

## ***How to build your own dilemma teaching story***

1. Dilemma-story pedagogy builds upon the constructivist assumption that values cannot be taught directly but that students must be given the opportunity to decide for themselves if their own values are viable or need to be changed in order to make a decision. Ethical dilemmas serve as opportunities for reflection and decision-making: individually and as a group.
2. Familiarise yourself with one or more of the dilemma stories on this website in order to make sense of the instructions below. Brainstorm 'contentious' topics drawn from your learning area that contain one or two ethical issues. This could be a topic about the environment, science, scientific knowledge and its uses, etc.
3. Write a story that creates for us a scenario and create the characters that will bring the story to life. The story will have a sequence of ethical dilemmas, i.e. situations in which decisions have to be made on behalf of the characters in the story that could potentially be harmful to others or to the environment. Your story will contain events that build towards an issue that represents a culminating dilemma, i.e. the most profound dilemma in the story.
4. Divide the story into chunks that can each be the focus of a dilemma question about one event or part of the story.
5. We have found that it is a good idea to build up the intensity in the story by starting off with one or two easy or warm-up dilemma questions. The early questions thus begin as easily selected choices between two or more pathways, but later questions demand more difficult choices between disagreeable alternatives.
6. Group-dynamics in Dilemma-Story Pedagogy: students often need to 'warm-up' to the idea of discussing their own values and opinions with other students in the class. This can best be done by building up the group-sizes slowly, e.g., individual reflection is followed by discussion in pairs; then groups of three; then groups of four.
7. It is essential to the success of the story to always have students reflect individually at first, before having them work collaboratively. This ensures that students actively reflect on their own ideas before sharing and potentially copying their friends' thoughts.
8. When asking a question, make sure students have to explain their answers – this forces them to think beyond yes or no responses.
9. Include guidelines for group work with the questions, as teaching the students to develop trust, confidence and tolerance is an integral part of the activity.
10. Design a final activity that enables a "take home message" at the end of the story. Ideally this could be poster-session in which groups of four present their ideas in poster-form to the whole class. This activity could culminate in a whole-class discussion. At this point students are usually sufficiently warmed-up for the discussion which will be lively and fruitful.

## How to Write the Teaching Story - Step by Step

### 1. Setting the scene

#### Story:

You are an immigrant by the name of.....in the 1930s that has moved to Perth to start a new life.  
You are ...

*(Example from Wetlands dilemma)...(continue writing your own story in this way)...*

#### Teacher instructions:

Students reflect individually at first: (5 mins)

**Dilemma: On your own, think about which land would be the best to purchase.**

Record your decision on paper along with the reasons for your decision.

Organise students into pairs (5 mins)

Compare your decision with the other person in your pair and discuss the reasons for your decision.  
Try to understand why the other person has made the decision they have.

### 2. Developing the story

#### Story:

You purchase the larger plot. You proceed to clear the 5 ½ hectares ...

*(ex Wetlands dilemma)...(continue writing in this way)...*

#### Teacher notes:

Students reflect individually at first (5 mins)

**Dilemma Qn: On your own, think about whether the “night-cart man” offer is worth taking up or not.**

Record your decision on paper along with the reasons for your decision.

Organise students into groups of 3 (10 mins)

Compare your decision with the other persons in your group and discuss the reasons for your decision. Try to understand why the other persons have made the decisions that they have.

#### Story:

Your family decides to un-block the stream and spend some of the family budget on installing rain water tanks ...

*(ex Western Swamp Tortoise dilemma)...(continue writing in this way)...*

**Teacher notes:**

Students reflect individually at first (5 mins)

**Dilemma Qn: Do you think that this is a good idea or should the tortoise remain as a rare native animal in its own habitat?**

Think about your decision on your own and record it, together with your reasons. (5 mins)

Organise groups of four (10 mins)

Compare your decision with the other persons in your group and discuss the reasons for your decision and try to make sense of any differing points of view.

Prepare a poster that you will present to the whole class outlining your group's decisions and ideas.

### 3. Concluding the story ... setting up the final activity

**Story:**

A few weeks later, a Blue whale is seen off Tasmania. The animal is wounded after being attacked by a ...

*(ex Whales dilemma)...(continue writing this way)...*

**Teacher notes:**

Groups of four present posters. The rest of the class is invited to ask clarifying questions. (10 mins)

Whole group discussion: the final dilemma

**Final Dilemma: Would you try to save this single Blue Whale? Why? Why not?**

Compare your decision with the other people in your class and discuss the reasons for your decision. Try to understand why the other people have made the decision that they have.

As a follow-up:

**The government has proposed that warning beacons for whales are set up at certain beaches to help prevent of whales stranding, at a cost of \$500 000.**

Write a letter to your local newspaper to put forward your views on this idea.

### **Tips for teaching:**

Be aware that the teacher is the facilitator of the students' learning process. Try not to lead the discussion by giving your own opinions.

If controversial opinions arise do not judge them but instead invite the class to discuss the issues further.