions found in the discussion starters in the same order as they are written. The questions are intended to be a guide. Your role at this stage is to provide for comprehension, analysis, and personalization, doing whatever is necessary to secure these instructional ends.

As students respond, employ two skills consistently: wait-time and probing. These will facilitate, clarify, and complete student responses. Without them, students may not be able to respond to questions completely.

Finally, summarize what you believe students have learned and introduce the next learning activity.

Each of the five phases of usage are important. The initial assignment tends to focus student attention and establish a learning set. The study time creates optimum conditions for students to acquire and begin to process information. Asking students to write answers enhances the likelihood that they will participate in the discussion that follows. The discussion of individual student responses enables

students to contrast how they have reasoned with how other students have reasoned and provides both the teacher and other students with the chance to challenge students to think in new ways. The teacher summary at the end helps students to isolate those aspects of the learning activity that are worthy of being remembered and/or used.

### **On Your Own**

Most standard instructional resources may be converted into structured dilemmas. To accomplish this, take the following steps:

1. Define the focus of study within which you intend to use the structured dilemma.
2. Select a reading, visual, or audio resource that is relevant to the current focus of study. Alternatively, you may choose to paraphrase such a resource or write your own social situation.
3. Write four, five, or six questions that students may use in order to test their understanding of the social situation. (Conventions for doing this were presented at the beginning of this chapter, in the section entitled “Description.”)
4. Write two, three, or four relational questions that will help students seek out relationships between the social situation and their current focus of study. (See “Descriptions.”)
5. Write two to five value/feeling questions that will require students to express personal preferences and feelings about the social situation. (See “Descriptions.”)